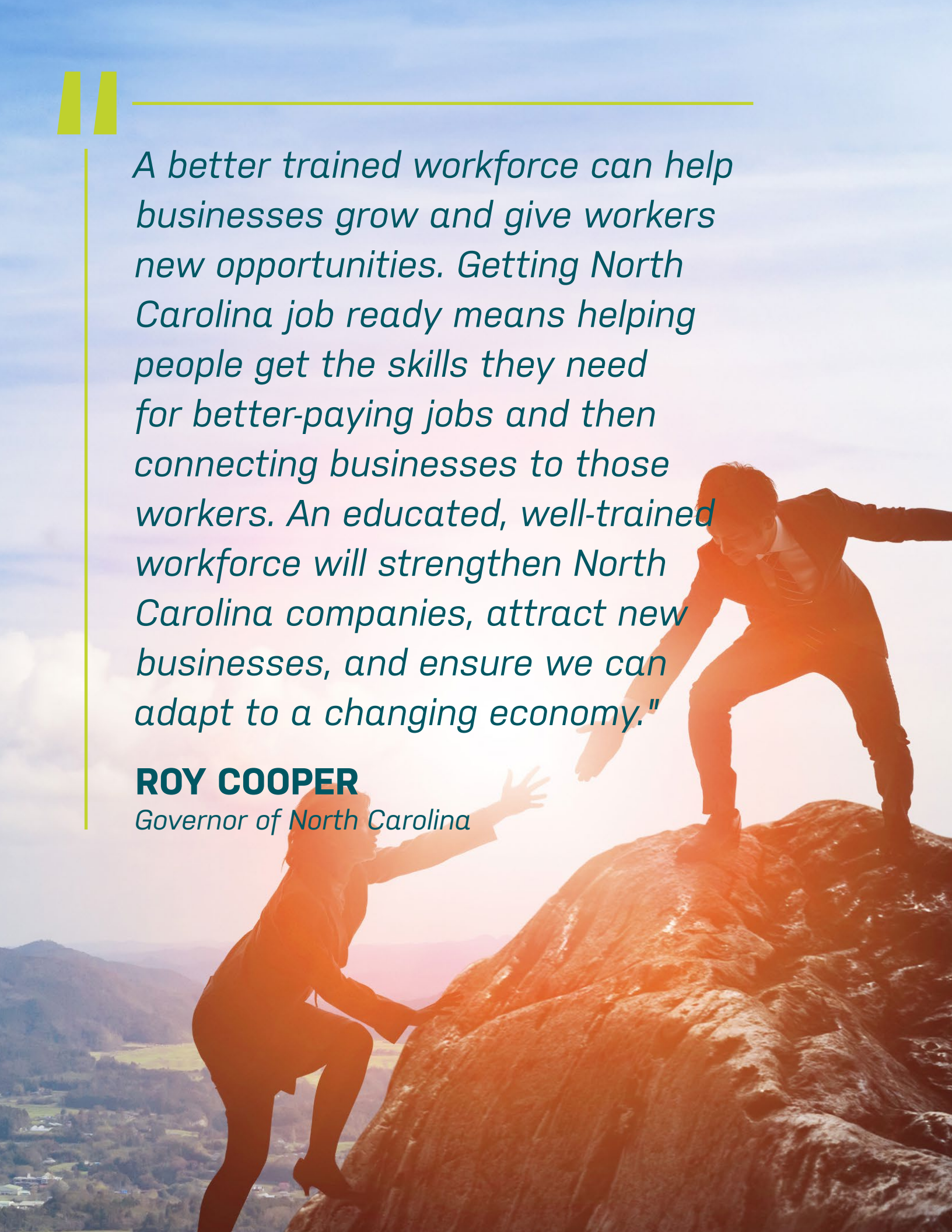


**PREPARING  
NORTH CAROLINA'S  
WORKFORCE  
FOR TODAY  
AND TOMORROW**

2023-2025 Strategic Plan



A woman in a business suit is helping a man in a business suit climb a large, textured rock. The woman is on the left, reaching up with her hands to assist the man. The man is on the right, leaning forward and reaching up towards the woman's hands. The background shows a landscape with rolling hills and a clear sky. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

*A better trained workforce can help businesses grow and give workers new opportunities. Getting North Carolina job ready means helping people get the skills they need for better-paying jobs and then connecting businesses to those workers. An educated, well-trained workforce will strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure we can adapt to a changing economy."*

**ROY COOPER**

*Governor of North Carolina*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NCWorks Commission supports 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 2022 to develop a new plan for the 2023-2025 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.

**After extensive stakeholder work and programmatic reviews, the following systemwide 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 2023-2025 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 for state and local leaders a framework 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, MISSION & CHARGE

## 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.

## 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, equity, and accessibility while enabling 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.





## GOALS

### 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.

**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 provide them access to digital networks, data, and career exploration tools, such as [NCcareers.org](https://www.nccareers.org). [NCcareers.org](https://www.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 K-12, 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, which is currently hosted on [NCcareers.org](https://www.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 25-44 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. 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.

**Increase access to education for those that have barriers.** Support persons with disabilities, adult learners, justice-involved individuals, 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.



## 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.

**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 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.** 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.

### 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.

**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.



## 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.

#### **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, 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** 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 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.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The creation of the NCWorks Commission's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan included an extraordinary engagement effort from North Carolina's workforce development stakeholders, leaders, and professionals. Thank you to our commission members, designees, subject matter experts, and commission staff who supported the development of this document. 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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NC Association of Workforce Development Boards  
NC Community College System Office  
NC Department of Administration

NC Department of Commerce  
NC Department of Health and Human Services  
NC Department of Public Instruction  
NC Independent Colleges and Universities  
NC Local Education Agencies  
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