

Helping Recent College Graduates Find Jobs

BACKPACKS TO BRIEFCASES

We all know that higher education should lead to a higher skilled and higher paying job, right? College students typically expect to find a job shortly after they graduate.

They've invested in their futures, and now, they are ready to make some money. But sometimes, things don't go as planned,

and recent college graduates find themselves unemployed, or with a low-paying job that doesn't even require the college degree they just attained.

This is where Backpacks to Briefcases comes in.

BACKPACKS TO BRIEFCASES

Capital Area
NCWorks NextGen Program

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Connects recent college graduates to jobs in their field of study
- Provides internships leading to full-time job opportunities
- Provides career readiness skills needed to be successful in a professional environment
- Results in significant earnings increases
- Provides employers a low-cost, highly efficient pipeline of college-educated talent
- Saves employers time with recruiting new talent

The purpose of Backpacks to Briefcases is to provide recent graduates with real-world job experience and the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities. The program creates a new way to help recent graduates find employment opportunities that will take advantage of their earned degrees.

Backpacks to Briefcases helps to identify, train and place recent college graduates in jobs that better align with their career aspirations. The program provides paid internships and access to job openings, enabling graduates to launch their professional careers. Once employed, participants have an income stream to help pay off their school loans, as well. Recent graduates, those who completed a bachelor's degree within the past 6-24 months and who are currently unemployed or underemployed, are eligible for the program.

Participants work approximately 30-32 hours per week for approximately \$11-\$12 per hour. They complete enhanced career development exercises including resume preparation, soft-skill development, interview preparation, instruction in job search strategies, and elevator speech rehearsal. They also have access to

networking events that connect them with employers. In addition to the participants, the program also benefits the employers and the local communities where these recent graduates live and work, as an increased talent pool is available for businesses and the employed workers make an economic impact on the community.

Backpacks to Briefcases was initially implemented in the Capital Area workforce development region, and, due to its success, has been replicated in other workforce areas. The program went on to win a national University Economic Development Association (UEDA) best practice award in 2012. Currently, the Mountain Area, Capital Area, Kerr-Tar, and Cape Fear workforce development boards all have Backpacks to Briefcases programs in their areas, with other areas looking to start. And in 2017, the National Association of Development Organizations honored the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board with an Innovation Award for their program.

PARTNERSHIPS



35 LOCAL EMPLOYERS



DUKE ENERGY
FOUNDATION



LOCAL COMMUNITY
COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES



CAPITAL AREA
NCWORKS NEXTGEN



N.C. STATE UNIVERSITY'S
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP



CAPITAL AREA
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

PROGRAM FUNDING

In 2011, the Capital Area Workforce Development Board secured a little more than \$200,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funds to pilot Backpacks to Briefcases. The program originated as a direct result of a large number of unemployed adults who were recent graduates visiting Capital Area's career centers looking for employment. The Capital Area board wanted a way to provide additional services specific to new college graduates who had not been able to find work within six months of graduating.

The program is currently funded in part by Capital Area Workforce Development Board, a three-year, \$386,000 grant from the Duke Energy Foundation, and N.C. State University. The purpose of the Duke Energy Foundation grant was to expand workforce development efforts and real-life work opportunities to prepare recent college graduates for jobs in a variety of fields. The grant allowed N.C. State and Capital Area to continue Backpacks to Briefcases, helping unemployed or underemployed recent college graduates from Wake and Johnston counties secure paid internships that lead to employment opportunities. The Capital Area Workforce Development Board also contributes Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds to the program, and 100% of the total funding is used for service delivery.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The Backpacks to Briefcases program provides recent graduates with real-world job experience and the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities, ultimately leading to employment. The initiative helps transition students from college to the workforce, providing jobs for individuals and supplying employers with college-educated talent.

- In the Capital Area workforce region, 106 recent college graduates have been served to date.
- Out of 78 participants who have completed the program, 67 are currently employed or have gone on to graduate school, achieving an 86% overall placement rate.
- Of 44 recent college graduates surveyed, individuals received an 87% average wage increase from \$8.39/hour pre-enrollment to \$19.09/hour post-internship.

ABOUT THE SERIES

Brought to you by the NCWorks Commission, the Spotlight on Local Workforce Innovations series showcases local innovations in collaborative, employer-led workforce development partnerships across our state. The series will highlight promising practices that can be replicated across North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission is the state's Workforce Development Board. Led by a private sector chair, the 33-member, Governor-appointed commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders. The commission's mission is to ensure North Carolina has an innovative, effective workforce development system that meets the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.