



**NC Modification for
Local Area Workforce Development
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
Title I Plans**

July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

Introduction and Instructions

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires each Local Area Workforce Development Board (WDB) to develop and submit, in partnership with the chief local elected official, a comprehensive four-year plan. Four-Year Plans were submitted in May 2020.

In North Carolina, annually, each Local Area WDB, in consultation with the chief local elected official, is to provide updates to the Comprehensive Four-Year Plan. The WIOA Program Year (PY) 2022 Plan is to provide current information and be effective July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023 and will include required current local policies. The Local Area Plan will support the alignment strategy described in the 2020-2024 NC Unified State Plan in accordance with WIOA Section 102(b)(1)(E), and otherwise be consistent with the NC Unified State Plan. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper's mission is to ensure North Carolinians are better educated, healthier, and have more money in their pockets so that they can live more abundant, purposeful lives. The cornerstone to achieving this goal is to help people get good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families. Through NC Job Ready, Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative, North Carolina is working to build a stronger and better workforce. NC Job Ready is built on three core principles: education and skills attainment are the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce; an employer-led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job ready workforce; and local innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system. In addition, Local Area WDBs shall comply with WIOA Section 108 in the preparation and submission of the plan.

Through its strategic planning efforts, the NCWorks Commission developed a vision and mission for North Carolina's Workforce System. This vision is to build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy. The mission of the state's workforce development system is 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.

Federal and State Requirements for Local Administration of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Local Area WDBs should reference the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Public Law 113-128, enacted July 22, 2014. Additional information is available at the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration website: www.doleta.gov.

North Carolina policy information is available at <https://www.nccommerce.com/jobs-training/workforce-professionals-tools-resources/workforce-policies>. Local Area WDBs should reference the North Carolina [WIOA Unified State Plan](#).

Local Area Plan Submission and Due Date

The Local Area Plan must be submitted through Workforce Information System Enterprise (WISE), the Division's web-based financial system. The due date is **May 6, 2022**. Each attachment must be submitted and labeled separately in either Word, Excel, or PDF format. Attachments not submitted separately will not be accepted. Forms requiring original signatures may use DocuSign® (or similar) and may be uploaded in WISE. If original signatures are obtained, forms must be mailed (and uploaded in WISE) to the Local Area WDB's assigned Planner at: N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions, 4316 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4316.

I. Local Area WDB Overview

The Local Area WDB Overview provides important contact information that is used throughout the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS). It is important that this section remain current during the Program Year. Updates should be submitted to the Local Area WDB's assigned DWS Planner when changes occur.

In the first section and anywhere else in the Local Area Plan, please include the appropriate salutation along with Titles such as Dr., The Honorable, Chairperson, and Judge. Thank you.

1. Provide the Local Area WDB's official (legal) name as it appears on the local Consortium Agreement established to administer the WIOA or, if not a Consortium, in the formal request for Local Area designation.

The Local Area's legal name is the High Country Workforce Development Board.

The local consortium is the High Country Workforce Consortium.

- If the Local Area is a Consortium, attach a copy of the current Consortium Agreement. Name document: Local Area WDB Name Consortium Agreement.

See High Country Consortium Agreement.

- If the Local Area is not a Consortium, attach a copy of the formal request for Local Area designation. Name document: Local Area WDB Name Local Area designation letter.

2. Provide the Local Area WDB's official name.

- If the Local Area WDB officially changed its name, please attach a copy of the Status of Incorporation, attorney's letter, or other document.

High Country Workforce Development Board

3. Provide the name, title, organization name, address, phone number, and email address of the Local Area WDB Director.

Name: Ms. Misty Bishop-Price	Title & Salutation: Director
Organization: High Country WDB	Address: 468 New Market Blvd. Boone, NC 28607
Phone number: 828-265-5434, ext. 119	Email address: misty.bishopprice@highcountrywdb.com

4. Provide the name, elected title, local government affiliation, address, phone number, and email address of the Local Area WDB's Chief Local Elected Official (CLEO).

Name: Mr. G. Keith Elmore	Elected Title & Salutation: County Commissioner
Government: Wilkes County	Address: 124 Old Cotton Mill Place Roaring River, NC 28669
Phone number: 336-651-7346	Email address: kelmore@wilkescounty.net

5. Provide the name, title, business name, address, phone number, and email address of the individual authorized to receive official mail for the CLEO, if different than question 3.

