



NC DEPARTMENT
of COMMERCE
WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative**

State of North Carolina

Program Year 2018

Submitted December 31, 2019

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ROY COOPER
Governor
ANTHONY M. COPELAND
Secretary

December 31, 2019

Winston Tompoe, Acting Regional Administrator
Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor

Dear Mr. Tompoe:

We are pleased to present this Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative to the Department of Labor for Program Year 2018. This report represents the dedicated efforts of numerous professionals in the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions and our partners in the workforce system, which, in our state, we call "NCWorks."

In general, our state has experienced a tight labor market within the past year, with many employers struggling to fill positions. At the same time, state leaders have focused on developing a skilled workforce that responds to changing economic needs. Governor Roy Cooper has continued to implement his "NC Job Ready" workforce initiative, which 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 evolving industry needs, and local innovation to take great ideas and apply them statewide. The Division of Workforce Solutions plays an essential role in this initiative. Meanwhile, our state has also adopted an official educational attainment goal, which is likewise driven largely by the needs of employers. The goal is that 2 million 25- to 44-year-olds in our state will hold a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential by 2030. The NCWorks Commission, our statewide workforce development board, has endorsed that ambitious, but attainable, goal, while also aligning its strategic direction with Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready framework.

By overseeing and supporting WIOA Title I and III programs across our state, the Division of Workforce Solutions helps bring talent and businesses together. Sitting at the intersection of the private sector, the state and training providers, we are proud to play a key role in North Carolina's economic prosperity as we seek to be innovative and proactive, anticipating the needs of the future. We also aim to be customer-focused as we collaborate with North Carolina's 23 local workforce development boards and other partners who appreciate the connections between workforce development and economic development.

We value our strong relationship with the Department of Labor, and we appreciate this opportunity to report on how our agency is making a difference for North Carolina's jobseekers, employers and communities.

Linda Cheatham
Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions

I. Progress in achieving state goals/vision

State's Strategic Vision and Goals in the Unified Plan

North Carolina established a WIOA State Steering Council to coordinate and align policy among the agencies overseeing WIOA programs. This body continued to meet since the submission of the 2016 Unified State Plan, worked together on the 2018 plan modifications, and has a strong collaboration with the development of the 2020 Unified State Plan. The group continues its efforts on many of the items mentioned below, including sector strategies and system performance.

Sector Strategies

A key principle of Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative—NC Job Ready—is employer leadership, recognizing that employer-led workforce development programs have the best career outcomes. In line with the Governor's vision, one of the Division of Workforce Solutions' strategic goals is *Employer Leadership*. To further this vision, a cross-agency leadership team representing key workforce development, education, and economic development systems came together to clarify a state vision and strategy for building sustainable partnerships with business and industry across North Carolina's regions. The team is made up of key system leaders who share a commitment to working collaboratively to promote economic competitiveness and income mobility in North Carolina. Following the Next Gen Sector Partnership Academy, the state facilitated the launch of three separate sector strategies, two in Advanced Manufacturing and one in the Biotech industry.

Career Pathways

The NCWorks Commission, the board that oversees North Carolina's workforce development system, continues to support, promote and certify NCWorks Certified Career Pathways which are led at the local area level.

Business Engagement

In line with Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready workforce development initiative, the Division of Workforce Solutions collaborated with the NCWorks Commission to build a state level business engagement strategy to support Local Area efforts, which resulted in the development of the NCWorks Menu of Business Services tool in PY17. Since then, the Division of Workforce Solutions business services priority has been to foster the alignment of economic and workforce development, using WIOA's Effectiveness in Serving Employers Data Elements as guides.

DWS Business Services has hosted cross-training workshops for state economic developers to learn about and receive practical content for including workforce investment training dollars into their economic development recruitment, expansion and retention projects. A special emphasis has been on accessing untapped labor pools, specifically to integrate the Governor's Executive Order 92, which emphasizes the hiring of disabled jobseekers.

Additional emphasis on building the capacity for layoff aversion services and prioritizing small business applications for Work Opportunity Tax Credits has allowed us to be much more strategic in our proactive outreach and engagement with employers across the state. Increasing our employer penetration rate is a priority, and we have developed new reporting methods that accommodate employer-facing services not previously accounted for. There is further improvement needed, which will continue into PY20.

Work-based Learning activities

North Carolina is focusing on increasing the number of and improving the quality of work-based learning opportunities for individuals across the state. As part of a National Governors Association Policy Academy, North Carolina has established an interagency team that collected information on current work-based learning activities, developed an online tool (the “Navigator”) that helps people connect to work-based learning opportunities offered by businesses, and held a statewide summit to encourage more businesses to participate in work-based learning.

