

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL  
ON WORKFORCE AND  
APPRENTICESHIPS



# Strategies to Advance North Carolina's Workforce Development Progress

DECEMBER 2025



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

## VISION

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

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



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December 15, 2025

Dear Governor Stein:

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

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

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

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

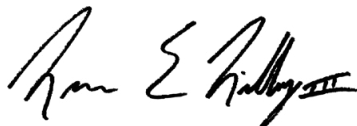
We again express our sincere appreciation to the many talented individuals from across North Carolina who serve on this Council, to the subject matter experts who have informed our work, and to the professional staff of the NCWorks Commission, the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the North Carolina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

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

With gratitude for the opportunity to serve,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jeff A. Cox".

President Jeff Cox

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lee Lilley".

Secretary Lee Lilley

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eddie D. Settle".

Senator Eddie Settle



# Objective 1

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

## GOALS

1.

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

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

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

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

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

**Baseline Data:** For the graduating high school class of 2024, approximately 93% of students met this goal.
3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Objective 2

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

### GOALS

4. Double the number of registered apprentices.

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

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

5. Increase participation in work-based learning:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Objective 3

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

### GOALS

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. Reduce state government vacancy rate to 15%.

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

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

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

## Objective 4

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

### GOAL

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

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

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

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



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

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



## NEXT STEPS

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

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

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