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NORTH CAROLINA WIOA UNIFIED STATE PLAN
PYS 2024-2027

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OVERVIEW

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Governor of each State must submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor that outlines a four-year strategy for the State's workforce development system. The publicly-funded workforce development system is a national network of Federal, State, regional, and local agencies and organizations that provide a range of employment, education, training, and related services and supports to help all job-seekers secure good jobs while providing businesses with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. States must have approved Unified or Combined State Plans in place to receive funding for core programs. WIOA reforms planning requirements, previously governed by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), to foster better alignment of Federal investments in job training, to integrate service delivery across programs and improve efficiency in service delivery, and to ensure that the workforce system is job-driven and matches employers with skilled individuals. One of WIOA's principal areas of reform is to require States to plan across core programs and include this planning process in the Unified or Combined State Plans. This reform promotes a shared understanding of the workforce needs within each State and fosters development of more comprehensive and integrated approaches, such as career pathways and sector strategies, for addressing the needs of businesses and workers. Successful implementation of many of these approaches called for within WIOA requires robust relationships across programs. WIOA requires States and local areas to enhance coordination and partnerships with local entities and supportive service agencies for strengthened service delivery, including through Unified or Combined State Plans.

OPTIONS FOR SUBMITTING A STATE PLAN

A State has two options for submitting a State Plan—a Unified State Plan or a Combined State Plan. At a minimum, a State must submit a Unified State Plan that meets the requirements described in this document and outlines a four-year strategy for the core programs. The six core programs are—

- the Adult program (Title I of WIOA),
- the Dislocated Worker program (Title I),
- the Youth program (Title I),
- the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program (Title II), and
- the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program (authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III),
- the Vocational Rehabilitation program (authorized under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV).

Alternatively, a State may submit a Combined State Plan that meets the requirements described in this document and outlines a four-year strategy for WIOA's core programs plus one or more of the Combined State Plan partner programs. When a State includes a Combined State Plan partner program in its Combined State Plan, it need not submit a separate plan or application for that particular program. If included, Combined State Plan partner programs are subject to the "common planning elements" (Sections II-IV of this document) where specified, as well as

the program-specific requirements for that program where such planning requirements exist separately for the program. The Combined State Plan partner programs are—

- Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)
- Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)))
- Work programs authorized under section 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(o))
- Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers programs (Activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))
- Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et seq.)
- Unemployment Insurance programs (programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws in accordance with applicable Federal law)
- Senior Community Service Employment program (programs authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))
- Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Community Services Block Grant (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.))¹

[1] States that elect to include employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.) under a Combined State Plan would submit all other required elements of a complete CSBG State Plan directly to the Federal agency that administers the program. Similarly, States that elect to include employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development that are included would submit all other required elements of a complete State Plan for those programs directly to the Federal agency that administers the program.

HOW STATE PLAN REQUIREMENTS ARE ORGANIZED

The major content areas of the Unified or Combined State Plan include strategic and operational planning elements. WIOA separates the strategic and operational elements to facilitate cross-program strategic planning.

- The **Strategic Planning Elements** section includes analyses of the State's economic conditions, workforce characteristics, and workforce development activities. These analyses drive the required vision and goals for the State's workforce development

system and alignment strategies for workforce development programs to support economic growth.

- The **Operational Planning Elements** section identifies the State's efforts to support the State's strategic vision and goals as identified in the Strategic Planning Elements section. This section ensures that the State has the necessary infrastructure, policies, and activities to meet its strategic goals, implement its alignment strategy, and support ongoing program development and coordination. Operational planning elements include:
 - State Strategy Implementation,
 - State Operating Systems and Policies,
 - Assurances,
 - Program-Specific Requirements for the Core Programs, and
 - Program-Specific Requirements for the Combined State Plan partner programs. (These requirements are available in a separate supplemental document, Supplement to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified and Combined State Plan Requirements. The Departments are not seeking comments on these particular requirements).

When responding to Unified or Combined State Plan requirements, States must identify specific strategies for coordinating programs and services for target populations.² States must develop strategies that look beyond strategies for the general population and develop approaches that also address the needs of target populations. Use of links to external websites and documents is permitted within the State Plan narrative submission, if such links remain active and adhere to Section 508 accessibility requirements.

Paperwork Reduction Act: The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) provides that an agency may not conduct, and no person is required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. Public reporting burden for this information collection is estimated to be 86 hours per state; including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Responding to this collection is required to obtain or retain the Federal grant benefit. In addition, responses to this information collection are public, and the agencies offer no assurances of confidentiality. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Workforce Investment, and reference OMB control number 1205-0522. Note: Please do not return the completed plan to this address.

[2] Target populations include individuals with barriers to employment, as defined in WIOA Sec. 3, as well as veterans, unemployed workers, and youth.

I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE

Unified or Combined State Plan. Select whether the State is submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan. At a minimum, a State must submit a Unified State Plan that covers the six core programs.

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

Combined State Plan. This plan includes the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser Act, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, and Vocational Rehabilitation programs, as well as one or more of the optional Combined State Plan partner programs identified below.

This is a unified plan

COMBINED PLAN PARTNER PROGRAM(S)

Indicate which Combined Plan partner program(s) the state is electing to include in the plan.

Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)

No

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)

No

Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)))

No

Work programs authorized under section 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(o))

No

Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers programs (activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))

No

Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.)

No

Unemployment Insurance programs (programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws in accordance with applicable Federal law)

No

Senior Community Service Employment program (programs authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))

No

Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development

No

Community Services Block Grant (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.))

No

B. PLAN INTRODUCTION OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Unified or Combined State Plan may include an introduction or executive summary. This element is optional.

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

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

Introduction

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

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

North Carolina's State Workforce Development Board, the NCWorks Commission, developed and adopted a new strategic plan in February of 2023 and incorporated the Governor's vision into its strategic plan. The plan was developed with input from partners at the state and local

level and sets forth a vision and strategic goals for North Carolina's workforce development system, providing a framework for the delivery of workforce development services in North Carolina. The plan focuses on the coordination and alignment of the state's workforce programs and partners to ensure an equitable recovery for all North Carolinians. The plan also provides the foundation for the development of North Carolina's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan.

Through its strategic planning efforts, the NCWorks Commission developed a vision and mission for North Carolina's Workforce System. This vision is to build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy after the COVID-19 pandemic. The mission of the state's workforce development system, is to ensure North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity, and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation.

As a complement to this work, North Carolina will continue to seek out opportunities to successfully carry out its strategic vision for workforce development, while aligning with the other federal systems and programs that help individuals gain skills and employment, and those that are aligned with WIOA activities. The surrounding systems with the clearest opportunity for alignment with WIOA activities include, but are not limited to Perkins V, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Food and Nutrition Services-Employment and Training program (SNAP FNS-E&T), North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), among others.

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

II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a Strategic Planning Elements section that analyzes the State's current economic environment and identifies the State's overall vision for its workforce development system. The required elements in this section allow the State to develop data-driven goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce and to identify successful strategies for aligning workforce development programs to support economic growth. Unless otherwise noted, all Strategic Planning Elements apply to Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan as well as to core programs. Where requirements identify the term "populations", these must include individuals with barriers to employment as defined at WIOA Section 3. This includes displaced homemakers; low-income individuals; Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; individuals with disabilities, including youth who are individuals with disabilities; older individuals; ex-offenders; homeless individuals, or homeless children and youths; youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system; individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers; farmworkers (as defined at section 167(i) of WIOA and

Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 35-14); individuals within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program; single parents (including single pregnant women); and long-term unemployed individuals. Additional populations include veterans, unemployed workers, and youth, and others that the State may identify.

A. ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

The Unified or Combined 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 or Combined 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.

II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

(A) Economic Analysis

North Carolina is defined by an expansive geography that covers over 53,000 square miles and spans from the mountains in the west, to the piedmont region in the state's center to the coastal plain region in the east. This expansive geography contributes to the state's diverse mix of rural communities, small towns, cities, metropolitan areas, and regional economic centers, each with its own unique industrial composition. Part of North Carolina's economic development strategy includes organization of the state's 100 counties into eight multi-county economic development regions called Prosperity Zones, which are intended to help ensure economic growth across all areas of the state, by leveraging regional economic, workforce and educational resources.

Overlaying the eight prosperity zones are North Carolina's 20 Local Workforce Development Board (WDB) areas that help facilitate the delivery of workforce services to the state's citizens and employers. In the Western Prosperity Zone: Southwestern WDB, Foothills WDB and Mountain Area WDB. In the Northwest Prosperity Zone: High Country WDB, Western Piedmont

WDB and Foothills WDB. In the Piedmont Triad Prosperity Zone: Piedmont Triad Regional WDB and GuilfordWorks WDB. In the Southwest Prosperity Zone: Centralina WDB, Foothills WDB, Charlotte Works WDB and Gaston County WDB. In North Central Prosperity Zone: Kerr-Tar WDB, Durham WDB, Turning Point WDB, Mid-Carolina WDB, and Capital Area WDB. In the Sandhills (South Central) Prosperity Zone: Lumber River WDB, Cape Fear WDB, and Mid-Carolina WDB. In the Northeast Prosperity Zone: Rivers East WDB, Northeastern WDB, and Turning Point WDB. In the Southeast Prosperity Zone: Eastern Carolina WDB and Cape Fear WDB.

In late 2022, the NCWorks Commission conducted a study to understand the opportunities to realign the workforce board system to better support economic development in the state. Authorized by the Office of Governor Roy Cooper, the study explored data focused on commuting patterns, labor and economic trends, and stakeholder perspectives from numerous sources including the NC Department of Commerce Labor and Economic Analysis Division, and the Division of Workforce solutions. In addition, the commission conducted in-depth interviews and surveys with workforce, economic development, and education leaders across the state. In making its recommendation, the NCWorks Commission provided eight guiding principles to support local leaders in making their decisions regarding local workforce development areas. These principles are:

- Seek to better the lives of North Carolinians through realignment: Support changes to the workforce development board system that will prioritize access to services for jobseekers and employers, efficient use of available resources, and responsiveness to local and regional needs.
- Expand local workforce development board access: Reduce the number of single-county workforce development boards to better reflect labor market and commuting patterns.
- Decrease redundancy among local workforce development boards within economic development areas: Minimize the overlap of workforce development boards across multiple Prosperity Zones and, as applicable, Councils of Government, to better promote alignment with economic development activities.
- Better align community college and workforce development board service areas: Minimize the overlap of workforce development boards across multiple community college service areas.
- Match local workforce development board outreach to area jobseeker and business customer needs: Maximize the average percentage of individuals who live and work in the same region to be more reflective of current labor and commuter patterns.

- Ensure consistent service, strong visibility, and sufficient capacity among local workforce development boards: Support policies that will strengthen the visibility and capacity of workforce development boards as well as partnerships between workforce and economic development entities to make certain that employers and jobseekers receive consistent service and response across the state.
- Allow flexibility for administrative entities: Support existing administrative entities, including Councils of Government (COG), non-profits, and city/county governments, to remain in their administrative role, even if newly redrawn workforce area boundaries are different from previous boundaries.
- Consider further review of the broader workforce system: While the role of Local Area Workforce Boards is central in workforce development, they are part of a broader system which may benefit from additional changes to further promote alignment and efficiency.

The net outcome of the 2022 workforce board system realignment study is the state had a net reduction in the number of Local Area Workforce Development Boards to 20 LAWDBs. The maps on the following pages illustrate the revised county alignment for North Carolina, which became effective on July 1st, 2023. The Division of Workforce Solutions continues to work with leaders in local areas to identify additional opportunities to realign existing boards based on the approved principles.

Map of North Carolina Workforce Development Boards

NORTH CAROLINA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

Local Areas



Cape Fear	Durham	GuilfordWorks	Mid-Carolina	Rivers East
Capital Area	Eastern Carolina	High Country	Mountain Area	Southwestern
Centralina	Foothills	Kerr-Tar	Northeastern	Turning Point
Charlotte Works	Gaston County	Lumber River	Piedmont Triad Regional	Western Piedmont

Effective July 1, 2023



Map of North Carolina Prosperity Zones

NORTH CAROLINA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

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Edits/Rev. July 1, 2023



(i) Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.

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

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

Like the rest of the nation, North Carolina experienced significant health, social and economic, impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between February and April of 2020, North Carolina's economy was challenged by the loss of 566,200 seasonally adjusted total non-farm jobs representing a 12.2% decline in total employment. The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate peaked at 14.2% in April 2020, with an estimated 656,620 unemployed workers during the month, while the state's labor force dropped to 4.6 million, down from its peak of over 5.0 million in December of 2019.

While the pandemic brought major economic challenges, North Carolina's state and local areas have been on a path of economic recovery. By October of 2021, the state's seasonally adjusted total non-farm employment rebounded to 4,663,700 reflecting an increase of 37,800 jobs above the February 2020 pre-pandemic employment level (4,625,900). By December of 2022, total non-farm employment reached 4,852,500, more than 226,000 jobs above the February 2020 level.

Between December 2022 and November of 2023, the state added 96,800 total non-farm jobs, an increase of 2.0%. During this same period, the state experienced 10 out of 11 months of positive monthly job gains. By November 2023, North Carolina's seasonally adjusted total non-farm employment reached 4,949,300 which is 323,400 jobs or 7.0% above the February 2020 pre-pandemic employment level.

As a result of the pandemic, all of North Carolina's major industrial sectors were challenged by employment loss. However, most of the state's major industrial sectors have experienced positive job growth with employment in most sectors exceeding their pre-pandemic employment levels.

Employment in North Carolina's service providing industries was 3,910,800 in February of 2020, by April of 2020 these industries experienced a collective decline of 505,600 jobs or 12.9%. The largest job losses were experienced in the Leisure and Hospitality Services industries with a loss of 232,700 jobs or 44.5%; Trade, Transportation and Utilities industries with a decline of 72,000 jobs; Education and Health Services industries with a decline of 67,600 jobs; and Professional and Business Services with a decline of 56,400 jobs.

By November of 2023, employment in North Carolina's service providing industries accounted for 4,223,600 or 85.3% of North Carolina's 4.9 million total non-farm jobs. Between April of 2020 and November of 2023, North Carolina's service providing industries gained 818,400. This includes an increase of more than 312,000 jobs over February 2020 employment levels.

Among the state's major service providing industry sectors, Trade, Transportation and Utilities industries are up 80,200 jobs over February 2020 pre-pandemic levels, Information industries are up 7,900 jobs, Financial Activities industries are up 41,600 jobs, Professional and Business Services industries are up 108,000 jobs, Educational and Health Services industries are up 66,100 jobs, Leisure and Hospitality Services industries are up 15,100 jobs and Other Services industries are up 6,600 jobs. One notable exception is North Carolina's Government sector which is 12,700 jobs below its pre-pandemic level, this includes State Government employment which is down 10,400 and Local Government employment which is down 8,000.

Between February and April of 2020, the state's goods producing industries experienced a decline of 60,600 jobs or 8.5% decline. This included a decline of 48,400 jobs in the state's Manufacturing industries, a decline of 12,100 jobs in Construction industries and a loss of 100

jobs in the state's Mining and Logging industries. By November of 2023, the goods producing industries accounted for 725,700 or 14.7% of North Carolina's 4.9 million total non-farm jobs. Collectively the state's goods producing industries are up only 10,600 jobs or 1.5% over February 2020 pre-pandemic levels. Over the last several months, these industries continue to be impacted by employment challenges including notable closures in the state's furniture manufacturing sector.

Dispersed across the state's industry sectors are a diverse set of occupations which help to fuel the state's economic diversity. North Carolina's occupational employment is concentrated across seven major occupational groups: Office and Administrative Support Occupations account for 12.0% of total jobs in the state, followed by Sales and Related Occupations (10.0%); Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (9.8%); Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (8.7%); Production Occupations (7.0%); Business and Financial Operations Occupations (6.5%); and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (6.4%). These major occupational groups represent over three-fifths (60%) of total jobs in the state.

(ii) Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.

Industry Projections

While assessment of the current industry and occupational trends provides some indication of the state's economic conditions, additional information regarding industry and occupational projections is needed to help guide the efforts of North Carolina's workforce development system. North Carolina's Labor and Economic Analysis Division produces both Industry and Occupational Employment Projections. Long-term projections are based on a 9-year period for this cycle (2021-2030) and are available at the statewide level and at 16 prosperity zone sub-regions. Each prosperity zone sub-region is comprised of multiple counties which helps to emphasize major regional labor markets within each of the prosperity zones.

Based on the latest industry projections, North Carolina's industry employment is expected to reach over 5.3 million jobs by 2030, a projected growth of 445,729 jobs compared to the state's 2021 employment level (4.9 million). Nearly two-thirds (63%) of all projected net job growth will be concentrated in six major industry sectors: Health Care and Social Assistance; Accommodation and Food Services; Professional, Scientific & Technical Services; Transportation and Warehousing; Administrative Support and Waste Management Services; and Educational Services.

By 2030, Health Care and Social Assistance industries are expected to add 76,000 jobs. The sector will account for 17.1% of the state's total net job growth. Changes in health care policies, the state's aging population as well as technological advances are expected to continue to spur employment growth in this sector. This industry is expected to have the fifth highest percentage growth in the state at 12.7%.

The Professional, Scientific & Technical Services industry is projected to add over 53,000 jobs and account for 15% of the state's total net job growth. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services will have the second highest percentage growth in the state at 18.5% (behind Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation at 25%). By 2023, Accommodation and Food Services is projected to add over 66,000 jobs (15% of the state's total net job growth), Transportation and Warehousing is projected to add nearly 32,000 jobs (7%), Administrative Support and Waste

Management Services is projected to add over 31,000 jobs (7%), and Educational Services is projected to add nearly 25,000 jobs (5%).

Manufacturing is a large component of North Carolina's economy and is expected to account for over 486,000 jobs by 2030. Over the last several decades, job losses in North Carolina's Manufacturing industry have been well documented. However, Manufacturing employment is projected to increase modestly by 2030, in contrast to the nation. In North Carolina, Manufacturing is projected to grow by about 22,200 jobs, or at an annualized growth rate of 0.52% compared to United States' annualized growth rate of -0.11%. The largest projected job gains are in Food Manufacturing (+6,700), Chemical Manufacturing (+4,100), and Transportation Equipment Manufacturing (+3,600). Manufacturing sub-sectors projected to lose jobs include Textile Mills (-1,800), Apparel Manufacturing (-1,500), and Printing and Related Support Activities (-1,000).

While most of North Carolina's major industry groups are expected to gain jobs, employment for Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting is expected to decrease slightly (-1,200), driven by a projected decline in Animal Production and Aquaculture (-1,800) and offset by a modest gain in Crop Production (+500).

The state's overall projected employment expansion of 445,729 jobs corresponds to a 9.1% growth rate; however, not all regions of the state are expected to grow at the same rate. Among the 16-prosperity zone sub-regions, Raleigh-Durham is expected to experience the fastest job growth (11.4%), followed by Charlotte (11.2%), Wilmington (9.9%), and Waynesville-Franklin (9.1%). The remaining 12 regions are projected to grow at a slower rate than the state, with the Goldsboro-Kinston region expected to experience the slowest job growth at 3.8%. Additionally, both the Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham regions will continue to lead the state in total employment and net job growth.

While total projected job growth provides a measure of the relative strength of the regional economies, changes in the underlying industry sectors will continue to drive the economic diversification within each of the prosperity zones and prosperity zone sub-regions. Both service-providing and goods-producing industries are projected to gain jobs across each region.

Digging deeper into the goods-producing industries, seven of the 16 prosperity zone sub-regions outpaced the state's overall projected employment growth in goods-producing industries of 5.6%: Wilmington (9.2%), Raleigh-Durham (8.9%), Hickory (7.1%), Winston-Salem (7.0%), Jacksonville-New Bern (6.0%), and Charlotte (6.0%). The largest net jobs gains are projected in the Raleigh-Durham (12,957), Charlotte (10,519), Winston-Salem (4,108), and Hickory (3,799) regions. Projected job gains are driven by Construction and Manufacturing industries while the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting industry is projected to decline in the majority of regions.

Within the service-providing industries, four regions will experience faster growth than the state's overall projected employment growth in service-providing industries of 10.2%: Charlotte (12.5%), Raleigh-Durham (12.2%), Waynesville-Franklin (10.5%), and Wilmington (10.3%). Health Care and Social Assistance, the industry projected to add the most jobs statewide, will grow faster than the state (12.7%) in the Raleigh-Durham (15.2%), Winston-Salem (14.7%), Pinehurst-Rockingham (14.4%), Asheville (14.2%), Charlotte (13.7%), and Wilmington (13.0%) areas. Accommodation and Food Services will also add large numbers of

jobs, with faster growth projected in the Raleigh-Durham (20.5%), Greensboro (18.9%), Winston-Salem (18.9%), Asheville (17.9%), Charlotte (17.8%), Jacksonville-New Bern (17.3%), and Boone-Wilkesboro (17.1%). Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, the third largest contributor to projected jobs statewide, will grow faster in the Charlotte (20.7%) region compared to the state (18.5%). Finally, jobs in Transportation and Warehousing will grow the fastest in the Raleigh-Durham (14.9%), Charlotte (14.1%), and Winston-Salem (12.8%) areas, although all lower than the statewide projected growth of 16.0%.

Occupational Projections

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

In addition to job demands that stem from employment growth, North Carolina will experience demand for workers due to worker separations from individuals exiting the labor force as well as individuals transferring to different occupations. These worker separations are driven by several factors including employee turnover, job successions, and worker retirements due to an aging workforce. Several of the state's major occupational groups are projected to experience demand for workers due to both job growth and separation needs, including Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations as well as Sales and Related Occupations – with projected job openings above 800,000 and 720,000, respectively, from 2021 to 2030. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations are also projected to have large numbers of openings (above 700,000) due to replacement needs. Furthermore, while overall employment in Office and Administrative Support Occupations is expected to decline, this occupational group is projected to experience over 690,000 openings between 2021 and 2030.

Across the 16 prosperity sub-zone regions, several occupational groups will experience growth in employment. In eight of the 16 regions, Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations are projected to have the highest net new jobs and openings, and in seven regions, Computer and Mathematical Occupations is projected to be the fastest growing occupational group. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations are projected to grow by approximately 500 jobs in the Pinehurst-Rockingham area to more than 15,000 in the Raleigh-Durham area by 2030, while total openings in these occupations will range from nearly 9,800 openings in the Pinehurst-Rockingham area to almost 176,000 in the Charlotte area. Meanwhile, growth in the Computer and Mathematical Occupations is expected to range from 7.5% in the Goldsboro-Kinston area to 24.7% in Charlotte.

Emerging Industry and Occupational Initiatives

Between 2024 and 2028, North Carolina will receive \$1.5 billion dollars from the federal government's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. Combined with

American Rescue Plan Act funding of nearly \$1 billion dollars appropriated in 2021, this investment will provide access to broadband internet for more than 500,000 unserved or underserved homes and businesses across the state. A recent labor analysis estimates that these investments will generate approximately 6,000 new jobs in the broadband sector, and ensuring a qualified workforce to fill these jobs remains critically important to success. The WIOA system will support broadband workforce needs by helping the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Division of Broadband and Digital Equity implement its BEAD workforce plan. For example, Local Workforce Boards are well positioned to convene employers, education, and community partners to develop career pathways for the broadband sector that demonstrate how individuals can enter into and advance their careers in the sector, which will generate more interest overall and attract a more diverse workforce. In addition, NCWorks Career Centers will connect job seekers to broadband training opportunities through the NextGen training program and other appropriate funding resources.

North Carolina is a leader in clean mobility and clean energy manufacturing, research, and deployment in the Southeast and is preparing the associated workforce in real-time. Three of North Carolina's largest economic development project announcements (Wolfspeed (2022), VinFast (2021), and Toyota (2021, 2022, 2023)) are in the clean mobility sector, and combined, will create more than 14,000 new jobs. New clean mobility Tier-1 supplier projects announced over the past 18 months will create an additional 1,200 jobs in the State.

The State's clean energy research and development, manufacturing, and deployments will continue to grow, due in large part to the carbon emissions reduction goals directed by the bipartisan Energy Solutions for North Carolina legislation enacted in 2021, and our incumbent utilities' (Duke Energy and Dominion Energy) commitments to carbon neutral energy generation by mid-century. Combined with Governor Cooper's executive action calling for the state to achieve net-zero emissions economy-wide by 2050, the clean energy workforce and the pressure to prepare the workforce will continue to grow.

North Carolina Department of Commerce evaluated the workforce needs of the clean energy and clean transportation sectors in 2019, and even the more recently published assessments of North Carolina's clean mobility and clean energy sectors, which are now outdated due to historic investments and funding resulting from the enactment of the Inflation Reduction Act, the CHIPS Act, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Because of the rapidly changing pace of these sectors, NC Commerce is contracting with a consultant to model various clean energy scenarios and plans under consideration. The findings and analyses (which will be updated to reflect changing inputs and variables) will allow NC Commerce to better understand the types of occupations necessary to meet scenarios, understand the education, training, economic, and business conditions to inform policy and programming, and specific to the WIOA Unified State Plan-create and deploy policies and programs to meet the clean energy workforce needs.

To prepare the workforce for the clean mobility and clean energy boom, NC Commerce is partnering with sister agencies and industry alongside regional community colleges, workforce boards, and universities while aligning federal funding awards to develop the training and certification programs required for employee success.

AdvanceNC is an innovative workforce development ecosystem developing a robust talent pipeline to support unprecedented economic growth in central North Carolina. This collaboration optimizes strengths from community colleges, universities, and workforce

boards—addressing the needs of thriving regional employers and positioning North Carolina as a global leader in advanced manufacturing. Additionally, a statewide council on Advanced Manufacturing and Electric Vehicles was formed in late 2022 to drive awareness about careers in Advanced Manufacturing/Clean Technology for all North Carolinians. The council is also working with employers and educators to build a statewide, short-term training credential which will lead to an entry level technician role within the sector.

Significant efforts have also been dedicated to identifying employers within the North Carolina semiconductor industry and adjacent industries, as well as other organizations, to establish a sectoral partnership. Extensive research, networking, and data analysis have been conducted to pinpoint companies operating in the semiconductor sector and related fields, such as electronic manufacturing services, supply chain management, and technology development. These concerted efforts aim to foster a robust sectoral partnership that can drive innovation, address industry-specific challenges, promote workforce development, and ultimately propel the growth and competitiveness of the semiconductor industry in North Carolina utilizing the CHIPS act.

(iii) Employers' Employment Needs.

Employer Needs Survey

North Carolina's workforce development system is committed to providing the state's employers with a highly skilled workforce. Part of this commitment includes working with employers to continually assess their workforce needs. As part of this effort, North Carolina's workforce partners have implemented a biennial Employer Needs Survey, designed to gauge employers' hiring plans, recruitment strategies, hiring experiences and workforce challenges. The first survey was implemented in 2014, with additional surveys and reports completed in 2016, 2018, and 2020. The sample of respondents in this scientifically designed survey is drawn from the population of employers paying into the state's unemployment insurance system with at least 10 employees and the results are representative of the state's geographic and industry composition. In addition to an all-industry sample that represents the industrial mix of the state, special industry-specific samples have been a regular part of this survey. In the most recent survey, 2,363 responses were collected by telephone from business establishments that included private and public employers with at least 10 employees across 97 of the North Carolina's 100 counties.

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

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

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

Employers were also asked about changes they had made to their businesses because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers reported increasing wages for existing workers (62% of employers) and new hires (55%), offering flexible schedules (48%) and signing bonuses (31%), and implementing remote work in response to the pandemic. About one quarter of employers reported changing hiring practices, making scheduling changes, and investing in technology including automation. In addition to existing benefits, twelve percent of employers had added or expanded paid leave benefits and nine percent had added or expanded health insurance in response to the pandemic.

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

The next iteration of this biennial survey began collection in November 2023, with results to be shared in the spring of 2024. While the focus of the survey remains on hiring difficulties, recruitment and retention strategies, new questions will be asked about employers’ outreach to populations with barriers to employment as well as the adoption of remote work and automation and artificial intelligence technologies.

Job Openings

While occupational and industry projections offer valuable insights into North Carolina’s future employment growth, they do not provide a comprehensive overview of current labor demand conditions. Based on job openings data from the Conference Board and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the following analysis evaluates current labor demand across the state.

As of June 2023—the latest data available—there were 368,000 job openings statewide. Labor demand was most concentrated in the Southwest region of the state (99,500), followed by the North Central (95,000) and Piedmont-Triad regions (68,000). By occupational group, Food Preparation and Serving had the most job openings (53,500), ahead of Transportation and Material Moving (44,000) and Office and Administrative Support (42,500).

The number of job openings in North Carolina surged following the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing 69% between February 2020 and June 2023. Since February 2020, the increase in job openings has been the largest in the North Central (+45,000), Southwest (+44,000), and Piedmont-Triad (+33,000) regions. The Transportation and Material Moving occupational group experienced the largest increase in job openings since February 2020 (+29,000), followed by Food and Preparation Serving (+28,000) and Office and Administrative Support (+19,000).

Over the past several years, a tight labor market has been a persistent feature of North Carolina’s economy. Since December 2021, there have been 0.9 jobseekers per job opening across the state—the lowest on record going back to 2001. Despite some general easing in labor

market conditions, hiring challenges remain due to a shortage of workers and an abundance of job vacancies. Furthermore, the continued aging of the population suggests labor shortages may persist well into the future.

B. WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the current workforce in the State and within various state regions. Provide key analytical conclusions in aggregate as well as disaggregated among populations to identify potential disparities in employment and educational attainment and understand labor force conditions for items (i)-(iii) below. Populations analyzed must include individuals with barriers to employment described in the first paragraph of Section II. Analysis must include—

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.

(B) Workforce Analysis

While assessment of North Carolina's employment demand provides critical information regarding the state's current and future economic conditions, analyses of the state's population trends, and labor force statistics reveal additional economic and workforce insights. According to the latest population estimates from North Carolina's State Demographer, between 2012 and 2022, North Carolina's population grew by 10.1% (over 980,000 people). While the state has experienced population growth, this growth has not been equal regionally. Mecklenburg and Wake Counties, the state's two largest counties, accounted for 41% of the state's net population increase from 2012 and 2022, and the 16 counties making up the Charlotte, Raleigh, and Durham-Chapel Hill Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) accounted for 75% of the state's net growth. Over this period, 47 North Carolina counties lost population (total combined loss of 126,000) and 53 counties gained population (total combined gain of 1.1 million). Like most of the country, North Carolina's population has also aged over the decade. The state's child (age 0-17) population fell by 0.3% (6,700 individuals), while the adult population grew by 13.3% (989,000). While 47 North Carolina counties experienced a decline in total population, 77 counties had fewer children in 2022 than in 2012.

(i) Employment and Unemployment

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, North Carolina's labor market has experienced a sharp contraction followed by a historically rapid economic recovery. The statewide unemployment rate peaked at 14.2% in April 2020 before steadily declining, reaching a near-historic low of 3.3% by the middle of 2023. In November 2023, there were 182,214 unemployed

persons across the state—well below the record of 656,620 in April 2020 and the pre-pandemic level of 190,670 in February 2020.

North Carolina's labor force likewise experienced a rapid rebound. The state's labor force fell from 5,015,309 in February 2020 to 4,635,833 in April 2020 before quickly reversing course. The labor force surpassed its pre-pandemic size in October 2021 and grew to 5,277,754 by November 2023. The labor force participation rate dropped from 61.2% to 56.5% between February and April 2020. In November 2023, the statewide labor force participation rate was 60.9%. Although labor force participation remains below its pre-pandemic rate, the current shortfall is primarily due to the aging of the population rather than any lasting consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even though the statewide recovery has been robust, the labor market rebound has differed across geographic regions in North Carolina. From 2020 to 2022, the Western region's annual average unemployment rate fell 4.4 percentage points—the largest of all regions. During the same period, unemployment rates for the Northwest, Piedmont-Triad, Southwest, and Sandhills regions declined by 3.6 to 3.8 percentage points. In 2022, the Sandhills region had the highest annual average unemployment rate of 4.8%, while the Western region had the lowest rate of 3.3%.

In addition to exhibiting geographic variation, unemployment rates have differed across demographic groups. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment, Black and Hispanic individuals in North Carolina had average unemployment rates of 6.5% and 3.0%, respectively, in 2022. The average unemployment rate for the white population was 2.9%, which is similar to the 2.8% unemployment rate for Asian individuals. The annual average unemployment rate was 4.0% for women and 3.4% for men. Unemployment rates for each of these demographic subgroups have declined from their 2020 pandemic highs. Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-year estimates show the American Indian and Alaska Native labor force in North Carolina had an unemployment rate of 6.6% vs. 5.1% for the state in 2018-2022. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders had an average unemployment rate of 8.8% during this same time period.

North Carolina's labor force statistics also reveal differences between certain population subgroups, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, and the foreign-born population. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 1.1 million individuals, aged 16 and over, with a reported physical or cognitive disability in North Carolina. For individuals with disabilities, the annual average unemployment rate was 7.5% in 2022. Among the more than 610,000 veterans in North Carolina, the annual average unemployment rate was 2.2% in 2022. Additionally, the state's foreign-born population (approximately 1.0 million individuals) had low unemployment rates, with an annual average rate of 2.7% in 2022.

Based on the Census Bureau's American Community Survey's 1-year estimates, in 2022 youth with disabilities had an unemployment rate of 14.2% while the overall youth population (aged 16-24) had an unemployment rate of 8.6%. At the same time, older individuals (aged 55+) had an unemployment rate of 2.3%. Data from the 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates show English-language learners had an average unemployment rate of 4.9% during this period. According to North Carolina's Reentry Outcome Reporting System (NC RORS), there were 12,806 individuals exiting prison in 2021. Of this cohort, 49% were employed in one year after prison, with real median annual wage earnings of \$7,343.

The COVID-19 pandemic represented a once-in-a-lifetime economic shock, triggering widespread layoffs and placing excessive strain on the state's Unemployment Insurance (UI) system. During the week ending March 28, 2020, the state processed more initial claims for Regular UI benefits (172,145) than in all of 2019 (165,986). In 2020, the state's UI system collectively processed over 1.5 million initial claims for Regular UI benefits, over 804,000 initial claims for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), and 22 million continued claims across all programs.

As the economic recovery has progressed, initial and continued claims for UI benefits have significantly declined from their historic peaks in 2020. By November of 2023, initial claims averaged 3,115 a week, and continued claims averaged 19,529 a week. When compared to November of 2022 weekly initial claims are slightly lower (3,115 vs 3,121) while the average weekly continued claims counts are somewhat higher (19,529 vs 14,743). However, these levels are in line with pre-pandemic levels. As a comparison the average weekly initial claims for 2017 through 2019 was 3,247 and 21,949 for continued weeks claimed.

(ii) Labor Market Trends

Industry Trends

As previously noted, North Carolina experienced significant health, social and economic, impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between February and April of 2020, North Carolina's economy was challenged by the loss of 566,200 seasonally adjusted total non-farm jobs representing a 12.2% decline in total employment. The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate peaked at 14.2% in April 2020, with an estimated 656,620 unemployed workers during the month, while the state's labor force dropped to 4.6 million, down from its peak of over 5.0 million in December of 2019.

While the pandemic brought major economic challenges, North Carolina's state and local areas have been on a path of economic recovery. By October of 2021, the state's seasonally adjusted total non-farm employment rebounded to 4,663,700 reflecting an increase of 37,800 jobs above the February 2020 pre-pandemic employment level (4,625,900). By December of 2022, total non-farm employment reached 4,852,500, more than 226,000 jobs above the February 2020 level.

Between December 2022 and November of 2023, the state added 96,800 total non-farm jobs, an increase of 2.0%. During this same period, the state experienced 10 out of 11 months of positive monthly job gains. By November 2023, North Carolina's seasonally adjusted total non-farm employment reached 4,949,300 which is 323,400 jobs or 7.0% above the February 2020 pre-pandemic employment level.

As a result of the pandemic, all of North Carolina's major industrial sectors were challenged by employment loss. However, most of the state's major industrial sectors have experienced positive job growth with employment in most sectors exceeding their pre-pandemic employment levels.

Employment in North Carolina's service providing industries was 3,910,800 in February of 2020, by April of 2020 these industries experienced a collective decline of 505,600 jobs or 12.9%. The largest job losses were experienced in the Leisure and Hospitality Services industries with a loss of 232,700 jobs or 44.5%; Trade, Transportation and Utilities industries

with a decline of 72,000 jobs; Education and Health Services industries with a decline of 67,600 jobs; and Professional and Business Services with a decline of 56,400 jobs.

By November of 2023, employment in North Carolina's service providing industries accounted for 4,223,600 or 85.3% of North Carolina's 4.9 million total non-farm jobs. Between April of 2020 and November of 2023, North Carolina's service providing industries gained 818,400. This includes an increase of more than 312,000 jobs over February 2020 employment levels.

Among the state's major service providing industry sectors, Trade, Transportation and Utilities industries are up 80,200 jobs over February 2020 pre-pandemic levels, Information industries are up 7,900 jobs, Financial Activities industries are up 41,600 jobs, Professional and Business Services industries are up 108,000 jobs, Educational and Health Services industries are up 66,100 jobs, Leisure and Hospitality Services industries are up 15,100 jobs and Other Services industries are up 6,600 jobs. One notable exception is North Carolina's Government sector which is 12,700 jobs below its pre-pandemic level, this includes State Government employment which is down 10,400 and Local Government employment which is down 8,000.

Between February and April of 2020, the state's goods producing industries experienced a decline of 60,600 jobs or 8.5% decline. This included a decline of 48,400 jobs in the state's Manufacturing industries, a decline of 12,100 jobs in Construction industries and a loss of 100 jobs in the state's Mining and Logging industries. By November of 2023, the goods producing industries accounted for 725,700 or 14.7% of North Carolina's 4.9 million total non-farm jobs. Collectively the state's goods producing industries are up only 10,600 jobs or 1.5% over February 2020 pre-pandemic levels. Over the last several months, these industries continue to be impacted by employment challenges including notable closures in the state's furniture manufacturing sector.

While information regarding statewide employment patterns provides an overview of the relative strength of the state's economy, more localized industry patterns can reveal regional and local strengths and opportunities. Information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage program provides a more refined view of local employment trends. According to this source, the average number of business establishments in North Carolina in 2021 was more than 314,000 and these businesses paid more than \$268.6 billion in wages to workers. In 2022 the average number of business establishments grew to over 347,000 and the total wages paid grew to almost \$297.2 billion.

In 2022, the majority of North Carolina's business establishments (60.6%) were concentrated within three of the state's eight regional prosperity zones. The Southwest Region Prosperity Zone, which includes the Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia Metropolitan Statistical Area and surrounding counties, accounted for more than 83,000 of the state's business establishments. The North Central Region Prosperity Zone which includes the Durham-Chapel Hill, Raleigh-Cary, and Rocky Mount Metropolitan Statistical Areas and surrounding counties, accounted for more than 82,400 business establishments. The Piedmont-Triad Prosperity Zone, which includes the Burlington, Greensboro-High Point and Winston-Salem Metropolitan Statistical Areas and surrounding counties had more than 44,800 business establishments. These three prosperity zones (Southwest, North Central and Piedmont-Triad) also accounted for approximately two-thirds (3,111,785) of the state's average employment (4,698,369) and 70.2% of the total wages paid in 2022.

The other five prosperity zones (Southeast Region, Western Region, Sandhills Region, Northwest Region and Northeast Region) accounted for 30.3% of North Carolina's business establishments, 29.5% of the annual average employment and 22.7% of the total wages paid.

The average weekly wage in North Carolina in 2022 was \$1,216. Average weekly wages across the eight prosperity zones ranged from a low of \$920 to a high of \$1,372. Average weekly wages in the Southwest Region (\$1,372) and the North Central Region (\$1,335) were above the statewide average while the average weekly wages in the other 6 regions were all below the statewide average. These included the Piedmont-Triad Region at \$1,069, the Western Region at \$955, the Southeast Region at \$953, the Northwest Region at \$924 and the Sandhills and Northeast Regions at \$920.

Occupational Trends

Just as North Carolina's industry mix reflects the state's diverse economic base, the state's existing workforce is spread across a diverse group of occupations. Approximately 12% of the state's occupational mix is centered in Office and Administrative Support Occupations, 10.0% in Sales and Related Occupations, 9.8% in Transportation and Material Moving Occupations, and 8.7% in Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations. Over the next several years, employment in Health Care Related Occupations is anticipated to continue to expand. Current employment levels reveal that 6.4% of all occupational employment is in Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations and 3.7% in Healthcare Support Occupations. An additional 7.0% of the state's occupational employment is concentrated in Production Occupations while 6.5% of the state's occupational employment is concentrated in Business and Financial Operations Occupations.

(iii) Education and Skill Levels of the Workforce

North Carolina possesses a world class system of higher education. This includes more than 130 degree-granting postsecondary public and private institutions as well as many institutions that offer post-secondary non degree courses and programs. The state has two systems of public higher education, the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) with 58 colleges and the University of North Carolina (UNC) System with 16 post-secondary institutions. North Carolina has 48 post-secondary nonprofit degree granting institutions. Thirty-six of the state's private non-profit post-secondary institutions of higher education are members of the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU). NCICU is a nonprofit organization that serves as a statewide advocate for private higher education in the state.

While the combined efforts of North Carolina's public and private institutions help produce a skilled workforce for the state, challenges still exist. In 2022, 9.8% of the population 25 years and over had less than a high school diploma, 24.9% had a high school diploma, 19.3% had some college but no degree, 10.1% had an associate degree, and 22.8% had a bachelor's degree while 13.2% had a graduate or professional degree as their highest level of educational attainment.

In addition to the educational attainment of the state's population, North Carolina faces challenges in addressing the education and training needs of those individuals with disabilities. Based on information from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 1-year estimates, there are over 1.2 million individuals with a disability in North Carolina who are 25 years of age or older. Of these, 16.5% have less than a high school diploma, 32.1% are high

school graduates, 30.4% have some college or associate degree, and 21% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Among the population 25 and older without a disability, only 8.2% have less than high school diploma, 23.2% are high school graduates, 29.1% have some college or associate degree, and 39.5% have a bachelor's degree or higher.

In 2022, approximately 8.4% of the state's population aged 25 years and over were veterans. The educational attainment of veterans differs from non-veterans. Veterans have a lower rate of bachelor's degrees or higher when compared to non-veterans (32.4% vs. 36.2%), a higher rate of some college or associate degrees (40% vs. 28.3%), a slightly lower rate of high school degrees (23.4% vs. 25.1%) and a much lower rate of less than a high school diploma than non-veterans (4.2% vs. 10.4%).

C. COMPARISON OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYTICAL CONCLUSION. DESCRIBE AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR MEETING HIRING, EDUCATION, AND SKILLS NEEDS IDENTIFIED IN THE ECONOMY COMPARED TO THE ASSETS AVAILABLE IN THE LABOR FORCE IN THE STATE.

Comparison of Economic and Workforce Analytical Conclusion

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

In 2021, occupations requiring no formal education or only a high school diploma accounted for 60.6% of total employment; however, this is projected to decline to 59.7% by 2030. At the same time, the share of occupations requiring education beyond high school will increase. Jobs requiring post-secondary non-degree training, or an associate degree will increase by 11.2% and 12.3%, respectively, while those requiring a bachelor's degree for entry will grow by 12.4% and jobs requiring an advanced degree for entry are projected to grow the fastest at 13.6%. These growth rates are all higher than the increase in jobs requiring a high school diploma or less for entry (7.4%).

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

On Feb. 20, 2019, myFutureNC unveiled its goal and bold vision for the future of education in North Carolina: to ensure that by 2030, 2 million North Carolinians, age 25-44, have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. In the summer of 2019, myFutureNC became a statewide nonprofit organization to carry on the work of the Commission. The goal was codified into law and has been endorsed by all of the education sectors as well as all of the local workforce development boards. According to myFutureNC, as of 2016 approximately 1.3 million adults aged 25 to 44 in the state had a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. Without

any changes, North Carolina is projected to have about 1.6 million adults who meet the attainment definition in 2030, which means the state will need to produce an estimated 400,000 additional residents to attain a high-quality postsecondary credential or degree for our state to meet the demands of employers.

In addition to the 2 million by 2030 goal, myFutureNC monitors progress on 18 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are leading benchmarks for educational attainment, aligned around four key transition points: Academic Readiness; College & Career Access; Postsecondary Completion; and Workforce Alignment.

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 ⁶ and optional one-stop delivery system partners.⁷

[6] Required one-stop partners: In addition to the core programs, the following partner programs are required to provide access through the one-stops: Career and Technical Education (Perkins), Community Services Block Grant, Indian and Native American programs, HUD Employment and Training programs, Job Corps, Local Veterans' Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, National Farmworker Jobs program, Senior Community Service Employment program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (unless the Governor determines TANF will not be a required partner), Trade Adjustment Assistance programs, Unemployment Compensation programs, and YouthBuild.

[7] Workforce development activities may include a wide variety of programs and partners, including educational institutions, faith- and community-based organizations, and human services.

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.

C. STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

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

Workforce Development, Education and Training Activities Analysis

(A) The State's Workforce Development Activities

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

Skills and Education Attainment

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

Recognizing that an educated North Carolina is a job-ready North Carolina, Governor Cooper established a goal to make North Carolina a Top Ten Educated State by 2025 by increasing the number of four-year-olds enrolled in high quality pre-K, raising the high school graduation rate, and increasing the number of North Carolinians with a post-secondary degree or credential. Governor Cooper has also been instrumental in the formation of the myFutureNC goal, and the statewide nonprofit organization focused on educational attainment. As North Carolina's economy grows, most new jobs require education beyond a high school diploma—but fewer than half of North Carolinians ages 25-44 have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. The mission for myFutureNC is to close the educational attainment gap in North Carolina by helping 2 million North Carolinians ages 25-44 achieve high-quality postsecondary attainment by 2030. This goal is helping to address the needs of employers, equip local communities to take action, and open up new opportunities for North Carolinians. In June 2019, Governor Cooper signed House Bill 664 codifying the myFutureNC goal into state law.

To close the attainment gap, the state must make significant investments in ensuring North Carolinians have access to, and support in completing, postsecondary training. After hearing countless stories of college students working hard to better their lives but getting thrown off course by a financial emergency, Governor Cooper launched the Finish Line Grants program. Initially funded with \$7 million federal WIOA state set aside funding, the Finish Line Grants help community college students who face unforeseen financial emergencies complete their training. Workforce Development Boards and community colleges partnered together to distribute funds to help students pay for course materials, housing, medical needs, car repairs, dependent care, or other financial emergencies that students may face through no fault of their own. From July 2018 through September 2022, local partnerships issued FLGs to nearly 6,000 students in North Carolina to help them stay on course to complete their training. Effective October 1, 2022, with funding from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief funds, the Governor, transitioned the Finish Line Grants (FLG) Program administration transitioned from the NC Department of Commerce to the NC Community College System Office. In 2023, SB 20, provided recurring funding to support the program starting in FY24.

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

North Carolina also has a strong history of developing career pathways to help North Carolinians get the education and training they need. To date, communities in North Carolina have developed 41 Certified Career Pathways to help North Carolinians work in high-demand, high-growth careers, with additional sustainable, long-term pathways being developed. The key is to promote the use of NCWorks Career Centers (North Carolina's branding for the One-Stops) and engage with NC Workforce Development Boards for incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training, internships, and apprenticeships to collectively reconnect the disconnected workforce and job seekers to high-demand fields. It is important to promote the alignment of the career pathways among sector partners and continue to support career pathway system approaches in a variety of program investments, evaluation and research activities, and technical assistance efforts, including the alignment of youth programs with regional career pathways and in-demand occupations.

North Carolina received a total of \$137.8 million in aid from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund through federal COVID-19 relief packages allowing the Governor's Office to launch the Longleaf Commitment for 2021 North Carolina high school graduates in partnership with the NC Community College System and the State Education Assistance Authority to guarantee that students graduating from high school in 2021 from low-income and working-class families receive enough financial aid to cover tuition and fees, at any of the state's 58 community colleges, in order to earn an associate degree and/or credits to transfer to a four-year institution. Intended to facilitate learning recovery, the Longleaf Commitment Grant program helps ensure that North Carolina high school graduates do not fall out of the education pipeline for good. The grant guarantees that eligible students receive \$700 to \$2,800 per year, for a total of two years if they attend one of the state's 58 community colleges. The North Carolina General Assembly provided State Fiscal Recovery funding in the 2021 budget to extend the Longleaf Commitment to students graduating from high school in 2022.

Governor Cooper invested \$27 million in creating the Summer Accelerator grant program. The program will provide tuition assistance to public and private postsecondary students who take summer courses in order to accelerate or stay on track towards graduation. The program provides up to \$5,000 for students taking community college, UNC System, or private university classes. Students can use the money for tuition, fees, books, housing, and other expenses.

Additionally, the North Carolina Department of Commerce has awarded 20 special grants to 11 Local Area Workforce Development Boards, totaling \$8.45 million, Boards will use the grants to help jobseekers and small businesses with training and other services in response to a tight labor market. These include programs for individuals who are in the reentry process and individuals with or at risk of substance abuse. Federal American Rescue Plan Act funds are supporting this initiative.

Employer Leadership

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

Recognizing that employers must be in the driver's seat of workforce development, Governor Cooper launched a NC Sector Strategies Council to promote a coordinated strategy among workforce, economic development, and education organizations to meet industry's workforce needs. Sector partnerships are collaborations of businesses from the same industry sector and same regional labor market that convene with economic, education and workforce partners to address workforce and other competitive needs of their industry. The state adopted the Next Generation Sector Partnership model, which puts businesses at the center of these collaborations and allows government and organizations to listen and learn how to support businesses more successfully. Currently, at least fourteen North Carolina regions are receiving technical assistance, coaching and support to launch regional industry sector partnerships in the advanced manufacturing, healthcare, IT, furniture, clean energy, and biopharma industries. As a result of the Governor's emphasis on clean energy, the NC Commerce Secretary's priority on Advanced Manufacturing, and the NCWorks Commission's strategic plan goal of prioritizing industry-led sector partnerships, Commerce/DWS will award up to 15 sector partnership planning grants for local and regional collaborations centered around clean advanced manufacturing. These grants will support planning, technical assistance and training to prepare regional employers and partners to implement strategies that support the growth of the industry. Within this program year, the goal is to have at least one clean advanced manufacturing sector partnership in each of the eight prosperity zones.

Governor Cooper has also made significant investments in increasing work-based learning opportunities for employers across the state, recognizing its power to give students and jobseekers a taste of the technical skills associated with a given career, help them develop critical soft skills needed to be successful, and equip them with the tools to decide if they are on the right career path. That starts with employers getting involved in their local schools to increase students' career awareness and understanding of the jobs available now and in the future. Work-based learning also includes internships, pre-apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships where students experience real-world professional environments and learn new skills specific to the job they hope to pursue.

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

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

was also one of six states selected by the National Governors Association to expand work-based learning opportunities. Through a partnership between the Governor's Office, Department of Commerce, North Carolina Business Committee for Education, Department of Public Instruction, and Workforce Development Boards, North Carolina hosted two state-wide summits focusing on expanding work-based learning in the state. Recently, North Carolina was selected for an ongoing cohort of states to continue this work and develop regional work-based learning cohorts. Governor Cooper has also proposed a Work-Based Learning Fund in his budget to help companies start or scale internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning activities. In addition to the Governor's proposed fund, the Commission approved a \$1 million NC Job Ready grant from state set-aside funds to be administered by DWS and awarded to local workforce boards. These grants are earmarked to support work-based learning opportunities, specifically those in OJT, IWT, WEX, customized training and Apprenticeship, for employers actively engaged in economic development projects – further emphasizing the alignment and collaboration of economic and workforce development. Granted in the last PY, \$100,000 was awarded to support two manufacturing business expansion projects in a rural county. To date, there have been five additional major economic development projects announced and in various discovery stages that will benefit from these grants. This grant has also incentivized economic developers to include workforce development at an early stage of the project process.

The unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted, like nothing else before, the need to collect data to better understand what our employers, jobseekers and communities were facing, as well as the need to communicate that data.

While we have partnered with the Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) of the N.C. Department of Commerce to produce Employer Needs Surveys every other year since 2014, our 2022 survey stands out as the first conducted during a global pandemic. We collected data for the 2020 survey before our lives, and our economy, changed in March of that year.

This new survey captures a moment in time, in late 2021, after North Carolina had experienced the pandemic's economic disruptions that left many out of work, followed by a period of rapid recovery and a tightened labor market. It is therefore illuminating, but not surprising, to read in this report about our employers' hiring difficulties. As these labor market challenges continue, we will use this data to help provide guidance to North Carolina's workforce system.

Despite the great strides we have made in recent years, many opportunities remain for the workforce system to engage with employers more fully. To that end, while they were filling out this Employer Needs Survey, more than 400 employers expressed interest in both learning more about workforce services and participating in workforce discussions, such as panels and roundtables. This led to outreach by workforce professionals to the businesses that asked for follow-up, and then to a series of regional employer roundtable discussions throughout the state. In these ways, this survey has added value by helping to inform many employers about workforce services and strategies, while also helping us to discover both successes and challenges.

The State of North Carolina is piloting a Business Pulse Survey to measure changes in conditions, attitudes, and behavior in real-time. This data could allow state, local, and regional workforce entities to recognize changing business needs and better prepare jobseekers for opportunities.

This survey was the first of its kind undertaken by the State of North Carolina. The goal is to receive a commitment of businesses, with a target of 400 across the state to complete a 5-minute survey every month for 12 months. The Business Pulse Survey was funded by the Duke Foundation and myFutureNC with the first and last surveys being a little longer to get a complete understanding of a company and its current condition. myFutureNC, in collaboration with partners on the NC Workforce Credentials Council, will engage education, workforce, and economic development organizations across North Carolina to provide input into identifying survey dimensions and feedback on survey items, and build buy-in and secure business participation.

The NCWorks Commission's emphasis to leverage data allowed North Carolina to evaluate its performance and activity tracking functions, identifying the need to better track employer engagement. This resulted in a new software platform and framework specific to employer activities and services. Fully functional this program year, state business services staff, state and regional analysts, LEAD staff and all local area workforce boards have staff utilizing, recording, tracking and reporting employer participation by industry, geography, size, and other indicators. These activities include work-based learning, economic development, Rapid Response, layoff aversion and other service referrals, and joint partner activities. Further enhancements to the system are forthcoming. This, along with the survey data, roundtable feedback and one-on-one conversations with employers, guides our decisions on continuous improvement and service delivery.

The North Carolina Workforce Leadership Academy (WLA) is a workforce leadership training program that is located within and administered by the Municipal Research Lab at North Carolina State University. The WLA is the only training program endorsed by the National Association of Workforce Boards and the only program approved to issue the Certified Workforce Leader credential on behalf of the Workforce Leadership Institute. The Employer Leadership Committee has several members serving on the advisor board for the Workforce Academy.

Workforce development is an essential component of a community's economic development initiatives. It has come to describe a relatively wide range of activities, policies, and programs employed by communities to create, sustain, and retain a viable workforce that can support current and future business and industry. *It* can include changes to culture, changes to attitudes, and changes to people's potential that help to positively influence a business' future success. Without a sufficient workforce, economic opportunities that might have been open to a community will move to other regions. The workforce development field also requires strong, committed, and capable leaders who can develop strategies that enhance the capacity of their community. These leaders need to be able to understand the economic conditions of their community, their neighbors, and their state to leverage the skills and capacity of their community for economic opportunities as they emerge. The intent of the North Carolina Workforce Leadership Academy is to provide training, education, and resources for these workforce development leaders throughout North Carolina. This will be accomplished by a four-course certification program that prepares students for positions of leadership within the field of workforce development.

This program differs from other training opportunities in the state. Currently, the training opportunities within North Carolina are focused on the day-to-day aspects of working as an

employee in the workforce development field. This training is primarily directed towards preparing employees to help residents obtain employment. By focusing on the development of leaders within the workforce development community, the academy will focus on preparing attendees to participate on and lead workforce development boards, engage with economic developers, and create initiatives that will further the entire community.

Central to the North Carolina Workforce Leadership Academy (WLA) is the creation of a Certified Workforce Leader program. The program is a non-degree professional certification and will be comprised of four courses offered over a week-long intensive program. Upon successful completion of the program courses, the student will be given a certificate of program completion and the title of Certified Workforce Leader. The next offering of the WLA program will be in October 2024. There are several recruitment events planned, including the Spring 2024 Southeastern Employment and Training Association (SETA) conference, the Spring 2024 North Carolina Economic Development Association (NCEDA) conference, and the Spring 2024 North Carolina Employment and Training Association (NCETA) conference.

Local Innovation

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

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

In 2018, Governor Cooper launched the “NCWorks Local Innovation Fund,” a grant administered by the Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions and the NCWorks Commission.

The Local Innovation Fund was established as part of Governor Cooper’s NC Job Ready initiative to prepare North Carolina’s workforce for the jobs of today and tomorrow. The Commission, which is designated as the state’s Workforce Development Board under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, recommends policies and strategies to enable the state’s workforce and businesses to compete in the global economy. The fund started in 2019 and supported six local partnerships with grants.

This grant provides funding for local communities to pilot innovative programs or replicate successful program models that address a local or regional workforce issue; specifically targeting an underserved or under resourced community or population. The NCWorks Local Innovation Fund supports projects that help connect Communities and assemble collaborative teams to design and implement a set of solutions to a workforce issue. The Local Innovation Fund’s new grants will support North Carolina’s First in Talent Plan, which seeks to prepare workers for career and entrepreneurial success, prepare businesses for success by growing and attracting a talented workforce, and prepare communities to be more competitive. The NCWorks Commission’s strategic plan also includes a goal of promoting the replication of creative solutions by supporting local innovation.

The two innovative projects during this grant cycle included implementation grants totaling \$450,000. These grants come from the Local Innovation Fund, which is an initiative of the NCWorks Commission, the state workforce development board, and the Division of Workforce Solutions within the N.C. Department of Commerce which helps to administer the fund.

One of the two grants was awarded to **Building Hope** (*Chatham, Orange, and Wake counties*) preparing gender minorities for careers in construction. This region received a \$225,000 grant that helps address both a critical need for workers in the construction industry and gender pay disparities by increasing the number of women trained in various skilled trades. A Chapel Hill-based nonprofit organization, Hope Renovations, provides pre-apprenticeship training in construction trades, case management to help resolve employment barriers like childcare, internships, and additional coaching services to help women succeed on the job. This grant will allow Hope Renovations to expand services beyond Orange County and support the training of approximately 40 participants. Partners include Capital Area Workforce Development Board, Hope Renovations and Wake Technical Community College.

The other grant was awarded to **OPT-IN and J.E.T.** creating opportunities for opportunity youth. (*Burke County*): A \$225,000 grant will support “opportunity youth” (those who are currently neither in the labor force nor in school) and help meet Burke County’s workforce needs by expanding the “OPT-IN” (Opportunity Internship) program and launching the “Jobs, Education, and Training” (J.E.T.) program. OPT-IN serves recent high school graduates by matching them with local employers for an eight-week, paid exploratory internship. Participants also receive mentoring and professional development classes. Similarly, J.E.T. can serve any Opportunity Youth between the ages of 18-24, connecting them to local companies offering family-sustaining wages, while providing mentoring and professional development. Both programs will focus on outreach to communities of color. Partners include Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, The Industrial Commons, and its affiliate program “Work in Burke,” Burke Development, Inc., Western Piedmont Community College, Burke County Public Schools, NCWorks Career Center - Burke County, N.C. Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities and Meridian Specialty Yarn Group, Inc.

The NCWorks Commission has submitted the documentation for procurement to hire a 3rd party evaluator with a budget of \$50,000. Once selected, the 3rd party evaluator will compile mid-project and final reports which include comprehensive reporting of all outcomes gained during the cycle of the grant. The hope is these projects can be replicated throughout the state.

According to Governor Cooper, “As North Carolina keeps growing and creating more good jobs, we need collaboration and creativity to empower our people with the education and training needed to fill the jobs of today and tomorrow,” Governor Cooper said. “I applaud the partners that have received these new grants, which will not only help their own communities but also serve as inspiring models for others across the state.”

In addition to individual committee efforts. The Local Innovation Committee is working as a collaborative team with the Skills and Education Attainment Committee and the Employer Leadership committee to provide an upcoming webinar series on the topic of Justice Involved workforce efforts.

The local Innovation committee works to advance leadership development opportunities to workforce professionals. Education and workforce partnerships drive successful career-

readiness initiatives. Empowering local workforce leaders with development opportunities that encourage knowledge transfer will promote capacity building, strengthen the effectiveness of localized efforts, and improve outcomes across the communities they serve.

Promote local workforce initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline. Employers want educated, skilled, and competent workers to help them solve tomorrow's business challenges today. Workers want skills and responses to recover from workforce disruptions. An effective and efficient way to address talent expectations is to utilize technology to retool the employer/job seeker connection while upskilling and reskilling our workforce for emerging and high-demand roles. This process includes efforts to provide training to workers for growth with the goal of providing a sustainable living wage with the opportunity to achieve advancement in North Carolina industries.

NCWorks Supporting NC Job Ready

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

The NCWorks system is comprised of an array of workforce and educational programs that serve a diverse population across various age groups. The NCWorks system provides workforce development activities that increase occupational skill attainment, employment, retention, and participant earnings. The state's workforce development services range from online self-service activities to staff-assisted services in one of 60 comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers (from here forward may also be referred to as career centers), to multi-year training programs at high schools, community colleges and universities and Vocational Rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. Individuals may participate in a single program or activity or may be eligible to receive services through multiple programs and service providers. The system consists of programs and networks designed to help individuals succeed in the workplace by providing career services, skill development, training, and employment services to workers and by helping businesses locate, hire, and retain a skilled workforce.

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

Under North Carolina's general statutes, the NCWorks Commission is charged with reviewing and evaluating the state's publicly supported workforce development programs for effectiveness, duplication, fiscal accountability, and coordination. The NCWorks Commission completes an annual review of 19 workforce development program plans, policies, and services across five agencies in North Carolina. This annual review includes an analysis of the WIOA core programs, as well as other one-stop delivery system partners. The commission reviews workforce program funding levels and sources, service provision types, special populations served and business outreach initiatives. Appendix 2B includes a summary of the workforce

programs offered in North Carolina. In 2023 the 20 newly aligned North Carolina Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and the NCWorks Commission worked to update specific services and outcomes of performance being provided by the career centers to better understand and trend opportunities for improvement. These three core services provided areas are:

- Basic Services (Initial contact & evaluation; Job search assistance; Provision of information; Referral)
- Career Services (Career planning & counseling; Supportive services; Testing/assessments)
- Education and Training Services (Adult basic education; Occupational skills; Post-secondary; Pre-Vocational skills; Secondary)

The data for these areas will be taken from the NC Association of Workforce Development Boards (www.ncawdb.org) NC Workforce Service Delivery Outcome Dashboard, which was developed in collaboration with the NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD).

(B) The Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities

Strengths

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

NCWorks is a unified workforce development system and an instrumental partner for ensuring North Carolina's economic future. The primary partners for career search and job placement assistance are the state's 20 Local Workforce Development Boards and the Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS). North Carolina's 20 Local Workforce Development Boards provide oversight, planning, and administration of NCWorks Career Centers. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) is the state administrative entity for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I and Title III programs. DWS provides Wagner-Peyser, Veterans Services, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) staffing in career centers.

There are 60 comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers throughout the state of North Carolina. Each career center has the following fundamental qualities:

- Locally-responsive and demand-driven;

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

North Carolina has a strong State Workforce Development Board, the NCWorks Commission. The Commission is led by a private sector chair, with 37 members including representatives from the business community, state workforce agency administrators, state education leaders, and community leaders. Members of the Commission are appointed by the Governor. The Commission oversees North Carolina's Workforce Development system and ensures that the system is coordinated and aligned to meet the needs of the state's citizens and businesses. The NCWorks Commission is charged under both state and federal law with the authority and responsibility for ensuring that the state's workforce programs are working efficiently, effectively, and collaboratively in preparing the state's workforce and meeting the needs of businesses. In February of 2023, the NCWorks Commission approved the biennial strategic plan with a shared mission and vision for the workforce development system:

To ensure North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity; and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation. To build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The four strategic goals of the 2023 NCWorks Commission's strategic plan align with Governor Cooper's vision for workforce development in North Carolina and a new statewide educational attainment goal. These strategic goals assimilate North Carolina's workforce system's current strengths and incorporate strategies for aligning services in a way that results in high quality workers trained for in-demand occupations.

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

The State of North Carolina operates eight administrative regions known as Prosperity Zones that organize the state's 100 counties to provide a consistent regional structure for economic and workforce development activities. Each zone features one-stop, physical locations, providing citizens and businesses with the ability to interact with representatives from multiple state agencies, as well as to encourage better collaboration between the agencies themselves. The state deploys subject matter experts in each zone, from transportation and environmental topics to workforce development, community planning and liaisons to existing businesses in the zones.

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

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

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) contributes to the NCWorks system through both cost sharing and the provision of services. NCWorks and NC DHHS have an infrastructure and cost sharing agreement, under which NC DHHS cost allocates an average of \$300,000 annually to Local Workforce Boards for NCWorks services provided to individuals with disabilities participating in the Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation programs, which are administered by NC DHHS. Additionally, the NC DHHS Vocational Rehabilitation programs regularly provide reviews and consultations on NC Works site and program accessibility, and Vocational Rehabilitation counselors will also schedule time to work at several of the NCWorks Career Center locations to provide information and referral services for individuals with disabilities.

NC DHHS also provides the connection to NCWorks through its Division of Social Services, which administers North Carolina's TANF Employment and Training (NC Work First), SNAP Employment and Training (FNS E&T), Economic Opportunity/Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funds for emergency services and other supports for the wellbeing and health of North Carolina's workforce, including services and strategic approaches to curtailing the significant stresses opioid and substance use places on families and workforce through the NC DHHS Opioid Action Plan that has demonstrated great success.

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

Weaknesses

The state has identified several areas that need further strengthening. These include coordination of WIOA Title I and III programs with the WIOA Title II programs; integration of case management systems across workforce programs; updating of local Memoranda of Understanding; enhanced services to the state's businesses; and improved coordination and collaboration with state and local economic development activities.

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

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

North Carolina's workforce programs support several independent case management/data collection systems.

Consistent data sharing processes to address referral tracking, common intake, and service delivery would improve the system. In October of 2019, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) announced Geographic Solutions was awarded the contract for developing the case management system for the Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Services programs for both EIPD and DSB. Phase I of the new system has since been implemented and Phase II is currently in development. This has the potential of dramatically improving data integration, as Geographic Solutions is the current developer for the North

Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) NCWorks.gov case management system for WIOA Title I & III. A subsequent phase is planned to include Title II integration, so services can be tracked by all core partners. Additionally, the North Carolina SNAP Employment & Training Program (FNS E&T) has recently contracted with Geographic Solutions to build a module so their case management system (NC FAST) can actively communicate with NCWorks.gov. Both projects will certainly improve the integration of the state's case management systems and will help ensure customers have a more seamless experience in receiving services. As of late 2021, the FNS E&T program coordinator has initiated meetings with the Governance and System Alignment Committee of the NCWorks Commission to discuss dual enrollment with the WIOA Core programs and further integration of our case management systems. Additionally, with the passage of the 2023 NC Medicaid Expansion Law, there will now be a requirement of the creation of a seamless system for individuals receiving services.

The Memorandum of Understanding process between the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards core partners is revised to ensure services and access to these services are clearly defined for all core partners. In addition, a review of the MOU timeline for submission is reviewed to align with Title II grant submissions.

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

A closer relationship with economic development organizations, at the local, regional, and statewide level, is needed.

- This will help provide improved understanding of the current and future economy and will help the NCWorks system prepare the workers that are needed for existing, new, and expanding businesses in North Carolina. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has invigorated its business services team with the end goal of supporting increased performance and accountability for business services delivered by the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards and supporting better alignment between the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards and economic development throughout the state. This includes the provision of additional funding to the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards to support Business Engagement Coordinators who work to establish and facilitate relationships with local economic developers. DWS has purchased Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software (Salesforce) for the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB) to utilize, which will serve to assist them to more effectively deliver business services throughout the state. The LWDB's in collaboration with LEAD has also established an "Employer Services" dashboard (www.ncawdb.org) that captures and displays information on the number of employer establishments receiving WIOA core program services in various categories. Finally, the NCWorks Commission has added a business engagement staff member to foster building relationships with economic development across the entire system. DWS is committed to providing resources to the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards which will enhance their delivery of business services throughout the state and foster their relationships with economic development.

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

The NCWorks Commission is focused on developing an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system. In addition, they are developing a roadmap for how the state workforce programs will achieve the goals and objectives that will address these limitations while creating a more customer-centric system that listens and responds to the needs of businesses to build employer-led job training programs that produce high quality career outcomes. A stronger alignment of policies between the Commission and core partners will help achieve these goals as well. This will help ensure that North Carolina's workforce development system continues to be successful in the current and future economy.

(C) State Workforce Development Capacity

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

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

North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions

The North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has administrative responsibility for WIOA Title I and Title III programs. Services are delivered through 60 local, comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers located within the state's 20 Local Workforce Development Boards. The LWDBs work to ensure the provision of high-quality workforce services to individuals and businesses across the state. Each of the local boards have representation from the Division of Workforce Solutions, local community colleges, and local Vocational Rehabilitation programs to ensure coordination and capacity building at the local and regional level.

The Division of Workforce Solutions has developed an integrated services delivery model, which the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards have implemented at local NCWorks Career Centers to ensure an integrated and customer-focused approach to providing services to individuals and business.

North Carolina's 20 Local Workforce Development Boards provide operational oversight of the NCWorks Career Centers across the state. The NCWorks Commission develops and sets policies that guide the operation of the career centers. All 60 comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers, located throughout the state, provide and/or have access to Title I and Title III services. Staff at NCWorks Career Centers, community colleges, and Vocational Rehabilitation offices work collaboratively across entities to provide referral services across programs. Some career centers are co-located within community colleges, social services offices, and/or offices where Vocational Rehabilitation services are available.

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

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

Services provided (both virtually and in-person) to employers include:

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

North Carolina Community College System

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) provides a comprehensive array of educational and training programs and a diverse set of services to individuals and employers through 58 community colleges. It is the third largest community college system in the nation with programs and services provided through the college's multicampus locations and supported by the system office in Raleigh. In 2022-23, the 58 community colleges served about 595,000 individuals. The North Carolina Community College System staff provide state-level administrative support for the System under the direction of the State Board of Community Colleges.

Educational and training programs offered at the 58 colleges plus 160+ other campuses/and off-campus locations include a diverse group of programmatic and course offerings organized into several programmatic areas which include Curriculum programs, Continuing Education programs, Economic Development programs and College and Career Readiness adult education programs funded by Title II.

Curriculum programs operated by the NCCCS include a variety of educational programs which range in length from one semester to two years. In addition to college transfer programs designed to allow students to transfer to a four-year college or university after completion of an associate degree, the NCCCS Curriculum program area includes those post-secondary Career and Technical Education programs that are designed to lead to employment, and which receive part of their funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Educational Act. Continuing Education Programs operated by the North Carolina Community Colleges include continuing education courses related to a diverse set of occupational training sector partnership development and community focused training. Most of the programming is occupational training that benefits both employers and students. Courses are designed to assist individuals in gaining short term training and skill enhancement including occupational skills, entrepreneurial skills, personal growth, and career development. Organized within the North Carolina Community College Continuing Education programs are several programmatic areas including Workforce Continuing Education job training and (focusing on career development and soft/durable skills) Human Resources Development programs. The NCCCS Economic Development area oversees several of the state's workforce training initiatives including ApprenticeshipNC, BioNetwork, NCEdge Customized Training, and the Small Business Center Network. ApprenticeshipNC is North Carolina's employer-driven Registered Apprenticeship program that combines on-the job learning with related classroom instruction. BioNetwork provides education for the life science industry sector across the state. NCEdge Customized Training supports existing, expanding, and new companies through specialized training for both pre- and post-hire needs. Small Business Centers support entrepreneurial opportunities across the state of North Carolina through the provision of training, technical assistance, and small business counseling.

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

language skills to adults functioning below secondary level and/or who need to earn a high school equivalency.

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

North Carolina's Community College System and its 58 colleges are a valuable component of the NCWorks system. The colleges provide a diverse group of program offerings with many of the programs included on the state's Eligible Training Provider list. A large proportion of the state's WIOA training services are provided through the North Carolina Community Colleges. In addition, many of the colleges serve as contractors for WIOA services, and 12 sponsor NCWorks Career Centers on their campuses.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

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

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

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

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

In North Carolina there are two entities with administrative responsibility for the services provided under the WIOA Title IV Rehabilitation Act program: The Division of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities (EIP) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). Both EIP and DSB are administratively housed within the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. DSB is responsible for administration of Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV services to individuals who are blind, deafblind, and visually impaired and the EIP is responsible for administration of VR Title IV services to individuals with all other disabilities.

Combined, North Carolina has 87 local Vocational Rehabilitation office locations that provide counseling staff, vocational evaluators, human resource placement specialists, and other staff as appropriate to meet the needs of those individuals who require the specialized services offered by the Vocational Rehabilitation programs. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by the Vocational Rehabilitation program staff vary from site to site depending on local needs and agreements.

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

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

B. STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

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.

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 employment⁸ and other populations.⁹

(B) Goals for meeting the skilled workforce needs of employers.

[8] Individuals with barriers to employment include displaced homemakers; low-income individuals; Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; individuals with disabilities, including youth who are individuals with disabilities; older individuals; ex-offenders; homeless individuals, or homeless children and youths; youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system; individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers; eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers (as defined at section 167(i) of WIOA and Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 35-14); individuals within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program; single parents (including single pregnant women); and long-term unemployed individuals.

[9] Veterans, unemployed workers, and youth and any other populations identified by the State.

3. PERFORMANCE GOALS

Using the tables provided within each Core Program section, 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.)

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, which may include evaluation findings, and other feedback to make continuous or quality improvements.

State Strategic Vision and Goals

1. Vision

Governor Roy Cooper has outlined a vision for North Carolina's workforce development system that is predicated by three guiding principles: education and skills attainment is the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce; an employer led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job ready workforce; and local innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system. Governor Cooper's vision is being implemented through his NC Job Ready initiative and the NCWorks Commission (as the State Workforce Development Board) has incorporated the Governor's vision into its strategic plan. The

NCWorks Commission's vision is defined as follows in the 2023-25 Strategic Plan: "To build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy."

The mission of the state's workforce development system, established by the NCWorks Commission, is "To ensure North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity; and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation."

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

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

The NCWorks Commission developed and adopted its latest strategic plan in February 2023. The plan was developed with interagency input from partners at the state and local level and sets forth a vision and strategic goals for North Carolina's workforce development system. It provides a strategic framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including, but not limited to the WIOA core programs. The statewide attainment goal was interwoven into the NCWorks Commission strategy and plan development. The plan focuses on the coordination and alignment for all workforce programs in the state and provided the foundation for the development of North Carolina's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan.

The purpose of the Strategic Plan is to create an integrated workforce system that effectively responds to the needs of employers and prepares workers for North Carolina's economy. The strategic plan, titled Preparing North Carolina's Workforce for Today and Tomorrow, sets forth a vision to build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic the federal government made several transformative investments in infrastructure, clean energy, manufacturing, science, and technology policy through the passage of the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD), Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and the CHIPS & Science Act. This infusion of federal funding to support economic development and growth in communities will also bring new, good-paying jobs across these sectors. The

NCWorks Commission is already working to identify and prepare North Carolinians for these jobs.

Goals

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

Goal 1 – Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy by increasing skills and education attainment. North Carolina will need additional focus on equity, education, and training, which is crucial to creating more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient workforce. As the skill requirements of jobs increase and change rapidly, businesses need a diverse, highly skilled pipeline of workers ready for the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to training so they can be equipped for those jobs.

Goal 2 – Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership. Employer-led job training programs have the best career outcomes. Employers know what skills their workers need, and employer involvement is key for workforce development and job readiness. Businesses that invest in developing North Carolina's workforce will benefit from well-trained employees and a more innovative and diverse workplace that better reflects its community.

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

Goal 4 – Promote System Access, Alignment, Integration, and Modernization. North Carolina's workforce system includes multiple agencies, programs, and funders. Collaboration, policy alignment, systemic communication, integration, and modernization of the workforce system will ensure a strong and healthy workforce system that prioritizes the development and growth of a diverse and inclusive workforce while adapting to an ever-changing economy.

The goals listed in the 2023-2025 Strategic Plan serve as the basis for the 2024-2026 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan and are consistent with those of the strategic plans for the agencies that administer the core programs under WIOA. In addition, they align with Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative, which is built on three core principles: (1) skills and education attainment so North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow, (2) employer leadership to remain relevant to evolving industry needs, and (3) local innovation to take great ideas and apply them statewide. Furthermore, the NCWorks Commission goals integrate and align with the myFutureNC statewide attainment goal.

Performance Goals

The tables in each WIOA core program section provide the anticipated levels of performance for Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV programs. These performance levels are based on year-end performance figures from PY 2022. At this time, program year goals for PY 2024 and PY 2025 have not yet been negotiated.

Assessment

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

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

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

C. STATE STRATEGY

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) AND INCLUDES REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP. "IN-DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTOR OR OCCUPATION" IS DEFINED AT WIOA SECTION 3(23)

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)

(C) State Strategy

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

Increasing Skills and Education Attainment

Education is the foundation for a strong workforce. We must prepare workers to succeed in North Carolina's economy by increasing skills and educational attainment. North Carolina continues to focus on equity, education, and training, which is crucial to creating more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient workforce. As the skill requirements of jobs increase and change rapidly, businesses need a diverse, highly skilled pipeline of workers ready for the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to training so they can be equipped for those jobs. Below are specific strategies identified in the 2023-25 strategic plan to help increase skills and education attainment and to ensure North Carolina has the best workforce development system in the country.

- **Increase career awareness.** Every North Carolinian needs access to career information that will lead them to high growth jobs and training programs that will prepare them for those jobs. Career information includes the opportunity for jobseekers to gain individual experiences with employers and provides them access to digital networks, data, and career exploration tools, such as NCcareers.org. NCcareers.org is North Carolina's central online resource for students, parents, educators, job seekers and career counselors looking for high-quality job and career information. A digital platform will assist in recruitment and outreach efforts in addition to equity and inclusion attempts to link work to high-demand jobs. It will be important to include and apply these tools and outreach efforts in the promotion of services to 16-to-24-year-old participants through NCWorks NextGen youth programs. The NC Workforce Credentials Advisory Council, made up of representatives across K12, higher education and workforce, developed a list of non-degree credentials that are valued by employers and lead to careers with family sustaining wages. The council will continue to expand the list each year. The list is currently hosted on NCcareers.org.
- **Advocate for increased educational attainment.** Enhance career, technical, and other education and training programs to raise the high school graduation rate and improve the technical curriculums offered – including remote online learning environments. The importance of digital literacy is highlighted in the effort to increase the number of

postsecondary degrees, credentials, or certificates needed to address the education attainment gap and make progress toward the goal of *myFutureNC* that by 2030, 2 million North Carolinians between the ages of 25 and 44 years old have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential, the statewide attainment goal.

- **Promote access to job training for high-demand and high-growth fields through sustainable, long-term career pathways.** Employers continue to have high rates of job vacancies, which highlights the need to ensure that North Carolinians are able to access the training and education they need. To meet those demands, recruitment and re-training are vital. The key is to promote the use of NCWorks Career Centers and engage with NC Workforce Development Boards for incumbent worker training programs, On-the-Job Training, internships, and apprenticeships to collectively reconnect the disconnected workforce and job seekers to high-demand fields. The Certified Career Pathways connect industries to the workers they need and ensure that the education and training pipeline is aligned with employer specifications. It is important to promote the alignment of the career pathways among sector partners and continue to support career pathway system approaches in a variety of program investments, evaluation and research activities, and technical assistance efforts, including the alignment of youth programs with regional career pathways and in-demand occupations. Employers in all sectors are invited to collaborate with partner agencies to identify and adopt effective strategies to increase alignment, examine hiring and recruitment practices, and ensure access or use of supports, such as digital literacy, childcare, and transportation. Lastly, all partners must recognize that high demand fields are not the same from region to region. Identify and as needed, support the development of pathways, curriculum, and training programs to support jobs that will be created from the BEAD, BIL, IRA, and CHIPS & Science Act.
- **Increase access to education for those that have barriers.** Support persons with disabilities, adult learners, justice-involved people, and others through equitable access to employment, education, and resources. Additionally, support and enhance initiatives that engage youth and young adults between the ages of 16-24 to build a career path and obtain the skills and education needed to prepare them for successful employment and continued educational achievement. Support the need for increased Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to foster innovation for NextGen youth and young adult programs, create the implementation of more high-quality, work-based learning opportunities and apprenticeships. Financial assistance for books and materials, childcare, transportation, internet access, and electronic devices are wrap-around supports that are critical to successful participation in training and education.

Fostering Employer Leadership

North Carolina will proactively address the changing needs of the economy for a job-driven system by strengthening and expanding business engagement strategies. Our goal is to create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership. Employer-led job training programs have the best career outcomes. Employers know what skills their workers need, and employer involvement is key for workforce development and job readiness. Businesses that invest in developing North Carolina's

workforce will benefit from well-trained employees and a more innovative and diverse workplace that better reflects its community. Below are specific strategies identified to ensure a stronger connection to the business community and to ensure that the workforce system is meeting the needs of the economy.