Name: same as above	Title & Salutation:
Business Name:	Address:
Phone number:	Email address:

6. Provide the name, address, phone number and email address of the Administrative/Fiscal Agent responsible for disbursing Local Area WIOA grant funds. This is the entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds. [WIOA Sections 107(d)(12)(B)(i)(III) and 108(b)(15)].

Name: Ms. Julie Wiggins	Title & Salutation: Executive Director
Organization: High Country Council of Governments	Address: 468 New Market Blvd. Boone, NC 28607
Phone number: 828-265-5434, ext 125	Email address: jwiggins@hccog.org

7. Provide the name, title, organization name, address, phone number and email address of the Administrative/Fiscal Agent's signatory official.

Name: Ms. Julie Wiggins	Title & Salutation: Executive Director
Organization: High Country Council of Governments	Address: 468 New Market Blvd. Boone, NC 28607
Phone number: 828-265-5434, ext. 125	Email address: jwiggins@hccog.org

8. Attach a copy of the Administrative Entity/Fiscal Agent's organizational chart with an 'effective as of date'. Name document: Administrative Entity Name Organizational Chart.

See High Country Council of Governments Organization Chart.

9. Provide the Administrative Entity's Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and assurance that the 'System for Award Management' (SAM) status is current. Administrative Entities must register at least annually on the SAM website www.sam.gov to receive Federal funding [required by Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Section 4.11 and Section 52.204-7].

DUNS# 136098337

Expiration Date: February 9, 2023

10. Provide the name of the Local Area WDB's Equal Opportunity Officer who shall be responsible for assuring that discrimination does not occur in its programs or projects. (CPS 10-2021)

Rebecca Bloomquist

Composition of the Local Area WDBs shall comply with WIOA Section 107. Local Area WDB Membership Requirements have been provided as a reference at [Appendix C](#).

11. Provide each Local Area WDB members' name, business title, business name and address, phone number and email address on the provided form. The first block is reserved to identify the Local Area WDB chairperson ([form provided](#)). Indicate all required representation and indicate if vacant. [WIOA Section 107(b)(2)]. Name document: Local Area WDB Name Board List.

See High Country WDB List.

Note: Please complete the entire form. Check the block on the form provided certifying compliance with required WIOA Local Area WDB business nomination process.

If a Local Area WDB list is not in compliance, please provide the current list and state the expected date that a compliant list will be provided (detailing vacant positions).

Use and identify categories as indicated on the form. Do not change required category names except to clarify those with multiple categories and do not count those names twice. Identify any names representing a dual category with an asterisk (*).

12. Briefly describe how the Local Area WDB works with local elected officials to ensure viable local business representatives are appointed to the Local Area WDB in compliance with WIOA Section 107.

Per the HCWDB By-Laws, "Members are appointed from among individuals nominated by local groups such as chambers of commerce; economic development commissions; business trade associations; education agencies; vocational education institutions; community-based organizations; higher educational institutions; private/proprietary schools; state and/or local labor organizations; and other interested organizations."

These nominations are reviewed with local elected officials in addition to any recommendations they have. The HCWDB Director has these discussions with the appropriate Consortium and county commissioner members to review board requirements for service.

The Chief Local Elected Official must establish by-laws consistent with applicable local procedures, state, and federal laws to include WIOA Final Rules and Regulations 679.310(g). The Local Area WDB shall submit by-laws that clearly demonstrate all WIOA and North Carolina required elements described in [Appendix A](#). Additional by-laws guidance/template and electronic meeting formats have been provided in [Appendix B](#).

13. Attach the Local Area WDB By-laws including date adopted/amended. By-laws must include the required elements found in [Appendix A](#). Name document: Local Area WDB Name By-laws.

See High Country WDB By-Laws.

14. To demonstrate that the attached Local Area WDB By-laws comply, complete [By-Laws Required Elements – Crosswalk chart](#).

See High Country WDB By-Laws Required Elements Crosswalk.

Sunshine Provision - The Local Area WDB shall make available to the public, on a regular basis through electronic means and open meetings, information regarding the activities of the Local Area WDB, including information regarding the Local Area Plan prior to submission of the Local Area Plan, and regarding membership, the designation and certification of one-stop operators, and the award of grants or contracts to eligible providers of youth workforce investment activities, and on request, minutes of formal meetings of the Local Area WDB. [WIOA Section 107(e)]

15. Describe how the Local Area WDB will make copies of the proposed Local Area Plan available to the public. If stating the Local Area Plan will be on the Local Area WDB website, provide link. [WIOA Section 108(d)]

The plan will be posted on the HCWDB's website for at least 30 days prior to June 30, 2022. The High Country COG (the Board's fiscal agent) distributes a weekly newsletter to all the member governments in the region. An announcement will be included in the weekly newsletter during the public comment period to include a link to the plan on the Board's website. The High Country COG's website will also be used to solicit public comments by either posting the plan on its website or providing a link to the plan on the Board's website.