DWS supported these efforts by allocating resources for a permanent business services representative position on each local area workforce board staff. A portion of this staff person’s role is to proactively engage with businesses, provide valuable information and/or services, and encourage work-based learning as an option to increase the knowledge, skills and abilities of available talent. While the role of the Business Services Representative is multi-faceted, it is another avenue to greater collaborations with economic development, in that the representative offers work-based learning investment grants to economic development projects.

II. Progress in sector strategies and pathways

Sector Strategies

The Governor’s Office, in conjunction with the NCWorks Commission convened a cross-agency leadership team (NC State Sector Strategy Council) representing key workforce development, education, and economic development systems to clarify a state vision and strategy for building sustainable partnerships with business and industry across North Carolina’s regions. The team was made up of key system leaders who share a commitment to working collaboratively to promote economic competitiveness and income mobility in North Carolina.

The NC State Sector Strategy Council has developed a vision, identified what success will look like, and clarified the state’s role, as follows:

Vision

Grow good jobs and promote economic mobility for all North Carolinians by collaborating across education, workforce development and economic development programs to efficiently and effectively meet the needs of driving industry sectors ¹in North Carolina’s regional economies.

What Does Success Look Like?

The team identified what success would look like in deepening and strengthening partnerships with business and industry across North Carolina’s regions:

- A clear vision and understanding of the value-add of all partners.
- Develop cross-sectional goals to incentivize collaboration.
- Focus on business needs, not just what individual programs can offer.
- Don’t get caught in ownership and credit.
- Change how we do business, not “just another initiative.”

¹ To clarify, “...driving energy sectors” here means “directing support and resources to target/priority sectors.”

What is the State Role?

While sector partnerships are regional, in PY17 the council identified several specific ways that the state can create the right conditions to foster and support the development of strong partnerships with industry at a regional level. During PY18, the council validated these roles (below) and successfully supported the launch of three sector strategies.

- **Communicate a vision and help regions define their own roadmap to achieve that vision.** The state has a role to play in articulating and promoting a shared vision for aligning education, workforce development and economic development in order to grow good jobs and prepare North Carolinians for those jobs. The state can also help regions develop a customized plan of action without making decisions for them or mandating collaboration.
- **Create a framework with flexibility and customization built in.** A framework or “blueprint” from the state can help regions understand *how* to strengthen partnerships with industry. Coupled with customized technical assistance from the state level, this framework can help guide and support regions in building sustainable partnerships.
- **Spotlight and share what’s working.** Create opportunities for regions to learn from one another and replicate successful practices.
- **Encourage the development of broad-based, cross-agency regional teams.** In order to ensure that sector partnerships are not just a “workforce thing” or “education thing” or “economic development thing,” the group discussed who needs to be included in regional teams. State agencies have a role to play in encouraging each of these players to actively participate and contribute:
 - Community Colleges (Customized training leaders as well as Presidents)
 - K-12 CTE Directors
 - Regional Operations Directors
 - EDPNC Team
 - County-based economic developers
 - Workforce Development Board Directors
 - Career Pathway Facilitators
 - University system representatives

III. Waivers

North Carolina received a USDOL waiver of the required collection and reporting of performance-related data of all students participating in training programs listed on the state’s Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). The waiver was approved for PY2018- PY2019 (July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020).

IV. Performance System

Progress on Federal Primary Indicators of Performance

The table below gives an overview of the performance results for North Carolina’s Title I and III programs for Program Year (PY) 2018, with the state achieving over 100% of its negotiated goals for each of the primary indicators of performance. Measurable Skill Gains and Youth Median Earnings continue to be “baselined,” without goals set for performance comparison.