- **Create a workforce development system that is value-driven for employers, aligns education with industry demands, prepares North Carolinians for the future, and drives economic development.** To meet this goal, we will support efforts to streamline customer access, measure, and invest in what works and coordinate across agencies to actively engage employers to drive North Carolina's workforce system.
- **Increase the number of employers participating in all types of work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships** while also establishing employer champions; and engage employers in education efforts from early childhood through kindergarten to grade 12, post-secondary, and beyond.
- **Enhance programs to enable employers to provide training for new and existing employees.** Successfully upskilling workers will enable employers to promote from within and bring in new employees to fill the vacancies. This will help to develop a job-ready North Carolina
- **Prioritize and acknowledge industry-led partnerships.** As market dynamics shift quickly, North Carolina needs to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of businesses. The North Carolina local Workforce Development Boards are in a unique position to lead business engagement strategies in their communities. Diversity among partner agencies is important, and all agencies, business entities and associations engaged in economic and workforce development will collaborate to fully understand business needs and efficiently deliver the right services to address those needs through sector-strategy models.
- **Leverage employer data on workforce projections and training needs using tools and measures for business engagement.** Technology, such as Salesforce, a cloud-based customer relationship management (CRM) tool, can be utilized to assist employer customers.
- **Support Employers including Private Businesses and Local Governments leveraging federal funding to support workforce development.** North Carolina has convened a work group of stakeholders from the NC Office of Management and Budget, NC Department of Commerce, the NCWorks Commission, NC colleges and universities, and K-12 partners to identify employers in the state that are pursuing funds from BEAD, BIL, IRA, and CHIPS & Science Act. The state encourages that proposals align with activities and principles from successful Good Jobs Challenge grant applications, including regional competitiveness and inclusive economic growth; equitable job opportunities for underserved populations and communities; worker-centered, employer-led workforce training systems; and integrating diverse, local stakeholders into workforce training partnerships.

With the importance of semiconductor manufacturing in North Carolina, The NC Department of Commerce created a site to provide interested businesses with information on state resources, useful data, grants, and funding opportunities made available by the CHIPS and Science Act. To support successful CHIPS proposals, the NC Department of Commerce Labor and Economic Analysis Division compiled semiconductor-specific business, labor, and training data to regional and statewide business and workforce assets. The workgroup aims to help employers increase access to training and employment opportunities to underrepresented populations and those with barriers to employment can benefit.

Successful CHIPS proposals will also need to include a workforce development plan. The workforce development plan must demonstrate appropriate investments and commitments to recruit, train, hire, retain, and upskill a skilled and diverse workforce. The NC Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions developed a template for a workforce development plan that applicants can utilize.

In addition, the NC Department of Commerce provides information for Childcare Resource and Referral, which provides evidence-based technical assistance, professional development, coaching and compensation supports for early childhood professionals. Information regarding NC Smart Start, which promotes high quality early care that is child-focused, family-friendly, and fair to providers is also provided on the site for interested employers. The Commission will continue providing support and convening partners as additional funding opportunities become available from the federal government under BIL, IRA, and CHIPS & Science.

In mid-2023, the Employer Leadership Committee for the NCWorks Commission, began a subcommittee initiative around reentry. This initiative involves proposing prerelease of justice involved for paid apprenticeships in the advanced manufacturing sector. The subcommittee is partnering with the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction and the North Carolina Community College System Office. A pilot program is planned to start in 2024 with one or two facilities. The prison system will provide opportunities for interested justice involved individuals. The prison system will review the potential participants who qualify to participate in the apprenticeships. If approved for the apprenticeship, the justice involved individual is transferred to a particular corrections facility near the apprenticeship worksite in order to be transported regularly to the worksite.

Supporting Local Workforce Innovation

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

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

- **Support initiatives to innovate and replicate good ideas.** Local leaders know the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of the communities they serve. Supporting the piloting of new ideas designed for their communities is critical. When local innovation efforts are successful, communities across the state can learn from them and incorporate them into their local efforts as well. In this way, replication of good ideas can become best practices across the state.
- **Promote local workforce initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline.** Employers want educated, skilled, and competent workers to help them solve tomorrow's challenges today. Workers want skills and responses to recover from workforce disruptions. An effective and efficient way to address talent expectations is to utilize technology to retool the employer/job seeker connection while upskilling and reskilling our workforce for emerging and high-demand roles. This process includes efforts to provide training to workers for growth with the goal of providing a sustainable living wage with the opportunity to achieve advancement in North Carolina industries.

Promoting Governance and System Alignment

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

- **Strengthen and support system integration and inclusive practices** through continuous coordination, communication, and data sharing among the key components of North Carolina's workforce system: the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina CommunityCollege System, University of North Carolina System, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, North Carolina Workforce Development Boards, the North Carolina Departments of Commerce and Health and Human Services, economic development partners and the many community-based organizations in our state. The NCWorks Commission, in conjunction with our partners above, develops the WIOA Unified State Plan and all new WIOA Title 1 and Title 3 Policy Statements to align workforce development programs which support a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system in North Carolina.
- **Support increased awareness, communication, accessibility, and understanding of the “NCWorks” brand** throughbuilding a broad brand awareness aimed at attracting a large and diverse customer base, promoting a unity of effort to increase accessibility and user-friendly navigability. Continue to evolve the scope of technology in the career center system to provide enhanced remote accessibility to all North Carolinians with a particular emphasis on engaging individuals with marginalized backgrounds, including individuals from rural communities, low-income backgrounds, people of color, justice-involved individuals, individuals with disabilities, and youth who are in or have aged out of foster care.

- **Research and recommend advanced technology for outreach to adapt to new generations and marginalized populations entering the workforce** by staying abreast of the rapidly changing demands and needs of employers and job seekers to ensure that our workforce system remains nimble, adaptive, and fully utilized. As technology advances, there is a continuous need to keep pace and adapt to the changing needs of customers.
- **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.
- **Convene Relevant State Partners to Coordinate Workforce Related Federal Funding Opportunities.** The NCWorks Commission will work to convene relevant members of the Commission along with other state agencies including the Department of Transportation, the Department of Environmental Quality, Office of State Budget and Management, and the Department of Information Technology to identify opportunities to coordinate on federal funding opportunities from BEAD, BIL, IRA, and CHIPS & Science Act as related to workforce needs in high growth, high demand fields.

Implementation and Performance Measurement

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

North Carolina has continued to strengthen its integrated service delivery system for the WIOA core programs. The NCWorks system fosters better coordination between the entire workforce development system. In addition, North Carolina has a strong career pathways strategy which has developed 41 comprehensive career pathways that all individuals can use to plan their career and obtain economically sustaining employment. North Carolina will continue to implement the key strategies in the unified plan to help students and job seekers achieve economic prosperity.

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

supply and demand, with long-term consequences for North Carolina's businesses and communities.

The North Carolina State Sector Strategy Council was formed to address these challenges. Key leaders from the North Carolina Community College System Office, the NC Department of Commerce, EDPNC, the NCWorks Commission, and the Governor's Office (all comprising the North Carolina State Sector Strategy Council), have come together to clarify a state mission and strategy for supporting collaborative business engagement through industry-led sector partnerships. The ultimate goal of the Council is to support the development of local and regional sector partnerships that:

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

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

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

Strategies for strengthening business engagement are also well under way in North Carolina. An inter-agency NCWorks team coordinated the development of comprehensive employer services literature and brochures for dissemination across all programs and established regional business services teams to ensure coordination among Local Workforce Development Boards. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, North Carolina emphasizes local success which is built upon the concepts of (1) regionalism as an approach to engage businesses, (2) creating collaborative partnerships with economic development/education to provide solutions, and (3) developing sector strategies to build talent pipelines. Additionally, a new NCWorks logo was introduced in October 2019 for an increased brand awareness. In 2020, all the signage at the NCWorks Career Centers was updated to reflect the new logo.

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

- conducting annual reviews of all workforce program plans to identify gaps in service, duplication, and opportunities for better alignment;
- developing local annual performance measures for all workforce programs;
- developing and reviewing WIOA Title I and Title III policies;
- developing and reviewing the local area plans to ensure adherence to the state plan; and
- engaging outside consultation for third-party review, analysis, evaluation, and recommendations for continuous improvement of services and resulting outcomes.

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

Strategies to Align Core Programs

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

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

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

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

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

The North Carolina Department of Commerce released a new strategic plan, First in Talent, in July 2021. The plan has a greater focus on talent and workforce development than traditional

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

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

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

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

Strategies to achieve Goal 1:

- Increase career awareness. Every North Carolinian needs access to career information that will lead them to high growth jobs and training programs that will prepare them for those jobs. Career information includes individual experiences with employers and access to digital networks, data, and career exploration tools, such as NCcareers.org.
- Advocate for increased educational attainment. Enhance programs to raise the high school graduation rate and improve the technical curriculums offered – including remote online learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the evolution of education in the digital age. The importance of digital literacy is highlighted in the effort to increase the number of postsecondary degrees, credentials, or certificates needed to address the education attainment gap and make progress toward the goal of myFutureNC that by 2030, 2 million North Carolinians between the ages of 25 and 44 years old have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential.
- Promote access to job training for high-demand and high-growth fields that pay a living wage. Many employers have job openings that remain unfilled because of a lack of workers with the right skill sets. To meet those demands, specifically in a post-pandemic era, recruitment and re-training are vital. The key is to promote the use of NCWorks Career Centers and engage with workforce development boards for incumbent worker training programs, internships, and apprenticeships to collectively reconnect the disconnected workforce and job seekers to high-demand fields. Employers in all sectors are called upon to collaborate with partner agencies to identify and adopt effective strategies to increase alignment and make better use of resources. It is also important that all partners recognize that the need for high-demand fields is not the same from region to region.

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

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

Strategies to achieve Goal 2:

- Create a workforce development system that is value-driven for employers, aligns education with industry demands, prepares North Carolinians for the future, and drives economic development. To meet this goal, we will streamline customer access, measure, and invest in what works and coordinate across agencies to actively engage employers to drive North Carolina's workforce system. NCCareers.org is North Carolina's central online resource for students, parents, educators, job seekers and career counselors looking for high-quality job and career information.
- Increase the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships while also establishing employer champions; and engage employers in education efforts from early childhood through kindergarten to grade 12, post-secondary, and beyond.
- Enhance programs to enable employers to provide training for new and existing employees. Successfully upskilling workers will enable employers to promote from within and bring in new employees to fill the vacancies. This will help to develop a job-ready North Carolina.
- Prioritize, acknowledge, and certify industry-led partnerships. As market dynamics shift quickly, North Carolina needs to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of businesses. The 20 North Carolina local workforce development boards are in a unique position to lead business engagement strategies in their communities. Diversity among partner agencies is important, and all agencies, business entities and associations engaged in economic and workforce development will collaborate to fully understand business needs and efficiently deliver the right services to address those needs through sector-strategy models.
- Leverage employer data on workforce projections and training needs using tools and measures for business engagement. Technology such as Salesforce, a cloud-based customer relationship management (CRM) tool, can be utilized to assist North Carolina businesses to connect with and get more information about their customer base.

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

Strategies to achieve Goal 3:

- Advance leadership development opportunities to workforce professionals. Education and workforce partnerships drive successful career-readiness initiatives. Empowering local workforce leaders with development opportunities that encourage knowledge transfer will promote capacity building, strengthen the effectiveness of localized efforts, and improve outcomes across the communities they serve.
- Support initiatives to innovate and replicate good ideas. Local leaders know the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of the communities they serve. Supporting the piloting of new ideas designed for their communities is critical. When local innovation efforts are successful, communities across the state can learn from them and incorporate them into their local efforts as well. In this way, replication of good ideas can become best practices across the state.
- Continue to leverage technology to reimagine the talent pipeline, learning from the lessons we learned COVID-19. Employers want educated, skilled, and competent workers to help them solve tomorrow's business challenges today. Utilizing technology to retool the employer/job seeker connection and upskilling and reskilling our workforce for emerging and high-demand roles is an effective and efficient way to address talent expectations.

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

Strategies to achieve Goal 4:

- Strengthen and support system integration and inclusive practices through continuous coordination, communication, and data sharing among the key components of North Carolina's workforce system: the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina System, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards, the North Carolina Departments of Commerce and Health and Human Services and the many community-based organizations in our state. The NCWorks Commission, in conjunction with our partners above, develops the WIOA Unified State Plan and all new WIOA Title 1 and Title 3 Policy Statements to align workforce development programs which support a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system in North Carolina.
- Support increased awareness, communication, accessibility, and understanding of the "NCWorks" brand through building a broad brand awareness aimed at attracting a large and diverse customer base, promoting a unity of effort to increase accessibility and user-friendly navigability. Continue to evolve the scope of technology in the NCWorks Career Center system to provide enhanced remote accessibility to all North Carolinians.
- Research advanced technology for marketing to adapt to new generations entering the workforce by staying abreast of the rapidly changing demands and needs of businesses and job seekers to ensure that our workforce system remains nimble, adaptive, and fully

utilized. As technology advances, there is a continuous need to adapt to consumer expectations and environmental changes such as the recent pandemic.

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

NCWorks Commission Strategic Plan (2023-2025)	Goal 1: Prepare workers to succeed in the NC economy by increasing skills and education attainment.	Goal 2: Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership.	Goal 3: Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation.	Goal 4: Promote System Access, Alignment, Integration, and Modernization.
myFutureNC Commission Attainment Goal for North Carolina (2019-2030)	By 2030, 2 million North Carolinians (25-44) with a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential.			
State Board of Education 2025 Strategic Plan (2019-2025)	Goal 3. Increase educator preparedness to meet the needs of every student by 2025.		Goal 2. Improve school and district performance by 2025.	Goal 1. Eliminate opportunity gaps by 2025.
State Board of Community Colleges (2022-2026)	Goal 1. Enrollment Goal 2. Student Success	Goal 4. Economic and Workforce Development	Goal 4. Economic and Workforce Development Goal 5. System Funding & Effectiveness	Goal 2. Student Success Goal 5. System Funding & Effectiveness
University of NC Board of Governors (2017-2022)	Goal 2. Student Success	Goal 4. Economic Impact and Community Engagement	Goal 5. Excellent and Diverse Institutions	Goal 1. Access Goal 3. Affordability and Efficiency

NCWorks Commission Strategic Plan (2023-2025)	Goal 1: Prepare workers to succeed in the NC economy by increasing skills and education attainment.	Goal 2: Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership.	Goal 3: Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation.	Goal 4: Promote System Access, Alignment, Integration, and Modernization.
Department of Health and Human Services Strategic Plan (2021-23)	Goal 1. Advance health equity by reducing disparities in opportunity and outcomes for historically marginalized populations within DHHS and across the state.	Goal 2. Help North Carolinians end the pandemic, control the spread of COVID-19, recover stronger, and be prepared for future public health crises with an emphasis on initiatives serving those communities most impacted.	Goal 3. Build an innovative, coordinated, and whole person — physical, mental and social health — centered system that addresses both medical and non-medical drivers of health.	Goal 4. Turn the tide on North Carolina's opioid and substance use crisis. Goal 5. Improve child and family well-being so all children have the opportunity to develop to their full potential and thrive. Goal 6. Support individuals with disabilities and older adults in leading safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives. Goal 7. Achieve operational (Goal 7 continued) excellence by living our values—belonging, joy, people-focused, proactive communication, stewardship, teamwork, and transparency.

III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

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. This section must include—

A. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

The Unified or Combined 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 Development Board for the state of North Carolina. The commission operates in accordance with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, North Carolina General Statute, and commission bylaws. Commission members are appointed by the Governor and appointees are given the responsibility for setting the strategic direction of the state-wide workforce development system. Commission members advise state leaders on how to strengthen the state's workforce and serve North Carolina businesses. The commission has several responsibilities including the development of policies for the alignment of workforce programs, assessment of the effectiveness of North Carolina's core and partner programs, and oversight of the NCWorks Career Center system.

Membership

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

Committees

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

Staff

The North Carolina Department of Commerce provides staff support to the commission to carry out the commission's duty to develop an effective and efficient workforce development system. Staff consists of a director, deputy director, senior workforce analyst, and other persons

engaged in administrative, policy, technical research, and support areas. Staff is responsive to the needs of the commission and initiates actions necessary to support the commission in its mandated functions.

Meetings

The commission conducts quarterly business meetings at the call of the chair. Business meetings are attended by the entire commission and are open to the public. Meeting agendas are developed by commission staff and approved by the chair. Actions of the commission are determined by a majority vote of the members present, and a majority of the commission constitutes a quorum for the transaction of business. The rules set forth in Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, govern the procedures of the commission.

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

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY

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

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

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.

Core Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy

NC Job Ready is Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow. NC Job Ready focuses on three priorities: skills and education attainment, employer leadership, and local innovation. The core programs in WIOA will align and achieve the strategies identified in North Carolina's Unified State Plan by emphasizing these priorities. The NCWorks Commission's 2023-2025 strategic plan will provide the foundation for this work and will continue to track the success of the plan. Below are the four major goals that form the basis of the strategic plan. These goals are to:

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

- As North Carolina continues to progress past the COVID-19 pandemic, the core program partners continue to embrace, utilize and implement various strategies to continuously improve service provision to both jobseekers, employer customers and stakeholders. During this recovery period, North Carolina must focus on equity, education, and training, which is crucial to creating more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient workforce. As the skill requirements of jobs increase and change rapidly, businesses need a diverse, highly skilled pipeline of workers ready for

the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to training so they can be equipped for those jobs. Related to the education attainment component of this goal, the plan calls for making progress toward the goal set by the myFutureNC Commission: that by 2030, 2 million North Carolinians between the ages of 25 and 44 years old have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. WIOA Title II will collaborate with the NC Community College System to support Integrated Education and Training (IET) implementation to accelerate skills while beginning the path to earning an industry recognized certification. Title II will provide professional development for training providers and Adult Education programs on creating concurrent enrollment opportunities in programs of study assessed to be in high demand in the local areas. In addition, Title II will work with local NCWorks Career Centers to support career services and provide training vouchers for the Title II IET.

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

- Employer leadership includes an emphasis on increasing the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships while also establishing employer champions; and engage employers in education efforts from early childhood through kindergarten to grade 12, post-secondary, and beyond. North Carolina and the core program partners will continue to engage both private and public sector employers in assisting in the development of creating sustainable methods to support implementation of value-added services. This will include active partnerships with Workforce Development Boards, Career and Technical Education Business Advisory entities, Community Colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation and local NCWorks Career Centers to align strategies and effectively target available resources to meet employer needs.

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

- Local innovation calls for promoting leadership development opportunities for the state's workforce professionals, and for funding community-based initiatives that pilot new ideas or replicate proven programs. NC Job Ready seeks to prepare workers for career and/or entrepreneurial achievement, prepare businesses for success by growing and attracting a talented workforce, and prepare communities to be more competitive. This goal also prioritizes leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline.

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

- This goal relates to the coordination of the workforce development system itself, which involves numerous partner agencies. Among other items, the plan calls for enhancing public awareness of the services provided through NCWorks for individuals and businesses, while researching new technological means to serve the system's customers.
- The Workforce Development Boards across the state will continue to promote the programs and services provided by the NCWorks Career Centers, to both businesses and job seekers and will continue to enhance and modernize the services by increasing

access through virtual platforms, especially in areas where transportation is a challenge. Also, some Workforce Boards provide services at outreach locations and in partner sites across their local area, this increases access to the NCWorks programs and services, to both employers and job seekers and supports aligning with other workforce development organizations in their local area.

Coordinate Across Programs at State and Local Levels

North Carolina continues to integrate programs under WIOA that meet local needs and ensure nonduplication of services and that provide equal access to all eligible clients. Currently programs in Titles I and III, operated by the N.C. Department of Commerce, utilize a referral process to Title II and Title IV programs. The N.C. Department of Commerce will continue to work in coordination and partnership with Local Workforce Development Boards across North Carolina to continuously improve alignment, promote seamless service delivery and minimize/eliminate duplication of services for jobseeker and employer customers alike. As the referral processes are established, based on the guidelines, the state agency leads will meet quarterly to review and assess the referral process efficacy. The WIOA State Steering Council reviews current referral policy and strategies biannually to identify ways to strengthen these processes to avoid duplication of services. The NCWorks Commission leads the WIOA State Steering Council, which includes representatives from the Departments of Commerce, Public Instruction, Health and Human Services, the N.C. Community College System, and the Department of Administration. The N.C. Department of Commerce works continuously to improve the integration of services to ensure a customer-centered approach to service delivery. This integration is supported by the NCWorks Commission's 2023-2025 strategic plan that cites promotion and strengthening system integration as one of their goals.

The NCWorks Commission's 2023-2025 strategic plan provides a framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including, but not limited to the programs covered under WIOA. The State Steering Council also identified key actions needed to ensure coordination and alignment.

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

Other activities of the WIOA State Steering Council:

1. Review the inter-agency teams at the local and regional levels to enhance alignment of workforce services, as local and regional activities should be aligned to improve the system.
2. Develop a statewide plan and offer resources to provide access to all statewide education and workforce development entities to get all workforce system participants enrolled in NCWorks Online.
 - NCWorks Online is the state's official job-search portal that helps connect people to jobs and helps businesses find the talent they need. Individuals can develop a resume, assess

their skills, find training to gain the skills they need, and apply for jobs. Businesses use the system to post jobs and find the talent they need. In addition, the system includes labor market information by industry, occupation, and region.

- Title II and Title IV core partners will collaborate with their local NCWorks Career Center to enroll program participants into NCWorks. NCWorks will provide access to training for eligible participants.
- This system is a valuable tool for individuals, businesses, economic developers, and workforce development partners. As more individuals register and use NCWorks Online, businesses will have a larger pool of talent to select from for their workforce needs. In addition, NCWorks Online can be a valuable tool for showing businesses interested in locating or growing in North Carolina that the state has the workforce they need to be successful.

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

- Since 2014, the state of North Carolina has used the name NCWorks to allow the workforce development system to work under one brand name, in order to help customers, individuals, and businesses more easily identify where to access workforce development services. Further work to unify under one brand name has been completed including unveiling a refreshed NCWorks brand logo at the 2019 NCWorks Partnership Conference, as part of an overall outreach effort.
- A single brand for the entire workforce development system reduces, to the extent possible, the focus on individual programs or services and replaces it with a statewide approach. A common brand also reduces confusion for those unfamiliar with the system by simplifying the message and increasing the efficiency of statewide outreach.

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

- Customers of the state's workforce development system may access more than one service. For example, a business looking to grow may need to increase the size of its workforce immediately but also ensure there is a pipeline of workers to continue to fill those positions. The company may be interested in customized training as well as work-based learning programs to ensure it can meet its current and future workforce needs. The workforce development system seeks to develop outreach strategies that provide information on the full range of services available.
- The NCWorks branding and outreach campaign, launched by the state in late 2019 and continuing through 2020, sought to promote workforce development services consistently and effectively. Informed by research, the campaign focused primarily on North Carolina's employers. The main goals of the campaign were to raise awareness of the services specifically for businesses, help to increase usage of the NCWorks system by business leaders, and to amplify NCWorks' voice and visibility across the state. While the campaign concluded, its benefits continue in the form of certain materials and employer-focused social media activity.

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

- There are many ways for employers to engage with the workforce development system who can identify and provide resources for services they need for growth and sustainability and provide opportunities for individuals to gain work experience necessary to be a successful candidate for employment. A recent survey of businesses found that lack of relevant work experience was one of the top three reasons employers were having difficulty finding the talent they need. However, businesses may not be fully aware of the ways they can connect with the workforce development system to provide opportunities that both help individuals gain the experience they need and develop a pipeline of talent to meet the businesses' need.
- Workforce development entities need to work together to identify all the ways that businesses can interact with the workforce development system from facility tours to work-based learning activities such as internships and externships, to apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, customized training, continuing education, job shadowing, and on-the-job training opportunities. Then, business outreach specialists can share information with the businesses on the full range of activities, across programs, in which a business can engage to help develop the talent needed to grow their business.
- The N.C. Department of Commerce continues to work in conjunction with the NCWorks Commission to identify and document active and emerging sector partnerships as well as the creation of Certified Career Pathways to help foster success for employers and jobseekers alike. As of 2023, NCWorks has identified 41 Certified Career Pathways as well as an additional 16 existing and emerging sector partnerships, which are foundational to the development of Career Pathways. These efforts will continue to better align resources, services and promote seamless engagement for jobseekers with continued guidance and input from Employer stakeholders. This strategy continues to contribute to effective utilization of available funds to have vocational and economic impacts specifically targeted to meet local and regional industry needs and promote sustainable career development for participants.

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

- 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 depends on knowledgeable staff with the confidence and understanding of the system that is required to perform all aspects of

their jobs. The NCWorks Training Center, in collaboration with core WIOA partners will develop core partner cross training opportunities for staff.

- The Division of Workforce Solutions manages the NCWorks Training Center, which achieves its mission by providing a variety of training options tailored to meet the dynamic needs of the Division of Workforce Solutions, NCWorks Career Center staff, the state's 20 Local Workforce Development Boards and staff of partner agencies. These efforts and services help ensure all staff and partners are well-trained with foundational skills and knowledge relevant to workforce trends. This is accomplished through workshops by professional, peer, and in-house trainers for both face- to-face sessions and online webinars and tutorials. The NCWorks Training Center also provides a vast list of supportive services including meeting and conference preparation and planning, along with other customized event services as requested.
- The NCWorks Training Center is readily available with logistical planning of events, registration, data collection, supportive services, and training delivery. The current catalog of 122 interactive online courses enhances the accessibility of training on a variety of on demand topics.
- Several of these courses are bundled into a product entitled Welcome to Workforce, which provides a structure for comprehensive system orientation and skill development over a 2-year period. This basic foundation is critical for new staff to acquire a solid understanding of the work they perform and is also a useful refresher for more seasoned staff.
- The NCWorks Training Center continues to provide workforce development professionals with a globally recognized credentialing opportunity through the Facilitating Career Development (FCD) course. This 120-hour course uses the curriculum of the National Career Development Association (NCDA) curriculum and standardizes the knowledge and experience of workforce development professionals and others in career development services. The instructional format blends traditional classroom, web-based distance learning, and independent project completion. This course provides a unique opportunity for workforce professionals from varied perspectives of the career field to network, share ideas and resources and develop new partnerships to benefit the public. This course is offered 4-6 times per year depending on the need.
- In order to provide more immediate training to a broader business services audience the NCWorks Training Center now offers recorded and/or interactive online course on business services topics such as: Salesforce, Labor Market Information; On-the-Job-Training in a Nutshell; and WIOA Programs and Services. These courses are designed for

any staff in the NCWorks Career Center who interfaces with the business community and the content encourages for development of strong relationships with business, effective communication skills, and using needs assessment to determine solutions for businesses in recruiting and retaining a viable workforce.

- A recent initiative led by the Training Center is a comprehensive leadership development course entitled STAR: Successful Teams Achieve Results. The course values and structure were developed using a team of workforce professionals that included Workforce Board Directors, senior leadership at the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS), and NCWorks Career Center Managers. The course was initially open only to those in managerial and supervisory positions, but in 2022 was expanded to include aspiring managers. In total, STAR has had 132 graduates since the first course was offered in 2019, with 18 graduates who attended six 2-day sessions over a six-month period. The second class began shortly after and graduated 19 in November of 2019. The pandemic brought about a shift to a fully virtual format and has since graduated 51 in 2021 and 44 in 2022. In addition, the current cohort will produce 21 graduates in December 2023. The plan is to deliver one course each calendar year that can accommodate 24 students.
- Another new initiative designed to enhance accessibility to training and increase awareness of professional development opportunities is the NCWorks Training Champions. Each Workforce Board was given the opportunity, in collaboration with the Division of Workforce Solutions leadership, to identify staff of the NCWorks Career Centers to participate in the training. The training consisted of three sessions over 4 months. Participants were exposed to tools and techniques for designing, training, and team activities, how to access and effectively utilize existing online course options and develop their own skills as a training advocate. The 28 staff who graduated in the Spring of 2023 are actively encouraging staff development in their local areas, supporting their peers in professional growth, and providing the Training Center with accurate and tangible information on local training needs and preferences. NCWorks Training Champions meet quarterly to share professional development ideas and training needs.

Business Engagement and Sector Partnerships

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

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

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

- Ensure alignment of sector partnerships to local and regional priority and in-demand industries for outcomes toward growth and economic impact. As of 2023, NCWorks has identified 14 existing and emerging sector partnerships, which are foundational to the development of Career Pathways. These efforts will continue to better align resources, services and promote seamless engagement for jobseekers with continued guidance and input from Employer stakeholders. This strategy has continued to help contribute to effective utilization of available funds to have vocational and economic impact specifically targeted to meet local and regional industry needs and promote sustainable career development for participants.

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

- Key leaders from the North Carolina Community College System Office, the NC Department of Commerce, The Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC), the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS), the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the NC Chamber, the NCWorks Commission, and the Governor's Office (all comprising the North Carolina State Sector Strategy Council), have come together to clarify a state mission and strategy for supporting collaborative business engagement through industry-led sector partnerships.
- The 20 North Carolina Local Workforce Development Boards are also in a unique position as neutral conveners to lead business engagement strategies in their local communities. Diversity among partner agencies is important, and all agencies, business entities and associations engaged in economic and workforce development are working to collaborate to fully understand business needs and efficiently deliver the right solutions to address those needs through sector strategy models. All programs and activities provided through the NCWorks Career Centers in North Carolina are industry led and data driven.
- Multiple regions have launched sector partnerships, have emerging sector partnerships, or are exploring the potential of sector partnerships across the state. There are three operating advanced manufacturing partnerships in the Western, Northwest, and Southeast Prosperity Zones, and one emerging in the Sandhills Prosperity Zone of the state. A healthcare sector partnership just launched in the Northeast Prosperity Zone

and is being re-launched in the Sandhills Prosperity Zone. Aviation, Offshore Wind and Biopharma are three industry sectors also being explored across the state.

- Reentry is currently a hot topic in North Carolina's tight labor market. The Employer Leadership Committee for the NCWorks Commission, recently began a subcommittee initiative around reentry. This initiative involves proposing prerelease of justice involved for paid apprenticeships in the advanced manufacturing sector. The subcommittee is partnering with the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction and the North Carolina Community College System Office. A pilot program is planned to start in 2024 with one or two facilities. The prison system will provide opportunities for interested justice involved individuals. The prison system will review the potential participants who qualify to participate in the apprenticeships. If approved for the apprenticeship, the justice involved individual is transferred to a particular corrections facility near the apprenticeship worksite in order to be transported regularly to the worksite. Plans are to replicate the initiative in other regions of the state based on the success of the pilot project.

Career Pathways

North Carolina implemented a strong career pathway strategy that expanded on the work done over the last decade by the K-12 and community college systems. Local Area Workforce Development Boards continue to promote activities that support Career Pathways for critical industry clusters and those that create new career pathways are recognized by the NCWorks Commission. Pathways include multiple entry and exit points, so all people can use the pathway to plan their career. North Carolina's career pathways strategy is undergoing an analysis to revise the training on how to use career pathways to advise and support all individuals. As of 2023, NCWorks has identified 41 Certified Career Pathways as well as an additional 14 existing and emerging sector partnerships, which are foundational to the development of Career Pathways. These efforts will continue to better align resources, services and promote seamless engagement for jobseekers with continued guidance and input from Employer stakeholders. This strategy continues to utilize Local/Regional Employer guidance to ensure that access to career pathways that have significant vocational and economic impact continuously improve.

- Increase, strengthen, and promote work-based learning activities, including investigating how they could be incorporated into agreements with companies receiving state economic development incentives; as well as how teachers and instructors can integrate work-based learning into their curriculum programs.
- Increase support for registered apprenticeships with pre-apprenticeships to develop a full-service program that reaches all industry sectors and communities.

North Carolina continues to focus on providing career pathways to our citizens. These pathways align with the skill needs of industries in the economy of North Carolina and prepares our

citizens to be successful in a full range of educational options by providing education, training, and other services to meet the needs of the individual. Currently the North Carolina Department of Commerce recognizes 41 Certified Career Pathways as well as 14 additional emerging and continuing sector partnerships across the 20 Local Workforce Development Board coverage areas.

Additionally, in 2023, the NCWorks Commission was awarded a NC Evaluation Fund Grant by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways (CCPs). The NCWorks Commission contracted with an independent research and evaluation firm to analyze participation, participant outcomes, and alignment to labor market demands. Profiling of CCP participants was conducted by sector, region, and demographics. Participation was disaggregated by the year of participation, gender, race, veteran status, disability status, employment status, and prior education level, as well as prosperity zone. Participants were analyzed by the year of participation, gender, race, veteran status, disability status, employment status, prior education level, and prosperity zone. The evaluative study explores labor market outcomes of participants by sector for the top sectors, demonstrating earnings prior to the program and after the program.

Work-based learning is a key element in career pathways and other work. North Carolina is continuing to go through analysis measures to identify opportunities to foster the alignment of economic and workforce development, including cross-training workforce partners to increase and promote work-based learning across the state. Two examples of successful measures are the continued allocations of resources (by DWS) to support a work-based learning focused position in all local areas which is tied to goals and performance metrics, and the incorporation of all work-based learning and training activities to economic development projects where companies are seeking state or local economic incentives. There are a variety of types of work-based learning in which a business could engage including internships for students, externships for educators, co-ops, and apprenticeships. Businesses would benefit from these programs by helping to develop the future talent they need to maintain or grow their business. The main goal is to expand the number of NCWorks Certified Work-Ready Communities to demonstrate to businesses that communities have the workforce needed.

The NC Work Ready Communities initiative is a partnership between the NC Work Ready Certified Communities State team and the ACT Work Ready Communities team to support economic development throughout the state by providing counties with a framework to validate that they have a skilled workforce ready to fill current and future jobs. An on-going goal of this initiative is to expand the number of NC Work-Ready Communities to demonstrate to businesses that communities have the workforce needed. The availability of a skilled and ready workforce drives economic development activities throughout North Carolina. The Certified Work-Ready Community certification demonstrates the employability of a local workforce, which strengthens the important connection with economic development. This initiative rewards the many workforce partners and local employers who have committed to improving the skill level of its workforce and achieves high standards of workforce quality. As of December 2023, sixty-eight counties participate in this initiative.

Other initiatives related to these career pathway efforts include:

- Workforce development partners use sector partnerships and career pathways to prepare workers to succeed by gaining the skills and experience needed for in-demand occupations.
- NCWorks Career Pathways are developed to focus on local and regional in-demand occupations in collaboration with local educational institutions and partners. Education and workforce development partners will continue to target their resources on career awareness and increasing enrollment in career pathways.
- As resources and budgets tighten, targeting resources toward helping people enroll in career pathways for high-demand occupations will help the workforce system be more efficient with its resources; individuals will gain access to high-demand occupations and improve their quality of life; and businesses have the workforce they need to be successful and grow.
- Connect Title II Adult Education, College and Career Readiness programs by creating multiple entry points to ensure access for underserved populations. As of 2023, Title II programs have developed over 160 Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs falling within 11 career clusters statewide, allowing individuals to enter a pathway while completing their high school credential. Initiatives are currently in place to increase advising to College and Career Readiness students to support students along their pathway, ensuring appropriate entry and exit points as they align with an individual's goals and needs.
- NC College and Career Readiness will collaborate with core partners and NC community colleges to support the development of pre-apprenticeships linked to registered apprenticeships to target adults who have barriers to employment. State Leadership funds will be used to coordinate with core providers to establish a student referral system, cross-training, and integrated service delivery system.
- The Community College System will coordinate workforce development strategies to support on-ramp programming to include Integrated Education and Training (IET) which is an educational model that combines occupational skills training with adult education services to increase the educational and career advancement of participants. IET, workforce preparation, career advising, and apprentices and transition services. There are currently 157 approved IET templates approved in the community college system.
- Title II will work with Career and Technical Education to provide training on developing key elements for career pathways to include contextualized instruction for targeted

industries, and programming that targets the needs of serving individuals with disabilities and English language learners.

- Continue to support the implementation of NCcareers.org, a career information portal that ensures students and job seekers have reliable information on career opportunities and educational programs to prepare for those opportunities.
- An interagency working group of partners continues to review and update NCcareers.org and make recommendations for the portal. This web portal is a hub where students and job seekers can turn to find relevant and accurate career information. This hub has been revamped and continues to be built with new features.
- Support collaborative efforts under the Vocational Rehabilitation program to provide individuals with disabilities the rehabilitative services, training, and supports needed to obtain or maintain employment, including utilization of career pathways, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and community-based work experiences (internships, job shadowing, and on the job training) whenever available and whenever these venues are well-matched with the skills, interests, and abilities of its program consumers.
- The Vocational Rehabilitation programs will continue to incorporate, to the maximum extent possible, career pathways and jobs with the potential to lead to career advancement within their services to individuals with disabilities through approaches to include increased emphasis and on reference to career pathways during comprehensive assessment of individuals' skills, interests, and aptitudes and during counseling and guidance sessions with individuals.
- Program leadership will promote to staff and service recipients, the use of established resources highlighting information about career pathways and in-demand occupations; increase emphasis on established career pathways and career growth when developing employment goals and individualized plans for employment with services and training that directly support the employment objectives; remain actively engaged with workforce partners in the collaborative development of career pathways and identify particular issues or challenges individuals with disabilities may encounter when adopting a career within an established career pathway or enhancements that may be particularly favorable for the populations served by the state's Vocational Rehabilitation programs.
- Individually and collaboratively address the unique needs of current and prospective customers, including community college students, youth, individuals with barriers to

employment, veterans, and other populations to help them succeed in education and careers.

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

Use Data to Drive Strategies and Ensure Accountability

From using data-driven decision making to improve workforce programs, to providing performance dashboards to stakeholders, system accountability is wide-ranging and imperative to North Carolina's workforce development's future. North Carolina's system will be accountable to the public for providing high-quality workforce development services in the following ways:

- Continue the process of interfacing NCWorks Online with North Carolina's array of workforce development case management systems.
- There are several case management systems in North Carolina that are used by workforce development programs to track services provided to participants that could include tuition reimbursement amounts, referrals to other agencies, counseling notes, etc. These case management systems are required for data collection and federal reporting. Currently, there is no integration or interface between these systems, requiring extra work on the part of customers and staff. For example, as customers access the workforce system through different agencies, they are required to resubmit eligibility and/or demographic information, which is time consuming and redundant. During the past plan, initial exploration of methods addressing this limitation did occur, but the progress had been impeded because some of the partners were in the process of replacing their current case management systems. This is a lengthy process. Progress and funding commitments have been made toward this alignment in that the North Carolina SNAP Employment & Training Program (FNS E&T) has recently contracted with Geographic Solutions to build a module so their case management system (NC FAST) can actively communicate with NCWorks.gov. Additionally, in October 2019, Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Services Programs (EIPD and DSB) committed to funding, through a contract with Geographic Solutions for developing their case management system, which went live with Phase I functionality on August 23, 2023. During Phase III of the implementation, it is anticipated that common areas of referral sharing, and data collection will have the potential of dramatically improving alignment of data systems, as Geographic Solutions is the current developer for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) NCWorks.gov case management system for WIOA Title I & III.
- The Division of Information Technology (IT) department is currently in the process of partnering with other agencies to work on improved system integration.

- Develop an annual workforce development system report card with universal success metrics.
- While each workforce development program typically has multiple performance measures, many of them mandated by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor, universal success metrics give North Carolina customers a consistent look at the results of the workforce system. These results will be displayed via a report card and provide a common framework to measure our workforce system's progress across a wide variety of programs. This report card will be easy to access and understand, and will highlight the employment, wage, and training results for each workforce development program.
- The NCWorks Commission has established a set of core performance measures for all workforce programs in the state and reports on these measures annually. Measures look at employment and educational enrollment status of former participants across programs.
- Create metrics based on consistently collected feedback from customers to strengthen the workforce development system.
- Historically, each workforce development agency has been responsible for measuring the overall satisfaction of its clients. Measuring this level of satisfaction is program specific and lacks consistency. An integrated workforce development system requires universal customer satisfaction metrics based on a consistent feedback loop. The analysis of the feedback will be used to strengthen North Carolina's workforce development system.
- NCWorks contracted with a research evaluation group to develop, distribute, and analyze customer feedback across the state. In addition, the biennial Employer Needs Survey conducted by the Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) collects workforce development system feedback from over 2,000 business establishments about their hiring practices, hiring difficulties and workforce needs.
- The workforce development system must be continuously responsive to its customers. The NCWorks Commission will continue to work with workforce development agencies to establish a continuous improvement process that canvases all customers regardless of access point, seeks to understand their challenges, and provides a mechanism for strengthening the system.

- Employer partnerships that identify/promote industry-recognized credentials to better assess the employer demand and the outcomes of those with the credentials in the workforce.
- The Community Colleges System and myFutureNC have worked with employers to identify non-degree credentials valued by employers, in close partnership with the Department of Public Instruction, Department of Commerce, NCWorks Commission, the Governor's Office, and myFutureNC. Known in the state as "North Carolina Workforce Credentials," these are credentials that require more than a high school diploma and less than a postsecondary degree; are in demand in North Carolina; and lead to family sustaining wages. To form the initial list of credentials of value, the team identified high-demand, well-paying occupations, and the industry credentials within them. The interagency team then held meetings with employers in key industry sectors to review credentials to validate those valued by the employers. After development of the initial list of credentials, an application process was created and is now hosted on NCcareers.org, allowing partner agency staff to submit employer-recommended credentials for review and addition to the list. In addition to quarterly additions to the list, the various agency partners worked together to survey businesses in fall 2023 to do a more extensive update of the list.
- As industry-recognized credentials become more prevalent in the labor market, it is important for educational institutions to establish data-sharing relationships with certifying bodies and for state agencies that manage wage and occupation data to ensure their training programs are well aligned with industry and professional standards. There are challenges impacting the effectiveness of direct collaboration between these groups including legal issues and security of data. Educational institutions often do not have access to certification exam data, which limits their ability to know if students are leaving their programs well prepared to meet industry-specified competencies. The NC Community College System and other partners will continue to pursue data-sharing relationships.

Finalize state performance measures for Local Workforce Boards. According to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) section 116 and NC General Statute 143B-438.10, the NCWorks Commission is responsible for developing performance accountability measures for Local Workforce Development Boards. The commission reviewed baseline information in the spring of 2016 and developed performance measures beginning in program year 2016. With the 2022-23 Local Area Workforce Development Boards realignment from 23 to 20 boards, these measures needed to be reconsidered and updated.

NCWorks Commission Local Workforce Development Board Performance Measures

In 2023 North Carolina's 20 Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and the NCWorks Commission worked to update specific services and outcomes of performance being provided

by the career centers to better understand and trend opportunities for improvement. These three core services provided areas are:

- Basic Services (Initial contact & evaluation; Job search assistance; Provision of information; Referral)
- Career Services (Career planning & counseling; Supportive services; Testing/assessments)
- Education and Training Services (Adult basic education; Occupational skills; Post-secondary; Pre-Vocational skills; Secondary)

The data for these areas will be taken from the NC Association of Workforce Development Boards (www.ncawdb.org) NC Workforce Service Delivery Outcome Dashboard, which was developed in collaboration with the NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD).

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.

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

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

The programs under review include the American Indian Workforce Development Program administered by the NC Department of Administration; the Title I adult and youth programs, Wagner-Peyser, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and Veterans' Program, administered by the NC Department of Commerce; the Registered Apprenticeship Program, Bionetwork, NCEdge Customized Training, Small Business Center Network, College and Career Readiness)Adult Education and Basic Skills), Occupational Continuing Education, and Postsecondary Career

Technical and Vocational Education programs administered by the NC Community College System; the Career and Technical Education program administered by the NC Department of Public Instruction; and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)/Work First, Snap/Food and Nutrition Services, Community Services Block Grant; Senior Community Service Employment, and the Vocational Rehabilitation and VR Services for the Blind programs administered by the NC Department of Health and Human Services.

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

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

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

Strategic planning efforts related to workforce development, including those of the Education Cabinet, Community College System, the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, State Board of Education and myFutureNC are consistent with those of the Commission. Efforts to

coordinate and align strategic plans, goals, and performance measures with the North Carolina Unified Plan are made through interagency workgroups and stakeholder participation.

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

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

C. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

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 (e.g. transportation), to individuals, including those populations identified in section II(a)(1)(B), and individuals in remote areas. 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 continues the coordination and alignment of programs to create an integrated workforce system that allows all customers to access timely and relevant services.

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

developed to integrate Title II. The formal mechanisms listed below continue to be used to improve coordination between all WIOA programs, including Title II.

First, the WIOA State Steering Council was established in 2015 to bring together the senior leadership of each program covered under WIOA to review current activities, discuss solutions, and track implementation. This council meets periodically and reviews progress on WIOA implementation and develop strategies for improvement and review state policies that may inhibit programs from fully aligning activities. The council implements strategies for better alignment such as creating a common intake form, exploring the possibility of an integrated case management system, and strengthening the referral process between programs. The council will provide feedback to the NCWorks Commission regarding challenges and barriers to completing the work, and suggestions for new policy.

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

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

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

In addition to the strategies put in place by the NCWorks Commission, the three agencies responsible for implementation of WIOA have key activities in place to ensure a well-coordinated, customer-focused, and high-quality system is in place. For example, per federal requirements, during recent Title II grant application planning processes involving local Adult Education providers, NCCCS collaborated with the Local Workforce Boards via the Workforce Development Directors Council, and the Local Workforce Boards included the goals of Adult Education in their WIOA Annual Plans. Another example would be sector strategies. For example, the location and creation of electric vehicle (EV) companies and infrastructure has spurred a cross-agency collaboration including the Governor's Office, DWS, and NCCCS to meet the needs of growing companies while connecting individuals to better careers.

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 career centers serve as the front-line touch points for the state's job seekers. The WIOA State Steering Council continues to work

on developing key strategies for integrating services across all WIOA Titles, in addition to other workforce programs.

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

To ensure a customer-focused career center system, the NC Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions implemented a state-wide, integrated services delivery approach to better serve the state's citizens and businesses by responding to customer needs. Integrated services delivery focuses on customer service and is organized around services to customers, not discrete programs offered in silos. In North Carolina, it is a system in which Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I (Adult and Dislocated Worker) programs and Title III (Wagner-Peyser Employment Services) are the operational backbone of NCWorks Career Centers.

Career centers deploy integrated staffing and use integrated technology to generate an integrated customer pool and customer flow. Staff are organized by function and are cross trained so that all center staff have the capacity to serve all customers and is knowledgeable about all services the center offers. In addition, staff use a single, web-based system (NCWorks Online) that provides job matching services to job seekers and employers, as well as program and client management/participant tracking. When customers are interested in training and more individualized services, they are enrolled in both WIOA Title I Adult program and Wagner-Peyser program; and the goal is to enroll at least 75% of Trade Adjustment Act customers in WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker program. This model emphasizes cross-training of staff and strong partnership to serve customers better.

The NCWorks Commission is charged with certifying one-stop comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers. They are responsible for setting new criteria and standards for quality customer service for the state-wide career center system. These criteria include elements to ensure high-quality customer service, integrated services delivery, accessibility, and consistent program offerings to ensure a consistent level of quality customer service throughout the state's workforce delivery system. During 2022, the NCWorks Commission started the 3-year recertification process of North Carolina's one-stop career centers. Given the important changes happening at career centers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission requested a 1-year extension from the Department of Labor. This extension was granted in October 2021 allowing the NCWorks Commission to time to update the certification criteria to reflect the numerous virtual services offered by one-stop career centers. Beginning in May 2022, NCWorks Commission staff began the career center recertification process, and completed recommendation of recertification by December 2022.

In addition, many career centers are co-located with community colleges and/or county social services and have Vocational Rehabilitation staff who work on-site. In addition, a strong partnership and referral process is in place for all workforce development programs offered by the state and local communities. The COVID-19 pandemic helped career centers realize a greater potential to reach customers via virtual service access. These practices include offering virtual appointments, training sessions, and group meetings. Career centers still abide by strict cleaning protocols between customer visits. Many NCWorks Career Centers have installed plexiglass barriers at reception and utilize portable barriers for in-person meetings. Each Career center maintains an inventory of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In addition to the

traditional in-person job fair, NCWorks Career Centers connected employers to job seekers by hosting drive-through and virtual job fairs. The pandemic required NCWorks Career Centers to consider innovative ways to serve customers.

Plans for Integration of All WIOA Programs

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

Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act

Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, providers must align their program plans to those of the Local Workforce Development Boards. To ensure services are aligned, Title II operates a competitive Request for Proposal process that requires local Boards to review and comment on the extent of a proposal's alignment to the local plan. In addition, Title II providers share in infrastructure costs based on proportionate use by Title II students. Through MOUs, Title II providers negotiate roles and responsibilities for integrated services. The Unified Plan process provides for an opportunity to bring together Adult Education/Literacy and Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Youth programming in new ways.

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

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

services which will ensure seamless and more efficient service delivery and cross-agency collaboration.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

The Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation programs administered through Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Services for the Blind are integrated and aligned with other components of the statewide workforce development system. The partnerships and linkages that were established prior to the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 have served as a stable and effective foundation for effective service delivery. Cooperative agreements or memorandum of agreements have been established with all Local Area Workforce Boards. The agreements provide for the following strategies:

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

The rehabilitation needs of individuals who are served through components of the statewide workforce development system other than through the public Vocational Rehabilitation program is assessed through the methodology outlined in the respective sections of the VR portions of the NC Unified State Plan. One of the ongoing goals for both the Vocational Rehabilitation and NCWorks system is to continue to refine the processes and procedures for NCWorks Career Center staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the

career centers should be referred to EIP or DSB rather than being served through NCWorks. It is necessary to determine which consumers served by the NCWorks system have a disability. Strategies to improve this will be further explored via mutual collaboration between VR and NCWorks Career Centers to establish training for its staff.

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs contribute to the infrastructure and personnel costs of NCWorks Career Centers and allocate time for VR counselors to staff the Career Centers, in addition to providing information and referral services. This collaboration better enables persons with disabilities to access core workforce services. Vocational Rehabilitation staff are also represented on the state level as well as on local boards. The VR programs support the NCWorks efforts to provide more universal access to placement and training services, integrate programs by offering a common core of information and services, and offer program participants more choices regarding where and how they receive services. Through local agreements, direct service delivery staff within the Title IV programs have increased access to comprehensive data, which enables faster service delivery and cross-agency collaboration, and local Vocational Rehabilitation program offices across the state have access to these databases.

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

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

Enhanced working relationships and communication with other key partners of the workforce development system such as the NC Division of Social Services, NC Community College System, regional economic development partners, and other local partnerships allow all the agencies to better meet the needs of the individual. Other efforts to provide comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services, including supportive services to individuals, will also be conducted through (a) cooperative agreements with agencies not carrying out activities under the statewide workforce development system for the purpose of information and resource sharing and referrals; (b) coordination with education agencies, such as the Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina System, and local education agencies for the provision of training and transition services to youth with

disabilities, including pre- employment transition services; (c) cooperative agreements and contracts with private nonprofit Vocational Rehabilitation service providers for the provision of rehabilitation training with short- and long-term supports; (d) arrangements and cooperative agreements for the provision of supported employment services with the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services to ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities have equal access to VR and best practice employment services; and (e) coordination with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities to facilitate VR services and the provision of transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Programs

North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, called Work First (WF), is one of the many programs that connects families to resources to support wellness and economic self-sufficiency. The program is based on the premise that parents have a responsibility to support themselves and their children.

The Work First program promotes a strengths-based, family-centered practice approach and shares in the mission of the NC DHHS, in collaboration with its partners, to protect the health and safety of all North Carolinians and provide essential human services. NC DHHS is responsible for establishing, supervising, and monitoring the Work First Program. At present, all services and benefits are delivered by the county department of social services in North Carolina's 100 counties. Work First provides parents with short-term training and other services to help them become employed and move toward self-sufficiency.

North Carolina's success at helping families move from Work First to work thus far has led to a broadened focus for the Work First program. No longer is the focus just on helping those families who receive Work First Cash Assistance obtain employment. North Carolina has added the flexibility and program structure for counties to provide former Work First families with job retention and child and family enrichment services designed to help ensure families experience long-term success. Further, since child support is critical to ensuring families' success, North Carolina allows counties to provide work-related services to non-custodial parents of Work First children.

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.

North Carolina's workforce development system is committed to the provision of comprehensive, high-quality services to employers that help to meet the current and projected workforce needs and achieve the goals of industry and sector partners throughout the state. The three agencies with administrative responsibility for the WIOA core programs work together via local, regional, and state-level teams and initiatives focused on meeting the needs of

businesses and industry in North Carolina. An interagency NCWorks team facilitates the integration of employer services through several coordinated efforts including: the development of comprehensive employer service informational brochures and literature that are disseminated for use across all WIOA programs; working with a vendor to implement a new integrated customer relationship management tool, and establishing area business services teams to ensure coordination among Local Workforce Development Boards and other partners including community colleges, public schools and Vocational Rehabilitation. Further, the State will recommend a business services committee be established by Local Workforce Development Boards that will develop local and regional strategies for employer engagement and report to the boards quarterly.

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

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

The following overarching goals are essential to these efforts:

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

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

NCWorks Career Centers

NCWorks Career Centers help employers find, train, and retain qualified employees. Each center provides services to help local businesses, including the following:

- job applicant screening and qualified candidate referrals;
- valuable and up-to-date labor market facts and projections, such as wages;
- information on tax credits for hiring particular groups of workers;

- space to conduct job interviews;
- help arranging job fairs;
- workshops on employer-related subjects;
- employee training resources;
- layoff/closure prevention services for employers; and
- information about federal bonding (insurance for hiring at-risk workers.)

NCWorks Online, North Carolina's web-based job matching system, provides the mechanism for businesses to post jobs, get real-time analysis on the labor market, find qualified candidates to fill open positions, and all at no cost to employers.

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

The North Carolina Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions provides the resources and guidance to the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards to implement successful work-based learning and on-the-job training (OJT), which provides North Carolina a means to expand and enhance workforce service delivery to the State's citizens. OJT is a viable pathway for unemployed workers seeking employment and for employers seeking workers. It offers the unique opportunity to offset initial training costs to fill skilled positions while building organizational productivity as the employee learns job requirements. An OJT arrangement can be the impetus for an employer to create a job opportunity. Local Workforce Development Boards consider OJT placements in the context of in-demand occupations or industries where career pathways exist with employer partners who have a documented plan to add jobs.

OJT is a viable and compatible part of North Carolina's Integrated Services Delivery services. Local Workforce Development Boards OJT policy is critical for consistency, institutionalizing services the local board seeks to deliver, and managing and leveraging OJT funds. Local OJT policy also provides guidance on how to comply with federal and state OJT requirements and leverage other hiring.

Work Opportunity Tax Credits

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit encourages employers to hire individuals who are qualified for open positions but face barriers to employment. Businesses can receive a onetime tax credit of \$2,400-\$9,600 for hiring a qualified job applicant; the amount varies, depending on the hire.

To be eligible for the tax credit, employers must hire an individual from one of the following groups:

- Recipients of Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Former offenders;
- Vocational Rehabilitation program participant;
- Recipients of long-term family assistance;

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

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

North Carolina Community Colleges Services to Employers

The North Carolina Community College System is a system of 58 comprehensive community colleges that melded the collection and missions of the state's public junior colleges and its public Industrial Education Centers in the 1960s. The system provides a diverse set of education and training programs as well as an array of services to the state's business and industries. The system is nationally known for its educational and training programs including the nation's first and most robust customized training program (now referred to as NCEdge Customized Training).

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

North Carolina's Community Colleges also play a major role as a network of Eligible Training Providers, with all colleges sponsoring job training or curriculum programs which are approved for WIOA customers. In addition, there are 12 career centers that are located on a community college campus. These efforts as well as additional linkages between community colleges and NCWorks Career Centers make program collaboration and cross-referral easier.

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

The North Carolina Community College System's 2022-2026 strategic plan, *Leading Through Change*, prioritizes faculty and staff recruitment and retention, enrollment, student success, economic and workforce development, as well as system funding and effectiveness. Education, training, apprenticeship/ credentialing, and other services to employers will remain a priority. Workforce development partners are included in the development of the Community College System's strategic plan.

Registered Apprenticeship

North Carolina's registered apprenticeship program ApprenticeshipNC is administered by the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). Participating employers work with ApprenticeshipNC to create a written agreement that specifies the length of a participant's training, the related technical instruction, and outline of the skills that each participant will need to learn as well as the wages that he or she will earn. Through participation in the ApprenticeshipNC, employers gain:

- a proven process for imparting the knowledge and skills of experienced personnel to new employees; greater workforce competency and productivity; partnerships with certification and licensing agencies; credentials that are recognized both in North Carolina and nationwide; and;
- valuable assets in the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified workforce.

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

North Carolina's ApprenticeshipNC program encompasses registered apprenticeship programs as well as Pre-Apprenticeships and Youth Apprenticeships in its broader portfolio for work-based learning opportunities. Pre-apprenticeships offer greater flexibility to employers while establishing a process for individuals to get "credit" toward a Registered Apprenticeship based on work-based experiences and/or classroom training.

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

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

Additional coordinated employer efforts include coordination of WIOA core partners, economic development and ApprenticeshipNC to provide services to several of the state's high demand

industries: Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare, Logistics/Transportation, Energy, Construction, IT and Hospitality. A DOL/OA grant award for expanding registered apprenticeship could assist in this coordination.

Business Advisory Committees

The North Carolina Community College System requires business advisory committees per the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (reinforced through its program review and accountability process), and (where applicable) federal requirements. All technical programs at a community college have program advisory committees which generally meet at a minimum one to two times a year. Many colleges involve deeper involvement; for example, Brunswick Community College works with an extensive set of economic development and workforce development partners to aggressively seek input on college programming and other workforce services from businesses throughout the county.

In deciding what education, training, or certification programs to offer, community colleges rely on a combination of direct input from business (as referenced above), data analyses, and priorities established by economic development partners. Data analysis is generally conducted by college Institutional Research staff (primarily for planning of one- and two-year programs), by college Workforce Continuing Education program leaders (for short term training), and/ or procured from the NC Department of Commerce/Labor and Economic Analysis Division or local economic development partners. There is increasing use of supply and demand analyses as well as a variety of economic and labor market data analyses to determine priorities for education/training based on industries that need workers (and thus education/training) and current/projected hiring within specific occupations.

Sector Strategies

North Carolina has a long history in sector strategies using WIA/WIOA funded services, with locally and regionally defined initiatives as well as statewide sector initiatives in areas ranging from Allied Health, Clean 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 this supports the development and provision of community college biotech-related education, training, and certification across the state.

NORTH CAROLINA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

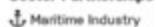
Sector Partnerships



1. North East Prosperity Zone

- Yellow: Turning Point WDB
- Orange: Rivers East WDB
- Pink: Northeastern WDB

Sector Partnerships



Maritime Industry

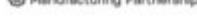


Health Care Advancement Collaborative

2. Southeast Prosperity Zone

- Purple: Cape Fear WDB
- Yellow: Eastern Carolina WDB

Exploring Sector Partnerships

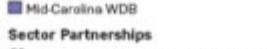


Manufacturing Partnership

3. North Central Prosperity Zone

- Blue: Kern-Tar WDB
- Pink: Capital Area WDB
- Orange: Durham WDB
- Yellow: Turning Point WDB
- Dark Blue: Mid-Carolina WDB

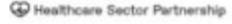
Sector Partnerships



4. Sandhills (South Central) Prosperity Zone

- Dark Blue: Mid-Carolina WDB
- Dark Blue: Lumber River WDB
- Pink: Cape Fear WDB

Sector Partnerships



Healthcare Sector Partnership

5. Piedmont Triad (Central) Prosperity Zone

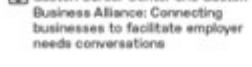
- Pink: Piedmont Triad Regional WDB
- Green: Gaston County WDB



6. Southwest Prosperity Zone

- Yellow: Foothills WDB
- Green: Gaston County WDB
- Orange: Charlotte Works WDB
- Pink: Centralina WDB

Exploring Sector Partnerships



7. Northwest Prosperity Zone

- Blue: High Country WDB
- Yellow: Foothills WDB
- Yellow: Western Piedmont WDB

Sector Partnerships



8. Western Prosperity Zone

- Orange: Southwestern WDB
- Pink: Mountain Area WDB
- Yellow: Foothills WDB

Sector Partnerships



NCEdge Customized Training

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

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

Small Business Centers

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

computers, books and other media, as well as the provision of information about businesses and industries, and referrals to other governmental and business resources.

NC Workforce Credentials

The Community Colleges System and myFutureNC have worked with employers to identify credentials in close partnership with the Department of Public Instruction, Department of Commerce, NCWorks Commission, and the Governor's Office. Known in the state as "North Carolina Workforce Credentials," these are credentials that 1) require more than a high school diploma and less than a postsecondary degree; 2) are in demand in North Carolina; and 3) lead to family sustaining wages. To determine these credentials, the interagency team started with Department of Commerce data on "Star Jobs" to identify high-demand, well-paying occupations. Then the team identified industry credentials for these occupations. Finally, the interagency team held meetings with employers in key industry sectors to review possible credentials and validate those highly regarded by the employers. An initial list of validated credentials has been established, and the North Carolina Workforce Credentials Advisory Council was created to sustain the effort and continue to work with interagency partners to identify additional sectors and respond to the evolving needs of employers over time.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs Services to Employers

The Divisions of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities (EIPD) and Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) currently utilize a dual customer approach by providing services to both businesses and individuals with disabilities. These divisions emphasize the definition and marketing of business services to ensure the dual customer approach is recognized and implemented. Business services include recruitment, hiring, consultation on Section 503 compliance, sensitivity/diversity training, accessibility consultation, internships, on-the-job training (OJT), education on tax incentives, follow-up, and job retention services.

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

The performance of these community employment program specialists are measured, in part, by assessing relationships with business as evidenced by direct and indirect placements of eligible jobseekers with disabilities. Additionally, as of July 2019 the tracking of measurable skill gains achieved by consumers served by the community employment program specialists. EIPD and DSB VR programs believe that relationships with employers is the essence of creating positive connections between jobseekers and business, and that providing follow-up and technical assistance to business fosters these relationships so that they can have a sustainable impact on the supporting individuals with disabilities in finding, maintaining, and advancing in employment.

Provision of VR Services through Coordination with Employers

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

EIPD staff plan to expand the role of employers in vocational evaluation and career development services. EIPD 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. EIPD 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.

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

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

Provision of Transition Services through Coordination with Employers

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

The Vocational Rehabilitation programs of EIPD and DSB plan to enhance its current internship policies to expand the service to a larger group of students with disabilities, including possibly, those who are college-bound or currently enrolled in college training. The goal is to create enriching work experiences for students that expose them to work options, allow them to

develop high expectations around their capacity for competitive employment, and build a resume that will enable young people with disabilities to compete for quality jobs. The VR programs plan to also enhance internship opportunities for individuals with disabilities by developing employer-based internship programs with businesses who recognize the value of building up workers. Internship opportunities for youth will be short-term, occur in conjunction with the student's educational requirements or during the student's school breaks, and may involve paid training and engage internship training supports such as job coaching.

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

The Vocational Rehabilitation programs will continue to explore unique business partnerships that benefit the unique training and recruitment needs of students and youth with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities. EIPD 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.

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

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

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

Other Collaborative Employer Services

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

Through its existing collaborations, program offerings, tools, and continued innovation, North Carolina's Workforce System is committed to the provision of effective employer services, best practices and guidance that encourages and enhances the adoption and implementation of comprehensive employer services across all workforce programs in the state.

E. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND OTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS.

Describe how the State's Strategies will engage the State's community colleges, adult education providers, area career and technical education schools, providers on the State's eligible training provider list, and other education and training providers, as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training system. WIOA section 102(b)(2)(B)(iv). Include how the State's strategies will enable the State to leverage other Federal, State, and local investments to enhance access to workforce development programs at these institutions.

NCWorks Career Centers all have formal partnerships with the 58 community colleges across the state, as well as the 115 local public-school districts. 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 career center locations. Also, many of the state's WIOA youth program contracts are with local school systems. Local WDBs, community colleges and public schools work together to offer services and activities to youth participants such as Career Days, mentoring, and job shadowing.

Partnership Engagement with education and training providers is written throughout the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. Postsecondary Perkins provides infrastructure funding for career centers. Some NCWorks Career Centers place career counselors and case managers at community colleges where the need arises. In addition to the career awareness, career planning, and education and training programs offered by high schools and colleges, Career and Technical Education programs at community colleges work together with WIOA to offer opportunities for paid on-the-job training, supportive services and shared career counseling. Emphasis on postsecondary credentials, such as one of the accountability measures

in Perkins V and the goal of postsecondary credentials in myFutureNC provide the framework for future collaboration.

There is community college and Adult Education (Title II) representation on all 20 Local Workforce Development Boards in North Carolina, and some boards also have representation from local Career and Technical Education programs. North Carolina's Local Workforce Development Boards and NCWorks Career Centers are called upon to collaborate with local education partners to help connect NC employers to the NC employees they need to succeed in our state and help our citizens gain new skills and find employment. One key example of this partnership is the state's career pathways initiative (see earlier section on career pathways). There is representation on the NCWorks Commission from the UNC System and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU).

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

Career Pathways

As referenced earlier, the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways are a key element of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready workforce development initiative to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow. The state now has 41 NCWorks Certified Career Pathways across the state and published an "impact report" that focused on the thirteen that had reached one year of implementation by June 30, 2018.

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

They outline and define the following:

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

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

scope. The NCWorks Commission continues to support the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways work across the state.

In 2023, the NCWorks Commission contracted an independent research and evaluation firm to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways (CCPs) and analyze participation, participant outcomes, and alignment to labor market demands. Profiling of CCP participants was conducted by sector, region, and demographics. Participation was disaggregated by the year of participation, gender, race, veteran status, disability status, employment status, and prior education level, as well as prosperity zone. Participants were analyzed by the year of participation, gender, race, veteran status, disability status, employment status, prior education level, and prosperity zone. The evaluative study explores labor market outcomes of participants by sector for the top sectors, demonstrating earnings prior to the program and after the program.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

The Department of Health and Human Services Division of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities (EIP) programs work with NC Community College System in that EIPD 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 support. 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, EIPD and colleges within the NCCCS are two of the partner organizations that comprise Project SEARCH™ teams in NC. Project SEARCH™ is a collaborative model serving individuals with the most significant intellectual or developmental disabilities, in which students participate in a series of three internships at the host business as well as job-focused academic skills training to prepare them for integrated, competitive employment in their community. Currently, there are two Project SEARCH™ sites with community college partnerships with the expectation that more will be developed.

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

Partner Engagement with Other Education and Training Providers

A key priority of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative is skills and education attainment. As the skill requirements of jobs are increasing and rapidly changing, businesses need to find people with the right skills for the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to training so they can be ready for those jobs. This involves the fostering of partnerships between businesses, educators, and state and local workforce development agencies. NC community

colleges offer much of the postsecondary education and training in the state and are considered by some as the provider of choice for WIOA. Other education and training partners are also available and (along with community colleges) are identified through the state's Eligible Training Provider List.

The NCWorks Online system allows the individual providers the ability to login and apply to be on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) to receive referrals of Title I eligible customers. Once they have completed their application, the DWS ETP Coordinator or ETP staff will review the application and take the necessary steps to determine if this provider is one that should be on the state list of approved providers. Once a provider is approved, they must then key in all the programs they offer that will again have to be reviewed and approved by the DWS ETP Coordinator or ETP staff. Once a provider has been approved for WIOA training, every WDB in the state has the option to certify that this provider can be available in their area based on their approval process. With the two-year review process, they will have to be approved again based on current standards by the ETP Coordinator and ETP staff.

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

- Institutions of higher education that provide a program of training that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;
- Registered Apprenticeship programs registered by the ApprenticeshipNC, which is the state approving agency for North Carolina and is recognized by USDOL Office of Registered Apprenticeship as the approving agency;
- Public or private training providers, including joint labor-management organizations, pre-apprenticeship programs, and occupational/technical training; and
- Providers of adult education and literacy activities provided in combination with occupational skills training.

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

In addition to collaboration with NCCCS, and sponsorship of postsecondary training at various educational institutions, the VR Programs have established policies and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services. These are described in the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services portion of the Unified Plan under section (d) Coordination with Education Officials.

With regard to the WIOA Title IV program, the NC Division of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities (EIP) modified its state level memorandum of agreement with the Department of Public Instruction in 2018 to outline a collaborative partnership between the two agencies and provide state-level approval and support to expand transition services for students with disabilities, including Pre-employment transition services for students with

disabilities that are potentially eligible for VR services. At the local-level VR offices and local education agencies will also continue third-party cooperative agreements that outline how the agencies will partner in the provision of services to students with disabilities, with regard to funding contributions, procedures for information sharing, and referral processes. Currently, the local third-party cooperative agreements are statewide with 96% of all LEAs in North Carolina contributing funding towards 202 positions for VR professional and support staff.

EIPD' and DSB's Vocational Rehabilitation programs will maintain and strengthen their programmatic relationships with school transition services through its continued active participation on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This workgroup led by the Department of Public Instruction, also includes the University Center for Development and Learning, Parent/Child Advocacy Agency, Career and Technical Education, and NC Community Colleges System. The Team was established to develop statewide goals and better coordinate transition activities for students with disabilities, enabling this population to achieve post-school outcomes, including employment and post-secondary education. Currently, NC's Capacity Building Plan is focused on improving student involvement in the individualized education program (IEP) process so that planning is more consistent with a student's post-school goals.

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

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

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

Include how the State's strategies will enable the State to leverage other Federal, State, and local investments **to enhance** access to workforce development programs at **these** institutions.

North Carolina is making access to education a priority. A key priority of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative is skills and education attainment, and Governor Cooper has laid out the goal to make North Carolina a Top Ten Educated State by 2025 by increasing the number of

four-year-olds enrolled in high quality pre-K, raising the high school graduation rate, and increasing the number of North Carolinians with a post-secondary degree or credential. An educated North Carolina is a job-ready North Carolina. In addition, NCWorks Certified Career Pathways continue to be key tools for increased educational access for citizens and collaboration among workforce partners.

In response to the need for developing a workforce with increased skills and educational attainment, Governor Cooper implemented the Finish Line Grants program, which helps community college students who face unforeseen financial emergencies complete their training. The program was initially administered by the Division of Workforce Solutions but transitioned to the NC Community College System in October of 2022. The program is operated with Governor's Emergency Education Relief funds to help students pay for course materials, housing, medical needs, car repairs, dependent care, or other financial emergencies that students may face through no fault of their own.

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

Other Leveraged Resources to Increase Educational Access

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

- Pell grants. North Carolina community college students rely on Pell grant funding each year.
- Pandemic recovery-funded scholarships (time-limited)
 - Workforce Resilience Grants for Short-Term Workforce Credentials – award up to \$750 or the total cost for certain Workforce Continuing Education programs that lead to an industry-recognized credential
 - Longleaf Commitment – scholarships for recent North Carolina high school graduates to attend a NC community college with no tuition costs
- GI bill educational resources for veterans and initiatives and tools that make it easier for veterans to crosswalk their military experience and gain educational credit/credentials.
- State, local, and private scholarships or sponsorships (e.g., Golden LEAF Foundation, Duke Energy/other private companies, State Employees' Credit Union, and other sources). Funding flows through the NC Community Colleges Foundation, State Board of Community Colleges, or local community college foundations, and directly to students.
- In addition to its scholarships for individual students, Golden LEAF Foundation is an important source of workforce development grant funding in North Carolina. Grants are

made to community colleges, LEAs, nonprofit organizations, and other entities to boost education and training, pay for equipment needed for job training programs, etc.

- The John M. Belk Endowment is supporting key work related to a variety of postsecondary education initiative and career pathways in North Carolina.
- At the local level, county commissions approve and provide much of the funding for community college buildings, including specialized workforce development centers.

Other state and national foundations and corporative giving programs are important for workforce development access and success. North Carolina is part of the National Governor's Association Policy Academy on Work-Based Learning, which is supporting educational goal-setting and collaborative workforce development. North Carolina has recently been selected by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) for grant funding from the Workforce Innovation Fund and to join the Workforce Innovation Network. This grant will help North Carolina advance digital skill development for equitable economic participation in alignment with state workforce and economic development goals. In addition, North Carolina is also part of the Credentials of Value Institute. The Education Strategy Group (ESG), with generous support from the Lumina Foundation, launched the Credentials of Value Institute in the fall of 2019. North Carolina has continued this work through the creation of the NC Workforce Credential Advisory Council, which is a partnership between the Department of Public Instruction, NC Community Colleges, and the North Carolina Department of Commerce to identify and prioritize non-degree credentials that put learners on a pathway to sustaining wage jobs and support the state's postsecondary attainment goal, ensuring that by 2030, two million North Carolinians (between the ages of 25 and 44) have a high-quality credential or postsecondary degree. The NC Workforce Credential Advisory Council comprises 21 members representing employers, state agencies, and educators from across the state. As the work continues for this council in 2023, it will:

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

If funding allows after paying for work-related needs, local departments of social services can use Child Care and Development Fund dollars and state Smart Start dollars to assist with subsidized childcare for those in training or looking for work.

At the local level, decisions are made by community action agencies (with federal CSBG and private funding sources), nonprofit organizations and/or faith-based organizations to provide transportation assistance, childcare assistance and/or occasionally direct educational assistance.

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

NC Community College System Office has researched barriers to access, including but not limited to education costs, wrap-around costs (transportation, credentialing, childcare, etc.) and nonfinancial barriers, and work in collaboration with workforce, education, and nonprofit partners to mitigate barriers.

Track state and federal program changes that could impact education and training affordability and ensure that support through WIOA programs is connected with community college financial aid resources.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

The EIPD and DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Programs plan to maintain and strengthen their programmatic relationships with school transition services through its continued active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This team, including NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) leadership, EIPD, University Center for Development and Learning, Parent/Child Advocacy Agency, Career and Technical Education, and NC Community Colleges System representation was formed in recent years to develop statewide goals and provide better coordinated transition activities for students with disabilities to achieve better results with post-school outcomes, including obtaining employment or attending post-secondary education.

Currently, NC's Capacity Building Plan is focused on improving student involvement in the individualized education program (IEP) process so that planning is more meaningful and associated with a student's post-school goals. The state is continuing to work on a Transition Toolkit for teachers and anticipates the development of toolkits for parents, students, and agencies that will be individualized at the local level. DPI consultants are providing transition training to LEAs to promote student-led IEPs, and NC DVR plans to provide training to VR counselors and LEA representatives focusing on the role of the VR Counselor in the IEP process.

EIPD 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, EIPD and DSB VR programs plan to increase transition service offerings to students with disabilities through partnerships with NC public schools. Some areas of program development and service enhancement being considered by EIPD are:

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

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

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

By enhancing and incorporating new programs that promote and support work-based experiences, EIPD 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. EIPD has recently revised policies for In-School Work Adjustment services to students with significant or most significant disabilities. The service is coordinated through school-based agreements to incentivize a student's participation in school-coordinated work experiences by providing guidance and counseling as well as an incentive payment to students for improvements in work behaviors and attitudes. The Division continues to offer internship and OJT services to students but hopes to increase utilization and improve feasibility for students, schools, and partnering businesses through policy and procedure revisions and collaboration with workforce system partners. Other pre-employment transition services under consideration are intended to address students' expectations around pursuing employment and to improve their preparedness for participating in additional rehabilitation services, such as training and placement.

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

F. 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 emphasizes the importance of postsecondary credentials. As referenced earlier regarding myFutureNC, Governor Cooper, other government leaders, business and education leaders have all agreed upon a postsecondary education goal, with resolutions of support by all major workforce and education governance and other policy boards in the state (including the NCWorks Commission). North Carolina will focus efforts by all education and workforce programs to help working adults gain post-secondary credentials either through the state's higher education system or through other strategies such as Registered Apprenticeship and third-party industry credentials.

Registered Apprenticeship

North Carolina is also working to grow its Registered Apprenticeship program and make stronger connections with Local Workforce Boards, NCWorks Career Centers, and other workforce programs across the state.

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

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

NC Community College System Areas of Focus

The North Carolina Community College System's 2022-2026 strategic plan sets the following goals:

1. Recruit and retain top talent to enable the NC Community College System to educate and prepare the state's workforce.
2. Increase access and enrollment at NC community colleges to meet the state's educational attainment goal and expand postsecondary opportunities.
3. Provide resources inside and outside the classroom for all students to successfully enroll, persist, and complete education or training in a chosen career path.
4. Provide education, training, and credentials to develop the most competitive and agile workforce in the nation.
5. Increase state aid funding allocations, streamline the allocation formula, and implement practices to improve system effectiveness.

Other sections of the plan address the critical roles of community colleges, the State Board and the Community College System Office; strategies to address faculty and staff shortages and to attract talent; cultivation of a pipeline of highly skilled workers that meets the needs of employers; and modernization and alignment of the Community College funding to support the

colleges' needs.

Examples of specific strategies that tie in with NCCCS roles in the workforce system:

- Advocate for a 7% increase in state funding in the 2023-25 biennium and seek an additional 2% from non-state funding sources for employee retention, bonuses, and merit pay.
- Increase marketing and outreach to prospective students and streamline and strengthen the pathways to community colleges and careers.
- Engage with the business community to create a diverse and skilled workforce and cultivate existing talent.
- Implement new communications and statewide marketing strategies and develop a data management and integration plan for the NC Community College System to enhance research and reporting capacity.

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.

G. 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.

Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies.

Throughout the workforce system, economic development partners aid in the identification of economic priorities - key industries and occupations for emphasis in career pathway development, education and training curriculum development, and assistance in reaching businesses that often have less regular communication with workforce development leaders than economic development leaders. In addition, in certain areas, economic development leaders have led the charge for workforce initiatives, ranging from eastern North Carolina regional economic development entities demonstrating the value of WorkReady Communities to efforts in western NC to close the "interest gap" and change perceptions of manufacturing jobs.

North Carolina's key workforce development strategies are well aligned with economic development activities in North Carolina. When the NCWorks Commission was developing its strategic plan, it pulled key strategies from the state 10-year economic development plan, the Jobs Plan, to include in the commission plan to ensure alignment between economic and workforce development. The state economic development plan is a rolling four-year plan. A new plan was released July 2021 and has a large emphasis on workforce and workplace (employers). This work has resulted in a workforce development plan that is in alignment with

the state's economic development plan. The information below details more specific ways the state's strategies connects with economic development.

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

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

- Research advanced technology for marketing to adapt to new generations entering the workforce by staying abreast of the rapidly changing demands and needs of businesses and job seekers to ensure that our workforce system remains nimble, adaptive, and fully utilized.
- Measure and report on the effectiveness of the workforce development system including the usage and quality of services by collecting, understanding, tracking, and sharing data effectively to maintain a responsive and successful workforce development system, while evaluating the current system to identify any changes to maximize outcomes for local communities and the state of North Carolina.

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

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

In addition, North Carolina has eight regions across the state that are used to coordinate activities, especially in economic and workforce development. These regions, called Prosperity Zones, align 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 on a regular basis to discuss current economic and workforce development issues.

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. THE STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT COORDINATED IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGIES (E.G., LABOR MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEMS, DATA SYSTEMS, COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS, CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS, JOB BANKS, ETC.).

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 60 comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers (NC's one-stop system).

North Carolina One-Stop Partner Programs Contributions:

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

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions issued an operational guidance notice that outlines the infrastructure cost sharing information and includes a required template for the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Infrastructure Cost Agreement addendum. Policy was initially issued in May 2018 and each subsequent Program Year since.

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

All North Carolina workforce policies and guidance notices are well vetted by subject matter experts, including DWS leadership, and support the State's workforce program implementation and coordination with core one-stop center partners including WIOA Title I - Adult, Dislocated

Worker, and Youth; Adult Education and Literacy Act – Community College programs; Wagner-Peyser employment services; and Rehabilitation Act Title I - Vocational Rehabilitation programs, as well as other required one-stop partners. As of November 2020, the NCWorks Commission approves major statewide policies in accordance with the federal Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA), and these are known as Commission Policy Statements. Meanwhile, the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) issues Operational Guidance notices, which carry the full authority of NCWorks Commission policies. Commission Policy Statements and Operational Guidance Notices are posted on the NC Commerce website at: <https://www.nccommerce.com/jobs-training/workforce-professionals-tools-resources/workforce-policies>. The North Carolina Community College System Office, Title II policies and manuals are posted on the NCCCS website at: College and Career Readiness - NCCCS (nccommunitycolleges.edu), 2022 Title II Providers' Guide and College and Career Readiness Manual - NCCCS (nccommunitycolleges.edu), Program Quality & Accountability - NCCCS (nccommunitycolleges.edu). The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Title IV policies and manuals are posted on the NCDHHS website at: NC DHHS: Vocational Rehabilitation Program Casework and Service Delivery Policy and Services for the Blind – NCDHHS Policies and Manuals. Issuing policy and guidance is paramount in communicating specific workforce strategies and deadlines that lead to successful workforce program initialization and execution that ultimately lead to success for both job seekers and employers.

The NCWorks Commission also has several policies that support the implementation of the state's strategies. The commission established criteria for NCWorks Career Centers to ensure they are high quality, customer-focused career centers that meet the needs of job seekers and employers. Local Workforce Development Boards must apply to the commission for certification and all comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers in their area must be certified. NCWorks Career Centers are certified for three years and develop continuous improvement plans that are reviewed by staff every year. Criteria for certification is currently being updated to reflect the specific categories identified in TEGL 16-16:

- Effectiveness:
 - Assessing center performance
 - Customer satisfaction
- Physical and Programmatic accessibility:
 - Evidence of integrated service delivery and One-Stop partnerships
 - Americans with Disabilities Act compliance
 - Equal Employment Opportunity practices and monitoring
 - Branding guidelines
 - Business services
 - Youth services
 - Virtual Services
- Continuous Improvement:

- Staff Training
- Implementation of previous certification years' continuous improvement recommendations

The commission also created a certification process for NCWorks Certified Career Pathways for recognizing career pathways that help to develop a talent pipeline for in-demand occupations. 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 Development Boards, community colleges, and the public schools to work with engaged employers. This collaboration identifies and creates clear pathways for in-demand occupations to ensure that the state has the workforce needed for our businesses to succeed.

