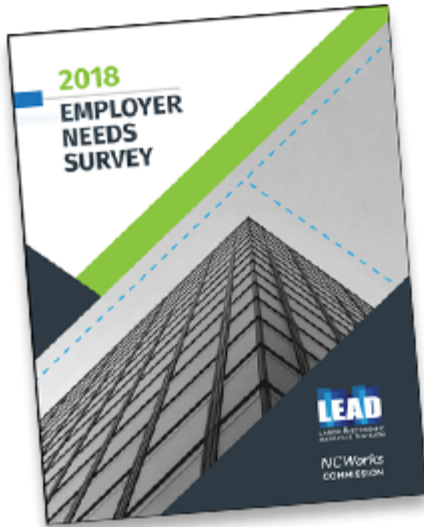


# sync<sup>®</sup> NEWS & OPPORTUNITIES FROM N.C. COMMERCE



## Survey of Employers Supports *NC Job Ready* Approach Matching Worker Skills to Employer Need

Half of North Carolina employers are having difficulty filling open positions, according to the results of a new survey of business executives published last week (July 11).

The 2018 Employer Needs Survey, conducted by the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) on behalf of the NCWorks Commission, further validates the need to strengthen the state's workforce development system.

"These results reflect what I hear from business leaders time and again: they often have jobs but can't find workers with the right skills to fill them," said **Governor Roy Cooper**. "We must get people who are looking for jobs together with businesses who want them. Getting North Carolina job ready means listening to what businesses need so we can prepare North Carolinians for the jobs of today and tomorrow."

*NC Job Ready*, Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative, is built on three core principles: skills and education attainment so North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow, employer leadership to remain relevant to



North Carolina First Lady Kristin Cooper (right) with Carmelita Coleman, Executive Director for Sayso.

## Commerce Workforce Team Spearheads Drive to Help Foster Children

North Carolina First Lady Kristin Cooper commended employees from Commerce's Workforce Solutions division during a July 9 event marking a statewide drive benefiting young people in the state's out-of-home care system.

The *Luggage of Hope* service project collected luggage and toiletries to ease transitions for children in foster care. Kids in foster care must sometimes move to new locations, often without the basic means to carry their belongings.

**First Lady Kristin Cooper** is using her platform to improve the well-being of children in North Carolina by focusing on preventing and mitigating adverse childhood experiences. Cooper has served as a guardian ad litem for children in Wake County since 2003, using her legal training to represent foster children in court. At the

evolving industry needs, and local innovation to take great ideas and apply them statewide. To train and expand North Carolina's workforce, Governor Cooper has called for NC GROW to offer financial aid for high-demand fields; Finish Line Grants to help students overcome financial challenges to complete their degrees; and an Employer Training Fund to help employers address workforce training needs and employee skill gaps.

The 2018 Employer Needs Survey, an update to similar surveys released in 2014 and in 2016, asked more than 2,000 North Carolina businesses about their hiring practices with an emphasis on hiring difficulties and workforce needs. In addition to an overall sample of all industries, researchers surveyed a sample of manufacturers and a set of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-related industries.

Among the findings of the survey were:

- 50% of employers who tried to hire in the past year had difficulty filling at least one position, up from about 40% in 2016;
- Manufacturers and STEM-related businesses found it more challenging to fill positions than employers as a whole, with nearly 60% reporting difficulty hiring;
- Employers in the state's two largest metropolitan areas (Charlotte and the Research Triangle) had less difficulty hiring (40%) than businesses overall, while employers in the state's medium-sized metro areas had more difficulty (61%);
- The top two reasons employers gave for their hiring difficulties were "employability" issues (such as a lack of a strong work ethic, professionalism or reliability) and a low number of applicants;
- 70% of rural employers cited a low number of applicants as the top reason for difficulty, a significantly higher percentage than that of employers as a whole (55%);
- 88% of all employers said that they attempted to fill at least one position in the past year;
- Prospects for job growth remain strong, with 43.3% of employers expecting the size of their own workforce to increase this year, and only 2.3% of employers expecting it to decrease.

"This year's survey provides vital data about the extent to which North Carolina businesses are experiencing hiring difficulties and identifies the top reasons, recognizing that different challenges exist for different industry segments, different business sizes and different regions," **NCWorks Commission Chair Kevin Trapani** wrote in a letter accompanying the report on the survey results. "The conclusions drawn from the report will assist the workforce development ecosystem to develop or move to scale data-informed policies and programs that equip job seekers with the skills and experience required by businesses."

In particular, he cited the need for younger North Carolinians to participate in apprenticeships, internships and other work-based learning programs that will help them develop employability skills. Trapani also said that the survey pointed to opportunities for the state's workforce system to more fully engage with employers and promote greater awareness of available resources.

"The findings in the report support the key elements of Governor Roy Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative and his priorities for workforce development, to which we are fully committed," Trapani added. "Our continued, collaborative progress on NCWorks Certified Career Pathways, business

NCWorks Training Center on Chaponoke Road in Raleigh, the First Lady addressed the state employees who initiated *Luggage of Hope* and recognized the service efforts of the Workforce Solutions team across North Carolina.

"I want to thank the dedicated professionals at the Division of Workforce Solutions and the entire NCWorks team for organizing this community service effort," **Kristin Cooper** said. "By providing these suitcases and essential items, Luggage of Hope will offer some comfort and convenience to foster children facing challenging transitions."