PY 2018 Levels of Performance

| Title/Program | | Measure | Negotiated Value | Actual Performance | Percentage of Goal Achieved |
|------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Title I | Adult | Employment Q2 | 70.0% | 79.6% | 113.71% |
| | | Employment Q4 | 70.0% | 75.8% | 108.29% |
| | | Median Earnings | \$4,800 | \$5,641 | 117.52% |
| | | Credential Rate | 51.0% | 56.3% | 110.39% |
| | | Measurable Skill Gains | | 43.6% | |
| | Dislocated Worker | Employment Q2 | 75.5% | 76.2% | 100.93% |
| | | Employment Q4 | 73.0% | 75.7% | 103.70% |
| | | Median Earnings | \$6,200 | \$7,070 | 114.03% |
| | | Credential Rate | 58.0% | 59.2% | 102.07% |
| | | Measurable Skill Gains | | 52.9% | |
| | Youth | Employment Q2 | 70.0% | 70.9% | 101.29% |
| | | Employment Q4 | 69.0% | 73.2% | 106.09% |
| | | Median Earnings | | \$2,860 | |
| | | Credential Rate | 51.0% | 53.4% | 104.71% |
| | | Measurable Skill Gains | | 41.4% | |
| Title III | Wagner-Peyser | Employment Q2 | 70.0% | 72.5% | 103.57% |
| | | Employment Q4 | 69.0% | 72.3% | 104.78% |
| | | Median Earnings | \$4,800 | \$4,943 | 102.98% |

North Carolina has made a concerted effort over the past few years to educate staff from around the state and at all organizational levels, about the primary indicators of performance. This training has included information on what the measures are, the cohorts of individuals involved, and how the measures are calculated, including the data sources. Significant focus has been placed on specific areas of our case management system where data entry impacts the accuracy of a measure. Going forward this training will continue, but with expanded scope to include the variables that impact such measures, regardless of whether they be participant, geographic, or economic characteristics.

Even with the state’s success in achieving performance beyond our negotiated goals, North Carolina recognizes the need to continue to increase our actual performance levels across all indicators, especially the percentage of individuals earning a credential during their participation in WIOA programs. To ensure workforce system staff are fully prepared to assist individuals in their path toward achieving a credential, our ongoing staff training has stressed the importance of TEGL 10-16 Change 1, with particular attention paid to what are acceptable credentials and the need for industry-related credentials. We acknowledge that there is further work to be done with our workforce boards, both in providing participants the support services needed to complete their training, as well as the need for more consistent and timelier follow-up. In order to capture credentials as soon as they are earned, quarterly follow-up with our participants is a necessity. We anticipate continued improvement in this measure moving into PY 2019.

We are also paying close attention to our median earnings figures for all programs, recognizing that increasing wages for participants is a key aspect of long-term economic stability. The North Carolina Department of Commerce Labor and Economic Analysis Division assists us in keeping track of earning projections information and updated unemployment data. While their forecast is for an overall increase in the number of jobs in the state moving into PY 2019, the majority of these jobs would fall into the lower end of the pay scale. This implies workers will be able to find employment, but that the jobs found may not be at a high enough pay level to promote economic self-sufficiency. Further, according to NC GS 96-14.3, North Carolina is currently paying unemployment benefits for a period of 12 weeks, based on the most recent seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 4.0%. Individuals who have been unemployed for 13 consecutive weeks, for any reason, are considered long-term unemployed in North Carolina, therefore making them eligible for the Dislocated Worker program. Workforce boards are increasingly using this category of eligibility to serve individuals who may previously have been served under the Adult program. The potential effect of doing so is a lowering of the skills and qualifications of those seeking employment and a commensurate decrease in the median wages earned for the Dislocated Worker program.

Another factor that will likely have an impact on our performance numbers is the continued reduction of the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate for North Carolina was 4.7% as of July 2017 and had decreased to 4.2% by June of 2018 (the time period of the exiter cohort for PY 2018 performance measures). The rate has continued to stay low, with the latest data available, that of November of 2019, showing a rate of 3.8%. While this is certainly positive news overall for workers, indicating an increased demand for employees by businesses in the state, it also suggests that those individuals seeking the services of a career center may be ones from harder-to-serve populations with increased barriers to earning a credential and employment.

Local Workforce Board Measures

As per the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) section 116 and NC General Statute 143B-438.10, the NCWorks Commission is responsible for developing performance accountability measures for local workforce development boards. The NCWorks Commission developed these measures in consultation with the local workforce development board directors and chairs to complement the WIOA federal primary indicators of performance for adult and youth training and employment. Local Workforce Development Boards and the NCWorks Commission work together to collect performance data in three main areas: Outreach & Engagement, Skills Gap, and Process measures. The resultant nine measures for local board performance reveal trends in outreach and engagement with individuals and businesses, training for adults and youth, and career center and career pathway certifications. New targets that were approved by the commission in February 2018 are now effective as of July 1, 2018.

Common Exit Policy

The U.S. Department of Labor requires that an individual's WIOA exit date be the date on which the last service, funded by the program or partner program, is received by the individual. When an individual has not received a documented WIOA or partner-funded service for 90 days, the case management system will "soft exit" the individual based on entries completed. North Carolina utilizes a common exit model whereby a participant is not exited (and therefore remains active in all programs) until such time as they have not received *any* service within the past 90 days from any program, be it Title I, Title III, or Trade Adjustment Assistance. Individuals who are participating in more than one program will have a single common exit date, following 90 days of inactivity across *all* program enrollments. Follow-up and support services do not qualify as activities that extend the exit date.