North Carolina's Federal Performance Outcomes are tracked for all WIOA Core Programs. The Division of Workforce Solutions provides FutureWorks BI to keep the 20 Local Workforce Development Boards abreast of their current performance numbers in real-time. In late 2019, the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards (NCAWDB), in coordination with NCAWDB Director's Council, North Carolina Department of Commerce Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD), North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) and the NCWorks Commission developed the NC Workforce Service Delivery Outcome Dashboard that went live on the NCAWDB website in February 2020. The NC Workforce Service Delivery Outcome Dashboard provides a user-friendly tool for tracking real-time performance data.

In 2023 the 20 newly aligned North Carolina Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) and the NCWorks Commission worked to update specific services and outcomes of performance being provided by the career centers to better understand and trend opportunities for improvement. These three core services provided areas are:

- Basic Services (Initial contact & evaluation; Job search assistance; Provision of information; Referral)
- Career Services (Career planning & counseling; Supportive services; Testing/assessments)
- Education and Training Services (Adult basic education; Occupational skills; Post-secondary; Pre-Vocational skills; Secondary)

The data for these areas will be taken from the NC Association of Workforce Development Boards (www.ncawdb.org) NC Workforce Service Delivery Outcome Dashboard, which was developed in collaboration with the NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD).

North Carolina's Systems:

Titles I and III Operating Systems:

NCWorks Online is North Carolina's official job search portal and workforce development system. It's designed to connect job seekers with employers, providing a comprehensive platform for employment opportunities, career planning, and workforce resources. NCWorks Online serves as a centralized hub for job seekers, employers, and workforce development

agencies to connect, collaborate, and support North Carolina's workforce development initiatives. Below is a breakdown of its key features:

- Job Search: NCWorks Online offers a vast database of job listings from various employers across North Carolina. Job seekers can search for openings based on criteria such as location, industry, job title, and keyword.
- Resume Building and Posting: Users can create and upload their resumes to the platform, making it easier for employers to find qualified candidates. NCWorks Online also provides tools and guidance for crafting effective resumes.
- Skills Assessment and Training: The system helps job seekers assess their skills and identify areas for improvement. It offers access to training programs, workshops, and educational resources to enhance employability.
- Career Planning and Guidance: NCWorks Online provides career exploration tools, including assessments and information on in-demand industries and occupations. Users can explore different career paths and access guidance from career counselors.
- Employer Services: Employers can use NCWorks Online to post job openings, search for qualified candidates, and access workforce development resources. The platform facilitates communication between employers and job seekers. NCWorks Online is the primary source for the WIOA Employer services for current performance reporting with collaboration from other partners.
- Job Fairs and Events: The system features a calendar of job fairs, recruiting events, and workshops happening across the state. Job seekers can find opportunities to network with employers and learn about job market trends.
- Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Grants: NCWorks Online is used to schedule and report RESEA appointments with the collaboration of our Unemployment Insurance (UI) system.
- Federal Performance Reporting: NCWorks Online is the source of all data for reporting our seven Federal programs, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG), Jobs for Veterans State Grants, Wagner-Peyser, and Trade Adjustment Assistance. In addition, we report data pertaining to NDWG that are received directly by local workforce boards and for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training program from the United States

Department of Agriculture. All data for participant, employer, eligible training, and any other services received are subject to federal reporting. This data is matched to wage data from states' UI systems and the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) for performance.

FutureWorks is a platform that North Carolina utilizes in conjunction with NCWorks Online to assist with tracking WIOA data to include performance indicators. FutureWorks Systems is a business intelligence vendor we purchase an annual subscription. Their FutureWorks BI product allows our workforce development boards to easily isolate the specific elements of their WIOA data they wish to view, offers visualizations of the data to better understand what is going on, and does so in a system that is approachable and user-friendly. The data is updated monthly using a Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) extract file from NCWorks Online.

Title II Operating Systems:

Data Reporting and Analysis

The North Carolina Community College's Title II program uses **Benchmark's ADVANSYS**, a comprehensive web-based software designed to meet all requirements for the National Reporting System for Adult Education. The system allows North Carolina's 69 Title II-funded providers to enroll eligible students and track participation, attendance, and participant performance/outcomes. ADVANSYS generates reports and collects data to evaluate the effectiveness of Title II programs and services, thus allowing programs to analyze trends, outcomes, and performance metrics to inform decision-making and program improvements.

Workforce Portal

WIOA Title II participants register in NCWorks Online, North Carolina's official job search portal and workforce development system, to create a unique account for the purpose of identifying employment opportunities, career planning, connecting with employers, and collecting workforce resources. NCWorks Online allows job seekers, employers, and workforce development agencies to connect, collaborate, and support North Carolina's workforce development initiatives.

NCWorks Online performs the following workforce functions for Title II participants:

- **Job Search:** NCWorks Online offers job listings from various employers across the state. Job seekers can search for openings based on location, industry, job title, and keywords.
- **Resume Building and Posting:** Users can create, and upload resumes to the platform, making it easier for employers to find qualified candidates. A resume tutorial is included.
- **Skills Assessment and Training:** Job seekers assess skills and identify areas for improvement. It offers access to training programs, workshops, and educational resources to support employability.

- Career Planning: The portal provides career exploration tools, including assessments and information on in-demand industries and occupations. Users can explore different career paths and access career counselors.
- Employer Services: Employers can use NCWorks Online to post job openings, search for qualified candidates, and access workforce development resources. The platform facilitates communication between employers and job seekers.
- Unemployment Services: NCWorks Online integrates with the state's unemployment insurance system, allowing individuals to file claims, track payments, and access information related to unemployment benefits.

WIOA Co-enrollment Data

At the end of the program year, the North Carolina Community College System Office uploads Title II data into the **North Carolina Government Data Analytics Center portal**. NC Commerce uses this data to create a co-enrollment report indicating the number of unique individuals enrolled in Title II who were also enrolled in Title I, Title III, or Title IV.

Currently, the North Carolina Community College system's Title II program uses Benchmark's ADVANSYS software. The leadership in the core programs is in discussions on how Titles I-IV will integrate databases using Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) in the coming program years.

Title IV Operating System:

The **ENCORE system** is a specialized platform used by the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NC DVRS) to manage and deliver vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. Its key features and functionalities are:

- Client Management: ENCORE serves as a comprehensive client management system, allowing DVRS counselors and staff to track and manage information related to individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services. This includes demographic information, disability details, assessment results, employment goals, and progress notes. The system facilitates case management processes, enabling counselors to develop and track individualized plans for employment (IPE) for each client. Counselors can document services provided, monitor progress, and adjust plans as needed to support clients in achieving their vocational goals.
- Service Coordination: ENCORE supports coordination among multiple service providers involved in a client's rehabilitation journey, including DVRS staff, vocational counselors, training providers, employers, and other community resources. It streamlines communication and collaboration to ensure that clients receive comprehensive support.

- Data Reporting and Analysis: The system generates reports and collects data to evaluate the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation programs and services. This allows the Title IV programs to analyze trends, outcomes, and performance metrics to inform decision-making and program improvements.
- Accessibility Features: The ENCORE system is designed to be accessible to individuals with disabilities, ensuring that clients can easily navigate and interact with the platform. Accessibility features may include compatibility with screen readers, adjustable font sizes, and support for alternative input methods.
- Integration with State and Federal Systems: ENCORE integrates with other state and federal systems, such as the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the NCWorks Online reporting systems. This integration ensures compliance with regulations and facilitates the exchange of information for eligibility determination and reporting purposes. ENCORE and NCWorks Online are both hosted by Geographic Solutions and developed using the same Virtual One-Stop (VOS) platform. Although they are separate instances, the WIOA core partners can leverage sharing the same software vendor and base system for collaborative learning opportunities, data exchanges, and data imports from other agencies, such as with the exchanges for Work Opportunity Tax Credit verification, cross-program participation verification for infrastructure and cost-sharing agreements, and the interface with the Division of Employment Security's vendor, Sagitec, for the quarterly unemployment insurance wage data required for federal reporting.

The ENCORE system plays a crucial role in supporting the mission of the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services by streamlining processes, improving service delivery, and empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve their employment goals and maximize their independence.

Shared Systems

Common Follow-up System

North Carolina's Common Follow-Up System (CFS) is a tool used by various state agencies and workforce development organizations to track and measure the outcomes of individuals who have participated in workforce development and training programs. Here's an overview of its key features and functionalities:

- Data Collection: The CFS collects data on individuals who have received services from participating agencies, including employment and training programs administered by the state's workforce development system. This data includes demographic information, employment status, wages earned, education and training outcomes, and other relevant indicators.

- Integration with Multiple Systems: The CFS integrates data from different state agencies and programs, including the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, community colleges, and other training providers. This integration allows for a comprehensive view of an individual's participation and outcomes across various programs.
- Standardized Reporting: The system uses standardized data elements and reporting protocols to ensure consistency in tracking and reporting outcomes across different programs and agencies. This allows stakeholders to compare outcomes, identify trends, and assess the effectiveness of workforce development initiatives.
- Performance Measurement: The CFS enables stakeholders to measure the performance of workforce development programs and services by tracking key indicators such as employment retention, earnings growth, credential attainment, and skill development. This data helps agencies and policymakers evaluate program effectiveness and make informed decisions about resource allocation and program improvements.
- Outcome Analysis: The system supports analysis of participant outcomes over time, allowing stakeholders to identify factors that contribute to success or barriers to employment and advancement. This information can be used to tailor services and interventions to better meet the needs of individuals seeking employment and training opportunities.

The Common Follow-Up System serves as a valuable tool for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of workforce development efforts in North Carolina, facilitating data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD):

The Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) maintains several labor market information and data systems that will support the coordinated implementation of the State's strategies. The Demand Driven Data Delivery System (D4) is North Carolina's official labor market data source and contains the most current and historical labor market information available at the statewide, regional, and local levels, including data collected and published through the State's partnership with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, including the Current Employment Statistics (CES), Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Occupational and Wage Statistics (OEWS) and the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) programs. The data from these programs will assist job seekers, employers, policymakers, and workforce development professionals in understanding and responding to current labor market conditions in North Carolina.

LEAD has also created several additional data systems that will support the WIOA State Plan's strategies, many of which are housed at Analytics.nccommerce.com. These resources include data, dashboards, and publications covering topics such as labor supply and demand, industry and occupational projections, regional labor market overviews, and other visualizations. To help better understand regional and local labor market conditions, LEAD recently enhanced the Area Profiles, economic and demographic overviews available by county, workforce board area, and prosperity zone. In addition to labor market information, these profiles include data on populations including demographics, educational attainment, and commuting patterns that will further inform the State's strategies.

LEAD has also created NCcareers.org, an online resource for students, parents, educators, job seekers, and career counselors looking for high-quality job and career information. Within NCcareers.org, users can identify their skills/interests; explore occupations and local job/employer needs; identify education and training opportunities and prepare to enter/re-enter the job market. This tool connects users to NCWorks Online job postings, making it another valuable resource to connect job seekers with jobs in their local area. Jobseekers registered with NCWorks Online can also log into NCcareers with their credentials, allowing an easy transition between the systems. NCcareers also contains information specifically for individuals with disabilities and efforts are underway to publish additional data for veterans and justice-involved jobseekers. Taken together, these resources complement other existing data sources and are key to the coordination of the State's strategies.

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

In 2016, the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions developed, as part of the NCWorks Career Center Operations Strategic Priorities, several Lines of Effort (LOE) to address key initiatives within the North Carolina One-Stop system. These LOE's were created to provide a framework to focus effort and resources, with maximum flexibility at the Local Workforce Development Board level to enhance and improve career center operations. All the focus efforts were implemented and/or fulfilled. Currently the Cost Sharing Line of Effort (LOE) is still fully engaged since it is a requirement of the WIOA one-stop partner annual cost sharing agreements. Under this initiative, Division staff, Workforce Board Directors, and subject matter experts work together to address infrastructure cost processes including terms and method for collecting contributions.

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions issued a formal policy that outlines the infrastructure cost sharing information and includes a required template for the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Infrastructure Cost Agreement addendum. The policy was initially issued in May 2018 and each subsequent Program Year since.

North Carolina's Workforce Policies:

The NCWorks Commission, as mandated by the US Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, has approval authority over major statewide WIOA policy. The Commission transmits Commission Policy Statements on items that are subject to monitoring and audits by the Division of Workforce Solutions. The policy statements are issued by the Commission Chair and are posted by the DWS Planning and Policy Development Unit. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) issues operational and program guidance to support workforce systems administration and implementation. Operational Guidance Notices communicate directives and provides instruction for all of the 20 local Workforce Development Boards and other agencies administering workforce programs. The Operational Guidance Notices carry the full authority of the Commission Policies and are issued through the DWS Assistant Secretary. These notices are also posted by the DWS Planning and Policy Development Unit.

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

Integrated Service Strategies:

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

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

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

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

An Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) Operational Guidance that is issued each Program Year goes into depth on the methodology for infrastructure cost management. In addition, the operational guidance provides specific IFA and MOU completion instruction and guidance. DWS staff provide presentations on completion and work with WDBs and partners to ensure all signatures are included.

MOU and IFA documents are effective July 1 of each year, and DWS staff work with Local Workforce Boards throughout the year to insure coordination of funding and accurate accounting of all relevant costs. Per TEGL 17-16, all North Carolina local WDBs IFAs and MOUs were due by January 2018. Every program year local WDBs update IFAs, and if needed, MOUs. The updated IFAs and MOUs were due no later than October 31st of each Program Year.

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

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

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

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.

NCWorks Commission

The NCWorks Commission convenes the major entities that constitute the workforce development system in North Carolina. The state's Workforce Development System is comprised of an expansive group of state and local agencies; public and private educational systems and institutions; private training providers and nonprofit organizations. At the

statewide level, there are seven entities with administrative, oversight and/or operational responsibilities for the state's workforce development activities. These entities include the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, the North Carolina Department of Administration, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina Community College System, the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities. These administrative entities and their respective institutions and programs play a vital role in helping to educate the state's citizens and preparing the state's current and future workforce.

North Carolina Department of Commerce

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

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

The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has administrative responsibility for several of the state's workforce development programs and services. These include Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth), WIOA Title III the Wagner Peyser Act program, Trade Act program, Veteran's Employment and Training Services and the Agriculture Employment program. DWS has a state level staff that provide administrative oversight for programs as well as local staff who provide direct services for Wagner Peyser and Trade Act programs at area NCWorks Career Centers. In addition, DWS has eight Regional Operations Directors (RODs) that support the 20 Local Workforce Development Board Directors and the North Carolina Department of Commerce to facilitate the coordination of workforce, economic development, and educational services across the state's eight prosperity zones. The division supports the Local Workforce Development Boards' oversight for North Carolina's 60 local comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers.

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

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

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

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

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

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

North Carolina Department of Administration

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

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has administrative oversight for implementing the state's public-school laws for pre-K through 12th grade. Responsibilities are carried out under the direction of the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The State Superintendent is elected by the people and the State Board of Education includes the Lieutenant Governor, the State Treasurer, and 11 members who are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the North Carolina General Assembly. The State Superintendent serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet as well as on the NCWorks Commission. DPI provides leadership and service to 115 local public-school districts and to

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

The North Carolina Community College System

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) provides a comprehensive array of educational and training programs and a diverse set of services to individuals and employers through 58 colleges. It is the third largest community college system in the nation with programs and services provided through 220 locations (58 main campuses and 162 remote locations) throughout the state. The North Carolina Community College System Office staff provides state-level policymaking, strategy setting, funding, and administrative support for the System under the direction of the State Board of Community Colleges. The state board governance is in transition following legislation passed in 2023 and will be composed of 19 members, including the president of the NC Comprehensive Community College Student Government Association and 18 members appointed by the leadership of the North Carolina General Assembly. The Board is responsible for election of a system president, allocation of funding, and the adoption and administration of policies, regulations, and standards for the System. Each of the 58 local colleges is governed by a local board of trustees with responsibility for electing a president that serves as the college's chief executive officer. The NCCCS President serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet, as well as on the NCWorks Commission and myFutureNC (statewide attainment goal nonprofit) board of directors.

Education, training, and work-based learning programs offered through the 58 community colleges include a diverse group of programmatic and course offerings organized into several administrative programmatic areas which include Curriculum (academic) programs, Continuing Education (job training) programs, Economic Development programs and Basic Skills programs. Curriculum programs operated by the NCCCS include a variety of educational programs which range in length from one semester to two years. Within the NCCCS Curriculum program area are college transfer programs (designed to lead into baccalaureate programs at four-year colleges and universities), as well as workforce education programs designed to lead to employment upon program completion. The latter are workforce programs that receive funding support through the U.S. Department of Education's Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Educational Act. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is the official recipient of the federal Perkins Act funds for the State and works in collaboration with the NCCCS (which leads the postsecondary Perkins program) to develop the state Perkins plan and implement and deliver the programs and activities required under the Act.

Continuing Education programs operated by the North Carolina Community Colleges include non-credit courses related to a diverse set of occupational training, community enrichment training and sector partnership development. Most courses are designed to serve the talent pipeline needs of employers while assisting individuals in gaining short term training and skill enhancement including occupational skills, entrepreneurial skills, personal growth, and development. Organized within the North Carolina Community College Continuing Education programs are several programmatic areas including Workforce Continuing Education and (for

career development and soft skills training) Human Resources Development programs. Industry-recognized credentials are an increasing focus of training.

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

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

ApprenticeshipNC also provides additional work-based learning programs to meet industry needs, such as Pre-Apprenticeship and Youth Apprenticeship. ApprenticeshipNC has an advisory council of 13 members that consists of a combination of employers and agency representatives. The Apprenticeship Council provides guidance and assistance in the promotion of Registered Apprenticeship in North Carolina.

NCEdge Customized Training is part of the State's overall economic development portfolio and is offered to companies that are relocating to the state, existing NC companies that are expanding employment, or companies that need training along with new technology investment or to make productivity gains. The program focuses on manufacturing, distribution, and related "economic base" industries, and it helps skill-up a business' current workforce or provide pre-employment training. BioNetwork focuses specifically on life sciences companies and grows North Carolina's role in biotechnology, food production, and related areas. The Small Business Network provides workshops and 1:1 business counseling for prospective entrepreneurs at all 58 community colleges.

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

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

North Carolina's Community College System and its 58 colleges are a valuable component of the NCWorks system. The colleges provide a diverse group of program offerings with many of the programs included on the state's Eligible Training Provider list. A large proportion of the state's WIOA training services are provided through the North Carolina Community Colleges. In

addition, many of the colleges serve as contractors for WIOA services and there are 12 NCWorks Career Centers and numerous access points located on Community College campuses.

The University of North Carolina System

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

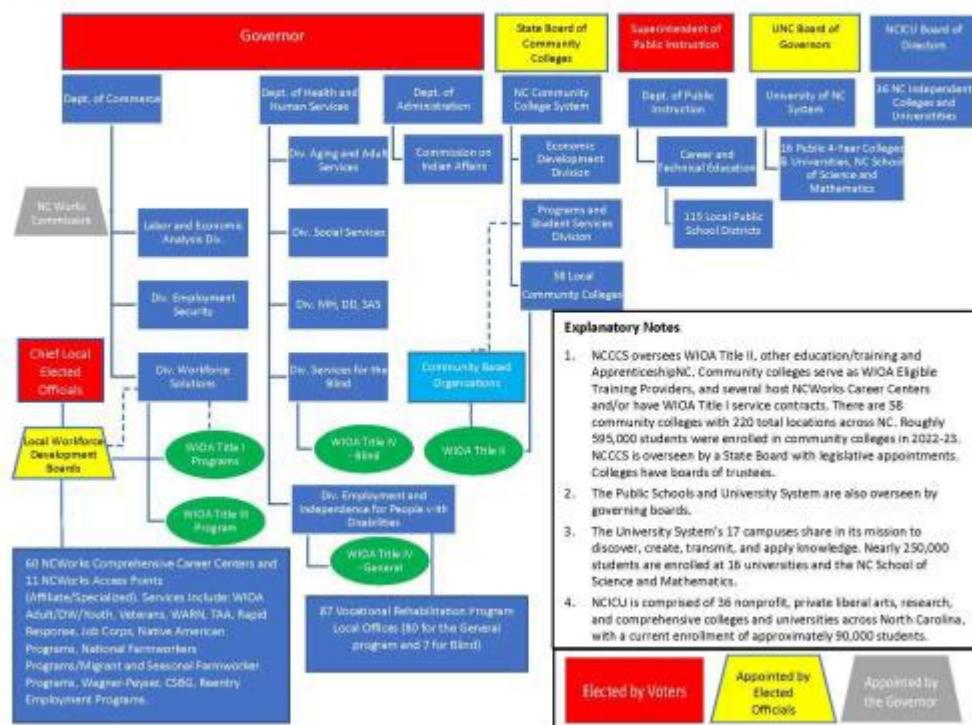
The UNC System is overseen by a 28-member Board of Governors, whose members are elected by the North Carolina General Assembly. The Board is responsible for planning and developing a coordinated system of higher education in North Carolina and for coordinating its work with the North Carolina Community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

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

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU) is the private, nonprofit, statewide body representing of independent higher education in North Carolina, addressing matters of state and federal policy and representing private colleges and universities across the state in collaboration with North Carolina's other education and workforce partners. The NCICU represents all 36 private nonprofit liberal arts, research, and comprehensive colleges and universities in North Carolina accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). NCICU's board of directors includes the presidents of each of the 36 institutions. Its member institutions provide a diverse set of programmatic offerings across various post-secondary degrees as well as non-degree offerings. The NCICU president serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet as well as on the NCWorks Commission.

North Carolina Workforce Development System



B. STATE BOARD

Provide a description of the State Board activities that will assist State Board members and staff in carrying out State Board functions effectively. Also, provide a membership roster for the State Board consistent with 20 CFR 679.110-120, including members' organizational affiliations and position titles.

The NCWorks Commission is the designated State Workforce Development Board for North Carolina. The commission operates in accordance with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, North Carolina General Statute, and commission bylaws. Appointees are given the responsibility for setting the strategic direction of the state-wide workforce development system. Commission members advise state leaders on how to strengthen the state's workforce and serve North Carolina businesses. The commission also develops policies to align workforce programs, assesses the effectiveness of core programs, and oversees the NCWorks Career Center system. The commission also recommends strategies that enable the state's workforce and businesses to compete in the global economy.

Mission of the NCWorks Commission: To ensure North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity; and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation.

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

II Board Activities

Activities that will assist State Board members and staff in carrying out State Board functions effectively. Also, provide a membership roster for the State Board consistent with 20 CFR 679.110-120, including members' organizational affiliations and position titles.

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 2023-2025 strategic plan and to carry out the functions under section 101(d) of WIOA. Each committee is led by a chair and is supported by NCWorks Commission staff. The committee chairs, along with the NCWorks Commission chairman make up the Commission's the Executive Committee. Each of the commission members serves on one of the committees.

Meetings

The commission conducts quarterly business meetings at the call of the chair. Business meetings are attended by the entire commission and are open to the public. Meeting agendas are developed by commission staff and approved by the chair. Actions of the commission are determined by a majority vote of the members present, and a majority of the commission constitutes a quorum for the transaction of business. The rules set forth in Robert's Rules of Order, (newly revised), govern the procedures of the commission.

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

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

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

Other Activities

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

The NCWorks Commission, in partnership with the Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD), develop a biennial Employer Needs Survey of North Carolina employers with 10 or more employees designed to gauge hiring experiences, recruitment and retention strategies and workforce challenges. Over 2,000 employers from across the state responded to this year's survey. The commission also participates in quarterly industry tours which highlight innovative workforce solutions across the state.

State Board Membership Roster

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

Member Name	Affiliation	Title, Organization
Roy Cooper	Government Representative (Ex-officio)	Governor, State of North Carolina
Catherine Truitt	Government Representative (Ex-officio)	State Superintendent, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Pamela Brewington Cashwell	Government Representative (Ex-officio)	Secretary, North Carolina Department of Administration
Jeff Cox	Government Representative (Ex-officio)	President, North Carolina Community College System

Member Name	Affiliation	Title, Organization
Machelle Baker Sanders	Government Representative (Ex-officio) Representing WIOA Title I and Wagner-Peyser	Secretary, North Carolina Department of Commerce
Kody Kinsley	Government Representative (Ex-officio)	Secretary, North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services
Peter Hans	Government Representative (Ex-officio)	President, University of North Carolina System
Sandra Thompson	State Official with primary responsibility for Adult Education and Family Literacy-WIOA Title II	Associate Vice President, College and Career Readiness, North Carolina Community College System
Cynthia Speight	State Official with primary responsibility for Vocational Rehabilitation or Services for the Blind-WIOA Title IV	Director, Division of Services for the Blind, North Carolina Division of Health and Human Services
Shawn Brown	Local Elected City Official	Mayor, City of Claremont
Ronnie Smith	Local Elected County Official	Commissioner of Martin County
Tom Rabon	Private Business Representative, State Board Chair	Chairman Emeritus, New Kind
Christopher Arabia	Private Business Representative (Other)	Regional President, Mid-South Metro of TD Bank
John Wesley Davis IV	Private Business Representative (Business/Military)	Partner, Adi Dassler International Family Office
Suzanne Johnson	Private Business Representative (Pharmaceuticals)	Senior HR Director, Grifols

Member Name	Affiliation	Title, Organization
Olalah Njenga	Private Business Representative (Small Business-Business Services)	CEO, YellowWood Group
Robert Doreauk	Private Business Representative (IT Software)	Executive Director of External and Legislative Affairs, AT&T North Carolina
Nikki Nissen	Private Business Representative (Healthcare)	VP Clinical Operations and Chief Nursing Officer, Novant Health Medical Group
Sharene Pierce	Private Business Representative (Energy)	Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer & Vice President of Talent Acquisition, Duke Energy
Himanshu Karvir	Private Business Representative (Hospitality, Tourism and Entertainment)	CEO, Virtelle Hospitality
Kim Toler	Private Business Representative (Chemical)	Training Manager, Nutrien
Greg Thompson	Private Business Representative (Transportation)	Operations Support Manager, Railroad Friction Products
Marti Matthews Martin	Private Business Representative (Other)	Director of Training, Clario
Daniel L. Briggs	Private Business Representative (Other)	President, Davidson, Piedmont, and Briggs Funeral Services
Paul Lawler	Private Business Representative (Other)	CFO, International Economic Development Council
Christopher Gergen	Private Business Representative (Small Business)	CEO, Forward Impact

Member Name	Affiliation	Title, Organization
Pam Townsend	Private Business Representative (Engineering)	Senior Vice President and Southeast Region Business Manager, WSP USA
Brock Ashburn	Private Business Representative (Agriculture, Forestry and Food)	Vice President of Operations, Highland Brewing Company
Darla D. McGlamery	Organized Labor Representative (CBO/Training/Veterans/Individuals with disabilities)	Business Agent, IATSE Local 491 and IATSE Local 600
Dan Segovia	Organized Labor Representative	Iron Workers Business Manager, Iron Workers Local 848-Charlotte NC
Tammy Simmons	Registered Apprenticeship Representative	Vice President of Marketing & Culture, Machine Specialties, Inc.
Sherry Carpenter	Community Based Organization	Vice President of Workforce Development, Goodwill Industries
Steven Hunt	Private Business Representative (Business and Industry)	COO, Metcon Construction
Hope Williams	Community Based Organization (Labor/Training-General)	President, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities
Jeffrey Frederick	Community Based Organization	Past President, North Carolina Association of Workforce Boards
Cheryl Richards	Private Business Representative (Business and Industry)	CEO, Catapult
Rodney Carson	Private Business Representative (Business and Industry)	Principal Engagement Manager, SAS Institute

Following up on USDOL's inquiry, NC Department of Commerce Legal Counsel stated North Carolina has not included members of the General Assembly in the state workforce board as adding them would not be consistent with state law. State ex rel. Wallace v. Bone, 304 N.C. 591,

decided in 1982, held that under the state constitution legislators cannot retain control over the process of implementation of legislation by appointing legislators to boards or commissions charged with implementing specific legislation. In North Carolina, N.C.G.S. 143B-438.10 establishes the makeup of the State workforce development board and no prior iterations of the law have included members of the General Assembly. The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 has always contained this provision, as did its predecessor the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which would have been in effect when G.S. 143B-438.10 was passed in 1999. Given that Wallace was decided in 1982, I suspect that the General Assembly would have relied on this case when determining the makeup of the board through our state statute, though of course that is only my assumption. Based on this I would respectfully ask that USDOL withdraw the requested revision on this matter.

§ 3111. State workforce development boards

(a) In general. The Governor of a State shall establish a State workforce board to carry out the functions described in subsection (d).

(b) Membership.

(1) In general. The State board shall include-

(A) the Governor;

(B) a member of each chamber of the State legislature (**to the extent consistent with State law**), appointed by the appropriate presiding officers of such chamber; and

(C) members appointed by the Governor, of which-

(i) a majority shall be representatives of businesses in the State, who-

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

A. ASSESSMENT OF CORE AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNER PROGRAMS.

Describe how the core programs will be assessed each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. 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. 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 is responsible for assessing North Carolina's workforce development system, including core WIOA programs. This work is accomplished by the Commission's Governance and System Alignment Committee which reports to the full commission at each quarterly meeting.

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

their services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the implementation of virtual services.

Given the important changes happening at career centers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission requested a 1-year extension from the Department of Labor in 2021. This extension was granted in October 2021 allowing the NCWorks Commission time to adjust the certification criteria to reflect the numerous virtual services offered by one-stop career centers. Beginning in May 2022, NCWorks Commission staff began the certification process for (at the time), 23 Local Area Workforce Development NCWorks Career Centers. From May 2022 through December 2022, 62 Comprehensive and 12 Affiliate NCWorks Career Centers were recommended for certification.

North Carolina's assessment of the quality, effectiveness, and improvement of programs is broken down and followed up on, using specific criteria as required by TEGL 16-16. The assessment for the NCWorks Career Center system and all local area workforce development boards career centers comprising this system addresses effectiveness, including customer satisfaction (quality), physical and programmatic accessibility, and continuous improvement. This assessment is conducted during each re-certification year. It is also completed for the years in between to ensure service expectations through: Maintenance of the certification criteria, development and accomplishment of continuous improvement goals as determined by the center, and adherence to the NCWorks Career Center branding guidelines.

The Commission is required to develop and continuously improve performance measures to assess the effectiveness of workforce training and employment in the state. The workforce development system agencies worked collaboratively to design and implement universal performance measures. The commission which oversaw these efforts, recognized that by using common metrics and applying them across a wide range of workforce programs, the performance measures offer a comprehensive program-by-program look at North Carolina's workforce system.

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

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.

B. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

For each four-year state plan and state plan modification, provide the results of assessments 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), in accordance

with methods described in 4(A). Describe how the State is adapting its strategies based on these assessments.

North Carolina General Statute requires the NCWorks Commission to develop, continuously improve, and report on systemwide performance measures to assess the effectiveness of the entire workforce development system. The commission initially began this work by convening a task force of members along with an advisory group representing each of the state workforce development agencies. After extensive stakeholder collaboration, core measures were developed to provide a common framework to analyze the performance of the workforce development system. By using common metrics and applying them across a wide range of workforce programs, the performance measures offer a comprehensive program-by-program look at North Carolina's workforce system.

The performance measures working group defined the list of programs, information, and measures to include in assessing the performance of North Carolina's workforce development programs. Data from the North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) were utilized to carry out the analysis. The CFS contains a rich longitudinal repository of information from a variety of education and workforce programs as well as employment, wage, claims, and benefit payment information from the unemployment insurance system.

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

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

- <https://www.commerce.nc.gov/measuring-performance-north-carolinas-workforce-development-system-january-2023-ncworks-commission/open>
- <https://www.commerce.nc.gov/measuring-performance-north-carolinas-workforce-development-system-january-2024-ncworks-commission/open>

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

and Postsecondary Career, Technical and Vocational Education programs (including Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs).

While the framework provides a consistent snapshot of individual program results, there are distinct variations in services, activities, and populations served that may result in differing levels of performance between programs. For example, many workforce development programs assist job seekers in obtaining basic literacy skills that are needed to obtain further credentials and move towards gainful employment. The success of this program may be measured by referrals to other workforce development programs and continuation in education and training programs, as well as employment.

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

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

The latest Workforce Development System Annual Performance Measures Report indicates a slight decrease of 9% (-73,257 individuals) in the total number of North Carolinians utilizing the workforce system. The steep decrease noted in PY2022 can likely still be attributed to the PY2020 Covid-19 global pandemic as numerous North Carolinians lost their jobs across a multitude of industries. All workforce development programs in North Carolina continued to decline in the number of individuals served, except for the North Carolina Community College System, which increased slightly to approximately 5% (+15,270 individuals).

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

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

C. EVALUATION

Describe how the State will conduct evaluations and research projects of activities carried out in the State 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 (WIOA Section 116(e)).

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

The Labor and Economic Analysis Division of NC Commerce (LEAD) is responsible for maintaining the CFS and for using CFS data to evaluate the effectiveness of state and federally funded workforce programs in North Carolina. In previous years, LEAD has utilized resources provided by US DOL's Workforce Data Quality Initiative grant to enhance its capacity to conduct workforce program evaluations, using control group and interrupted time series research designs to evaluate the impact of Vocational Rehabilitation, reentry employment, and registered apprenticeship programs. Two of LEAD's previous evaluation studies were submitted to US DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research.

This past year, the NCWorks Commission and North Carolina's workforce service-providing agencies worked closely with LEAD to further develop our state's cross-agency evaluation capacity. These agencies participated in US DOL's Evaluation Peer Learning Cohort and, as a capstone project, conducted an impact evaluation of workforce services provided under the WIOA Title I Youth program. LEAD also collaborated with the NCWorks Commission and Division of Workforce Solutions to evaluate the impact of the WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker programs, as well as partnering with the state's Department of Adult Correction and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to assess the effectiveness of prisoner reentry programs and Vocational Rehabilitation services provided to youth with disabilities.

North Carolina is pursuing these research partnerships as a "pilot project" to help improve our service-providing agencies' familiarity with evaluation methods, demonstrate the value of causal evidence, cultivate an evidence-driven culture, and develop processes for incorporating evaluation findings into workforce planning and policymaking. Moving forward, LEAD will continue working with the NCWorks Commission to evaluate the impact of WIOA core programs, in consultation with Local Workforce Boards and the state agencies responsible for administering these programs. As appropriate, research findings will be shared with US DOL and the general public and will be used to improve the services provided to workers in our state.

Additionally, in 2023, the NCWorks Commission was awarded a NC Evaluation Fund Grant by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways (CCPs). The NCWorks Commission contracted with an independent research and evaluation firm to analyze participation, participant outcomes, and alignment to labor market demands. Profiling of CCP participants was conducted by sector, region, and demographics. Participation was disaggregated by the year of participation, gender, race, veteran status, disability status, employment status, and prior education level, as well as

prosperity zone. Participants were analyzed by the year of participation, gender, race, veteran status, disability status, employment status, prior education level, and prosperity zone. The evaluative study explores labor market outcomes of participants by sector for the top sectors, demonstrating earnings prior to the program and after the program.

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

5. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

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)

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)

Operational Guidance Number 05-2023 references The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) released revised WIOA Allotments for PY 2023 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024) for Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 15-22.

The state allotments are based on funds appropriated to the USDOL by the United States Congress through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Public Law 117-328. According to the Act, Youth Activities funds became available for obligation on April 1, 2023. However, the Act funds the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs in two separate appropriations.

The first becomes available for obligation on July 1, 2023; this portion is commonly referred to as the “base” funds. The second becomes available for obligation on October 1, 2023; this portion is commonly referred to as “advance” funds because they are provided in the Appropriations Act passed during the fiscal year immediately before the fiscal year when the funds are available. In order to ensure that North Carolina is in compliance with USDOL requirements for Dislocated Worker allocations for PY 2023, the formula for each local Board's Dislocated Worker allocation was previously modified slightly.

The reason for the modification is to include the required element: Declining Industries. As a result, the new formula is comprised of the following components:

- 30% Insured Unemployment

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

Declining Industries consist of the change from the 3rd Quarter of one year to the 3rd Quarter of the next in the number of establishments in each county. For this year's calculations, that data consists of the change in the count of establishments from the 3rd Quarter of Calendar Year 2021 compared to the 3rd Quarter of Calendar Year 2022. It should be noted that Adult and Youth allocation formulas are unchanged. Also, the Hold Harmless provision remains in effect for all three program allocations calculations. The Hold Harmless provision ensures that "no local area receives an allocation percentage that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage received by the local area for the previous two years" (TEGL 15-22)

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

WIOA Adult Activities Formula:

- 1/3: State relative share of total unemployment in areas of substantial unemployment (ASU) (average 12 months ending 6/30)
- 1/3: State relative share of excess unemployment (average 12 months ending 6/30)
- 1/3: State relative share of economically disadvantaged Adult (American Community Survey 2016-2020)

In order to ensure that North Carolina is in compliance with USDOL requirements for Dislocated Worker allocations for PY 2023, the formula for each local board's Dislocated Worker allocation was modified slightly. The reason for the modification is to include the required element: Declining Industries. As a result, the new formula is comprised of the following components:

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

In April or early May of each year, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) of the Federal Department of Labor (DOL) releases a Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) that provides the program allotment amounts and specifics on the formulas states should use to determine the allocation amount for each Workforce Development Board (WDB). Out of each program's total allocation amount, an administrative holdback amount to be used for statewide workforce investment activities is deducted from the total. The percentage can vary year to year and program to program. In addition, the Dislocated Worker program also has a percentage of its allocation deducted, to be used for statewide rapid response activities. For PY 2023, the percentages deducted were as follows:

Program	Percent of Holdback
Adult	15% administrative holdback
Youth	15% administrative holdback
Dislocated Worker	15% 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 2023, that ratio was:

Program	July Percentage	October Percentage
Adult	19.6675%	80.3325%
Dislocated Worker	21.5656%	78.4344%

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

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

The formulas used for each program, as well as the definitions of some important terms within those formulas, are included below, sourced from TEGL 15-22.

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

WIOA Dislocated Worker Formula:

In order to ensure that North Carolina is in compliance with USDOL requirements for Dislocated Worker allocations for PY 2023, the formula for each local board's Dislocated Worker allocation was modified slightly. The reason for the modification is to include the required element: Declining Industries. As a result, the new formula is comprised of the following components:

- 30% Insured Unemployment

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

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

Plant Closing and Mass Layoff Data

Historically, North Carolina has depended on the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to provide data for this factor of Dislocated Worker allocations. However, as noted in TEGL 15-22, BLS no longer produces this dataset. The state is not aware of any suitable data at the state or national level that could be substituted for the BLS data and has therefore weighted this factor as zero.

Farmer-Rancher Economic Hardship Data

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

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

Much of the data available from these sources is limited to the state level and therefore is unsuitable for the county-level nature of Dislocated Worker allocations. For the data that is available at the county level, much of it is centered on specific crop or livestock metrics and not focused on economic hardship. One economic metric that is available annually and at the county level, through the NC Department of Agriculture, is related to a totaling of cash receipts from products sold. However, this metric provides no indication of economic stability or hardship nor any relationship to the number of farms involved and was therefore discounted. Lastly, we examined whether North Carolina could approach this factor in a similar fashion to how we approach the Declining Industries factor by examining a year-to-year change in the number of farmers by county. Unfortunately, the only access to this information at the county level is through the Census of Agriculture, which is only produced every 5 years, most recently in 2022.

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

- insured unemployment data,
- unemployment concentrations,

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

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

In April or early May of each year, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) of the Federal Department of Labor (DOL) releases a Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) that provides the program allotment amounts and specifics on the formulas states should use to determine the allocation amount for each Workforce Development Board (WDB). Out of each program's total allocation amount, an administrative holdback amount to be used for statewide workforce investment activities is deducted from the total. The percentage can vary year to year and program to program. In addition, the Dislocated Worker program also has a percentage of its allocation deducted, to be used for statewide rapid response activities. For PY 2023, the percentages deducted were as follows:

Program	Percent of holdback
Adult	15% administrative holdback
Youth	15% administrative holdback
Dislocated Worker	15% 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 2023, that ratio was:

Program	July Percentage	October Percentage
Adult	19.6675%	80.3325%
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Once the total allocation amounts for each program are known, the DOL-provided formulas are then used to calculate the Local Area allocation amounts. All three programs (Adult, Youth, Dislocated Worker) have a minimum allocation amount in effect, defined as follows:

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

The formulas used for each program, as well as the definitions of some important terms within those formulas, are included below, sourced from TEGL 15-22.

B. FOR TITLE II

I. DESCRIBE THE METHODS AND FACTORS THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL USE TO DISTRIBUTE TITLE II FUNDS.

The NC Community College System (NCCCS), College and Career Readiness (CCR) office will allocate AEFLA funds for multiyear awards for four years with a re-application process for continued funding in year two, three, and four for grantees. The NCCCS, CCR office will compete for funds separately for sections 231, 225, and 243. NCCCS office has a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process that ensures all eligible providers have direct and equitable access to apply for grant and contract (section 231(c)(1) of WIOA 34 CFR. All three applications will use the same review process. The RFP process includes screening for program's demonstrated effectiveness and past effectiveness. Additionally, the RFP includes a process for Local Workforce Development Boards to determine whether programs are consistent with the approved local workforce development plan (section 107(d)(11)(B)(i)(I) of WIOA and 34 CFR. An eligible provider must demonstrate past effectiveness by providing performance data on its record in improving the skills of eligible individuals who are basic skills deficient in the content domains of reading, mathematics, and English language acquisition. An eligible provider must also provide information regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to postsecondary education and training, per federal regulations 34 CFR 463.24. An eligible provider must demonstrate past effectiveness in two ways:

- An eligible provider previously funded under Title II of the Act must provide reports from the NC Title II data management system for previous year's performance.
- An eligible provider that has not been previously funded under Title II of the Act must submit previous year data to demonstrate its past effectiveness in serving basic skills deficient eligible individuals, including evidence of its success in achieving outcomes listed in the WIOA Title II AEFLA Federal Requirements.

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

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

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

2. Access- 50% of available funding will be allocated for access. This component is calculated on NRS reported hours reported in the previous year. Access will be determined by contact hours of participants within three weighted tiers:
 - Tier A -weight 5- Beginning Adult Basic Education Literacy, Beginning Adult Basic Education, Beginning English as a Second Language, and Beginning ESL
 - Tier B-weight 4- Low Intermediate ESL, High Intermediate ESL, Low Advanced ESL, Low Intermediate Adult Basic Education, and High Intermediate Adult Basic Education
 - Tier C-weight 3- Adult Secondary Education Low and Adult Secondary Education High

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

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

1. Base- 70%
2. Access/participation- 10%
3. Performance-20%

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

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

New providers, without reported NRS data receive the base.

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

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

1. Local educational agencies
2. Community-based organizations or faith-based organizations
3. Volunteer literacy organizations
4. Institutions of higher education,

5. Public or private nonprofit agencies, Libraries
6. Public housing authorities
7. Nonprofit institutions that are not described in any of the above and have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals
8. Consortia or coalitions of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above
9. Partnerships between an employer and an entity described above.

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

C. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

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.

Each VR agency (General Agency and Blind Agency) receives a separate grant award from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Funds in each grant are calculated based on the RSA statutory formula that takes into account population and per capita income in determining the amount of Federal funds made available to states for VR program purposes.

6. PROGRAM DATA

A. DATA ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

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.

Describe data-collection and reporting processes used for all programs and activities, including the State's process to collect and report data on co-enrollment, and for those present in the one-stop centers.

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

There are multiple state agencies in North Carolina that have administrative responsibility for the WIOA core programs. These include the North Carolina Department of Commerce, North

Carolina Community College System, and North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. While each of these entities maintain separate participant and financial information systems, the agencies have worked and continue to work collaboratively to integrate data across North Carolina's workforce development system. Each agency collects and reports their individual participant record system from their case management system and submits their required reports. The effectiveness in serving employers measures is a combined report by matching employer records using name and telephone numbers to identify common employers. NC currently has an integrated system for Title I and Title III with Geographic Solutions, and the Title IV programs signed a contract with Geographic Solutions for a replacement case management system. The Title IV programs implemented the initial phase of their new system, ENCORE, in August 2023. ENCORE is also hosted by Geographic Solutions and developed using the same Virtual One-Stop (VOS) platform as NCWorks. Although there will be separate instances of the Geographic Solutions system for NCWorks and Vocational Rehabilitation, the WIOA core partners will leverage having the same core system structure and data model to share and transfer information in a subsequent phase of implementation. The expectation is that data shared across agencies will be more complete and require fewer or no transformations during the ETL process.

The North Carolina Community College's Title II program uses Benchmark's ADVANSYS, a web-based software designed to meet all requirements for the National Reporting System for Adult Education. The system allows North Carolina's 69 Title II funded providers to enroll eligible students and track participation, attendance, and participant performance/outcomes. At the end of each program year, the NCCC System Office uploads Title II data into the North Carolina Government Data Analytics Center portal. NC Commerce uses this data to create a co-enrollment report indicating the number of unique individuals enrolled in Title II who were also enrolled in Title I, Title III, or Title IV.

The three agencies that administer the core WIOA programs participate in a state level longitudinal data collection system used in North Carolina along with other education and workforce programs. This Common Follow-Up System (CFS) allows N.C. to leverage its existing data collection systems and report our individual requirements needed but to have a common view of data and to show the effectiveness of all programs working together.

The NCWorks Commission uses the information from the CFS to complete its annual performance measures report. One of the indicators that is tracked for each program is continuation in higher education and/or other workforce programs. The commission reviews this information annually and reports to the N.C. General Assembly.

The core WIOA agencies have different methods of accessing UI wage data including direct access to data to allow immediate reports. Agencies also use UI wage data as part of the reports produced from the Common Follow-up System.

North Carolina has a long history and wealth of experience in the analyses and use of Unemployment Insurance wage data to meet both state and federal reporting and evaluation requirements. Through the North Carolina Common Follow-up System, the state has a longitudinal repository of Unemployment Insurance data with over 31 years of historical quarterly wage records (since Q4 of 1992). North Carolina has recently executed a data sharing agreement to participate in the State Wage Record Interchange System (SWIS). Access to NC UI

wage records is completed undersigned Memoranda of Understanding which outlines data sharing and confidentiality laws and requirements.

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

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

Programs administered through the Division of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities are regulated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) and conform to all privacy safeguards therein as well as obtaining a signed release from individuals seeking services.

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

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

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

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

North Carolina currently has an integrated system for Title I and Title III, hosted by Geographic Solutions. The Title IV programs have implemented the initial phase of their new system, ENCORE, as of August 2023. ENCORE is also hosted by Geographic Solutions and developed using the same Virtual One-Stop (VOS) platform. Although the systems for NCWorks and Vocational Rehabilitation are separate instances, the WIOA core partners can leverage having the same software vendor and base system for collaborative learning opportunities, data exchanges, and data imports from other agencies, such as with the exchanges for Work Opportunity Tax Credit verification, cross program participation verification for infrastructure and cost-sharing agreements, and for the interface with the Division of Employment Security's vendor, Sagitec, for the quarterly unemployment insurance wage data required for federal reporting.

Currently, the North Carolina Community College's Title II program uses Benchmark's ADVANSYS, a web-based software designed to meet all requirements for the National Reporting System for Adult Education.

The Governance and System Alignment committee has met with both WIOA core and partner program leadership to discuss the costs and benefits of having shared real-time information, such as through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). Collaboration across the WIOA Title programs has facilitated advances towards a more seamless workforce information system, as leadership acknowledges the need. With the implementation of ENCORE, North

Carolina has made great strides in aligning NCWorks with the Vocational Rehabilitation system. The next step may involve a committee study of the current databases, followed by the commission making recommendations to the Governor on how to further align the core programs using APIs. NCWorks can more efficiently interface with the NCDHHS Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV database, ENCORE, since the two are both hosted by Geographic Solutions and share the same Virtual One-Stop (VOS) platform, but interfaces with NCCCS Title II ADVANSYS system would be more costly to develop. Any common intake “no wrong door” system should have a main priority of facilitating the intake and service delivery process for all North Carolinians, particularly those with barriers to employment and those enrolled in multiple core programs.

**III. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL ASSIST THE GOVERNOR IN ALIGNING
TECHNOLOGY AND DATA SYSTEMS ACROSS REQUIRED 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**

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

The three agencies that administer the core WIOA programs participate in a state level longitudinal data collection system used in North Carolina along with other education and workforce programs. This Common Follow-Up System (CFS) allows N.C. to leverage its existing data collection systems and report our individual requirements needed but to have a common view of data and to show the effectiveness of all programs working together.

The NCWorks Commission uses the information from the CFS to complete its annual performance measures report. One of the indicators that is tracked for each program is continuation in higher education and/or other workforce programs. The commission reviews this information annually and reports to the N.C. General Assembly. The Governance and System Alignment committee has met with both WIOA core and partner program leadership to discuss the benefits of a shared database. The natural evolution of all the programs is driving our databases closer together, as leadership acknowledges the need. In the past 2 years, North Carolina has made great strides in aligning our systems. The next step may involve a committee study of the current databases, followed by the commission making recommendations to the Governor on how to further align the core programs with a common database. We may be able to easily interface the NCDHHS Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV database, since they will have

the same vendor, but any interface with NCCCS Title II would have a cost and will not be a simple solution. Any common intake system/shared database should have a main priority of facilitating the intake and service delivery process for all North Carolinians, particularly those with barriers to employment and those enrolled in multiple core programs.

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

IV. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S DATA SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES TO PRODUCE THE REPORTS REQUIRED UNDER SECTION 116, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM. (WIOA SECTION 116(D)(2)).

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

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

B. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS

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.

North Carolina's workforce development system has a long history and experience in the assessment of the state's workforce development and educational programs. This includes the assessment of the WIOA core programs as well as other state and federally funded partner programs. The state maintains a longitudinal data system, the North Carolina Common Follow-

up System (CFS) which provides the technical capacity and infrastructure for linking workforce development and education program participant records across agencies and programs with Unemployment Insurance wage and claims data. The CFS is mandated under state law and is operated by the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC). The development and enhancement of the CFS has been supported by both state and federal resources including U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant funds that were awarded in 2013 and 2019.

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

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

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

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

Workforce Development System, was issued in January 2024 and contains post-exit measures for six years after participation. The report includes assessment of the following programs: Wagner-Peyser Act (Title III) program; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Adult programs; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Dislocated Worker program; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Youth program; Veteran's Employment program; Division of Services for the Blind (Title IV program); Division of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities (Title IV program); Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Employment and Training program; Secondary Career and Technical Education (including Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs); Apprenticeship programs; Community College Basic Skills programs (including Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program), Community College NCEdge Customized Training program, Human Resources Development program, Community College Workforce Continuing Education programs (including short term occupational training) and Postsecondary Career, Technical and Vocational Education programs (including Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs).

In addition to the annual NCWorks Commission performance report, the Labor and Economic Analysis Division produces annual CFS Operational Reports and bi-annual CFS Evaluation Reports that includes post-exit employment and wage outcomes and enrollment in further education and workforce programs for several state's education and workforce programs. The 2023 Evaluation Report included post-exit outcomes by program year for five program year cohorts for 19 different programmatic areas. LEAD has also developed two online data tools utilizing information from the CFS to support the assessment of the state's education and workforce programs. The North Carolina Tool for Online Education and Workforce Reporting (NC TOWER) provides a web-based data delivery system that displays information on the long term outcomes for the state's publicly supported postsecondary education degree programs offered by the University of North Carolina System (UNCS) institutions and North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) Information available via NC TOWER includes employment and wage outcomes (by industry) and further enrollment in educational programs for up to 17 years after completion for UNCS and NCCCS institutions and programs.

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

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

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

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

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 31 years of historical quarterly wage records (since Q4 of 1992). North Carolina has recently executed the data sharing agreement to participate in State Wage Record Interchange System (SWIS). Access to NC UI wage records are completed undersigned Memoranda of Understanding which outline data sharing and confidentiality laws and requirements.

D. PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS

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 any data.

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

Programs administered through the Division of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities are regulated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) and conform to all privacy safeguards therein as well as obtaining a signed release from individuals seeking services.

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

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

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

7. PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS.

- A. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT THE PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISIONS FOR COVERED PERSONS 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.
- B. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MONITOR PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISIONS FOR VETERANS.
- C. DESCRIBE THE TRIAGE AND REFERRAL PROCESS FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS AND OTHER POPULATIONS DETERMINED ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE SERVICES FROM THE JOBS FOR VETERANS STATE GRANTS (JVSG) PROGRAM'S DISABLED VETERANS' OUTREACH PROGRAM (DVOP) SPECIALIST/CONSOLIDATED POSITION.

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 670,000 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 assessments and continuing throughout the job-search to help develop a path to 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 spouses of veterans, as defined by 38 U.S.C. 4215(a) (l) (A-B), in qualified job training programs. Qualified job training programs include all workforce programs funded directly, in whole or in part, by the US Department of Labor (USDOL), such as WIOA Title I and Title III (Wagner Peyser) employment services and other job training programs offered through competitive grants. The final rule implementing the priority of service requirement took effect on January 19, 2009, and can be found at 20 CFR 1010. Additionally, USDOL has provided policy guidance to the workforce investment system regarding the implementation of the priority of service. In brief, priority of service means that veterans and eligible 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.

Additionally, the priority of services requirements should not be interpreted to limit veterans and eligible persons to receiving services only from veterans' program staff. Procedures or policies that restrict a veteran's access to WIOA Title I or Title III services, even if such restrictions are intended to provide the veteran with specialized services, are contrary to the priority of service requirement.

Priority of service provisions for veterans are monitored on a regular basis through field checks and by generating reports from NCWorks Online, the state's labor exchange portal. Additionally, North Carolina statute requires annually that a report be submitted to the NC General Assembly, in accordance with General Statute 165-44, and consistent with the federal Jobs for Veterans' Act (P.L. 107-288).

Many US military veterans complete service only to discover they cannot find jobs when they return home. Although service members develop a wide range of skills through military education, training, and experience, they often find it difficult to translate these skills into civilian jobs, perhaps because technical skills, education, and experience differ between military and civilian sectors. This is especially true for veterans with medical training such as combat medics and corpsmen.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce provides a Veteran Services Program across the state to assist veterans with employment. The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs) assist veterans with overcoming barriers through individualized career services. Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERs) reach out to employers to advocate for hiring Veterans. Recent changes to the federal policies concerning the roles of these staff that serve veterans have been made to ensure that eligible veterans and eligible persons receive the best combination of services, according to their needs. The agency determined that to accomplish this refocusing, Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists will serve only those veterans and eligible persons most in need of the individualized career services to address significant barriers to employment. As a result, DVOP specialists will serve fewer veterans and eligible persons, but will be able to provide more individualized career services.

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

1. A special disabled or disabled veteran, as those terms are defined in 38 U.S.C § 4211(1) and (3); Special disabled and disabled veterans are those: who are entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retired pay would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs; or, were discharged or released from active duty because of a service connected disability;
2. Homeless, as defined in Section 103(a) of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(a)), those that are homeless or at risk of being homeless that are fleeing domestic violence situations;
3. A recently-separated service member, as defined in 38 U.S.C § 4211(6), who has been unemployed for 27 or more weeks in the previous 12 months;
4. An offender, as defined by WIOA Section 3 (38), who is currently incarcerated or who has been released from incarceration;

5. Lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate; or
6. Low-income (as defined by WIA at Sec. 101(25) (B).

7. Vietnam Era Veterans

8. Veterans Age 18-24

9. Eligible Transition Service Members

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

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

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

Another manifestation of the priority of service policy is in the NCWorks Online job order process. This means that all registered veterans have an opportunity to view the job opening before non-veterans. To accomplish this, a 24-hour business day hold plus overnight update is placed on each job order before it is released to the public.

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

1. NCWorks Career Centers have adapted to virtual services. We encourage people to use virtual/remote services as much as possible – calling or emailing the center staff where it may be more convenient.

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

Through virtual services veterans can:

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

Through virtual services employers are able to:

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

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

3. NCWorks introduced a veteran’s portal, <https://veterans.ncworks.gov/vosnet/default.aspx>. The veteran’s portal is a collection of resources that provides services to veterans, transitioning service members, and eligible spouses to obtain employment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Per VPL 07-09, North Carolina ensures that Veterans and eligible spouses are made aware of their eligibility for priority of service by:

- Incorporating signage at the NCWorks Career Centers (AJCs) stating that veterans and eligible spouses receive priority of service.
- Including verbiage on the NCWorks.gov website stating that veterans and eligible spouses receive Priority of Service in all USDOL funded programs.
- Frontline NCWorks Career Center staff members typically ask job seekers at the point of entry "Did you serve in the U.S. Military or are you the spouse of the veteran?"

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

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.)

regarding 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 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 (LWDBs), the NCWorks Commission in May 2013, established minimum certification criteria for NCWorks Career Centers to ensure consistency in quality service delivery throughout the state. The certification criteria are reevaluated with each 3-year certification cycle, the current NCWorks Career Center Certification Criteria was approved by the NCWorks Commission on May 17, 2017. Due to the changes in service delivery associated with the pandemic, the NCWorks Commission was granted a one-year waiver (through December 31, 2022), by USDOL to research all the new virtual service strategies being implemented in the career centers throughout the state. The commission included these virtual service strategies in the new NCWorks Career Center Certification Criteria.

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

1. The Local Workforce Development Board submits an application demonstrating how certification criteria have been met for their comprehensive career center. As part of the certification process each LWDB has to complete an assistive technology checklist.
2. NCWorks Commission Team members may visit the office(s) to observe and evaluate operations.
3. The Local Workforce Development Board receives certification upon successful evaluation.

Career Center Certification Accessibility Criteria:

- Entrance and exit must be accessible and free of obstacles with appropriate signage.
- Pedestrian routes inside the host agency facility must be accessible and free of obstacles.
- Entrance and exit doors are required to be equipped with hardware that is usable with one hand without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist.
- Furniture inside the Center must be arranged to allow wheelchair access.
- Computer and desk workstations must be wheelchair accessible.
- Restrooms must be appropriately accessible.
- Auxiliary aids and services must be available upon request as are interpreter services for ESL customers.
- Emergency drills are to be conducted annually and staff is to be provided with host agency procedures.
- Adequate accessible parking with compliant curb ramp(s) connected to the accessibility route into the Center(s). Accessible parking must be clearly marked.

Career Center Assistive Technology Checklist:

The following checklist is used as part of the center certification every three years for assistive technology, materials, accommodations, and staff competencies to better serve persons with disabilities.

Mobility, Vision, Hearing, Computer Access, and Learning are functional considered while assessing and supporting the federal programmatic and physical accessibility ADA requirements. These are general areas and suggestions of reasonable accommodations and are by no means a complete list.

Mobility

- The center meets the programmatic and physical accessibility requirements according to the review for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This review is conducted by Mose Dorsey with the Division of Workforce Solutions or can be done by a local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation specialist.

Vision

- Speech software for computers such as Natural Reader and microphone and headsets. With this free software you can copy, paste and edit text; and it will convert the text into spoken words.
- Use larger font on printed handouts when possible and audio description on videos such as closed captioning.
- Screen enlargement capability. This allows users with low vision to enlarge the print on the monitors by changing the magnifier settings or by using ZOOMTEXT software.
- A large monitor for people with low vision.

- Large keyboard caps and keyboard orientation aides for customers with low vision. Consider a work station with key markings with enlarged letters and numbers on the keyboard and instructions.
- Paper materials are presented in contrasting colors (e.g., black and white)

Hearing

- Ubi-Duo, CapTel or similar device. These devices caption and display everything a person says on the phone or in person into text. Also consider using smart phone Speech to Text apps as an option.
- Amplified telephone capabilities.
- Offer a quieter place to interact.
- Closed-captioned setting available for videos or presentations, and staff has the training to quickly turn on captions.
- Accommodate customers communicating in sign language. Smart phone apps such as the American Sign Language app can be used.
- Staff know how to locate and secure sign language interpreting services.

Computer Access

- A workstation or worktable that is height-adjustable for use by wheelchair users that offers alternative ways to access the computer, including for example: the capability to change from sit to stand.
- A workstation or worktable that is height-adjustable for use by wheelchair users that offers alternative ways to access the computer, including for example: a trackball or an alternate mouse, alternative keyboards, and/or a one-handed keyboard.
- A workstation or worktable that is height-adjustable for use by wheelchair users that offers alternative ways to access the computer, including for example: text-to-speech software, reading software, or word prediction software that helps people with limited use of their hands.
- Microphones and headsets

Learning

- Materials are or can be made available in language that is easy to understand (3rd to 5th grade level).
- Capability to record presentations, discussions and/or written materials for customers who have difficulty taking notes. Smart phones also have this capability.
- Basic orientation materials can be made available in alternate formats (large print, Braille, audio, text, etc.) upon request.

- Materials can be made available that account for a variety of learning styles and are also accessible to people who have limited or no reading skills (e.g., pictures, videos and audio formats), upon request.
- Word prediction software that assists with literacy and support for Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and Low Vision

Some of the software mentioned above can be found free on smart phones in the Play Store or App Store. Staff and customers can adjust the settings on their smart phones for more accessibility options as well. Some software and equipment can be rented at no charge at NCATP Exchange Posts provided by the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program.

Staff can also contact their North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) regional representative for more guidance on available resources/equipment and service locations at NCATP.org or call 919-859-8360.

NCWorks Career Centers are monitored and reviewed every year for continuous improvement and 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 may be conducted. NCWorks Career Centers must begin immediate corrective action to achieve compliance, depending on the nature of the finding.

Per federal law, each Local Workforce Development 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.

NCWorks Career Center staff receive and have access to training to follow established procedures to ensure inclusion and programmatic accessibility to center services. This training allows for staff to better understand the different types of disabilities, how to handle issues of disclosure and disability identification with sensitivity at program intake, and how to determine the most effective mix of services and referrals to make when a disability is identified. These trainings may 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. Disability Awareness training is also available online upon demand via the NCWorks Training Center website.

All NC Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act providers serve eligible individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Title II providers have career pathways designed for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These pathways offer micro-credentials and other credentials that lead to increased employment outcomes. The

NCCCS Associate Director of Disability Services supports all Title II programs in serving students with disabilities and providing guidance and professional development to staff, instructors, and partners. All services and access to these services will be clearly defined and outlined in the One-Stop core partner MOU.

All 58 Community Colleges have Disability Services staff on their campuses to support and provide reasonable accommodations to all qualified IDD students. This includes students who are blind or visually impaired, deaf, or hard of hearing and require specific accommodations based on the disability. Disability Services staff also posted virtual office hours on their websites to support current students with disabilities and to enroll new students on their caseloads to respond to the growing emotional/mental, physical, and learning needs of the student population.

EIPD Staff Adjustments to Address Service Delivery during/after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

- EIPD Services remained available to consumers during the pandemic through offices remaining open to the public with modified staffing patterns and some telework. CDC safety precautions utilized to protect staff and consumers.
- EIPD Staff were provided and received training on technology needed to provide remote services when needed, on COVID-19 vaccine and testing resources as well as helpful pandemic related resources to share with their clients.
- Cloth masks and hand sanitizer made available in all offices for consumers and staff.
- In-person service delivery continued during the pandemic with adjustments made to ensure safety for staff and consumers.
- EIPD Staff provides on going remote and in-person employment skills classes as needed for consumers and provided virtual training and awareness services to employers.

EIPD Adjustments to Services to Persons with Disabilities during/after the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Collaborated with community resources to make support available to ESL learners.
- Utilization of various virtual platforms as needed to communicate with consumers and afford them access to services.
- Increased remote capabilities in local offices. Staff continue to provide onsite and remote services when needed.
- In-person service delivery with post COVID-19 CDC adjustments made to ensure safety for staff and consumers.
- Adjusted funding to support virtual service delivery as needed to all consumers receiving services from providers such as Pre-ETS, Supported Employment and Job Preparation and Placement services.
- Developed remote employment skills classes for consumers and provided virtual training and awareness services to employers.

- Continued internships for college students remotely and developed new paid internship opportunities for EIPD consumers to work remotely and in person in various capacities within the agency (EIPD) and the state government.
- Correspondence in English, Spanish and large print when needed mailed to EIPD consumers making them aware of various resources.
- Policy adjustments and contract amendments made to assure access to services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- WorkSource East & WorkSource West (EIPD Job Training Centers) developed remote classes to assure continuation of services.

EIPD Contribution to Statewide Emergency Pandemic Response

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

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

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. Describe how English language learners will be made aware of the opportunity to enroll and/or co-enroll in all the core programs for which they are eligible.

North Carolina's One-Stop delivery system is able to meet the needs of our English language learners through our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) program. LEP is operated from the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) state office using the Applicant Services Unit and a LEP Coordinator. DWS has established policy for providing LEP services to all customers who do not speak English as their primary language. The goal is to deliver the same level of high-quality services to all our customers, even those with LEP.

The LEP state Coordinator is responsible for the following:

- distributing policy to all One Stops or NCWorks Career Centers;
- establishing procedures for serving LEP customers;

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

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

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

All programs offering Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) will outline in the MOU opportunities for core partners to refer and support English Language Learners, including the use of training vouchers for programs. IELCE providers will collaborate with MOU core partners to offer holistic services to ELL including developing a sustainable pipeline for career placement and incumbent worker career advancement, providing holistic wrap around services using telecommunications and virtual platforms, and expanding employer networks.

IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

Describe the methods used for joint planning and coordination among the core programs, and with the required one-stop partner programs and other programs and activities included in the Unified or Combined State Plan.

WIOA State Steering Council:

The NCWorks Commission's 2023-2025 strategic plan provides a framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including, but not limited to the programs covered under WIOA. The State Steering Council also identified key actions needed to ensure coordination and alignment.

In collaboration with the NCWorks Commission, the WIOA State Steering Council, initially established in 2015 continues as a permanent cross-agency body to coordinate and align policy and ensure continued implementation of WIOA at state and local levels. This council meets periodically and reviews progress on WIOA implementation and develop strategies for improvement and review state policies that may inhibit programs from fully aligning activities. The council implements strategies for better alignment such as creating a common intake form, exploring the possibility of an integrated case management system, and strengthening the referral process between programs. The council will provide feedback to the NCWorks

Commission regarding challenges and barriers to completing the work, and suggestions for new policy.

State-level coordination and alignment will continue to provide the framework, structure, and support for an integrated workforce development system, but it's local and regional activities that must truly be aligned to improve the system. The need for regional councils recognizes the uniqueness of North Carolina's regions and the need to develop and deliver services that meet these unique needs.

NC DHHS Program Coordination Activities:

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

V. COMMON ASSURANCES (FOR ALL CORE PROGRAMS)

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
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;	Yes
3. The lead State agencies with optimal policy-making authority and responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;	Yes
4. (a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administrating the core programs, required one-stop partners and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, including other organizations that provide services to individuals with barriers to employment, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public; (b) The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;	Yes
5. The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
made for the core programs to carry out workforce development activities;	
6. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3);	Yes
7. The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable;	Yes
8. The Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;	Yes
9. The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;	Yes
10. The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);	Yes
11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and	Yes
12. Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the Department of Labor.	Yes

VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

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.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR 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 THE LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS DESIGNATED IN THE STATE

The overlay of North Carolina's eight economic development Prosperity Zones shown on the map are the basis for designation of regions. The current 20 boards meet the performance and fiscal accountability criteria of the Opportunity Act and were accordingly re-designated after the initial two-year period. North Carolina began a regional approach to planning and service delivery under the Workforce Investment Act and established eight regions that most closely aligned the geography of the local workforce development areas and the Prosperity Zones. The regions with their constituent local workforce development areas are:

- Western Region: Southwestern, and Mountain Area WDBs;
- Northwest Region: High Country, Western Piedmont, and Foothills WDBs;
- Piedmont Triad Region: Piedmont Triad Regional and GuilfordWorks WDBs;
- Southwest Region: Centralina, Charlotte Works, and Gaston County WDBs;
- North Central Region: Kerr-Tar, Durham, and Capital Area WDBs;
- Sandhills Region: Lumber River and Mid-Carolina, WDBs;
- Northeast Region: Rivers East, Northeastern, and Turning Point WDBs; and
- Southeast Region: Eastern Carolina and Cape Fear WDBs.

B. DESCRIBE THE PROCESS AND POLICY 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. 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

The process for the initial designation and subsequent designation of local workforce development areas in North Carolina originates from a letter of request to the Governor from the local Chief Elected Official of each potential workforce development area. The letter of request must contain the official local area name, as well as the county(ies) that comprise the area. Upon receipt of the request by the Governor and review, it will be determined if the local area meets the criteria for successful performance and sustained fiscal integrity. With respect to requests for new local area designations, Commission Policy Statement 03-2022 Transfer of County(ies), which can be found at: CPS 03-2022 Local Workforce Development Area Transfer of County(ies) Policy, has been approved and issued by the NCWorks Commission. This policy outlines the processes and procedures for the realignment or designation of a local area.

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

1. A formal determination that either the WIOA Title I grant recipient or the administrative entity of the local area mis-expended funds provided under Subtitle B due to willful disregard of the requirements of the provision involved,
2. gross negligence, or
3. failure to comply with accepted standards of administration. Local areas must adhere to the uniform administrative requirements set forth in Title 2 CFR Part 200 and Title 29 CFR Parts 95 and 97. The state takes into consideration timely reporting of WIOA participant and expenditure data, timely completion and submission of the required annual single audit, previous monitoring reports, and any other documentation needed to make the determination.

North Carolina's workforce system includes businesses, organizations, agencies, employed and unemployed persons, training and educational institutions, adults, and youth. To enhance service to all these constituents, continued realigning workforce development planning and services with regional labor markets is both efficient and productive. Communities and regions recognize that to have successful economic development it must go hand-in-hand with a well-functioning workforce development system. North Carolina has built on several years of emphasizing the value of regional economic development efforts and worked with Local Workforce Development Boards and local elected officials to establish and enhance identification of appropriate regions and the working relationships that have been developed. The Governor's NC Job Ready plan focuses on employer leadership and a strong relationship between regional economic development partners and local workforce development areas to achieve his vision for the state.

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

The established regional framework enables Local Areas to better:

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

- Articulate a consistent and defined regional approach to workforce development.

Stronger alignment between regional economic development and local boards is a priority. In November 2021, the NCWorks Commission announced it would conduct a study to recommend whether the current local areas in North Carolina should be realigned. Authorized by the Office of Governor Roy Cooper, the study explored data focused on commuting patterns, labor and economic trends, and stakeholder perspectives from numerous sources including the NC Department of Commerce Labor and Economic Analysis Division, and the Division of Workforce Solutions. In addition, the commission conducted in-depth interviews and surveys with workforce, economic development, and education leaders across the state. In making its recommendation, the NCWorks Commission provided eight guiding principles to support local leaders in making their decisions regarding local workforce development areas. A public comment period occurred in spring 2022, and the Commission voted on its recommendations in May 2022. The Chief Local Elected Officials then worked with the applicable workforce development boards to determine how to implement the recommendations locally beginning in summer 2022. The outcome was a net reduction in the number of Local Area Workforce Development Boards to 20 LAWDBs, which was approved by the NCWorks Commission in February 2023. Governor Cooper designated the new local areas in spring 2023 and they officially began operations on July 1, 2023.

Successful performance and sustained fiscal integrity are critical to the success of WIOA programs and are managed by two units within the Division of Workforce Solutions. The Performance Unit manages the local workforce board annual allocation process as well as the performance metrics established by US DOL and the NCWorks Commission. Policy Statement 11-2020 <https://www.nccommerce.com/documents/workforce-policy-ps-11-2020-defining-workforce-innovation-and-opportunity-act-wioa> provides guidance to Local Workforce Boards on performance goals and expectations. This DWS policy statement mandates that Boards must meet or exceed all the individual Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker federal performance measures. The Performance team uses the “FutureWorks” software platform to track and report performance data on each of the 20 Local Workforce Boards to USDOL.

In determining whether the grant recipient/administrative entity in the local area has sustained fiscal integrity, the DWS reviews the following for the two-year period prior to the application: 1) Formal determinations of disallowed costs and non-compliance as documented by reports of the results of the state's WIOA monitoring, single audits and DOL monitoring (if applicable); 2) Results of investigations of incident reports alleging gross negligence, fraud, abuse or other misconduct; and 3) Formal communication of high-risk status and/or suspension of cash payments resulting from continued violations of administrative requirements and grant terms and conditions and the subsequent corrective actions implemented by the local area to correct the violations. The DWS does this by conducting a pre-award assessment.

The Accountability Unit conducts annual monitoring visits to all 20 local workforce development boards in North Carolina. This monitoring team conducts both programmatic and financial monitoring to ensure compliance with all US DOL and state policies and regulations. Summary reports of all monitoring visits are reviewed by DWS executive leadership for final approval.

C. PROVIDE THE APPEALS PROCESS AND POLICY REFERRED TO IN SECTION 106(B)(5) OF WIOA RELATING TO DESIGNATION OF LOCAL AREAS

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

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

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

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

D. PROVIDE THE APPEALS PROCESS AND POLICY REFERRED TO IN SECTION 121(H)(2)(E) OF WIOA RELATING TO DETERMINATIONS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Local Workforce Boards may make an appeal at any time following the procedures in CPS 08-2021, Date: May 13, 2021, though North Carolina distributes funds promptly as required at Sec 182 (e), pending Plan approval. The DWS policy associated with infrastructure funding is OG 23-2021, Date: August 20, 2021.

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

<https://www.nccommerce.com/documents/commission-policy-cps-08-2021-customer-complaint-appeal-and-resolution-policy>

2. STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

A. PROVIDE STATE POLICIES OR GUIDANCE FOR THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM AND FOR USE OF STATE FUNDS FOR WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES

NC Works Commission Policy Statements

Commission Policy CPS 06-2022, Change 1 | Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Monitoring/Oversight of Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs)

The purpose of this policy is to issue guidance regarding state and local level fiscal and programmatic monitoring requirements under the WIOA; primarily Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth funds.

Commission Policy | CPS 11-2021, Change 1 | Eligible Training Provider Guidelines, Penalties, Appeal Process and Performance Reporting

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

Commission Policy | CPS 09-2021, Change 1 | Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Formula Funds Expenditure Requirements

The purpose of this policy is to inform Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) of the requirements to meet the mandated 20% work experience rate for local WIOA Title I Youth formula funds and the mandated expenditure rate of at least 75% for local Youth formula funds used to serve out-of-school youth (OSY), unless a waiver has been granted. This change provides an updated list of allowable costs that may be included in work experience expenditures, in accordance with Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 9-22, that was issued March 2, 2023.

Commission Policy | CPS 02-2023 | Program Year (PY) 2023 NCWorks Local Innovation Fund Grants

The purpose of this policy is to announce the availability of NCWorks Local Innovation Fund Grants.

Commission Policy | CPS 06-2021, Change 1 | Guidelines for North Carolina NCWorks Career Center Code of Conduct Violations

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

This change to CPS 06-2021 provides the inclusion of processes for NCPause violations, updates the email addresses for the State Monitor Advocate, Ombudsman, and Customer Call Center, provides clarification on staff discretion, includes minor edits to the letter templates, and rescinds CPS 06-2021.

Commission Policy | CPS 04-2022 Requirement to Use Competitive Selection Processes to Procure Training Providers and One-Stop Operators

To inform Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) of the requirement to 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 One-Stop Operator of a local certified NCWorks Career Center.

Commission Policy | CPS 05-2022 Conflict of Interest Requirements for Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and Staff

To inform WDBs of the requirement to develop a Conflict of Interest Policy and provide a Conflict of Interest policy template.

Commission Policy | CPS 07-2022 Incident Reporting Process

To inform Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) on 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 (DWS) regarding the Incident Reporting process.

Commission Policy | CPS 03-2022 Local Workforce Development Area Transfer of County(ies) Policy

The purpose of this policy is to inform Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and local elected officials of the requirements and process for the transfer of county(ies) when a unit of local government requests a change to the current composition of their Local Workforce Development Areas (Local Areas). This guidance is in compliance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Section 106 and 20 CFR 679.200 et seq. The components of initial designation or subsequent designation are not addressed within this document.

Commission Policy | CPS 02-2022 Procurement and Contracting Policy

To provide Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and other subrecipients minimum standards and procedures designed to ensure the proper procurement of and contracting for services and rescind PS 21-2017.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To clarify the policymaking role of the NCWorks Commission and the operational guidance role of the NC Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS); and to adjust the official method of issuing

and disseminating procedural, administrative, management, and program directions to Division staff, Local Workforce Development Boards and other interested parties.

Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) Operational Guidance

Operational Guidance | OG 16-2021, Change 3 Defining Data Validation Process and Procedures

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

This Operational Guidance incorporates the inclusion of several new Wagner Peyser data validation elements and highlights minor changes to some existing elements of Attachment 2 (Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) Elements), such as changes in the wording of the allowed documentation to remain consistent with TEGL 23-19, Change 2.

This Operational Guidance rescinds OG 16-2021, Change 2, and the procedures herein supersede all previous policies, procedures, and guidelines regarding Defining Data Validation Process and Procedures.

Operational Guidance | OG 11-2023 Virtual Reality Grants Available to Workforce Development Boards

The purpose of this policy is to support Local Area Workforce Development Boards' Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) staff by providing grant funds to be used for virtual reality equipment to assist with career exploration and job training simulations.

Operational Guidance | OG 10-2023 Business Services Funding for Industry Sector Partnerships Planning Grants for Program Year (PY) 2023

The purpose of this policy is to provide planning grant funding to Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to convene local and regional partners and employers, plan and develop strategies and initiatives for evidence-based, in-demand industry sector partnerships as a regional strategy to meet the needs of businesses [WIOA Section 108(b)(4)(B)], specifically in subsectors of Advanced Manufacturing and primarily focused on clean energy, where applicable.

Operational Guidance | OG 01-2023, Change 1 Fierce Fellows Reentry Pilot Program

The purpose of this policy is to promote the Fierce Fellows Reentry Pilot Program, which focuses on the emotional and social development of Justice-Involved (JI) individuals as they transition from correctional facilities into communities across the state, and to assist with transmitting an application for the program.

This change updates enrollment requirements and rescinds OG 01-2023. This Operational Guidance (OG) and the procedures herein supersede all previous policy, procedures, and guidelines regarding the Fierce Fellows Reentry Pilot Program.

Operational Guidance | OG 04-2022, Change 2 American Rescue Plan Act Grant Funding Available to Local Area Workforce Development Boards

The purpose of this policy is to update grant enrollment requirements, removing the requirement for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Grant participants to be enrolled in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Adult. This Change also rescinds Operational Guidance 04-2022, Change 1.

This Operational Guidance and the procedures herein supersede all previous policies, procedures, and guidelines regarding ARPA Grant Funding Available to Local Area Workforce Development Boards. Operational Guidance 04-2022 is still active and continuing.

Operational Guidance | OG 08-2023 NCWorks Career Center Memorandum of Understanding and Partner Infrastructure Funding Agreement

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on the required NCWorks Career Center Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Partner Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA).

This Operational Guidance rescinds Operational Guidance OG 05-2022.

Operational Guidance | OG 18-2021, Change 1 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Supportive Services Guidance

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on the use of WIOA funds for supportive services to eligible participants enrolled in WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs. This change provides updated guidance on the provision of food as a supportive service and the inclusion of supportive services expenditures as an allowable cost for the youth work experience requirement, based on Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 09-22, which was issued on March 2, 2023.

This Operational Guidance (OG) rescinds OG 18-2021 and the procedures herein supersede all previous policy, procedures, and guidelines regarding WIOA supportive services.

Operational Guidance | OG 09-2022, Change 1 American Rescue Plan Act Business Work-Based Learning Grant

The purpose of this policy is to update the performance period and the funding expiration date for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Business-Work-Based Learning Grant funding.

Operational Guidance 09-2022 is still active and continuing.

Operational Guidance | OG 06-2023 American Rescue Plan Act Reentry Grant Additional Funding Available for Fierce Fellows Enrollments

The purpose of this policy is to announce and provide guidelines for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Reentry Grant additional funding available to Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) for Fierce Fellows enrollments.

Operational Guidance | OG 04-2022, Change 1 American Rescue Plan Act Grant Funding Available to Local Area Workforce Development Boards

Purpose: To update grant funding expenditure requirements, removing the requirement for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Grant funding to be obligated by December 30, 2024. This Change also updates the Program Manager Contact for the Substance Use Disorder Recovery Grant and updates the expiration date to December 31, 2026.

Operational Guidance 04-2022 is still active and continuing.

Operational Guidance | OG 05-2023 Local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Workforce Development Program Year 2023 Allocations

Purpose: To transmit WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Activities Program Allotments for Program Year (PY) 2023.

Operational Guidance | OG 07-2022, Change 1 Waiver of Expenditure Requirements for Out-of-School Youth

The purpose of this guidance is to announce and provide guidelines for the local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to implement North Carolina's approved waiver of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth 75 percent expenditure requirement for Out-of-School Youth (OSY). This change updates the expenditure level to "up to" 50 percent for In-School Youth, for those that choose to implement the waiver, updates the notification deadline for those choosing to implement the waiver, and updates the expiration date of this Operational Guidance to June 30, 2025, which is the end of the performance period for Program Year 2023 Title I funding.

This Operational Guidance (OG) rescinds OG 07-2022 and the procedures herein supersede all previous policy, procedures, and guidelines regarding the Waiver of Expenditure Requirement for Out-of-School Youth.