Public Comment - The Local Area WDB shall make copies of the proposed Local Area Plan available to the public through electronic and other means, such as public hearings and local news media; allow for public comment not later than the end of the 30-day period beginning on the date the proposed Local Area Plan is made available; and, include with submission of the Local Area Plan any comments that represent disagreement with the Local Area Plan. [WIOA Section 108(d)]

16. Attach a copy of the Local Area WDB’s organizational chart with an ‘effective as of date.’ Include position titles. Name document: Local Area WDB Name Organizational Chart.

See High Country WDB Organization Chart.

17. Complete the following chart for the PY2022 Local Area WDB’s planned meeting schedule to include time, dates, and location. *[Expand form as needed]*

Note: All Local Area WDB meetings shall be held in accessible facilities. All materials and discussions should be available in an accessible format upon request as indicated under North Carolina specific requirements detailed in [Appendix A](#).

Date	Time	Location (include address and room #)
July 14, 2022	2:30 PM	HCCOG 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 Executive Board Room <i>unless the meeting is held virtually on Zoom.</i>
September 8, 2022	2:30 PM	HCCOG 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 Executive Board Room <i>unless the meeting is held virtually on Zoom.</i>
November 10, 2022	2:30 PM	HCCOG 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 Executive Board Room <i>unless the meeting is held virtually on Zoom.</i>
January 12, 2023	2:30 PM	HCCOG 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 Executive Board Room <i>unless the meeting is held virtually on Zoom.</i>
March 9, 2023	2:30 PM	HCCOG 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 Executive Board Room <i>unless the meeting is held virtually on Zoom.</i>
May 11, 2023	2:30 PM	HCCOG 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 Executive Board Room <i>unless the meeting is held virtually on Zoom.</i>

18. Attach a copy of the signed 'Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and other Responsibility Matters – Primary Covered Transactions' ([form provided](#)). [Required by the Regulations implementing Executive Order 12549, Debarment and Suspension, 2 CFR 180, participants' responsibilities.] Name document: Local Area WDB Name Certification Form.

[See High Country WDB Debarment Form.](#)

Note: Document must have the original signature or DocuSign® (or similar) of the Administrative Entity signatory official. If using original signatures, mail the signed [Certification form](#) to the assigned DWS Planner at N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions, 4316 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4316.

19. Submit the original Local Area WDB and Chief Local Elected Official (CLEO) Signatory Page ([form provided](#)), bearing the original signatures of the Chief Local Elected Official(s) and the Local Area WDB Chairperson, and attach a copy of the signed document if not using DocuSign® (or similar). Name document: Local Area WDB Name Signatory Page.

[See High Country WDB Signatory Page.](#)

Note: If using original signatures, mail the [Signatory Page](#) to the assigned DWS Planner at N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions, 4316 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4316.

II. Local Area WDB Strategic Planning

The Local Area WDB is required to keep the Local Area Plan up to date and fluid as events and funding changes occur which may require local area responses. Local Area Plans will require an annual modification. North Carolina has implemented integrated services delivery with an enhanced emphasis on regional planning and services. This approach is consistent with federal, state, and regional initiatives and opportunities. North Carolina's workforce development system includes businesses, organizations, agencies, employed and unemployed persons, training and educational institutions, adults, and youth. To enhance services to all constituents, aligning workforce development planning and services with regional labor markets is both effective and productive. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper's NC Job Ready Initiative is built on three core principles: education and skills development are the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce; an employer-led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job ready workforce; and local innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system.

Locally, WDBs are creatively working to address the new challenges of job growth and expansions. Employers in Local Area WDB areas continue to have a shortage of lower-wage, entry-level and middle-skilled level workers. As a Local Area WDB and workforce system, Local Area WDBs are leveraging resources and engaging in new partnerships that include the business community, economic developers, chambers of commerce, NCWorks Career Centers, community colleges, public schools, and community partners. Working together, Local Area WDBs are paving the way for an even stronger economy through sector partnerships and career pathways initiatives.