V. Effectiveness in Serving Employers performance indicator pilot

As part of the Effectiveness in Serving Employers performance indicator pilot, North Carolina has chosen to submit data for the Employer Penetration Rate and the Repeat Business Customer Rate. For PY 2018, employer service data was combined from the Title I and III programs along with data from Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation. When compared to the number of business establishments in the state during the second quarter of calendar year 2019 (using BLS data for the last quarter of the reporting period as given in the indicator specifications), the North Carolina workforce system served just under eleven percent (10.8%) of the state’s business establishments. When considering the Repeat Business Customer Rate since the start of performance under WIOA, just under thirty-nine percent (38.9%) of those businesses that were served by the system during PY 2018 had been served previously.

| Employer Measure | NC Workforce System PY 2018 |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Employer Penetration Rate | 10.8% |
| Repeat Business Customer Rate | 38.9% |

VI. Current or Planned Evaluation and Research Projects

Employer Needs Survey

Under direction from the NCWorks Commission, the NC Commerce Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) uses relevant data to inform strategies that enable North Carolina’s workforce and businesses to compete in a global economy. The 2018 Employer Needs Survey is an update to the 2014 and 2016 reports and is used to track the needs of employers over time, and to ensure that our workforce strategies meet those needs. Although hiring remains strong in North Carolina, with 43.3% of employers expecting hiring to increase in the future, half of those companies surveyed conveyed difficulty in hiring new staff.

The findings in the report support the key elements of the Governor’s NC Job Ready Initiative and his priorities for workforce development; skills and education attainment, employer leadership and local innovation.

A copy of the full report may be found at: <https://files.nc.gov/nccommerce/documents/files/2018-employer-needs-survey.pdf>.

VII. Customer Satisfaction

State’s approach to customer satisfaction

The NCWorks Customer Satisfaction Survey is an initiative to solicit feedback from individuals and businesses registered with NCWorks, in an effort to improve overall services offered, as well as to increase customer satisfaction. Results and feedback from the survey are used to determine and promote continuous quality improvement initiatives and make overall improvements to the one-stop system.

Survey Methodology

Two independent online customer satisfaction surveys were developed using a robust online survey platform, to obtain feedback from individuals and businesses that utilized one or more services (Online, Career Center, and Telephone) provided by NCWorks. The Initial Customer Experience Satisfaction Survey (ICISS) was developed to assess the initial customer experience of job seekers throughout the state of North Carolina. The Business Customer Satisfaction Survey (BCSS) was developed to assess business customers' needs and their satisfaction with the services received.

Sample questions on the survey included, *'In what ways have you used NCWorks services?'*, *'Tell us the reason(s) for your most recent website visit to NCWorks Online'*, *'How easy was it to use the automated phone system?'* and *'Based on your experience, how likely are you to recommend calling the NCWorks Career Center to others?'*.

Response

Online survey data collection took place between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019. In total, we received feedback from close to 30,000 job seekers and 9,000 business customers across all 23 local area workforce development boards.

Results

Job Seeker Survey Results.

- The top three reasons for using NCWorks included: job search, obtaining information on unemployment benefits, and job application. Of all respondents, 96% cited that NCWorks career center staff provided adequate service; 97% cited that staff took the time to listen to customer needs; and 93% received additional information, beyond their initial need, from staff.
- **NCWorks Online:** Job seekers identified specific areas of improvement: (a) increase access to NCWorks staff and resources without long wait times; (b) improve the ease NCWorks.gov navigation; (c) improve the NCWorks website; and (d) increase number and variety of jobs to match millennial skill sets and those available to higher level managers.
- **NCWorks Career Center:** Job seekers identified specific areas of improvement: (a) improve NCWorks.gov navigation assistance and career center computer equipment; (b) increase access to staff for face to face assistance, follow-up services and access to career center resources; and (c) reduce customer wait-time.
- **NCWorks Telephonic Service:** Job seekers identified specific areas of improvement: (a) ensure those answering the phones are trained on all services available; (b) decrease the wait-time for assistance; (c) improve the timeliness of follow up calls.