Operational Guidance | OG 04-2023: 2023 Lower Living Standard Income Level (LLSIL)

The purpose of this policy is to transmit the Program Year 2023 income chart identifying the higher of the "Federal Poverty Level Income Guidelines" and the "70% LLSIL Guidelines" for the year. This Operational Guidance rescinds OG 02-2022.

Operational Guidance | OG 03-2023 Wagner-Peyser Application Signature Requirements

The purpose of this policy is to detail the requirement that all Wagner-Peyser applications must be signed beginning July 1, 2023.

Operational Guidance | OG 03-2022, Change 1 Revised Local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Workforce Development Program Year 2022 Allocations

The purpose of this policy is to transmit adjusted WIOA funding levels for Program Year (PY) 2022 Dislocated Worker Local Area Allocations under WIOA Title I Section 132(c).

This Operational Guidance (OG) rescinds OG 03-2022, and the procedures herein supersede all previous policy, procedures, and guidelines regarding WIOA Workforce Development Program Year 2022 Allocations.

Operational Guidance | OG 10-2022 Partners for Reentry Opportunities in Workforce Development (PROWD) Grants

Purpose

To announce that the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) will be the lead agency for the Partners for Reentry Opportunities in Workforce Development (PROWD) Grants, providing oversight for the initiative, financial management, reporting, monitoring, and technical assistance to all subgrantees. The purpose of the grant is to increase federally incarcerated individuals' work readiness at the time of release, increase employment in sustainable wage positions after release, and reduce recidivism through the initiative's three-stage program approach.

Operational Guidance | OG 09-2022 American Rescue Plan Act Business Work-Based Learning Grant

To transmit the guidelines and application for the administration of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Business Work-Based Learning Grant funding. This funding is specifically for non-profits and state agencies. Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) are not eligible for this grant.

Update: See OG 09-2022, Change 1.

Operational Guidance | OG 08 2022 | Guidance on Acknowledgment of Federal Funding in Accordance with the Stevens Amendment

To remind Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), NCWorks Career Center Operators and other workforce development partners of requirements under the "Stevens Amendment", as it pertains to transparency and accountability in federal spending of federal grant funds awarded to the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) and the workforce development system.

Operational Guidance | OG 04 2022 American Rescue Plan Act Grant Funding Available to Local Area Workforce Development Boards

Find all files and attachments for workforce system Operational Guidance | OG 04 2022 on this page.

The purpose of this guidance is to transmit the guidelines and application for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant funding. Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) will have the opportunity to apply for three separate grant opportunities: Substance Use Disorder Recovery, Reentry Support, and Small Business Work-Based Learning.

Update: See also OG 04-2022, Change 1.

Operational Guidance | OG 01-2022 NCWorks Tracking for Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs)

The purpose is to provide NCWorks Online (NCWO) reporting requirements for WDB level grants.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Workforce Policy | OG 10-2021 Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion Guidance

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

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

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

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

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

Operational Guidance | OG 03-2021 Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Co-enrollment with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Dislocated Worker Programs

To introduce strategies to strengthen participant outcomes for TAA and WIOA participants by increasing access to multiple services to benefit the long-term success of program participants through simultaneous admission known as co-enrollment (20 CFR 618.600).

Operational Guidance | OG 04-2021 Revised Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program Participant Transportation Operational Guidance

To transmit the revised Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Participant Transportation Policy for Training, Job Search Allowance and Relocation Allowance Reimbursement and to rescind PS 01-2019.

Operational Guidance | OG 02-2021 Guidance for Local Incumbent Worker Grants

To provide operational guidance on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines in WIOA Section 134(d)(4) to Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) choosing to use up to 20% of the combined Adult and Dislocated Worker allocated formula program funds to pay for employees' training and to rescind Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) PS 13-2020.

Operational Guidance | OG 01-2021 Utilization of Certified Historically Underutilized Businesses

To provide guidance on how Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) may take advantage of services provided by the North Carolina Historically Underutilized Businesses (NC HUB) Office and to help meet statewide utilization goals.

B. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE INTENDS TO USE GOVERNOR'S SET ASIDE FUNDING FOR MANDATORY AND DISCRETIONARY ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING HOW THE STATE WILL CONDUCT EVALUATIONS OF TITLE I ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES.

North Carolina will use state set aside funding to support the key goals and strategies laid out in NCWorks Commission's strategic plan and move forward with the Governor's Vision for workforce development.

- Sector strategies and business engagement. Funds will be available to help develop and support public-private partnership, increase number of registered apprenticeship programs, and cross-training of staff across programs.

- Work Based Learning staffing grants at the local level to enhance work experience, OJT, and related activities.
- Career center improvements. Funds will be used to update and improve outreach materials, technology upgrades, and staff training.
- Finish Line Grants to assist students with supportive services to insure they finish their credentialed coursework.
- American Job Center Network Branding to maintain compliance with US DOL outreaching criteria.

Two recent innovative research and evaluation projects recently funded using the Governor's state set aside funding included Local Innovation Grant implementation grants totaling \$450,000, which is an initiative of the NCWorks Commission, the state workforce development board, and the Division of Workforce Solutions within the N.C. Department of Commerce which helps to administer the fund.

One of the two grants was awarded to Building Hope (Chatham, Orange, and Wake counties) preparing gender minorities for careers in construction. This region received a \$225,000 grant that helps address both a critical need for workers in the construction industry and gender pay disparities by increasing the number of women trained in various skilled trades. A Chapel Hill-based nonprofit organization, Hope Renovations, provides pre-apprenticeship training in construction trades, case management to help resolve employment barriers like childcare, internships, and additional coaching services to help women succeed on the job. This grant will allow Hope Renovations to expand services beyond Orange County and support the training of approximately 40 participants. Partners include Capital Area Workforce Development Board, Hope Renovations and Wake Technical Community College.

The other grant was awarded to OPT-IN and J.E.T. creating opportunities for opportunity youth. (Burke County): A \$225,000 grant will support "opportunity youth" (those who are currently neither in the labor force nor in school) and help meet Burke County's workforce needs by expanding the "OPT-IN" (Opportunity Internship) program and launching the "Jobs, Education, and Training" (J.E.T.) program. OPT-IN serves recent high school graduates by matching them with local employers for an eight-week, paid exploratory internship.

Participants also receive mentoring and professional development classes. Similarly, J.E.T. can serve any Opportunity Youth between the ages of 18-24, connecting them to local companies offering family-sustaining wages, while providing mentoring and professional development. Both programs will focus on outreach to communities of color. Partners include Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, The Industrial Commons, and its affiliate program "Work in Burke," Burke Development, Inc., Western Piedmont Community College, Burke County Public Schools, NCWorks Career Center - Burke County, N.C. Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities and Meridian Specialty Yarn Group, Inc.

The NCWorks Commission has submitted the documentation for procurement to hire a 3rd party evaluator with a budget of \$50,000. Once selected, the 3rd party evaluator will compile mid-project and final reports which include comprehensive reporting of all outcomes gained during the cycle of the grant. The hope is these projects can be replicated throughout the state.

According to Governor Cooper, "As North Carolina keeps growing and creating more good jobs, we need collaboration and creativity to empower our people with the education and training needed to fill the jobs of today and tomorrow," Governor Cooper said. "I applaud the partners that have received these new grants, which will not only help their own communities but also serve as inspiring models for others across the state."

C. 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.

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 layoffs from any industry by providing a company with an Incumbent Worker Training Grant. North Carolina's "Business Edge" program helps distressed or challenged businesses avert or prevent layoffs. Led by the State and is a partnership with the local Workforce Development Boards, Small Business & Technology Development Center (SBTDC), NCSU Industry Expansion Solutions (IES), NC Community Colleges and Certified Turnaround Professionals, the goal is to provide support to at risk companies to keep manufacturers running and workers in these jobs.

D. DESCRIBE THE STATE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO PROVIDE RAPID RESPONSES IN CASES OF NATURAL DISASTERS INCLUDING COORDINATION WITH FEMA AND OTHER ENTITIES.

Led by the NC Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Disaster Recovery Task Force was established and comprised of partners from the Small Business Administration, NC Rural Center, NC Community College System, Small Business and Technology Development Center, NC Office of Recovery and Resilience, and Golden Leaf Foundation. The task force is charged with helping small businesses and the community successfully emerge from natural disasters. In the event of a natural disaster, the Division of Workforce Solutions and its Rapid Response team works closely with Workforce Development Boards, USDOL Employment and Training Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and American Red Cross to ensure available resources are provided to dislocated workers and survivors of a natural disaster. The Division can file a National Dislocated Worker Grant as well as provide guidance and/or financial assistance to help impacted communities in organizing support for dislocated workers and meeting the basic needs of their families. Such assistance may include providing heat, shelter, food, clothing and other necessities and services. The Rapid Response Team coordinates with partner agencies to dispatch the mobile career classroom to serve as hub to help small

businesses and further assist survivors in locating missing family members or file a claim for Disaster Unemployment Assistance.

E. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE PROVIDES EARLY INTERVENTION (E.G., RAPID RESPONSE) AND ENSURES THE PROVISION OF APPROPRIATE CAREER SERVICES TO WORKER GROUPS ON WHOSE BEHALF A TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA) PETITION HAS BEEN FILED. (SECTION 134(A)(2)(A) AND TAA SECTION 221(A)(2)(A).) THIS DESCRIPTION MUST INCLUDE HOW THE STATE DISSEMINATES BENEFIT INFORMATION TO PROVIDE 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 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 AND HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THE PROVISION OF APPROPRIATE CAREER SERVICE TO WORKERS IN THE GROUPS IDENTIFIED IN THE PETITION (TAA SEC. 221(A)(2)(A)). NOTE: UNTIL THE TAA PROGRAM IS REAUTHORIZED, THE REQUIREMENTS TO PROVIDE RAPID RESPONSE AND APPROPRIATE CAREER SERVICES TO WORKER GROUPS ON WHOSE BEHALF A PETITION HAS BEEN FILED IS NOT APPLICABLE.

The state Rapid Response Dislocated Worker Unit works closely with the state's Trade Adjustment Assistance Unit, which keeps staff apprised of new TAA petitions filed. Information on how to file a petition for TAA is provided to all companies faced with either a mass layoff or facility closure and is part of the employer packet provided to the management team at the initial rapid response meeting. If the company is impacted due to foreign competition or discloses their plans to shift production to another country, then information on the Trade Program is shared. If the company is already certified or becomes certified for TAA while workers are still employed, then Trade orientation sessions are facilitated on-site so workers will understand the expanded benefits the Trade Program offers.

Information about Trade Act Programs is disseminated to impacted individuals in several ways. A press release is provided to the Department of Commerce Public Information Officer, which is then distributed to the appropriate media market. When a Trade petition is certified while employees are/have been released from employment, Division staff contact the trade affected employer and ask them to provide a list with contact information of their incumbent and dislocated workers. These workers are mailed a letter that outlines the types of benefits available and advises them of potential eligibility, and they are instructed to contact their local NCWorks Career Center to complete the required application. This letter includes NCWorks Career Center locations and phone numbers.

Workers are co-enrolled into WIOA to receive timely and individualized career services as well as the wrap around supportive services not offered through the Trade Program.

B. ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

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 (WDBs) to emphasize all aspects of work-based learning as part of its engagement with businesses throughout the business lifecycle, including On-the Job-Training (OJT), Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), apprenticeships, internships, and customized training. Local Area Workforce Boards utilize formula funding to fund Local IWT programs, OJT and internships.

North Carolina's Incumbent Worker Training is branded as a service that the local WDB's may use to assist meeting the demand to up-skill the existing workforce in the area of technical and essential skills, leadership and professional development and desired or required certifications. On-the-Job training (OJT) has successfully been paired with apprenticeship programs in some regions to provide more technical assistance to employers for workforce development and adult education.

In addition, DWS partners with the NC Community College System to develop customized training programs for an employer's incumbent workers, as well as provide apprenticeship training and education. All training programs are designed to meet the special requirements of an employer (including a group of employers) to retain a skilled workforce or avert the need to lay off employees by assisting the workers in obtaining the skills necessary to retain employment.

To further assist employers and employees, Customized Training includes WDB staff assistance by providing funding for the employer to provide workforce training. This type of training becomes accessible which would otherwise not be available to many employers given the restrictions for Customized Training funds provided through the NC Community College System.

In addition to the programs already mentioned, WDBs have participated in Manufacturing Day along with the Manufacturing Institute and Creators Wanted MFG Day event, created Virtual Career Marketplace events featuring numerous manufacturing employers and a monthly exercise of contacting a provided list of key industry sector employers. Workforce Development Boards have partnered with County Economic Development, NC Department of Commerce-Division of Workforce Solutions, and NC State Industry Expansion Solutions to formulate plans aimed at helping companies to serve new markets amid challenges from the impact of COVID-19.

Local apprenticeship programs have been developed with companies such as Columbus McKinnon and Power Curbers by WDBs and NCWorks staff working in partnership as effective business intermediaries. Local Workforce Boards Business Services teams offer informational virtual meetings for employers providing trends and pertinent business developments within a region.

Our layoff aversion program, Business Edge, has seen a growing need for IWT to upskill employees in new technologies and operations to keep their businesses relevant and competitive. The benefits of this can result in new jobs being created where OJT can be offered, where applicable, alongside Federal Bonding and Work Opportunity Tax Credits. Specific

Business Services funding has been awarded in the past, and continues in PY20, to Local Area Workforce Boards to support the emphasis of work-based learning models.

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

Similar to other in-person services provided by workforce development boards, COVID-19 impacted the ability to deliver the aforementioned work-based learning training models. Business closures, social distance requirements and supply issues all posed challenges to the standard delivery model of these services. As the vaccination rate increases, business closures decrease and the demand for labor strengthens, the State is working with partner agencies and local workforce development boards to encourage work-based learning with businesses.

To continue its primary mission of supporting NC manufacturing companies, the Business Edge program worked with local workforce development boards during the COVID-19 pandemic. A targeted contact campaign to assess the initial impact of business shutdowns was organized by Business Edge and implemented by the Workforce Boards. The hospitality industry was a secondary focus with similar assessment goals with cooperation of the Prosperity Zones once the initial manufacturing campaign was complete.

The manufacturing contact plan revealed some businesses capable of and willing to pivot production from their primary products to personal protection equipment. Examples range from a football helmet company producing face shields to distilleries producing hand sanitizer to hospital bedlinen producers shifting to isolation gowns. A strategic partner, North Carolina State University's Industry Expansion Services was essential in assisting identified companies in their efforts to pivot production.

Another strategic partner, the North Carolina Community College System worked to complete specialized training with an important aviation manufacturer. The Local Workforce Board and community college worked together to ensure training of employees in FAA mandated classes would continue during the pandemic. The continuation of training for federal certification requirements prevented delays in resuming production once quarantine mandates were lifted.

2. REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

Describe how the State will incorporate Registered Apprenticeship into its strategy for service design and delivery (e.g., outreach to sponsors and prospective sponsors, identifying potential participants and connecting them to apprenticeship opportunities).

Registered Apprenticeship, Pre - Apprenticeship, and related strategies operate under the name "ApprenticeshipNC" within the North Carolina Community College System, with a combination of state and regional staff. Close relationships with the Division of Workforce Solutions, NCWorks Career Centers, Community Colleges, NC Department of Public Instruction and public schools enable the program to grow and evolve.

For example, NCWorks Career Centers and the Community College System are working to develop Pre - Apprenticeships for local employers. The career centers will assist with

conducting assessments, providing referrals and screening potential apprentices for Pre-Apprenticeship. The Pre-Apprenticeship provides pre-employment training as determined by the employer so that a talent pipeline of workers is created for employers to choose from. Those that successfully complete their Pre-Apprenticeship will go on to a Youth Apprenticeship or a Registered Apprenticeship. High School students that are registered in a Pre-Apprenticeship or a Registered Apprenticeship while in high school and continue into the registered apprenticeship after graduation, will have their tuition waived at a local community college. WIOA funds will be used for those eligible to assist with training needs for the apprentice.

North Carolina is also utilizing public/private partnerships to grow its Registered Apprenticeship programs, focusing on Youth Apprenticeship with sector strategies. Several of these partnerships are growing apprenticeships in advanced manufacturing; specifically, tool and die, machining and mechatronics. Another sector strategy is in the area of IT Registered Apprenticeships. There are approximately 10,000 unfilled IT jobs in the state and there are public/private partnerships working to form a solid and sustainable Registered Apprenticeship program.

Additionally, because the US Military is the second largest employer in the state, Fort Bragg has an approved Registered Apprenticeship program to register soldiers in multiple apprenticeable occupations. Camp Lejeune has a pipe fitting/welder Pre-Apprenticeship program that enables Marines to receive training and at successful completion to receive credentials upon transitioning out of the service. Upon graduation from their pre-apprenticeship, the Marine transitions out of the military into civilian life with direct entry to a career with an employer to complete their Registered Apprenticeship. We are looking at connecting more employers to those transitioning out of the service so that more can not only receive nationally recognized credentials but have possible direct entry into employment as they exit the military.

ApprenticeshipNC also works with several large electrical, plumbing, carpentry, and masonry companies to recruit youth into these technical trade skilled careers where there are massive shortages of trained workers. The youth are enrolled into a pre-apprenticeship and upon graduation transition directly into a career with an employer to complete the Registered Apprenticeship. Companies also have the option of beginning with a Youth Apprenticeship for those that begin in high school.

Additionally, apprenticeship staff work in partnership with local workforce development boards to assist employers in finding potential apprentices. NCWorks Career Centers and Community Colleges in order to collaborate and work as an Integrated Service Delivery Team that holistically serves all of the needs of our businesses. This integration with NCWorks Career Centers is helping to meet the demand for much needed apprentices. This process is creating models within the state to integrate not only the NCWorks Career Centers, but Community Based Organizations. NCWorks assists with recruiting and screening potential apprentices for the employer, in addition to screening for benefits being offered through the career center. This model provides braided funding from all entities so that the apprentice and employer are able to benefit from the services available. This has also created the opportunity for outreach to students in middle school about apprenticeships and the many career opportunities that are available. It also has enabled the ability to reach out to a more diverse population so that all have an equal opportunity.

3. TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

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

The workforce development system, established under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), emphasizes informed customer choice, job-driven training, provider performance, and continuous improvement. The selection of legitimate training providers and quality training programs is vital to achieving these core principles.

The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) has issued guidance that requires states to collect and report performance information on all individuals and WIOA Title I Core Program participants (of Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs) served by each program on the state list of Eligible Training Providers (ETP List). The requirements for ETP reporting can be found in WIOA section 116(d)(4) and 116(d)(6)(B) and in the WIOA Joint & Department of Labor Only Final Rules at 20 CFR 677.230 and 20 CFR 680.490. Beginning with Program Year 2021, North Carolina will be required to collect and submit performance data on all individuals for each Eligible Training Provider and their approved training programs.

North Carolina is charged with ensuring that data elements related to the initial application, continued eligibility, and performance information regarding approved training providers and programs are entered into the supported state system, NCWorks Online.

Eligible Training Provider Determination Process

1. Qualifications for Training Providers:

a. Licensing/Accreditation

Eligible Training Providers must be licensed by the appropriate North Carolina or federal licensing authority, as required by both North Carolina and federal law. Training providers must be in good standing and compliant with all other State and federal regulatory agencies including:

- In instances where specific occupations have governing boards that issue licenses, such as the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Health Service Regulation, North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles, Training providers must be licensed by the appropriate governing board to offer training for the occupation.
- Private post-secondary institutions must be approved by a federal or North Carolina authority such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Licensed/Accredited Training Providers not eligible to be on the ETPL include, but are not limited to:

- Training providers that are debarred by State or federal government during the debarment period;
- Private post-secondary training providers who apply for a NC Proprietary license and are denied licensure due to the determination that the training program is not vocational in nature after vetting conducted by the NC Community Colleges.

2. Business Requirements

- Training providers must be a legal entity, registered to do business in the State of North Carolina.
- Training providers must have provided training services during all of the 12 months prior to applying for the ETPL and have a proven track record of students successfully completing its programs. Note: this provision does not apply to Registered Apprenticeship programs.
- Training providers are required to have refund policies specifying when refunds for tuition and other costs associated with the training program will be allowed. Refund policies that indicate that no refunds will be made are not acceptable. Refund policies must be written and published so that students are aware of how to request a refund.
- Training providers must have a grievance policy which provides for due process to allow students to file complaints with an organization against faculty, staff, or other employees. Grievance policies must be written and published so that students are aware of how to file a complaint.
- Training providers must have a form of general liability insurance. General Liability Insurance is defined as a standard insurance policy issued to business organizations to protect against liability claims for bodily injury (BI) and property damage (PD) arising out of premises, operations, products, and completed operations; and advertising and personal injury (PI) liability.
- All Public and Private providers of training services must maintain a current insurance policy for the duration of being listed as an eligible training provider per federal and state law. Upon expiration of the certificate, the provider must submit a new certificate to the DWS-ETP Coordinator.
- Training providers must establish, publish, and disseminate materials to students including, but not limited to, official catalogs and other materials. Training providers must provide to students, and to prospective students, information that is complete and accurate. The information provided must be sufficient to enable prospective students to make rational decisions about enrolling in the school and to enable enrolled students to understand their rights and responsibilities as a student in the school.
- A training provider's financial capacity must be appropriate to its scale of operations. The school must demonstrate, principally from its annual comprehensive financial statements, and from other financial information, that it has adequate capability to satisfy its contractual obligation to students, including the capability to provide the programs and services described in its official publications and to meet its financial obligations.
- Training providers must comply with non-discrimination and equal opportunity provisions of all federal and state applicable laws including, but not limited to:
- Regulations under Section 188 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;

- 29 CFR 37, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;
- Age Discrimination Claims Assistance Act of 1988;
- Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972;
- Title II Subpart A of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; and
- The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008.

3. Necessary Documentation for Eligibility Determination

The training provider must meet all State criteria listed in Part II numbers 1 and 2 of this policy to allow the State to make an eligibility determination, along with the necessary documentation listed below. The information requirements established mandate that a provider of training services submit appropriate, accurate, and timely information to the State, to enable the State to disseminate information that assists participants in choosing training providers. Documents to be collected and reviewed are:

- College's or Company's Accreditation (state or national);
- Legitimacy of the College or Company (must include the provider's NCID # or FEIN #);
- Most recent financial audit or financial statements for the prior six months
- Agreement for a drug-free workplace and;
- General Liability Insurance – If this expires during the Program Year, it is the responsibility of the training provider to submit the current policy.
- 12 prior months of Performance data for the programs to be considered for inclusion on the NC Eligible Training Provider List.
- Out-of-State Providers must show proof of inclusion on their Home-State ETPL.

4. Eligible Training Provider Exemptions

Certain training providers are not subject to the requirements of the ETP provisions, as set forth in WIOA Title I-B Section 122, because they are exempt from ETP requirements. However, it is required that such a training provider's basic information be entered in NCWorks Online.

Training services exempt from the ETP eligibility requirements include:

On-The-Job Training (OJT) - Training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant while engaged in productive work in a job that provides knowledge and skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job and is made available through an OJT program;

- **Customized Training** – Training:

- That is designed to meet the specific requirements of an employer (including a group of employers);
- That is conducted with a commitment by the employer to employ an individual upon successful completion of the training, and;
- For which the employer:
 - Pays a significant portion of the cost of training, as determined by the Local Area WDB involved, taking into account the size of the employer and such other factors as the local board determines to be appropriate, which may include the number of employees participating in training, wage and benefit levels of those employees (at present and anticipated upon completion of the training), relation of the training to the competitiveness of a participant, and other employer-provided training and advancement opportunities; and,
- In the case of customized training involving an employer with locations in multiple local areas in the State, a significant portion of the training cost, as determined by the Governor, takes into account the size of the employer and other factors as the Governor determines to be appropriate.

- **Incumbent Worker Training** – Training designed to assist workers in obtaining the skills necessary to retain employment or avert layoff;
- **Transitional Jobs** – Time-limited work experiences which are to be combined with comprehensive employment and supportive services and are to be designed to help individuals establish a work history, demonstrate success in the workplace, and develop the skills that lead to entry into and retention of unsubsidized employment;
- **Internships and Work Experience** – Planned, structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace for a limited time period. Work experience may be paid or unpaid, as appropriate. An internship or work experience may be arranged within the private (for profit) sector, the non-profit sector, or the public sector.
- Instances where the Local Area WDB provides training services through a pay-for-performance contract, or;
- When circumstances as described in WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(G)(ii) occur, and the Local Area WDB determines that:
- there are insufficient providers, or;

- there is a training services program with demonstrated effectiveness offered in the local area by a community-based organization or other private organization to serve individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, or;
- it would be most appropriate to award a contract to an institution of higher education or other eligible provider of training services in order to facilitate the training of multiple individuals in in-demand industry sectors or occupations, and such contract does not limit customer choice.

All providers and programs that have not previously been eligible to provide training services under WIOA sec. 122 or WIA sec. 134, except for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Programs, must submit required information to be considered for initial eligibility. The requirements to become an eligible training provider apply to all organizations providing WIOA Title I-B training to adults, dislocated workers, and youth with the specific exception of RAs. For RAs, under WIOA, all programs must be included upon request and maintained on the list of ETPs for as long as that program remains registered.

State ETPL Application Process

The State of North Carolina uses a two-tier eligibility determination approach. First, the training provider must be an eligible entity to apply for the ETPL by meeting the State's criteria listed in Part II numbers 1 and 2 of this policy. Second, the training programs offered by the training provider must meet eligibility and performance criteria to be listed on the ETPL.

Under WIOA Title I-B, a training provider must provide verifiable program-specific information based on criteria established by the State. The application process for initial eligibility on the ETPL is as follows:

The training provider must submit a fully completed online application via the State's website, www.ncworks.gov. Further, the provider must submit any required supporting documentation by electronically uploading such documentation into their online application.

The application will include the following required information:

- At least one or more factors for performance [refer to ETP Performance section for details on performance information];
- A description of the degree in which the training provider is in partnership with a business. This could include information about the quality and quantity of employer partnerships;
- A description of the accessibility of all training programs pertaining to physical access, programmatic process, and communications. This includes, but is not limited to, location, delivery of service, and access for individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities;
- Other documentation as needed [refer to the Qualifications for Training Providers section for other documentation information].

- An initial review is conducted by the state's ETP Program Coordinator and/or ETP staff to determine if the training provider is an eligible entity.
- Once the training provider is deemed eligible, the training provider will receive access to key their training program(s) into their NCWorks Online profile for review.
- The training provider will then be instructed to submit each desired program for program review and approval via the virtual one-stop system.
- The application is reviewed by the ETP Program Coordinator and/or ETP staff using a standard ETP Rubric.

Rubric Components include the following factors in determining a quality training program:

- Performance Data
- Partnership(s) with Employer(s)
- In-Demand Occupation/Industry
- Credential obtained upon program completion
- Accessibility of Program
- A determination of eligibility letter will be sent electronically to the training provider.

If approved, a WIOA Eligible Training Provider Agreement and Approved Program List Addendum (ETPL Contract) is sent by the state's ETP Coordinator or ETP Staff to the provider within 30 days of the provider's application submittal.

Once the contract is signed, the State will disseminate the new program listing on the State's website and virtual one-stop system (NCWorks Online).

If denied, the training provider has the right to appeal or reapply when ready.

Registered Apprenticeships & Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs

Registered Apprenticeship (RA) – TEGL 13-16 defines a Registered Apprenticeship as "...a proven model of job preparation that combines paid on-the-job training (OJT) with related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill levels and wages. Registered Apprenticeship is also a business-driven model that provides an effective way for employers to recruit, train, and retain highly skilled workers. It allows employers to develop and apply industry standards to training programs, thereby increasing productivity and the quality of the workforce. As an 'earn and learn' strategy, Registered Apprenticeship offers job seekers immediate employment opportunities that pay sustainable wages and offer advancement along a career path. Graduates of Registered Apprenticeship programs receive nationally-recognized, portable credentials, and their training may be applied toward further post-secondary education."

Registered Apprenticeship Programs are not subject to the same eligibility procedures for ETPL approval. RA Programs are considered eligible, and will be added to the ETPL, if the program sponsor indicates its desire to be on the ETPL. RA Programs will remain on the ETPL for as long as the program remains registered under the National Apprenticeship Act or until the program sponsor notifies the State that it no longer wants to be included.

Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Program (IRAP) – In March 2020, USDOL produced Final Rule 20-386-NAT to define and give specific instructions pertaining to IRAPs. IRAPs are high-quality apprenticeship programs, recognized as such by a third-party entity under standards established by the department in the new rule. Through these programs, individuals will be able to obtain workplace-relevant training and progressively advancing skills that result in an industry-recognized credential, all while getting paid for their work. An IRAP is developed or operated by entities such as trade and industry groups, corporations, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, unions, and joint labor-management organizations. Unlike RA Programs, IRAPs are subject to the same eligibility process and requirements as a standard training provider.

Eligible Program of Training Services

A program of training services may be delivered in person, online, or in a blended approach and is defined, under WIOA, as one or more courses or classes, or a structured regimen that leads to:

- a recognized post-secondary credential, secondary school diploma or its equivalent,

Types of acceptable Credentials:

- Secondary School diploma or equivalent
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree for purposes of the Vocational Rehabilitation program
- Occupational licensure
- Occupational certificate, including RA and Career and Technical Education educational certificates
- Occupational certification
- Other recognized certificates of industry/occupational skills completion sufficient to qualify for entry-level or advancement in employment.
 - employment, or
 - measurable skill gain toward such a credential or employment.

▪ The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) defines a measurable skill gain as one of the following types of gains:

- Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gain
- Attainment of Secondary School Diploma
- Secondary Transcript/Report Card
- Training Milestone
- Skills Progression

Initial Period of Eligibility for Approved Programs

Initial eligibility will be granted for a 12-month period once approved by the State. After the initial period, the training provider is subject to continuing eligibility requirements.

All training programs are subject to re-certification on a one-year or two-year basis, depending on if it is an existing program or a new program, as described in this paragraph. New programs are subject to re-certification one year following the initial ETP approval. Existing programs, or programs that have been previously approved, are subject to a re-certification every two years. This process will incorporate a review of the performance of the Provider and the program if performance data has been previously collected for that program. A review of eligibility documents for the provider will also be performed, in order to keep all documentation current and compliant with Federal/State law. If all areas are in order, and the provider has updated the Cost Details and any other pertinent program information, ETP program staff will approve the training program in NCWorks Online. Email messages will be sent via NCWorks.gov automatically to alert Providers of key dates regarding approved programs.

Technology-Based Learning

Training providers using technology-based learning, also referred to as **distance, online, web-based, or computer-based** learning, must meet the following requirements:

- Training providers offering distance learning programs must be licensed to provide training in the State of North Carolina.
- Training providers must have a platform for student interaction with an instructor or instructors.
- Training providers must ensure periodic assessment of each student.
- Training providers' policy must describe the responsibilities of each party (training provider, participant) to the distance learning experience.
- Training providers must have procedures in place for tracking student's participation in the training program.
- Training providers must comply with any additional requirements determined by the Local Area WDB.

Criteria for Determining Program Eligibility

State Criteria – In establishing criteria pursuant to WIOA Sec. 122(b)(1), the State shall consider each of the following: *(An addendum will be created and added to this policy at a later date to provide more clarity to the following areas.)*

- Performance Accountability and Outcomes
- Ensure access to training services throughout the State (including use of technology)
- Dissemination of the training provider's Performance Outcomes and training information
- Training must lead to "In-Demand" industry occupations and sectors
- State licensing requirements and licensing status of providers
- Provider's ability to offer industry-recognized certificates and credentials
- Provider's ability to offer programs that lead to a recognized post-secondary credential
- Quality of the program of training services
- Ability to serve individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities
- Other including:
 - Compliance
 - Informed Choice
 - Providers must meet the needs of local employers and participants
 - Accountability of providers

Local Criteria: The Local Area WDBs may establish criteria and information requirements in addition to the criteria and information requirements established by the State or may require higher levels of performance than required by the State for purposes of determining eligibility for providers of training services to receive funds. The criteria set by each Local Area WDB will be described in its corresponding ETP policy.

Criteria for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Program Inclusion

The inclusion process for a RA program begins once a RA indicates they wish to be placed on the ETPL. At that time, the RA must supply the following information to the State:

- Occupations included in the RA
- The name and address of the RA sponsor
- The name and address of related technical instruction provider and location of instruction if different from the program sponsor's address
- The method and length of instruction and;
- The number of active apprentices

The RAs are automatically eligible to be included in the state's ETPL and are exempt from eligibility and performance requirements. (Note that Pre-Apprenticeship programs do not have the same automatic ETP status. [20 CFR Sec. 680.470]) Any voluntarily provided performance data will be provided by the State Apprenticeship Agency. Once on the state ETPL, RAs will be included and maintained on the list until:

- the RA notifies the State agency that it no longer wants to be included on the list.
- the program becomes deregistered under the National Apprenticeship Act.
- the program is determined to have intentionally supplied inaccurate information.
- a determination is made that the RA substantially violated any provision of Title I of WIOA or the WIOA regulations, including 29 CFR part 38.

Program Costs

An eligible training provider must make available to the prospective students its schedules of tuition and fees. The institution shall disclose all fees required to be paid by students (including tuition, required fees, books, supplies, activities, etc.), and any non-refundable fees must be so identified. A reduction in tuition, fees, or other charges may be implemented when there are specific criteria for student eligibility and selection procedures precisely disclosed within the policy at the institution. All students within the enrollment period that the reduction is offered shall be eligible to apply. The cost of the training to WIOA participants must not exceed the cost charged to any other student in the program. All costs necessary for successful completion of a program must be clearly stated. A breakdown of cost must be identified for publication on the ETPL. A breakdown may include the following:

- Tuition
- Fees
- Books
- Licensing cost
- Certificate fees
- Graduation fees
- Uniforms
- Tools
- Registration fees
- Supplies

Publication of ETPL

[ETA TEGL 08-19 pg. I-8]

WIOA requires that the State disseminate the statewide list of all eligible training providers and accompanying performance and cost information to WDBs and to the public. The State of North Carolina will post the list on its Virtual One-Stop System (NCWorks Online). Individuals, counselors, and providers will have direct access to the list.

Training providers will appear on the statewide ETPL after verification by the State to determine eligibility. As new programs, and providers, are verified and approved, the statewide list will be updated on an ongoing basis. If a program is removed from the list, the WDB will cease to approve additional Individual Training Accounts for that program, and the ineligible program will be removed from the statewide list.

The State ETPL must be accompanied by appropriate information to assist participants in choosing employment and training activities. Such information must include the following, disaggregated by local areas served, as applicable:

- Recognized post-secondary credential(s) offered;
- Provider information supplied to meet the State's eligibility procedure;
- Performance and cost information aligned with the time periods; and,
- Additional information as determined by the State as follows:
- Program length including number of units such as credits, hours, weeks, or semesters needed to earn the credential(s) offered.
- Program Service/Location and type
- Class/Faculty size
- Program prerequisites
- Target occupations
- Program description, and
- Additional information as deemed appropriate.

Solicitation of Training Providers

The State and each Local Area WDB may solicit an invitation to training providers to submit applications to apply for status as approved training providers. This solicitation may be done through various appropriate methods, including, but not limited to, mailings, email, phone conversations, and in-person meetings. The State may also solicit training providers from outside of the State.

Continuing Eligibility

Eligible training providers that were determined to be initially eligible under WIOA Title I-B will be subject to the application procedure for continued eligibility when their initial year of eligibility expires. In addition, all providers previously approved under Continuing Eligibility will have a review at least every two years to determine continuing eligibility status.

Application Process

Initially, one month prior to the expiration of the initial period of eligibility, eligible training providers must submit a new and completed ETP application on the State's virtual one-stop system (NCWorks Online), and for each program for which recertification is sought. The training provider must confirm all detailed program information listed. To maintain eligibility status, training providers must submit any such information as the State may request to adequately prepare the performance information for each training program for which continued eligibility is being sought.

In determining continuing eligibility status, the State will take into consideration the following elements:

1. Changes in Organization/Provider Information:

- Business Requirements
- Accreditation/licensure renewals, if necessary
- Updated Certificate of Insurance
- Out-of-State Providers must remain on their Home-State ETPL to remain on North Carolina's ETPL
- Updates and/or changes in refund or grievance policies, if any;

2. Changes in Program Information:

- Schedule changes
- Curriculum updates
- Match against In-Demand List
- Credential offered
- Review of business partners that affect the program; and

The performance of providers of training services on the performance accountability measures described in WIOA Sec 116(b)(2)(A)(i)(I-IV). This includes the timeliness and accuracy of the eligible training provider's performance reports. The State reserves the right to establish minimum performance standards. Until the performance data for all accountability measures are available, the State may consider alternate factors related to performance for that accountability measure. Once training providers have two years of performance outcomes using the WIOA performance indicators specified in section 116, the State will then take them into account.

1. To ensure equity throughout the State, these factors will be taken into consideration when determining eligibility:

2.

- a. Specific economic, geographic, and demographic factors in the local area for which providers are seeking continued eligibility; and

- b. Characteristics of the populations served, including demonstrated difficulties in serving these populations.

Upon review of the factors above, the State will determine if the program maintains eligibility. Continued eligibility status will be confirmed and transmitted to each provider through the NCWorks Online email messaging system.

A continuing eligibility review must be conducted at least once every two years from the date of any prior continuing eligibility review.

1. Continuing Eligibility Review for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) and Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs)

RAs that have initially indicated their desire to be placed on the State ETPL are not subject to the same continuing eligibility and performance requirements of the State's ETPL policy.

Note: Pre-Apprenticeship programs do not have the same automatic ETP status. [20 CFR sec. 680.470].

The biennial review of provider eligibility will include verification of the registration status of RA and removal of any programs as described in 20 CFR Sec 680.470. Any voluntarily provided performance data on RAs will be provided by the State Registered Apprenticeship Agency. Once on the State ETPL, RAs will be included and maintained on the list until:

- the RA notifies the State agency that it no longer wants to be included on the list.
- the program becomes deregistered under the National Apprenticeship Act.
- the program is determined to have intentionally supplied inaccurate information.
- a determination is made that the RA substantially violated any provision of Title I of WIOA or the WIOA regulations, including 29 CFR part 38.

Unlike RA Programs, IRAPs will be held to the same recertification process as all other Eligible Training Providers.

Eligible Training Provider Performance

1. Background

In accordance with WIOA section 116 and regulations at 20 CFR 677.230 and 20 CFR 680.490, North Carolina is required to report performance information about ETPs to USDOL ETA. This requirement covers all three WIOA Title I programs: Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth. Further, as noted previously, all waivers regarding the reporting of data for all participants (not solely WIOA participants) have expired. This means that starting with PY 2021 (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022), all approved programs of study that appear on North Carolina's ETPL must have data submitted not only for the WIOA participants within the program, but also for every individual in that program of study regardless of WIOA participation status.

2. Annual Performance Data Submission

Performance reporting for ETPL will be comprised of data from multiple sources:

- NCWorks Online, North Carolina's chosen case management platform
- Provider initial application and recertification documentation
- Data submitted directly from providers

The ETPL contains approved programs of study. This means that a single training provider may have more than one program of study appearing on the ETPL. Therefore, as outlined in TEGL 03-18, providers "must submit data to the State for all of their approved programs in a manner that allows the State to generate and report separate records for each program of study." Further, this policy applies to all programs of study on the ETPL, including those programs that did not serve WIOA participants during the reporting period. In other words, if a program of study appears on the ETPL during a given reporting period, providers will be required to submit data for that program of study, whether or not WIOA participants made use of that program of study.

The State will collect performance data from eligible training providers on an annual basis. Under 20 CFR 680.460, ETPs are required to report the data requested by the State as a criterion of continued eligibility on North Carolina's ETPL. To make this process as easy as possible for providers, North Carolina will be offering a downloadable MS Excel spreadsheet that will enable easy data uploading. The spreadsheet is formatted with tabs for each of a provider's approved programs of study. The provider need only complete the Excel tab for each program, and that will provide the State all of the necessary information to complete its required reporting. The required data elements on the MS Excel spreadsheet are as follows:

- **SSN** – the participant's nine-digit Social Security Number[1]
- **Start Date** – the participant's enrollment date in the approved program of study
- **Status** – the participant's status in the approved program of study; options include Enrolled, Completed, Withdrawn, or Transferred
- **Exit Date** – the date the participant left the approved program of study (those with a status of Completed, Withdrawn, or Transferred)
- **Credential** – a Yes/No/Unknown response on whether the participant attained the credential tied to the approved program of study

3. Performance Data for Initial and Continued Eligibility and Program Quality

For training providers applying for initial or continued eligibility, one of the required factors that the State must consider is performance. This is essential, ensuring that North Carolina maintains a list of high-quality training providers, and enables participants to make informed decisions on the types of training that will lead to their individual success.

For North Carolina, the performance metrics being used to evaluate a provider's performance include:

- Employment Q2: the percentage of all program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program

- Employment Q4: the percentage of all program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program
- Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit: the median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
- Credential Attainment: the percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent

Note: The State acknowledges that obtaining timely and accurate information regarding employment is difficult and may represent an undue burden on training providers. The State will work with providers, individually, to develop a corrective action plan to address data collection. Providers and programs will maintain eligibility throughout the corrective action process.

The minimum levels of performance required will be noted in both the initial and continued eligibility applications.

In addition to the performance metrics noted above, in an effort to maintain the highest quality list of training providers, North Carolina may also consider these additional factors:

- The degree in which the training program relates to in-demand industry sectors and occupations
- Length and cost
- Training delivery method including reasonable access for:
 - individuals who are employed
 - individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities and
 - how easily accessed the program is in rural areas
- Credentials:
 - is the credential highly valued by employers/industries?
 - are they required for specific occupations?
 - Training program completion rates
 - Participant outcome information including the percentage of participants who entered unsubsidized employment in an occupation directly related to the program of training.

Insufficient Performance Data

In the event the training provider does not have the required performance data, it must 1) show good cause as to why the data is unavailable and 2) provide alternative information that demonstrates compliance with State eligibility criteria. “Good cause” should include:

- The training program is new and data on past performance is not available;

- Only partial performance data is available;
- Collection of data will cause excessive costs and/or hardship for the training provider during the initial eligibility; and/or
- Other reasonable circumstances that may cause data to be unavailable.

If the required and alternate information cannot be provided, DWS ETP staff will provide technical assistance to allow the provider an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to meet eligibility criteria. DWS ETP staff will assist the provider in developing a plan of action with an appropriate timeline to be determined on an individual basis. If the provider is unresponsive or unable to meet the requirements set forth by the agreement, the following penalties will be enforced:

- 1st Offense – 90-day suspension from NC ETPL
- 2nd Offense – One-year suspension from NC ETPL
- 3rd Offense – Three-year suspension from NC ETPL
- 4th Offense – Permanent disqualification from NC ETPL

When the Training Providers who did not submit performance data are deactivated, the ETP staff will have 10 business days to inform the providers via email. The email will consist of the cause of deactivation, their right to an appeal, the date the written notice of appeal should be received by the ETP Coordinator, and the appropriate penalty associated with the level of Offense.

4. Alternate Performance Information

Until the performance data for each accountability measure is available, the State may consider alternate factors related to performance for that accountability measure if the information is substantially similar to the information otherwise required. In considering alternate factors related to performance, the State may set minimal performance criteria, use existing available data, or develop other proxies as appropriate. Once training providers have two years of performance outcomes using the WIOA performance indicators specified in section 116, the providers will be expected to supply the originally required information.

Supplemental data may include documentation on self-employment and self-reported earnings, a copy of a W-2 form or pay stub that documents employment during the time period in the measure.

Notice of Ineligibility, Suspension, Termination of Eligible Training Providers, and Complaints from Participants against Training Providers

1. Complaints from Participants

If a participant wishes to file a complaint against a Training Provider, DWS staff and/or Local Area WDB staff must refer to NCWorks Commission Policy Statement Number CPS 08-2021.

DWS ETP Program Coordinator and staff, DWS Ombudsman, and the Local Area WDB will work transparently through the investigation process to ensure:

- a safe process is provided for the complainant.
- a thorough and efficient investigation into the allegations has been performed to determine the appropriate action.

2. Initial Eligibility Denials

A training provider may be denied initial eligibility for the following reasons:

- The application is not complete, or information was not provided in a timely manner;
- The training provider does not meet the WIOA definition of an eligible training entity;
- The training program does not meet the WIOA definition of an eligible training service;
- The training program does not result in a WIOA recognized credential;
- Performance data is not included with the application;
- The training program does not support in-demand occupations and/or sectors identified through labor market analysis;
- The training provider is not in compliance with the WIOA statute, regulations, or any agreement executed under WIOA law;
- The State or Local Area WDB determines that the training provider intentionally supplied inaccurate information.

3. Reapplication

When a training provider or program is denied for any reason other than lack of documentation or information, the provider must wait six months to reapply.

4. Denial Notice

Within 10 business days after the State determines that a training provider's application does not meet the eligibility criteria, the State shall issue a denial notice to the training provider.

The notice shall be emailed to the training provider at the email address listed on the application and to the attention of the contact person identified on the application. The notice shall clearly:

- display the "date emailed";
- identify the program that was denied or terminated;
- state specific reason(s) for the action; and
- state the training provider has the right to appeal within 30 calendar days of the date the notice is emailed.

5. Suspension/Removal

A training program may be removed from the ETPL for the following reasons:

- The State determines that the training provider supplied inaccurate information;
- The training program no longer meets the WIOA definition of occupational skills training;
- The program does not meet minimum performance standards once established. If there are not students enrolled in the training program during the past year, there will be no performance data to review for continued eligibility. The State must examine the demand for the related occupation to determine if there is still a demand for it and decide whether to keep the program on the ETPL for another year.

A training provider may be removed from the ETPL for a substantial violation of the requirement to timely and accurately submit all of the information required for completion of the eligible training provider performance reports and all of the information required for initial and continued eligibility. The following are all considered substantial violations:

- Intentionally supplying inaccurate or false information;
- A 3rd Offense or greater of a training provider failing to provide complete performance data as discussed in the *Insufficient Performance Data* section of the policy
- Substantially violating a provision of WIOA Title I or its implementing regulations;
- Failure to meet required performance outcomes;
- Failure to abide by the equal opportunity and nondiscrimination requirements under WIOA Section 188;
- Failure to comply with monitoring and audits;
- Failure to maintain required licenses and accreditation requirements;
- Failure to comply with all applicable provisions in the ETPL contract and/or policy; or
- Other just cause.

6. Notification and Termination Letter

Within 10 days after the State determines that a training provider is in violation of any of the reasons indicated above, a notice of violation or finding shall be issued by the State, requiring the development of a corrective action plan. The letter should include a detailed description of the violation or finding, an invitation to work collaboratively to develop a mutually agreed upon corrective action plan, and a specific timeframe of 14 days to respond to the notification. If the training provider fails to respond, a termination letter will then be issued.

The termination notice shall be mailed to the training provider at the address listed on the application and to the attention of the contact person identified on the application.

The notice shall clearly:

- display the “date mailed”;

- identify the violation or finding;
- state specific reason(s) for the action; and
- state the training provider has the right to appeal within 30 calendar days of the date indicated on the notice. When a training program is removed from the State ETPL, WIOA participants currently enrolled in the program may complete their training as outlined in their WIOA Individual Employment Plan (IEP) unless the program or provider has lost state licensing, certification, or authorization to operate by the appropriate state oversight agency.

Note: The State reserves the right to terminate a provider based on prior violation history if violations reoccur. The State will bypass the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) process and send a termination letter to the training provider if the evidence gathered during the investigation does prove gross negligence on behalf of the training provider occurred. The training provider will have 30 days from the date of the termination letter to appeal. A due process hearing will be set up for a final ruling on whether the training provider will be allowed to remain on the State ETPL.

7. Corrective Action Plan (CAP)

The State and the Eligible Training Provider must develop a mutually agreed upon CAP, if the provider is:

- found in violation of their contract, or
- if the provider is requesting technical assistance to become compliant.

8. Prior to Plan Development:

If the provider is found in violation of the contract, the State must identify the finding and how it was acquired. Examples include, but are not limited to, Local Area WDB's monitoring report, State's compliance and monitoring report, continuing eligibility review, and information reported through an anonymous tip or random review; i.e., secret shopper, Secretary of State website check, or other means that provides evidence of potential non-compliance with ETPL contract provisions or ETPL policy.

Identify which law or provision is being violated. Gather supporting documents and/or conduct interviews (if necessary) to determine if the finding or allegation of wrongdoing is factually based. This will determine whether the provider can continue to receive referrals during the CAP process or not.

9. Notification Letter:

The State will send a letter via mail within 10 business days of determining a violation has occurred. The letter should include what the violation or allegation is, an invitation to develop a corrective action plan, and specific timeframe of 14 days to respond to the notification. If the training provider chooses not to respond to the letter, it is confirming its decision to withdraw participation from the ETPL.

10. Development of CAP:

The training provider, along with assistance from the State, must develop a corrective action plan. The CAP will serve as a reapplication and should contain the following:

- Details of discussion; date, time, method of communication (phone, in-person meeting, online meeting, etc.), persons involved in discussion, and relevant details;
- Description of circumstances;
- Description of steps that will be taken to rectify the situation, including procedural changes to prevent reoccurrence;
- Appropriate timeframe to achieve completion/resolution;
- Depending on severity of issue, time frames will vary
- An evaluation of progress must be periodically conducted. The State will determine the date(s) of progress evaluation, based on the severity of the issue and the complexity of the actions necessary to achieve completion/resolution.

11. Repayment of Program Funds

A provider of training services whose eligibility is terminated due to the termination causes displayed above, shall be liable for the repayment of funds of all adult, dislocated worker, and youth funds received under Title I-B of WIOA during the period of noncompliance. [Ref. Act Sec 122(f)(1)(c)] No repayment funds should be collected from the training provider until the opportunity to appeal is over, which is 90 days from the date of the initial denial notice.

12. Appeal Hearing Process

Following issuance of a denial of eligibility, determination of suspension, or termination of eligibility, the training provider will have 30 days in which to submit an appeal to the DWS. Within 30 days of the receipt of the appeal, the training provider will be notified of the date, time, and place where a due process hearing will be conducted. After that hearing, a final decision will be issued within 30 days.

The Appeals Hearing Panel will consist of staff who serve a one-year rotating term and shall be represented in the following manner:

1. One DWS Management representative
2. One Local Area WDB Director or a designee of the WDB Director
3. One Regional Director

All appeals must be forwarded, in writing, to the following address:

NC Division of Workforce Solutions

Attn: ETP Program Coordinator

4316 Mail Service Center

Raleigh, NC 27699-4316

4. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR FOR THE ADULT PRIORITY OF SERVICE REQUIREMENT IN WIOA SECTION 134 (C)(3)(E) THAT REQUIRES AMERICAN JOB CENTER STAFF, WHEN USING WIOA ADULT PROGRAM FUNDS TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES, TO GIVE PRIORITY OF SERVICE TO RECIPIENTS OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT (INCLUDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS).

The State has a process in place to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of career and training services to individuals who are Veterans with barriers to employment, low-income, public assistance recipients or basic skills deficient. In addition, the State requires that Workforce Development Boards describe in their annual plan a description of their priority of services processes, including any related policies, to meet priority of service requirements for Adult Training Services.

Efforts to ensure that special populations receive much needed services are addressed through North Carolina's integrated services delivery (ISD) approach. As part of ISD, community resource staff are assigned to each career center. These staff are knowledgeable of specific program(s) and work to provide services and resources such as transportation, food, housing, and training opportunities.

The State's Field Services Teams continuously monitor special population priority, for compliance, using North Carolina's management information system (MIS), NCWorks Online, along with face-to-face interviews, using a comprehensive monitoring tool.

DWS has provided priority of service notification to all Local Workforce Boards. During annual program audits, Program Monitors with the DWS Accountability Unit will review a sample size of cases to see that local areas are adhering to WIOA sec. 134 (c)(3)(E). The process for the monitoring will focus on reviewing notations in NCWorks where jobseekers may self-disclose that they are receiving public assistance during the welcome/intake process. Modifying the Priority of Service model used to serve our Veteran population, NCWorks Career Center staff will provide these services to these customers. DWS is looking to see how the EEO function may be able to assist with providing guidance in the process.

5. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

The State has implemented Operational Guidance for the transfer of local WIOA funds between the Adult and Dislocated Worker funding streams. The guidance establishes procedures to manage transfers and to facilitate accurate reporting to the U.S. Department of Labor. The guidance dictates that while 100% transfer is allowable, local workforce development areas are reminded that appropriate services to both dislocated workers and adult customers are required. Local areas are to include rationale for requesting transfer and explanation of how services to adults and dislocated workers will be maintained, along with meeting priority of service requirements. 100% transferability gives local workforce areas:

- more flexibility to move funds where they are most needed and can provide the greatest benefit;

- ability to better respond to ongoing changes within local areas;
- increased local control over program design and delivery;
- enhanced collaboration between industry needs and worker training;
- more ability to leverage non-WIOA resources; and
- better control in the implementation of WIOA programs and services to best to meet both employer and participant need.

The State has established criteria, issued through DWS Operational Guidance for determining when transfer of funds is appropriate. Local Areas must submit requests via the State's online Workforce Information System Enterprise (WISE) system. Once the request has been received by the State, it will be reviewed within 5 business days to determine approval or denial of request. All requests must include the following:

- Reason for transfer request, including current service level information,
- Listing of other Local Area funding availability to serve the A/DW population (i.e., NDWG, other Federal or State funding, other Special Grant funding).
- Statement that participants served with transferred funds will be subject to performance outcomes of new funding source.
- Statement that all funds transfers are subject to priority of service requirements. Upon review, Local Areas will receive written notification.

Please see DWS Operational Guidance regarding transfer of funds for additional information.

<https://www.nccommerce.com/documents/operational-guidance-og-21-2021-funds-transfer-between-adult-and-dislocated-worker>

6. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S POLICY ON WIOA AND TAA CO-ENROLLMENT AND WHETHER AND HOW OFTEN THIS POLICY IS DISSEMINATED TO THE LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS AND REQUIRED ONE-STOP PARTNERS. TRADE ACT SEC. 239(F), SEC. 235, 20 CFR 618.325, 20 CFR 618.824(A)(3)(I).

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solution (DWS) OG 03-2021, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Co-enrollment with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Dislocated Worker Program introduces strategies to strengthen participant outcomes for TAA and WIOA participants by increasing access to multiple services to benefit the long-term success of program participants through simultaneous admission known as co-enrollment. In cases where Rapid Response is not triggered at the state level, Local Business Service Representatives are notified of the TAA petition filing and the statutory requirement to ensure that States provide Rapid Response and appropriate career services to petitioners as mandated in the WIOA Final Rule at §§ 682.302(d) and 682.330(i). New and updated operational guidance is distributed via email and permanently accessible on the division's intranet.

7. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S FORMAL STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT WIOA AND TAA CO-ENROLLED PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE NECESSARY FUNDED BENEFITS AND SERVICES. TRADE ACT SEC. 239(F), SEC. 235, 20 CFR 618.816(C)

The assessment process forms the basis for determining which TAA Program benefits and services, including training, are most appropriate to enable trade-affected workers to successfully become re-employed. If an assessment has already been administered by a partner program, it must be reviewed once a worker becomes a trade-affected worker to ensure it has the required components as listed in § 618.335 for an initial assessment and, if necessary, § 618.345 for a comprehensive and specialized assessment. Both WIOA and TAA programs are involved in developing a participant's IEP. The individual employment plan (IEP) is an individualized career service plan, under WIOA sec. 134(c)(2)(A)(xii)(II), that is developed jointly by the participant and career planner when determined appropriate by the one-stop center or one-stop partner. The plan is an ongoing strategy to identify employment goals, achievement objectives, and an appropriate combination of services for the participant to achieve their employment goals by utilizing all available resources, benefits and services.

8. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S PROCESS FOR FAMILIARIZING ONE-STOP STAFF WITH THE TAA PROGRAM. 20 CFR 618.804(J), 20 CFR 618.305

TAA state staff in collaboration with Regional Analysts provide periodic training to designated staff in one-stop centers in accordance to TAA rules and regulation in order to effectively administer the TAA program. This training is in person, virtually, one-on-one, and/or in group settings. Trainings are also available at any time on the NCWorks Training Center <https://www.ncworkforcetraining.com/>.

C. YOUTH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.

With respect to youth workforce investment activities authorized in section 129 of WIOA, States should describe their strategies that will support the implementation of youth activities under WIOA. State's must-

1. IDENTIFY THE STATE-DEVELOPED CRITERIA TO BE USED BY LOCAL BOARDS IN AWARDING GRANTS OR CONTRACTS FOR YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AND DESCRIBE HOW THE LOCAL BOARDS WILL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE ABILITY OF THE PROVIDERS TO MEET PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES BASED ON PRIMARY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE FOR THE YOUTH PROGRAM AS DESCRIBED IN SECTION 116(B)(2)(A)(II) OF WIOA.¹¹ FURTHER, INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL AREAS IN DETERMINING WHETHER TO CONTRACT FOR SERVICES OR TO PROVIDE SOME OR ALL OF THE PROGRAM ELEMENTS DIRECTLY.

¹¹ Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(i)(V)

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

coordinating the delivery of the youth services with local employers, NCWorks Career Centers and other youth services already available in the community.

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

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

Local Workforce Development Boards will follow the procurement procedures set forth in their own local comprehensive regional plan as established by each local area to ensure proper competition and transparency.

Outlined in State policy and Section 107(g)(1)(A) of WIOA, Workforce Development Boards shall not provide training services to customers. The state policy currently is Commission Policy Statement 04-2022. This requirement is reiterated in 20 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 679.410(b). A Workforce Development Board acting as a direct provider of services is not optimal, as the Workforce Development Board is designed to oversee the One-Stop System and its services, not provide them. Local Workforce Development Boards must competitively procure these training services in compliance with all state and federal regulations. Each local Workforce Development Board must competitively procure Youth services and maintain a very clear and distinct firewall between the Workforce Development Board and the services delivered to customers. If the competitive procurement process fails, the local Workforce Development Board may seek other noncompetitive options for the first year or request a waiver from the State to allow it to provide training services directly to customers. Procurement of WIOA funded Youth Services requires the selection of youth providers through a competitive selection process. Each local Workforce Development Board, with recommendations from its designated youth committee and in accordance with criteria outlined in the local WIOA Plan, is afforded the opportunity to identify providers of youth services that effectively address the needs of local youth.

Local Youth Committees, who serve as sub-committees to the Board, may play a significant role in developing programs and services for youth. Their responsibilities include developing portions of the local plan related to eligible youth and making recommendations to local Workforce Development Boards regarding youth service providers. As part of the local plan, each local area must have written criteria to identify effective youth activities and providers. The local Workforce Development Boards fund youth providers based on performance and

program cost data provided by potential providers and based on criteria that may include those youth activities and providers that:

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

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

Targeted activities include employment opportunities available throughout the school year as well as during the summer months so that young adults have access to work experiences and Local Areas can expend required funds for in school and out of school youth in addition to having the following services available as appropriate:

1. Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized post-secondary credential;
2. Alternative secondary school services, or dropout recovery services, as appropriate;
3. Paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component, academic and occupational education, which may include:

- a. Summer employment opportunities and other employment available throughout the school year;
 - b. pre-apprenticeship programs;
 - c. registered apprenticeship programs
 - d. internships and job shadowing; and
 - e. on-the-job training opportunities;
4. Occupational skills training, which shall include priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized post-secondary credentials that are aligned with in demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area involved, if the local Board determines that the programs meet the quality criteria described in section 123;
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 post-secondary education and training.

Each local Workforce Development Board shall ensure that each participant be provided information on the full array of applicable or appropriate services available through the local Workforce Development Board, other providers, one-stop partners, including those providers or partners receiving funds under this subtitle; and referral to appropriate training and educational programs that have the capacity to serve the participant either on a sequential or concurrent basis. The North Carolina local Plan Instructions and 20 CFR §681.470 states that it is not required for local programs to use funds for each program element. Local Area WDB programs may leverage partner resources to provide program elements. However, if the program is not funded with WIOA youth funds, the Local Area WDB must have an agreement in

place with a partner organization to ensure that the program element will be offered and be identified in the local area Plan Youth Program Elements Chart. If offered by a partner, the program element must be connected and coordinated with the WIOA youth program and be identified in the local area Plan. The Plan Instructions are an annual occurrence and enfolded in a Commission Policy Statement.

The local Workforce Development Boards must comply with the most restrictive local, state, or federal regulations for the procurement process. The current procurement policy can be found in Commission Policy Statement 02-2022. At a minimum, the procurement process must ensure, but is not limited to:

- Procurement follows local Workforce Development Board written policies and procedures;
- Solicitation methods that promote fair and open competition, such as a request for proposal (RFP);
- Written code of conduct that includes arms-length negotiations, specific conflict of interest provisions to ensure those who develop or issue a proposal are separate and distinct from those who are involved in the selection process;
- Clear and accurate description of the services being procured;
- Must provide an opportunity to Small, Minority and Women's (SMW) Business' organizations and labor surplus suppliers to participate in its procurement process;
- Specific contract time frame with the option to extend the contract for a specified period based on a provider's compliance with the terms of the contract; and
- Local Workforce Development Boards shall maintain records sufficient to detail the significant history of procurement.

In addition, each local Workforce Development Board use the following criteria in awarding contracts for youth services:

- Proposals state the extent to which the organization specifically focuses on serving at-risk youth, including youth who are at risk of school dropout or at-risk of school displacement due to suspension or expulsion;
- Proposals state whether the organization leverages community-based resources, including partnerships with organizations that provide mentoring services and private-sector employment involvement;
- Proposals illustrate the use of an evidenced-based program models by the organization, with a proven track record of success;
- Proposals illustrate experience in operating programs and demonstrated ability to perform services required in the request for proposal including but not limited to financial capabilities and past performance measures negotiated by the State;
- Proposals illustrate staff identified to carry out project supervision, property management, fiscal management, internal program management, compliance

monitoring, performance measure reviews for measures as described in WIOA Section 116, and equal opportunity and affirmative action compliance.

WIOA has established core performance indicators to ensure that Federal investments in employment and training programs are accountable to job seekers, employers, customers, and taxpayers, see Table 1. There is a 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.

Through the annual local Plan Instructions process, Local Workforce Development Boards are asked to examine their primary WIOA negotiated performance indicators. This is an example of an opportunity to assess their status and report on factors that impact their performance both positively and negatively to the State in addition to assess strategies that are in place to maintain or improve performance and specifically meet the Measurable Skills Gains measure. In addition, the local Workforce Development Boards are asked questions about eligible training providers.

It is expected that each local Workforce Development Board will meet or exceed the negotiated individual federal performance level. For WIOA programs, to be considered passing for each Average Program Score, a Workforce Development Board must average 90.0% of the goals across the program's performance indicators. Workforce Development Boards are encouraged to monitor their performance using NCWorks.gov and NCWorks Performs (FutureWorks) to assess performance against goals. NCWorks Performs allows Workforce Development Boards to keep watch over key performance indicators. The Boards can share successes or identify specific areas where they may need to direct their performance focus and look for performance patterns. Workforce Development Boards can have conversations with high-performing Boards to learn about their success, use real-time data, assign resources where they are most needed, and do more to make sure they take into consideration the ability of the providers to meet performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance for the youth program.

In addition, the State office attended the U.S. Employment and Training Administration (ETA) 2023 Performance Accountability Training and stays abreast of information through other trainings, Training and Employment Guidance Letters, and information offered through WorkforceGPS, so they are able to serve as a resource for technical assistance for local Workforce Development Boards.

N.C. State WIOA Performance Indicators – Table 1		
Category	Measure	Description
Youth	Employment Rate -2nd Quarter After Exit	The percentage of participants who are in education or training services, or in unsubsidized employment during the 2nd quarter after exit.
	Employment Rate - 4th Quarter After Exit	The percentage of participants who are in education or training services, or in unsubsidized employment during the 4th quarter after exit.
	Median Earnings	The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2nd quarter after exit.
	Credential Attainment	The number of participants who exited during the reporting period who obtained a recognized postsecondary credential during the program or within one year after exit OR those who were in a secondary education program and obtained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent during the program or within one year after exit and were also employed, or in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after exit.
	Measurable Skill Gains (MSG)	The percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.
Employers	Effectiveness in Serving Employers: Repeat Business Customers	Percentage of employers who have used WIOA core program services more than once during the last three reporting periods.
	Effectiveness in Serving Employers: Employer Penetration Rate	Percentage of employers using WIOA core program services out of all employers in the State

2. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS IN ACHIEVING EQUITABLE RESULTS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND IN-SCHOOL YOUTH. DESCRIBE PROMISING PRACTICES OR PARTNERSHIP MODELS THAT LOCAL AREAS ARE IMPLEMENTING AND THE STATE'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING AND SCALING THOSE MODELS WITHIN THE STATE FOR BOTH IN-SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH.

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

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

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

The State intends to achieve improved outcomes for Out of School Youth by implementing an increased focus in monitoring service providers and performance levels and providing technical assistance to local Workforce Development Boards. The State participates in meetings with local Youth Leads, offers technical assistance, and assists with presentations on best practices panels on topics which include outreach, predicated on evidenced based research and keep Local Areas abreast of national best practices by circulating WorkforceGPS and other articles.

To support promising practices and scale projects, WIOA allows funding to be used for special projects relevant to workforce and labor market conditions that exist in the State. Funds may be used for innovative programs, strategies and demonstration projects related to meeting the education and employment needs of eligible youth. In addition, funds may also be used for supporting the development of alternative, evidence-based programs and other activities that enhance the choices available to eligible youth and encourage such youth to re-enter and complete secondary education, enroll in postsecondary education and advanced training, progress through a career pathway, and to enter unsubsidized employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency. The State has previously designated funds for special statewide youth initiative grants and will strive to do so in the future. These grants are consistent with the U.S. Department of Labor's (USDOL) commitment to providing high quality services for youth and young adults beginning with embracing virtual concepts, teleworking, intake and assessment, career exploration and guidance. In addition, the grants provide continued support for educational attainment, opportunities for skills training in in-demand industries and occupations and culminating with career employment via career pathway or enrollment in post-

secondary education that provide training opportunities, pre-apprenticeships, internships, and job placement assistance programs for America's youth. The grants also allow for an opportunity to promote positive and safe work experiences for young workers; and improve transition outcomes of youth and young adults with disabilities toward successful employment and adulthood.

It is important for disconnected youth to be able to obtain credentials for career employment in jobs that are in demand locally. North Carolina's youth grants are an opportunity to provide resources for the Local Area Workforce Development Board to expand services in the local region, equipment and software for social media, videos for advanced resumes, career expos and more. The State supports innovation at both the system design and service delivery levels. These grants present an opportunity for local Workforce Development Boards to create systemic change within their workforce systems that improves services, better aligns activities across programs and achieve equitable results for In-School and Out-of-School Youth. North Carolina has promising practices in place that support apprenticeship preparation, expanding the need of rural underserved areas and keeping youth in their local rural areas after being trained by choosing a career pathway right for them.

One example of a grant funded youth initiative is #worklocal. The #worklocal initiative highlights individuals that graduated in Northeastern NC and obtained positions locally that are sustainable with promising career ladders and working with the E3 Initiative: Enroll More Youth, Expose Youth to Local Careers & Ensure Stronger Completion Rates. The grants main goal is to expand Northeastern's #worklocal initiative by adding several elements aimed at increasing Enrollment in the NextGen program through targeted digital outreach and a new partnership with the College of the Albemarle, increasing Exposure to local career opportunities within the certified career pathways, and Ensuring stronger rates of positive outcomes within the NextGen program through more focused mentoring opportunities and the development of cohorts that will foster a deeper sense of community among our Youth. Focusing on these elements will help fill the gaps that lead young people in the region to leave and ensure sustainable and strong local economies for today and tomorrow. This is a promising practice that now can be shared among the local Workforce Development Boards across the State.

Another model is NextGen Outreach- Presenting a new lease on Life. This model raises awareness, creates interest, and promotes growth and self-sufficiency of NextGen customers. The model provides solutions that meet the needs of rural underserved areas to address the needs of technology, affords training and employment opportunities and engages youth in the workforce system leading to self-sufficiency.

The third model is the Apprenticeship Prep Program (APP) model. Youth apprenticeships offer an effective solution with long-term benefits—not only for the apprentices themselves, but also for the employers and communities whose future prosperity will rely on them. The Apprenticeship Prep Program prepares young people with education, career readiness skills, and pre-apprenticeship opportunity. At the end of the program, they are prepared for an apprenticeship, employment, or continued education.

For sharing information in a consistent manner, the State partners with the North Carolina local Workforce Development Directors. In addition, the Directors and their Board Chairs are formally organized as the NC Association of Workforce Development Chairs. As the voice for workforce development in North Carolina, they work collectively to plan, coordinate, oversee,

and deliver workforce solutions through the NCWorks system. The Association is another mechanism in which the Workforce Development Boards can actively share promising practices and allow the State to provide information through their established website. This partnership is in addition to the State being invited to share information at the Directors' established meetings. Finally, the State hosts an annual partnership conference which is a venue to share models of success. The NCWorks Partnership Conference traditionally draws hundreds of Workforce Development Professionals from across the state. Attendees represent labor, state and federal government, education, community-based organizations, community colleges and the private sector. In 36 years, the Conference continues to offer timely topics and networking opportunities for the workforce development community.

USDOL has granted North Carolina a waiver for Program Years 2022 and 2023, which reduces the minimum Title I Youth expenditure rate requirement for OSY from 75% to 50% and allows the maximum expenditure rate for in-school youth (ISY) to be increased from 25% to 50%. North Carolina will request this waiver again for Program Year 2024. Local Workforce Development Boards have the option to choose to implement the use of the waiver locally so that they are serving out-of-school and in-school equitably and best in their local area. The local Workforce Development Board makes this decision during the annual local Plan submission. The local Workforce Development Board describes how they will achieve the 50% OSY expenditure rate and describe the steps that will be taken to comply with the Workforce Development Board's programmatic goals and outcomes; why there is a need to serve additional ISY in the local area region and state how the Workforce Development Board will achieve the 50% ISY expenditure rate, and how the local area region will be able to meet the demand for youth services by using the waiver among the other youth questions. This waiver will allow for the expansion of already successful provisions of work-based learning programs and other WIOA services, such as pre-apprenticeship programs, and services to at-risk and disadvantaged youth to assist with increasing enrollments, secondary education attainment, and workforce readiness to additional In-School Youth (ISY). The use of the waiver and services complements USDOL strategies in that it:

- focuses on ensuring that eligible youth achieve secondary and postsecondary educational success;
- increases youths' access to and opportunities for the education, training, employment, and support services that they need;
- aligns with WIOA's intent by supporting career pathways and the preparation of young people for in-demand careers; and
- ensures that ISY do not fall into an at-risk category because of expenditure restrictions.

Local Workforce Development Boards will have increased flexibility to develop unique solutions to better serve youth according to local conditions. Out-of-school will continue to be served as a priority population in accordance with WIOA.

3. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS IN IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE MODELS FOR DELIVERING YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING EFFECTIVE WAYS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS CAN MAKE AVAILABLE THE 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129(C)(2); AND EXPLAIN HOW LOCAL

AREAS CAN ENSURE WORK EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP AND REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP, IS PRIORITIZED AS A KEY ELEMENT WITHIN A BROADER CAREER PATHWAYS STRATEGY.

In the local Comprehensive Four-Year and Regional Plan and again in subsequent Program Years, each Workforce Development Board is required to provide a detailed chart and description of how each of the required fourteen program elements will be made available to youth. Each local plan identifies how these services will be administered through referral, WIOA resources or both. Boards are required to establish procedures for the delivery of these elements in their respective local workforce development areas and the individual's Service Strategy. Through State operational guidance, policy statement, and technical assistance, the State assists Local Workforce Development Boards in delivering youth workforce investment activities including ensuring work experience, pre-apprenticeship, registered apprenticeship, are priorities within the career pathway strategy and Individual Service Strategy.

The State's program and fiscal monitoring teams monitor local area implementation practices, on an ongoing basis, utilizing North Carolina's management information system, NCWorks Online, in addition to other monitoring practices.

WIOA 20 CFR §681.470 states that it is not required for local programs to use funds for each of the fourteen youth program elements. Local Area Workforce Development Board programs may leverage partner resources to provide program elements. However, if the program is not funded with WIOA youth funds, North Carolina Local Area Workforce Development Boards must have an agreement in place with a partner organization to ensure that the program element will be offered. If offered by a local partner, the program element must be connected and coordinated with the local WIOA youth program.

To support the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, entry into postsecondary education, and career readiness for participants, the WIOA Youth Program shall provide elements consisting of the following program elements.

1. tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized postsecondary credential;
2. alternative secondary school services, or dropout recovery services, as appropriate;
3. paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component academic and occupational education, which may include—
 - summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
 - pre-apprenticeship programs: (While students can pursue pre-apprenticeship training when still in school, programs for out-of-school youth are often sponsored by community organizations that work with apprenticeship sponsors or other employers to address behavioral, economic, and other barriers to employment of youth who do not have a career path. North Carolina's apprenticeships are managed by the North Carolina

Community College system. More about the program ApprenticeshipNC can be found on the website at <https://www.apprenticeshipnc.com/>.)

- internships and job shadowing; and
- on-the-job training opportunities;

4. occupational skill training, which shall include priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that are aligned with in demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area involved, if the local board determines that the programs meet the quality criteria described in section 123;
5. education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
6. leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors, as appropriate;
7. supportive services;
8. adult mentoring for the period of participation and a subsequent period, for a total of not less than 12 months;
9. follow-up services for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation, as appropriate;
10. comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral, as appropriate;
11. financial literacy education;
12. entrepreneurial skills training;
13. services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and
14. activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training.

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

The purpose of the Work Experience (WEX) activity is to provide the WIOA Title I participant with opportunities for career exploration, skill development, and reinforcement of the work ethic. Pursuant to WIOA section 129(c)(2)(C), Local Area Workforce Development Boards are required to offer youth programs that involve paid and/or unpaid work experiences that have as a component both academic and occupational education. The educational component may occur concurrently or sequentially with the work experience. Further academic and

occupational education may occur inside or outside the work site. Work experiences provide the youth participant with opportunities for career exploration and skill development. Youth Service Providers are required to provide information to youth regarding career pathways and related industries to accelerate the advancement towards self-sufficiency. Recognized best practices for engaging youth in work experiences:

- (1) Programs prepare youth for work experiences through training and guidance in soft skills. Youth programs engage young adults in training or class activities that develop these soft skills. This may include learning about professional work culture, working in teams, interpersonal skills, and communication.
- (2) Some programs also train youth in technical skills or hard skills needed for specific career pathways or work settings. Youth will learn skills specific to an occupational sector.
- (3) Program staff devote significant time to developing and maintaining relationships with employers. Dedicated staff (job developers) may handle all aspects of employer relations, from making an initial inquiry about partnering, to establishing worksite agreements with employers, to responding to any employer concerns during the work experience.
- (4) Programs clearly communicate what is expected of employers, youth, and families before the start of a work experience to include mentoring the youth and providing feedback to the program coordinator. Some programs address the importance of work in life, how the program helps youth make a successful transition to work, what employers expect of workers, and how to appropriately interact with employers.
- (5) Programs carefully match youth to work experience opportunities based on individual interests and skills. Making the right match increases the success of the work experience by ensuring that youth feel motivated from the start to participate fully.
- (6) Programs provide on-going support to youth and employers throughout the work experience. To ensure a work experience is successful for everyone involved, programs maintain communication with both the youth and employers from the first to the last day of the work experience. While some programs have daily or weekly contact with youth to monitor their progress, other programs conduct first-week, midpoint, and last-week work site visits at a minimum.

These best practices are used by Local Workforce Development Boards to develop and implement training and workforce preparation practices that benefit their community, including the creation of programs that will develop skilled, job ready talent to meet the current needs of business and industry. These practices and the new local talent pools are adaptable for the future needs of workers and businesses to attain and continue economic growth.

Local Workforce Development Boards demonstrate the 14 program elements through Plan responses, local program design, and local policy and are further demonstrated through promising youth program practices that are also collected in the local Plan responses. The Innovation Section of the local Plans allow Workforce Development Boards to demonstrate how local Workforce Development Boards may make the 14 program elements available and/or demonstrate how local Workforce Development Boards ensure work experience is available as a key element to include work experience and apprenticeship.

The Cape Fear Workforce Development Board utilizes the use Workplace Excellence Series soft skills training to enhance employability of youth seeking employment. The training is used for all work experience participants. The training is provided in multiple formats to include in-person instruction and virtual options which may be accessed from any internet-connected device. The training is module-based and built to support the work-readiness of young jobseekers.

Capital Area's NextGen program's best practice is utilizing pre-apprenticeship opportunities that yield positive placement into employment opportunities. These pathways promote credential and measurable skill gains leading to full-time employment with sustainable wages and partnership with educational providers. In Program Year 2022, Capital Area provided NextGen participants with pre-apprenticeship opportunities in Information Technology and again in the Lineman pathway. The effectiveness of the apprenticeship model has been demonstrated by the number of positive completers that have exited to clearly defined pathways with nationally – recognized credentials.

The Durham County Workforce Development Board promising youth program practice is the Work Experience program where participants are matched with their chosen career path. They have exposed participants to in-demand careers, which has resulted in participants entering new careers such as Biomanufacturing Technician, Phlebotomy and Central Sterile Processing Technicians. Most recently, participants became one of the first four apprentices at KBI Biomanufacturing. In addition to traditional work experience programs, they also have a special work-based learning program for high school equivalency participants. Here, participants attend high school equivalency tutoring two days a week and work with a local employer the remainder of the week. Upon completion of the work experience, the employer can hire the participant if both parties agree, and the high school equivalency is complete. The opportunity for full-time permanent employment has been a great motivator to help participants stay on track and complete the high school equivalency. Evidence of the effectiveness is collected through employer and participant evaluations plus the hiring rate.

The High Country Workforce Development Board has worked well with partners, such as high school equivalency learning labs and local employers to increase awareness of programs and opportunities. This work has resulted in more enrollments who have limited, if any, work experience. Adding in the services of work experience assists in keeping youth motivated towards high school equivalency completion while also earning wages and gaining much needed experience and confidence. This can be measured by the number of dropouts being served and participating in the work experience activity.

Kerr-Tar Workforce Development Board Youth Program Coordinator and the Youth contractors participate in a monthly meeting/training entitled Youth Elements. This meeting/training supports building and strengthens the contract program managers and case managers competencies in WIOA regulations, local and state policies and procedures that enhance workforce development services to youth participants and ensure providers are competent about their requirements and responsibilities. Youth Elements also focus on youth eligibility criteria, performance measures, and procedures. Kerr-Tar has also implemented OJT for Out-of-School Youth through career center services. The Youth Contractor makes referrals to the Talent Employment Solutions Team Members for job ready youth. This is a service that had not been previously offered in the Kerr-Tar Career Centers.

Triad Career Connect is an initiative of the Piedmont Triad Regional Workforce Development Board designed for in and out of school youth, aged 16-24, who face barriers to achieving employment. This program consists of a combination of work-based learning under the supervision of an experienced craft person or trade professional and dedicated time for in-class learning through the local community college. Participants learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation, as they are exposed to potential career options. In the three current locations of Triad Career Connect, the focus is advanced manufacturing. TCC targets disengaged and emerging youth populations to provide career connections and credential attainment for a diverse talent pool.

The Turning Point Workforce Development Board has a proactive work experience program. Youth are provided work experience opportunities based on their current job experience and proposed career interest. Youth is then placed on a work site that matches their previous job experience or lack thereof. Work experience opportunities are meant to be built in a progressive manner that will allow the youth to gain valuable work experiences and potentially obtain unsubsidized employment. Throughout the enrollment in WIOA, youth are exposed to the 14 elements and offered concurrent services, if needed, by partnering agencies/organization, to increase a youth's probability of finding suitable employment or enrolling into post-secondary education. Working as a team, the Business Engagement Coordinator and the Outreach Coordinator work with youth to explore careers using NCWorks, Traitify, Reality Check on NCCareers. The Business Engagement Coordinator provides current business advice on interviewing skills and skills needed to retain the job. These workshops are provided at high schools, community colleges or partner events and have been proven effective by young adults requesting additional events to be hosted. Plans to collect feedback and data from Career and Technical Education Career Development Coordinators are forthcoming.

NCWorks Commission continues to build on existing partnerships with Workforce Solutions, Department of Public Instruction, NC Community Colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, Services for the Blind, businesses, and others to ensure that North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity. This work complements Governor Roy Cooper's NC Job Ready workforce initiative, which 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.

Communities across North Carolina are struggling with training, retaining, and recruiting talent to meet the workforce needs of their local employers. As a result, many employers either cannot grow their business or decide to relocate to another area, leaving communities with smaller economies and people without good jobs. The NCWorks Commission is continuing the Local Innovation Fund, a competitive grant program to identify, design, and implement new strategies, or scale existing models, to solve challenging workforce issues. The NCWorks Local Innovation Fund will make available funding to local communities to pilot innovative programs or replicate successful program models that address a local or regional workforce issue, with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The NCWorks Commission is especially interested in projects that address an underserved or under-resourced community or population currently disconnected from the education and workforce system. The NCWorks Commission is also

interested in projects bringing together diverse community organizations; increase educational attainment and address digital literacy needs, if relevant; and develop talent pipelines for in-demand, high-wage occupations. Projects may focus on populations such as Opportunity Youth — the one-in-seven young people who are disconnected from the economy; or communities that have been cut off from needed resources by geography, lack of transportation, or discrimination; or low-income people that struggle to put food on the table but cannot improve their skills for better jobs because of work and family requirements. If North Carolina is going to be successful, it must help ALL North Carolinians acquire the education and training needed for good jobs.

