

**Preparing North Carolina's Workforce for Today and Tomorrow**  
NCWorks Commission  
2021-2023 Strategic Plan

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The creation of the NCWorks Commission's 2021 - 2023 Strategic Plan included an extraordinary engagement effort from North Carolina's workforce development stakeholders, leaders, and professionals. We extend a special thanks to our elected officials, appointed commission members, workforce development partners, and staff for their dedication and support for transforming North Carolina's workforce development system.

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## PARTNERS

- NC Community College System
- NC Department of Administration
- NC Department of Health and Human Services
- NC Department of Public Instruction
- NC Independent Colleges and Universities
- NC Department of Commerce
- North Carolina Local Education Agencies
- 58 North Carolina Community Colleges
- The University of North Carolina System
- 23 Workforce Development Boards of NC
- myFutureNC

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NCWorks Commission oversees the state's workforce development system, develops policy, and advises the Governor, General Assembly, state and local agencies, and businesses on how to strengthen the state's workforce.

The commission is required by state law to create, each biennium, a comprehensive strategic plan for North Carolina's workforce system that includes goals and objectives; an assessment of programs, policies, and delivery of services; and recommendations.

The commission began work in the Fall of 2020 to develop a new plan for the 2021-2023 biennium. This plan provides the framework for all workforce agencies to create a more aligned and coordinated system. This improved workforce system will strengthen services to individuals and businesses and produce better outcomes.

The NCWorks Commission develops policies and strategies which value diversity and enable the state's workforce to compete in the current and future global economy. The commission leads, builds partnerships, forms alliances, and is accountable for strengthening North Carolina's innovative, inclusive, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system.

After extensive stakeholder work and programmatic reviews, the following system-wide goals and objectives were created for the workforce development system:

- Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy by increasing skills and education attainment.
- Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership.
- Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation.
- Promote system access, alignment, integration, and modernization.

The NCWorks Commission 2021-2023 Strategic Plan focuses on key priorities from Governor Cooper's *NC Job Ready Initiative*. NC Job Ready targets three core principles: skills and education attainment, employer leadership and local innovation throughout North Carolina. Collectively, ensuring North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow is our goal.

This plan provides a framework for state and local leaders to use to strengthen the state's workforce development system. The information contained within this plan provides the initial phase in the development of data-driven recommendations for North Carolina's workforce development system.

## 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.

## MISSION

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.

## CHARGE

The NCWorks Commission develops policies and strategies which value diversity and enable the state's workforce to compete in the current and future global economy. The commission leads, builds partnerships, forms alliances, and is accountable for strengthening North Carolina's innovative, inclusive, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system.

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

COVID-19 has significantly impacted numerous individuals across the state, causing unprecedented increases in unemployment and rapid changes in the way people learn and access information. In a post-pandemic recovery era, North Carolina will need more 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.

- **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](https://www.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. COVID-19 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 are 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.** Employer-led job training programs have the best career outcomes. Employers know best 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.

- **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 to businesses. The 23 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.** 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 innovative solutions.

- **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 COVID-19 workforce recovery initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline.** Employers want educated, skilled, and competent workers to help them solve tomorrow's business challenges today. The COVID-19 global pandemic has heightened this workforce need. 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.** 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 can adapt to an ever-changing economy.

- **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 23 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 develop the WIOA State Unified 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 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.