Business Survey Results

- Overall feedback was positive with 87% of respondents indicate NCWorks meets business needs; 93% indicate NCWorks provides useful services; 92% indicate that access to NCWorks technology is a benefit; and 91% indicate that the opportunity for NCWorks collaboration is a benefit.
- **NCWorks Online:** Business customers identified specific areas of improvement: (a) increase access to qualified applicants; and (b) improve NCWorks.gov online navigation
- **NCWorks Career Center:** Business customers identified specific areas of improvement: (a) improve NCWorks.gov online navigation; and (b) improved training in business services and outreach.

- NCWorks Staff: Business customers identified specific areas of improvement: (a) provide more consistent NCWorks.gov employer account assistance for job postings; and (b) increase opportunities for employer-employee engagement at NCWorks career centers (more job fairs).

Continuous improvement processes for incorporating the customer satisfaction feedback

Indicators from the survey showed that both jobseekers and businesses had an above average satisfaction level with services they received from NCWorks staff; both telephonically and within the career centers. The Division of Workforce Solutions continues to work with local area workforce development boards on joint training for center staff (the Facilitating Career Development course) and for local area business services representatives (the Business and Employer Professionals course); both hosted by the Division of Workforce Solutions.

As part of the state’s on-going Career Center certification process, local workforce area and career center management are required to monitor current survey outcomes and address improvement issues at the local level. Center management across the state also has continuous staff trainings which incorporate survey areas to sustain and improve.

Additionally, the Division of Workforce Solutions is developing a strategic plan that puts customer focus as a top priority, as well as incorporating a comprehensive review of the NCWorks.gov technology platform.

VIII. Wagner-Peyser

Reemployment Programs

The federally funded Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) and Employment Assessment Interview (EAI) programs are an integral part of North Carolina’s Integrated Service Delivery System to enhance and expand the capacity of the workforce system to improve reemployment service delivery to unemployment insurance (UI) claimants. The RESEA and EAI programs are statewide initiatives. Sixty-five (65) percent of first-pay claimants who are ranked most likely to exhaust benefits before employment, are referred to RESEA for services, while the remaining thirty-five (35) percent are referred to the EAI program.

RESEA

The intent of the RESEA program is to provide unemployment insurance (UI) claimants with an entry to a wide array of available resources that support reemployment. RESEA programs are designed to be an integral part of the state’s strategies for delivering reemployment services. The target populations for RESEA services include individuals who are identified as most likely to exhaust their UI benefits and transitioning veterans receiving Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Servicemembers (UCX).

EAI

EAI provides concentrated reemployment services to claimants receiving UI benefits. The EAI program is mandatory for persons receiving UI benefits and is a part of the NCWorks Career Center’s daily Integrated Services Delivery format. EAI claimants must be scheduled within four (4) weeks of their first payment of UI benefits for program services. For the period of July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019, 11,252 claimants were provided EAI services.

For both RESEA and EAI, key milestones for the year include:

- Ongoing program enhancement within NCWorks Online to streamline Career Center staff program processes and procedures, such as promotion and development of email/text appointment reminders to improve RESEA show-rates;
- Evaluating the profiling model used to select participants;
- Revising call-in letters to stress the importance and value of attending the reemployment service program;
- Providing translated call-in letters and other related documentation to assist claimants with limited English proficiency to understand program requirements and benefits; and
- Making reminder phone calls/emails when possible to reinforce the positive value of the service and to remind the customer of the appointment.

North Carolina Department of Commerce Reentry Initiative

The Reentry Initiative ensures job seekers with criminal records are provided assistance with overcoming barriers to employment. Initiative staff provide technical assistance and training to NCWorks Career Center staff who, in turn, provide direct services to former offenders, market the initiative to employers and community partners, participate in outreach efforts, and coordinate efforts with community partners.

The Reentry Initiative works to promote the Federal Bonding Program, which provides individual fidelity bonds to employers when they hire “at risk” job applicants who are, or may be, denied coverage by commercial carriers because of criminal history, poor work history, history of drug or alcohol abuse, or due to a dishonorable discharge from the military. DWS has doubled the number of bonds issued from the previous year, and has a plan in place to increase bonds issued in the upcoming year.

The recent passage of North Carolina House Bill 770 (Session Law 2019-91) will remove barriers to the Reentry population to obtain apprenticeship and other occupational licenses.

Older Worker Program

The program ensures older workers are provided with resources to assist them in seeking employment.

Equal Opportunity, Americans with Disabilities Act, Limited English Proficiency

DWS is responsible for ensuring Career Center and partner agency facilities have the capacity to provide a full range of employment and training services that are accessible to persons with disabilities, those with limited English proficiency, and other special populations.