The Innovation Fund model is OPT-IN and J.E.T.: Creating Opportunities for Opportunity Youth. This grant funded model supports “opportunity youth” (those who are currently neither in the labor force nor in school) and help meet Burke County’s workforce needs by expanding the “OPT-IN” (Opportunity Internship) program and launching the “Jobs, Education, and Training” (J.E.T.) program. OPT-IN serves recent high school graduates by matching them with local employers for an eight-week, paid exploratory internship. Participants also receive mentoring and professional development classes. Similarly, J.E.T. can serve any Opportunity Youth between the ages of 18-24, connecting them to local companies offering family-sustaining wages, while providing mentoring and professional development. Both programs will focus on outreach on communities of color. Partners include Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, The Industrial Commons, and its affiliate program “Work in Burke,” Burke Development, Inc., Western Piedmont Community College, Burke County Public Schools, NCWorks Career Center - Burke County, N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Meridian Specialty Yarn Group, Inc.

The State intends to achieve improved outcomes for Out of School Youth by implementing an increased focus on monitoring service providers and performance levels and providing technical assistance to local Workforce Development Boards.

The State is invited to share information at the local WDB Director’s established meetings and Youth Leads meetings. Similarly, the State participates in meetings with local Youth Leads as budget travel restrictions allow. The State offers technical assistance and assists with presentations on best practices panels on topics which include outreach predicated on evidenced based research and keep Local Areas abreast of additional national best practices by circulating WorkforceGPS and other articles. In addition, the State holds an annual NCWorks Partnership Conference to allow for sharing of information, best practices, professional development, and training opportunities through the NCWorks Training Center. Staffed by the Division of Workforce Solutions Training Center, the NCWorks Partnership Conference traditionally draws hundreds of Workforce Development Professionals from across the state. Attendees represent labor, state and federal government, education, community-based organizations, community colleges and the private sector. The conference offers opportunities to serve and collaborate in creative, innovative, and impactful ways. In its 36th year, the conference will focus on growing the customer base and talent pool as we build an inclusive workforce by engaging untapped talent; broaden our reach in the business community to expand worker opportunities by involving untapped employers; and develop a more inclusive network of organizations by collaborating with untapped partners.

The focus of the conference changes each year, but always includes topics that reflect USDOL's priority on youth along with our Governor's focus on making North Carolina's citizen job ready. The conference is a full-scale opportunity for WDBs and partners to highlight and share promising practices and partnership models so that these practices can be replicated or implemented in other areas across the state. As an example, the Division of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities used information gained at a conference to influence the design of their Pre-Employment Transition Services program for students with disabilities.

4. PROVIDE THE LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN THE STATE POLICY FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO ENTER OR COMPLETE AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(III)(VIII) AND FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COMPLETE AN EDUCATION PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR IN-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(IV)(VII). IF THE STATE DOES NOT HAVE A POLICY, DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT LOCAL AREAS WILL HAVE A POLICY FOR THESE CRITERIA.

North Carolina has the following language in its state policy for requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment" criterion for out-of-school and for "requiring additional assistance to complete an education program, or to secure and hold employment" criterion for in-school youth.

In North Carolina's state policy, "requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment" is defined for In-School Youth, including youth with a disability, who meet the criteria in category one. [WIOA Section 129(a)(1)(C)(iv)(VII)]

1. In-School Youth, ages 14-21, low-income, and

- a) has poor attendance patterns in an educational program during the last 12 calendar months; or
- b) has been expelled from school within the last 12 calendar months; or
- c) has been suspended from school within the last 12 calendar months; or
- d) has below average grades of less than a "C" grade point average;

or

- e) has previously been placed in out-of-home care (foster care, group home, or kinship care) for more than 6 months between the ages of 14-21; or
- f) has a currently incarcerated parent(s)/guardian

Limitation:

In each local area, not more than 5% of the newly enrolled In-School Youth assisted in a given program year may be made eligible based upon WIOA Section 129(a)(3)(B) as an individual

who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

In North Carolina, “a low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment” is defined for Out-of-School Youth, including youth with a disability, who meet the criteria in category two.

2. Out-of-School Youth, ages 16-24, low-income and

- a) has dropped out of a post-secondary educational program during the past 12 calendar months; or
- b) has a poor work history, to include no work history, or has been fired from a job in the last 6 calendar months; or
- c) has previously been placed in out-of-home care (foster care, group home, or kinship care) for more than 6 months between the ages of 16-21; or
- d) currently has an incarcerated parent(s)/guardian.

Exception: WIOA allows a low-income exception where 5% of WIOA youth may be participants who ordinarily would be required to be low-income for eligibility purposes and meet all other eligibility criteria for WIOA youth except the low-income criteria. A program must calculate the 5% based on the percent of newly enrolled youth in the Local Area's WIOA youth program in a given program year who would ordinarily be required to meet the low-income criteria. [WIOA Section 129(a)(3)(A)(ii) and 20 C.F.R. § 681.250].

North Carolina has the following law for attending school:

§ 115C-378. Children are required to attend.

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

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

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

North Carolina follows the following rules for out-of-school youth:

To be eligible to participate in activities carried out under any Title I WIOA program an individual shall, at the time the eligibility determination is made, be an out-of-school youth or an in-school youth. (B) OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH. —In this title, the term “out-of-school youth” means an individual who is—

- (i) not attending any school (as defined under State law); (ii) not younger than age 16 or older than age 24; and (iii) one or more of the following:

(I) A school dropout.

(II) A youth who is within the age of compulsory school attendance but has not attended school for at least the most recent complete school year calendar quarter.

(III) A recipient of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent who is a low-income individual and is—

(aa) basic skills deficient; or

(bb) an English language learner.

(IV) An individual who is subject to the juvenile or adult justice system.

(V) A homeless individual (as defined in section 41403(6) of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 14043e-2(6))), a homeless child or youth (as defined in section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2))), a runaway, in foster care or has aged out of the foster care system, a child eligible for assistance under section 477 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 677), or in an out-of-home placement.

(VI) An individual who is pregnant or parenting.

(VII) A youth who is an individual with a disability.

(VIII) A low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

For In-School Youth, North Carolina uses the following Title I WIOA rules:

In this section, the term “in-school youth” means an individual who is—

1. attending school (as defined by State law);
2. not younger than age 14 or (unless an individual with a disability who is attending school under State law) older than age 21;
3. a low-income individual; and
4. one or more of the following:
 1. Basic skills deficient.
 2. An English language learner.
 3. An offender.
 4. A homeless individual (as defined in section 41403(6) of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 14043e-2(6))), a homeless child or youth (as defined in section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2))), a runaway, in foster care or has aged out of the foster care system, a child eligible for assistance under section 477 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 677), or in an out-of-home placement.
 5. Pregnant or parenting.
 6. A youth who is an individual with a disability.

7. An individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

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

(5) BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT. —The term “basic skills deficient” means, with respect to an individual—

- who is a youth, that the individual has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or
- who is a youth or adult, that the individual is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society.

North Carolina defines “below the 8th grade level” to mean a testing score at or below 8.9. North Carolina does recognize the WIOA Title II definitions of English Language Learner (WIOA Section 203(7)) and promotes a positive and cooperative understanding of the importance of language access to federally assisted programs for limited English proficiency individuals.

D. SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

In States where there is only one local workforce investment area, the governor serves as both the State and local chief elected official. In such cases, the State must submit any information required in the local plan (WIOA section 106(d)(2)). States with a single workforce area must include—

1. ANY COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THAT REPRESENT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PLAN. (WIOA SECTION 108(D)(3).)
2. THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISBURSAL OF GRANT FUNDS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM THAT FOR THE STATE. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(15).)
3. A DESCRIPTION OF THE TYPE AND AVAILABILITY OF WIOA TITLE I YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSFUL MODELS, INCLUDING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(9).)

Not Applicable

4. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP PARTNERS.

Not Applicable

5. THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.

Not Applicable

6. HOW TRAINING SERVICES OUTLINED IN SECTION 134 WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS AND/OR THROUGH CONTRACTS, AND HOW SUCH TRAINING APPROACHES WILL BE COORDINATED. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MEET INFORMED CUSTOMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS REGARDLESS OF TRAINING APPROACH.

Not Applicable

7. HOW THE STATE BOARD, IN FULFILLING LOCAL BOARD FUNCTIONS, WILL COORDINATE TITLE I ACTIVITIES WITH THOSE ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE II. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL CARRY OUT THE REVIEW OF LOCAL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED UNDER TITLE II CONSISTENT WITH WIOA SECS. 107(D)(11)(A) AND (B)(I) AND WIOA SEC. 232.

Not Applicable

8. COPIES OF EXECUTED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WHICH DEFINE HOW ALL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL CARRY OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INTEGRATION OF AND ACCESS TO THE ENTIRE SET OF SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM, INCLUDING COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES ADMINISTERING REHABILITATION ACT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Not Applicable

E. WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

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;

2. DESCRIBES THE ACTIONS THAT THE STATE OR LOCAL AREA, AS APPROPRIATE, HAS UNDERTAKEN TO REMOVE STATE OR LOCAL STATUTORY OR REGULATORY BARRIERS;

3. DESCRIBES THE GOALS OF THE WAIVER AND THE EXPECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES IF THE REQUEST IS GRANTED;

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.

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; AND

 6. DESCRIBES THE PROCESSES USED TO:

 A. MONITOR THE PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE WAIVER;

 B. PROVIDE NOTICE TO ANY LOCAL BOARD AFFECTED BY THE WAIVER;

- C. PROVIDE ANY LOCAL BOARD AFFECTED BY THE WAIVER AN OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON THE REQUEST;
- D. ENSURE MEANINGFUL PUBLIC COMMENT, INCLUDING COMMENT BY BUSINESS AND ORGANIZED LABOR, ON THE WAIVER.
- E. COLLECT AND REPORT INFORMATION ABOUT WAIVER OUTCOMES IN THE STATE'S WIOA ANNUAL REPORT.

7. THE MOST RECENT DATA AVAILABLE REGARDING THE RESULTS AND OUTCOMES OBSERVED THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EXISTING WAIVER, IN CASES WHERE THE STATE SEEKS RENEWAL OF A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED WAIVER.

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) is seeking a waiver of the requirement under WIOA §129(a)(4) and 20 CFR 681.410 that the state and local workforce areas spend no less than 75 percent of youth funds to provide services to Out-of-School Youth (OSY).

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) is requesting this waiver in order to allow flexibility to lower the expenditure requirement of OSY Formula funding from 75% to 50%, for both statewide and local activities, based on service needs of the Youth population.

North Carolina's goal is to increase the number of ISY served, which will increase at risk ISY's access to opportunities to education, training, employment, and support services. This goal directly relates to goals and strategies outlined in the strategic plan.

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

North Carolina's goal is to increase the number of ISY served by 10%, which would be approximately 727 ISY for PY 23-24. As a result of more ISY served, the programmatic outcomes include an increase in the obtainment of industry recognized credentials and an increase in measurable skills gains obtained by ISY.

This waiver will allow for the expansion of already successful provisions of work-based learning programs and other WIOA services, such as pre-apprenticeship programs, and services to at-risk and disadvantaged youth to assist with increasing enrollments, secondary education attainment, and workforce readiness to the additional In-School Youth (ISY) served.

Approval of this waiver would permit Boards the opportunity to determine how best to meet the educational and training needs of youth, regardless of school status, and specific to the population, geographical location, and economic and employment conditions of each local area. Increasing outreach to ISY while maintaining a focus on serving OSY will help develop a larger pool of young people qualified and prepared to meet the current and future needs of employers in their workforce areas and throughout the state.

The decreased requirement in OSY expenditures to 50% and increase of ISY expenditures to 50% will affect multiple populations of the public workforce system, including, but not limited to:

- North Carolina's at-risk and disadvantaged youth population who face barriers to education, training, and employment;
- Local Workforce Boards through increased flexibility to develop unique solutions to better serve youth according to local conditions; and
- Number of ISY served who meet one or more of the following WIOA defined ISY barriers:
 - Justice involved;
 - Homeless individual; a homeless child or youth; a runaway; in foster care or has aged out of the foster care system; a child eligible for assistance under Section 477 of the Social Security Act, or in out-of-home placement; or
 - Pregnant and parenting

While all boards may not choose to utilize this waiver, DWS anticipates that the implementation of this waiver will allow North Carolina to increase ISY enrollments by 10% which will lead to an increase in the number of ISY that obtain measurable skills gains and industry recognized credentials.

Annual WIOA programmatic reviews will include an evaluation of the impact of the waiver on local programs to ensure programmatic goals and outcomes are being met and implementing the waiver. these strategies will ensure that our goals mentioned in this request, as well as those outlined in the existing state and local WIOA plans, are consistent with the established objectives of WIOA, and federal and state regulations.

Prior to this waiver request, all local workforce development board directors were notified of the intent of this request and have been provided an opportunity to comment during the public review and comment period.

;

All boards have had the opportunity to comment on the waiver directly to the DWS staff when provided notice and during the public comment period.

The meaningful public comment period is provided along with the posting and notification of the unified state plan, this includes an opportunity for comments by business and organized labor during the unified state plan public comment period.

;

DWS will submit any findings with the annual WIOA report.

While North Carolina does not have data for Program Year 2023, which began on July 1, 2023, the chart provided below details the number of ISY served, as well as the number of ISY that received industry recognized credentials and obtained measurable skills gains for Program Years 2019 – 2022.

Program Year	Number of ISY Served	Number of ISY that received Credentials	Number of ISY that obtained Measurable Skills Gains
PY 19-20	823	317	352
PY 20-21	668	259	301
PY 21-22	654	188	322
PY 22-23	661	137	341

TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and 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;	Yes
3. The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;	Yes
4. The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);	Yes
5. Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;	Yes
6. The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;	No
7. The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);	Yes
8. The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
9. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;	Yes
10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.	Yes
11. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);	Yes

ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	79.0%	80.0%	79.5%	80.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	77.5%	79.5%	78.0%	80.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$7200	\$8,276	\$7300	\$8300
Credential Attainment Rate	64.0%	64.0%	64.5%	64.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	57.0%	64.2%	57.5%	65.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and

- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	72.0%	74.5%	72.5%	74.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	73.0%	73.0%	73.5%	73.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$7800	\$8,595	\$7900	\$8,600
Credential Attainment Rate	66.0%	66.0%	66.5%	66.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	65.0%	67.4%	65.5%	68.0%

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a

reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	74.0%	75.9%	74.5%	76.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	73.0%	75.1%	73.5%	75.1%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$3600	\$4,708	\$3700	\$4,800
Credential Attainment Rate	53.0%	53.0%	53.5%	53.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	54.0%	56.8%	54.5%	57.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAM (EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

All Program-Specific Requirements provided for the WIOA core programs in this section must be addressed for either a Unified or Combined State Plan.

A. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL STAFF THE PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES UNDER THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT, SUCH AS THROUGH STATE EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO STATE MERIT STAFF EMPLOYEES, STAFF OF A SUBRECIPIENT, OR SOME COMBINATION THEREOF.

DWS staff (state merit staff employees) may be physically housed at NCWorks Career Centers across the state. Under the Integrated Service Delivery model, these Wagner-Peyser funded state employees lead the RESEA program, assist with Title I programs, career counseling, employer services, job search activities, and other related labor exchange services. Most importantly, these area career center staff are directly accountable for implementing the Governor's vision for workforce development at the local level. Regional Operations Directors, also funded by Wagner-Peyser, are instrumental in oversight of all Wagner-Peyser services. While Local Workforce Development Boards have operational control of all NCWorks Career

Centers, Regional Operations Directors provide the continuity needed to ensure the Governor's vision for workforce development comes to fruition.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF TO ENSURE STAFF IS ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

DWS will utilize professional development activities for Employment Service staff using the NCWorks Training Center whose primary mission is to provide high-quality, affordable, easily accessible training and professional development services for North Carolina's workforce system. Having a well-trained workforce development staff ensures that the Governor's NC Job Ready Plan can be fully implemented.

The NCWorks Training Center achieves its mission by providing a variety of training options tailored to meet the dynamic needs of the Division of Workforce Solutions, NCWorks Career Center staff, the state's 20 Local Workforce Development Boards and staff of partner agencies. These efforts and services help ensure all staff and partners are well-trained with current skills and knowledge relevant to workforce trends. This is accomplished through online training courses, workshops by professional, peer, and in-house trainers in both face- to-face sessions and online webinars and tutorials, and an online library of training resources. The NCWorks Training Center also provides a vast list of supportive services including meeting and conference preparation and planning, along with other customized event services as requested.

The NCWorks Training Center is located in a self-contained facility and boasts two well-equipped classrooms. The largest classroom can seat 42 in a traditional set-up and over 100 in theater style with no tables. The computer lab accommodates 24 learners using laptops, which can be removed to convert to a traditional classroom. The NCWorks Training Center team is comprised of four diverse and highly skilled staff members who continually strive to stay current on workforce trends and issues at the state and national levels, and to use this knowledge to design, coordinate, plan, and facilitate training.

Records of training and events are retained and managed through the Training Registration and Information Network (TRAIN). This comprehensive system is managed by the Training Center and Division staff to access online training options and resources, to collect and retain student records, to maintain data for easy reporting, to store student transcripts, and to manage event and training self-service registration online.

The NCWorks Training Center is readily available with logistical planning of events, registration, data collection, supportive services, and training delivery. The current catalog of 122 interactive online courses successfully enhances accessibility of training on a variety of on demand topics.

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

The NCWorks Training Center continues to provide workforce development professionals a globally recognized credentialing opportunity through the Facilitating Career Development (FCD) course. This 120-hour course uses the curriculum of the National Career Development Association (NCDA) curriculum and standardizes the knowledge and experience of workforce

development professionals and others in career development services. The instructional format blends traditional classroom, web-based distance learning, and independent project completion. This course provides a unique opportunity for workforce professionals from varied perspectives of the career field to network, share ideas and resources, and develop new partnerships to benefit the public. This course is offered 4-6 times per year depending on the need.

In order to provide more immediate training to a broader business services audience the NCWorks Training Center now offers recorded and/or interactive online course on business services topics such as: Salesforce, Labor Market Information; On-the-Job-Training in a Nutshell; and WIOA Programs and Services. These courses are designed for any staff in the NCWorks Career Center who interfaces with the business community and the content encourages for development of strong relationships with business, effective communication skills, and using needs assessment to determine solutions for businesses in recruiting and retaining a viable workforce.

Each year, the NCWorks Training Center plans, coordinates, and hosts the NCWorks Partnership Conference. This event is traditionally offered as an in-person conference and offers opportunities for attendees to participate in more than 60 workshops provided by professional trainers from around the country and peers from around the state. Attendees include frontline staff of NCWorks Career Centers, Workforce Board Directors and staff, private sector business representatives, staff and management of various government agencies, and non-profit organizations. The conference attendance each year averages 1,000. The theme, workshop topics, and networking activities are planned by an interagency team working together over a 10-month period and guided by the Training Center team. During the pandemic, the conference was offered in a fully virtual format and maintained similar participation rates from the same groups.

The newest initiative lead by the Training Center is a comprehensive leadership development course entitled *STAR: Successful Teams Achieve Results*. The course values and structure were developed using a team of workforce professionals that included Workforce Board Directors, senior leadership at the Division, and NCWorks Career Center Managers. Six cohorts have been offered since 2019 with 95 graduates who attended 12-13 sessions over a six-month period. The course is open to existing staff of the core workforce system (Division, Local Workforce Boards, service contractors) who are recommended by leadership.

Another initiative designed to enhance accessibility to training and increase awareness of professional development opportunities is the *NCWorks Training Champions*. Each Workforce Board was given the opportunity, in collaboration with Division leadership, to identify staff of the NCWorks Career Centers to participate in the training. The training consists of two sessions led by the Training Center team and exposes participants to tools and techniques for designing training and team activities, how to access and effectively utilize existing online course options and develop their own skills as a training advocate. The 35 staff who graduated are actively encouraging staff development in their local areas, supporting their peers in professional growth, and providing the Training Center with accurate and tangible information on local training needs and preferences.

Emphasis is also on providing training support to other work units of the Division. This year included live virtual training with Division's Accountability Section in collaboration with Maher

and Maher to upskill the internal staff and the Workforce Boards on fiscal and contractual issues. Other topical areas supported were NCWorks Online basis training for local staff, several data-related and programmatic monitoring technical trainings, and quarterly training for veterans services staff.

3. DESCRIBE STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WIOA STAFF ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES AND REFERRAL TO UI STAFF FOR ADJUDICATION

The Division of Workforce Solutions, the Workforce Development Boards, and the Division of Employment Security (DES) continue to collaborate on ways to provide significant assistance to individuals requesting help in filing for unemployment insurance compensation. In this focus on collaborative efforts, DWS, Workforce Development Boards, and DES established a joint task force to develop short range improvement goals for UI participants in the RESEA program. A major initiative that was previously derived from the task force was DES statewide unemployment insurance training of Career Center Staff: providing an overview of the unemployment insurance program, instruction on utilizing claimant databases, and processes and expectations for staff serving customers. The joint task force has evolved to an RESEA work group consisting of both DWS and DES staff which meets monthly to address concerns, implement improvements and maintain continuous program collaboration and communication.

DWS Analysts meet monthly with the DES Chief of Programs and her Unemployment Insurance Department leaders to exchange information on unemployment insurance and potential barriers and/or concerns of the career centers. In addition, Assistant Secretary from DES and DWS, along with their executive staff meet quarterly to discuss unemployment insurance policy, keep abreast of program changes, and identify any potential issues. Changes or corrections to unemployment insurance procedures are distributed to NCWorks Career Center staff electronically via statewide Bulletins. Individuals are instructed on how to file a claim by way of the Internet (www.des.nc.gov) or by calling the Customer Call Center (1-888-737-0259). Individuals are able to access the computers and telephones within the NCWorks Career Center, with or without assistance from NCWorks Career Center staff, to file a claim.

As in the past, DES expects to hold UI training sessions to help NCWorks Career Center staff understand how to provide targeted UI assistance to jobseekers, and when to hand-off jobseekers with claims issues to DES for processing. Having established clearer expectations of UI assistance within career centers has become very beneficial to jobseekers.

Guidance and information are provided using the "North Carolina Unemployment Insurance Guide pamphlet which includes information such as:

- How to File a Claim
- Where to call concerning claim question
- Eligibility criteria
- Where to call if I have questions regarding my appeal

Copies of the pamphlets have been shared with all the State's Local Workforce Development Boards for distribution through the NCWorks Career Centers. DES and DWS worked together to create Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for UI processes. Additional resource materials have been provided for sharing of information such as: poster sized flyers addressing work search tips and fraud prevention, as well as printable documents accessible through the DES website including 'Top 10 Things You Should Know When Filing Your Claim, Common Unemployment Insurance Mistakes, and How to Prevent UI Fraud.

B. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE WILL PROVIDE INFORMATION AND MEANINGFUL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN FILING A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA AS A CAREER SERVICE

Customers entering an NCWorks Career Center to learn about or to apply for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits are assisted by trained professionals. DES provided comprehensive statewide training to career center staff on UI and as a result are well versed in the topic and can answer general questions about the program and the level of benefits available to recipients in North Carolina. DES has also developed a website robust of program information for use by center staff as well as individuals attempting to apply for UI or learn more about UI.

Customers who wish to apply for UI are directed to the public computers in each career center and, if assistance is requested for any reason, including limited English proficiency, disabilities, or other barriers, staff will provide the requested assistance to the customer in completing the online application for benefits. Assistance with UI questions is also available to customers by phone. Staff are also available to help connect customers with the UI call center operated by the Division of Employment Security, the state's administrator of UI. Call center staff will answer very specific questions concerning individual claims and their benefits. Certain staff within the DWS hierarchy have also been provided with additional application accesses to resolve certain technical issues and address claims issues or request expediting as needed.

C. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UI CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

Labor exchange services are provided to unemployment insurance claimants when they participate in their reemployment appointment. Each claimant is notified by mail of a mandatory reemployment appointment with a NCWorks Career Center. Included with each appointment notice is blank Work Search log and guidelines. During this appointment claimants receive an orientation of employment services to provide an awareness of career center services offered, new customers visiting a NCWorks Career Center receive the same orientation of employment services provided to UI claimants. This is essential in allowing all customers to take advantage of services he/she views as beneficial. The employment services orientation combined with an employability and skills assessment conducted by Career Center staff ensures customers benefit from Governor Roy Cooper's initiative "NC Job Ready", a holistic approach to providing a better trained workforce for employers and providing new work opportunities for job seekers. Labor exchange services are also extended to claimants through the mandatory registration in NCWorks Online. This ensures that claimants are registered for work. Through the job matching system, assistance is provided to find employment. Employers registered in NCWorks Online have access to the claimants resume and qualifications. DES and DWS plan to expand the use of NCWorks Online by implementing the work search repository functionality.

This would allow UI customers to more easily keep track of their work search and provide a greater advantage for staff to be able to help customers with their job search.

During the reemployment visit, the NCWorks Career Center staff discuss job referrals, Job Development Contacts, referrals to workshops (e.g., resume writing, job seeking skills, keeping a job, etc.), referrals to supportive services and make referrals for applicable training programs. The NCWorks Career Center staff also reviews claimants work test requirements. The requirements include:

- 1) the claimant continues to be out of work due to no fault of their own;
- 2) the claimant has not returned to work;
- 3) the claimant is able, available, and actively seeking employment.

D. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE W-P FUNDS TO SUPPORT UI CLAIMANTS, AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN W-P AND UI, AS APPROPRIATE INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

1. COORDINATION OF AND PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES FOR UI CLAIMANTS AS REQUIRED BY THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT;

The Division of Workforce Solutions, the Workforce Development Boards, and the Division of Employment Security, which administers the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, work very closely together to meet the employment needs of UI recipients. As described in questions (b) and (c) above, Wagner-Peyser funded staff, (WIOA Title I funded staff or partner staff in select areas) in NCWorks Career Centers meet with UI recipients within the first four weeks of receiving benefits, document that they are registered for work, review their job search activities, and make referrals to available jobs or WIOA Title I training, if appropriate. If the claimant has not complied with the Work Search and Claims Filing requirements, the Division of Employment Security is notified of the non-compliance and the case is referred for adjudication.

2. REGISTRATION OF UI CLAIMANTS WITH THE STATE'S EMPLOYMENT SERVICE IF REQUIRED BY STATE LAW;

NCWorks Career Center staff meet with UI recipients within the first four weeks of receiving benefits, verify that they are registered for work, review their job search activities, and make referrals to available jobs or WIOA Title I training, if appropriate. If the claimant has not complied with the Work Search and Claims Filing requirements, the Division of Employment Security is notified of the non-compliance and the case is referred for adjudication.

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

**If the claimant has not complied with the Work Search and Claims Filing requirements, the Division of Employment Security is notified of the non-compliance and the case is referred to UI Adjudication for investigation.

4. PROVISION OF REFERRALS TO AND APPLICATION ASSISTANCE FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES.

NCWorks Career Center staff meet with UI recipients within the first four weeks of receiving benefits, document that they are registered for work, review their job search activities, and make referrals to available jobs or WIOA Title I training, if appropriate.

E. AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN (AOP). EACH STATE AGENCY MUST DEVELOP AN AOP EVERY FOUR YEARS AS PART OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN REQUIRED UNDER SECTIONS 102 OR 103 OF WIOA. THE AOP MUST INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF NEED. AN ASSESSMENT NEED DESCRIBES THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

1. ASSESSMENT OF NEED. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs) generally live in rural, isolated areas throughout North Carolina. Approximately 95 percent are of Hispanic/Latino origin; many are primarily monolingual in Spanish; and more than 50 percent are from Mexico. These farmworkers have several obstacles to employment which include transportation, childcare, limited English-speaking abilities and education, lack of Social Security numbers and job training. All of these barriers are major reasons for their lack of economic mobility. North Carolina has an estimated 75,000 farmworkers during peak harvest season.

- 22,805 are Migrant Farmworkers
- 16,735 are Seasonal Farmworkers
- 9,075 are farmworkers who work more than 150 days (year-round)
- 26,936 are H-2A foreign farmworkers

The Division of Workforce Solutions' (DWS) full-time, year-round outreach staff plan to continue assisting farmworkers and their families by providing crucially needed individualized career services in mostly rural areas where the majority of farmworkers live and work. DWS outreach staff will coordinate efforts with Telamon (NFJP grantee) and public & private community service organizations to provide these services to MSFWs.

2. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE STATE MEANS: 1) IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, THE MONTHS OF HEAVY ACTIVITY, AND THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF PRIME ACTIVITY; 2) SUMMARIZE THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS' NEEDS IN THE STATE (I.E. ARE THEY PREDOMINANTLY HIRING LOCAL OR FOREIGN WORKERS, ARE THEY EXPRESSING THAT THERE IS A SCARCITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE); AND 3) IDENTIFYING ANY ECONOMIC, NATURAL, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE AFFECTING AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE OR ANY PROJECTED FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE

Assessment of Agricultural Activity in North Carolina

(1) North Carolina is a farm labor demand state. The following are its five most labor-intensive crops:

- Tobacco (April through Nov.) – Statewide
- Sweet Potato (May, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov.) – Northeast, Southeast, Piedmont
- Blueberry (May, June, July) – Southeast
- Nursery/Horticulture (March through December) - Statewide
- Christmas Tree (Feb. through Dec.) – Western

The following factors are affecting agriculture in the state:

- The effects of the environment such as freezes, droughts, flooding, hailstorms, tornadoes and hurricanes will continue to impact North Carolina's economy and agriculture production.
- The H2A AEWRR has continued to increase every year. This increased expense along with other input costs (fuel, fertilizer, etc.) increasing has many farmers looking at quitting farming.
- The number of Farm Labor Contractors working in North Carolina have increased use of the H-2A program substantially in recent years & is expected to continue to increase.
- MSFW's are aware of higher wages paid to workers coming to North Carolina under the H-2A program. Staff have become aware of many MSFW's requesting higher wages closer to the H-2A required wage rate.
- With land use practices changing due to our state becoming more urbanized and with the cost of land increasing, many farmers are being forced to sell their land and are losing their rented land to development/urban sprawl.
- The tightened labor market has created job opportunities with increased pay rates and additional incentives that lure farmworkers from seasonal and temporary farm labor. Agricultural employers have continued to increase utilization of the H-2A program annually in North Carolina.
- Ag employers have stressed the need for local more workforce assistance especially in the specialized areas such as equipment operations, farm manager fertilizer distributor and ex.

3. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS MEANS SUMMARIZING MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER (MSFW) CHARACTERISTICS (INCLUDING IF THEY ARE PREDOMINANTLY FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES, WHAT LANGUAGE(S) THEY SPEAK, THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MSFW'S IN THE STATE DURING PEAK SEASON AND DURING LOW SEASON, AND WHETHER THEY TEND TO BE MIGRANT, SEASONAL, OR YEAR-ROUND FARMWORKERS). THIS INFORMATION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DATA SUPPLIED BY WIOA SECTION 167 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM (NFJP) GRANTEES, OTHER MSFW ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATE AND/OR FEDERAL AGENCY DATA

SOURCES SUCH AS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION

Assessment of the Unique Needs of Farmworkers

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs) generally live in rural, isolated areas throughout North Carolina. Approximately 95 percent are of Hispanic/Latino origin; many are primarily monolingual in Spanish; and more than 50 percent are from Mexico. These farmworkers have several obstacles to employment which include transportation, childcare, limited English-speaking abilities and education, and job training. All of these barriers are major reasons for their lack of economic mobility. According to information obtained from DWS, NC Farm Bureau, NC Dept of Agriculture and the North Carolina Agromedicine Institute, North Carolina has an estimated farmworker population of 75,000 during peak harvest season. Based on estimates from DWS outreach staff there are approximately:

- 22,805 are Migrant Farmworkers
- 16,735 are Seasonal Farmworkers
- 9,075 are farmworkers who work more than 150 days (year-round)
- 26,936 are H-2A foreign farmworkers

Low Season Migrant workers can drop to 4,000 while seasonal workers drop slightly to around 12,000.

The Division of Workforce Solutions' (DWS) full-time, year-round outreach staff plan to continue assisting farmworkers and their families by providing crucially needed individualized career services in mostly rural areas where the majority of farmworkers live and work. DWS outreach staff will coordinate with Telamon (NFJP grantee) and with public & private community service organizations to provide these services to MSFWs.

4. 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:

The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

- Contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices.
- Providing technical assistance to outreach workers. Technical assistance must include trainings, conferences, additional resources, and increased collaboration with other organizations on topics such as one-stop center services (i.e. availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities), the employment service complaint system, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs in the area, and a basic summary of farmworker rights, including their rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment.

- Increasing outreach worker training and awareness across core programs including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training on identification of UI eligibility issues.
- Providing State merit staff outreach workers professional development activities to ensure they are able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.
- Coordinating outreach efforts with NFJP grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups.

A. CONTACTING FARMWORKERS WHO ARE NOT BEING REACHED BY THE NORMAL INTAKE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE OFFICES

The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices:

- The outreach efforts as required by 20 CFR 653.107 (b) (2) will be conducted by permanent full-time, year-round outreach staff members through personal contact, phone calls, and emails. All outreach staff will be bilingual (English and Spanish) as warranted by the predominately Spanish speaking MSFW population in North Carolina. Staff reached out to the National Monitor Advocate Team, during the Covid 19 pandemic, and collaborated with other service agencies to create procedures to perform virtual outreach. These virtual outreach procedures will serve as a contingency plan to be enacted if extreme unforeseen events prevent in-person outreach from occurring. All MSFW outreach workers will spend the majority of their time in the field and report to the agricultural field supervisor who will have primary responsibility for ensuring accomplishments of outreach goals. North Carolina is divided into eight prosperity zones which will be covered by the outreach workers. Currently there are 2 vacancies for outreach workers in significant offices. These vacancies have been posted and should be filled soon. Then each significant MSFW office within the state will have a full-time, year-round outreach worker, which may cover multiple prosperity zones depending on the MSFW population in the surrounding counties. The future plans include having an outreach worker &/or an Ag. BSR in each prosperity zone. Hiring decisions will be made annually.

DWS will continue to promote an aggressive outreach program. MSFWs will be contacted throughout North Carolina and be offered a full range of employment and training services to the extent that staff funding will allow.

- Services will continue to be delivered with priority outreach in NCWorks Career Centers that have high concentrations of MSFWs in their service areas.
- DWS has established policy for providing LEP services to all customers who do not speak English as their primary language. All outreach staff will remain up to date on all LEP services.

The following NCWorks Career Centers have been designated as MSFW Significant: Clayton, Clinton, Kenansville, North Wilkesboro, and Rocky Mount.

The Agricultural Employment Services program of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solution (DWS) is committed to serving the agricultural industry in the state by recruiting North Carolinians for agricultural job openings, with the goal of full utilization of all local and intrastate (within North Carolina) workers who desire agricultural employment. Serving the agricultural industry is part of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready Plan. As needed, interstate or migrant farmworkers and H-2A temporary foreign guest workers are brought in using the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) to supplement the existing agricultural workforce. Local seasonal and year-round farmworkers are permanent customers whom DWS staff members serve throughout the year. Migrant and H-2A workers will be in North Carolina in varying numbers throughout much of the year, primarily for harvest operations. Additionally, migrant farmworkers are brought in to supplement local workers in transplanting operations.

B. PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO OUTREACH STAFF. 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 AND EMPLOYMENT-RELATED LAW COMPLAINT SYSTEM ("COMPLAINT SYSTEM" DESCRIBED AT 20 CFR 658 SUBPART E), 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 program area specialists, agricultural field supervisor, agricultural employment consultants, and the state monitor advocate. Training will consist of basic orientation to the full range of employment services: Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, application and job order-taking, recruitment and referral procedures, complaint processing procedures, recognition of apparent violations, farmworkers' rights, supportive services, coordination of outreach efforts with other community-based organizations, completion of outreach logs and reports, and MSFWS' contacts. Outreach staff will also receive training in PC usage so that they will be able to access DWS automated services via desktop or laptop computers. The state monitor advocate will perform a general review of the training provided, with special emphasis on the portion of the training that deals with processing complaints and apparent violations.

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

Bi-annual training is conducted for all permanent outreach workers on all workforce programs and for additional required training. This training includes outreach safety, migrant housing, field checks, post-certification visits, Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System, human trafficking, farmworkers' rights, Unemployment Insurance (UI) Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), Prevailing Practice and Prevailing Wage Surveys,

and MSFW registrations. Training will be provided by area program specialists, field supervisor, and state monitor advocate.

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

Training and workforce development will be fostered through new and current outreach staff shadowing the program supervisor and H2A director in the field or by training meetings online. Further development will also be obtained through newly created online trainings within the NCWORKS Training center where they will obtain certifications upon completion. MSFW workshops are also highly encouraged through partner agencies such as East Coast Migrant Head Start and Migrant Food Ministry, etc.

Outreach workers report to agricultural field supervisor who has primary responsibility for ensuring accomplishments of outreach goals. Through improved reporting practices, better local office coordination of time, and more flexibility by management in assignment of outreach duties, outreach will be conducted virtually and in person. Outreach workers, as well as other staff, will visit living areas, work sites, and gathering areas to explain the full range of services provided by the DWS and other agencies. When state guidance limits travel workers will be contacted by phone, email, on state approved social media, and utilizing state messaging apps. Unemployed and underemployed farmworkers will be advised of agricultural and nonagricultural job opportunities. Outreach workers will provide information and referrals to MSFWs to supportive services, as well as assist them in securing aid such as food stamps, clothing, blankets, hygiene kits, and migrant shelter, when needed.

E. COORDINATING OUTREACH EFFORTS WITH NFJP GRANTEES AS WELL AS WITH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMUNITY SERVICE AGENCIES AND MSFW GROUPS

DWS works closely with other agencies concerned with the needs of MSFWs to coordinate the provision of referral services to these agencies. Copies of the AOP will be provided, upon request, to agencies concerned with the needs of MSFWs. In addition, DWS partners with Telamon to strengthen the ability of eligible MSFWs and their dependents to obtain or retain employment, stabilize their employment, and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

5. SERVICES PROVIDED TO FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

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

II. HOW THE STATE SERVES AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS AND HOW IT INTENDS TO IMPROVE SUCH SERVICES

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 basic career services, individualized career services and follow-up services. Staff will determine the service needs of the MSFW customers and either provide those services or direct these customers to staff who can provide the needed services. Agricultural employment consultants will be strategically assigned to NCWorks Career Centers for the purpose of providing employment and training services to MSFWs. Training will be provided to NCWorks Career Center staff to serve the MSFW population.

Outreach workers will locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by NCWorks Career Centers. Outreach workers will visit working, living, or gathering areas and explain the following services available through NCWorks Career Centers in a language understood by them: availability of referrals to training, supportive services, career services, employment opportunities, information on the Employment Service and Employment-related Law Complaint System, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs, and a basic summary of farmworkers' rights. Outreach workers will then encourage MSFWs to visit their local NCWorks Career Centers to obtain the full range of employment and training services.

Many of the MSFWs that are eligible for Title I services fail to ever realize the services that are available to them through the one-stop delivery system. In conjunction with our outreach team, we have developed an Agricultural Business Services Representative to help us ensure that these MSFWs are provided the opportunity to take advantage of these opportunities. Many of the MSFW's who are eligible for the Title I services are already employed (many of whom are underemployed). This new position is tasked with building relationships with growers and intern allowing these relationships to grant outreach staff the additional opportunities to assist the MSFWs either currently or who become employed at farming operations. Once MSFWs are referred to Title I services, the Ag. BSR will help the outreach worker follow up with the services provider to ensure the MSFW was provided all the Title I services available to them.

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

Agricultural Business Services staff members (Ag. BSR's) reach out to agricultural employers in rural areas throughout North Carolina, assisting them in their pursuit of agricultural workers. Agricultural employers who are expected to hire MSFWs will be identified through coordination with various providers of workforce development services. Services to these employers will be marketed by performing the following activities: conducting employer visits, promotional telephone contacts, and staff participation in growers' meetings and training seminars, workshops, and conferences. Staff will continue to partner with other agencies to provide Farm Labor Contractor Workshops in person or virtually when opportunities arise. Partner agencies include, but are not limited to, the US DOL Wage & Hour Division, North Carolina Department of Labor, and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. These trainings are intended to educate, train, and assist farm labor contractors on compliance with various state and federal regulations.

In conjunction with our new Ag. Business Services Reps (Ag. BSR's) we are now able use them as a liaison between ourselves and other Agricultural businesses. The BSRs are able to connect with employers, agencies, boards and educational systems to assist in providing services to

underrepresented MSFW populations. With the BSRs bridging the gap between employers and us, we are now able to connect to wider and previously overlooked MSFW populations within our state such as those that reside as part-time students in the educational systems, packing house workers, other agricultural departments (such as the department of ag) and within all other AG employment sites that are usually unreachable by current outreach staff. The BSR is able to reach beyond the current scope of our AEC staff while, by bringing services to employers and workers alike. They assist our MSFW community by providing internship opportunities, OJT/incumbent worker services and apprenticeship programs. This enables us to collaborate when it comes to referrals by them to us to visit untapped MSFW populations, and for us to be able to refer MSFWs to them for training and other services that would benefit them and also the employers alike.

B. MARKETING THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE COMPLAINT SYSTEM TO FARMWORKERS AND OTHER FARMWORKER ADVOCACY GROUPS

The Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System is marketed to farmworkers and farmworker advocacy groups in the following manner: through presentations at different community events, conferences, workshops, farmworkers' worksites and living areas. Handouts and complaint system posters are encouraged while in the field to farmworkers to better assist in their knowledge and usage. Annual in-office trainings are also conducted by outreach staff so, that career center staff are equipped with the most recent information on the complaint system.

C. MARKETING THE AGRICULTURAL RECRUITMENT SYSTEM FOR U.S. WORKERS (ARS) TO AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS AND HOW IT INTENDS TO IMPROVE SUCH PUBLICITY.

The Agricultural Recruitment System will be marketed to agricultural employers through presentations at Commodity Association events, by posting farm work available posters in English and Spanish, and performing outreach. Outreach staff will conduct field visits to local gathering places of local, interstate, and intrastate MSFWs to provide job search, development and placement opportunities for the targeted communities. Brochures will be distributed in Spanish and English in public-gathering places. Proper outreach summaries will be kept detailing these visits through monthly outreach logs. Outreach staff will also be involved in continuous recruitment efforts for local, interstate, and intrastate farmworkers. We will also collaborate with the State Monitor Advocate to promote the Agricultural Recruitment System during his field visits to agricultural employers, Farm Labor Contractors and MSFWs. As funds allow, all media, including Hispanic radio, TV, and newspapers, will be utilized to ensure positive recruitment of agricultural workers.

6. 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).

DWS Collaborative Agreements and Efforts Description:

- A Memorandum of Understanding was entered with Telamon to establish protocols for cooperatively serving the MSFW population in North Carolina.
- A Memorandum of Understanding was entered with the U.S. DOL Wage & Hour Division to form a partnership to more effectively and efficiently communicate and cooperate on areas of common interest, including training materials, providing employers and employees with compliance assistance information, and sharing information, as appropriate.
- Collaborative efforts have been expanded within the educational systems such as community colleges and universities where part-time MSFW/SFWs currently attend. Our BSRs are able to go within these spheres of the community to reach these new populations and provide them with better opportunities for their knowledge and job development through strategies such as internship, apprenticeship and work experience. This enables us to extend our services to new MSFW populations to create for them new and better career opportunities for themselves and their families.
- The DWS serves as an advisory member of the Farm Labor Practices Group (FLPG). The FLPG is a multi-sector diverse group of businesses, grower groups, advocacy organizations, and government entities which serve as: a facilitated forum for learning about farm labor issues from the diverse perspective of members; an opportunity to deepen mutual understanding and build productive new relationships through informal discussions with other members; an opportunity for members to work collaboratively to address farm labor challenges of mutual interest; and a means to offer constructive support to growers and farmworkers.
- DWS also collaborates with GAP Connections and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension service agencies. The agricultural services outreach staff participates in Farm Safety & Compliance events and Farm Labor Contractor Workshops. These events provide the opportunity for both employer and farmworkers to be informed and educated on a variety of topics including common violations, migrant housing, field sanitation, green tobacco sickness, heat stress, basic first aid and CPR, H-2A clearance orders, farm labor contractor registrations, pesticide safety, and human trafficking. In addition, training on compliance topics such as labor laws, worker rights, and harassment is included.
- DWS is a member of the North Carolina Agricultural Stakeholders Text Tree Meteorological Disaster Preparedness. This group has been assembled to assist vulnerable worker populations in North Carolina in the event of an impending meteorological disaster.
- DWS has established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the North Carolina Department of Labor (NCDOL). This is to set forth the principles of the working relationship which establishes general procedures for cooperation between the two agencies in order to ensure effective preoccupancy inspections and to eliminate duplication of efforts. Specifically, this MOU will establish a process and framework to: 1) train DWS inspection personnel to conduct preoccupancy inspections of migrant housing; 2) establish procedures for DWS personnel to complete and submit reports related to preoccupancy inspections of migrant housing; and 3) institute new

procedures for reimbursing NCDOL for a portion of the cost associated with DWS personnel conducting preoccupancy inspections of migrant housing.

- DWS has developed a positive relationship with NC Farm Bureau and continues to work with them in our efforts to better the Agricultural community.

The State Workforce agency intends to continue collaboration with existing partners and to establish new partners over the next four years. We will continue to participate and collaborate with other service agencies by providing presentations, coordination of outreach efforts when possible, and participating in public meetings, conferences, and workshops to better serve the agricultural population in our state.

NCSWA will meet with MSFW service providers including our NFJP, Telamon Corporation annually where parties can request establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements.

B. REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT

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.

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.

The DWS solicited information and suggestions from public agencies, employer organizations, and other interested groups. Comments, feedback, and suggestions have been requested from the following agencies:

- North Carolina Department of Agriculture
- North Carolina Department of Labor Agricultural Safety and Health
- North Carolina Migrant Education
- Telamon Corporation

- Farm Bureau Federation of North Carolina
- Governor's Council for Hispanic/Latino Affairs
- North Carolina Cooperative Extension Services
- Legal Services of North Carolina, Farmworker Unit
- Farmworker Advocacy Network (FAN)
- North Carolina Agromedicine Institute
- US Department of Labor Wage & Hour [MM1]

No comments, feedback or suggestions were received.

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.

DWS has successfully provided quantitatively proportionate services as compared to the general population and continues to meet the MSFW equity ratio indicators and minimum service level indicators as required by the US DOL at 20 CFR 653.109. The statewide MSFW Service Level Indicators report for the past four years shows compliance for 3 years (2022, 2021, 2020) with 7 of 8 equity ratio indicators and two of three minimum-service level indicators.

PY 2019 DWS was out of compliance by meeting 5 of 8 equity ratio indicators and 1 of 3 minimum-service level indicators. The Covid-19 pandemic began during this program year, which led to staff being taken out of the field and forced to telework. It took time to develop a plan to provide outreach services virtually. DWS has been in compliance since then and will stay in compliance because there is now a plan to provide outreach services virtually if the need arises, and Quarterly assessments will be made by the field supervisor to ensure those numbers are met. If these goals are not met an explanation must be provided to the SMA to ensure future compliance and possible revisions of our current goals if necessary, considering the yearly fluctuations amounts of MSFW within the state.

- Total active MSFW applications – 5,862
- Referred to employment – 7,790
- Placed in Jobs – 2,648

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.

DWS successfully collaborated with other service providers and adhered to the requirements of WIOA and the Wagner-Peyser Act at sections 20 CFR, parts 651, 652, 653, 655, and 658. As such, MSFWs were offered and provided a full array of employment and training services equitable and quantitatively comparable to that offered and provided to non-MSFWs. Outreach activities were conducted statewide by (AEC's)Agricultural Employment Consultants.

In the last four years, H-2A Foreign Labor Certification program activities have increased. Each year agricultural employers have requested more than 20,000 foreign workers to fill temporary agricultural job openings in North Carolina. The increase usage of this program has been a challenge for outreach staff to meet MSFW registration goals. The number of MSFWs has decreased while the number of foreign workers continues to increase. As noted in Gov. Roy Cooper's Job Ready Initiative, DWS will focus on creating strategies and solutions to current challenges, and recruit more MSFWs, placing emphasis on providing enhanced employment & training services, as well as job placement in both agricultural and nonagricultural industries. For many years, DWS has focused on recruitment for labor intensive crops; however, with changes/updates made by the US DOL to the definition of agriculture, DWS will expand recruitment efforts in other areas of the agriculture industry, such as pine straw, reforestation, hog, chicken, dairy farms, greenhouses and nurseries, beekeeping, construction on farm sites, and other work activities that are incidental to farm work.

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 (SMA) submits his recommendations concerning the DWS 2020 Agricultural Outreach Plan in accordance with federal regulation section 20 CFR 653.107(c)(1)(v).

The previous SMA and the current SMA conducted more in-depth onsite reviews. The SMA utilized a monitoring guide questionnaire that was created to interview various career center staff members in order to measure their knowledge and to recognize where training was needed. Additionally, the SMA meets on the regular with North Carolinas Workforce Development Boards, NCWorks Career Center Managers and NFJP Partners to discuss improving the coordination and administration of the services offered to MSFWs. During the meetings at the Career Centers, the local staff is trained and reoriented on the registration process of potential MSFWs.

In addition, the SMA and the program manager created training focused on the Complaint System that was presented specifically to career center managers who then assigned complaint specialists and backups. This training was conducted statewide giving exposure to the Monitor Advocate System and the Agricultural Services Program. Upon completion of the training, it was noted that career centers were capturing and recording more complaints statewide. Complaints and apparent violations will be forwarded to the State Complaint Specialist.

The SMA will continue to conduct onsite reviews at the MSFW significant offices but will also perform onsite reviews at career centers with permanent outreach staff. The monitoring guide will also be updated and modified to better fit changes in the program and in the state, so NC meets performance measures. The SMA will continue to review the delivery of services to MSFWs and provide training and technical assistance, as needed. The SMA and outreach staff

will continue to provide training on MSFW and employer services and the Complaint System on an as-needed basis or when requested.

The North Carolina SMA has had the opportunity to review and comment on the AOP (Agricultural Outreach Plan) and approved the plan as submitted. The SMA contributed to the design, scope and priorities of this plan as a method of continuing to serve and meet the needs of the North Carolina agricultural employers, workers, industry and community.

WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time (sec 121(e)(3));	Yes
2. If the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers, the State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111, State Workforce Agency staffing requirements;	Yes
3. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser Act services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and	Yes
4. SWA officials: 1) Initiate the discontinuation of services; 2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued; 3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued; 4) Approve corrective action plans; 5) Approve the removal of an employer's clearance orders from interstate or intrastate clearance if the employer was granted conditional access to ARS and did not come into compliance within 5 calendar days; 6) Enter into agreements with State and Federal enforcement agencies for enforcement-	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
agency staff to conduct field checks on the SWAs' behalf (if the SWA so chooses); and 7) Decide whether to consent to the withdrawal of complaints if a party who requested a hearing wishes to withdraw its request for hearing in writing before the hearing.	
5. The SWA has established and maintains a self-appraisal system for ES operations to determine success in reaching goals and to correct deficiencies in performance (20 CFR 658.601).	Yes

WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as "baseline" indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A "baseline" indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, "baseline" indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as "baseline" based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each

of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	69.0%	69.0%	69.5%	69.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	69.0%	69.0%	69.5%	69.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$5500	\$6983	\$5600	\$7000
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAMS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a description of the following as it pertains to adult education and literacy programs and activities under title II of WIOA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA).

A. ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS

Describe how the eligible agency has aligned 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 state of North Carolina adopted the North Carolina Community College System College and Career Readiness Adult Education Standards in 2010. In April 2013, when the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) introduced the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education, the NCCCS College and Career Readiness Adult Education Standards were reviewed and aligned to reflect the new OCTAE standards. At that time, the standards were renamed, "The NCCC Adult Education Content Standards" (NCCCAECS). NC

requires that all adult education instruction be aligned to the NCCC Adult Education Content Standards. NC requires that English language instruction be aligned to the OCTAE English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education (ELPS). The ELPS outline language demands across academic areas that must be developed for success in postsecondary and occupational training.

NC has aligned its content standards to postsecondary entry assessments. Specific math and reading curricula have been developed to include postsecondary entry standards contextualized to career clusters. This project, Career READY, trains in the use of these standards and the operation of two courses, math and English, that are designed specifically for students to enroll in secondary education without remediation.

NC provides training on standards-based instruction (SBI) through our NC Core Credentialing System. The NCCC CCR Department created a virtual on-demand training on Standards Based Instruction in 2023. NC Title II participated in OCTAE's Standards in Action Instructional Training on Developing ELL Lessons aligned to the Content Standards and disseminated this training by establishing a cohort of ELL instructors, regionally located, to serve as trainers and to provide technical assistance.

Documentation of SBI is part of the NCCCS Title II program monitoring process, and it continues to be part of the competitive RFP process.

B. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, 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 or Combined State Plan must include at a minimum the scope, content, and organization of these local activities.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES (SECTION 203 OF WIOA)

- 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.

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.

The North Carolina Community College System Office's College and Career Readiness Department will run all competitions (231, 225, and 243), in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C. Requests for Proposals (RFP) for the following sections will be released on a 4-year grant cycle: Adult Education and Family Literacy (231), Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (243), and Corrections and Other Institutionalized Individuals (225). The current awards were competed in the 2021-2025 release. The next competition for funds will be released in Spring 2025 for the 2025-2029 grant cycle.

Public service announcements and promotions are released to the media statewide, and the announcement is posted on the system office's website on the front-facing page. The announcements specify the purpose the funds are to be used for, the eligible population that these funds to be used for, and deadlines for submissions.

Upon release of the RFP, an applicant may apply for the one, two, or three Title II funded grant opportunities. Each of the sections requires a demonstrated effectiveness screening tool, a narrative addressing the 13 considerations outlined in Sec. 231(e) (231, 243, and 225), supplemental questions (243 and 225), a budget, and a detailed budget narrative.

All eligible providers have direct and equitable access to apply and compete for funds. These organizations may include, but are not limited to:

1. Local education agencies
2. Community-based or faith-based organizations
3. Volunteer literacy organizations
4. Institutions of higher education
5. Public or private nonprofit agencies
6. Libraries
7. Public housing authorities
8. Consortia or coalitions of agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities
9. Non-profit institutions not described in (a) through (g) of this section that have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals

10. Partnerships between employers and entities described (a) through (i) of this section

Applicants are required to align proposed activities with the WIOA LWDB plan for the workforce development area/region. The LWDB reviews the adult education application to determine the extent to which the application addresses the adult education and literacy needs as identified in the LWDB plan and available labor market information. An evaluation will be provided by the LWDB, indicating degree to which the applicant addresses the adult education and literacy needs identified in the LWDB's plan. The evaluation provided by the LWDB will be included in the review materials and will be used to determine the extent in which the applicant addresses the required considerations.

Additionally, the eligibility and past effectiveness of potential providers will be considered when evaluating applications (4). Eligible organizations must complete a demonstrated effectiveness table that is included in the RFP (34 CFR § 463.23). The table asks for data regarding improving skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and English language acquisition. Past effectiveness regarding employment, secondary school completion, and transition to postsecondary education data is also included in the table. Eligible applicants will be required to provide performance data for subject areas relevant to the allowable activities supported by the AEFLA grant award. Upon submission of the application, the North Carolina Community College System, Office of Adult Education will verify past effectiveness to determine if applicants are eligible to receive funding.

To be eligible for funding, applicants will be required to address the thirteen considerations outlined in the Workforce Innovation an Opportunity Act. These considerations will inform the development and implementation of adult literacy programs to ensure needs are met for learners seeking education, training, and employment opportunities.

Eligible providers must also outline how they will provide instruction in all Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs) in adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and English language acquisition (ELA). e following activities and programs:

- Adult Education and Literacy services that increase an individual's ability to read, write and speak in English and perform mathematics or other activities necessary for attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent: transition to postsecondary education and training and obtain employment.
- English Language Acquisition (ELA) program to assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners in—(A) improving their— (i) reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension skills in English; and (ii) mathematics skills; and (B) acquiring an understanding of the American system of Government, individual freedom, and the responsibilities of citizenship.
- Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities offered in collaboration with an employer or employee organization at a workplace or an off-site location that are designed to provide adult education and literacy activities to improve the productivity of the workforce.
- Family Literacy programs that are of sufficient intensity and quality, to make sustainable improvements in the economic prospects for a family and that better enable parents or family members to support their children's learning needs, and that integrate all of the

following activities: (a) Parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency; (b) Interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children; (c) Training for parents or family members regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children; and (d) An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

- Integrated Education and Training service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.
- Integrated English literacy and civics education (IELCE) that provides instruction in literacy and English language acquisition, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training.

The application packet includes Statement of Assurances that must be signed by all applicants. Item 9 in the packet states - The Applicant agrees that not more than 5% of Federal funds will be used for administrative purposes. If 5% is too restrictive to accomplish the tasks, then a higher rate may be negotiated. Allowable expenditures will be reviewed at the Bidder's Conference.

Completed grant applications will be submitted to the NCCCS-CCR portal and will be evaluated by external grant reviewers.

Each application will be assessed using a rubric addressing the seven requirements and thirteen considerations of the WIOA Title II, Adult Education, and Family Literacy Act.

The North Carolina Community College System Office's College and Career Readiness Department will award Title II grants to eligible adult education providers within the state of North Carolina for the purpose of developing and implementing adult education and literacy programs in the respective service areas.

Guiding themes to inform CCR's work during the 2025-2029 cycle include: building economic equity, identifying opportunities, supporting digital transformation, and increasing Integrated Education and Training options.

1. Build Economic Equity: The CCR office collaborates with NC Works and the NCCCS to identify and implement career pathways that include an Integrated Education and Training (IET) service approach. The pathways have multiple on ramps targeting those adults identified in the state plan as having multiple barriers. A marketing and outreach plan is being created to target these adults which will ensure equitable access to these programs.

2. Identify Opportunities: In keeping with the NCCCS system goals: to serve as engine for NC workforce development, serve as North Carolinians first choice for accessible and affordable post-secondary education and training, and provide a national model for diversity and inclusion, CCR participates in state level projects that support credential attainment. CCR supports the REACH project, which develops career pathways to increase the number of credentials earned by communities of color.

3. Digital Transformation: CCR was awarded \$1.3 by the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) to promote digital inclusion to ensure economic mobility and civic participation for students at NC community colleges affected by the digital divide by certifying and deploying trained digital navigators at 20 community colleges that serve Tier 1 and/or Tier 2 counties.

4. Career Pathways for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: North Carolina's community colleges and the North Carolina General Assembly are expanding a pilot program that provides career pathway opportunities to individuals with intellectual and development disabilities. College and Career Readiness will serve as a partner in this initiative.

C. CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED INDIVIDUALS

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following correctional educational programs identified in section 225 of WIOA:

- 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.

The North Carolina Community College System Office's College and Career Readiness Department (CCR) releases Requests for Proposals (RFP) for Section 225 Corrections and Other Institutionalized Individuals using the same timeline and guidelines as Section 231 and Section 243. The current awards were competed in the 2021-2025 grant cycle. The next competition for all sections will be released in Spring 2025 for the 2025-2029 grant cycle.

Applicants for Section 225 funding must complete the following components:

- demonstrated effectiveness screening tool,
- narrative addressing the 13 considerations outlined in Section 231(e),
- supplemental questions for Section 225,

- Section 225 budget, and a
- Section 225 detailed budget narrative.

Completed Section 225 grant applications will be submitted to the NCCCS-CCR portal for evaluation by external grant reviewers. Funds will be awarded to eligible adult education providers to develop and implement allowable educational programs in local jails and prisons, halfway houses, and state correctional facilities. The categories of programs offered in North Carolina in 225 include: (1) adult education and literacy activities; (2) special education; (3) integrated education and training, (4) career pathways, (5) concurrent enrollment, (6) peer tutoring, and (7) transition to re-entry initiatives and other post release services with the goal of reducing recidivism. Providers will be required to give priority of service for academic programs to individuals who are likely to be released in a 5-year time frame. Please note, North Carolina is not currently offering secondary school credits in prison education.

The funding formula for Section 225 allocations has 3 components:

- Base: 30% of available funding is allocated equally across providers.
- Participation: 30% of available funding is allocated based on the provider's share of participants. Participant is defined as an individual in a Title II program who has received at least 12 hours of service in a Period of Participation (POP). The participation component is available only to providers who have submitted 2019-2020 data.
- Performance: 40% of available funding is allocated based on provider's share of Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs).

North Carolina Department of Adult Corrections (DAC) and NCCCS staff meet on a regular basis to support the local prison and community college partners and carry out initiatives to improve and expand prison education.

As jails and prisons return to pre-pandemic schedules, the F.R.E.E. (Future Recidivism Elimination Education) program will be expanded to offer more Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs within the correctional facilities. Particular attention is given to identifying pathways with career opportunities for individual with criminal records.

Additionally, DAC is working with state prisons to roll out secure internet access for use for prison education. This is expected to expand offerings and access to education and training across prisons. When fully operational, this technology will allow programs to offer secondary school credits. It will also allow programs to begin offering digital literacy instruction.

North Carolina prisons housed 31,507 individuals on 8/31/2023 as reported on the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction Custom Offender Reports. North Carolina's Title II providers offer basic skills instruction in 53 DAC prison facilities, in addition to local detention centers, jails, and youth development centers.

D. INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs under section 243 of WIOA. Describe how adult English language learners, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, are served in IELCE programs.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be offered in combination with integrated education and training activities found in 34 CFR section 463.36.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs under section 243 of WIOA. Describe how adult English language learners, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, are served in IELCE programs.

The North Carolina Community College System Office's College and Career Readiness Department (CCR) releases Requests for Proposals (RFP) for Section 243 Integrated English and Civics Education using the same timeline and guidelines as Section 231 and Section 225. The current awards were competed in the 2021-2025 grant cycle. The next competition for all sections will be released in Spring 2025 for the 2025-2029 grant cycle.

Applicants for Section 243 funding must complete the following components:

- demonstrated effectiveness screening tool,
- narrative addressing the 13 considerations outlined in Section 231(e),
- supplemental questions for Section 243,
- Section 243 budget, and a
- Section 243 detailed budget narrative.

Applicants must describe how the program will integrate IELCE components to empower adult English language learners, including professionals with degrees and credentials, to improve

their language proficiency, gain essential workforce skills, pursue careers and/or advancement, and achieve civic competencies.

Completed Section 243 grant applications will be submitted to the NCCCS-CCR portal for evaluation by external grant reviewers. Funds will be awarded to eligible adult education providers to develop and implement allowable educational programs to meet the requirements of 243.

The Director of IELCE conducts virtual and on-site visits to provide technical support to ensure compliance and to provide professional development activities that contribute to program improvement.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be offered in combination with integrated education and training activities found in 34 CFR section 463.36.

The funds awarded for Section 243 must be used in combination with integrated education and training. IELCE applicants are required to submit an IET plan for each IET offered. The RFP also requires applicants to describe how participants will access and participate in IETs. Specific occupations and occupational clusters based on labor market demands and the LWDB plan must be identified. An additional requirement is that occupationally relevant materials and contextualized curricula will be used. All providers have access to NC's repository of relevant IETs and Guided Career Pathways templates and plans.

The Director of IELCE provides direct support to programs that are developing new IETS. This position will also convene regional meetings allowing providers to share best practices and troubleshoot systemic problems regarding IET creation and participation.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

All IELCE programs will be required to include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

Literacy and English language acquisition will include language proficiency, vocabulary development, grammar, and communication skills. Rights and responsibilities of Citizenship and civic participation will include understanding legal rights, civic knowledge, historical context, civic responsibilities, and community resources.

To support instruction, the IELCE Director will deliver professional development on Teaching Skills That Matter (TSTM) to integrate instruction in literacy and English language acquisition with instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

The RFP will require applicants to address the following:

- Describe how English language instruction, including reading, writing, and comprehension skills in English, mathematics, and civics education are based on the

best practices derived from the most rigorous research available and are aligned with the English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education.

- Describe how the instruction will be contextualized to meet the education and employment needs of participants.

By integrating literacy and English language acquisition with instruction on citizenship rights and responsibilities, IELCE programs enable learners to become informed, active, and civically engaged members of their communities while enhancing their language proficiency and literacy skills.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

The IELCE program is specifically designed to prepare adults who are English language learners (ELLs) for unsubsidized employment in high-demand industries and occupations, ultimately leading to economic self-sufficiency.

The RFP will require applicants to address the following:

- Describe how the program will work with the LWDB to identify opportunities for the ELL population.
- Describe how the program will partner with local employers to introduce participants to occupations that are available both regionally and state-wide.
- Describe how the program will partner with local employers to introduce participants to occupations that are available both regionally and state-wide.
- Describe how the program will develop and sustain relationships with employers that lead to job placements for participants.

Additionally, local providers connect learners to the local NCWorks Career Centers who provide workforce development services as well as access to other programs and activities carried out by one-stop partners identified in WIOA. Each required partner must provide access to its programs and activities through the NCWorks career center system.

The structure of IELCE program equips adult ELLs with the language proficiency, job skills, workplace knowledge, cultural competence, and career readiness needed to secure unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations, leading to economic self-sufficiency and long-term career success.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.

There is a strong relationship between the North Carolina WIOA Title II leadership and the state workforce development leadership. This facilitates a strong relationship between grant funded IELCE programs and the local workforce development system. Each provider is required to sign an MOU with the LWDB. Local providers connect learners to the local NCWorks Career Centers

who provide workforce development services as well as access to other programs and activities carried out by one-stop partners identified in WIOA. Each required partner must provide access to its programs and activities through the NCWorks career center system.

E. STATE LEADERSHIP

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA

The North Carolina Community College's College and Career Readiness program (CCR) will use state leadership funds to carry out the following required state leadership activities under section 223 of WIOA:

1. *The alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other core programs and one-stop partners, including eligible providers, to implement the strategy identified in the unified State plan under section 102 including the development of career pathways to provide access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities.*

College and Career Readiness (CCR) is developing strategies to strengthen the relationship between local Title II providers, core partners, local workforce development boards, and one-stop partners with the overall objective of increasing access to education, improving literacy rates, and enhancing employment opportunities for the citizenry. Benefits of a strengthened relationship will allow for the alignment of services and coordination in delivery of service and leveraging the expertise of one-stop partners in employment and training.

Strategies for strengthening relationships will include convening joint planning sessions, interagency agreements, and regular communication to ensure coordination.

- CCR staff will meet quarterly with NC Workforce Development Board Association and include representatives of Title II program directors.
- Core partners will be invited to present at CCR kickoffs and regional professional development convenings.
- CCR newsletter will be distributed to the workforce development boards to aid in building their knowledge of CCR priorities and activities.
- CCR will collaborate with Local Workforce Development Boards to define a process for reviewing, amending, and signing the Memorandum of Understanding.
- CCR will collaborate with core partners to provide Career Services training using an appropriate delivery format.
- Pilot programs will be identified to develop procedures to share best practices with all Title II funded providers.
- CCR State Director serves as a NCWorks Commissioner and will disseminate information from meetings to all providers.
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The CCR leadership and professional development team will use funds made available under section 222(a)(2) to provide technical assistance, professional development, and additional resources to eligible providers as they develop and implement career pathways and Integrated Education and Training programs. Additionally, there are dedicated personnel who support all providers on curriculum development that focuses on contextualization, credentialing, and support services that meet the needs of adult learners.

B. The establishment or operation of high quality professional development programs to improve the instruction provided pursuant to local activities required under section 231(b), including instruction incorporating the essential components of reading instruction as such components relate to adults, instruction related to the learners, instruction provided by volunteers or by personnel of a State or outlying area, and dissemination of information about models and promising practices related to such programs.

College and Career Readiness (CCR) strives to engage practitioners and partners in ongoing, accessible, and reflective learning opportunities that positively impact program practice and student performance. To facilitate this vision, we will collaborate with the NCCC System's Virtual Learning Community, Center for Occupational Research and Development (CORD), and the NCCC Student Success Center to create an online meeting space for instructors to have access to research-based instructional practices, exchange ideas with peers, and to participate in professional development opportunities. Professional development courses are available in synchronous and asynchronous formats and are available on-demand as self-paced courses. Asynchronous professional development courses ensure that high-quality, research-based professional development is available to every Title II instructor in North Carolina, no matter how remote the location.

To align with state priorities, the professional development focus will include course and sessions on:

- Ensuring instruction is contextualized to careers.
- Building individual program capacity for implementing models that accelerate transition, -Guided Career Pathways, Integrated Education and Training, and Pre-Apprenticeships.
- Improving instruction offered via distance education, hybrid, or HyFlex.
- Increasing digital literacy for students and instructors.
- Standardizing the curricula used across the state.
- Technology integration.
- Evidence-based reading instruction emphasizing the use of research-supported strategies, continuous assessment and feedback, and targeted interventions.

The state priorities for professional development will be monitored consistently and evaluated based on:

- Ongoing feedback from local providers
- Student performance data

- National initiatives

The following three credentialing options will continue to be offered: Core Credential, ASE Language Arts, and ASE Mathematics. All three are offered asynchronous and introduce practitioners to the essential components of reading as well as up-to-date, research-based methods for teaching literacy to adult students. They also provide fundamental knowledge, skills, and researched-based methods of instruction for adult education including for English language learners, essential components of reading, and meeting needs of students with disabilities.

We will continue to make available LINCS courses, webinars and communities of practice, professional networking opportunities, and resources for ongoing professional development.

C. The provision of technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities receiving funds under this title.

CCR partners with NCCCS office and has subject matter experts on staff to meet the provision of technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities receiving funds under this title, including--the development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and appropriate, in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition programs, distance education, and staff training; the role of eligible providers as a one-stop partner to provide access to employment, education, and training services; and assistance in the use of technology, including for staff training, to eligible providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies.

Additionally, individual in person or virtual technical assistance opportunities are available to all providers. Technical assistance may be precipitated by the need for specialized support, guidance, or troubleshooting and may be requested by the provider or the state office. Specialized teams typically respond to request regarding program implementation challenges, compliance and accountability initiatives, performance improvement initiatives, and professional development needs, and stakeholder engagement.

D. The monitoring and evaluation of the quality of, and the improvement in, adult education and literacy activities and the dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices within the state.

Monitoring and evaluating the quality of adult education and literacy activities, as well as disseminating information about effective practices and models, are crucial components of ensuring program effectiveness and continuous improvement. Using Benchmark's ADVANSYS student data management system, performance and operations will run bi-weekly enrollment, performance/measurable skills gains, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and participant retention reports for senior leadership. Providers are also required to submit monthly budget reports. These reports allow state staff to monitor proportionate spending and adherence to fiscal guidelines. These reports will be evaluated and disseminated to the grant representatives.

These reports are compared monthly. Programs that do not show improvement after a two-month are contacted by the provider's assigned grant representative. During this conversation, it is determined if a technical assistance meeting is warranted. In the Spring of each program year, risk assessments are completed for each provider. The risk assessment informs on-site, target, or virtual monitoring visits. During on-site monitoring visits, state teams conduct a review of all documents, program director interview, business office/fiscal agent interviews, student interviews, faculty/staff interviews, and class observations.

The migration to the new data management system has given the state office the advantage of generating real-time data and, thus, shortening the lead time to determine which providers are in jeopardy of not meeting performance benchmarks.

The access to more timely data also will allow the state office to identify exemplar programs that have promising practices. Once these programs are identified, the professional development team will work with the provider to share the best practice through the quarterly newsletter, a virtual PD session, or a regional professional development session.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT PERMISSIBLE STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA, IF APPLICABLE

College and Career Readiness (CCR) will use funds to carry out permissible state leaderships activities to support statewide initiatives to promote the purpose of this title to include the development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, and distance education, including professional development to support the use of instructional technology.

- CCR's professional development staff will introduce providers to LINCS (Literacy Information and Communication System) which offers a wide range of professional development courses and resources for adult educators, literacy practitioners, and workforce development professionals.
- The professional development team for College and Career Readiness (CCR) will provide guidance, support, and professional development on technology, instruction, and distance education. We will continue vetting and purchasing high-quality, research-based state licenses for adult education instructional software. For every state license, we will provide a series of instructional webinars on best practices on utilizing the new software.
- CCR will offer transition English and math which are aligned to academic standards required for entry into gateway math and English. The courses are contextualized to career clusters. Students enrolled in the Career READY program engage in academic advising, career advising, and academic preparation support services. By providing holistic wrap-around services, adult learners enrolled in the courses are eligible to enter postsecondary courses at North Carolina's community colleges. The transition courses provide equitable educational services and opportunities for at-risk students.
- CCR will continue to partner with NCCCS on Racial Equity for Adult Credentials in Higher Education (REACH) Collaborative. The goal is a two percent increase in credential attainment for Black, Hispanic and Native Americans between the ages of 25-64. The intent is to focus on building equity for College and Career Readiness students.

The project provides technical assistance and professional development on credential pathways with embedded short-term credentials that lead to family sustaining wages.

- CCR will provide technical assistance to eligible providers in developing and implementing programs that achieve the objectives of this title and in measuring the progress of those programs in achieving such objectives, including meeting the State adjusted levels of performance described in section 116(b)(3). In collaboration with NCCCS System Effectiveness, providers will have access to data dashboards through Power BI. These analytic tools allow for providers to monitor program performance. The data dashboards allow for customized reports.
- CCR providers are well positioned to assist students transition to postsecondary education. Local community colleges have Basic Skills Plus programs that allow for curriculum or continuing education credit tuition costs be waived for students who are dually enrolled in an adult education and literacy course.
- CCR will continue to promote digital inclusion ensuring economic mobility and civic participation for students in the North Carolina Community College. A digital navigator training course will be developed with versions in both English and Spanish. Twenty rural colleges that serve Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties with populations in their service areas that include incarcerated/justice-involved, racial/ethnic minority group, English language learners (ELLs), and veterans will serve as pilot colleges. This is a two-year project.
- Improving teacher retention is critical to maintain an effective educational program. Professional development opportunities that align with instructional needs will be available on an ongoing basis. Providers will have access to professional development related to creating a positive and supportive work environment that fosters collaboration, respect, and a sense of belonging among teachers.

F. ASSESSING QUALITY

Describe how the eligible agency will assess the quality of providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II. Describe how the eligible agency will take actions to improve such quality, including providing the activities described in section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA. Describe how the eligible agency will use evaluations, data analysis, program monitoring, or other methods to improve the quality of adult education activities in the State.

North Carolina will use the following strategies to assess the quality of providers and programs.

The assessment of the quality of programs and providers will be ongoing throughout the grant cycle.

Providers will be asked to complete a semi-annual self-assessment. This process will require grantees to assess where they are in terms of enrollment, retention, performance, and fiscal responsibility. Providers will work with regional grant representatives to discuss any strengths, weaknesses, or areas of concern in any of the metrics outline in the self-assessment. Student and stakeholder surveys will be included when appropriate/available.

The State office will review performance metrics and quality indicators using Power BI data collected by the NCCC System office's Research and Performance Management (RPM) team. Data points to be reviewed include literacy gains, credential attainment, post-secondary transition, Basic Skills Plus enrollment, and monthly budget reports.

North Carolina will use the following strategies to improve the quality of providers and programs.

Based upon the outcomes of the provider and state assessments, strategies will be determined to improve the quality of providers and programs. Strategies will include virtual or technical assistance sessions. Subject matter experts will meet with the provider and grant representative to discuss root causes any qualitative issues. Based upon the outcomes of the two-way dialogue, the next steps would include one or more of the following:

- Targeted monitoring – If one or two problematic areas are identified, the team will focus on those areas and provide specific professional development when appropriate.
- Risk Assessment prioritization - If the quality impacts program integrity, participant outcomes, or compliance, a risk assessment will be completed.
- On-site visit – An on-site visit will be warranted if the state needs to gather firsthand information, address operations, and verify compliance.

To further improve the quality of programs and providers, an Introduction to Title II Performance and Accountability Requirements will continue to be available on the NCCC Virtual Learning site. This course provides information about the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) performance indicators, and the National Reporting System's (NRS) accountability system for reporting literacy data. This course will provide directors and staff with the information needed to understand the National Reporting System's data reporting requirements and methods for tracking program participation, progress, and performance.

College and Career Readiness offers a core credentialing system to train instructors in evidence-based teaching methodologies. There are four cohorts offered each program year. These professional development sessions include the learning philosophies and frameworks that are unique to adult education and literacy activities. Additionally, instructors will continue to be offered credentialing courses in Adult Secondary Education Math and Adult Secondary Education Language Arts. These courses are offered in ten-week sessions.

Additional professional development courses and instructional support webinars that will be available to instructors include:

- Webinars: Evidence-Based Reading Comprehension, Phonics and Phonemic Awareness, Text Selection, and Guided Reading
- Integrating Technology in the Classroom
- Contextualizing Your Lesson
- Lesson Planning: Content Standards and Curriculum Mapping

North Carolina will use the following strategies to monitor the quality of providers and programs.

The monitoring team will analyze the data collected during the visit, including observations, interviews, document reviews, and data analysis. The findings, observations, and recommendations will be compiled into a monitoring report. This report will be communicated to the program administrators. If necessary, the program administrators will work with the state team to develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP). Throughout the CAP, the state team will provide follow-up communicate with the provider to assess progress. The goal of the monitoring process is to promote and ensure continuous program improvement ensuring compliance, improving program quality, and supporting the success of adult learners.

North Carolina will use the statewide data for the purposes of:

- Ensuring compliance and correcting non-compliance
 - Use data analysis to monitor program performance and identify areas of non-compliance with state or federal regulations, standards, or guidelines.
 - Implement corrective actions or targeted interventions to address non-compliance issues promptly.
 - Track progress and effectiveness of corrective measures through ongoing data analysis and monitoring.
 - Use data dashboards generated in Power BI to convey information in an accessible and actionable manner for providers.
- Informing development or refinement of professional development activities
 - Analyze data on educator performance, student outcomes, and program effectiveness to identify specific areas where professional development is needed or can be improved.
 - Tailor professional development activities to address identified needs that align with program goals.
 - Use the insights gained from data analysis to make informed decisions, develop strategies, set priorities, allocate resources, and implement interventions.
 - Provide access to resources to include journals, publications, conferences, webinars, and professional networks to stay updated on the latest developments in education and training.
- Identifying exemplary programs and best practices for regional and statewide sharing
 - Showcase successful programs as models for other providers and instructors, facilitating regional and statewide sharing opportunities through workshops, conferences, and collaborative networks.
 - Encourage peer learning and knowledge exchange among educators through case studies, best practice sharing, and collaborative partnerships.

- Disseminate best practices through online platforms: website, blog, social media, and bimonthly newsletter.
- Promote communication among providers.

By leveraging statewide data, North Carolina can enhance program quality and improve outcomes for learners, while supporting the continuous growth and optimum performance over time.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;	Yes
2. The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program;	Yes
3. The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan;	Yes
4. All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;	Yes
5. A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	Yes
6. The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;	Yes
7. The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and	Yes
8. The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program;	Yes

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out title II of the Workforce	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding the supplement-not-supplant requirement);	
2. The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;	Yes
3. The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not "eligible individuals" within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA;	Yes
4. Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.	Yes
5. The eligible agency agrees that in expending funds made available under Title II of WIOA, the eligible agency will comply with sections 8301 through 8303 of the Buy American Act (41 U.S.C. 8301-8303).	Yes

AUTHORIZING OR CERTIFYING REPRESENTATIVE

CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements

The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Please download and sign the forms below. Please scan and return the forms to wioa@ed.gov at the same time you submit your State Plan via the portal.

1. SF424B - Assurances – Non-Construction Programs
[\[http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html\]](http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)
2. Grants.gov - Certification Regarding Lobbying
[\[http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html\]](http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)
3. SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (required, only if applicable)
[\[http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html\]](http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	Enter information in this column
Applicant's Organization	North Carolina Community College System Office
PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	Enter information in this column
First Name	Sandra

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	Enter information in this column
Last Name	Thompson
Title	Associate Vice President, College and Career Readiness
Email	thompsons@nccommunitycolleges.edu

SECTION 427 OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS ACT (GEPA)

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity. The State applicant is also responsible for ensuring that its subrecipient applicants complete the GEPA Section 427 form or a State developed form that sufficiently meets the GEPA Section 427 requirement for any local-level-project and activity and maintains the subrecipients' responses in the State office.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.

- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

GEPA Section 427 Instructions to State Applicants for their Subrecipient Applicants

The State grantee provides a subrecipient applicant seeking Federal assistance instructions and guidance for how it must comply with the GEPA Section 427 requirement. The State grantee determines the form and content of the information a subrecipient applicant must include in its application regarding the steps it proposes to take to ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, its local-level project or activity. For example:

- The State grantee may require its subrecipient applicant to use and submit the GEPA Section 427 form that it is required to submit to the Department; or
- The State grantee may use a State-developed form that is sufficient to meet the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- The State grantee maintains the subrecipient applicants' responses in the State office.

Please refer to GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for AEFLA Application Package

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity. The State applicant is also responsible for ensuring that its subrecipient applicants complete the GEPA Section 427 form or a State developed form that sufficiently meets the GEPA Section 427 requirement for any local-level-project and activity and maintains the subrecipients' responses in the State office.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for AEFLA Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

The mission of the North Carolina Community College System is to open the door to high quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to postsecondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals by providing: (a) education, training, and retraining for the workforce, including basic skills and literacy education, occupational and pre[1]baccalaureate programs; (b) support for economic development through services to and in partnership with business and industry; and (c) services to communities and individuals which improve the quality of life.

