

SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL WORKFORCE INNOVATIONS

Preparing youth for employment in high-demand industries, and closing the skills GAP

The Golden LEAF Opportunities for Work (GLOW) special initiative was launched in January 2020, a time at which unemployment was low and North Carolina was experiencing significant job growth. The GLOW initiative was intended to provide funding to address the urgent workforce issues facing North Carolina. At the time of the launch, North Carolina employers were having difficulty filling positions through traditional workforce development strategies; therefore, it was necessary to develop creative strategies to expand the pool of workers available for employment.

Project GAP was not the start, but a catalyst for my success. Over the last year, I've achieved so many things, lost 100 pounds, got a job, got my GED, and my driving license. And Project GAP helped me pursue another goal of mine, to get CPR certified. It helped me discover even more about myself and how I really wanted to pursue nursing for my future career.

J. CALVERT
A Project GAP Participant

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the labor market in North Carolina, over the last two years, there is still a significant need to educate and train a qualified workforce. It is projected that by 2030, 67% of jobs will require a post-secondary degree or credential. On its current trajectory, post-secondary educational attainment will only reach 54% (myFutureNC). As such, increasing the number of people in the workforce, especially for jobs requiring a post-secondary degree or credential, is necessary for North Carolina's economic vitality.

To help address these challenges, the initiative targeted projects with the following priorities:

- Close the skills gap by targeting working-age adults who are pursuing work but who face significant

barriers to employment, are underemployed, or are experiencing long-term unemployment.

- Provide opportunity for working-age adults to obtain post-secondary credentials.
- Increase the skilled workforce.
- Increase the labor force participation rate.
- Prepare working-age adults for employment in high demand fields in their community or region.

In June 2020, the Golden LEAF Board of Directors awarded approximately \$3.5 million to support ten projects through this initiative. Elizabeth City State University's (ECSU) "Project GAP" was one of the ten projects selected. ECSU was awarded \$385,000 to launch their program, which is currently working to fill the gap in the workforce throughout rural Northeastern North Carolina. ECSU is a University of North Carolina System constituent university in Northeastern North Carolina offering 28 bachelor's degrees and four master's degrees and is the only four-year university offering a Bachelor of Aviation Science and Unmanned Aerial Systems, or drones, in the state.

Project GAP targets "disconnected" young adults, ages 18-24, including women with dependent children, the long-term unemployed, single parents, foster care participants, high school dropouts, court-referred individuals, and academically at-risk ECSU students.

PROGRAM REVIEW:

What does the program offer?

Program Goals

- Enroll 110 participants within a 2-year period
- Ensure 70 participants (who completed the program) are gainfully employed within a 2-year period
- Ensure 70 participants (who completed the program) are credentialed within a 2-year period

Golden LEAF is committed to growing the talent, knowledge, and skill of North Carolina's workforce, especially in rural areas. ECSU is surrounded by the communities which Golden LEAF serves, with a majority of the school's student population living and working in these areas. By supporting workforce training programs that lead to quality jobs in these areas, Golden LEAF is fulfilling its mission to increase economic opportunity in North Carolina's rural and tobacco-dependent communities.

Workshops Offered Include:

- Career Exploration
- Education Exploration
- Free Virtual Financial Coaching
- Personal Branding & Communication
- Resume Writing
- Professional Attire
- Interviewing (virtual & in-person)
- Proper Work Conduct & Code-Switching

Partnerships Include:

- ACE Academy
- Albemarle Pregnancy Center
- College of the Albemarle
- Community Agencies
- Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice
- EC Health and Rehabilitation
- Edgecombe Community College
- Elizabeth City State University
- Employers across the state
- Golden LEAF Foundation
- Hockmeyer Equipment Corporation
- NCWorks
- NEED – Nash Edgecombe Economic Development: Wilson, Edgecombe, Nash County
- NextGEN Youth Program
- Northeastern Workforce Development Board



► 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.

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