IX. National Dislocated Worker Grants (NDWG)

North Carolina’s Hurricane Florence, Sector Partnership, and Reemployment and System Integration National Dislocated Worker Grants were in operation during Program Year 2018.

National Dislocated Worker Grant participants are often co-enrolled in the WIOA Dislocated Worker program in order to provide additional supportive services not offered through NDWG programs. National Dislocated Worker Grants have minimal impact on North Carolina’s established performance measures.

North Carolina’s Rapid Response unit works closely with local area staff to coordinate state rapid response activities with services offered through National Dislocated Worker Grants.

Hurricane Florence National Dislocated Worker Grant

The Hurricane Florence National Dislocated Worker Grant was awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor in the amount of up to \$18.5 million to provide employment opportunities to long-term unemployed and to participants who became unemployed as a result of the disaster. Employment opportunities were in the public or non-profit sectors and provided services related to disaster clean-up, debris removal, and office or administrative work related to the disaster.

The project involved hiring outreach workers for humanitarian efforts; warehouse workers for food banks and food distribution; office assistants to support the American Red Cross; and clerical assistants to support county health departments and DWS local offices. Workers were limited to working for up to 12 months or 2080 hours. More than 500 participants were served by this program.

The NCWorks Mobile Career Center, a mobile unit that provides Career Center services to customers and includes services to help survivors of natural disasters, was dispatched to hurricane-impacted counties to assist with the recruitment of grant participants who may not have had access to NCWorks Career Centers. The Mobile NCWorks Career Center also provided a safe environment in which to facilitate workshops.

Sector Partnership National Dislocated Worker Grant

The Sector Partnership National Dislocated Worker Grant (SP NDWG) was awarded in the amount of \$5,250,000 to support the State's existing efforts to meet employer needs and equip the workforce through NCWorks Certified Career Pathways. Certified Career Pathways are in high-demand occupations and help individuals become work ready in a shorter time period as they seek to reduce duplication of educational and work experience attainment. Employers benefited from participation in Certified Career Pathways by being able to create a pipeline of talent to meet their short- and long-term needs. Certified Career Pathways also benefited the educational and workforce development institutions that serve dislocated workers by providing a guided, sector strategy approach – with a regional focus – to provide classroom and work-based learning opportunities.

The SP NDWG provided funding to local and regional partners to ensure the certification of career pathways. Funds were used to provide assessments, career counseling and compensation for work-based learning opportunities. Additionally, administrative funds were used to provide resources for local and regional teams to administer the programs. The SP NDWG provided North Carolina another tool to incentivize the certification of career pathways statewide, further ensuring that dislocated workers navigating the pathways received the same level of high-quality career and educational opportunities anywhere in North Carolina. More than 500 participants were served by this program.

Reemployment and System Integration National Dislocated Worker Grant

The Reemployment and System Integration National Dislocated Worker Grant was awarded in the amount of \$834,230. Following a modification submitted by DWS during PY 2017 and approved by the U.S. Department of Labor during PY 2018, the Reemployment and System Integration grant was designed to streamline the provision of Labor Market Information (LMI) for the benefit of both customers (dislocated workers) and the NCWorks Career Center staff who assist them. DWS partnered with LEAD to obtain and import the relevant data.

The grant supported the purchasing of equipment, including touch-screen kiosks and printers, which present the user with simple, easy-to-read results. This equipment was installed at various NCWorks

Career Centers across the state after the end of PY 2017. New formatting of the LMI data allowed a faster display of career pathways that focus on high-growth, high-demand occupations, which can lead to reemployment. This also allowed staff to focus on transferable skills and real-time LMI so that they could assist customers in developing realistic, practical career paths.

X. Rapid Response

During Program Year 2018, the DWS Rapid Response unit, part of the agency's Business Services Section, responded to a total of 69 Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notifications (WARN) from across the state, which covered 8,481 employees. Overall, 4,273 employees or 50% worked for a company located in an economically distressed county. By county, those with the highest percentage of employees impacted were: Mecklenburg County (25%), followed by Pitt (10%), Wake (9%), Caldwell (8%) and Guilford (7%).

Over half of the worker dislocations during the year were attributed to permanent closures, with significant layoffs occurring in the manufacturing industry (59%), followed by transportation logistics (7%), retail (7%), and distribution (6%) industries.