Every year, the system provides hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians open-door access to affordable and diverse learning environments to improve their education, transform their careers, and change their lives. NCCCS responds to GEPA through the RFP process. All applicants describe steps to meet the requirements of Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA). The state partners with NCCCS Student Support Services to provide training to providers on providing accommodations and ADA accessible activities. The State uses state leadership funds to support the career pathways targeted to underrepresented communities, specifically Native Americans, African American and Hispanics. The focus is on removing barriers to access by providing access to grants, financial aid and counseling, instruction and services. Title II partners with the NC Student Success Center's regional equity coaches. Providers disseminate anti-discrimination policies through employee and student handbooks and other official materials. The NCCCS staff monitors Title II recipients to assess compliance with GEPA as outlined in their plan.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity. The State applicant is also responsible for ensuring that its subrecipient applicants complete the GEPA Section 427 form or a State developed form that sufficiently meets the GEPA Section 427 requirement for any local-level-project and activity and maintains the subrecipients' responses in the State office.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for AEFLA Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

Based on the proposed Title II project, the following barriers may impede equitable access to and participation of students, educators, and other beneficiaries: gender; race; national origin; color; disability; or age. Also, situational barriers often impede equitable access. These might

include transportation, social stigmas, educational, awareness, language, financial, and cultural barriers.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity. The State applicant is also responsible for ensuring that its subrecipient applicants complete the GEPA Section 427 form or a State developed form that sufficiently meets the GEPA Section 427 requirement for any local-level-project and activity and maintains the subrecipients' responses in the State office.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for AEFLA Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

Each applicant must include a description of steps to ensuring equitable access to federally funded Title II programs and projects. On a statewide level, leadership funds are made available for the purpose of aligning literacy activities with core and one-stop partners and professional development activities that address barriers that may impede adult learners access to and participation in Title II programs. The following are examples of some steps that will be taken to reduce barriers to equitable access and participation in Title II projects and activities: system of referrals between core partners and community resources, professional development regarding cultural sensitivity, flexible scheduling/multiple modalities, identifying supportive services, and inclusive learning environments.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity. The State applicant is also responsible for ensuring that its subrecipient applicants complete the GEPA Section 427 form or a State developed form that sufficiently meets the GEPA Section 427 requirement for any local-level-project and activity and maintains the subrecipients' responses in the State office.

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

Work to address identified barriers will begin immediately, and in some cases, before the 2025-2029 grant cycle. The North Carolina Community College has received funding from the NC General Assembly to develop a pilot program to house Vocational Rehabilitation counselors on site at community colleges to provide services for the I/DD population. This initiative will begin fall 2024. To address access issues, HyFlex and hybrid classes will be delivery options for Title II classes beginning in summer 2024. Additionally, the NCCC system office is working with a marketing firm to increase visibility and public awareness of Title II programs. Technical assistance is ongoing to help providers identify resources to help with financial barriers.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as "baseline" indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A "baseline" indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, "baseline" indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as "baseline" based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);

- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the

core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	38.0	41.0	38.0	41.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	37.0	41.0	37.0	41.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3932.0	5,000.00	3932.0	5,100.00
Credential Attainment Rate	30.0	31.0	30.0	31.5
Measurable Skill Gains	43.6	43.6	43.6	44.0
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

A. STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL.

1. ALL VR AGENCIES, EXCEPT FOR THOSE THAT HAVE AN INDEPENDENT CONSUMER-CONTROLLED COMMISSION, MUST HAVE A STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (COUNCIL OR SRC) THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA IN SECTION 105 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPLICABLE, HAS:

Select A or B:

(A) is an independent State commission

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

2. IN ACCORDANCE WITH ASSURANCE (A)(1)(B), IF SELECTED, PLEASE PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVE TYPE, INCLUDING THE TERM NUMBER OF THE REPRESENTATIVE, AS APPLICABLE, AND ANY VACANCIES, AS WELL AS THE BEGINNING DATES OF EACH REPRESENTATIVE'S TERM.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	1/0	10/2021
Parent Training and Information Center	1/0	7/2021
Client Assistance Program	1/0	10/2021
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	1/0	12/2023
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	2/0	7/2022
Business, Industry, and Labor	3/0	9/2021
Disability Advocacy Groups	1/0	10/2022
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	1/1	vacant
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	1/0	10/2022
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the	1/0	1/2024

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)		
State Workforce Development Board	1/0	9/2021
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	NA	3/2019
Parent of Disabled Child	2/0	11/2022

3. IF THE SRC IS NOT MEETING THE COMPOSITION REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 105(B) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT AND/OR IS NOT MEETING QUARTERLY AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 105(F) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, PROVIDE THE STEPS THAT THE VR AGENCY IS TAKING TO ENSURE IT MEETS THOSE REQUIREMENTS.

Not Applicable

4. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(21)(A)(II)(III) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, INCLUDE A SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT (INCLUDING HOW IT WAS OBTAINED) INTO THE STATE PLAN AND ANY STATE PLAN REVISIONS, INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORTS, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS.

The NC legislature recently approved a change in NC-G's public facing name and is now called the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD). The EIPD State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meets quarterly and holds subcommittee meetings the day prior the full council meeting.

There are three subcommittees: An Executive Subcommittee, a Policy Subcommittee, and a Consumer Input and Outreach Subcommittee. Each is led by a chair who coordinates with the SRC liaison in preparing a meeting agenda. Meeting agendas for the Executive Subcommittee include SRC membership updates, a quarterly program performance review, usually presented by EIPD, and miscellaneous EIPD updates on events, strategies, and collaborations. The Policy and Rules Subcommittee will review and comment on any new policies or policy or rule changes proposed by EIPD. The Consumer Input and Outreach Subcommittee will review the analysis of the consumer satisfaction survey results, typically presented by EIPD, and provide input on how to increase satisfaction and any proposed changes to the survey instrument or data collection. This committee also plans town-hall style public listening sessions, which are currently held the evening prior to the full council meeting at least three times annually in a virtual/in-person hybrid format. Reports on the listening sessions and subsequent recommendations from the SRC are reviewed at the full council meeting, which also includes presentations from EIPD and broader discussions on EIPD priorities, strategies, and performance. The full council will also provide input for EIPD policies, the consumer satisfaction surveys, and Unified State Plan.

The SRC's Policy and Rules Committee, which reviews the policy drafts regarding client services and other agency policies, including agency policies required for compliance with the Workforce

Innovation and Opportunity Act, has reviewed the following policies and revisions since June 2022:

- Informed Choice
- Approval for Private/Out of State Training
- Financial Needs Survey
- Supervisor Guide
- SSI/SSDI cost participation
- ENCORE Policy Modules - high level changes
- Revisions to IPE Instructions, VR Handbook, Identification and Verification, Supervisor Approval, Client Informed Choice, Combined Revisions, Financial Need, and Post-Employment
- Project SPARK (SWTCIE)
- Invoice Processing
- Imprest Cash
- Service Enrollments
- Sign Language Interpreters
- Client Signatures
- Updates to Outcomes and Pre-ETS
- Assertive Community Treatment
- Supported Internships and Internship Guidelines
- Financial Needs Survey Allowable Net Monthly Income
- Benefits Counseling
- Individual Placement and Supports Services
- Rehabilitation Counselor Policy

In June 2023, the SRC developed an updated strategic plan (2023-2025) comprised of four strategic goals and sub-strategies, which provide guidance when formulating SRC meetings and establishing committee priorities and shape the agency's approach to policy development implementation. The current goals:

Goal 1: Increase marketing and outreach to individuals with disabilities, employers, and potential partners, including colleges and universities.

1. *Plan for multi-faceted outreach to employers and potential VR consumers and partners in coordination with other Division efforts.*

2. *Leverage social media and other platforms to heighten awareness of VR and its services to North Carolinians with disabilities.*
3. *Identify strategies with potential partners to promote vocational rehabilitation as a potential career option. (Examples: University Career Fairs, VR jobs that are not known to students, focus on students as target audience, for those in transition, career change, vocation/occupational interests. NC Works is an option. Colleges/Universities as an option. HS/Transitional programs. Community Colleges.)*

Goal 2: Honor people's life choices by assuring that IPE goals and service provision are consumer-driven/consumer-focused.

1. *Review how VR is measuring casework quality and recommend new measures as the SRC finds appropriate.*
2. *Review consumer satisfaction questionnaire for clarity and distinction between experiences with VR versus contracted vendors.*
3. *Monitor and evaluate performance on consumer satisfaction with their involvement in their IPE.*

Goal 3: Assist VR in attracting and retaining professional staff.

1. *Propose legislative strategies to increase salaries for rehabilitation counselors.*
2. *Draft a bill, get it introduced and submitted to legislature with goal of having the bill incorporated into the budget.*
3. *Advocate for salary pay grades for counselors be aligned at the appropriate level by HR.*
4. *Continue to work with the division and HR to reduce the length of time from candidate's acceptance to job offer.*

Goal 4: Assist VR in adapting to the changing employment landscape and marketplace.

1. *Increase the number of people with disabilities who are employed in inclusive workplaces*
2. *Promote and support efforts to keep Vocational Rehabilitation staff informed of existing and emerging technologies and other relevant developments that can expand employment options for Vocational Rehabilitation consumers.*
3. *Broaden the employment opportunities for people with disabilities.*
4. *Create processes and procedures to ensure that consideration is routinely given to training in, and utilization of appropriate technology and other tools when developing IPEs.*
5. *Track number of Vocational Rehabilitation consumers who obtain non-traditional employment as an indicator that the staff are actively considering the full range of employment options available in the contemporary labor market.*
6. *Increase the number of people with disabilities who are working in high demand occupations.*

Additionally, the SRC had made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: In support of their strategic plan pertaining to increased marketing and outreach to individuals with disabilities, employers, and potential partners, including colleges and universities, the Council recommended to conduct stakeholder listening sessions remotely with increased measures of outreach including mailed out invitations, emailed invites, and social media blasts to invite stakeholders to attend the professionally coordinated virtual listening sessions to be held a minimum of 3X per year.

Recommendation 2: The Council recommends improving 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. EIPD 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 report during quarterly meetings to allow managers to provide updates for local activities, developments and to express any concerns to the Council. EIPD has incorporated the recommended changes and will continue with these standing topics until the Council recommends further adjustments.

Recommendation 4: The Council recommended to continue to jointly conduct consumer input sessions to be held a minimum of three times annually collecting input from various communities across the state and to strongly encourage staff attendance at such sessions whenever possible. EIPD will continue to actively support jointly conducted input sessions canvassing various communities across the state focusing on how the VR program is addressing consumers' VR needs through its service provision.

Recommendation 5: Whereas the Council is concerned about providing responsive services to consumers and realizes the Division's abilities in this area are impeded when high vacancy rates occur within the Division, the Council recommends that EIPD 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. EIPD 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 EIPD continue the use of the telephonic client satisfaction survey. Further, the Council recommends continuing the practice of surveying clients in active status and to continue employing a weighted sampling method to maintain costs and ensure representation across disability types, minority status, age, and gender.

5. PROVIDE THE VR AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE REJECTION OF ANY INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

List each recommendation/input followed by the VR agency response

Through its quarterly meetings and strategic planning process, the Council has provided input and made the following recommendations, all of which were incorporated, adopted, or otherwise supported by the VR agency.

Recommendation 1: (increased marketing and outreach) The Division has supported all recommended adjustments and expansions to the methods of outreach, including increased frequency and expansion of outreach venues to potential clients and partners.

Recommendation 2: (improving efficiency of the Vocational Rehabilitation process) EIPD supports all components of this recommendation and are currently addressing them. The procedures for purchasing prosthetics and orthotics has been improved and ongoing work is being done to simplify the self-employment evaluation process to a feasible extent.

Recommendation 3: (regular reports from the Client Assistance Program at SRC meetings) EIPD has incorporated the recommended changes and will continue with these standing topics until the Council recommends further adjustments.

Recommendation 4: (jointly conducted public input sessions) EIPD will continue to actively support jointly conducted input sessions canvassing various communities across the state focusing on how the VR program is addressing consumers' VR needs through its service provision. This has been accomplished virtually since June, 2020 and the Consumer Input and Public Outreach committee meets with Division staff regularly to steadily improve and expand the means of accomplishing this.

Recommendation 5: (regular reports on direct service position vacancies) EIPD supports this recommendation and will continue to work with Council members to regularly provide updates through statewide and regional vacancy reports.

Recommendation 6: (telephonic client satisfaction surveys) The Division supports this recommendation and will continue its adjusted sampling practices, contracts, and purchase orders accordingly.

B. COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA).

Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

1. THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, INCLUDING:

A. INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT;

Individuals with most significant disabilities (MSD) are defined as those whose physical or mental impairments require interventions or permanent accommodations that cannot be easily achieved to mitigate their limitations in three or more functional capacities regarding employment, such as communication, interpersonal skills, mobility, self-care, self-direction, work skills, and work tolerance. For the disabling condition to meet the definition of "most significant," such individuals must either require multiple core VR services for a minimum of nine months to complete their vocational rehabilitation program or require personal assistance services, rehabilitation technology, or extended services for their employment.

In PY 2022, Individuals with MSD accounted for 10,791 (45%) of 23,906 VR consumers served under an IPE that year. Within the MSD population, 1.5% had a sensory or communicative disability; 12.7% had a physical disability; 28.5% had a mental health or psychosocial disability; and 57.3% had a cognitive or intellectual disability. About 68% had a secondary disability. Nearly 49% were transition age youth; 40% were female; 54% were of a minority race or ethnicity; 41% had low literacy or were basic skills deficient; and 9% were ex-offenders.

The services provided most for the MSD population in PY 2022, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were: (1) supported employment services, which were provided to 1,370 VR participants with MSD with expenditures of \$6.2 million; (2) job placement assistance, mostly through a community rehabilitation program, which was provided to 1,235 VR participants with MSD with expenditures totaling \$4.9 million; (3) job readiness training, which was provided to 1,010 VR participants with MSD with expenditures totaling \$2.5 million; (4) maintenance, which was provided for 761 VR participants with MSD with expenditures totaling \$1.4 million; and (5) transportation, which was provided for 677 VR participants with MSD with expenditures totaling \$757,000. Overall, 4,838 received career services totaling \$15.7 million; 452 received training services totaling \$1.7 million; and 1,649 received other services totaling \$3.8 million.

In a quarterly telephonic interview survey regarding an individual's rehabilitation needs towards becoming employed, administered by North Carolina State University from PY 2022 through the first half of PY 2023, among 521 total VR participants with MSD who were not employed the following were needs were identified: 136 (36%) of 380 indicated they needed additional VR services; 73 (19%) of 378 indicated they needed transportation; 168 (41%) of 412 indicated they had medical problems they needed remedied; 10 (3%) of 324 indicated they needed childcare or eldercare services; 80 (19%) of 338 indicated they felt discriminated against because of their disability, which implies a need for advocacy; 135 (32%) of 418 indicated they weren't ready to work, suggesting a need for job readiness and related services; 67 (17%) indicated fear of losing benefits, suggesting a need for benefits counseling; and 210 (50%) of 424 indicated they needed job search assistance.

B. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

Individuals who are of a minority race or ethnicity accounted for 52.8% (n = 22,836) of 43,255 eligible DVRS VR consumers served in PY 2018-19.

Within this population 31.2% (n = 7,124) were individuals with MSD; 60.7% (n = 13,866) were individuals with significant disabilities; and 8.1% (n = 1,846) did not have significant disabilities.

Regarding their primary disability, 0.4% (n = 93) had blindness or a visual impairment; 3.6% (n = 826) were deaf, hearing impaired or deaf-blind; 13.8% (n = 3,146) had a mobility, dexterity, or other orthopedic impairment; 12% (n = 2,155) had another type of physical impairment related to a medical condition; 35.2% (n = 8,030) had a cognitive impairment; and 8,000 (35%) had a psychosocial or other mental impairment.

Individuals of minority backgrounds ranged in age from 13 to 82, with 35 as the average and 32 as the median age. Of the 22,836 eligible VR consumers of minority backgrounds, 37.1% (n =

8,467) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 46.6% (n = 10,645) were ages 25 to 54; and 16.3% (n = 3,724) were ages 55 and older.

About 47.1% the individuals of minority backgrounds were female (n = 12,075).

The minority backgrounds of this population included 87.4% (n = 19,965) who were Black or African American; 10.8% (n = 2,475) who were Hispanic or Latino; 3.1% (n = 706) who were American Indian or Alaskan Native; 1.6% (n = 371) who were Asian; and 0.6% (n = 144) who were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2018-19 as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 20,437 individuals with MSD (89.8%); diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 5,684 (25%); job search assistance, mainly by VR agency staff, which was provided to 4,789 (21.1%); job placement assistance, mostly through a community rehabilitation program, which was provided to 4,458 (19.6%); transportation which was provided to 3,234 (14.2%); short term job supports, mostly as work adjustment job coaching, which was provided to 3,086 (13.6%); counseling and guidance, which was provided to 2,962 (13%); maintenance, which was provided to 2,569 (11.3%); and supported employment services, which were provided to 1,842 (8.1%). Other services provided are listed in table J.2.

Table B.2. Services provided for Individuals of Minority Backgrounds, PY 2018-19

Service Type	Number of clients that received the service	Percent of minority population served
Assessment	20,437	89.5%
Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments	5,684	24.9%
Job Search Assistance	4,789	21.0%
Job Placement Assistance	4,458	19.5%
Transportation	3,234	14.2%
Short Term Job Supports	3,086	13.5%
Counseling and Guidance	2,962	13.0%
Maintenance	2,569	11.2%
Supported Employment Services	1,842	8.1%
Job Readiness Training	1,278	5.6%
Vocational Training	847	3.7%
Benefits Counseling	768	3.4%
Literacy Training	663	2.9%

Service Type	Number of clients that received the service	Percent of minority population served
Information and Referral Services	617	2.7%
University Training	521	2.3%
Community College	490	2.1%
Rehabilitation Technology	427	1.9%
Interpreter Services	360	1.6%
Miscellaneous Training	306	1.3%
On-the-Job Training	298	1.3%
Disability Related Skills Training	126	0.6%
Customized Employment Services	90	0.4%
Graduate School Training	59	0.3%
Customized Training	37	0.2%
Reader Services	24	0.1%
Extended Services	16	0.1%
Personal Assistance Services	7	< 0.1%
Technical Assistance	< 5	< 0.1%
Apprenticeship Training	< 5	< 0.1%

In a telephone survey of 1,740 VR clients of minority race or ethnicity who were unemployed, regarding their satisfaction with the VR program and barriers to employment, 59.8% reported they needed additional help with their job search; 49% said they needed additional VR services; 47.4% said they had medical problems that prevented them from working; 28% said they didn't have transportation; 23.6% said they weren't ready to work; 19.7% said they felt discriminated against because of their disability; 17.4% said there weren't any jobs available that they wanted; 17.3% said they feared losing their disability or healthcare benefits; and 6% said they didn't have childcare.

C. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

Over half the individuals served by EIPD are also served through other components of the workforce development system. According to the 2022 NC Common Follow-up System Operational Report, from PY 2010-11 to PY 2020-21, EIPD served 180,826 unique individuals, of which, at some point during the 10-year period:

- 45.5% were enrolled at NCCCS,

- 3.4% were enrolled in UNC system,
- 25.6% participated in the NC TANF Work First program,
- 0.37% participated in the DSB VR program, and
- 53.2% had also received services through NCWorks Career Centers under the Title I Adult, Youth, or Dislocated Worker programs or Title III, Wagner-Peyser, including NCWorks Online.

In a survey of Workforce Development Board Directors from the Kerr-Tar, Western Piedmont, Capital Area, and Charlotte Works Workforce Development Board regions, as key informants, the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and visual disabilities were identified as follows: More collaboration between VR and the Talent Employment Solutions Team at career centers when EIPD has determined that people are job ready; employment related service needs should be better advertised and success stories broadcasted to a wider audience; workforce partners have to do a better job of telling their story; individuals with disabilities, especially, need to know they can offer valuable skills to the workforce; individuals with disabilities struggle in some cases with an employer's lack of assistive technology or don't know how to request accommodations; individuals with disabilities may need to know how to answer interview questions concerning their abilities; other needs included job search assistance, including resumé preparation, employability workshops, advocacy training, assessments, interpreting services, psychological services, counseling services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes.

D. YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. 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 IDEA.

Transition age youth, ages 14-24, comprise 42.3% (n = 10,115) of the 23,906 total VR cases served under an IPE in PY 2022. Another 6,019 potentially eligible students with disabilities were provided pre-employment transition services.

Within the population of youth served under an IPE, 52% (n = 5,231) had most significant disabilities; 78% (n = 7,881) had a cognitive impairments as their primary disability; 53% (n = 5,371) had a secondary disability; and 52% (n = 5,249) were of a minority race or Hispanic ethnicity.

Overall, in PY 2022, 3,550 youth were provided VR career services totaling \$9.8 million; 447 were provided VR training services totaling \$2 million; and 784 were provided other VR services, such as auxiliary services, totaling \$3 million. A total 6,019 students with disabilities were provided pre-employment transition services totaling \$14.3 million. The most commonly provided VR services in PY 2022 were (1) assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 2,662 youth and totaled \$1.5 million; (2) job placement assistance, which was provided to 817 youth and totaled \$2.8 million; (3) supported employment services, which were provided to 561 youth and totaled \$2.5 million; (4) short-term on the job supports, which were provided to 540 youth and totaled \$2.1 million; (5) maintenance, which was provided to 490 youth and totaled \$2 million; (6) transportation, which was provided for 273 youth and

totaled \$382,000; and (7) four-year college or university training, which was provided for 208 youth and totaled \$1.6 million.

In a telephonic interview survey of VR consumers' needs towards becoming employed, conducted quarterly by North Carolina State University in PY 2022 and the first half of PY 2023, among 438 transition age youth younger than 24, 96 (34%) of 281 indicated they needed additional VR services; 47 (17%) of 277 indicated they needed transportation; 81 (28%) of 294 indicated they had medical problems they needed to first resolve before they could work; 8 (3%) of 235 indicated they needed childcare or eldercare; 44 (14%) of 318 felt discrimination kept them from becoming employed, suggesting a need for advocacy or self-advocacy training; 103 (32%) of 324 indicated they were not ready to work, suggesting a need for work readiness training or services; 26 (9%) of 292 indicated they feared losing their benefits, such as SSDI or Medicaid, suggesting a need for benefits counseling; and 153 of 321 (48%) indicated they needed additional help with their job search.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.

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. EIPD extends its services for people with disabilities through partnerships with the CRPs. The CRPs provide one or more of the following services to people with disabilities to help them prepare for and obtain employment: community-based assessment, vocational evaluation, work-adjustment training, supported employment, and job coaching. Toward the start of the fiscal year with over 135 CRPs across the state and more than 7,800 VR participants received services from a CRP, of which approximately 39% received supported employment (SE) services. Of those provided CRP services that year, 2,804 achieved their employment objectives in the same year, including 1,110 individuals that were placed in employment in an integrated setting with supports, while many others continued to progress towards employment.

The CRPs have representation on a Steering Committee that includes agency staff and representatives from the NC DHHS Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (MH/DD/SAS), and representatives from the CRP community appointed by the VR program, the NC Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), and the NC Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NCARF). The steering committee meets on a quarterly basis and focuses on budgetary and program issues and makes recommendations. Needs for improving and expanding CRPs identified by the steering committee include review and ongoing revisions to rules and standards, including qualifications standards for CRP staff providing or supervising direct services to consumer, which were developed to address the need for service quality and uniformity; the development of a new evaluation instrument to assist with monitoring the quality of services being provided by CRPs, and also address the need for service quality and uniformity; the development of a website specific to CRP resources, such as vendor applications and rules and standards, which now

includes a description of the process for becoming an approved vendor; an evaluation of fair rates and methods of compensation for CRPs and supporting activities such as transportation services provided to consumers, which addressed the need for fiscal responsibility in providing these services efficiently, yet fairly; and the development of effective collaborative efforts with the NC DHHS.

Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) to provide consistent funding for extended supported employment addressed the need for VR Program participants to receive follow-along services, even after their case was successfully closed.

C. GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND STRATEGIES

Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of Section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under Section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE SRC AND THE VR AGENCY JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND ANY REVISIONS; AND

The following goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council for the PY 2020-2023 Unified State Plan and were retained without revisions for PY 2024.

The initial development involved a meeting between the VR Agency's Planning and Evaluation Unit and the Employment Services Section to develop an initial draft the goals and priorities based on the most recently completed CSNA, analysis of the consumer satisfaction surveys, program evaluation data, public input from open forum meetings, and the agenda topics and discussions during that year's SRC Council meetings. The draft goals and priorities were then presented the VR agency Director, Senior Director, and SRC, and then revised, based on their review and comment, and subsequently adopted.

Notably, the goal under the priority of Competitive Integrated Employment is of particular importance to the VR agency for PY 2024 due to efforts towards employment and inclusion for people with disabilities such as the NC Olmstead Plan, NC InclusionWorks, Transitions to Community Living (which emphasizes individual placement and supports) and the SWTCIE grant. However, many of these and other initiatives target youth and students with disabilities and there is a recognized need to expand pre-employment transition services, which remains a goal. Additionally, the VR agency recognizes the importance of business engagement to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities. Finally, the VR agency also identifies the need for capacity building with regard to both internal capacity, including the recruitment and retention of VR counselors and support staff, and collaboration and partnerships with other agencies and programs to leverage resources, such as for multiagency efforts, including the Olmstead Plan, InclusionWorks, and Transitions to Community Living.

Priority: Competitive integrated employment

Goal: Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

Priority: Youth and students with disabilities

Goal: Increase opportunities for training and employment services for youth with disabilities.

Goal: Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

Priority: Business engagement

Goal: Increase partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities.

Priority: Capacity building

Goal: Increase internal capacity and develop the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

Goal: Increase collaboration with WIOA core and required program partners to integrate and expand services for individuals with disabilities.

2. IDENTIFY MEASURABLE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND THE BASIS FOR SELECTING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES (E.G., CSNA, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, SRC RECOMMENDATIONS, MONITORING, OTHER INFORMATION). AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 101(A)(15)(D), (18), AND (23), DESCRIBE UNDER EACH GOAL OR PRIORITY, THE STRATEGIES OR METHODS USED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OR PRIORITY, INCLUDING AS APPLICABLE, DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES OR METHODS THAT—

A. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES;

B. OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ACCESSING VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

C. 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, POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES); AND

D. IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE QUALITY EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES.

List and number each goal/priority, noting the basis, and under each goal/priority, list and number the strategies to achieve the goal/priority

The following goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by EIPD and the State Rehabilitation Council. The previous section (c.1.) describes the process of how the priorities were developed :

Priority 1: Competitive integrated employment

Goal 1. Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment. This goal corresponds to (D) Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes. The measurable objectives are:

Objective 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 1.2. The number of persons achieving employment outcomes will equal or exceed the previous year.

Objective 1.3. The percentage of all individuals who have achieved an employment outcome after exiting the program having received services will equal or exceed 50%.

Objective 1.4. 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 1.5. At least 75% of VR consumers who achieved competitive employment will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities.

Objective 1.6. The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

Objective 1.7. Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment to 50%.

Objective 1.8. The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

Objective 1.9. Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment to 50%.

Objective 1.10. 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 1.11. Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment to 50%.

Objective 1.12. The total number of individuals with disabilities who are ex-offenders exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

Objective 1.13 . Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities who are ex-offenders exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment to 50%.

Priority 2: Youth and students with disabilities

Goal 2.1. Increase opportunities for training and employment services for youth with disabilities. This goal corresponds to (C) 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, post-secondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).

Objective 2.1. Increase the number of transition-age youth with disabilities provided VR services over that of the prior year.

Objective 2.2. The total number of transition age youth with disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

Objective 2.3. Increase the rehabilitation rate for VR participants who are transition age youth with disabilities to 50%.

Objective 2.4. Increase the number of students with disabilities provided pre-employment transition services over that of the prior year.

Priority 3. Business engagement

Goal 3.1. Increase partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities. This goal corresponds to (B) Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services.

Objective 3.1. Increase the number of work experiences, on-the-job training opportunities, and internships, including supported work experiences, such as Project Search, for VR participants over the prior year.

Objective 3.2. The total number of VR participants who participated in work experiences, on-the-job training opportunities, and internships, including supported work experiences, such as Project Search, exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

Objective 3.3. Increase the rehabilitation rate for VR participants who participated in work experiences, on-the-job training opportunities, and internships, including supported work experiences, such as Project Search, exiting the VR program in employment to 50%.

Priority 4. Capacity building

Goal 4.1 Increase collaboration with WIOA core and other VR program partners to integrate and expand services for individuals with disabilities. This goals corresponds to (B), (C), and (D) with regard to partnerships that increase services and access to employment for individuals with most significant disabilities, multiple barriers to employment, and transition age youth.

Objective 4.1. The total number of VR participants who are co-enrolled in another program or a program partnership will increase over the prior year.

Objective 4.2. The total number of VR participants who are co-enrolled in another program or a program partnership exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

Objective 4.3. Increase the rehabilitation rate for VR participants who are co-enrolled in another program or a program partnership with disabilities to 50%.

D. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

1. PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED FOR THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS;

List the goals/priorities and discuss the progress or completion of each goal/priority and related strategies

Priority 1: Improve Client Outcomes

Goal 1.1. Increase the number and proportion of individuals exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

Measurable Objectives for Goal 1.1	PY 20	PY 21	PY 22
Objective 1.1.1. The number of persons achieving employment outcomes will equal or exceed the previous year.	3,153	3,398	2,927
Objective 1.1.2. The percentage of all individuals who have achieved an employment outcome after exiting the program having received services will equal or exceed 50%.	42.3%	43.9%	38.1%

Goal 1.2. Increase the number and proportion of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

Measurable Objective for Goal 1.2	PY 20	PY 21`	PY 22
Objective 1.2.1. At least 75% of VR consumers who achieved competitive employment will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities.	92%	93%	94%

Goal 1.3. Increase earnings for individuals exiting the VR program in employment.

Measurable Objectives for Goal 1.3	PY 20	PY 21	PY 22
Objective 1.3.1. Increase average hourly earnings for individuals who exit the VR program in competitive employment to 52% the statewide average for all North Carolinians.	43%	48%	48%

Performance Assessment

Objective 1.1.1. The number of individuals exiting VR in employment increased from PY 2020 to PY 2021 and then decreased in PY 2022. This is due in large part to a smaller total VR caseload and the trend of fewer VR applicants, which had already occurred for about a decade, was greatly exacerbated during the COVID pandemic and the subsequent labor economy.

Objective 1.1.2. The rehabilitation rate has averaged 41.4% for the past three years and has not met the goal of 50% since before WIOA was enacted. Although the Division considers employment rate at case closure a meaningful measure of program success, the emphasis has been on the provision of quality services that help individuals leave the VR program with increased work opportunities, even if their case closes without an employment outcome. This is evidenced in the post-exit employment rate where, in PY 2018, 62% of exiters were employed in the second post-exit quarter, which declined to 49% in PY 22 due to the COVID pandemic. The VR program will continue help individuals increase their ability to find or maintain work post-exit and will evaluate the employment rate at the second and fourth post-exit quarter.

Objective 1.2.1. An increasing proportion of individuals exiting in employment have significant or most significant disabilities, from 89% in PY 2018 to 94% in PY 2022. This trend may be due in some part to historically low unemployment rates that provide increased opportunities for individuals whose disabilities are not significant impediments to employment. The VR program has expanded its contracts with community rehabilitation programs to provide services targeted to individuals with significant or most significant disabilities, including brain injury support services, community-based work adjustment, and individual placement and supports.

Objective 1.3.1. The VR program has yet to meet the former federal standard having VR exiters in competitive integrated employment earn at least 52% the state average hourly wage, however PY 2022 is as close as it's ever been. The ratio for each of the past three years increased from 48%. The average hourly wage was \$11.40 for VR exiters and \$23.44 for the state in PY 2022.

The VR program continues in its commitment to helping individuals with disabilities maintain and advance in employment during a period of historically low unemployment. Although the VR program is serving a larger proportion of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities who depend on public assistance and family and friends for support, it maintains its commitment to helping such individuals work towards increasing their economic independence. The NC Division of VR Services has expanded its contracts with community rehabilitation programs for training and job supports. Placements through community rehabilitation programs account for approximately half of the VR clients who exited in employment. There has also been an added emphasis on the provision of vocational counseling and guidance, benefits counseling, rehabilitation services, and matching employers' workforce needs with the skillsets of VR consumers. The VR program has increased placements for on-the-job training and internships and expanded brain injury support services, community-based work adjustment, and individual placement and support (IPS) services. Other strategies employed to improve performance are summarized in more detail in the strategies section of the Unified State Plan.

Priority 2: Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment

Goal 2.1. Increase the number and proportion of individuals with mental illness and substance abuse disorder exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.1	PY 20	PY 21	PY 22
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.	1,165	1,290	1,156
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 to 52%.	37.9%	39.3%	36.2%

Goal 2.2. Increase the number and proportion of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.2	PY 20	PY 21	PY 22
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.	1,272	1,513	1,377
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 to 50%.	43.0%	45.1%	40.0%

Goal 2.3. Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.3	PY 20	PY 21	PY 22
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.	1,634	1,696	1,588
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 to 55.8%.	43.1%	42.8%	37.6%

Goal 2.4. Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities who are ex-offenders exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.4	PY 20	PY 21	PY 22
Objective 2.4.1. The total number of individuals with disabilities who are ex-offenders exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.	327	349	306
Objective 2.4.2. Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities who are ex-offenders exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment to 52%.	34.3%	32.6%	31.1%

Performance Assessment

Objectives for Goal 2.1: In PY 2022, individuals with mental illness as either their primary, secondary, or other impediment to employment accounted for 39.5% of all employment outcomes. Success in this area is largely attributed to expanded use of community rehabilitation programs through the milestone system and collaborative interagency efforts, including those that specifically target this population such as the individual placement and supports model of supported employment.

Objectives for Goal 2.2: Individuals with most significant disabilities have comprised an increasing proportion of the employment outcomes to 47% in PY 2022. Nearly 90% of these exiters are individuals with a cognitive or psychosocial disability. Over half are individuals of minority backgrounds, and 40% are transition-age youth at the time of exit. Success in this area is largely attributed to a focus on services for transition-age youth with I/DD and expanded use of community rehabilitation programs through the milestone system, and collaborative interagency efforts, including those that specifically target this population.

Objectives for Goal 2.3: For PY 2022, individuals of minority backgrounds accounted 54.3% of all employment outcomes. Success in this area is largely attributed to outreach in underserved areas and the application of a financial needs test for certain direct cost services. This allows the Division to provide these services to individuals, often of minority backgrounds who can least afford them.

Objectives for Goal 2.4: For PY 2022, 10.5% of individuals exiting the VR program in competitive integrated employment were identified on the RSA-911 as ex-offenders. Success in this area is attributed to job placement and job search assistance, employer engagement, and

partnerships with corrections agencies in transitioning such individuals on parole and probation into the workforce.

Priority 3: Increase Client Satisfaction

Goal 3. Increase client satisfaction with the VR program, their counselor, and other staff.

Measurable Objectives for Goal 3	PY 20	PY 21	PY 22
Objective 3.1. Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied that they were treated by VR staff with courtesy and respect.	96%	98%	96%
Objective 3.2. Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied with the help they received from VR to decide on job choices.	80%	81%	91%
Objective 3.3. Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied with VR identifying their service needs towards becoming employed.	88%	94%	91%
Objective 3.4. Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied with the time it took to develop their individualized plan for employment.	86%	94%	92%
Objective 3.5. Increase the percent of clients who are, overall, satisfied with their experience with the VR program.	86%	89%	92%

Performance Assessment

For PY 2022, the percentages on the measures of customer satisfaction were 91% and above for all measures with overall satisfaction with the VR program at 92%. Approximately 96% of VR consumers were satisfied they were treated with courtesy and respect by program staff and from 91% to 92% were satisfied with staff identifying their vocational rehabilitation needs, the timeliness of their eligibility determination, and the development of their individualized plan for employment. VR offices adjusted for staff vacancies while maintaining high standards of customer service.

2. PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR, REFLECTING ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE. EXPLAIN ANY DISCREPANCIES IN THE ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS; AND

	PY 2022 Actual	PY 2022 Negotiated
Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit	49.0%	46%
Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after Exit	\$3,541	\$2,984
Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit	35.2%	36%
Measurable Skills Gain Rate	27.4%	38%
Credential Attainment Rate	28.0%	27%

EIPD was successful in achieving the negotiated levels of performance for the employment rate for 2nd quarter after exit, median earnings 2nd quarter after exit, and the credential rate. The employment rate 4th quarter after exit fell short by 0.8%, which is still close. The discrepancy may be due to loss to follow up for some individuals and timely access to UI wage data. Effective for PY 2023, the new case management system, ENCORE, has an interface with UI wage data that populates these data, which allows for timely reporting and reduces the administrative burden for staff. The measurable skills gain rate also fell short of the negotiated level and by 10.6%. The discrepancy is attributed to staff vacancies, a need for additional training and oversight, in addition to system design issues. EIPD has since implemented a new case management system and a WIOA training specialist now provides regularly recurring MSG training for staff.

3. THE USE OF FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES (SECTIONS 101(A)(18) AND 101(A)(23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT) (E.G., SRC, SILC).

In FY 2022, Innovation and Expansion Funds in the amount of \$264,827 were expended to support the statewide Independent Living Council Resource Plan. There were no other I&E expenditures that year. This was reported on the RSA-17 for FY 2022 (submission #806).

E. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS, AND ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF TITLE VI FUNDS:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

2. IF THE VR AGENCY HAS ELECTED TO RECEIVE TITLE VI FUNDS, SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRES VR AGENCIES TO INCLUDE SPECIFIC GOALS AND PRIORITIES WITH RESPECT TO THE DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. DESCRIBE THE USE OF TITLE VI FUNDS AND HOW THEY WILL BE

USED IN MEETING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

Title VI, Part B funds for 2023 were \$539,292. However, DVRS forecasts annual expenditures of approximately \$7 million for supported employment services that will be provided through the Title I basic support grant. DVRS estimates that 1,550 individuals will receive supported employment services each program year.

As incorporated into its policies concerning supported employment services, EIPD first provides ongoing support as appropriate for supported employment. Ongoing support includes services needed to support and maintain the individual in SE based on a determination by the EIPD counselor of the individual's needs as specified in an IPE. Supported employment is provided from the time of job placement until the individual exits the VR program.

At the time of transition to extended services from an extended services provider, EIPD ensures through its contracts, agreements, and policies that extended services are provided by a state agency, a private non-profit organization, through natural supports or any other appropriate resource other than VR, after the individual has made the transition from the state VR support. Extended services begin when: (a) the individual is employed, (b) intensive training is completed, and (c) stabilization on the job has occurred. Individuals may be served for as long as there is a reasonable expectation that an extended services source will be identified during the course of rehabilitation. EIPD will only contract with supported employment service providers that give written commitment that they will provide extended services compliant with Federal regulations. The provision of extended services to youth for a period not to exceed 4 years or until such time that the youth reach the age of 25 is considered in the EIPD contract with supported employment providers. In no instance would EIPD establish a contractual relationship with a supported employment vendor who did not agree to the provision of sufficient extended services to youth throughout the lifetime of an individual's job. In accordance with § 363.4(a) and 34 CFR 361.5(c)(19)(v), NC EIPD will arrange to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, if no other provider of extended services is identified.

Ongoing support provided during extended services must include a minimum of twice-monthly monitoring at the work site to assess job stability unless under special circumstances, especially at the request of the individual, the IPE provides for off-site monitoring and based upon that assessment, the coordination or provision of specific services at or away from the work site, that are needed to maintain employment stability. If off-site monitoring is determined to be appropriate, it must, at a minimum, consist of two face-to-face meetings with the client and one employer contact monthly. These activities apply to all supported employment clients and not only those whose services are provided through funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities.

EIPD is collaborating with community rehabilitation programs, other agencies and organizations to provide extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities. Because EIPD will only utilize community rehabilitation programs that give written commitment that they will provide extended services

compliant with Federal regulations as supported employment vendors, many of those community rehabilitation programs providing SE services also provide extended services under their service contract at no additional cost to EIPD when other resources for extended services are not available. The Request for Application (RFA) is one of the key tools EIPD utilizes for contract and program development, in which the entity submitting the application has completed much of the foundational work in leveraging and braiding resources from other public and private funds. And, through its continued participation on interagency committees and collaboration efforts, EIPD will continue to work with community rehabilitation programs, Local Management Entities/Managed Care Organizations (LME/MCOs), and other organizations to leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

3. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES MAY BE PROVIDED WITH TITLE 1 OR TITLE VI FUNDS FOLLOWING PLACEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN EMPLOYMENT. IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(22) AND SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, DESCRIBE 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; AND THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES.

EIPD in cooperation with the DMHDDSAS 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 80 supported employment programs, serving over 1,550 VR participants. Supported employment providers receive vendorship funding through the utilization of Title VI, Part B funds and Title I General services fund. 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. While these are examples and there is no restriction to supported employment services based on the type of disability, supported employment services will be provided on a time-limited basis only to individuals with the most significant disabilities. These services may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- prior to supported employment, the individual would receive, funded under Title I, job development and job placement services for work in an integrated setting for the maximum number of hours possible based on the unique strengths, resources, interests, concerns, abilities, and capabilities and consistent with the informed choice 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, and with the required consent for release, regular contact with employers, trainees, parents, guardians, or other suitable professional and informed advisors, to reinforce and stabilize the job placement; and
- Individual Placement and Support Services (IPS) is a supported employment model serving individuals with severe and persistent mental illness/serious mental illness and is administered under the fidelity model of IPS. The funding for IPS is blended as comparable service and agency purchase through Title I funds. EIPD currently has partnership with 14 IPS providers and funds three components of this service through Title I to include job development and placement, job support and vocational recovery, and short term follow along support services. IPS funding transitions to the Managed Care Organization for continued funding. Title VI funds are not used for IPS.

Students enrolled in secondary school programs who are determined “at risk” for dropping out of school and at least 16 years old or are in at least the second half of the school year prior to the year the student is expected to exit high school can receive VR services funded under Title I leading to supported employment. A supplemental evaluation service, funded under Title I, may be extended for students who are considering competitive integrated employment and in situations where the individual needs experiences to help them make an informed choice about pursuing CIE. Additionally, a supplemental evaluation may be used when the Division needs additional information regarding supports necessary to help an individual maintain employment. A newly developed Supported Internship service, funded under Title I as a VR service, is available to individuals who will benefit from extended exposure to work in the community to make an informed decision and to gather additional information regarding required job support. However, the supplemental evaluation, job development and placement, and any supported internships or work-based learning experiences are provided as VR services or pre-employment transition services that would precede supported employment. Supported employment occurs after job placement and not for work experiences.

4. SECTIONS 101(A)(22) AND 606(B)(4) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE THE VR AGENCY TO DESCRIBE EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY AND ARRANGE, INCLUDING ENTERING INTO COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS, WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES AND OTHER APPROPRIATE ENTITIES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. THE DESCRIPTION MUST INCLUDE EXTENDED SERVICES, AS APPLICABLE, TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES TO YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 363.4(A) AND 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(C)(19)(V).

The Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD) has developed a cooperative agreement with both NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMHDDSS) and NC Division of Health Benefits (DHV) 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 use disorders and individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities. The enhanced partnership between the Divisions lead to a shift in 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 the 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 (TCL). 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. EIPD, DMHDDSUS, and DHB are partnering to implement the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment in this state. In 2012 DMHDDSAS received a four-year grant from Dartmouth Supported Employment Center to implement IPS SE. A fifth research site was added in July 2015. Outside of the five research sites is a statewide network of employment providers who are also partnering with clinical behavioral health providers to implement this program. DMHDDSUS has also developed a state definition for supported employment and long-term vocational support using the IPS model of supported employment. Four of six LME/MCOs utilize a sequential milestone funding model with some milestones are paid with state/Medicaid funds and other milestones funded by EIPD. This sequential funding model requires extensive collaboration but stretches state and Medicaid funds. Each VR office has a liaison counselor specifically for those provider agencies providing IPS SE.

Recently, the state has made effort to develop a standardized sequential funding milestone model that will be implemented in the coming months. This standardization will increase tracking capabilities, reduce administrative burden on IPS providers, and will drive quality services as the standardized model is outcome driven with specific deliverables.

Another partnership NCEIPD has with DMHDDSUS is educating the LME/MCO, VR field staff, and IPS contracted providers concerning the IPS model of supported employment (SE) Representatives from EIPD, DMHDDSUS, and DHB are assisting with education and collaboration among all entities to help with implementation throughout the state. LME/MCO systems have increased the number of contracted SE providers as this model becomes more familiar and systems change to include this model. Extensive technical assistance continues to be provided to facilitate service delivery with local VR and IPS teams as well as broader technical assistance provided through large training sessions, webinar instruction, and one on one assistance. DMHDDSUS funded technical assistance to VR staff to increase expertise on IPS and to further understand the benefits of employment as a means for recovery.

The established CRP-EIPD 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

The EIPD Program Specialist for Statewide Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) and six (6) Regional Community Rehabilitation Specialists provide oversight for CRPs to verify that supported employment services provided by the Division will include a transition period in which extended services will be provided by the VR agency for youth in accordance with

regulations, for a period of up to four years or at such time that a youth reaches the age of 25, whichever occurs first. Additionally, our CRP team along with local Business Relations Representatives are piloting a project with ten local offices and the CRPs in their respective areas to share job leads in an effort to meet employer needs, to more effectively meet local labor market needs, and to increase collaboration between VR and CRPs.

Continued collaboration between the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities and entities such as the North Carolina

Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, NCCDD 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. 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.

EIPD continues to have 15 active Project SEARCH sites across the state and has dedicated Project SEARCH coordination to our Program Specialist for Intellectual Disabilities. As a result of this dedicated role, we have hosted quarterly webinars for our Project SEARCH™ teams, regular team meetings, and have provided opportunities for team members to meet with each other to share ideas and resources.

Finally, EIPD 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.

An agreement between EIPD 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.

F. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before

the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

1. ESTIMATES FOR NEXT FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR—

A. VR PROGRAM; AND

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Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
N/A	33,500	33,500	\$132.5M	N/A

B. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

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Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
N/A	1,550	1,550	\$7M	N/A

G. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. PURSUANT TO SECTION 101(A)(5) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, THIS DESCRIPTION
MUST BE AMENDED WHEN THE VR AGENCY DETERMINES, BASED ON THE ANNUAL
ESTIMATES DESCRIBED IN DESCRIPTION (F), THAT VR SERVICES CANNOT BE PROVIDED TO

ALL ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE WHO APPLY FOR AND ARE DETERMINED ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES.

* VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

2. FOR VR AGENCIES THAT HAVE DEFINED PRIORITY CATEGORIES DESCRIBE—

A. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

Not applicable

B. THE ORDER (PRIORITY CATEGORIES) TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES ENSURING THAT INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES; AND

The North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation programs are not under an order of selection, and the North Carolina designated state units do not plan to implement an Order of Selection during the period covered by the Unified State Plan.

C. THE VR AGENCY'S GOALS FOR SERVING INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, INCLUDING HOW THE AGENCY WILL ASSIST ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS ASSIGNED TO CLOSED PRIORITY CATEGORIES WITH INFORMATION AND REFERRAL, THE METHOD IN WHICH THE VR AGENCY WILL MANAGE WAITING LISTS, AND THE PROJECTED TIMELINES FOR OPENING PRIORITY CATEGORIES. NOTE: PRIORITY CATEGORIES ARE CONSIDERED OPEN WHEN ALL INDIVIDUALS IN THE PRIORITY CATEGORY MAY BE SERVED.

The North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation programs are not under an order of selection, and the North Carolina designated state units do not plan to implement an Order of Selection during the period covered by the Unified State Plan.

3. HAS THE VR AGENCY ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE OF THE ORDER OF SELECTION WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT?

No.

H. WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS.

The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with Section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate "not applicable."

In accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 361.25, RSA clarified that EIPD must assure that services provided under the VR portion of the Unified State Plan will be available in all political subdivisions of the State unless a waiver of statewide is requested and approved in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 361.26.

RSA requires waiver of statewide, which will be requested by EIPD in PY 2024 because EIPD provides pre-employment transition services through local education agencies (LEAs) that have interagency transfer agreements (ITAs) between EIPD and LEAs in approximately 80% percent of public schools. These are LEAs where students are provided with VR transition services and pre-employment transition services with a VR counselor on site and the LEAs contribute a non-Federal share of the funding:

Alamance Burlington Schools, Anson County Social Services, Asheboro City Schools, Bladen County Schools, Caswell Schools, Chapel Hill/Carrboro Schools, Chatham County Schools, Cumberland County Schools, Davidson County Schools, Davie County, Durham Public Schools, Elkin City Schools, Franklin County Schools, Granville County Schools, Guilford County Schools, Harnett County Schools, Hoke County Schools, Johnston County Schools, Lee County Schools, Lexington Schools, Montgomery County Schools, Moore County Schools, Mt. Airy City Schools, Orange Co. Schools, Person County Schools, Public Schools of Robeson County, Randolph County Schools, Richmond County Schools, Robeson County Board of Commissioners, Rockingham County Schools, Scotland County Schools, Stokes County Schools, Surry County, Thomasville Schools, Vance County Schools, Wake County Public School System, Warren County Schools, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, Yadkin County Schools, Brunswick County Board of Education, Carolina East Medical System, Carteret County Board of Education, Columbus County Board of Education, Craven County Board of Education, Duplin County Board of Education, Edgecombe County Board of Commissioners, Edgecombe County Board of Education, Elizabeth City/Pasquotank County Schools, Lenoir County Board of Education, Nash/Rocky Mt Board of Education, New Hanover County Board of Education, Onslow County Board of Commissioners, Onslow County Board of Education, Pender County Board of Education, Pitt County Schools, Wayne County Board of Education, Whitesville City Schools, Wilson County Board of Education, Alexander Schools, Alleghany Co Schools, Ashe Co Schools, Asheville City Schools, Avery County Schools, Buncombe County Schools, Burke County Schools, Cabarrus County, Caldwell County Schools, Catawba County Schools, Charlotte/Mecklenburg Board of Education, Cherokee County Schools, Clay Schools, Cleveland Schools, Foothills Correctional, Gaston County Schools, Graham Schools, Haywood County Schools, Henderson County Schools, Hickory City, Iredell/Statesville Schools, Jackson Schools, Kannapolis City Schools, Lincoln County Schools, Macon Schools, Madison County Schools, McDowell County Schools, Mitchell County Schools, Mooresville Schools, Newton-Conover Schools, Polk County Schools, Rowan-Salisbury Schools, Rutherford County Schools, Stanly County Schools, Swain Schools, Transylvania County Schools, Union County Public Schools, Watauga Co Schools, Wilkes County Schools, and Yancey County Schools.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency's comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the State VR agency will undertake to

ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

1. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PERSONNEL AND PROJECTED PERSONNEL NEEDS INCLUDING—

A. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

B. THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF PERSONNEL THAT ARE EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING RATIOS OF QUALIFIED VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS;

C. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE VR 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.

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Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed*	No. of Personnel Currently Needed*	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years*
	<p>*Note that these represent the number of filled positions as of May 2024</p>	<p>*Note that these represent the number of funded positions</p>	<p>*Note that these represent the number of funded positions needed. Additional permanent positions can only be created by the NC General Assembly</p>
Rehabilitation Counselor	206	305	305
Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisor	44	55	55
Vocational Evaluation Specialist (Regional)	3	3	3
Vocational Evaluator	27	41	41
Community Employment Specialist	42	65	65

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed*	No. of Personnel Currently Needed*	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years*
	*Note that these represent the number of filled positions as of May 2024	*Note that these represent the number of funded positions	*Note that these represent the number of funded positions needed. Additional permanent positions can only be created by the NC General Assembly
Human Services Coordinator	22	27	27
Rehabilitation Casework Technician	101	124	124
Processing Assistant	108	110	110

D. RATIO OF QUALIFIED VR COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS:

In total, the ratio of VR counselor positions to individuals served during PY 2022-23 is 305 counselors to 34,122 clients or 1 : 112.

E. PROJECTED NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED IN 5 YEARS:

EIPD expects to serve approximately 35,000 individuals per year over the next five years with 11,000 new applicants each year (including former participants with closed cases) and 24,000 cases on-hand carried over from the previous year.

2. DATA AND INFORMATION ON PERSONNEL PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

A. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND 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.

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Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
NC A&T University	MS Mental Health Counseling	117	22
NC A&T University	PhD Counselor Education & Supervision	19	1
NC A&T University	Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions	11	5
Winston Salem University	MS Rehabilitation Counseling	46	19
Winston Salem University	BS Rehabilitation Studies	37	19
UNC Chapel Hill	MS Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling	48	23
Eastern Carolina University	PhD Counselor Preparation & Research	15	2
Eastern Carolina University	MS Rehabilitation Counseling	18	7
Eastern Carolina University	Certificate in Rehabilitation Studies	5	2
Eastern Carolina University	Certificate in Addictions Prevention & Treatment	6	6
Eastern Carolina University	Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling	14	9

B. THE VR AGENCY'S PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, WHICH ADDRESSES THE CURRENT AND PROJECTED NEEDS FOR QUALIFIED PERSONNEL; AND THE COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF EFFORTS BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY 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.

EIPD coordinates an unpaid internship program through our Professional Development & Training section with the support of management, Human Resources, and counselors across the state. Because North Carolina has the benefit of several Universities with Rehabilitation Counseling programs, many of which also receive RSA grant funds for student scholarships, we have many students seeking internships with our agency. This is an important recruitment tool for us. Many of our interns are from the two Historically Black Universities in our state; NC

Agricultural & Technical (A&T) State University and Winston-Salem State University (WSSU). We also work with several universities both in and out-of-state that have master's programs in Rehabilitation Counseling or closely related degrees, as well as some colleges.

The Professional Development & Training section (PDT) improved and streamlined our processes for working with students, universities and EIPD staff in 2018 to ensure effective communication and support. We have continued to refine and communicate our processes to agency staff, students and Universities through training opportunities, quarterly meetings with University personnel (NC University Collaborative), and well-designed materials, including a Practicum/Internship Users Guide which provides the forms necessary to ensure timely processing of the student application, an easy to follow flow-chart, and clearly defined responsibilities for all involved: the Rehabilitation Education Specialist (RES), the student, the university coordinator, the unit office and lead office assistant, and the site supervisor. The Professional Development & Training section's RES acts as the liaison and coordinator for all these parties. This has greatly enhanced our success in this area. Training is provided yearly to our agency staff on the processes and opportunities to recruit, onboard and supervise student interns. In addition, RES staff provide presentations to graduate program students on EIPD internship and employment opportunities and processes.

During the school year 2022-23, we provided internships and practicums for 27 students from 8 universities and colleges. We provided a total of 8,692 hours of training; 8,260 hours for internship students and 432 hours for practicum students, as follows.

- Winston-Salem State University – 16 students
- East Carolina University – 5 students
- NC A&T – 1 student
- UNC-Chapel Hill – 1 student
- Elizabeth City State University – 1 student
- Jacksonville University - 1 student
- Barton College - 1 student
- Lees McRae College - 1 student

We have MOUs with a total of 29 Universities and colleges. Below are the additional schools we have MOUs with but did not have interns from during this timeframe:

- State University of New York at Buffalo, NY
- Thomas University, GA
- West Virginia University, WV
- Texas Tech University, TX
- Carteret Community College, NC
- University of Mount Olive, NC

- Mid-Atlantic Christian University, NC
- Lenoir-Rhyne University, NC
- Western Piedmont Community College, NC
- Capella University, MN
- University of the Southwest, NM
- Wingate University, NC
- The George Washington University, Washington DC
- University of Oklahoma, OK
- Sacred Heart University, CT
- University of Wisconsin-Stout, WI
- Elon University, NC
- University of South Carolina, SC
- Florida State University, FL
- Assumption University, MA
- UNC Pembroke, NC

EIPD personnel work closely with the University programs and staff. We participate in their advisory boards, support their submission for grants and the creation of new programs, collaborate to deliver training at conferences and agency-wide training events, and provide presentations for their students when requested. Since 2020 we have worked with the staff of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to provide virtual *Coffee & Chat* events as well as *Job Fairs* for students to talk with VR agency staff about opportunities for internships and employment. In 2022 PDT staff met with the rehabilitation counseling Practicum & Internship students at Winston-Salem State University and A&T State University to explain our internship process and opportunities.

Since 2021, EIPD and DSB agency leaders have held quarterly University Collaborative meetings, inviting all NC Universities with VR graduate programs, all universities that have had interns with us or a MOU in place for internships, as well as other universities nation-wide that have VR graduate programs in place. The goals and purpose of these meetings are to collaborate to provide information regarding internships, how to apply for positions, provide information on VR career fairs, and answer any questions they or their students may have about VR. We also seek information from as to what students are looking for when applying for positions, where they are going after graduation, and barriers that create difficulty recruiting new graduates. Both in-state and out-of-state universities have been represented in these meetings and this appears to be an effective way to build relationships and connections between VR and University staff and students. The Collaborative will continue to meet for the foreseeable future.

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. Plans have also begun to begin to alert the universities with Rehabilitation Counseling Programs to openings as posted to further encourage qualified applicants.

Since 2019, NC has been part of the Employment First movement that recognizes that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment, and DHHS has diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) among its core values and organizational priorities.

C. DESCRIPTION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND ACTIVITIES THAT ENSURE ALL PERSONNEL EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY RECEIVE APPROPRIATE AND ADEQUATE TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS:

I. 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

II. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO VR AGENCY PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS AND FOR PROVIDING TRAINING REGARDING THE AMENDMENTS TO THE REHABILITATION ACT MADE BY THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT.

A. SYSTEM OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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:

NC EIPD provides a comprehensive system of staff development for VR professionals and paraprofessionals, particularly with respect to service delivery, specific disabilities, ethics, vocational counseling, transition services, WIOA Performance Measures, job placement, diversity topics, rehabilitation technology, supervisory skills and leadership development. This includes training provided by the EIPD PDT team's Rehabilitation Education Specialists as well as Rehabilitation Program Specialists, Assistive Technology Specialists, and Quality Development Specialists. We also financially support and encourage attendance in collaborative training events, leadership training programs and statewide conferences. Agency staff may also participate in training offered through the NC Department of Health and Human Services as well as the NC Office of State Human Resources, most of which is at no cost. For the 2022-23 timeframe, PDT is also engaged in extensive training of staff to support them in transitioning to our new Case Management System, ENCORE.

Agency training sessions are conducted through customized instructor-led sessions in-person, via webinar, or hybrid training events, as well as online learning experiences. Continuing education units are provided in the form of CRC credit for all internal training programs that qualify. Conference attendance is encouraged and supported, including registration and

reimbursement for travel and per diem. In addition, the PDT section provides training, facilitation and team building to small groups, offices, and sections upon request and as feasible.

A total of **87 training events** were provided by the Professional Development & Training section during this PY 2022-23 timeframe. This represents a significant increase from the 53 training events provided in the previous fiscal year. Thirty-seven of these events supported the implementation of the ENCORE case management system. Fourteen events were statewide conferences focused on workforce development, supported employment, deaf & hard of hearing services, substance use disorder, Autism, vocational evaluation, transition, and other rehabilitation issues.

A total of 5,353 employees completed one or more of our training events this cycle. Compared to the previous year, we achieved **3,299 more training completions** in this cycle. This year's increase in participants is directly related to our PDT section's increased ability to create in-person training events as well as hybrid and virtual training events to meet the needs of agency staff as we moved out of the limitations created during the pandemic.

The following is a list of conferences, classroom, and online training that we provided and/or supported this year.

Conferences (14 conferences)

1.
 - a. National Association of Multi-Cultural Rehabilitation Counselors (NAMRC) – **33 participants**
 - b. NC Foundation for Alcohol & Drug Studies (NCFADS) Winter School – **14 participants**
 - c. NC Foundation for Alcohol & Drug Studies (NCFADS) Summer School – **15 participants**
 - d. NC Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NCARF) Spring Conference – **21 participants**
 - e. NC Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NCARF) Fall Conference – **27 participants**
 - f. NC Rehabilitation Association conference (NCRA) – **118 participants**
 - g. NCWORKS Partnership Conference – **67 participants**
 - h. Southeastern Regional Institute on Deafness (SERID) – **13 participants**
 - i. NC Association of Persons in Supported Employment (NC APSE) Spring Conference – **35 participants**
 - j. NC Association of Persons in Supported Employment (NC APSE) Fall Conference – **24 participants**
 - k. Autism Society of NC Annual Conference – **11 participants**

- i. Vocational Evaluation & Career Assessment Professionals (VECAP) Conference - **3 participants**
- m. NC Transition Conference (NCDCT) - **75 participants**
- n. National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association Conference (NMEDA) - **4 participants**

Webinars & In-person Classroom Sessions (73 sessions)

- - NC Collaborative on Secondary Transitions (*3 sessions*)
 - IPS 101 for VR (*2 series*)
 - Windmills Disability Awareness training (*4 sessions*)
 - Business Liaison Summit
 - Policy Power Hour (*3 sessions*)
 - Understanding LGBTQ+ Pronouns and Workplace Inclusion
 - Internship Program Guidelines for Site Supervisors – Ongoing Student Development
- 1.
 - a. Travel & Training Overview (*4 sessions*)
- 1.
 - a. WIOA Performance Measures (*3 session*)
- 1.
 - a. Business Relations Representatives Statewide Meeting
- 1.
 - a. STEP UP Leadership Development Program (*2 sessions*)
 - b. Let's TALK: Communication Skills for Supervisors & Managers
 - c. Code of Ethics: Be Well Series - Neuroscience & Mindfulness
 - d. Making a Difference Together: Employer Resources & Community Inclusion
 - e. Ask HR (*2 sessions*)
 - f. NC Project Search
 - g. 2023 & Me: Mind, Movement & Mental Health
 - h. Be in the Know: We're Better Together & Effective Communication (*2 sessions*)
 - i. Tips for Providing Job Placement Services to Deaf & Hard of Hearing Clients

- j. Employment First NC Anniversary Celebration
- k. ENCORE Training Preparation (*9 sessions*)
- l. ENCORE Train-the-Trainer (*4 sessions*)
- m. ENCORE Agency Training Events (*24 sessions*)

The Professional Development & Training section staff also provided a total of 46 small group facilitated events this year requested by offices and sections across the state. Topics included: *Languages of Appreciation; Communication; Micro Aggressions & Implicit Bias; Safety; Trauma; Connection; Stress Management; Diversity Awareness; Teambuilding; Resilience; Leadership; Inclusion; Empathy at Work; Client Rights, Abuse & Neglect; and LGBTQ Pronouns.*

In addition to the above, individuals can request to attend local training events and conferences upon approval of their manager and utilizing office administrative funding. This is not tracked by the Professional Development & Training section.

Assistive Technology

As noted above, we supported participation in the NMEDA conference for 4 of our rehabilitation engineers. The Assistive Technology Expo is a yearly event that our staff are encouraged to attend. This conference is managed in its entirety by NC Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) and is a free conference. Registration for this event was not needed and therefore not tracked by the Professional Development & Training section.

Leadership Training

Several leadership training programs provided by the NC Office of State Human Resources are supported and encouraged. The PDT section compiled a guide to these training sessions to increase awareness and attendance. Individuals can register on their own with their manager's approval for the no-cost leadership training outlined below. Two higher-level management training programs require multiple approvals as there is a cost associated with these training programs and require more time involvement.

- **Equal Employment Opportunity & Diversity Fundamentals (EEODF)**

This is a required training for all supervisors and managers and is assigned upon promotion, to be completed within one year. The curriculum provides leaders with applicable information to help them manage teams more effectively while promoting diversity and inclusion. This is a no-cost program.

- **Leading at All Levels for Supervisors (LAAL-S)**

This series is designed for frontline and new supervisors and includes four individually scheduled classes, including Supervisory Foundations, Coaching for Supervisors, Leading Teams for Supervisors, and Managing Work for Supervisors. These classes are provided at no cost.

- **Advanced Skills for Managers (ASM)**

This multi-session training program is delivered only to those in middle managerial roles and focuses on leadership best practices to develop high performing employees, teams, and

programs. This cost-program is also a pre-requisite course for the Certified Public Manager program, described next. Five EIPD managers completed this program during 2022-2023.

- **Certified Public Manager Program® (CPM)**

This 14-month curriculum is an in-depth, comprehensive, competency-based and nationally certified leadership development program for middle managers. Extensive effort is spent helping participants assess their current performance, identify appropriate improvements, and commit to implementing meaningful behavior change. To support our CPM participants during the beginning of their program, Executive Leadership members meet once with the participants to provide guidance and encouragement for their project assignment, and then again at the end of their program to learn about their project findings and results. This additional assistance has further encouraged individual leadership development and trust in agency management to provide support.

This cost-program involves a selective application process. Six managers completed the program in 2022 and two managers are currently participating in the 2023 program to graduate in 2024. Applications for the 2024-25 program will soon be available and eligible managers will be encouraged to apply.

New Employee Training

New employees receive both mandatory and optional training opportunities. Currently the agency developed an in-person quarterly New Employee Orientation training program that was launched in November 2023.

Below are the mandatory e-Learning courses that are automatically assigned upon hire or transfer:

- DHHS-EIPD Annual SSA Contract Training (yearly)
- DHHS HIPAA training; (yearly)
- DHHS Active Shooter in the Workplace training (yearly)
- Privacy: Restricted Intelligence (bi-monthly series)
- IT Cyber Security (bi-monthly series)
- NCVIP Employee Performance Management (curriculum)
- Unconscious Bias Program (Series)
- QPR Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention
- NC ABLE
- EIPD CRP Services Overview
- ENCORE Basic Navigation & Referral
- Acceptable Use of DHHS Resources
- NC Client Assistance Program: Bridge Over Barriers

- DHHS Telework/Alternative Work Schedules Policy
- Managing Your Inbox: Email as a Public Record
- VPN MFA Enablement User Training
- Secondary Employment Policy Training

ENCORE Case Management System

In 2018-19 EIPD & DSB began the search for a new electronic case management system to replace the aging BEAM case management system. The new case management solution was purchased in late 2019 from Geographic Solutions, Inc. (GSI). Their virtual one-stop solution is a commercial-off-the-shelf case management software product that is heavily customized to meet our needs. The planning, design, building and testing phases of the solution continued from 2020 through 2023. User training development began in 2021 in preparation for deployment. Deployment was delayed several times as the system was not deemed ready to launch and training rollout plans continued to evolve to meet the changing needs for user training. In-house preparation and planning for a hybrid model of delivery of ENCORE training began in earnest in 2022. The system went live on August 23, 2023.

GSI provided several training events to prepare us as system users and trainers:

- One 4-day training event was provided to 21 cross-divisional employees representing the Business, Technical, Workflow, Administration & Helpdesk users in March 2023.
- Three 4-day Train-the-Trainer events was provided to 75 DVR employees in May 2023, with one or more employees representing each office.
- One hundred Community Rehab Program staff were provided one day of training in the use of ENCORE system in August 2023.

Utilizing those trained by GSI, internal agency training was provided in two-day events using a hybrid model of delivery.

- Nine events focused on the efforts of those trained in the delivery of ENCORE to prepare for in-house delivery.
- Six events focused on the training staff learning and practicing in the system prior to GSI Train-the-Trainer events.
- Eighteen events were provided in June 2023 across the agency to all staff users, with over 700 employees completing the training.
- Additional training continues for those who missed the training, new employees, for those having difficulty, and for those in specific roles, such as fiscal processing and program specialists.
- Agency-wide training efforts are expected to continue into 2024, to include, webinars, classroom sessions, job aids, e-Learning options, resources, and in-office support.

Future Training Focus

New Employee Orientation in-person sessions are scheduled for 2024 with the first one provided November 2023 for approximately 42 employees. This is an effort to improve retention and support our new employees as well as our managers who are managing multiple vacancies.

Our yearly Statewide Manager Meeting last held in November 2023 for approximately 120 agency leaders. This is also an effort to provide support and applicable information to agency supervisors and managers so they can be successful in their role.

Training will continue to be provided in the areas of ENCORE, QPR Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention; IPS training; transition services; ethics; diversity, equity & inclusion topics; job placement services; disability awareness; policy and WIOA training; Leadership training; VR-related conferences, Independent Living, Assistive Technology, Internships as well as additional priority needs as requested.

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.

EIPD leaders and staff acquire and disseminate information, including knowledge from research and other sources, through conferences and trainings as described in the preceding sections, and through regularly scheduled meetings, instructor led training, webinars and e-Learning courses, reports, email distribution, and through posted information on our SharePoint intranet site, which includes directories, policy, reports, forms, training materials and videos, and links to other information sources. Information is also shared at collaborative meetings among staff and leaders across the state. EIPD also retains subject matter experts who serve as statewide program specialists in the areas of medical consultation, deaf and hard of hearing; mental illness and substance abuse; developmental disabilities and brain injury; transition-age youth, business relations; community rehabilitation programs; assistive technology and rehabilitation engineering. Domain-specific knowledge is shared by the program specialists with regional and local office staff through meetings, webinars, reports, presentations, and conferences.

3. DESCRIPTION OF VR AGENCY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PERSONNEL STANDARDS CONSISTENT WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B) TO ENSURE THAT VR AGENCY 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, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

While EIPD modeled the counselor personnel standard after the CRCC, the Division also initiated its own comprehensive standard with more specific listing of degrees that it will accept.

Effective October 1, 2008, this standard-related requirement for a Rehabilitation Counselor hire included:

- Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling;
- Master's degree in a closely related field such as Counseling, Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, Communication Disorders, Human Services;
- Current certification as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor or Licensed Professional Counselor;
- Current enrollment in a qualifying master's degree program AND graduation occurs prior to the date of hire.

As of December 21, 2009, all employees in the Rehabilitation Counselor I and Rehabilitation Counselor II roles met the CSPD mandate. Although the mandate has been lifted, DHHS has not at this time changed its policies regarding minimum requirements for the VR counselor position but has explored using the minimum credentialing standard as a preferred recruiting standard for positions that are in locations particularly difficult to recruit for. This is allowable as per the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Currently, employees that do not meet the minimum education requirements serve in trainee status and not function as a Rehabilitation Counselor and must progress toward attaining the necessary requirements outlined in a Memorandum of Agreement within the specified timeframe. If the employee does not meet the specified requirements or they are not progressing at an acceptable rate, the employee is separated during their probationary status period.

The VR program is currently experiencing challenges in recruitment which are primarily attributable to the current economic climate. This means that recruitment for Rehabilitation Counselor positions have been more challenging compared to past years. EIPD 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.

4. METHOD(S) THE VR AGENCY USES TO ENSURE THAT PERSONNEL ARE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN APPROPRIATE MODES OF COMMUNICATION WITH OR IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE OF APPLICANTS OR ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKING ABILITY.

EIPD acknowledges communication as a vitally important aspect of the rehabilitation process 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.

EIPD counselors have the responsibility for determining the individual's preferred language and providing a qualified foreign language interpreter/translator at the earliest possible

opportunity, before or after the initial contact with the Division. This translation service is provided at no cost to the person with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). A specific budget (budget code 1292) is designated solely for the provision of this service. The interpreters/translators for all languages, including American Sign Language, must be qualified and trained with demonstrated proficiency in both English and the native language of the client. The Department of Health and Human Services has a contract with TeleLanguage Line, which assists the department in meeting the needs of foreign language interpretation and information requests through the phone. DVR can take advantage of this service and utilizes the translation services of these Foreign Language Interpreters via the phone where Spanish as well as many other languages are available. All fundamental VR and IL forms are available in Spanish for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Information on how to access the TeleLanguage Line and LEP materials is in our internal SharePoint website. The EIPD public website is also in Spanish for the section VR Services to Consumers. The PDT Training section always provides ASL and CART services for our webinars and any recorded events. ASL and CART are provided during in-person training upon request.

For federal fiscal year 2022-23, EIPD has 13 caseloads specifically serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals, however 6 of these caseloads have a counselor vacancy. There are also 10 technicians (1 vacancy), 3 Business Relations Representatives, 1 Program Specialist, 1 Assistive Technology consultant and 1 Rehabilitation Education Specialist with experience working with the deaf and hard of hearing who support the counselors and consumers being served. Sixteen Interpreting agencies, 1 Captioning agency and 98 independent licensed interpreters are available to the Division through the DHHS Interpreting Service Vendor list.

5. 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.

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.

The EIPD program specialist for transition services represents EIPD on the State Transition Team, which also includes the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI), college/university, parent, student, and community and advocacy organization representation. EIPD also participates in the annual National Capacity Building Institute and receives federal technical assistance and training through the National Technical Assistance Center-The Collaborative (NTAC-C). Participation in this training and technical assistance helps EIPD identify evidence-based practices to share with special education professionals. The State Transition Team's State Transition Plan includes a specific goal to increase interagency professional development opportunities, implemented through a training initiative called the NC Collaborative on Secondary Transition. EIPD also assists with conference planning and arranging and conducting sessions for the annual NC Division of Career Development and Transition (NCDCT) conference, the annual NC Exceptional Children's Conference, and the annual NC Division of Career and Technical Education Summer Conference to coordinate and offer training across disciplines that support students with disabilities. Lastly, according to the

Division's Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with NC DPI and local Cooperative Agreements with LEAs, the Division offers ad hoc training via in-person and virtual formats to focus on transition trends or policy changes to promote staff proficiency in coordinating VR and IDEA transition services for students with disabilities.

J. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

- 1. DESCRIBE PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION BETWEEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATION OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PUBLIC EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, THAT ARE DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF THE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE RECEIPT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES.**

The NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and NC Division of Services for the Blind continue to operate under a state level memorandum of agreement (MOA) with DPI. The MOA includes the requirements of the final federal regulations on Title IV of WIOA. The purpose of the MOU is to outline a collaborative partnership between the two agencies to provide state level approval and support for enhanced transition services to students with disabilities. The revised MOA with DPI specifies the way Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) will be coordinated and provided within NC schools as well as how students with disabilities, including those who are potentially eligible for VR services, will be identified and served in compliance with federal regulations.

In addition to a state level MOA, the EIPD and DSB local offices and local education agencies (LEA) customize a local Third-Party Cooperative Agreement (TPCA) to outline how the agencies will work together to ensure that VR services are administered to students with disabilities. The TPCA stipulates administrative funding to support VR staff, outlines procedures for information sharing, and requires a process for referring students with disabilities to VR in order for the Divisions to carry out the VR program. EIPD TPCAs with 90 of the 115 city/county-wide LEAs in North Carolina contribute funding towards 190 positions including VR counselors, business relations representatives, vocational evaluators and additional VR support staff such as casework assistants and casework technicians available to provide VR transition services to students with disabilities served by the local education agency. In areas where a TPCA has not been established, the local manager designs a process for students and youth in the local area to access VR services. Since the issuance of WIOA Title IV regulations, EIPD has worked to formalize and implement the requirements under WIOA including Pre-ETS. Following a series of interim policy directives, EIPD released policies and procedures in March 2018 outlining three primary mechanisms for making Pre-ETS available to students with disabilities in the state who need them: EIPD staff-provided, purchased via fee-for-service, and contracted projects. These mechanisms allow for flexibility and growth to meet the varied needs of students with disabilities across the state based on a diversity of staff capacity and local resources as well as the needs of local schools and school districts. EIPD continues to target a flexible approach to making VR and pre-ETS available to students with disabilities for added value to citizens and NC public schools.

Plans for Coordination with Education Officials

EIPD maintains and strengthens its programmatic relationships with school transition services through active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Transition Team. This team, including EIPD, NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI), college/university, parent, student, and community and advocacy organization representation was formed to develop statewide goals to coordinate transition activities for students with disabilities resulting in improved post-school outcomes, including obtaining employment or attending post-secondary education. Currently, NC's Capacity Building Plan consists of five goals in two focus areas: (1) Interagency Collaboration and (2) Family Engagement. tools. In 2018, a sub-team of the State Transition Team was formed to focus on targeted impact that could be achieved by state agency membership. This Core Sub-Team continues to implement a joint technical assistance and training initiative coined the NC Collaborative on Secondary Transition to provide state-level technical assistance and training on WIOA requirements as well as to promote training around alignment with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Perkins V programs. The TA and training mechanism focuses on common messaging to special educators, career technical education professionals, and VR staff across the state to move them forward with compliance and innovation so that they may achieve the very best post-school outcomes for students with disabilities around the state. So far, thirty-one (31) local, interagency transition teams have participated in this intensive training.

DESCRIPTION OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

EIPD policies associated with transition and pre-ETS services were updated and enhanced in March 2018. The policies outline methods for assessing the local needs for Pre-ETS and for requesting and arranging pre-ETS, beginning as early as a student would qualify in NC (age 14). The Division's policies further outline mechanisms for the outreach and identification of students with disabilities who require VR transition services and participation in and coordination of student-level planning with school personnel. The Division's policies also address VR staff coverage for local education agencies to assure that any eligible student may access VR transition services and require annual reporting of VR services to local education officials.

DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT (IPE) FOR TRANSITIONING STUDENTS

The Division's casework policies on transition services defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post- secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

Furthermore, EIPD 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, EIPD 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, EIPD 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. EIPD policy does require career exploration to be provided and documented in order to determine a more specific goal. Amended job choices, including amendments at closure, must be accompanied by documentation reflecting the process and services that had an impact on the final job choice, including job shadowing, job sampling, guidance and counseling.

Moreover, EIPD 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. DESCRIBE THE CURRENT STATUS AND SCOPE OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY. CONSISTENT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT PURSUANT TO 34 C.F.R. § 361.22(B), PROVIDE, AT A MINIMUM, THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGREEMENT:

A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, WHICH MAY BE PROVIDED USING ALTERNATIVE MEANS FOR MEETING PARTICIPATION (SUCH AS VIDEO CONFERENCES AND CONFERENCE CALLS), TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES AND OTHER VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES;

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY PERSONNEL FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPS) UNDER SECTION 614(D) OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT;

C. THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES;

D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. OUTREACH TO THESE STUDENTS SHOULD OCCUR AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE DURING THE TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS AND MUST INCLUDE, AT A MINIMUM, A DESCRIPTION OF THE PURPOSE OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM, ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS, APPLICATION PROCEDURES, AND SCOPE OF SERVICES THAT MAY BE PROVIDED TO ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS;

E. COORDINATION NECESSARY TO SATISFY DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS SET FORTH IN 34 C.F.R. PART 397 REGARDING STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE SEEKING SUBMINIMUM WAGE EMPLOYMENT; AND

F. ASSURANCE THAT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, NEITHER THE SEA NOR THE LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WILL ENTER INTO A CONTRACT OR OTHER ARRANGEMENT WITH AN ENTITY, AS DEFINED IN 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(D), FOR THE PURPOSE OF OPERATING A PROGRAM UNDER WHICH YOUTH WITH A DISABILITY IS ENGAGED IN WORK COMPENSATED AT A SUBMINIMUM WAGE.

A. Consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services:

In order to ensure effective facilitation of the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, DHHS (the designated DSA) maintains both a joint formal agreement with the Exceptional Children and Career Technical Education Divisions of DPI and also maintains 90 separately held TPCAs with local education agencies (LEA's) or school programs. The agreement with DPI was revised in 2018 and includes the following components:

- Local cooperative agreements
- Consultation and technical assistance
- Transition planning
- Pre-employment transition services
- Roles and responsibilities
- Outreach and identification of students with disabilities
- Coordination responsibilities of each agency that promote the coordination, timely and appropriate delivery of transition services (IDEA)
- Criteria related to subminimum wage requirements in Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Procedures for resolving interagency disputes

- Data sharing

Additionally, in that the agreement is not only with the Exceptional Children's division of the SEA, but also the Career and Technical Education division, EIPD hopes to leverage partnerships that create more opportunity for students with disabilities to advance along a career pathway and to participate in work-based experiences beginning in high school.

Within the current formal interagency agreement between DHHS and DPI, the consultation and technical assistance section requires that the Departments:

- Make consultation and technical assistance available through in-person meetings or through other means, such as conference calls, webinars, or video conferences
- Provide educational and training opportunities, including joint training opportunities, to SEA and LEA staff to ensure understanding of pre-employment transition services and other transition services and the roles and responsibilities of SEA, LEA, and VR partners in the provision of these services
- Meet annually to address systems, policy, practice, and funding issues that facilitate or negatively impact the transition of students with disabilities from school to work or post-secondary education.
- Align policy and practices at the state and local level to facilitate the seamless transition of students with disabilities from school to work or post-secondary education
- Designate individuals to represent the agencies and act as liaisons to facilitate the joint efforts of the two agencies
- Provide consultation, when requested by local staff, on determining responsibility in instances where services required by a student may be both a special education or related service under IDEA and a VR service under WIOA

Considering the reauthorization of the federal Perkins Act, along with the relative newness of WIOA, the Division is working with the Career Technical Education and Exceptional Children Divisions of DPI through the NC Collaborative on Secondary Transition to offer training and technical assistance to local, interagency transition teams in carrying out formal agreements.

At the local level, TPCAs between local VR units and the LEAs mirror the components of the state level MOU. Therefore, at the local level, Division staff are required to provide consultation, technical assistance, and administrative support to their assigned school system. They are also required to participate in joint planning with the LEA to assess the needs of students with disabilities and prioritize VR service-delivery strategies, including those for providing pre-employment transition services. Lastly, the local VR Unit and LEA are required to exchange policy information relevant to the coordination of services and participate in training made available by the opposite party when possible.

