



Terri L. Henry
terrhenr@ebci-nsn.gov

SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL WORKFORCE INNOVATIONS

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians + Tribal Employment Rights Office: Rebuilding a Sustainable and Successful Workforce

The Cherokee people are known for their beautiful, dynamic, rich culture, with a long history in Western North Carolina. The Cherokee are also known as "Anikituwagi," the people of Kituwah, the most sacred site or "Mother Town" of all Cherokees, a place of healing and peace. These traditions are woven into the workforce efforts of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal Employment Rights Office (EBCI-TERO). Terri Henry, J.D., the director of TERO, provided us with a closer look into the programs offered and changes taking place in this community.

We provide a place for people to talk about their future. We're trying to instill dignity in people - self-respect, self-awareness, (and) self-reliance. What we're really trying to do is create some confidence in our people to know that they have within themselves the ability to solve every problem."

TERRI L. HENRY
Director, Tribal Employment Rights Office, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

In 2017, TERO pioneered the Mother Town Healing Program (MTHP), which works with tribe members who are battling drug and alcohol addiction. The organization supports participants by providing employability skills, mentoring, and job placement, through one-year paid internships. TERO partners with tribal programs, tribal entities, and local businesses to provide employment opportunities for participants and is a certified "Working Smart" training provider. Active in supporting the community, TERO also hosts job fairs and promotes health and wellness. TERO works to customize career pathways focused on an individual's personal interests and skills. The intention is that participants who complete the program will contribute their talents and skills to the tribe and community with a renewed sense of purpose.

TERO has three Workforce Development program components. The first two, MTHP and the TERO Job Bank, are funded by the tribe. In 2021, TERO began administering the Work Experience (WEX) program, funded by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Native Employment Works through the U.S. Departments of Labor and Health & Human Services. These are designed to assist the whole participant by addressing barriers to employment.

TERO Program Goals

- **Reinforce the dignity of work:** Shifting the language to elevate the mental construct to positively reinforce the dignity of work.
- **Partners elevate the workforce conversation:** Positioning Placement Site Supervisors into mentorship roles.
- **Focus on life goals:** Pre-assessments and Individual Employment Plans (IEP's) drive internship placements and training.
- **Participants identify a career path:** Facilitate career development through proactive communication, evaluations and check-ins.

WEX Integral Program Elements

- Individual Assessment & IEP
- Paid On-the-Job Training (OJT) & Internships
- TERO Career Path Training, which utilizes Working Smart Curriculum (developed by Charlotte Works), with additional 8 hours of instruction to include cover letter writing, resume preparation, job applications and interviewing skills.
- Strength-Based Employee/Supervisor Evaluations - in-person supervisor meetings to provide a better understanding of expectations.
- WEX Program Performance Evaluations (Intern & Placement Supervisor).
- 1:1 Career Counseling (fast track offered by NCWorks - 3 certificates earned).
- Registered Apprenticeships - Creating community partnerships with local employers.

Requirements for Participants

- WEX age requirements comport with the WIOA & NEWP program requirements for adults and youth.
- MTHP: At least 18 years of age
- Member of the Eastern Band Cherokee Indians, EBCI identification & roll number
- MTHP: Authorization for Use or Disclosure of Health Information Form (Analenisgi or other care provider)

Screening Application

- Internships are offered with tribal programs, tribal entities and local businesses. If participants are deemed a good fit and a job is available, they can apply for permanent employment. Transformation of WEX involves rethinking the workforce experience and adjusting previous language and goals to a more meaningful learning opportunity.
- Staff helps with applications, resumes, and mock interviews with the goal of participants obtaining gainful work experience.

PROGRAM REVIEW

Lessons Learned/Program Outcomes

In-house training has proven beneficial to the EBCI-TERO program. Previously, classes were taught by a community college partner, but having tribal staff certified in delivering the Working Smart curriculum has significantly helped to provide a more results-oriented program. This change has helped with scheduling and allowed more flexibility in offering the classes. All members of the EBCI-TERO remain dedicated and continue to explore different funding streams, with the goal of making sure the program participants feel empowered. The number of community partners increased when the training roles changed from supervisor to mentor. The overall effectiveness of the WEX program has yet to be realized because the program is still small and just beginning its second year.

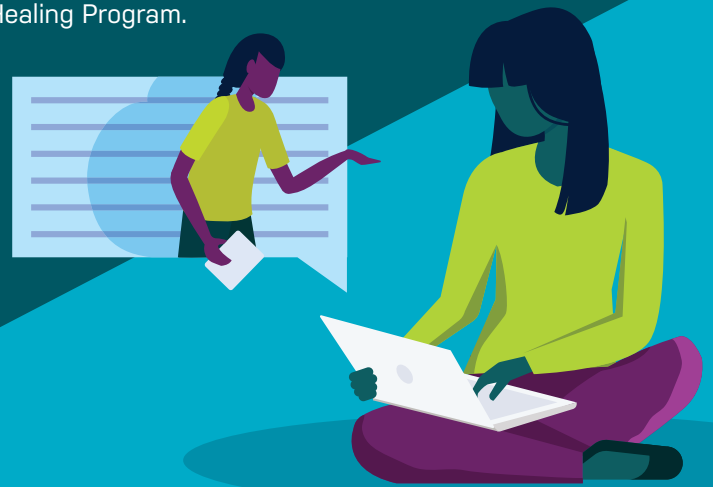
Personal Success

"This training has helped me see the connection to my work responsibilities and benefits to my professional development." - WEX participant (2022)

One of many success stories comes from a WEX program student, who was experiencing extreme anxiety, mental health issues, and a disability diagnosis. She lacked integral workplace skills and wasn't motivated to put action and effort into her assigned duties. She struggled with fundamental workplace professionalism and communication, which made it challenging to find a job that matched her interests. After completing her assessment, the student's love of animals was revealed. Staff at a local equestrian program hosted her for an internship. This opportunity motivated her to increase her workplace knowledge and equestrian skills, which led to full-time employment in a field that she loved.

Program Highlights

In 2019, EBCI – TERO received Governor Roy Cooper's NCWorks Award of Distinction for outstanding accomplishments and contributions in workforce development, spotlighting the Mother Town Healing Program.



► 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 37-member, Governor-appointed commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state, workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders.

Contact: 919-814-0313
NCWorksCommission@commerce.nc.gov