The Rapid Response team engages with businesses to develop a comprehensive plan of action to ensure employees have a successful transition into new employment based upon sector strategies and career pathways. This is a proactive process, with services conveniently provided onsite at the business location that may include customized job seeking skills workshops, hiring events, targeted job fairs, health insurance information, and financial resources. The NCWorks Mobile Career Center, or "Mobile Unit," was dispatched over 137 times during the program year to assist with recovery from Hurricane Florence, business closures, hiring events and job fairs. The Mobile Unit also attended events for youth, homeless veterans, and people with disabilities.

Layoff Aversion

Layoff Aversion Task Force

In July 2017, the 20-member Layoff Aversion Task Force team completed the comprehensive plan for layoff aversion that meets the requirements within TEGL 19-16. The Task Force team named the document, "Saving Jobs in North Carolina: a Technical Assistance Guide for Layoff Aversion." The team consisted of:

- North Carolina Department of Commerce Regional Operations Directors
- Business Services Representatives
- Workforce Development Board Directors
- Economic Developers
- Community College Representative
- A representative from North Carolina State University
- Company Representatives – Union & Non-union

Business Edge Process

The name "Business Edge" was chosen as an alternative to "layoff aversion" in the hope that our communications efforts regarding the process would be perceived positively by companies. The Business Edge process was established and approved by senior leadership at the Department of Commerce.

During PY18, Business Edge heightened its purpose and its ability to penetrate companies and identify the challenges of those companies in distress. Various solutions were provided as a result of establishing key partnerships. Outlined below are key outcomes:

- The Business Edge message was delivered at several Workforce Development Boards (WDB's) during the year. Individual and group meetings with Directors and Business Services Representatives were held to enlighten them on the current state of the Business Edge process. One great experience was participation in the Triangle South WDB's annual retreat. Several business leaders/owners, university administrators and other workforce professionals were in attendance and relevant questions were asked and favorable comments expressed.
- In order to increase our capacity and ability to penetrate companies, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was executed between Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) and the Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC). DWS is funding 5 positions (Layoff Aversion Specialists) for a period of up to 3 years to focus exclusively on identifying clients for that meet the criteria for Business Edge. Training on the Business Edge process was delivered to the SBTDC team (Layoff Aversion Specialist and Center Directors) in early 2019. It was important to emphasize the role of the BSR's because each Board has established relationships with companies, and we want to encourage partnering.
- To ensure the Business Edge process had a solution provider, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was executed between Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) and North Carolina State University's Industry Expansion Solutions (IES). DWS will fund all the approved solutions delivered by IES. This partnership gives DWS the capability to become a service provider for operations/facility support throughout the state of North Carolina. Training on the Business Edge process was delivered to the IES team. They have staff throughout the state, so the local staff was present while others joined via Webinar. It was important to emphasize the role of the BSR's and the Layoff Aversion Specialists because they will be involved in the coordination of all IES services provided.
- DWS held a special presentation on Business Edge for our partners from the North Carolina Community College System that focused on providing customized training solutions for employees of companies regardless of size, industry or financial condition. The local community colleges are a valuable resource within our early warning network since they also can be a referral source.
- Business Edge has a very comprehensive ACCESS database that replaces the initial spreadsheet management tool. We now have the capability to print reports based on contacts made, leads, clients, etc. There are other features that can be helpful if needed. Our goal is to pilot Salesforce in 2020.
- AccessNC has been a great source for identifying companies in tier 1 and 2 counties that may need our services. The companies are being allocated by Board and by sectors – apparel, electrical, furniture and textiles.
- Employer penetration for PY 18 was 216 companies, of which Business Edge had 13 clients that we engaged with and 12 of them became projects. In other words, 13 clients entered phase 1, which is the Initial Local Assessment, and 12 of them progressed to phase 2, which is when they become a project.
- Based on the total number of employees at the 13 companies we assisted during PY 18, there was a potential savings of **\$4,481,400** to the Unemployment Insurance Trust fund.
- **1,067 jobs** have been saved as a result of Business Edge.

XI. Governor's Reserve

In line with one of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready key elements, skills and education attainment, DWS partnered with local area workforce development boards and community colleges on the Finish Line Grant initiative to help North Carolina's community college students address financial hardships that could otherwise prevent degree completion. As of the end of July 2019, DWS awarded just over \$1.3 million, for close to 2,000 Finish Line Grants to assist those students in the most need. Based on the success of this initiative, DWS is continuing the program in 2019.