After learning that young people sometimes must pack their belongings in trash bags when entering or transitioning within the out-of-home care system, Workforce employees joined forces to collect much-needed luggage that county social service agencies sometimes struggle to supply. The division partnered with Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SaySo), a Durham-based statewide nonprofit directed by youth currently or formerly in North Carolina's substitute care system.

"What started with a small committee at the central office grew into something much bigger," said **Danny Giddens, Assistant Secretary of Workforce Solutions**. "The project became a huge success thanks to the involvement of our regional leaders and NCWorks Career Centers across the state, who have connected with local SaySo chapters. I join the First Lady in thanking everyone throughout the workforce system for their support of this worthy cause."

In addition to NCWorks Career Centers across the state, several partnering Workforce Development Boards supported the effort and received an inpour of donations from their local communities. Luggage of Hope surpassed the original goal of collecting 72 pieces of luggage with around 230 donated statewide, the majority of which were filled with toiletry items.

The NCWorks Career Center in Battleboro collected more suitcases and toiletries than almost any other location. Even while helping job seekers and employers in an area with the state's highest unemployment rate, employees at the center were dedicated to the service project.

"As soon as we heard about the Luggage of Hope project, our team pulled together to provide suitable luggage and toiletries," said **Diane Thomas, the Career Center manager**. "We had collected over 12 luggage and overnight bags within the first few weeks. This program touched the hearts of our team. Some have had first-hand interaction with foster children in our area. We cannot think of a better way to serve our community than giving a child a smile."

engagement strategies, and NCWorks Career Centers will support NC Job Ready by preparing North Carolinians for the jobs of today and tomorrow."

"The Employer Needs Survey is a valuable source of data and insights for North Carolina's workforce development and education partners," said **NCWorks Commission Executive Director Catherine Moga Bryant**. "Hiring in a tight labor market presents different challenges than those experienced during a downturn, and this report provides policymakers and business leaders with information on what those challenges are and how to meet them."

The NCWorks Commission, which is designated as the state's Workforce Development Board under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, recommends policies and strategies to enable the state's workforce and businesses to compete in the global economy. Led by a private sector chair, the 33-member Commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators and community leaders.

Assisting the Commission with the Employer Needs Survey were the Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services at NC State University and the Division of Workforce Solutions at the NC Department of Commerce. Grant funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration supported the project.

The [full report is available online: 2018 Employer Needs Survey](#).

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## Governor Cooper Announces Finish Line Grants Program to Help Community College Students Complete Training

Governor Cooper announced the Finish Line Grants program July 12. Now, community college students who face unforeseen financial emergencies can get financial assistance to complete their training. The program will leverage up to \$7 million in federal funds to help students pay for course materials, housing, medical needs, dependent care, or other financial emergencies that students may face through no fault of their own.

"We know far too many students cite challenges other than academic reasons for not finishing school, and this program will help ensure more people can finish their training and get a good-paying job to support themselves and their families," said **Governor Cooper**.

Grants will be available for the 2018-2019 school year. Every community college in North Carolina may participate in the Finish Line Grants program but is not required to do so. Community colleges and workforce development boards will collaborate to apply for funding and will establish a joint process for reviewing funding requests from students who have completed 75 percent of their degree or credential. Community college students may receive a maximum of \$1,000 per semester by contacting their community colleges' financial aid office or their local NCWorks Career Center to apply.

"Many community college students juggle work, family, and life, so financial emergencies can bring their school work to a halt," said **Peter Hans, president of the North Carolina Community College System**. "A Finish Line Grant could make all the difference to helping a student complete their degree or credential."

Workforce Development Boards, NCWorks Career Centers and other Workforce staff collected luggage and toilet items by Prosperity Zones from May 14 to June 30, 2018. Volunteers from local SaySo chapters will pick up the items and distribute them within each Prosperity Zone.

SaySo's mission is to 'work to improve the substitute care by educating the community, speaking out about needed changes and providing support to youth who are or have been in substitute care.' Since the organization's founding in 1998, youth-driven advocacy has been at the core of SaySo's activities.

To contribute to non-profit SaySo, visit [saysoinc.org/donate](http://saysoinc.org/donate).

The N.C. Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions administers a statewide system of workforce programs that prepare North Carolina's citizens for employment and connect businesses to the talent they need. For more information, visit [nccommerce.com/workforce](http://nccommerce.com/workforce).

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## On Our Radar

- [NC Influencers want more jobs, skills training - but tariffs lurk over economy](#) (*Charlotte Observer*) - July 16

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## N.C. in the News

- [Army confirms Austin selected as site of Futures Command center](#) (*The Statesman*) - Austin, TX - July 12)
- [Cooper, Colorado governor tout outdoor recreation industry as 'unifying force'](#) (*Citizen-Times*) - Asheville - July 11)
- [Two manufacturers to add \\$23M investment, dozens of jobs in Charlotte region](#) (*Charlotte Business Journal*) - July 11)
- [Duke pushes solar at both distributed and utility-scale](#) (*PV Magazine*) - July 11)
- [America's Top States for Business 2018](#) (*CNBC*) - July 10)
- [Pitt County developing formula for pharma growth](#) (*Daily Reflector*) - Greenville - July 8)

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SYNC is North Carolina Commerce's electronic newsletter for local government officials, private-sector allies, state policy makers, and other economic development leaders. We offer unfiltered details about new economic development projects and events, useful news about your peers, and opportunities to synchronize with statewide programs and tools in

A [fact sheet about the Finish Line Grants program is available online.](#)

order to advance economic development in your community. [Send your story ideas to the editor.](#)

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