Within the current formal interagency agreement between DHHS and DPI, transition planning requires that the Departments:

- Cooperate and work jointly in providing/promoting transition planning for students with disabilities.
- Assist local education agencies (LEAs) in planning for/promoting the transition of students with disabilities in the development and completion of the IEP required under IDEA and the IPE required under WIOA.
- Coordinate with/support the development of students' IEPs and IPEs through local third-party agreements.
- Communicate/encourage communication regarding students' IEP and IPE goals and needed transition services as soon as possible after the IEP and IPE are developed.
- Foster innovation in transition program design and service delivery strategies between the local EIPD and DSB offices and the LEAs.
- Support local involvement in the planning and activities of Local Area Workforce Boards as well as partnerships with local employers to promote programs and services for students and youth with disabilities.
- Provide consultation to assure access to and programming for students with disabilities in career and technical education, work-based learning, career assessment, career decision-making training, and career counseling as determined by the local transition planning teams.

At the local level, TPCAs between local VR units and the LEAs mirror the components of the state level MOU such that the local VR Unit and the LEA are required to engage in planning that promotes the development of the IPE and, and prepares students for transition from school to post-school activities, including planning for pre-employment transition services. The parties shall also use existing data when appropriate or obtain supplementary assessments and for each eligible individual, the local EIPD unit shall complete a comprehensive assessment that consults the transition component of the student's IEP if an IEP exists.

The NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) is the State Education Agency with whom the DSA partners to promote and implement the VR program throughout NC public schools. As a locally controlled state, VR transition services are further coordinated with LEAs who opt in to such agreements. Where LEAs do not opt in to agreements, EIPD provides VR transition and pre-ETS according to the state level MOU using an itinerant staff structure as opposed to a designated staff structure so that VR transition and pre-ETS can still be made available to students with disabilities statewide. The current interagency agreement between EIPD and the state education agency includes two sections relevant to roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Procedures for resolving interagency disputes including procedures for LEAs to initiate the process to receive reimbursement or regarding implementation of the Agreement.

The Roles and Responsibilities section requires that:

- The Departments administer aspects of their respective programs. [Inasmuch as public education services are locally controlled, this requires that DPI assist LEAs in the planning, development, and implementation of transition services to students with disabilities to become college, career, and community ready. DHSS as the DSA is required to administer all aspects of the State Vocational Rehabilitation program including the determination of eligibility, diagnostic and evaluation services, rehabilitation planning, transition services and the provision of a program of Vocational Rehabilitation services, some of which are subject to financial need or comparable benefits.]
- DHSS assumes responsibility, within the limitation of resources, for the cost of services included in the students IPE, according to the established DHSS policies and fee schedule
- DHSS reports annually the total amount of state-appropriated monies expended for rehabilitation services for students with disabilities. The reports should be made available annually to DPI within 60 days of the end of the state fiscal year.
- DPI provides access to annual report data on students serviced through the Career Technical Education and Exceptional Children Divisions.
- DPI supports the sharing of diagnostic information of students with disabilities for the purpose of accessing Vocational Rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services, so long as sharing is in compliance with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and other legal requirements relating to student privacy rights.
- DPI supports practices for LEAs to secure psychological, vocational and educational assessments, according to state and local policies, for students suspected of needing assessments.

In addition to collaborative practices put in place by the state-level agreement, the local TPCAs between the local VR unit and LEA narrow down more specific responsibilities including requiring that:

- The parties assist in outreach and identification of students with disabilities who require VR services or pre-ETS.
- The parties develop a system for generating referrals to the VR program.
- The LEA assists with securing and sharing diagnostic information required for students to access the VR process.
- The local VR unit contacts the student at the earliest possible time to initiate a VR application and/or request pre-ETS.
- The local VR Unit, in collaboration with the LEA, provides or arranges for the provision of pre-ETS to students with disabilities who need them.
- The LEA supports the Division in providing pre-ETS to students in their district.

The section of the state-level MOU between DHHS and DPI regarding Procedures for Resolving Interagency Disputes requires the following:

- That parties utilize their best efforts to resolve any dispute that may arise in the provision of services outlined in the agreement and collaborate to achieve the best possible outcome for students with disabilities.
- When there are real or perceived overlaps in the responsibilities for special education or other related services under IDEA and VR services under the Rehab Act, DHHS and DPI support and advise local staff in considering the following factors to determine the responsible party:
 1. whether the service is customary to the party from whom the service is requested (if customary, the party shall provide);
 2. the primary objective of the service/support (educational or vocational);
 3. the impacts of delaying service provision;
 4. agency-specific policies or limitations around the provision of the service (e.g., maximum purchase rates, selection of providers);
 5. eligibility of student under Part B of IDEA;
 6. length of time to exit from school in terms of ongoing need for and replacement frequency of service or equipment (e.g., if equipment is needed, will the lifespan of the equipment be contained to the student's time within the secondary educational setting or extend to the transition from school to post-school activities?); and/or
 7. the need for transferability of skills and practice with service/equipment to be prepared for post-school IPE participation (e.g., will the student need time to practice using equipment or receiving a specific transition service to facilitate transition to post-school services/outcome as planned on the IPE without delay or interruption? If so, this may warrant VR funding of the equipment or service.)

The local TPCAs between local VR units and LEAs mirror the state level agreement in terms of resolving interagency disputes and include a requirement that the parties consult with state level designees from EIPD and DPI when a resolution cannot be achieved at the local level.

In terms of other financial responsibilities and qualified personnel for delivering transition services, the TPCAs require that:

- each participating LEA contribute an annually specified sum for rehabilitation services directly provided by Division staff and for the administration of those services, that expenditures are made under the approved agency State plan; and that the expenditures are made under the control and supervision of EIPD.
- EIPD finances the program by use of State and Federal matching funds, as required under Title I of the Rehab Act and that financing the rehabilitation program occurs on an annual budget basis to ensure continuity of operations; and that EIPD must provide State funds equal to the State's share of planned expenditures as specified in the Federal Act.

- EIPD maintains accounts and supporting documents that permit an accurate determination at any time of the status and State and Federal participation of expenditures incurred in the operation of the rehabilitation program; and that the specific items of each annual budget are determined jointly and agreed to by the parties prior to the beginning of each fiscal year.
- The contribution by the LEA to EIPD is made upon submission of an invoice by EIPD to the LEA for the state's share of the annually agreed upon budget and consist totally of non-Federal funds which have not or will not be used to match Federal funds other than Federal Vocational Rehabilitation funds used in this program.
- EIPD provides Federal funding in the amount of 78.7 percent of the agreed-upon annual budget depending on the availability of Federal funds and the program arrangements.
- EIPD provides, within the limitations of available resources, case service funds necessary to the delivery of Vocational Rehabilitation services.
- EIPD assigns rehabilitation staff to serve each high school within the LEA who will maintain an active caseload at all assigned schools; and that rehabilitation staff visit the assigned school on a scheduled routine basis to receive referrals and transact other matters necessary to effectively administer the rehabilitation program; and that in the event of a staff vacancy or leave of absence, EIPD exercised best efforts to maintain the continued delivery of services to students.
- The LEA identifies a staff person(s) to serve as liaison to rehabilitation staff assigned by the Division in carrying out the planning, coordination, and delivery of services as outlined in this agreement.
- The LEA shall provide adequate meeting space in all assigned schools that is accessible to staff and individuals with disabilities, private for individual counseling, and environmentally comfortable, with conditions that are conducive to confidentiality and counseling; and that any and all equipment purchased under the Agreement remains property of the Division.

The procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services is addressed specifically through the state-level MOU between EIPD and DPI. The agreement requires that:

- DPI inform LEAs of services available from EIPD and promote referrals for students with disabilities who may or may not be receiving special education and are in need of pre-employment transition services and/or VR transition services, including the development of an IPE
- EIPD reviews the required documentation of students with disabilities who have been referred by the LEA to determine eligible for the Vocational Rehabilitation services; and that this eligibility determination remains the sole responsibility of the EIPD.

In addition to procedures put in place by the state-level agreement, the local TPCAs between the local VR unit and LEA specify the responsibilities related to outreach for the locally-controlled education party as well as VR:

- The parties assist in outreach and identification of students with disabilities who require VR services or pre-employment transition services,
- The parties develop a system for generating referrals to the VR program
- The LEA assists with securing and sharing diagnostic information required for students to access the VR process
- The local VR unit contacts the student at the earliest possible time to initiate a VR application and/or request pre-employment transition services.

Other Evidence and Historical Information on Collaboration with Education Officials

Since 2003, the EIPD 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 EIPD staff participate in an annual Exceptional Children's Conference and regularly scheduled cross training regarding the provision of services at the local level. Specialized cooperative training activities, workshops and conferences have existed over the years and will continue to occur periodically, including both Vocational Rehabilitation staff and educators in conjunction with the requirements of the state's Comprehensive Plan.

EIPD 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, EIPD is well represented in our state. EIPD hosted transition training in Spring 2016 that included presentations by many of our partnering agencies and focused on policy changes and program development as a result of WIOA. EIPD 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, EIPD continues to expand Project SEARCH™ in NC with a total of fourteen (14) sites supported this past year. Project SEARCH™ is provided through a public-private collaboration that varies by location and includes EIPD, the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities, managed care organizations, community colleges, and private employers.

Additionally, EIPD 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.

K. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

EIPD continues to utilize a dual customer approach by providing services to both businesses and individuals with disabilities. The Division emphasizes the definition and marketing of business services to ensure the dual customer approach is recognized and implemented. Business services include recruitment, hiring, consultation on Section 503 compliance, sensitivity/diversity training, accessibility consultation, internships, On-the-Job Training (OJT), education on tax incentives, and follow-up and job retention services. NC DVR continues to market business services by employing 70 community employment program specialists that serve the statewide program. These individuals often have education and experience in a business-related field, such as human resources and marketing, so that EIPD 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. EIPD believes that relationships with employers is the essence of creating positive connections between jobseekers and business, and that providing follow-up and technical assistance to businesses fosters these relationships so that they can have a sustainable impact in supporting the individuals with disabilities in finding, maintaining, and advancing in employment.

EIPD 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. EIPD 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 EIPD provides to jobseekers and those services provided to business. The unique role of the business relations representatives highlights this intersection well.

In 2016, EIPD 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, EIPD' utilization of internship services (funding) increased by 800%. EIPD 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.

EIPD staff, including business relations representatives, will continue to develop relationships with business based on the individual placement needs of eligible individuals with disabilities who are placement-ready. Employers will be engaged in the individual preparation of job

seekers with disabilities by involving them in Employment Marketing Skills training classes as well as Job Clubs. Employers participate in job interview preparation of job seekers in addition to information-sharing with job seekers about employer expectations in general and within their specific industry.

Additionally, EIPD has invested in disability sensitivity training in 2018 to promote the transition of students with disabilities to employment after high school. EIPD community employment program specialists 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. Train the Trainer workshops were held in December 2019 to train new business relations representatives and State Office personnel. Windmills Training will continue to be a viable business service that we offer to all employers who are interested in diversifying their workforce. Furthermore, EIPD will continue to pursue customized training partnerships like one developed with Fenner Drives in 2016. This project engaged high school students with significant disabilities in semester-long employer-based training at the Fenner Drives facility, located in Wilmington, NC. The students earned school credit while they gained career exploration and specific skills in the manufacturing industry and were provided internship wages and on-the-job supports. A very similar customized training partnership has been established with New Hanover County Schools which provides work-based learning for an underserved population and will serve as a pipeline for difficult to fill positions in environmental services within New Hanover County Schools. EIPD 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, such as community colleges.

L. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), 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 to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

1. STATE PROGRAMS (DESIGNATE LEAD AGENCY(IES) AND IMPLEMENTING ENTITY(IES)) CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

Assistive Technology services and devices are provided to eligible individuals statewide who require them. Rehabilitation technology and assistive technology services are sponsored and provided to the degree necessary to complete the rehabilitation program. Included are services and devices which can supplement and enhance an individual's functions such as adapted computer access, augmentative communication, specialized seating and mobility, vehicle modifications, and services which can have an impact on the environment, such as accessibility, job re-design, work site modification and residence modification. Application of the available engineering and assistive technology services and technologies is important when making determinations of eligibility particularly for individuals with significant and most significant disabilities. Rehabilitation engineering evaluations and services are not subject to an individual's financial eligibility; however, devices, equipment and modifications recommended by the engineer are subject to financial eligibility. Applicants during the assessment phase, and consumers determined to be eligible for services in need of and who can benefit from

rehabilitation engineering services, devices and assistive technology services can be referred to providers of these services, and these services can assist to assist with assessment processes. Presently within the state, these services are made available statewide by Rehabilitation Engineers, Assistive Technology Consultants, and other agency staff as well as through outside Assistive Technology Suppliers and Providers.

The Division is fortunate to have the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program as a vital program component. The program increases access and the provision of services to individuals served within the VR program and supports the Division mission of increasing independence for clients in the home, post- secondary school, and work setting. In addition, this affords clients of the Division with fast access to the programs array of services which includes: technical expertise in selecting the most appropriate device; hands-on demonstration and try-out of low tech and high tech devices for people with disabilities; information on a variety of technology options; funding resource information and strategies; short-term loan of equipment to consumers, families and professionals who serve them; training to consumers, families and professionals; technical assistance to local organizations, schools, and programs to expand assistive technology local service delivery capacity; awareness and outreach activities to inform the public about equipment and devices people with disabilities can use for greater independence.

EIPD collaborated with the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) to purchase iPads to train EIPD and community rehabilitation program (CRP) field staff in the use of technology to overcome specific barriers to employment. Staff learned different software applications (apps) as well as different ways to communicate to employers during job development. NCATP provides a professional development program available to all VR staff who provide evaluation, assistive technology equipment and assistive technology services for the consumers they are serving. NCATP has nineteen staff serving the state of North Carolina, which includes the Director, AT Information/ Referral /Funding Specialist, Intake Coordinator, Inventory Specialist, 1 AT Re-use Special Projects Assistant, 4 Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) and 8 Assistive Technology Consultants. The 8 AT Consultants and 4 SLPs provide direct one-on-one services in the Assistive Technology Centers.

Since 2015 EIPD 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 EIPD 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 EIPD. Both EIPD 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.

2. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

EIPD is 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, EIPD 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).

3. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH;

EIPD staff work with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to coordinate services for specific individuals and also to address areas of broader systemic impact such as community education, disability awareness, and outreach services to various disability groups, including out of-school youth. The CILs are consumer-controlled, cross-disability, community-based non-residential, private non-profit organizations that provide programs and services for people with all types of disabilities and their families. The goal of CILs is to promote and support opportunities for people with disabilities to fully participate in an integrated community and search for the possibilities to live as they choose. These centers are funded through Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Information and referral, independent living skills training, advocacy, peer counseling, and transition services are the five core services each center provides. In addition to these core services, the centers may provide additional services which are tailored to serve individuals with disabilities in their service area.

4. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS;

At this time, EIPD 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. EIPD does sponsor activities through several community rehabilitation programs that provide training services to EIPD consumers through contracts with entities such as the NC Department of Transportation for maintenance of facilities and distribution of safety campaign materials. EIPD does promote training and employment practices that align with competitive integrated employment standards.

5. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT (42 U.S.C. 1396 ET SEQ.);

The NC DHHS Division of Health Benefits (DHB) is the state agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act. EIPD has developed a cooperative agreement with DHB to ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities have equal access to VR and best practice employment services. DHB is a lead partner agency, in addition to the EIPD 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.

6. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES;

EIPD 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 EIPD milestone format for contracted outcomes. EIPD 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. EIPD will continue to look toward expanding availability of such services in unserved and/or underserved areas of the state. EIPD is represented at the NC Statewide Brain Injury Advisory Council.

7. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES; AND

EIPD continues to partner with the DMHDDSAS in implementing individual placement and support supported employment (IPS SE) throughout the state. Currently, there are 38 fidelity IPS SE teams with 19 unique providers programs throughout the state and EIPD contracts with 18 of them. EIPD offers such programs the opportunity to apply to become an IPS contractor through an ongoing RFA. EIPD 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 EIPD 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. EIPD 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.

8. OTHER FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM.

DVRS extensively collaborates with and utilizes the services of federal, state, and local entities to achieve its mission on behalf of NC citizens with disabilities. DVRS routinely pursues improving its overall effectiveness through working relationships, partnerships, contracts and formal or informal agreements with entities at all levels. DVRS maintains written cooperative agreements with various federal, state, and local agencies. These include but are not limited to the Social Security Administration; the United States Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs; the DHHS Division of Health Benefits; Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Office of Long-Term Services and Supports; Division of Disability Determination; Division of Social Services; Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse; and numerous local school systems, hospitals, and physical medicine and rehabilitation centers. The

Easter Seals / United Cerebral Palsy Society of North Carolina, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Brain Injury Association of North Carolina; the Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehab and Employment; the American Heart Association, and the North Carolina Arthritis Foundation are examples of consumer and advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities with which the Division has maintained agreements to facilitate the maintenance of the highest feasible level of communication and coordination in the joint development and implementation of operational methods including, where applicable:

- Assisting consumers, their families, and advocates in accessing services from DVRS and from the other agencies and entities;
- Referral of individuals who have disabilities and especially those who have severe disabilities to DVRS for services;
- Referral by DVRS to other agencies or entities for the various supportive services and assistance available;
- Determination of the responsibility of each agency or entity in making referrals, in serving individuals jointly, and in identifying resources;
- Provision of educational information regarding the services, including equipment and assistive technology, available and eligibility criteria of the Division and of the other agency or entity;
- Joint training of staff in areas pertaining to services available and procedures of DVRS and the other agency or entity;
- Shared funding DVRS positions and program costs and the colocation of DVRS staff with staff from the other agency or entity where co-location would be effective and feasible;
- Developing means to promote greater awareness and greater utilization of the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- Provision for the sharing of information between agencies as required by law or upon receipt of client permission and with regard to maintaining confidentiality;
- Establishing an evaluation system to determine levels of competency of paraprofessionals such as interpreters for the deaf who wish to serve as vendors for DVRS;
- Enhancing post-secondary training supports to assist in the transition to employment;
- Improving the public image of the employment capabilities of individuals in various disability groups;
- Assessing the effectiveness of the cooperative agreements;
- Jointly promoting improvement in the quality of life through comprehensive approaches to the improved health of consumers jointly served and through services to family members;
- Jointly promoting ethical research practices to develop improved medical and other disability related interventions;

- Promoting systems change through collaborative projects;
- Expanding services and community resources for unserved and underserved groups;
- Promotion of collaboration at the community office level offices between the Division and other agencies and entities;
- Through joint planning councils, providing joint input from the Division and from other agencies and entities for budgeting, service delivery, and policy changes for block grants, special demonstration projects, and other grants;
- Providing input regarding formulation of vocational services provided by other agencies and entities.

Additionally, DVRS local Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living Program and NC Assistive Technology Program staff work with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in North Carolina to coordinate services for specific individuals and to address areas of broader systemic impact such as community education/awareness and outreach to various disability groups. The CILs are consumer- controlled, cross-disability, community-based nonresidential, private non-profit organizations that provide programs and services for people with all types of disabilities and their families. The goal of CILs is to promote and support opportunities for people with disabilities to fully participate in an integrated community and search for the possibilities to live as they choose. These centers are funded through Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Information and referral, independent living skills training, advocacy, peer counseling, and transition are the five core services each center provides. In addition to these core services, the centers may provide additional services which are tailored to serve individuals with disabilities in their service area.

The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) is an independent nonprofit council (not an entity within a state agency) that is established under Section 705 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. The majority of its members are individuals with disabilities. The SILC is responsible for jointly developing and endorsing the State Plan for Independent Living in conjunction with the designated state unit (DVRS and DSB). The duties of the SILC are to monitor, review, and evaluate the implementation of the State Plan for Independent Living. Further, the SILC is mandated to coordinate activities with the State Rehabilitation Council and other councils that address the needs of specific disability populations.

9. OTHER PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.

Private non-profit providers of rehabilitation services are necessary and valuable partners in the delivery of the array of services needed by the individuals eligible for VR services within the state. EIPD routinely seeks out such partnerships especially in geographic areas where additional services and/or service provider choices need to be established. EIPD establishes and maintains contracts or agreements with over 120 private, for profit and non-profit VR service providers providing an array of services to EIPD consumers. Sixty-two (62)(51) private-non-profit VR service providers have established performance-based contracts with the Division, where the organizations are administered funds when an individual receiving services within their program has achieved designated goals or "milestones" on their way toward their ultimate goal of competitive employment. Additionally, performance-based cooperative agreements engaging non-profit organizations encompass brain injury support services (2), Project

SEARCH™ (15), Individual Placement and Support Services (10), and Pre-Employment Transition Services (18). Details of this system and its implementation were developed in collaboration with the community rehabilitation provider community through representation via the CRP-EIPD steering committee and through feedback solicitations made via web-based feedback mechanisms.

EIPD 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 EIPD 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 EIPD. 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 EIPD occurred in the south central geographical region of the state, where the tribe is established. EIPD 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 EIPD 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). EIPD contracts with Vocational Opportunities of Cherokee, Inc. (VOC) for the purchase of these services when it is appropriate for EIPD VR clients who are not members of the EBCI.

EIPD also employs rehabilitation counselors that serve as liaisons with the Cherokee Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program, which helps maintain communication channels. Recently, EIPD 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 EIPD State Rehabilitation Council as the mandatory representative for the AIVRS. EIPD and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians updated their memorandum of agreement October 19, 2009, which also remains in effect.

ASSURANCES

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner, that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

The VR agency must select the “Edit” button to review and agree to the VR State plan Assurances.

<p>The State Plan must include</p> <p>1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.</p> <p>3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:</p> <p>3.a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
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<p>The State Plan must include</p>
3.b. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).
3.e. as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.f. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.h. the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).
3.m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:
4.a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if

The State Plan must include
implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act
4.g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,
4.j.i. has developed and will implement,
4.j.i.A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
4.j.i.B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and
4.j.ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25) and 113).
4.j.iii. shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.

The State Plan must include
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:
7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.
7.b. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?

Yes

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973

(REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY TITLE IV OF WIOA[1], AND ITS STATE PLAN SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT;

[1] Public Law 113-128.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (formerly the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services)

2. IN THE EVENT THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY IS NOT PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH VOCATIONAL AND OTHER REHABILITATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY MUST INCLUDE A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT FOR THE VR PROGRAM (SECTION 101(A)(2)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT). AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT)[2]AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[3], THE REHABILITATION ACT, 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C), AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[4], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE TO STATES UNDER SECTION 111(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY, OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[5], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[6], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF

EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

[5] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT OR, IF NOT APPLICABLE, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C);

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Kathie B. Smith

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Division Director

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Public Law 113-128.

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

^[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

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^[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

To review and complete the Certification section of the VR portion of the State plan, please select the “Edit” button.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Kathie B. Smith
Title of Signatory	Division Director
Date Signed	March 4, 2024

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

After the Unified or Combined State Plan submission, each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan's approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

In the final rule implementing WIOA, the Departments indicated that they would initially implement this indicator in the form of a pilot to test the feasibility and rigor of three proposed approaches. During Program Year (PY) 2022, the Departments initiated the rulemaking process to establish a standard definition of Effectiveness in Serving Employers. States will continue to report two of three proposed approaches until the Departments issue the final rule and implement the indicator.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	49.7%	49.7%	49.7%	50.1%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	44.0%	36.5%	44.0%	38.9%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4500	\$3577	\$4500	\$3677
Credential Attainment Rate	39.0%	30.6%	39.0%	31.6%
Measurable Skill Gains	47.5%	32.2%	47.5%	35.7%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

The North Carolina Division of Employment and Inclusion for People with Disabilities (EIP) is partnering with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS), other divisions and departments, and community rehabilitation programs in developing work opportunities for individuals with disabilities consistent with the Division's priority of competitive integrated employment and associated goals of helping VR participants achieve these employment opportunities, particularly for VR participants with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment. The expansion of these partnerships is also consistent with the Division's priority of capacity building and the associated goal of developing the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants.

Regarding partnerships with community rehabilitation programs, the Division establishes and maintains and plans to continue contracts or agreements with over 120 VR service providers that provide community-based assessments, vocational evaluations, job development, work adjustment training, and short- and long-term on-the-job supports. Specialized providers offer services for specific disabilities, such as the University of North Carolina's TEACCH® Autism program, and the Brain Injury Support Services program at Community Partnerships, Inc. Over 100 of these programs deliver services through performance-based contracts with the Division, where the organizations are administered funds when an individual receiving services within their program has achieved designated goals or "milestones" on their way toward their final goal of competitive, integrated employment. This system and its implementation were developed in collaboration with the community rehabilitation programs providers, which have stakeholder representation on a steering committee as well as various other opportunities to provide stakeholder input.

Consistent with the priority of youth and students with disabilities and associated goals of increasing opportunities for training and employment services for youth and the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities, the Division has established and plans to continue agreements with 90 of North Carolina's 115 school districts. Under these agreements, the local education agencies contribute funding towards 190 VR program positions, including VR counselors, business relations representatives, vocational evaluators, and support staff such as casework assistants and casework technicians. Other strategies to expand and improve services for youth include expanded performance-based cooperative agreements with Project SEARCH™ sites and organizations that provide various pre-employment transition services.

Regarding the priority of business engagement, in addition to the priorities of competitive integrated employment and youth and students with disabilities, the VR program employs 70 business relations representatives, and has three regional specialists and one statewide program specialist who will continue to engage employers and expand opportunities for

internships, on-the-job training, and employment for adults, students, and youth with disabilities.

Both of North Carolina's VR agencies have implemented an updated electronic case management system built off the Geographic Solutions, Inc. Virtual One Stop platform, which also supports the NC Title I and Title III programs. Additional phases of the new system, ENCORE, will be implemented with functionality that will allow the public to self-register and inquire about services and, in the final phase, enable the Title IV program to exchange data with the Title I and Title III programs. This effort furthers both goals for the VR program priority of capacity building. Under this priority, EIPD and DSB collaborated with the state's other education and workforce programs, including but not limited WIOA partners, to develop a new NCCareers career information system. NCCareers launched in 2020 and includes various tools for career exploration, labor market information, and links to other agencies and programs, including services for individuals with disabilities. A representative for EIPD and DSB serves as a voting member of the NCCareers steering committee and agency staff continue to participate in workgroups for content development and new system functionality.

Additionally, EIPD has requested approval from RSA to fund the following initiatives: Purchase of DB101, a disability benefits online tool that helps folks understand in plain language how to navigate the world of benefits and work; upscaling security at WorkSource East campus in response to increased safety concerns around break-ins, property damage, loitering of the homeless population and other safety concerns; and future planning for a residential facility for the WorkSource West training center.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

The public and commercial infrastructure and distribution of resources necessary for equitable access, including but not limited to local education resources, including LEA funding for transfer agreements; local unemployment rates, employment opportunities and employers who are willing or that otherwise can provide work-based learning experiences; public transportation and the availability of private transportation services; technology, including communication technology, such as access to personal computing devices and high speed internet service; the availability of various service providers, including those commonly needed for vocational rehabilitation such as community rehabilitation programs, medical services providers, and

postsecondary education training providers; and the availability of human resources, including qualified rehabilitation professionals, varies throughout the state of North Carolina. The various components of this necessary workforce system infrastructure are generally more developed in the highly populated metropolitan areas than in the less populated rural areas. Consequentially, individuals with disabilities living in rural "service deserts" with higher local unemployment rates may experience barriers to equitable access to vocational rehabilitation services and have fewer local employment opportunities.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

Ensuring equitable access to vocational rehabilitation services in a context where infrastructure, resources, and opportunities vary across regions like North Carolina requires a strategic and targeted approach. Here are steps our vocational rehabilitation program will take:

1. **Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the specific barriers and challenges faced by individuals in different regions of North Carolina. Identify gaps in access to vocational rehabilitation services and resources, considering factors such as local education resources, employment opportunities, transportation options, technology access, and availability of service providers.
2. **Strategic Resource Allocation:** Allocate VR resources and funding based on the identified needs and disparities across regions. Prioritize areas with higher unemployment rates, limited access to education and training resources, inadequate transportation infrastructure, and other barriers to equitable access.
3. **Collaboration with Local Partners:** Establish partnerships with local education agencies, employers, transportation authorities, technology providers, community organizations, and service providers in each region. Collaborate to leverage existing resources, share expertise, and coordinate efforts to address barriers to access.
4. **Targeted Outreach and Education:** Conduct targeted outreach efforts to raise awareness about vocational rehabilitation services and available resources in underserved communities. Provide education and training sessions on vocational

rehabilitation options, rights, and benefits to individuals with disabilities, their families, educators, employers, and community members.

5. **Transportation Assistance Programs:** Develop partnerships with local transportation providers to ensure that individuals can access vocational rehabilitation services, job interviews, training programs, and employment opportunities, especially in areas with limited public transportation options. Incentivize these partnerships with the funding necessary, such as with higher transportation rates based on need.
6. **Support Technology Access Initiatives:** Implement initiatives to improve access to technology, including personal computing devices and high-speed internet service, for VR participants living in underserved areas. Provide training and support on the use of technology for vocational training, job search, telecommuting, and accessing remote services.
7. **Expansion of Service Provider Network:** Expand the network of service providers, including community rehabilitation programs, medical services providers, and postsecondary education training providers, in underserved regions. Provide incentives or support for service providers to establish or expand their presence in areas with limited resources.
8. **Professional Development and Recruitment:** Invest in professional development and recruitment efforts to ensure an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals in all regions of the state. Offer incentives to encourage professionals to work in underserved areas.
9. **Data Monitoring and Evaluation:** Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to ensure equitable access to vocational rehabilitation services. Collect data on service utilization, outcomes, and satisfaction levels across regions to identify areas for improvement and guide future decision-making.
10. **Advocacy and Policy Change:** Advocate for funding, grant opportunities, and policy changes at the local, state and federal levels to address systemic barriers and inequities in access to vocational rehabilitation services. Work with policymakers, advocacy groups, and stakeholders to promote policies that prioritize equity, accessibility, and inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

By implementing these steps, EIPD can work towards ensuring equitable access to services and opportunities for individuals with disabilities across diverse regions of North Carolina.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that

provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

All of the efforts needed to address the identified barriers have been ongoing and will be continued throughout the 2024-2027 plan:

1. **CSNA:** will include an initial assessment and planning phase to begin in PY 2025. Key milestones will include:
 - a. Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify specific barriers and disparities across regions.
 - b. Analyze data on local education resources, unemployment rates, transportation options, technology access, and availability of service providers.
 - c. Form a multidisciplinary workgroup comprising stakeholders and subject matter experts, including the SRC, to plan and guide the process.
 - d. Formulate recommendations for addressing identified barriers.
2. **Resource Allocation and Partnership Development:** following the recommendations from the CSNA in PY 2025:
 - a. Allocate resources and funding based on the findings of the needs assessment, prioritizing regions with the greatest disparities and barriers to access.
 - b. Establish partnerships with local education agencies, employers, transportation authorities, technology providers, and service providers in each region.
 - c. Negotiate transfer agreements with local education agencies to ensure access to resources and funding for vocational training programs.
3. **Outreach and Awareness:** Already in process and expanding in PY 2024 with the agency name change from Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) to the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD). Key milestones include:
 - a. Launching a targeted outreach and awareness campaign to inform individuals with disabilities, their families, educators, employers, and community members about available vocational rehabilitation services and resources.
 - b. Conducting workshops, seminars, and information sessions in underserved communities through the local VR offices to address misconceptions and increase participation in vocational rehabilitation programs.
 - c. Utilize various communication channels, including social media, to reach diverse audiences.

4. Infrastructure and Technology Enhancement: Already in process and continuing in PY 2024:

- a. Implement initiatives to improve infrastructure and technology access in underserved areas, such as with the allowable infrastructure and cost-sharing agreements with local workforce boards to support NCWorks.
- b. Expand access to personal computing devices and high speed internet for VR participants as appropriate to their need and individualized plan for employment.
- c. Increase the utilization of "technology hubs" for VR participants in partnership with libraries, community centers, and educational institutions to provide training and support for utilizing communication technology.

5. Transportation Solutions: Ongoing and continuing in PY 2024, to incentivize and increase access to transportation:

- a. Purchase transportation services for individuals with disabilities to access vocational rehabilitation services, job interviews, training programs, and employment opportunities as appropriate to their need and individualized plan for employment.
- b. Partner with public transportation agencies to improve accessibility and coverage in underserved areas.
- c. Explore innovative solutions such as rideshare programs, volunteer driver networks, or transportation vouchers for individuals with mobility challenges.

6. Service Provider Expansion: Ongoing and continuing in PY 2024:

- a. Collaborate to incentivize the network of service providers, including community rehabilitation programs, medical services providers, and postsecondary education training providers, in underserved regions.
- b. Explore grant funding for service providers to establish new facilities or expand existing ones in areas with limited resources.
- c. Offer training and technical assistance to enhance the capacity of service providers in underserved areas to meet the unique needs of individuals with disabilities.

7. Human Resources Development: Ongoing and continuing in PY 2024:

- a. As per the section on Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, EIPD will invest in professional development and recruitment efforts to address shortages of qualified rehabilitation professionals in underserved areas.
- b. Offer incentives to attract and retain qualified professionals.
- c. Collaborate with universities and professional organizations to develop training programs and certification pathways for rehabilitation professionals.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation (Ongoing):

- a. Continue the monitoring and evaluation of program implementation and outcomes.
- b. Collect data on service utilization, participant outcomes, satisfaction levels, and progress.
- c. Use data-driven insights to identify successes, challenges, and areas for improvement, and adjust strategies accordingly.

GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

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where the organizations are administered funds when an individual receiving services within their program has achieved designated goals or "milestones" on their way toward their final goal of competitive, integrated employment. This system and its implementation were developed in collaboration with the community rehabilitation programs providers, which have stakeholder representation on a steering committee as well as various other opportunities to provide stakeholder input.

Consistent with the priority of youth and students with disabilities and associated goals of increasing opportunities for training and employment services for youth and the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities, the Division has established and plans to continue agreements with 90 of North Carolina's 115 school districts. Under these agreements, the local education agencies contribute funding towards 190 VR program positions, including VR counselors, business relations representatives, vocational evaluators, and support staff such as casework assistants and casework technicians. Other strategies to expand and improve services for youth include expanded performance-based cooperative agreements with Project SEARCH™ sites and organizations that provide various pre-employment transition services.

Regarding the priority of business engagement, in addition to the priorities of competitive integrated employment and youth and students with disabilities, the VR program employs 70 business relations representatives, and has three regional specialists and one statewide program specialist who will continue to engage employers and expand opportunities for internships, on-the-job training, and employment for adults, students, and youth with disabilities.

Both of North Carolina's VR agencies are partnering in the development a customized off-the-shelf electronic case management system based on the Geographic Solutions, Inc. WIOA platform, which supports the state's Title I and Title III programs. The new system, ENCORE, will be implemented in phases, with functionality that will allow the public to self-register and inquire about services and, in the final phase, enable the Title IV program to exchange data with the Title I and Title III programs. This effort furthers both goals for the VR program priority of capacity building. Under this priority, EIPD and DSB collaborated with the state's other education and workforce programs, including but not limited WIOA partners, to develop a new NCCareers career information system. NCCareers launched in 2020 and includes various tools for career exploration, labor market information, and links to other agencies and programs, including services for individuals with disabilities. A representative for EIPD and DSB serves as a voting member of the NCCareers steering committee and agency staff continue to participate in workgroups for content development and new system functionality.

Additionally, EIPD has requested approval from RSA to fund the following initiatives: Purchase of DB101, a disability benefits online tool that helps folks understand in plain language how to navigate the world of benefits and work; upscaling security at WorkSource East campus in response to increased safety concerns around break-ins, property damage, loitering of the homeless population and other safety concerns; and future planning for a residential facility for the WorkSource West training center.

Assistive technology services and devices are provided to eligible individuals statewide who require them. Rehabilitation technology and Assistive technology services are sponsored and provided to the degree necessary to complete the rehabilitation program. Included are services and devices which can supplement and enhance an individual's functions such as, adapted computer access, augmentative communication, specialized seating and mobility, vehicle modifications, and services which can have an impact on the environment, such as accessibility, job re-design, work site modification and residence modification. Application of the available engineering and Assistive technology services and technologies is important when making determinations of eligibility particularly for individuals with significant and most significant disabilities. Rehabilitation engineering evaluations and services are not subject to an individual's financial eligibility; however, devices, equipment and modifications recommended by the engineer are subject to financial eligibility. Applicants during the assessment phase, and consumers determined to be eligible for services in need of and who can benefit from rehabilitation engineering services, devices and Assistive technology services can be referred to providers of these services, and these services can assist with assessment processes. Presently within the state, these services are made available statewide by Rehabilitation Engineers, Assistive Technology Consultants, and other agency staff as well as through outside Assistive Technology Suppliers and Providers. The Division is fortunate to have the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program as a vital program component. The program increases access and the provision of services to individuals served within the VR program and supports the Division mission of increasing independence for clients in the home, post- secondary school and work setting. In addition, this affords clients of the Division with fast access to the programs array of services which includes: technical expertise in selecting the most appropriate device; hands-on demonstration and try-out of low tech and high tech devices for people with disabilities; information on a variety of technology options; funding resource information and strategies; short-term loan of equipment to consumers, families and professionals who serve them; training to consumers, families and professionals; technical assistance to local organizations, schools, and programs to expand Assistive technology local service delivery capacity; awareness and outreach activities to inform the public about equipment and devices people with disabilities can use for greater independence. EIPD collaborated with the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) to purchase iPads to train EIPD and community rehabilitation program (CRP) field staff in the use of technology to overcome specific barriers to employment. Staff learned different software applications (apps) as well as different ways to communicate to employers during job development. A team member from the Employment and Program Development Section will present at the National TASH Conference in Portland, Oregon in December 2015 where NC's project with the iPads will be highlighted. NCATP provides a professional development program available to all VR staff who provide evaluation, Assistive technology equipment and Assistive technology services for the consumers they are serving. NCATP has nineteen staff serving the state of North Carolina, which includes the Director, AT Information/ Referral /Funding Specialist, Intake Coordinator, Inventory Specialist, 1 AT Re-use Special Projects Assistant, 4 Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) and 8 Assistive Technology Consultants. The 8 AT Consultants and 4 SLPs provide direct one-on-one services in the Assistive Technology Centers.

Since 2015 EIPD has progressively increased their collaborative efforts with NCATP and other Ability partners to provide assistive technologies and related services to farmers and

farmworkers within the state. There have also been joint outreach efforts to Veterans with disabilities who may be interested in pursuing agriculturally-oriented occupations.

Additionally, the current interagency agreement between EIPD 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 EIPD. Both EIPD and DSB share information about technical assistance and consultation to DPI, LEAs, and schools regarding accommodations and assistive technology that will help facilitate the education and Vocational Rehabilitation of students with disabilities, including students who are deaf or hearing impaired, blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired.

EIPD employs several strategies to increase outreach activities to various minority groups with the goal of also reaching those individuals with the most significant disabilities. The major thrust of activities is to go where the minority individuals and groups are; contrasted with expecting them to come to Vocational Rehabilitation or to know how to access services without assistance. Management and staff on the local, regional, and state levels continue to identify minority or ethnic groups in their community along with identifying group leaders, common meeting places, and preferred ways to access information, and also neighborhood and community resources that can be used and developed to bring rehabilitation services to more minority individuals with the most significant disabilities. As there are numerous diverse cultures throughout North Carolina, Staff are encouraged to concentrate on the groups in their area. The specific groups of considerable interest include: North Carolina Native Americans, Hispanic/Latino populations and African and Asian populations. The Division has created a staff position that is dedicated to developing and furthering initiatives for outreach to Hispanic/Latino populations. This individual routinely travels to the communities where there are high concentrations of the targeted populations and provides marketing information to their meetings and carnivals. The Division also has active program specialists who provide outreach to advocacy organizations serving individuals in the following areas: Mental Illness and Substance abuse, Veterans, Developmental Disabilities, Traumatic Brain Injuries, and Deaf/Communication Disorders. Specific objectives and strategies pertaining to these activities are included within the State Plan Goals.

EIPD, in partnership with DSB, piloted a staff development initiative that will continue through the PY 2020-24 planning cycle: Project E3: Educate, Empower, and Employ. Project E3 includes intensive technical assistance to build program capacity for state VR programs, with a focus on improving engagement and successful outcomes of individuals with disabilities experiencing intergenerational poverty. In late 2017, Project E3 staff initiated in-person training and tools to increase VR participation in two economically disadvantaged North Carolina communities. The programmatic intervention included community-based participatory research to identify key issues and challenges, map existing resources, and confirm commitment from providers and other stakeholders. Subsequent intervention strategies included implementation of an in-reach/outreach strategy for youth SSI recipients, applicants, and their families regarding VR services; the alignment of work incentives benefits counseling with financial literacy and empowerment coaching; and staff development training in evidence-based employment practices, including motivational interviewing and trauma-informed care.

EIPD revised its state level memorandum of agreement with DPI upon issuance of the final federal regulations on Title IV of WIOA. The purpose of the agreement is to outline a collaborative partnership between the two agencies to provide state level approval and support for enhanced transition services to students with disabilities. The revised agreement with DPI will also specify the manner in which pre-employment transition services will be coordinated and provided within NC schools as well as how students with disabilities, including those who are potentially eligible for VR services, will be identified and served in compliance with federal regulations. In addition to a state level memorandum of agreement, the EIPD 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. EIPD 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, EIPD has implemented strategies for serve transition-aged youth and will continue to enhance programs and services to transition-aged youth with increased focus on students with disabilities and pre-employment transition services. New programs are intended to align the Division with federal requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, namely pre-employment transition services, as well as provide improved transition services to students while they are in high school. EIPD expects that NC public schools will see a value-add for investing in the VR partnership. EIPD 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, EIPD, 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. EIPD plans to continue collaboration with DPI leadership on technical assistance grants that focus on improving transition services and employment outcomes for transition aged youth.

EIPD 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 EIPD 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 EIPD and DSB initiated that will launch during the PY 2020-2024 planning cycle is the migration to a Geographic Solutions case management system, which will facilitate data sharing across WIOA partners and improve case management and reporting.

In Spring 2022, EIPD and DSB met with RSA to establish negotiated rates for the performance accountability measures under section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Expected levels of performance based on the Statistical Adjustment Model are consistent with actual agency performance with the exception of the Measurable Skills Gain rate, which was lower in PY 2020 and 2021 due to limited in-person training opportunities during the COVID pandemic. The Divisions acknowledge that to improve performance on other measures, such as median quarterly earnings, they must help consumers to prepare higher paying positions through credential attainment and measurable skills gains. EIPD and DSB are currently looking for ways to adjust programs, services, and support to accomplish this in a fiscally- responsible manner. Further, EIPD 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 EIPD 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 EIPD is employing is to increase the earning potential of individuals who have entrepreneurial skills through the support the Division has made available through a dedicated Small Business Specialist on staff who helps support staff and consumers in their assessment of this option as a fit and when it is mutually determined as such, coordination of local resources and ongoing supports for the consumer pursuing this option. In 2013, EIPD participated in a NIDRR-funded Learning Collaborative administered by the Institute for Community Inclusion. EIPD 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, EIPD 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.

EIPD 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 EIPD within the NCWorks Career Centers and other components of the workforce development system. Development and implementation of information systems that link all components of the statewide workforce development system; that link the components to other electronic networks including non- visual electronic networks; and that relate to such subjects as employment statistics and information on job vacancies, career planning, and workforce development activities. Further development and use of customer service features such as common intake and referral procedures when feasible, customer databases, resource information, and human services hotlines. Establishment of cooperative efforts with employers to facilitate job placement and carry out any other activities that Vocational Rehabilitation and the employers determine to be appropriate. Identification of staff roles, responsibilities, and available resources, along with specification of the financial responsibility of each component of the statewide workforce development system with regards to paying for certain services

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

The strategy of collaboration with community rehabilitation programs and other agencies and organizations to provide extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities applies to the priorities and their corresponding goals of competitive integrated employment; youth and students; business engagement; and capacity building to serve individuals with most significant disabilities. For adults and youth with most significant disabilities, this strategy addresses the goals of increasing competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes; increasing opportunities for training and employment services; expanding work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities; and increasing collaboration to integrate and expand services. This strategy is consistent with the comprehensive needs

assessment, which identified supported employment services as one of the most needed services for adults and youth with most significant disabilities.

Continued and expanded collaboration through performance-based cooperative agreements with non-profit organizations also includes the provision of brain injury support services for individuals with brain injury and Project SEARCH™ and pre-employment transition services programs for youth and students with disabilities, consistent with the needs comprehensive needs assessment findings regarding individuals with most significant disabilities and students and youth with disabilities.

Strategies to increase outreach to minorities, regarding the needs assessment findings on services to individuals of minority backgrounds, also include identifying and coordinating with community groups and other resources at the local level. Managers and staff, including program specialists, reach out to organizations for the American Indian, Latino, African American, and Asian populations to help increase awareness of the availability of Vocational Rehabilitation services. These strategies support the priorities of *competitive integrated employment and youth and students with disabilities* as they relate to underserved populations and individuals with cultural barriers to employment.

Other strategies specific to the goals related to the priority of *youth and students with disabilities* include local Third-Party Cooperative Agreements (TCPA) through which local education agency (LEA) resources are committed to fund VR support staff, in addition to outlining how VR and local school systems will collaborate to serve students with disabilities. EIPD also coordinates services for youth through the State Capacity Building Team for Transition, which has representation from state education and advocacy agencies to coordinate transition services for students to achieve better post-school outcomes.

Regarding the comprehensive needs assessment findings on the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs, other strategies include coordination through advisory committees comprised of supported employment, other community rehabilitation program providers along with Division staff. Regular meetings provide an effective venue identifying and updating the needs, goals, and priorities as they pertain to community rehabilitation programs.

Innovation and expansion funds were used as a partnership contribution to NCCareers.org, North Carolina's career information website application. A portion of innovation and expansion funding will be used in support of activities of the NC EIPD state rehabilitation council.

The strategies listed in part (B) of this section specific to improving employment outcomes for individuals who have most significant disabilities and additional barriers to employment will be applied as strategies to overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program. Strategies specific to overcoming identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with most significant disabilities in Supported Employment include continued collaboration with DMHDDSAS to (a) optimize coordination of services at the local service level to improve ease of service access for

consumers requiring supported employment services; (b) expand implementation of the Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment; (c) develop a funding mechanism that utilizes supported employment funds from VR, state funds from the Local Management Entities, and Medicaid dollars from the Managed Care Organizations to fund supported employment for those needing the individual placement and support (IPS) model of supported employment; (d) train VR field staff as well as Community Rehabilitation Program providers in the IPS Model of Supported Employment; (e) conduct fidelity reviews of providers who contract to provide the IPS Model of Supported Employment; and (f) increase the number of sites across the state to be a part of the IPS Model of Supported Employment.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

Similar to the barriers that impact equitable access to VR services, in general, public and commercial infrastructure and distribution of resources necessary for equitable access, local unemployment rates, employment opportunities and employers who are willing or that otherwise can provide supported employment experiences; public transportation and the availability of private transportation services; technology, including communication technology, such as access to personal computing devices and high speed internet service; the availability of various service providers, including those commonly needed for supported employment, such as community rehabilitation programs; and the availability of human resources, including qualified rehabilitation professionals, varies throughout the state of North Carolina. The various components of this necessary workforce system infrastructure, which undergird supported employment services, are generally more developed in the highly populated metropolitan areas than in the less populated rural areas. Consequentially, individuals with disabilities living in rural "service deserts" with higher local unemployment rates may experience barriers to equitable access to supported employment services and have fewer local employment opportunities.

Edit

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

Addressing barriers to equitable access to supported employment services in North Carolina requires a targeted and strategic approach. Here are the steps EIPD will take:

1. **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the specific barriers and challenges faced by individuals in different regions of North Carolina. This will include data on local unemployment rates, availability of employment opportunities, transportation options, technology access, and availability of service providers and funding for supported employment.
2. **Partnership Development:** Expand partnerships with local employers, community rehabilitation programs, partner agencies, and other relevant stakeholders. Collaborate to leverage resources, share expertise, and coordinate efforts to address barriers to equitable access to supported employment services.
3. **Employer Engagement:** Work closely with employers to promote inclusive hiring practices and create supported employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. EIPD will provide training and support to employers on disability awareness, reasonable accommodations, and the benefits of hiring diverse talent.
4. **Transportation Solutions:** Develop transportation solutions to ensure that individuals can access supported employment services and job opportunities. Partner with private and public transportation services agencies to improve accessibility and coverage in underserved areas. Explore options such as rideshare programs.
5. **Technology Access Initiatives:** Implement initiatives to improve access to technology and provide training and support on the use of technology as needed for a VR participant to receive supported employment services.
6. **Expansion of Service Providers:** Expand the network of community rehabilitation programs and other service providers offering supported employment services in underserved regions. Provide incentives or support for providers to establish or expand their presence in areas with limited resources.
7. **Professional Development and Recruitment:** Invest in professional development and recruitment efforts to ensure an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals and fund service rates for supported employment that allow CRPs to

recruit and retain job coaches in all regions of the state. Offer incentives to encourage service providers to work in underserved areas.

8. **Outreach and Education:** Conduct outreach and education efforts to raise awareness about supported employment services and available resources in underserved communities. Provide information sessions, workshops, and materials to individuals with disabilities, families, educators, employers, and community members.
9. **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement:** Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to ensure equitable access to supported employment services. Collect data on service utilization, employment outcomes, and satisfaction levels to identify areas for improvement and guide future decision-making.

By implementing these steps, EIPD can work towards ensuring equitable access to supported employment services for individuals with disabilities across diverse regions of North Carolina.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

To ensure equitable access to supported employment services in North Carolina

1. **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment:** To be completed in PY 2025:
 - a. Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify specific barriers and challenges faced by individuals in different regions of North Carolina. This would include the needs of individuals with most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services, and the need to expand or improve community rehabilitation services.
 - b. The CSNA would include an analysis of data on local unemployment rates, employment opportunities, transportation options, technology access, availability of service providers, and human resources as related to overcoming barriers to equitable access to supported employment services.
 - c. The CSNA would be guided by various stakeholders and subject matter experts, including vocational rehabilitation professionals, SRC members, and other stakeholders.

2. **Partnership Development and Resource Allocation:** Ongoing in PY 2024 with efforts adjusted in PY 2025 in accordance with the findings and recommendations from the CSNA:
 - a. Establish partnerships with collaborating agencies, local employers, community rehabilitation programs, transportation providers, and other stakeholders.
 - b. Allocate resources and funding based on the findings of the needs assessment, prioritizing incentives in regions with the greatest disparities and barriers to access.
 - c. Negotiate contracts and agreements with service providers to ensure availability of supported employment services and related transportation options.
3. **Employer Engagement and Outreach:** Continuing in PY 2024 and ongoing:
 - a. Work closely with employers to promote inclusive hiring practices and create supported employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
 - b. Conduct outreach and awareness campaigns to educate employers about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and the availability of supported employment services.
 - c. Establish employer partnerships and job placement agreements to facilitate the placement of individuals with disabilities in competitive integrated employment settings.
4. **Expansion and Improvement of Community Rehabilitation Programs and Service Providers:** Continuing in PY 2024 with strategic adjustments in PY 2025 in accordance with the findings and recommendations of the CSNA:
 - a. Expand the network of community rehabilitation programs and other service providers offering supported employment services in underserved regions.
 - b. Provide incentives or support for providers to establish or expand their presence in areas with limited resources.
 - c. Offer training and technical assistance to enhance the capacity of service providers and employers to meet the unique needs of individuals with disabilities.
5. **Personnel Development and Recruitment:** Continuing in PY 2024:
 - a. Consistent with the section on Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, invest in professional development and recruitment efforts to ensure an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals.
 - b. Reimburse community rehabilitation programs at rates that allow them to competitive hire and retain job coaches and other staff needed to provide supported employment.

- c. Explore incentive options to encourage professionals to work in underserved areas.
- d. Collaborate with colleges and universities to develop training pathways for rehabilitation professionals.

6. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment (Ongoing):

- a. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of program implementation and outcomes.
- b. Collection of data on service utilization, employment outcomes, and satisfaction levels to identify areas for improvement.
- c. Use data-driven insights to adjust strategies, reallocate resources, and refine program initiatives to better meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.

By following this approach EIPD can systematically address barriers to equitable access to supported employment services and ensure that individuals with disabilities across North Carolina have equal opportunities for employment success.

**PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
(BLIND)**

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

A. STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL.

1. ALL VR AGENCIES, EXCEPT FOR THOSE THAT HAVE AN INDEPENDENT CONSUMER-CONTROLLED COMMISSION, MUST HAVE A STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (COUNCIL OR SRC) THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA IN SECTION 105 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPLICABLE, HAS:

Select A or B:

(A) is an independent State commission

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

2. IN ACCORDANCE WITH ASSURANCE (A)(1)(B), IF SELECTED, PLEASE PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVE TYPE, INCLUDING THE TERM NUMBER OF THE REPRESENTATIVE, AS APPLICABLE, AND ANY VACANCIES, AS WELL AS THE BEGINNING DATES OF EACH REPRESENTATIVE'S TERM.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	2/0	9/20 (new member appointment pending)
Parent Training and Information Center	1/0	7/23
Client Assistance Program	2/0	7/22
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	1/0	7/22
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	2/0	7/23
Business, Industry, and Labor	1/0	8/21
Disability Advocacy Groups	1/0	7/23
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	2/0	7/22
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	2/0	8/21
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	1/0	7/22
State Workforce Development Board	1/0	7/23
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	NA	NA
Parent of Disabled Child	2/0	7/22

3. IF THE SRC IS NOT MEETING THE COMPOSITION REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 105(B) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT AND/OR IS NOT MEETING QUARTERLY AS REQUIRED IN SECTION

105(F) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, PROVIDE THE STEPS THAT THE VR AGENCY IS TAKING TO ENSURE IT MEETS THOSE REQUIREMENTS.

Not Applicable

4. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(21)(A)(II)(III) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, INCLUDE A SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT (INCLUDING HOW IT WAS OBTAINED) INTO THE STATE PLAN AND ANY STATE PLAN REVISIONS, INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORTS, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS.

The NC Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has an established State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) that helps the Division develop and improve programs and services for North Carolinians who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. DSB SRC members provided input regarding the development of the 2024 – 2027 Unified State Plan during quarterly meetings with the full council and through meetings and calls with the Division's director and SRC chair and co-chair. The SRC made recommendations based on DSB's 2023 SRC Annual Report, most recent CSNA (2022), consumer satisfaction survey results, and input from stakeholders shared during SRC public forums. The SRC felt that the needs identified from these sources align with and can continue to be addressed utilizing goals and strategies established in the previous Unified State Plan and recommended many of them for this plan.

In PY 2022, the SRC made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Continue to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

Recommendation 2: Continue increasing training and employment services for adults with visual disabilities.

Recommendation 3: Provide more training and employment services for youth with visual disabilities.

Recommendation 4: Provide more pre-employment transition services for students with visual disabilities.

Recommendation 5: Continue to work closely with businesses to create work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.

Recommendation 6: Continue efforts to fill staff vacancies and/or modify staffing structure to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

Recommendation 7: Continue collaborating with core WIOA and required program partners and community stakeholders to integrate and expand services for individuals with visual disabilities.

Recommendation 8: Continue outreach efforts to identify individuals who are most significantly disabled and require supported employment services to achieve a successful competitive integrated employment outcome.

Recommendation 9: Continue efforts to expand the number of community rehabilitation program providers.

5. PROVIDE THE VR AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE REJECTION OF ANY INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

List each recommendation/input followed by the VR agency response

List each recommendation/input followed by the VR agency response

Recommendation 1: Continue to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

Recommendation 2: Continue increasing training and employment services for adults with visual disabilities.

Recommendation 3: Provide more training and employment services for youth with visual disabilities.

Recommendation 4: Provide more pre-employment transition services for students with visual disabilities.

Recommendation 5: Continue to work closely with businesses to create work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.

Recommendation 6: Continue efforts to fill staff vacancies and/or modify staffing structure to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

Recommendation 7: Continue collaborating with core WIOA and required program partners and community stakeholders to integrate and expand services for individuals with visual disabilities.

Recommendation 8: Continue outreach efforts to identify individuals who are most significantly disabled and require supported employment services to achieve a successful competitive integrated employment outcome.

Recommendation 9: Continue efforts to expand the number of community rehabilitation program providers.

Agency Response: The Division did not reject any of the Council's recommendations. DSB agrees that continuance of these goals addresses the identified needs of the community we serve, fosters and strengthens relationships and collaboration with key partners and stakeholders, maintains consistency with our mission, and supports the achievement of our performance standards and measures.

B. COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA).

Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

1. THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, INCLUDING:

A. INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT;

The last DSB assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness or visual impairments was conducted in PY 2021 Q3 (January - March 2022), in time for the PY 2022 USP update. The next triennial assessment is scheduled for PY 2024 Q3 (i.e., January - March 2025). Updates to the services data and survey results for PY 2022-23, however, are provided here.

Individuals with most significant disabilities (MSD) are defined as those whose physical or mental impairments require interventions or permanent accommodations that cannot be easily achieved to mitigate their limitations in three or more functional capacities regarding employment, such as communication, interpersonal skills, mobility, self-care, self-direction, work skills, and work tolerance. For the disabling condition to meet the definition of "most significant," such individuals must either require multiple core VR services for a minimum of nine months to complete their vocational rehabilitation program or require personal assistance services, rehabilitation technology, or extended services for their employment.

In program year 2020-21 (as assessed in March 2022), Individuals with MSD accounted for 692 (30%) of 2,330 eligible DSB VR consumers served. Within this population, 312 (45%) were individuals whose primary disability was blindness, 353 (51%) were individuals with other visual impairments as their primary disability, 20 (3%) had deaf-blindness as their primary disability, and 7 (1%) had another type of disability as their primary impediment to employment. Individuals with MSD ranged in age from 13 to 81, with 38 as both the median and average age. Of the 692 eligible VR consumers with MSD, 201 (29%) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 336 (49%) were ages 25 to 54; and 155 (22%) were age 55 or older. About 52% the individuals with MSD were female (n = 361) and 51% were individuals of minority backgrounds (n = 353), with Black or African American accounting for 43% and Hispanic or Latino accounting for 6%.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2020-21, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were counseling and guidance, which was provided to 184 individuals (26.6%); assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 139 individuals (20.1%); training of any type, which was provided to 104 individuals (15.0%); rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 68 individuals (9.8%), diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 55 individuals (7.9%).

The number of individuals with MSD provided purchased services in PY 2022 (updated in May 2024) included: 147 provided VR career services totaling \$237,962; 79 provided VR training services totaling \$467,891; 260 provided other VR services totaling \$633,873; and 27 students provided purchased pre-employment transition services totaling \$19,246. The most commonly provided purchased services by VR service category provided to individuals with MSD by DSB that year were: rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 203 individuals and totaled \$331,060; diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 96 individuals and totaled \$169,872; transportation, which was provided for 87 individuals and totaled \$131,449; assessment and evaluation services, which was provided for 56 individuals and totaled \$10,013; college or university training at a community college or university, including graduate schools,

which was provided for 52 individuals and totaled \$259,224; and maintenance, which was provided for 38 individuals and totaled \$149,993.

In a quarterly interview survey on rehabilitation needs and barriers to employment, conducted telephonically by NC State University, from January 2022 through March 2024, among 117 individuals with most significant disabilities who were unemployed, 3 (3.6%) of 84 indicated there were no jobs available that they wanted; 25 (29.4%) of 85 indicated they needed additional VR services; 6 (7.1%) of 84 indicated they needed transportation; 30 (32.6%) of 92 indicated they had medical problems that first needed to be remedied; 4 (4.7%) of 85 indicated they need childcare or eldercare; 12 (11.8%) of 102 indicated they felt discriminated against, suggesting a need for advocacy or self-advocacy training; 20 (20.8%) of 96 indicated they weren't ready for work, suggesting some need for job readiness; 8 (8.3%) of 96 indicated a fear of losing benefits, such as Social Security or Medicaid, suggesting a need for benefits counseling; and 34 (35.8%) of 95 indicated they needed job search assistance.

B. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

The last DSB assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness or visual impairments was conducted in PY 2021 Q3 (January - March 2022), in time for the PY 2022 USP update. The next triennial assessment is scheduled for PY 2024 Q3 (i.e., January - March 2025). Updates to the services data and survey results for PY 2022-23, however, are provided here.

The population of individuals who are minorities accounted for 1,292 (55%) of 2,330 eligible DSB VR consumers served in PY 2020-21. Within this population, 353 (27%) were individuals with MSD; 790 (61%) were individuals with significant disabilities; and 148 (12%) did not have significant disabilities. Regarding their disability, 446 (35%) had blindness as their primary impairment; 811 (63%) had a visual impairment other than blindness; 19 (1.5%) were deafblind; and 16 (1.2%) had a disability other than vision as their primary impediment to employment. Individuals of minority backgrounds ranged in age from 13 to 78, with 43 as the average age. Of the 1,292 eligible VR consumers of minority backgrounds, 234 (18%) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 684 (53%) were ages 25 to 54; and 374 (29%) were age 55 or older. About 54 percent of the individuals with minority backgrounds were female (n = 701).

The minority backgrounds of this population included 1,087 (84%) who were Black or African American; 149 (12%) who were Hispanic or Latino; 55 (4%) who were American Indian or Alaskan Native; 30 (2%) who were Asian; and 13 (1%) who were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2020-21, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were: counseling and guidance, which was provided to 262 individuals (20%); assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 237 individuals (18%); training service of any type, which was provided to 135 individuals (10%); diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 133 individuals (10%); rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 116 individuals (9%), and information and referral services, which were provided to 56 individuals (4%).

In PY 2022-23 (this is updated information obtained in May 2024), purchased VR training services were provided to 115 minorities with disabilities, totaling \$653,339; purchased VR

career services were provided to 311 minorities with disabilities, totaling \$533,457; other VR services were provided to 415 minorities with disabilities, totaling \$884,278. The most commonly provided purchased services by VR service category provided to minorities with disabilities by DSB that year were (1) rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 314 individuals totaling \$403,965; (2) diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 228 individuals totaling \$409,261; (3) transportation, which was provided to 127 individuals totaling \$175,078; (4) assessment and evaluation services, which were also provided to 127 individuals totaling \$32,221; (5) maintenance, which was provided for 75 individuals totaling \$284,135; (6) college or university training (community college, undergraduate, and graduate programs combined), which was provided to 73 individuals totaling \$364,232; and (7) job readiness training, which was provided for 20 individuals totaling \$222,405.

In a quarterly interview survey on rehabilitation needs and barriers to employment, conducted telephonically by NC State University, from January 2022 through March 2024, among 217 minorities with visual disabilities who were unemployed, 14 (9.2%) of 152 indicated there were no jobs available that they wanted; 44 (27.8%) of 158 indicated they needed additional VR services; 20 (12.5%) of 160 indicated they needed transportation; 64 (37.9%) of 169 indicated they had medical problems that first needed to be remedied; 4 (2.6%) of 153 indicated they need childcare or eldercare; 29 (15.8%) of 184 indicated they felt discriminated against, suggesting a need for advocacy or self-advocacy training; 38 (21.2%) of 179 indicated they weren't ready for work, suggesting some need for job readiness; 12 (6.9%) of 174 indicated a fear of losing benefits, such as Social Security or Medicaid, suggesting a need for benefits counseling; and 94 (52.2%) of 180 indicated they needed job search assistance.

The data reflects an opportunity DSB to provide more job-related training and preparation and continuance in our efforts to increase our supported employment providers/services to help consumers achieve competitive integrated employment outcomes.

DSB staff will continue to monitor employment trends and are actively engaged in adapting service methods to enable the consumers, including individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved to be successful in today's job market. We are engaged in strategic collaborations and partnerships with organizations such as ABLR and NSITE, to provide training for consumers in high demand occupations to create additional avenues for competitive integrated employment, including individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program. DSB is also expanding benefits counseling resources to help consumers learn more about work incentives and how competitive integrated employment may impact their Social Security and medical benefits so that they can make informed decisions regarding job opportunities.

VR Staff are provided various resources and training opportunities to enable them to develop better understanding and utilization of labor market information and tools to help consumers, including individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program make informed decisions regarding vocational goals. Some of those trainings that have been shared are from WorkForce GPS "Using Labor Market and Skills Information for Effective Sector Strategies" and NCWorks training center/solutions "LMI Tuesdays".

The rehabilitation program specialist for employment services, along with other DSB staff, will continue efforts to increase the number of approved vendors to provide supported employment services and work adjustment services to consumers, including individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program to assist them with maximizing their employment success.

C. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

According to the 2023 NC Common Follow-up System Operational Report, from PY 2012 through PY 2021, DSB served 9,186 unique individuals, of which, at some point during the 10-year period, nearly all individuals served by DSB were also served through other components of the NC workforce development system:

- 27.7% (n = 2,547) were enrolled at NC Community Colleges,
- 5.5% (n = 503) were enrolled in UNC system,
- 6.9% (n = 637) were provided education services through the NC Department of Public Instruction,
- 7.4% (n = 676) had participated in an education or training program with the NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction,
- 16.2% (n = 1,486) participated in the NC TANF Work First program through the DHHS Division of Social Services,
- 7.4% (n = 676) participated in the EIPD VR general program (i.e., they had been served through both the VR-general and VR-blind programs either under a shared case or at different times), and
- 43.8% (4,027) had received services through NCWorks Career Centers under the Title I Adult, Youth, or Dislocated Worker programs or Title III, Wagner-Peyser, including NCWorks Online.

In a quarterly interview survey on rehabilitation needs and barriers to employment, conducted telephonically as part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) by NC State University, from January 2022 through March 2024, among 366 individuals with visual disabilities that had also been served through other components of the NC workforce system and were unemployed, 19 (7.7%) of 247 indicated there were no jobs available that they wanted; 75 (29%) of 259 indicated they needed additional VR services; 34 (13.2%) of 258 indicated they needed transportation; 105 (37.8%) of 278 indicated they had medical problems that first needed to be remedied; 6 (2.4%) of 246 indicated they need childcare or eldercare; 50 (16.2%) of 308 indicated they felt discriminated against, suggesting a need for advocacy or self-advocacy training; 65 (21.8%) of 298 indicated they weren't ready for work, suggesting some need for job readiness; 21 (7.3%) of 289 indicated a fear of losing benefits, such as Social Security or Medicaid, suggesting a need for benefits counseling; and 136 (46.4%) of 293 indicated they needed job search assistance.

D. YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. 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 IDEA.

The last DSB assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness or visual impairments was conducted in PY 2021 Q3 (January - March 2022), in time for the PY 2022 USP update. The next triennial assessment is scheduled for PY 2024 Q3 (i.e., January - March 2025). Updates to the services data and survey results for PY 2022-23, however, are provided here.

The population of transition age youth, younger than 25, comprised 22% (n = 516) of the 2,332 total individuals served by the DSB VR program in PY 2020-2021, including potentially eligible students with disabilities and individuals who applied for VR services but had not been determined eligible by the end of the program year. Within this youth population, 208 (40%) of the 516 transition-age youth were ages 14-21 at the start of the program year and were identified as students with disabilities. At the time, there was only one potentially eligible student with disability provided pre-employment transition services who had not applied for VR services. Of the 516 eligible transition-age youth, 264 (51%) were female. Of the 516 that had been determined eligible for VR services, 201 (39%) were individuals with MSD, 279 (54%) had significant disabilities, and 35 (7%) did not have significant disabilities. Within this group, 200 (39%) had blindness as their primary disability, 299 (58%) had another visual impairment, 13 (2.5%) were deafblind, and 4 (< 1%) had another type of disability as their primary impairment.

The services provided most for transition-age youth in PY 2020-21, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were counseling and guidance, which was provided to 174 individuals (33.7%); training of any kind, which was provided to 139 individuals (26.9%); information and referral services, which were provided to 78 individuals (15.1%); and assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 73 individuals (14.1%). Within the population of 221 total students with disabilities, ages 14-21, 70 (31.7%) were provided pre-employment transition services during the program year: 33 (14.9%) were provided work readiness training; 40 (18.1%) were provided job exploration counseling; 14 (6.3%) were provided a work-based learning experience; 26 (11.8%) were provided counseling on postsecondary enrollment opportunities; and 25 (11.3%) were provided self-advocacy training.

The number of students provided pre-employment transition services during the program year (n = 221) approximates the number of students in secondary education with a visual impairment, including blindness and deaf-blindness, identified by the *North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's April 2017 Child Count by Grade and Disability* (n = 240), however, the American Community Survey Five-year Public Use Microdata Sample for 2012-2016 estimated 8,700 students, ages 14-21, in secondary or postsecondary education that have "serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses." Although this is a self-reported survey estimate subject to a margin of error, the difference suggests there many potentially eligible students in North Carolina, beyond those identified under IDEA, that may benefit from pre-employment transition services.

The number of transition age youth provided purchased services in PY 2022 (updated in May 2024) included 41 who were provided career services totaling \$61,644; 127 provided training

services totaling \$805,875, 152 provided other services totaling \$568,104, and 42 provided pre-employment transition services totaling \$29,093. The most commonly provided purchased services by VR service category provided to youth with disabilities by DSB that year were college or university training (community college, undergraduate, and graduate programs combined), which was provided to 118 individuals totaling \$663,518; rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 102 individuals totaling \$180,750; maintenance, which was provided for 44 individuals totaling \$329,814; and transportation, which was provided for 42 individuals totaling \$55,925.

In a quarterly interview survey on rehabilitation needs and barriers to employment, conducted telephonically by NC State University, from January 2022 through March 2024, among 92 transition age youth with visual disabilities who were unemployed, 4 (7.7%) of 52 indicated there were no jobs available that they wanted; 17 (30.4%) of 56 indicated they needed additional VR services; 4 (7.5%) of 53 indicated they needed transportation; 9 (15.5%) of 58 indicated they had medical problems that first needed to be remedied; 1 (1.9%) of 53 indicated they need childcare or eldercare; 7 (9%) of 73 indicated they felt discriminated against, suggesting a need for advocacy or self-advocacy training; 20 (27.4%) of 73 indicated they weren't ready for work, suggesting some need for job readiness; 3 (4.4%) of 68 indicated a fear of losing benefits, such as Social Security or Medicaid, suggesting a need for benefits counseling; and 24 (35.8%) of 67 indicated they needed job search assistance.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.

The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) directly provide or facilitate the provision of VR services, such as community-based assessments, job development, training, and job coaching for short-term job supports and supported employment services. In PY 2022, of DSB eligible VR clients served, 12 were provided short-term job supports totaling \$22,897 and 24 were provided supported employment services totaling \$91,948. This small population mostly includes individuals with significant or most significant disabilities and comorbidity of a cognitive or psychosocial impairment.

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals, 465 (69.2%) of 671 identified one or more needs with regard to establishing, developing, or improving CRPs in North Carolina. These needs, however, were not specific to services for individuals with visual impairments, but addressed the need for CRPs, in general. The most frequently identified need was staff training, which was mentioned in 220 (47.3%) of the responses; shortages in some areas, especially rural counties, which was mentioned in 128 (27.5%) of the responses; and communication among providers, including between CRPs and state agencies, which was mentioned in 123 (26.5%) of the responses. Other themes, more specific to individuals with visual impairments, included training for CRP staff on how to better serve the DSB population and the use of assistive technology, especially for individuals who are blind or deafblind.

DSB agrees to the importance of identifying, developing, and improving partnership with CRPs. Two newly approved CRP's were added in PY 2022. With these additions, DSB now has 50 CRP's approved as vendors for services. These new vendors were targeted to render services in

underserved areas. The effort to continue to identify CRP's to ensure equal access to services throughout the state remain a priority to the division to continue to identify CRP's to ensure equal access to services throughout the state.

C. GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND STRATEGIES

Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of Section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under Section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE SRC AND THE VR AGENCY JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND ANY REVISIONS; AND

The goals and priorities presented within this plan were jointly developed by and agreed to by the DSB and its State Rehabilitation Council.

2. IDENTIFY MEASURABLE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND THE BASIS FOR SELECTING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES (E.G., CSNA, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, SRC RECOMMENDATIONS, MONITORING, OTHER INFORMATION). AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 101(A)(15)(D), (18), AND (23), DESCRIBE UNDER EACH GOAL OR PRIORITY, THE STRATEGIES OR METHODS USED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OR PRIORITY, INCLUDING AS APPLICABLE, DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES OR METHODS THAT—

A. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES;

B. OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ACCESSING VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

C. 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, POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES); AND

D. IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE QUALITY EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES.

List and number each goal/priority, noting the basis, and under each goal/priority, list and number the strategies to achieve the goal/priority

The goals and priorities presented within this plan were jointly developed by and agreed to by the DSB and its State Rehabilitation Council.

Priority 1: Competitive integrated employment

Goal 1.1: Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

Strategies:

1.1 a Increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities for consumers.

1.1. b Assist consumers in exploring and developing opportunities for self-employment.

1.1 c Increase the provision of soft-skills, independent living, and assistive technology training for consumers.

1.1 d Provide work incentives counseling for consumers who are seeking employment and receive Social Security benefits.

1.1 e Continue to research and provide customized employment best practices and training for staff.

Goal 1.2: Increase training and employment services for adults with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, and underserved populations.

Strategies:

1.2 a Increase sponsorship of vocational and academic training for adult consumers particularly those who are minorities underserved populations with significant disabilities.

1.2 b Expand assistive technology training resources for consumers.

Priority 2: Youth and students with disabilities

Goal: Increase training and employment services for youth with visual disabilities.

Strategies:

2. 1b Research, identify and implement training and employment services that have proven to be highly effective in helping youth with visual disabilities achieve positive vocational outcomes.

2. 1c Increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities.

Goal 2.2: Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with visual disabilities.

Strategies:

2. 2a Enhanced targeted outreach efforts to identify individuals who can benefit from pre-employment transition services.

2. 2b Fill vacant pre-employment transition associate positions to help identify potentially eligible students and increase the provision of pre-employment transition services.

2. 2c Evaluate current pre-employment transition services delivery model to identify areas of improvement needed.

2. 2d If warranted after the review, redesign and implement a pre-employment transition services delivery model that will better meet the needs of students with disabilities.

2. 2e Continue to build relationships and partner with educational officials and educators to ensure mutual understanding of the opportunities WIOA provides for students with disabilities and the roles each partner play in the provision of services.

2. 2f Continue to collaborate with the school districts to maintain existing cooperative agreements and seek opportunities to expand them across the state.

Priority 3: Business engagement

Goal 3.1: Build stronger relationships and partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.

Strategies:

3. 1a Increase staff participation in local chambers of commerce and business leadership networks to help build stronger relationships with business partners.

3. 1b Increase the provision of business services for employers including disability-related in-service training, assistance with recruitment/pipeline development, assistance in identifying and providing services to retain employees with disabilities, assistive technology, and information regarding financial incentives for hiring individuals who have disabilities

3. 1c Provide training for staff regarding evidence-based best practices pertaining to business engagement.

Priority 4: Capacity building

Goal 4: Increase internal capacity and develop the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

Strategies:

4. 1a Research innovative and effective VR service delivery models.

4. 1b Reorganize the VR program staff structure as needed to improve service delivery for consumers and employers.

4. 1c Identify other division staff and resources that can be better utilized to support this effort.

4. 1d Provide staff training, equipment, materials, and resources to facilitate more efficient and effective higher quality VR services.

Goal 4.2: Increase collaboration with core WIOA and required program partners and community stakeholders to integrate and expand services for individuals with visual disabilities.

Strategies:

4. 2a Continue outreach efforts to inform and educate the partners and stakeholders about DSB and the needs of individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind.

4. 2b Continue to promote DSB's presence in NCWorks Career Centers through regular visits and periodic meetings.

Priority 5: Supported Employment

Goal 5.1: Increase outreach to identify individuals who are most significantly disabled and require supported employment services to achieve a successful competitive integrated employment outcome, including outreach to consumers who reside in rural areas who may also be underserved.

Strategies:

5. 1a Conduct more targeted outreach activities.

5. 1b Build and nurture business relationships with businesses and organizations that provide services and supports for individuals who will require supported or customized employment services to achieve competitive integrated employment to facilitate more referrals for VR services.

Goal 5.2: Provide supported employment training for new counselors.

Strategies:

5. 2a Provide training regarding the classification of most significantly disabled, impediments to employment, policies, procedures, and best practices pertaining to supported and customized employment, and available resources, i.e. community rehabilitation program providers, etc.

Goal 5.3: Continue efforts to identify and expand the number of community rehabilitation program providers focusing on areas across the state that have limited resources.

Strategies:

5. 3a Partner with existing or newly created community rehabilitation program providers who may have historically not provided services for individuals who have visual impairments to encourage and support the expansion of their services for consumers.

5. 3b Provide sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments including exposure to assistive technology and adaptive devices.

The goals and priorities were developed following an analysis of the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment survey and review of administrative data.

D. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

1. PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED FOR THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS;

List the goals/priorities and discuss the progress or completion of each goal/priority and related strategies

PY 2022 Updates:

Priority: Competitive integrated employment

Goal: Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

Strategies:

- Increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities for consumers
- Assist consumers in exploring and developing opportunities for self-employment
- Increase the provision of soft-skills, independent living, and assistive technology training for consumers
- Provide work incentives counseling for consumers who are seeking employment and receive Social Security benefits
- Continue to research and provide customized employment best practices and training for staff
- Provide training and resources for VR staff to enable them to develop better understanding and utilization of labor market information and tools to help consumers make informed decisions regarding vocational goals

Progress Evaluation: In PY 2022, Division of Services for the Blind Vocational Rehabilitation Services provided services to 826 consumers with the most significant disabilities. DSB sponsored 23 unpaid work experiences, two internships and one on-the-job training. These experiences were in a variety of workplace settings, such as an events center, a disability resource center, a hardware store, a chamber of commerce, and a county health department. Consumers worked in a variety of roles to learn skills ranging from engineering planning, case management, administrative work, pet care, and quality assurance (QA) testing. We sponsored two internships in the fields of marketing and healthcare research and one on-the-job training (OJT) with a non-profit organization in the field of data collection and analysis. During the mandatory Best Practices for New Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors training, a presentation educated counselors on how to utilize pre-vocational services (work experiences, internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities) to assist consumers with obtaining their employment goal. The average earnings/wages for consumers closed in competitive integrated employment was \$ 15.48.

Self-employment is an increasing trend, in part due to the rise of the gig economy. DSB continued working with the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities to revise our self-employment policy. Once the policy is updated, DSB staff will be provided guidance and training on the changes made. DSB staff continued to provide resources to consumers who are interested in pursuing self-employment. One of those resources is information on the small business centers that are located throughout North Carolina

communities. The small business centers specialize in assisting startups and early-stage businesses by helping to guide consumers through the process and steps that will help their businesses be successful.

The low vision program specialist (LVPS) collaborated with the DSB Career and Training Center specialized technology teacher to facilitate virtual demonstrations of head-borne technologies for staff across the state. In addition, the LVPS obtained demo units of the e-Sight 4 and Envision Glasses (adding to the OrCam Read demo unit already on site) for assessing consumers with specific goals and skills. The center also obtained two Braille Note Touch Plus 32's, and two new Mac laptops. Staff also work collaboratively with vendors to obtain loaner equipment for students when permanent equipment is not available. These strategies and products help keep DSB current with new and emerging technology so the people we serve can have the best possible vocational success.

DSB staff continued to provide one-on-one soft skills training to consumers. DSB Career and Training Center staff focus on providing soft skills training as well when consumers attend (Adapting to Blindness in a Learning Environment (ABLE). DSB staff continued to hold job clubs and various group trainings to assist consumers with increasing their soft skills which will result in a successful job placement.

DSB VR staff continued to refer consumers that require and are eligible for the Independent Living Programs to assist with the delivery of training on independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning, self-advocacy, etc. The DSB Career and Training Center provided independent living skills to consumers as well when they attended ABLE. DSB staff made appropriate referrals to assistive technology (AT) specialists and the career and training staff for AT training as needed. DSB staff provided information to consumers concerning the Ticket to Work program as well as contact information to benefits counselors across the state so that consumers could learn about work incentives and the effects that work will have on their benefits. DSB sponsored training for a staff member to become certified as a Community Partner Work Incentives Counselor. The staff member passed her certification, and a percentage of her job is focusing on working with consumers to help them understand their work incentives and benefits.

The mandatory Best Practices for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors training focused on Customized Employment. Information was provided to all new counselors on what Customized Employment entails and how it can benefit consumers to reach their goal of employment.

A training was provided by the Department of Commerce to all DSB Staff for the overview of labor market information (LMI). This training assists staff with understanding what the LMI is, where to access information for their service area, and how it can be used to help consumers identify and then prepare for occupations that suit their needs, interests, and desires.

DSB Staff monitor employment trends and are actively engaged in adapting service methods to enable the consumers we serve to be successful in today's market. We are engaged in strategic collaboration and partnerships with organizations such as ABLR and NSITE, to provide training for consumers in high demand occupations to create additional avenues to competitive integrated employment.

DSB had one consumer enrolled in the customized training through NSITE known as the Cisco Academy. The other consumer has successfully completed the customized training known as Sourcing through NSITE and is working toward obtaining employment in the field.