DWS is also partnering with the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) to implement initiatives resulting in improved services to veterans and those employers supporting veterans. As part of the North Carolina for Military Employment (NC4ME) initiative, DWS conducts ten NC4ME Hiring Events across the state throughout the year. These entail veteran job seeker resume and interview preparation, job seeker skill set matching with employer needs, and on-site interviews during the hiring event. A supporting effort of this initiative is formal training for employer Human Resources Directors on interpreting/cross-walking service member skills into civilian parlance, and on the benefits of hiring veterans. DWS also partners with DMVA to publish the annual North Carolina Veterans Resource Guide as an all-encompassing reference for veterans and employers.

DWS is continuing its partnership with the Communities in Schools of North Carolina organization for the Career and College Readiness Initiative. This initiative focuses on eight communities, one in each of the state's Prosperity Zones, with two different models to help students in middle and high school prepare for both graduation and for a career. The high school model focuses on helping students achieve high outcomes in graduation and employment rates, resulting in increased college access and completion. In addition, College and Career Specialists are trained to prepare students to achieve academic, career and life successes. In addition to the high school model, the program supports six middle schools offering the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) system, which is dedicated to close the achievement gap while equipping students with the skills necessary to succeed academically and socially.

XII. Promising practices/lessons learned/success stories

Examples of success are found in the recipients of the 2019 Governor's NCWorks Awards of Distinction, which recognize outstanding accomplishments and contributions related to workforce development.

NCWorks Awards were presented to the following recipients:

- **Regina Durham of Raleigh: Outstanding Adult.** Durham persevered through serious health issues to obtain employment and training with help from her local NCWorks Career Center. After exhausting her unemployment insurance, Durham recognized that to become reemployed in her field, interior design, she would need additional training, but she would need to find a job to support herself at the same time. Juggling medical treatments and job interviews, Durham completed her computer-aided design training and secured full-time employment in the same month.
- **Amy Bryan of Swansea, S.C.: Outstanding Young Adult.** In order to obtain education and career training, Bryan enrolled at the Oconaluftee Job Corps center in Cherokee. There, she excelled in the Forestry Conservation & Firefighting vocational training program and completed her high school education. Bryan's extensive training continued at Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania and Uwharrie National Forest in North Carolina, which resulted in her being accepted into the Savannah River USDA Forest Service program in South Carolina. Her

performance there led to a full-time Forestry Technician position with the federal government. Bryan's hard work and tenacity allowed her to graduate from Job Corps and start a career with opportunities for continued growth.

- **Jordan Shoffner of Asheboro: Outstanding Teen.** Shoffner, a participant in the NCWorks NextGen youth program in Randolph County, has experienced homelessness, but that has not kept him from pursuing his education and career goals. He completed his high school equivalency diploma at Randolph Community College and a work experience program with the local Habitat for Humanity ReStore at the same time. Always willing to help others, Shoffner continues to be actively involved with leadership activities hosted by the NextGen program and in community service. While currently working part-time, he plans to continue his education through the Electrical Lineman program at Forsyth Technical Community College.
- **Karen Rowe of Clayton: Wayne Daves Award for Outstanding Achievement in Workforce Development.** Rowe serves as a Talent Engagement Career Advisor at the NCWorks Career Center in Johnston County. Committed to reaching beyond the Career Center doors to serve customers, Rowe has implemented strategies and built strong community partnerships, including with the Cambridge House, which serves women in recovery. She has also volunteered to work with the domestic violence shelter and as the center's Reentry subject matter expert. Rowe pioneered an innovative use of tablet devices to better assist customers, which has since been adopted by all centers overseen by the Capital Area Workforce Development Board.
- **Tribal Employment Rights Office of Cherokee: Outstanding Employer.** The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO) works with tribe members who are battling drug and alcohol addiction or who have been involved with the criminal justice system. The organization supports clients by providing employability skills, mentoring, mental health services and job placement, including the possibility of one-year internships. TERO partners with several local businesses to provide employment opportunities for clients and is a certified Working Smart training provider through Southwestern Community College. Active in supporting the community, TERO also hosts job fairs and promotes health and wellness.
- **W.I.N. Partnership: Workforce Innovation Nextgeneration of Cabarrus County: Outstanding Innovative Partnership.** Wayne Brothers, Inc., a leader in the construction industry, has formed the W.I.N. partnership with Centralina Workforce Development Board's NCWorks NextGen services program and the Kannapolis City Schools. The workforce development board and the school system support Wayne Brothers' pre-apprenticeship program, which provides high school students with a chance to learn in the classroom and gain hands-on experience that will prepare them for their careers. The partnership seeks to meet the talent needs of the local construction industry, provide a diverse workforce, and respond to changes in economic conditions, skills and employment opportunities. Students who complete all requirements of the program are guaranteed an offer of employment after they graduate from high school.