1. Provide a description of the Local Area WDB's strategic vision and goals for preparing an industry-driven, educated and skilled workforce, including youth and individuals with barriers to employment. Include goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance and how it aligns with regional economic growth, industry sectors, and economic self-sufficiency. [WIOA Section 108(b)(1)(E)]

The High Country Workforce Development Board's strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce including youth and individuals with barriers to employment is to evaluate, enhance, and expand services by following the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) because it is the federal law that governs the state, local governments, and workforce board funding and policy development. The High Country WDB will continuously evaluate and enhance all workforce services in our workforce area based on meeting the needs of jobseekers and employers. The expansion and increase of services will be determined and possible with increase of workforce funding and workforce allocations.

The High Country WDB will continue to foster new and existing partnerships at the federal, state, and local level while promoting the High Country WDB/NCWorks Career Centers and workforce services. The High Country WDB will continue to advocate at the federal, state, and local government for policies that will enhance efforts of the High Country WDB being in compliance with the federal requirements of WIOA.

The High Country WDB will continue to expand and adapt organizational capacity to meet local and regional needs by helping employers meet their workforce needs, and help individuals build careers, strengthen the local economy while meeting the challenges of global competition. Therefore, by using such workforce programs as on-the-job training, work experience, and

dislocated worker funding allows the High Country WDB to prepare and educate youth and individuals with barriers to employment, because these programs enhance the skills and education level that prepares them for jobs in the workforce and the global economy and allows the individuals to attain certifications and credentials that will lead to successful and gainful employment.

Employment and training activities carried out via the NCWorks Career Centers will be in alignment with the primary indicators of performance as we strive to increase credential and skill attainment while assisting customers enter and retain employment opportunities.

2. Provide a description of how the Local Area WDB, working with the entities carrying out core programs, will expand access to employment, training, education and supportive service for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment. Include how the Local Area WDB will facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs, and improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential including a credential that is an industry-recognized certificate or certification, portable, and stackable. Include how these strategies will be a result of regional economic and employer-driven priorities. [WIOA Section 108(b)(3)]

The High Country WDB and WIOA service providers, continue to have dialogue with Adult Basic Education services within our local community colleges to increase partnering to serve those that have low basic skills or pursuing their GED/diploma so they may pursue additional educational opportunities and/or enter the workforce. To assist in serving and dual enrolling students, staff often attend student orientations to provide information regarding center services and enrollment. Students completing their GED/diploma are provided with guidance on continuing their education and gaining employment.

Locally, the WDB/provider staff is partnering closely with the local K-12 school systems, especially superintendents, high school principals, and CTE staff where appropriate for outreach and career pathways. Historically, the WDB has partnered with the local community action agencies for the purpose of targeting low income individuals for skill upgrading and placement into employment. It is anticipated that this partnership will increase to achieve the goals of reaching this population. In addition, local partnerships have been established with the regional local homeless shelter to provide job readiness and job search skills to those who are ready to transition from the shelter to full-time residency.

Board and career center partnerships with local Vocational Rehabilitation staff have been close, resulting in dual enrollments to meet customer needs when appropriate. A recent regional meeting between Vocational Rehabilitation and service providers resulted in renewing connections and discussion of potential new referrals. Mike Birkmire, Unit Manager at VR, serves as the local VR representative on the High Country Workforce Development Board for the region. WDB and Center staff regularly participate in community partner meetings to address services and needs of the community. This has resulted in partnership with Wilkes Recovery Revolution to partner on services related to employment for those in recovery and the implementation of the Recovery Friendly Workplace initiative in Wilkes with potential to expand in surrounding counties. Also in partnership with Commerce Re-entry services, we have been hosting expungement workshops for the community.

The WDB has completed the certification of career pathways in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and human services as they continue to be identified as in-demand sectors in the High Country. Staff recently participated in a Career Pathways training to increase their knowledge and application of information as part of case management services. Service providers present regular updates on the delivery of services during the WDB meetings and provide opportunities for board members to engage in questions and information sharing regarding priorities.

Career Center staff and WDB staff regularly engage with local businesses and economic developers through various chamber events and locally-focused (which could include additional geographic areas) task forces, councils, and meetings. In addition, the WDB Director regularly speaks to the High Country Council of Governments (COG) Executive Board and its representative from the seven-county region who provide feedback and insight on needs and initiatives from their respective counties. The High Country WDB serves as the Advisory Committee for the High Country COG Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), a guide for establishing regional goals and objectives, developing and implementing a regional plan of action, and identifying investment priorities and funding sources. Stakeholder meetings are held within the region with business, government, and economic development. All of these interactions and engagements coupled with regular reviews of local labor market data provide the foundation that informs the creation of the Local Area's strategies so that they are economic and employer-focused from inception.