The contract for ABLR was approved and executed. In Cohort 1, there were 8 students who completed the digital accessibility analyst course. Six of those 8 students passed and received the CPACC certification. All 8 students completed a 12-week internship. Thus far, 3 of those 8 have obtained successful employment in the accessibility field and the other 5 are continuing to work toward obtaining employment. In Cohort 2, 9 students completed the digital accessibility analyst course and 7 out of 9 received the CPACC. Cohort 2 are now completing their 12-week internship. DSB is currently working with ABLR to add another training course known as Sales Force Service Cloud in hopes that this will be offered in January 2024.

Goal: Increase opportunities for training and employment services for adults with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, and underserved populations.

Strategies:

- Increase sponsorship of vocational and academic training for adult consumers, particularly those who are minorities and underserved populations with most significant disabilities
- Expand assistive technology training resources for consumers

Progress Evaluation: In PY 2022, DSB sponsored 183 consumers for post-secondary training. Of those, 66 consumers were minorities. Additionally, in PY 2022, 82 consumers with the most significant disabilities were closed successfully in competitive integrated employment.

Leadership has made it a focus to provide adequate training to staff concerning the reporting of measurable skills gains. A monthly training is provided to DSB staff known as "Coffee Talk with WIOA", which provides support and education on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) along with the importance of accurate reporting. DSB achieved a measurable skill gains rate of 35.9% for Q4 program year (PY) 2022.

Priority: Youth and students with disabilities

Goal: Increase opportunities for training and employment services for youth with visual disabilities.

Strategies:

Increase the provision of soft-skills, independent living, and assistive technology training for consumers

- Research, identify and implement training and employment services models that have proven to be highly effective in helping youth with visual disabilities achieve positive vocational outcomes
- Increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities

Program Evaluation: During PY 2022, 410 students ages 14-24 were served by DSB's transition program. DSB staff continue to provide one-on-one soft skills training to youth and students with disabilities. DSB Career and Training Center staff focuses on providing soft skills training to the youth and students with disabilities during the youth summer program, Summer Adapting to Blindness Vital to Visually Impaired Youth (SAVVY). DSB transition staff have held youth summer programs in the local communities that focused on work readiness such as soft skills training, independent living skills, and/or assistive technology training, etc. DSB VR staff continue to refer youth and students with disabilities to the Independent Living Programs to assist with the delivery of training on independent living skills (such as cooking, cleaning, etc.). The DSB Career and Training Center provides assistive technology training and independent living skills to youth and students with disabilities during the SAVVY program. DSB staff made appropriate referrals to assistive technology specialists in the field that assisted with the delivery of AT training as needed for youth and students with disabilities. DSB VR staff continues to utilize a variety of sources to deliver services to the youth and students with disabilities. Activities are individualized or in small groups. Some of the activities come from the following resources: American Printing House (APH) Tote system, Career Connect, Explore Work, T-Folio, and other online platforms DSB contracted with nine service providers to assist with providing Pre-Employment Transition Services to youth across the state. There are now providers offering services in each of the 100 counties.

Goal: Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with visual disabilities.

Strategies:

- Enhanced targeted outreach efforts to identify individuals who can benefit from pre-employment transition services
- Fill vacant pre-employment transition services associate positions to help identify potentially eligible students and increase the provision of pre-employment transition services
- Evaluate current pre-employment transition services delivery model to identify areas of improvement needed
- If warranted after the review, redesign and implement a pre-employment transition services delivery model that will better meet the needs of students with disabilities
- Continue to build relationships and partner with educational officials and educators to ensure mutual understanding of the opportunities WIOA provides for students with disabilities and the roles each partner plays in the provision of services
- Continue to collaborate with the school districts to maintain existing Third-Party Cooperative Agreements and seek opportunities to expand them across the state

Program Evaluation: In PY 2022, 241 students with visual disabilities received Pre-ETS services by DSB staff. Also, four new students with visual disabilities were presumed eligible during PY 2022. Outreach and community awareness of available resources for Pre-ETS students and youth with visual impairments and blindness continued to be a priority for DSB staff. DSB's director, chief of rehabilitation field services and the program specialist for

transition services met monthly with the consultant for visual impairment state coordinator and consultant for visual impairment and co-director, NC DeafBlind Project from the Department of Public Instruction. These meetings build a better relationship and enhance services for the students.

The two agencies meet monthly to discuss joint opportunities, issues, and to conduct strategic planning, including developing combined training for staff. The chief of rehabilitation field services and the transition program specialist have been invited and will be presenting at the 71st Exceptional Children's Conference in November 2023 on DSB Transition and Pre-ETS services. DSB had six pre-employment transition services associates on staff across the state that assist with identifying potentially eligible students and increasing the provision of pre-employment transition services. DSB staff along with the Pre-ETS associates, continued to a variety of sources to deliver pre-employment transition services for students who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. These activities are individualized and/or take place in small groups. Some of the activities come from the following resources: APH Tote system, Career Connect, Explore Work, T-Folio, and other online platforms. Leadership continues to evaluate and research other resources that can be used to increase the provision of pre-employment transition services. DSB contracted with nine service providers to assist with providing Pre-Employment Transition Services to youth across the state. There are now providers offering services in each of the 100 counties.

Priority: Business engagement

Goal: Build stronger relationships and partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind.

Strategies:

- Develop branded outreach materials to market services to employers
- Increase staff participation in local chambers of commerce and business leadership networks to help build stronger relationships with business partners
- Increase the provision of business services for employers including disability-related in-service training, assistance with recruitment/pipeline development, assistance in identifying and providing services to retain employees with disabilities, assistive technology, and information regarding financial incentives for hiring individuals who have disabilities
- Provide training for staff regarding evidence-based best practices pertaining to business engagement.

Progress Evaluation: Amazon is one company that is dominating the NC labor market. DSB staff have collaborated and partnered with Amazon to assist them with fulfilling their need for employees. DSB staff have provided multiple services to consumers along with sensitivity training for employees that included information on orientation and mobility and sighted guide techniques. Several DSB consumers have obtained employment in many of the Amazon warehouses across the state. DSB staff continues to have a presence at the local chambers of commerce and NCWorks Career Centers. During the mandatory Best Practices for New

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors training, a staff member from NCW presented on the services that are provided, and the importance of collaboration between the two entities. DSB staff were provided training by the Department of Commerce on the NC Careers.org website to be able to use this website for collaboration with businesses and to determine the hiring needs of employers in their local areas. A training has been scheduled for January 2024, with Mississippi State University that will focus on business development training for counselors and other VR placement staff. This training will entail evidence-based best practices pertaining to business engagement with the focus on placing consumers who have been diagnosed with visual impairment/blindness. DSB Staff provided the following services to local businesses in the communities: talent pipeline/recruitment assistance, job applicant screening, information on tax credits, and federal bonding related to hiring.

Priority: Capacity building

Goal: Increase internal capacity and develop the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

Strategies:

- Research innovative and effective VR service delivery models.
- Reorganize the VR program staff structure as needed to improve service delivery for consumers and employers.
- Identify other division staff and resources that can be better utilized to support this effort.
- Provide staff training, equipment, materials, and resources to facilitate more efficient and effective higher quality VR services.
- Collaborate with DPI, ECU, and ECAC to provide staff training regarding deafblindness
- Collaborate with DPI, ECU, and ECAC to provide staff training regarding Person-Centered Planning.

Progress Evaluation: DSB leadership continued to evaluate current VR service delivery models and focused on researching other innovative and effective VR service models as needed. DSB continues to work collaboratively with other entities serving people who are deafblind, including the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH), the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Deaf-Blind Project with the Exceptional Children Assistance Center (ECAC), the non-profit North Carolina Deaf-Blind Associates, the Deaf-Blind Advisory Council, the Statewide Interagency Team and Regional Interagency Teams which are comprised of staff from DSDHH, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services, and the Exceptional Children Division of DPI. In addition, the Division of Services for the Blind is a member of the National Community of Partners (NCOP) sponsored by the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC).

DSB's Deafblind Assistive Technology Program Specialist (DBATPS) presented at the NC Deaf Blind 2022 Deafblind Family Institute Conference that took place from August 12 to August 14, 2022. This conference entailed collaborating with not only other partners but also with families and consumers at the DB Family Institute sponsored by a grant from the Department of Public

Instruction DeafBlind Project, Exceptional Children's Assistance Center, and East Carolina University.

gave DSB staff the opportunity to learn about person-centered planning and the discovery process. DSB staff used the ECAC to obtain resources that are shared with transition students/youth with disabilities and their families. Leadership continued to share training/webinars that are being delivered through the ECAC to increase staff's knowledge of deafblindness and other topics. The deafblind and AT program specialist with DSB attended the quarterly meetings for the North Carolina Council for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing.

DSB staff have increased collaboration with the NC Department of Public Instruction to build a better relationship and enhance services for the students. The two agencies meet monthly to discuss joint opportunities, issues, and to conduct strategic planning, including developing combined training for staff. DSB staff is working with the NC Department of Public Instruction to provide training on DSB services for Exceptional Children Directors and staff across the state to assist with increasing referrals and identifying those youth who may need services through DSB to meet their goal of employment. This was another way to assist DSB staff with increasing collaboration with the NC Department of Public Instruction and provide outreach on transition and Pre ETS services to teachers and leadership across the state.

Goal: Increase collaboration with core WIOA and required program partners and community stakeholders to integrate and expand services for individuals with visual disabilities.

Strategies:

- Continue outreach efforts to inform and educate the partners and stakeholders about DSB and the needs of individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind.
- Continue to promote DSB's presence in NCWorks Career Centers through regular visits and periodic meetings.
- Seek opportunities for division director and agency participation on the Local Workforce Boards.
- Continue to work with National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C) to complete integrated resource team/community academy training and implement this service delivery model that builds wrap-around services, including those provided by these partners, to meet the holistic and individualized needs of consumers seeking employment.

Progress Evaluation: Collaboration continued to be a priority for DSB staff during PY 2022. The DSB director served as an NCWorks Commission member. DSB staff attended monthly partnership meetings in their service area to collaborate with NCWorks and other community partners. At these partnership meetings, DSB staff can obtain information on the resources in the community for consumers as well as provide information on services that DSB can provide to those who are visually impaired, blind, or deafblind. NCWORKS provided a presentation during the mandatory Best Practices for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors training to increase the counselors' knowledge of services provided by NCWorks and to emphasize the importance of collaboration between the two agencies. concerning resources and delivery models to meet the holistic individualized needs of the consumers seeking employment.

Leadership shares trainings and opportunities that are provided by NTACT:C with VR staff to enhance the staff's knowledge.

Priority: Supported Employment

Goal: Increase outreach to identify individuals who are most significantly disabled and require supported employment services to achieve a successful competitive integrated employment outcome including outreach to consumers who reside in rural areas who may also be underserved.

Strategies:

- Conduct more targeted outreach activities.
- Build and nurture business relationships with businesses and organizations that provide services and supports for individuals who will require supported or customized employment services to achieve competitive integrated employment to facilitate more referrals for VR services.

Progress Evaluation:

Goal: Provide supported employment training for new counselors.

Strategies:

- Provide training regarding the classification of most significantly disabled, impediments to employment, policies, procedures, and best practices pertaining to supported and customized employment, and available resources, i.e., community rehabilitation program providers, etc.

Progress Evaluation: Mandatory best practices training has been provided for new counselors. This training is focused on assisting consumers to address and overcome barriers to employment and identifying career-based employment. A specific component pertaining to supported employment is included in the training.

Goal: Continue efforts to identify and expand the number of community rehabilitation program providers focusing on areas across that state that have limited resources.

Strategies:

- Partner with existing or newly created community rehabilitation program providers who may have historically not provided services for individuals who have visual impairments to encourage and support the expansion of their services for consumers.
- Provide sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments including exposure to assistive technology and adaptive devices.

Progress Evaluation: During PY 2022, DSB had 50 approved vendors that are available to provide supported employment services to consumers who are most significantly disabled. The Rehabilitation Program specialist for employment services along with other DSB staff continue their efforts to increase the number of approved vendors. DSB continued to provide sensitivity

and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments, including exposure to AT and adaptive devices. The training is known as New Employee Sensitivity Training (NEST) and takes place twice a year at the DSB Career and Training Center. In addition, our DSB specialists and counselors offer training to the community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment providers to increase their knowledge of working with consumers with those who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. Some examples of the training topics are sighted guide, AT, and adaptive devices.

2. PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR, REFLECTING ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE. EXPLAIN ANY DISCREPANCIES IN THE ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS; AND

DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Program performance (actual) for PY 2022

DSB exceeded the negotiated performance levels in PY 2022. This is the result of leadership continuing its focus on providing adequate training to staff concerning the reporting of measurable skills gains and credential attainment. A monthly training was and continues to be provided to DSB staff known as "Coffee Talk with WIOA", which provides support and education on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) along with the importance of accurate reporting. This time with staff allows for leadership to answer questions that staff may have on reporting. Also, leadership utilized this time to train staff on issues and concerns that were found during the edit checks, dashboard, etc. Resources were often reviewed and provided to staff from the National Technical Center.

Indicator	PY2022 Proposed Negotiated Level	PY2022 DSB Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	46.2%	50.6%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	36.0%	49.6%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$2,984	\$5,516
Credential Attainment Rate	27.0%	50.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	38.0%	57.3%

3. THE USE OF FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES (SECTIONS 101(A)(18) AND 101(A)(23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT) (E.G., SRC, SILC).

NC DSB utilizes VR grant funds for the activities of the DSB SRC. Such activities include supporting members' attending meetings and Disability Rights NC and NCSRC/CSAVR/NCSAB conferences, and participation in public forums and hearings. The general agency, NC EIPD, is the DSE in North Carolina that is responsible for administrating the Part B funds received and dispersed based on the Statewide Plan for Independent Living.

E. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS, AND ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF TITLE VI FUNDS:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

2. IF THE VR AGENCY HAS ELECTED TO RECEIVE TITLE VI FUNDS, SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRES VR AGENCIES TO INCLUDE SPECIFIC GOALS AND PRIORITIES WITH RESPECT TO THE DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. DESCRIBE THE USE OF TITLE VI FUNDS AND HOW THEY WILL BE USED IN MEETING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

NC DSB does not anticipate expending Title VI Supported Employment funds in the coming fiscal years and intends to relinquish these funds as a result.

3. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES MAY BE PROVIDED WITH TITLE 1 OR TITLE VI FUNDS FOLLOWING PLACEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN EMPLOYMENT. IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(22) AND SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, DESCRIBE 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; AND THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES.

DSB will provide supported employment services with Title I funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in competitive integrated employment.

Quality: Counselors build strong relationships with and work closely with individuals with the most significant disabilities to learn about their vocational rehabilitation needs and to share information about supported employment services to help them make informed decisions that they believe will help them achieve competitive integrated employment that is individualized and customized, consistent with their unique strengths, abilities, and interests.

DSB provides employment services through contracts with community rehabilitation providers. A collaborative relationship is developed with providers in which there is mutual understanding of the needs of individuals referred for services, and the expectations of both the division and the providers are known and met to ensure high quality service provision. Formal and informal feedback regarding employment services is sought from recipients of services. Individual progress is monitored by the counselors and concerns/issues are addressed in a timely manner. Community rehabilitation providers are also monitored by a staff program specialist to ensure they provide quality services and meet contractual requirements/milestones.

Additionally, DSB provides sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation programs/providers and extended services providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments, including youth. DSB also provides vocational rehabilitation counselors training pertaining to supported employment services to help them obtain/retain knowledge about the services; and stay abreast of changes in regulations, policies, procedures, and providers.

Scope: Individuals receiving VR services are provided comprehensive assessments of their rehabilitation needs when determining an employment goal consistent with their unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Supported Employment services begin after job placement. The Supported Employment program and supported employment services are provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities who through comprehensive assessments have been determined to need intensive services and ongoing supports to achieve a competitive integrated employment outcome. The scope of supported employment services varies based on the amount, intensity and type of support each individual needs to obtain, maintain, retain or advance in employment. Supported employment services are provided as specified in the individualized plan for employment (IPE) for a period of not more than 24 months, unless under special circumstances the eligible individual and the counselor jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE. When working with a youth, the IPE is created to align with and reflect the youth's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

DSB provides ongoing support services funded by the VR program Title I funds that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability, including youth with a most significant disability, in supported employment from the time of job placement until the transition to extended services. These services may include assessments of employment stability and rehabilitation needs, the provision or coordination of specific services at or away from the worksite that are needed to maintain stability, providing skilled job trainers for the individual at the worksite, social skills training, follow-up services, and facilitation of natural supports at the worksite.

Extent of Services: The extent of VR services offered is based on the individual's informed choice pertaining to their unique needs and the time that is required for the individual to reach stabilization on the job. The maximum number of months VR can provide supported employment services is 24 months. Exceptions can be made to extend the services if the counselor and the individual have determined that such services are needed to support and maintain the individual in supported employment.

Timing of Transition to Extended Services: Transition to extended services begins when an individual has maintained employment and achieved stability in the work setting for a minimum of 90 days. Extended services can be provided by other partnering state agencies, private nonprofit organizations, natural supports, or any other appropriate resource other than VR. DSB provides extended services utilizing VR program Title I funds to youth with disabilities only for up to four years or until age 25 when the youth no longer meet the definition of youth with a disability, whichever comes first or until an alternative funding source has been found; or until the youth no longer requires the service.

4. SECTIONS 101(A)(22) AND 606(B)(4) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE THE VR AGENCY TO DESCRIBE EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY AND ARRANGE, INCLUDING ENTERING INTO COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS, WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES AND OTHER APPROPRIATE ENTITIES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. THE DESCRIPTION MUST INCLUDE EXTENDED SERVICES, AS APPLICABLE, TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES TO YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 363.4(A) AND 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(C)(19)(V).

DSB works collaboratively with other entities serving individuals with disabilities that may require supported employment or extended services to maximize their employment success. The entities include: the NC Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH), the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Deaf-Blind Project with the Exceptional Children Assistance Center (ECAC), North Carolina Deaf-Blind Associates, the Deaf-Blind Advisory Council, the Statewide Interagency Team and Regional Interagency Teams which are comprised of staff from DSDHH, the NC Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities, the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services, and the Exceptional Children Division of DPI. In addition, the Division of Services for the Blind is a member of the National Community of Partners (NCOP) sponsored by the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC). Efforts are made to obtain information and resources to support, and fund extended services including other state agencies, such as the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services and NC Medicaid.

F. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

1. ESTIMATES FOR NEXT FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR—

A. VR PROGRAM; AND

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Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
NA	2,500	2,500	\$18.8M	NA

B. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

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Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
NA	40	40	\$400,000	NA

G. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. PURSUANT TO SECTION 101(A)(5) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, THIS DESCRIPTION
MUST BE AMENDED WHEN THE VR AGENCY DETERMINES, BASED ON THE ANNUAL
ESTIMATES DESCRIBED IN DESCRIPTION (F), THAT VR SERVICES CANNOT BE PROVIDED TO
ALL ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE WHO APPLY FOR AND ARE
DETERMINED ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES.

* VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

2. FOR VR AGENCIES THAT HAVE DEFINED PRIORITY CATEGORIES DESCRIBE—

A. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

The DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection.

B. THE ORDER (PRIORITY CATEGORIES) TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES ENSURING THAT INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES; AND

The DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection during Program Years 2024-2027.

C. THE VR AGENCY'S GOALS FOR SERVING INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, INCLUDING HOW THE AGENCY WILL ASSIST ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS ASSIGNED TO CLOSED PRIORITY CATEGORIES WITH INFORMATION AND REFERRAL, THE METHOD IN WHICH THE VR AGENCY WILL MANAGE WAITING LISTS, AND THE PROJECTED TIMELINES FOR OPENING PRIORITY CATEGORIES. NOTE: PRIORITY CATEGORIES ARE CONSIDERED OPEN WHEN ALL INDIVIDUALS IN THE PRIORITY CATEGORY MAY BE SERVED.

The DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection.

3. HAS THE VR AGENCY ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE OF THE ORDER OF SELECTION WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT?

No

H. WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS.

The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with Section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate "not applicable."

Not applicable

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency's comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the State VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

1. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PERSONNEL AND PROJECTED PERSONNEL NEEDS INCLUDING—

A. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

B. THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF PERSONNEL THAT ARE EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING RATIOS OF QUALIFIED VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS;

C. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE VR 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.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Rehabilitation Counselor I	14	22	22

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Rehabilitation Counselor II	6	8	8
Rehabilitation Counselor in Charge	5	5	5
Rehabilitation Services Manager I	1	2	2
Rehabilitation Services Manager II	4	4	4
Vocational Evaluator II	1	1	1
Community Employment Specialist	13	14	14
Rehabilitation Casework Tech	0	2	2
Total	44	58	58

D. RATIO OF QUALIFIED VR COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS:

While efforts continue to identify individuals who are visually impaired, blind, or deafblind who can benefit from services, including students and youth with disabilities, it is not expected that additional FTEs will be granted and partially funded by the State.

(A) In total, the ratio of VR counselors (58) to eligible individuals served (2,493) by the DSB VR program during PY 2023 was 1:43 or one counselor per forty three individuals served.

E. PROJECTED NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED IN 5 YEARS:

(B) Projected number of total individuals to be served in 5 years is estimated at over 3,000 with about 2,500 carry-over cases and more than 500 new VR applicants each year.

2. DATA AND INFORMATION ON PERSONNEL PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

A. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND 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.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
Winston-Salem State University	Master of Science	46	16
UNC Chapel Hill	Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling	55	27
East Carolina Univ	Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling	18	7
	Certificate in Addictions Prevention and Treatment Studies	6	6
	Certificate in Military & Trauma	14	9
	Certificate in Rehabilitation Studies	5	2
	Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Counselor Preparation and Research (formerly Rehab Counseling Administration)	15	2
NC Central Univ	Master of Education in Special Education, Visual Impairment, Orientation, and Mobility	20	7
	Master of Clinical Psychology	10	4
	Assistive Technology for Individuals with Visual Impairments	2	3
NC A & T Univ	Master of Mental Health Counseling Rehabilitation	19	8

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
	Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Rehabilitation Counseling and Rehabilitation Counselor Education	19	7

B. THE VR AGENCY'S PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, WHICH ADDRESSES THE CURRENT AND PROJECTED NEEDS FOR QUALIFIED PERSONNEL; AND THE COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF EFFORTS BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY 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.

Retaining Vocational Rehabilitation counselors has been more challenging than recruiting them. Most counselors who have left the agency have indicated the reason is to pursue employment with federal and private organizations largely due to being offered higher salaries. During PY 2023, DSB and EIPD, along with our HR and fiscal teams, successfully created and implemented a salary progression plan that resulted in salary increases for the VR staff. It is too soon to determine the impact of these changes.

DSB offers unpaid internship positions for students in their last semester of a master level degree program in rehabilitation counseling. Offering internships educates students about the needs of individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind and the Vocational Rehabilitation process. Providing these experiences also strengthens the candidate pipeline for employment with DSB. Internship opportunities were provided for the following universities and programs during PY 2023:

Institute of Higher Learning	Type of Program	Number of Interns
Winston Salem State Univ	Master of Science in Rehabilitation	1
UNC Chapel Hill	Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling	1
NC Central Univ	Master of Education in Special Education, Visual Impairment, Orientation and Mobility	1
	Master of Clinical Psychology	2
	Assistive Technology for Individuals with Visual Impairments	1

Nationwide recruitment is done by posting positions in NeoGov, an internet human resources application provider for government agencies. Available positions for rehabilitation counselors

and orientation and mobility specialists are sent to local colleges to help recruit graduating students for job opportunities. Positions are often posted on LinkedIn and the Academy of Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Programs website. Some positions are shared with CSAVR and NCSAB membership to assist with recruiting. North Carolina is an Employment First (EF) state. Employment First focuses on the importance of competitive, integrated employment as truly the first choice for individuals with disabilities. By adopting the EF mindset, state agencies are committed to be intentional about addressing barriers to competitive employment and assessing the success of our efforts in increasing the numbers of individuals with disabilities employed by state agencies. On an annual basis, DSB conducts a workforce analysis of its representation of persons with disabilities, of persons of different races and ethnic groups and other demographics in different personnel classifications and occupational categories. Those classifications and occupational categories in which persons with disabilities and minority groups are under-represented are identified, and goals are established to increase representation in DSB's workforce as an equal opportunity employer.

C. DESCRIPTION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND ACTIVITIES THAT ENSURE ALL PERSONNEL EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY RECEIVE APPROPRIATE AND ADEQUATE TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS:

- I. 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**
- II. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO VR AGENCY PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS AND FOR PROVIDING TRAINING REGARDING THE AMENDMENTS TO THE REHABILITATION ACT MADE BY THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT.**

DSB has an ongoing comprehensive system for personnel development that provides all staff classifications with appropriate job-related training. Staff members complete *Learning Request* forms yearly to identify specific training needs. The program specialist for staff development analyzes the learning requests, and then plans specific training activities to meet the identified needs. Because of these requests, training has been provided in an array of training events with relevant curriculum and skills acquisition experiences. DSB VR staff have participated in mandatory intensive training sessions this year pertaining to our new case management system ENCORE. A monthly training is provided to DSB VR staff titled "Coffee Talk with WIOA," which provides support and education pertaining to the Act along with documentation requirements and the importance of accurate reporting. DSB has maintained the authority granted by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification to provide Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Credits (CRC) for all certified rehabilitation counselors who participate in approved training provided by the division. The agency also has the authority to grant Continuing Educational Units (CEU) by the Academy of Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Programs (ACVREP). DSB staff are also routinely alerted to and complete other on-line training events provided by sponsors such as VRTAC:QM, VRTAC:QE, NTACT:C, NCWorks, and the ADA National Network. In coordination with the Office of State Human Resources, DSB employees

have been provided the opportunity to complete coursework in the *Leading at all Levels* curriculums for individual contributors and supervisors.

In 2022-2023, the following trainings were provided to VR staff:

TRAINING ACTIVITY	TARGETED ATTENDEES
New Employee Low-Vision Training	New employees
New Employee Sensitivity Training	New employees
NRTC Improving Business Development Skills	VRC/BSR/CES/Supervisors/Program Specialists.
Best Practices for New Counselors	New VRCs (10 attended)
Supervisor/SERT Training	All Program Chiefs/Supervisors - 7 (VR Program)
NCCAP	(13 attended)
NCRA Conference	VR Counselors (12 attended)
NCWorks Partnership Conference	VR Staff (12 attended)
AVRT Conference	(9 attended)
Extensive In-Service ENCORE position-related training	VRC/TRC; BSR/CES; AT; DB Specialists; PA
Assistive Technology Annual Training	Division of Assistive Technology Consultants and Instructors, DSB Career and Training Center AT Instructors (15 attended)
ATIA (Assistive Technology Industry Association	AT Staff who serve VR consumer (attended)
Deafblind Specialists Annual Training	Division Deafblind Specialists (6 attended)
WIOA Reporting and Credential Training	VR Staff (9 attended)
Supervisory/Leadership Development	ASM; LAAL; National Conferences; Facilitating Career Development (CSAVR, NCSAB, ADA Coord., NCAPSE) (5 participating)
Misc. Conferences	SERID; NC Beach Conference, Substance Use Conference, HKNC Training, International Orientation & Mobility Online Symposium, NCFADS, NCDB Institute

DSB utilizes NC DHHS leadership training as a point of entrance for pre-supervisory training. DSB also conducts leadership/pre-supervisory training to begin to identify staff interested in management opportunities. In addition, HR has provided workforce transition planning training.

3. DESCRIPTION OF VR AGENCY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PERSONNEL STANDARDS CONSISTENT WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B) TO ENSURE THAT VR AGENCY 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, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

All DSB employees in the rehabilitation counselor role have met the CSPD mandate. Although the mandate has been lifted, DHHS has not at this time changed its policies regarding minimum requirements for the VR counselor position but is investigating whether lowering the educational standard for VR counselors to the minimum credentialing specified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is necessary and beneficial to VR clients.

Currently, employees who 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. DSB's current minimum education and experience requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and trainees are as follows:

Minimum Education and Experience for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from an appropriately accredited institution; or a master's degree in a related human services field from an appropriately accredited institution; or current certification as a certified rehabilitation counselor by the Commission of Rehabilitation Counselor Certification.

Minimum Education and Experience for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Trainees

Bachelor's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a related human services field from an appropriately accredited institution. An employee in the progression is eligible to be placed in the full class of rehabilitation counselor upon completion of a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. The three-year progression may be extended as needed for an employee who is making satisfactory progress toward the attainment of the master's degree.

All rehabilitation counselors are required to complete developmental training in casework requirements and documentation during their first year of employment. The chiefs of rehabilitation and the area and district rehabilitation supervisors provide this training in small groups to directly address agency policies and procedures for professional casework practices. During rehabilitation counselors' first year of employment, their work is closely monitored and reviewed with most actions requiring supervisory approval. After one year of employment, rehabilitation counselors who meet certain standards may request promotion to independent

counselor status, rehabilitation counselor II. Evaluation procedures for this status consist of a written and oral examination of casework policies and procedures, caseload review and audit, and review of contact with caseload eligible individuals to assess the quality and satisfaction of services. The chief of rehabilitation field services administers and reviews all aspects of the examination process. Counselors are also required to participate in a week-long adjustment to blindness training which is designed to increase knowledge regarding working with individuals who have significant vision loss. There are also other training opportunities available for VR counselors throughout the year to enhance their skill levels in working with clients and related parties.

Efforts to Ensure Personnel Have a 21st Century Understanding of the Evolving Labor Force and The Needs of Individuals with Disabilities

DSB staff are actively involved in monitoring employment trends and adapting service methods to enable the clients we serve to be successful in today's market. Staff are engaged in strategic collaboration and partnerships with organizations such as Abler, and NSITE to provide training for consumers in high demand occupations to create additional avenues to competitive integrated employment. Amazon is one company that is currently dominating the labor market and consequently, DSB staff have collaborated and partnered with Amazon to assist them with fulfilling their need for employees. DSB staff have provided multiple services to consumers along with sensitivity training for employees that included information on orientation and mobility and sighted guide techniques. As a result of these efforts, several DSB consumers have obtained employment in many of the Amazon warehouses across the state.

As previously noted, self-employment offers tremendous opportunities and DSB is in the process of working with the EIPD to revise our self-employment policy because we feel this process should be achievable and better accommodate our consumers with meeting their self-employment goals. An innovative program for Pre-ETS clients was created for our DSB Career and Training Center's Summer Adapting to Blindness in Learning Environment (SAVVY) program. An opportunity for participants in the SAVVY Youth in Transition program to learn about entrepreneurship and explore what it would mean for them to be an entrepreneur was developed.

Effective use of assistive technology is an essential part of success in many careers in today's labor market. Assistive technology is constantly evolving, which requires DSB staff to stay abreast of changes to effectively serve its consumers. Training was provided to staff on advanced iPad accessibility features including voice over commands and gestures, app switcher, magnifier, zoom controller, and spoken content; Zoom Text customization including a camera with ZT, touch screen with ZT, and multiple monitors; AT for multiple disabilities such as Natural Point with smart navigation mouse using head movements to navigate, Eye Gaze, and Smart Pen; and NCATP resources. DSB also implemented a policy and procedure for hiring AT instructor vendors to expand the network of qualified individuals available to provide instruction to our consumers.

The importance of soft skills training for DSB's consumers is something that is significant in a forever-changing labor market. DSB staff were educated about a unique five-day virtual interactive event, the Blind & Socially Savvy, which was implemented for our Pre-ETS students statewide. This innovative soft skills development and leadership training program focused on coaching the use of social cues and body language, mingling/networking skills, learning

protocols for asking for and refusing help in public spaces, and navigating low expectations. The students also participated in informational interviews and virtual tours. The transition staff implemented virtual informational interviews with students and young adults served by DSB to increase their knowledge about a vocation and guide them in exploring career paths. Informational interviews were set up with a crime scene investigator, a business owner, a director of finance, a massage therapist, an aerospace engineer, and a broadcast radio/voice-over professional to name a few. Such interactive and meaningful experiences helped shape the students' understanding of the world of work and connected them to real-life professionals.

4. METHOD(S) THE VR AGENCY USES TO ENSURE THAT PERSONNEL ARE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN APPROPRIATE MODES OF COMMUNICATION WITH OR IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE OF APPLICANTS OR ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKING ABILITY.

DSB has personnel and utilizes interpreters or translators to communicate in the native/preferred language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

The capability to produce and/or purchase Braille is available in all DSB locations. Information can also be produced in large print for distribution as needed with the use of existing computer equipment. Computer workstations equipped with assistive technology are also available for consumer use within each district office and the DSB Career and Training Center. DSB has placed the policy and procedures manual on DSB's website. The website currently contains information about all DSB's programs, frequently used forms, links to resources, the local office locations, and the staff directory.

DSB has a specialized program for persons who have both vision and hearing loss. The program consists of five specialists to serve the district offices and a statewide program specialist who manages the activities of this program. Each member of this program is skilled in the use of sign language to enhance communication. The consultants work very closely with rehabilitation counselors on all cases where individuals have any degree of both vision and hearing loss. They provide information regarding specialized needs of these individuals, the availability of resources, and the arrangement of appropriate communication. This collaboration ensures the individual has the opportunity for maximum participation in a rehabilitation program of services that will lead to successful employment. DSB maintains a list of approved interpreters and dedicated funding for interpreting services through DHHS resources. A list of qualified sign-language interpreters is maintained in each office, and these can be hired as required to enhance communication. Language interpreters are sought and hired to facilitate communication with individuals for whom English is not their primary language.

5. 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.

DSB works with the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to ensure all students who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind have access to VR services while attending public school. DSB has eight memorandums of agreements with school systems to provide transition programs for their students. 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. These programs work with students, the school staff, and the parents or guardians as the student transitions from school to work and continues working with them until they achieve their employment goals. The specialized programs are in the following school systems: Brunswick County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Cumberland County, Guilford County, New Hanover County, Onslow County, Wake County Schools, Winston- Salem-Forsyth County Schools and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind. Each program consists of a rehabilitation counselor and a community employment specialist who are trained to work with students during their transition from school to work.

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 DSB Career and Training Center. 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.

J. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

1. DESCRIBE PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION BETWEEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATION OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PUBLIC EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, THAT ARE DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF THE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE RECEIPT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES.

DSB's policy defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post school activities including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment including supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The policy establishes that the coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, considering the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Transition services are provided by the DSB program to students beginning at age 14.

DSB provides pre-employment transition services/activities (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities who are in educational settings and are 14-21 years of age that may be clients or potential clients of the agency. DSB policy states that pre-employment transition services provided to students must be followed up by appropriate documentation of the services rendered. DSB offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. DSB offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. Each eligible student served by the DSB VR program must have an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that is jointly developed with students/parents and a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. The IPE must be developed and approved within 90 days after the student has been found eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

2. DESCRIBE THE CURRENT STATUS AND SCOPE OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY. CONSISTENT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT PURSUANT TO 34 C.F.R. § 361.22(B), PROVIDE, AT A MINIMUM, THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGREEMENT:

A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, WHICH MAY BE PROVIDED USING ALTERNATIVE MEANS FOR MEETING PARTICIPATION (SUCH AS VIDEO CONFERENCES AND CONFERENCE CALLS), TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES AND OTHER VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES;

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY PERSONNEL FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPS) UNDER SECTION 614(D) OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT;

C. THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES;

D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES.

OUTREACH TO THESE STUDENTS SHOULD OCCUR AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE DURING THE TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS AND MUST INCLUDE, AT A MINIMUM, A DESCRIPTION OF THE PURPOSE OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM, ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS, APPLICATION PROCEDURES, AND SCOPE OF SERVICES THAT MAY BE PROVIDED TO ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS;

E. COORDINATION NECESSARY TO SATISFY DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS SET FORTH IN 34 C.F.R. PART 397 REGARDING STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE SEEKING SUBMINIMUM WAGE EMPLOYMENT; AND

F. ASSURANCE THAT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, NEITHER THE SEA NOR THE LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WILL ENTER INTO A CONTRACT OR OTHER ARRANGEMENT WITH AN ENTITY, AS DEFINED IN 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(D), FOR THE PURPOSE OF OPERATING A PROGRAM UNDER WHICH YOUTH WITH A DISABILITY IS ENGAGED IN WORK COMPENSATED AT A SUBMINIMUM WAGE.

DSB's policy defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post school activities including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment including supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The policy establishes that the coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, considering the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Transition services are provided by the DSB program to students beginning at age 14.

DSB provides pre-employment transition services/activities (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities who are in educational settings and are 14-21 years of age that may be clients or potential clients of the agency. DSB policy states that pre-employment transition services provided to students must be followed up by appropriate documentation of the services rendered. DSB offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. DSB offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. Each eligible student served by the DSB VR program must have an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that is jointly developed with students/parents and a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. The IPE must be developed and approved within 90 days after the student has been found eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

1. Transition Planning

The parties shall engage in systems-level transition planning for students with disabilities to facilitate the development and implementation of the individualized education programs under 614(d) of the IDEA. The parties acknowledge that while student- level transition planning is the responsibility of staff under the employ and authority of EIPD and DSB, transition planning at the student-level may only be promoted by DPI through policy-making, consultation, professional development, and technical assistance to LEAs. Furthermore, the parties acknowledge that the framework for student-level transition planning shall be outlined in local third-party agreements. As such:

1. DSB and DPI agree to cooperate and work jointly in providing/promoting transition planning for students with disabilities.
2. DSB and DPI shall assist LEAs in planning for/promoting the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services.
3. DSB and DPI agree to work collaboratively to promote/assist students with disabilities in the development and completion of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) required under the IDEA and the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) required under WIOA.
4. DSB will coordinate with the LEAs on the development of students' IEPs and IPEs through third-party agreements. DPI shall promote and support the development of such agreements.
5. DSB and DPI shall communicate/encourage communication regarding students' IEP and IPE goals and needed transition services as soon as possible after the IEP and IPE are developed.
6. DSB and DPI shall foster innovation in transition program design and service delivery strategies between the local EIPD and DSB offices and the LEAs.
7. DSB and DPI shall support local involvement in the planning and activities of Local Area Workforce Boards as well as partnerships with local employers to promote programs and services for students and youth with disabilities.
8. DSB and DPI shall provide consultation to assure access to and programming for students with disabilities in career and technical education, work-based learning, career assessment, career decision-making training, and career counseling as determined by the local transition planning teams.

1. Pre-Employment Transition Services:
 - a. Section 113(a)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, as well as final §361.48(a)(2), requires DSB, in collaboration with the LEAs, to provide or arrange for the provision of pre-employment transition services required activities. DSB shall make these services available to all students with disabilities who need them.
 - b. DPI will support and facilitate collaboration between DSB and the LEAs in providing any or all the following five pre-employment transition services required activities to students with disabilities:
 1. Instruction in self-advocacy and peer mentoring
 2. Work based learning experiences
 3. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs at institutions of higher education
 4. Workplace readiness training
 5. Job exploration counseling

The interagency agreement between DSB and the state educational agency establishes a collaborative approach to transition planning for students with disabilities. DSB counselors and responsible state educational agency staff consult to ensure that the transitional elements of the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are incorporated in the student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). DSB counselors make every effort to participate with the students, parents and state educational agency staff in planning meetings pertaining to IEP development. Transition programs, services, and resources available through the VR program is shared to enable the student to make informed choices regarding their VR program and to ensure relevant services and supports from the IEP are considered and included and the IPE is reviewed on an annual basis at a minimum.

1. Roles and Responsibilities

- a. DSB shall administer all aspects of the state Vocational Rehabilitation program including the determination of eligibility, diagnostic and evaluation services, rehabilitation planning, transition services and the provision of a program of Vocational Rehabilitation services. Some services are subject to the student's financial eligibility and/or comparable benefits.
- b. DPI shall assist LEAs in the planning, development, and implementation of transition services to students with disabilities to become college, career, and community ready.

DSB shall assume responsibility, within the limit of resources, for the cost of services included in the student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), according to the established DHHS policies and fee schedule.

DSB shall report annually the total amount of state appropriated monies expended for rehabilitation services for students with disabilities. The report should be made available annually to DPI within 60 days of the end of the state fiscal year.

DPI shall provide access to annual report data on students served through CTED and ECO.

DPI shall support the sharing of diagnostic information of students with disabilities for the purpose of accessing Vocational Rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services, so long as sharing is in compliance with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and other legal requirements relating to student privacy rights.

DPI shall support practices for LEAs to secure psychological, vocational, and educational assessments, according to state and local policies, for students suspected of needing assessments.

Coordination responsibilities of each agency that promote the coordination, timely and appropriate delivery of transition services (IDEA).

The parties will use the various community media to promote public information and understanding of each program and its various functions.

The parties will promote a system to ensure that appropriate referrals are made with consent of parent/guardian or majority age student to each party.

The parties will emphasize the maximum utilization of comparable benefits defined, as services that are provided or paid for, in whole or in part, by other federal, state, or local public resources, which are available to the student.

Criteria related to subminimum wage requirements in Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.

DPI shall provide consultation to DSB on the development and implementation of documentation processes used by DSB and the LEA to carry out requirements under Section 511.

DPI and DSB shall provide consultation and training to LEAs and local EIPD and DSB staff on means for documenting completion of the actions described in 34 CFR 397.20 and 34 CFR

397.30 and processes for transmitting documentation consistent with confidentiality requirements under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and IDEA.

DPI and DSB shall support, promote, and emphasize the restriction, found in 34 CFR 397.31, that prohibits state and local educational agencies from contracting with entities for the purpose of operating a program for a youth under which work is compensated at a subminimum wage.

DSB and DPI shall collaborate to inform LEA and local EIPD and DSB staff of the requirement to provide youth with disabilities, aged 14-24, who are known to be seeking sub-minimum wage employment pre-employment transition services and/or IDEA transition services and referral to the VR program.

Procedures for resolving interagency disputes including procedures for LEAs to initiate the process to receive reimbursement or regarding implementation of the agreement. (IDEA)

The parties will utilize their best efforts to resolve any dispute that may arise in the provision of services outlined in this agreement and will collaborate to achieve the best possible outcome for students with disabilities.

When there are real or perceived overlaps in the responsibilities for special education or other related services under IDEA and VR services under the Rehab Act, DSB and DPI shall support and advise local staff in considering the following factors to determine the responsible party:

whether the service is customary to the party from whom the service is requested (if customary, the party should provide);

the primary objective of the service/support (educational or vocational); the impacts of delaying service provision;

agency-specific policies or limitations around the provision of the service (e.g., maximum purchase rates, selection of providers);

eligibility of student under part B of IDEA;

length of time to exit from school in terms of ongoing need for and replacement frequency of service or equipment (e.g., if equipment is needed, will the lifespan of the equipment be contained to the student's time within the secondary educational setting or extend to the transition from school to post-school activities?); and/or

the need for transferability of skills and practice with service/equipment to be prepared for post-school IPE participation (e.g., will the student need time to practice using equipment or receiving a specific transition service to facilitate transition to post-school services/outcome as planned on the IPE without delay or interruption? If so, this may warrant VR funding of the equipment or service.)

Data Sharing

The parties to this agreement do not anticipate the exchange of data containing personal identifying information. Information exchange shall be limited to non-confidential information or information that has been de-identified. In the event confidential information will be shared between the parties; the parties will enter into a separate data sharing agreement to cover the exchange of information.

DSB shall provide data to the Exceptional Children Division about the number of school age students served by the state VR agency, by disability, age, types of services provided and post-school employment outcome.

In its discretion, DPI shall provide appropriate data to Vocational Rehabilitation about students needing services.

DPI shall provide the framework for the collection of exit data by school systems regarding students with disabilities transitioning from school to postschool activities.

DPI shall assist local school administrative units in the planning, development, collection of data, and implementation of transition services for students with disabilities.

The terms of the DSB cooperative agreement with the separate nine LEAs and one regional school system are as follows.

The Division agrees to:

1.

- a. Finance the program in the same manner as other functions of the Division using state and federal matching funds, as required under Title I of the Federal Vocational Rehabilitation Act. Financing the rehabilitation program shall be on an annual budget basis to ensure continuity of operations. To receive federal matching funds, the Division must provide state funds equal to the State's share of planned expenditures as specified in the Federal Act.
- b. Agrees to provide a program of Vocational Rehabilitation services to eligible individuals referred by the contractor and to other individuals found eligible for services.
- c. Provide to all potentially eligible visually impaired students, between the ages of 14 to 21 years of age, pre-employment transition services with the collaboration of the Contractor. pre-

employment transition services are, job exploration counseling, work-based teaming experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or

postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy.

1.

- a. Provide to the Division staff assigned to the program effective and appropriate supervision of the Vocational Rehabilitation activities.
- b. Provide administration and consultative support to the contractor in the area of its program responsibilities.
- c. Share statistical and fiscal reports with the contractor regarding the Vocational Rehabilitation program, as deemed necessary to open communication and good administration practices, and that are mutually agreed upon by both parties being necessary.
- d. Provide federal funding in the amount of 78.7 percent of the agreed-upon annual budget depending on the availability of federal funds and the program arrangements.
- e. Provide, within the limitation of resources, case service funds necessary to the delivery of Vocational Rehabilitation services.
- f. Determine, through its professional counseling staff, all decisions affecting an individual's eligibility for services and the nature and scope of rehabilitation services to be provided must be made by the Division and cannot be delegated.
- g. Provide information deemed appropriate by the contractor regarding eligibility requirements and descriptions of rules, regulations, and policies governing the program.
- h. Assign one rehabilitation counselor and a community employment specialist to the school system and will maintain an active caseload at all assigned schools. Rehabilitation staff will visit the assigned schools on a scheduled routine basis to receive referrals and to transact other matter necessary to effectively administer the rehabilitation program.
- i. Contact referred students at the earliest possible time to initiate the process of providing rehabilitation services; however, prior to completing the application for Vocational Rehabilitation services, parent or guardian permission is required for services to minor. Appropriate feedback will be furnished to the referral source.
- j. Use existing assessment data when appropriate. When necessary, supplementary assessments will be procured.
- k. Complete a comprehensive evaluation on each eligible individual, to the degree necessary, to determine the vocational goal and scope of Vocational Rehabilitation services to be included in the IPE.

- i. Share consumer specific information with appropriate school personnel upon a duly executed Consent for Release of Confidential Information as specified in 34 CFR 361.38.
- m. Lunsford Act. Provider also acknowledges that G.S. § 14-208.18 prohibits anyone required to register as a sex offender under Article 27A of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes from knowingly being on the premises of any school. Provider shall conduct or arrange to have conducted, at its own expense, sexual offender registry checks on each of its owners, employees, agents, service providers and independent contractors ("Service providers") who will engage in any service on or delivery of goods to school system property or at a school system sponsored event, except checks shall not be required for individuals who are solely delivering or picking up equipment, materials, or supplies at: (1) the administrative office or loading dock of a school;

(2) non-school sites; (3) schools closed for renovation; or (4) school construction sites. The checks shall include at a minimum check of the State Sex Offender and Public Protection Registration Program, the State Sexually Violent Predator Registration Program, and the

National Sex Offender Registry ("the Registries"). For provider's convenience only, all of the required registry checks may be completed at no cost by accessing the United States Department of Justice Sex Offender public website at <http://w\vv.nsovww.sov/>. Provider shall provide certification on the Sexual Offender Registry Check Certification Form (Attachment A) that the registry checks were conducted on each of its service personnel providing services or delivering goods under this agreement prior to the commencement of such services or the delivery of such goods. Provider shall conduct a current initial check of the registries. The sex offender registry checks shall be conducted within 30 days of provider's execution of the agreement and prior to performing any services on school system property. In addition, provider agrees to conduct the registry checks and provide a supplemental certification form before any additional service providers are used to deliver goods or provide services pursuant to this agreement. Provider further agrees to conduct annual registry checks of all service providers and provide annual certifications at each anniversary date of this agreement. Provider shall not assign any individual to deliver goods or provide services pursuant to this agreement if said individual appears on any of the listed registries. Provider agrees that it will maintain all records and documents necessary to demonstrate that it has conducted a thorough check of the registries as to each service provider and agrees to provide such records and documents to the school system upon request. Provider specifically acknowledges that the school system retains the right to audit these records to ensure compliance with this section at any time in the school system's sole discretion. Failure to comply with the terms of this provision shall be deemed a material breach of the agreement.

1.

- a. Criminal Background Checks. Provider shall conduct criminal record and background checks on all service providers who will perform services pursuant to this agreement on school system property or at school system events. The criminal background checks shall be conducted within 30 days of provider's execution of the agreement and prior to performing any services on school system property. Provider shall provide the results of said checks to school

system within five (5) business days of receipt and shall not assign any service providers to provide services under the agreement if said worker has been convicted of or pled no contest to (1) any felony; (2) any crime, whether misdemeanor or felony, involving violence, illegal drugs, theft, child abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or personal impropriety of a sexual nature with regard to any other person; or (3) any other crime or conduct reasonably indicating that the service providers poses a threat to the safety or well-being of a school system's students, personnel, or property. In addition, provider shall obtain all authorizations necessary for school system to conduct additional criminal record and background checks at its sole expense at any time during the term of this agreement. If school system chooses to exercise this right, provider shall, within five (5) business days of a school system's request, provide the full name, date of birth, and state of residency for the past 10 years for all service providers providing services under the agreement, along with any other information reasonably requested by school system for purposes of performing criminal record and background checks. Without modifying or waiving any of a provider's obligations under this provision, the school system reserves the right to prohibit any service providers from providing services under this agreement if the school system determines, in its sole discretion, that said service providers have not undergone a criminal record and background check in accordance with this provision or if the results of such criminal record and background check reasonably indicate that the said service providers may pose a threat to the safety or well-being of students, school personnel, or others.

The contractor agrees to:

1.
 - a. Contribute annually a specified sum as the state's share of matching funds which reflect the amount of participation toward providing a program of service. Any contribution of funds shall be made available for expenditure at the sole discretion of the Division. It is understood that such funds must be spent for rehabilitation services and for the administration of those services; that expenditures must be made under the approved agency state plan; and that expenditures must be made under the control and supervision of the DHHS/EIPD and DSB. The

Divisions will maintain such accounts and supporting documents that will permit an accurate determination at any time of the status of state and federal participation of expenditures incurred in operation of the rehabilitation program. The specific items of each annual budget will be determined jointly and agreed to by the parties prior to the beginning of each fiscal year. The contribution of an invoice by the Division to the contractor will contribute to the Division an annual cash amount of X percent of the school systems total share of the agreed upon annual budget. The local percent match funds are to consist totally of non-federal funds which have not or will not be used to match federal funds other than Federal Vocational Rehabilitation funds used in this program.

1.

- a. The contractor shall provide adequate office space that is accessible to staff and individuals with disabilities, private for individual counseling, and environmentally comfortable, with conditions that are conducive to confidentiality and counseling. Any and all equipment purchased under this memorandum of agreement will remain the property of the Division.
- b. Provide maintenance of assigned accommodations, appropriate utilities, and basic telephone services.
- c. Provide all individuals determined eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services with these services that are its legal and traditional responsibility without cost to the Division.
- d. Assist in securing and sharing diagnostic information of mutual clientele for the purpose of Vocational Rehabilitation services and will provide, as appropriate, psychological, vocational, and educational assessments for students suspected of needing assessments so long as sharing is in compliance with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and other legal requirements relating to student privacy rights.
- e. Develop, in cooperation with the Division, a system to ensure that appropriate referrals are obtained by the Division.

The DPI/DSB cooperative agreement includes procedures for *Outreach and Identification of Students with Disabilities* as follows:

DPI shall in form LEAs of services available from DSB and promote referrals for students with disabilities who may or may not be receiving special education and are in need of pre-employment transition services and/or YR transition services, including the development of an IPE.

The determination of eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation services is the sole responsibility of DSB and cannot be delegated. DSB shall review the required documentation of students with disabilities who have been referred by the LEA to determine eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation services. The student must require Vocational Rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, regain, or advance in employment.

Vocational Rehabilitation counselors develop and cultivate working relationships with school systems by educating them about the transition and vocational services available through DSB and providing technical assistance and consultation pertaining to the needs of and resources available to transition students. DSB VR counselors participate in school systems' transition fairs as invited in order to meet potentially eligible students and to educate schools, students, and parents on DSB services.

DSB has hired and trained pre-employment transition services associates who are equipped to target potentially eligible students ages 14-21 years of age that may require pre-employment transition services. They are instructed to contact parents and teachers to assess need and desire for services, provide pre-employment transition services directly and document all

activities regarding service provision. If desired, this position can also refer students to a VR counselor so that they can then apply for a full program of VR services leading to competitive integrated employment. There are seven pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) associates positions statewide.

DSB reaches out to various county school systems to assure that they are aware of DSB services. Due to the growth of charter schools, private schools, and home-school organizations, DSB is reaching out to these entities to provide resources for any student who is blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. While most students do attend public schools due to the resources of specialized teachers for persons with visual impairments, DSB recognizes the importance to reach students enrolled in these programs.

K. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

DSB will continue to network with employers statewide to provide mutually beneficial services and supports utilizing the dual-customer approach. Services will primarily be provided by Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and business services representatives/community employment specialists. Staff will be intentional in their efforts to build relationships with employers to learn the nature of their businesses, the educational background and skill sets required of employees and the employers' recruitment needs. DSB will offer services to employers including information regarding the division, disability awareness and sensitivity training, educational information about the American with Disabilities and Workforce Investment and Opportunity Acts, incentives for hiring individuals who have disabilities, work-site assessment services and information on job modifications/accommodations and assistive technology. Employers will be encouraged to partner with DSB to create opportunities for job placement, on-the-job training, internships, work experiences, and supported/customized employment placements for clients. Staff will also provide information regarding benefits to employers that hire individuals with disabilities and assistance in retaining employees who have disabilities.

The principle that individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, can achieve high quality competitive integrated employment, when provided the necessary services and support, is incorporated throughout the Workforce Innovations Opportunity Act. Employment in businesses owned by community rehabilitation providers, group settings, affirmative industries, social enterprises, and other forms of non-traditional work settings will be evaluated by DSB on a case-by-case basis. The evaluation review process will be initiated whenever one or more of the following competitive integrated employment criteria are in question:

- purpose of the business;
- competitive wages;

- integrated location; or
- opportunities for advancement.

DSB will continue to invest in providing training for staff regarding evidence-based best practices pertaining to business engagement. Efforts will be made to create a database to assist us in measuring and tracking our effectiveness in serving employers. Additionally, DSB will develop branded outreach materials to market our services to employers and we will increase participation in local chambers of commerce and business leadership networks to help build stronger relationships with business partners.

L. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), 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 to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

1. STATE PROGRAMS (DESIGNATE LEAD AGENCY(IES) AND IMPLEMENTING ENTITY(IES)) CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

DSB has established cooperative and collaborative working relationships with various federal, state, and local agencies and organizations in our mission to help blind, visually impaired, and deafblind citizens of North Carolina receive the most comprehensive and beneficial services and supports available to facilitate their vocational and independent living goals. DSB has a cooperative agreement with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The agreement with DPI establishes coordination for the provision of educational and transitional services to students with visual impairments. DSB has a cooperative agreement with the University of

North Carolina System (UNC). DSB partners with UNC's Department of Allied Sciences in support of the university's rehabilitation counseling program. This includes the programs on campuses of UNC-Chapel Hill, Winston-Salem State University, A&T State University, East Carolina University, and North Carolina Central University campuses. The Division provides clinical experiences for students in the program through DSB district offices and the residential rehabilitation facility. DSB and UNC mutually plan and schedule student assignments. The Division provides students training and supervision, mentoring, constructive feedback, and formal evaluations. Students are also provided office and workspace, use of computers and other office equipment and technology, and exposure to other professions in the field rehabilitation such as, orientation and mobility, low vision, social work, and medical eye care.

UNC provides DSB staff opportunities to participate in clinical education conferences and meetings. This collaborative relationship also creates potential employment opportunities for students upon the completion of their education.

Additionally, DSB has cooperative agreements that establish policies and procedures for information sharing, referrals, and service coordination with other divisions within the NC Department of Health and Human Services including but not limited to the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities, Division of Services for Deaf and

Hard of Hearing, and the Division of Social Services. DSB has established an informational sharing agreement with the Division of Medical Assistance to facilitate the use of the Medicaid Management Information System for North Carolina to ensure all approved medical cost services provided by the division are at the appropriate pricing tiers. A cooperative agreement has also been established with the Social Security Administration to facilitate the receipt of Social Security benefits information for VR program applicants and participants.

Cooperative agreements have been established with the Eastern Band of Cherokee and Lumbee Tribal VR Programs in NC. The agreements specify how DSB and the Tribal VR Programs will jointly serve eligible individuals who have a disability of vision impairment or deafblindness to provide efficient and effective Vocational Rehabilitation services; to ensure that Tribal members with disabilities eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services are offered informed choice of program, services and service providers; to provide guidelines for information sharing when concurrent services are being provided; to facilitate cultural awareness and improve professional skills among staff; and to establish the working relationship between the Tribal VR Programs and DSB so that the individual programs and their consumers benefit from shared expertise, training, professional collaboration and the enhanced capabilities that will grow from this relationship. Additionally, the program directors for the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs rotate membership on the SRC.

DSB has informal collaborative relationships with other organizations and consumer and advocacy groups that are not carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Investment System such as the Governor Morehead School, NC Association of Blind Students, Governor Morehead School Alumni Association, NC Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, North Carolina Lions Inc., NC Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Prevent Blindness NC, Consumer Advocacy and Advisory Committee, North Carolina Conference on Visual Impairment and Blindness (NCCVIB) and Envisioning Youth Empowerment (EYE). DSB and the organizations and groups collaborate in referrals for services and supports, sharing information and resources, sponsorship and participation in trainings and events, outreach and educating the general public about blindness and vision loss and increasing the general public's awareness of the needs and abilities of individuals who have visual disabilities.

DSB is one of the designated state units (DSUs) that serve as a part of the NC Statewide Independent Living Council (NC SILC). NC SILC in collaboration with the DSUs develops three-year State Plans for Independent Living (SPILs). DSB actively engages with the SILC in the development of goals, objectives, and measures to help meet the independent living needs of North Carolinians who have disabilities. These entities serve together on various work groups and committees such as governance, community-based living, youth leadership forum, evaluation, civil rights, and IL services and supports. The work groups and committees address matters and complete the tasks and activities required to achieve the goals and desired outcomes stated in the SPIL. A SILC member serves on the DSB State Rehabilitation Council. As a PY 2020 update to the Plan, the SILC only has one DSU which is the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. DSB has a representative who participates in meetings and is involved in the development of the SPIL.

Cooperative and collaborative relationships have been established between NC Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and DSB. Consumers are referred by and to each entity, relevant

information is shared, CILs allows DSB the use of facilities for DSB to provide consumers community-based independent living skills training and in return DSB staff provides CIL staff in-service training pertaining to visual disabilities. DSB provides consumers individual advocacy skills training and refers to the CILs for systems change advocacy needs.

STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

The North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) is a state and federally funded program that provides assistive technology services statewide to people of all ages and abilities. NCATP leads North Carolina's efforts to carry out the federal Assistive Technology Act of 2004 by providing device demonstration, short-term device loans, and reutilization of assistive technology.

DSB collaborates with the NC Assistive Technology Program in joint planning, training, and service provision to make best use of all rehabilitation technology resources available internal and external to the NC Department of Health and Human Services. NCATP services are arranged for and provided to DSB consumers as needed. DSB also partners with NCATP as a sponsor of the Assistive Technology Expo that is held by NCATP annually.

2. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

While DSB does not currently have a formal cooperative agreement with the Department of Agriculture, we provide consultative services for the statewide AgrAbility Program and inform consumers of the program's availability and its resources and will provide consumers with assistance in accessing the services when desired.

3. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH;

DSB will continue our efforts to expand our partnerships with non-educational agencies such as the CILs to serve out-of-school youth in addition to the other populations the organizations mutually serve. Consumers are referred by and to each entity and relevant information is shared. CILs allow DSB the use of facilities for DSB to provide consumers community-based independent living skills training and in return DSB staff provides CIL staff in-service training pertaining to visual disabilities. DSB provides consumers individual advocacy skills training and refers to the CILs for systems change advocacy needs.

DSB staff presently work with the CILs to coordinate services for specific individuals and also to address areas of broader systemic impact such as community education, disability awareness, and outreach services to various disability groups, including out-of-school youth.

4. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS;

At this time, DSB does not directly engage in a formally established state use contracting program, where commodities or services determined to be of use to state agencies are purchased from community-based rehabilitation programs employing and training individuals with significant disabilities. State agencies are required to purchase commodities and services from state term contractors when available. Community-based rehabilitation programs employing and training individuals with significant disabilities can apply to the State of NC to

become state term contract vendors which will enable DSB to utilize them for this purpose as needed.

**5. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER
TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT (42 U.S.C. 1396 ET SEQ.);**

In a combined effort with the NC Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD), the Controller's Office, and Information Technology Services, DSB has established an informational sharing agreement with the Division of Medical Assistance to utilize the NCTracks Medicaid Management Information System for North Carolina. This system helps the division ensure all approved medical cost services are authorized at the appropriate pricing tiers and up to date. DSB and EIPD also have an agreement with the Social Security Administration allowing for the sharing of information on an as needed basis only to assist with presumption of eligibility and provision of services to those with verified disabilities. This information is available in our electronic case management system and every VR staff person that has access to such information must annually complete training pertaining to the Social Security agreement and the confidentiality protocols.

**6. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES;**

DSB serves individuals who have multiple disabilities and collaborates with the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, EIPD, Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services to help us better understand all disabilities and to provide the most comprehensive, holistic services and to maximize the use of comparable benefits and available resources for eligible clients.

7. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES; AND

NCDHHS, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services is the state agency responsible for providing mental health services. DSB collaborates with this agency to better understand all disabilities and to provide the most comprehensive, holistic services and to maximize the use of comparable benefits and available resources for eligible clients.

**8. OTHER FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM.**

DSB has established cooperative and collaborative working relationships with various federal, state and local agencies and organizations in our mission to help blind, visually impaired and deafblind citizens of North Carolina receive the most comprehensive and beneficial services and supports available to facilitate their vocational and independent living goals. DSB has a cooperative agreement with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The agreement with DPI establishes coordination for the provision of educational and transitional services to students with visual impairments. DSB has a cooperative agreement with the University of North Carolina System (UNC). DSB partners with UNC's Department of Allied Sciences in support of the university's rehabilitation counseling program. This includes the programs on campuses of UNC-Chapel Hill, Winston-Salem State University, A&T State University, East Carolina University, and North Carolina Central University campuses. The Division provides

clinical experiences for students in the program through DSB district offices and the residential rehabilitation facility. DSB and UNC mutually plan and schedule student assignments. The Division provides students training and supervision, mentoring, constructive feedback and formal evaluations. Students are also provided office and work space, use of computers and other office equipment and technology, and exposure to other professions in the field rehabilitation such as, orientation and mobility, low vision, social work and medical eye care. UNC provides DSB staff opportunities to participate in clinical education conferences and meetings. This collaborative relationship also creates potential employment opportunities for students upon the completion of their education.

Additionally, DSB has cooperative agreements that establish policies and procedures for information sharing, referrals and service coordination with other divisions within the NC Department of Health and Human Services including but not limited to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Division of Social Services. DSB has established an informational sharing agreement with the Division of Medical Assistance to facilitate the use of the Medicaid Management Information System for North Carolina to ensure all approved medical cost services provided by the division are at the appropriate pricing tiers. A cooperative agreement has also been established with the Social Security Administration to facilitate the receipt of Social Security benefits information for VR program applicants and participants.

Cooperative agreements have been established with the Eastern Band of Cherokee and Lumbee Tribal VR Programs in NC. The agreements specify how DSB and the Tribal VR Programs will jointly serve eligible individuals who have a disability of vision impairment or deafblindness to provide efficient and effective vocational rehabilitation services; to ensure that Tribal members with disabilities eligible for vocational rehabilitation services are offered informed choice of program, services and service providers; to provide guidelines for information sharing when concurrent services are being provided; to facilitate cultural awareness and improve professional skills among staff; and to establish the working relationship between the Tribal VR Programs and DSB so that the individual programs and their consumers benefit from shared expertise, training, professional collaboration and the enhanced capabilities that will grow from this relationship. Additionally, the program directors for the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs rotate membership on the SRC.

DSB has informal collaborative relationships with other organizations and consumer and advocacy groups that are not carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Investment System such as the Governor Morehead School, NC Association of Blind Students, Governor Morehead School Alumni Association, NC Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, North Carolina Lions Inc., NC Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Prevent Blindness NC, Consumer Advocacy and Advisory Committee, North Carolina Conference on Visual Impairment and Blindness (NCCVIB) and Envisioning Youth Empowerment (EYE). DSB and the organizations and groups collaborate in referrals for services and supports, sharing information and resources, sponsorship and participation in trainings and events, outreach and educating the general public about blindness and vision loss and increasing the general public's awareness of the needs and abilities of individuals who have visual disabilities.

DSB is one of the designated state units (DSUs) that serve as a part of the NC Statewide Independent Living Council (NC SILC). NC SILC in collaboration with the DSUs develops three-year State Plans for Independent Living (SPILs). DSB actively engages with the SILC in the development of goals, objectives and measures to help meet the independent living needs of North Carolinians who have disabilities. These entities serve together on various work groups and committees such as governance, community-based living, youth leadership forum, evaluation, civil rights and IL services and supports. The work groups and committees address matters and complete the tasks and activities required to achieve the goals and desired outcomes stated in the SPIL. A SILC member serves on the DSB State Rehabilitation Council. As a PY 2020 update to the Plan, the SILC only has one DSU which is the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. DSB has a representative who participates in meetings and is involved in the development of the SPIL.

Cooperative and collaborative relationships have been established between NC Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and DSB. Consumers are referred by and to each entity, relevant information is shared, CILs allows DSB the use of facilities for DSB to provide consumers community-based independent living skills training and in return DSB staff provides CIL staff in-service training pertaining to visual disabilities. DSB provides consumers individual advocacy skills training and refers to the CILs for systems change advocacy needs.

9. OTHER PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.

DSB furnishes extended services (to youth with the most significant disabilities only), supported employment services, and community-based work adjustment services from community rehabilitation programs (CRP) for individuals who require these services to maximize their employment success. The CRP must meet certain requirements before services are purchased. The CRP must 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 in phases that are called "milestones".

DSB has contracts with four (non-profit) CRPs for the provision of on-going support services for individuals who achieved their goal of employment with assistance from the supported employment services and extended services (to youth with the most significant disabilities only).

ASSURANCES

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner, that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

The VR agency must select the "Edit" button to review and agree to the VR State plan Assurances.

<p>The State Plan must include</p>
<p>1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.</p>
<p>3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:</p>
<p>3.a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.b. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).</p>
<p>3.e. as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.f. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.h. the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>

<p>The State Plan must include</p>
<p>3.k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).</p>
<p>3.m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:</p>
<p>4.a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.f. comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.</p>

The State Plan must include
4.j. with respect to students with disabilities, the State:
4.j.i. has developed and will implement,
4.j.i.A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
4.j.i.B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and
4.j.ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25) and 113).
4.j.iii. shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:

The State Plan must include

7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.

7.b. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?

Yes

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND) CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY TITLE IV OF WIOA^[1], AND ITS STATE PLAN SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT;

^[1] Public Law 113-128.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Services for the Blind

2. IN THE EVENT THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY IS NOT PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH VOCATIONAL AND OTHER REHABILITATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY MUST INCLUDE A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT FOR THE VR PROGRAM (SECTION 101(A)(2)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT). AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT)^[2] AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN^[3], THE REHABILITATION ACT, 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C), AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS^[4], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE TO STATES UNDER SECTION 111(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

NC Department of Health and Human Services

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY, OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[5], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[6], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

[5] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT OR, IF NOT APPLICABLE, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C);

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Cynthia Speight

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Director

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

[1] PUBLIC LAW 113-128. [2] ALL REFERENCES IN THIS PLAN TO "DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY" OR TO "THE STATE AGENCY" RELATE TO THE AGENCY IDENTIFIED IN THIS PARAGRAPH. [3] NO FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT MAY BE AWARDED WITHOUT AN APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. [4] APPLICABLE REGULATIONS, IN PART, INCLUDE THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS (EDGAR) IN 34 CFR PARTS 76, 77, 79, 81, AND 82; 2 CFR PART 200 AS ADOPTED BY 2 CFR PART 3474; AND THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM REGULATIONS AT 34 C.F.R. PART 361. [5] NO FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT MAY BE AWARDED WITHOUT AN APPROVED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 606(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. [6] APPLICABLE REGULATIONS, IN PART, INCLUDE THE CITATIONS IN FOOTNOTE 4, AS WELL AS SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM REGULATIONS AT 34 C.F.R. PART 363.

[1] Public Law 113-128.

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

[5] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

To review and complete the Certification section of the VR portion of the State plan, please select the “Edit” button.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Cynthia Speight, is the current Director of the Division of Services for the Blind
Title of Signatory	Director
Date Signed	3/4/2024

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

After the Unified or Combined State Plan submission, each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan’s approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

In the final rule implementing WIOA, the Departments indicated that they would initially implement this indicator in the form of a pilot to test the feasibility and rigor of three proposed approaches. During Program Year (PY) 2022, the Departments initiated the rulemaking process to establish a standard definition of Effectiveness in Serving Employers. States will continue to report two of three proposed approaches until the Departments issue the final rule and implement the indicator.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	49.7%	49.7%	49.7%	50.1%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	44.0%	36.5%	44.0%	38.9%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,500	\$3,577	\$4,500	\$3,677
Credential Attainment Rate	39.0%	30.6%	39.0%	31.6%
Measurable Skill Gains	47.5%	32.2%	47.5%	35.7%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

NC Division of Services for the Blind's mission is to enable people who are visually impaired, blind, and deaf-blind to achieve their goals of independence and employment. We strive for equitable access for all individuals in NC who need our services. One way we work towards equity is by utilizing our CSNA and data to identify underserved populations that become groups that we target for outreach. Target groups are identified based on the proportions of different demographic groups served by the Division in relation to the proportion of those demographic groups in the statewide population. The currently-identified underserved groups are:

- individuals living in rural areas
- black/African-American
- Latino
- American Indian
- Asian
- Other minorities
- Individuals who are low income
- Veterans
- Women
- adults over the age of 55

Additionally, due to our vocational rehabilitation program requirements, staff target:*

* Students with disabilities

* Youth with disabilities

Staff are encouraged to plan outreach events which target these populations. Between Oct 1, 2022 to Sept 30, 2023, the Division provided 401 events with the following results:

75% reached at least one target group

20% at least one racial or ethnic target group

26% individuals in rural areas

43% older adults

19% lower income individuals

16% Veterans

14% women

26% students with disabilities

20% youth with disabilities

The Division provides training to staff on diverse populations to equip staff with the cultural awareness, sensitivity, and confidence to work with all individuals who may need our services. We also provide training on individuals with challenging secondary disabilities such as severe and persistent mental health concerns and traumatic brain injury. Additionally, the Division has a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Council whose mission is to integrate best practices for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility into agency policies and programs.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

1. Limited availability of service providers in some regions of the state impact equitable access to services.
2. Post-pandemic, a number of transportation providers are no longer available which has made access to services which rely on local transportation more challenging.
3. Staff recruitment and retention challenges also impede equitable access and participation of recipients of our services. Additionally, staff with institutional knowledge and experience who leave the agency also impacts service delivery.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

1. Limited availability of service providers in some regions of the state impact equitable access to services.

We continuously seek out service providers and post the opportunity for new providers to apply to become contract service providers with our organization. We build and maintain positive working relationships with service providers and are responsive to their needs including providing them with training about the needs of the population we serve.

2. Post-pandemic, a number of transportation providers are no longer available which has made access to services which rely on local transportation more challenging.

Staff research resources for other transportation providers, expand the use of Uber and Lyft where available and equally important work to maintain good working relationships with current transportation providers.

3. Staff recruitment and retention challenges also impede equitable access and participation of recipients of our services. Additionally, staff with institutional knowledge and experience who leave the agency also impacts service delivery.

We have modified our salary structure for rehabilitation counselors to better aligned with the labor market rates; provided retention bonuses and continue to seek additional means of providing additional bonuses to assist with retaining staff for longer periods of time. Additionally, Sign-on bonuses were recently approved to assist with filling rehabilitation counselor positions which will hopefully help with filling vacancies and reducing the amount of time to fill positions

All employees are encouraged to develop written procedures for areas they cover. DSB has many positions where only one staff member performs a particular task. In these cases, staff are strongly encouraged to develop written procedures and easy-to-access written materials for supervisors and their replacements. Supervisors will also assist with creating procedures based on input from the employee when needed. Where funds allow, some retired employees are hired part-time to assist with vacancy coverage and to assist with onboarding new staff.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

1. Limited availability of service providers in some regions of the state impact equitable access to services. Our goal is to increase the number of service providers in regions of the state with limited providers by 1% each plan year.
2. Post-pandemic, a number of transportation providers are no longer available which has made access to services which rely on local transportation more challenging. This barrier is not within our power to resolve. We have already and will continue to utilize and support community transportation providers and rideshare options where available.
3. Staff recruitment and retention challenges also impede equitable access and participation of recipients of our services. Additionally, staff with institutional knowledge and experience who leave the agency also impacts service delivery. Strategies to address this barrier have been implemented. Our goal is to reduce our counselor vacancy rate from the current average of 25% to 12% or less by the end of program year 2024.

**GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT
EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES**

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.

- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

NC Division of Services for the Blind's mission is to enable people who are visually impaired, blind, and deaf-blind to achieve their goals of independence and employment. We strive for equitable access for all individuals in NC who need our services. One way we work towards equity is by utilizing our CSNA and data to identify underserved populations that become groups that we target for outreach. Target groups are identified based on the proportions of different demographic groups served by the Division in relation to the proportion of those demographic groups in the statewide population. Individuals who need supported employment are encompassed within the various target groups. The currently identified underserved groups are:

- individuals living in rural areas
- black/African-American

- Latino
- American Indian
- Asian
- Other minorities
- Individuals who are low income
- Veterans
- Women
- adults over the age of 55

Additionally, due to our vocational rehabilitation program requirements, staff target

* Students with disabilities

* Youth with disabilities

Staff are encouraged to plan outreach events which target these populations. Between Oct 1, 2022 to Sept 30, 2023, the Division provided 401 events with the following results:

75% reached at least one target group

20% at least one racial or ethnic target group

26% individuals in rural areas

43% older adults

19% lower income individuals

16% Veterans

14% women

26% students with disabilities

20% youth with disabilities

The Division provides training specifically on supported employment services in various ways so that staff are equipped to educate consumers on these services and make suitable referrals as the need is determined.

Mandatory best practices training is provided for all new vocational rehabilitation counselors. This training is focused on assisting consumers to address and overcome barriers to employment and identifying career-based employment. A specific component pertaining to supported employment is included in the training.

The Rehabilitation Program Specialist for employment services, along with the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services are available to consult with staff concerning consumers who may need supported employment services to maximize their employment success. This provides time for staff to ask questions or seek clarification from leadership as needed.

The Rehabilitation Program Specialist for employment services, along with other DSB staff, continue efforts to increase the number of approved vendors. DSB offers sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments, including exposure to AT and adaptive devices. The training is known as New Employee Sensitivity Training (NEST) and takes place twice a year at the DSB Career and Training Center. In addition, our DSB specialists and counselors offer training to the community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment providers to increase their knowledge of and ability to successfully work with consumers who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. Some examples of the training topics are sighted guide, AT, and adaptive devices.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

DSB strives to remove barriers wherever possible so that anyone who may qualify for Vocational Rehabilitation services receive services. The current, primary barriers identified are:

1. Limited availability of service providers in some regions of the state impact equitable access to services.
2. Post-pandemic, a number of transportation providers are no longer available which has made access to services which rely on local transportation more challenging.
3. Staff recruitment and retention challenges also impede equitable access and participation of recipients of our services. . Additionally, staff with institutional knowledge and experience who leave the agency also impacts service delivery.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

1. Limited availability of service providers in some regions of the state impact equitable access to services.

We continuously seek out service providers and post the opportunity for new providers to apply to become contract service providers with our organization. We build and maintain positive working relationships with service providers and are responsive to their needs including providing them with training about the needs of the population we serve.

2. Post-pandemic, a number of transportation providers are no longer available which has made access to services which rely on local transportation more challenging.

Staff research resources for other transportation providers, expand the use of Uber and Lyft where available and equally important work to maintain good working relationships with current transportation providers.

3. Staff recruitment and retention challenges also impede equitable access and participation of recipients of our services. Additionally, staff with institutional knowledge and experience who leave the agency also impacts service delivery.

We have modified our salary structure for rehabilitation counselors to better aligned with the labor market rates; provided retention bonuses and continue to seek additional means of providing additional bonuses to assist with retaining staff for longer periods of time. Additionally, Sign-on bonuses were recently approved to assist with filling rehabilitation counselor positions which will hopefully help with filling vacancies and reducing the amount of time to fill positions

All employees are encouraged to develop written procedures for areas they cover. DSB has many positions where only one staff member performs a particular task. In these cases, staff are strongly encouraged to develop written procedures and easy-to-access written materials for supervisors and their replacements. Supervisors will also assist with creating procedures based on input from the employee when needed. Where funds allow, some retired employees are hired part-time to assist with vacancy coverage and to assist with onboarding new staff.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

All activities to address barriers are ongoing and are contingent on approvals from other entities within State government, with whom we cannot enforce specific deadlines.

1. Limited availability of service providers in some regions of the state impact equitable access to services.

Our goal is to increase the number of service providers in regions of the state with limited providers by 1% each plan year.

2. Post-pandemic, a number of transportation providers are no longer available which has made access to services which rely on local transportation more challenging.

This barrier is not within our power to resolve. We have already and will continue to utilize and support community transportation providers and rideshare options where available.

3. Staff recruitment and retention challenges also impede equitable access and participation of recipients of our services. Additionally, staff with institutional knowledge and experience who leave the agency also impacts service delivery.

Strategies to address this barrier have been implemented. Our goal is to reduce our counselor vacancy rate from the current average of 25% to 12% or less by the end of program year 2024.

VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

States choosing to submit a Combined State Plan must provide information concerning the six core programs—the Adult program, Dislocated Worker program, Youth program, Wagner-Peyser Act program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation program—and also submit relevant information for any of the eleven partner programs it elects to include in its Combined State Plan. When a State includes a Combined State Plan partner program in its Combined State Plan, it need not submit a separate plan or application for that particular program.²⁴ If included, Combined State Plan partner programs are subject to the “common planning elements” in Sections II-IV of this document, where specified, as well as the program-specific requirements for that program.

[24] States that elect to include employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.) under a Combined State Plan would submit all other required elements of a complete CSBG State Plan directly to the Federal agency that administers the program. Similarly, States that elect to include employment and training activities carried by the Department of Housing and Urban Development would submit all other required elements of a complete State Plan for those programs directly to the Federal agency that administers the program.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR APPENDIX

ALL WIOA CORE PROGRAMS

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);

- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	79.0%	80.0%	79.5%	80.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	77.5%	79.5%	78.0%	80.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$7200	\$8,276	\$7300	\$8300
Credential Attainment Rate	64.0%	64.0%	64.5%	64.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	57.0%	64.2%	57.5%	65.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as

“baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	72.0%	74.5%	72.5%	74.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	73.0%	73.0%	73.5%	73.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$7800	\$8,595	\$7900	\$8,600
Credential Attainment Rate	66.0%	66.0%	66.5%	66.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	65.0%	67.4%	65.5%	68.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	74.0%	75.9%	74.5%	76.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	73.0%	75.1%	73.5%	75.1%

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$3600	\$4,708	\$3700	\$4,800
Credential Attainment Rate	53.0%	53.0%	53.5%	53.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	54.0%	56.8%	54.5%	57.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

WAGNER-PEYSER ACT - WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);

- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the

core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	69.0%	69.0%	69.5%	69.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	69.0%	69.0%	69.5%	69.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$5500	\$6983	\$5600	\$7000
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM - ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment

Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	38.0	41.0	38.0	41.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	37.0	41.0	37.0	41.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3932.0	5,000.00	3932.0	5,100.00
Credential Attainment Rate	30.0	31.0	30.0	31.5
Measurable Skill Gains	43.6	43.6	43.6	44.0
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (COMBINED OR GENERAL) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

After the Unified or Combined State Plan submission, each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan's approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

In the final rule implementing WIOA, the Departments indicated that they would initially implement this indicator in the form of a pilot to test the feasibility and rigor of three proposed approaches. During Program Year (PY) 2022, the Departments initiated the rulemaking process to establish a standard definition of Effectiveness in Serving Employers. States will continue to report two of three proposed approaches until the Departments issue the final rule and implement the indicator.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	49.7%	49.7%	49.7%	50.1%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	44.0%	36.5%	44.0%	38.9%

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4500	\$3577	\$4500	\$3677
Credential Attainment Rate	39.0%	30.6%	39.0%	31.6%
Measurable Skill Gains	47.5%	32.2%	47.5%	35.7%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (BLIND) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

After the Unified or Combined State Plan submission, each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan's approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

In the final rule implementing WIOA, the Departments indicated that they would initially implement this indicator in the form of a pilot to test the feasibility and rigor of three proposed

approaches. During Program Year (PY) 2022, the Departments initiated the rulemaking process to establish a standard definition of Effectiveness in Serving Employers. States will continue to report two of three proposed approaches until the Departments issue the final rule and implement the indicator.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	49.7%	49.7%	49.7%	50.1%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	44.0%	36.5%	44.0%	38.9%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,500	\$3,577	\$4,500	\$3,677
Credential Attainment Rate	39.0%	30.6%	39.0%	31.6%
Measurable Skill Gains	47.5%	32.2%	47.5%	35.7%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Additional Indicators of Performance

OTHER APPENDICES