3. Describe the Local Area WDB's use of **each** of the following initiatives: incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, customized training programs, industry and sector strategies, career pathways initiatives, layoff aversion, utilization of effective business intermediaries, and other employer services and strategies, designed to meet the needs of employers in the corresponding region in support of the regional strategy to meet the needs of businesses. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(4)(B)]

Having increased opportunities in Work Based Learning services is an enhancement to job seekers and employers. Work Based Learning opportunities increases opportunities for employers to provide skills upgrades, reduce the cost of training, and assist job seekers and/or incumbent workers with skills needed to remain successfully employed. Reduced training costs for employers allows them to be more productive by increasing skills needed to perform the job. Job seekers who learn additional skills are more employable and more likely to earn self-sustaining wages. The Work Based Learning services align with the NC Job Ready initiative of the Governor. The process that the WDB uses to promote and encourage Work Based Learning, On-the Job Training's and training is shared through engagement with the local Economic Development Commissions, local community colleges workforce development staff, as well as outreach from our business services staff in the local NCWorks Career Center.

4. Provide a description of how the Local Area WDB coordinates workforce investment activities—including strategies, enhancing services, promoting participation in training programs, and avoiding duplication of services - carried out in the Local Area with the provision of Adult Education and Literacy activities. [WIOA Section 108(b)(13)]

The WDB continues to build and partner with Adult Education to integrate education and training as part of provided services and to avoid duplication of services. This is done via center staff working closely and staying connected with Adult Education, and in some counties, have incorporated set scheduled time to spend within Adult Education to outreach to students and attend student orientation sessions. Other coordinated services may include referrals to other services or assistance with testing fees to assist in credential completion and avoid duplication of testing. This partnership results in students being dually enrolled in WIOA programs as suitable. Frequently, staff from both Adult Education, NCWorks, and the WDB are in joint partner or regional meetings where updates are provided and events are coordinated.

The WDB also reviews the local Adult Education proposal for services for the High Country area.

Workforce Development Alignment Summary for Caldwell, Mayland, and Wilkes Community Colleges

Board staff and Adult Education partners recently discussed regional needs and alignment strategies for the upcoming year to include a joint training session with center staff on the types of services available within Adult Education. With quality service to clients and students as the undergirding motivation for all of the partners, the group decided upon the following broad priorities and alignment activities on which to focus.

Goal 1: Improve service delivery in the One-Stops

- Continue referrals between agencies and continue to streamline the process for students, to share information, to avoid repetitious paperwork and to make tracking more efficient.
- Use similar tools for student intake, development, and assessment to allow sharing and consistency among partners (Such as “Working Smart” curriculum for soft skills and sharing of student assessments).
- Conduct regular cross-training for staff of NCWorks and Adult Education so that clients can receive accurate information from either source for a more fluid process with a goal to have two regional meetings per year along with ongoing local county meetings throughout the year.

Goal 2: Improve outreach and service to employers

- Understand and utilize each other’s work on career pathways to support training programs aligned with employer needs.
- Strengthen the partnership with the Business Services team to share information and market services and college training programs and align work-based learning opportunities when appropriate
- Coordinate services to identify On-the-Job Training, work experience, and apprenticeship programs as appropriate for employers and customers
- Align resources and tools for Labor Market Information to assist staff and students with informed decisions.

Goal 3: Engage the region's youth

- Maintain the MOU agreements between public schools, NCWorks and Adult Basic Education to coordinate efforts to serve dropouts, disconnected youth and graduates who are basic skills deficient.
- Convene regular meetings to facilitate communication between partners at the county level to remain engaged in program/staff changes and better serve customers.

Each local plan for Caldwell, Mayland, and Wilkes Community Colleges addresses our program's plans to provide Adult Education and Literacy Activities, including responses to our strategies for instructional practices, ensuring student engagement, offering transitional support, providing professional development to staff, engaging in continuous improvement measures, and aligning our services with those of the other WIOA partners.

Debbie Woodard, Dean of College Readiness at Wilkes Community College serves as the adult literacy representative on the High Country Workforce Development Board for Caldwell, Mayland, and Wilkes Community Colleges. She has served on the board since July 2015. Mike Birkmire, Unit Manager at VR, serves as the local VR representative on the High Country Workforce Development Board for the region.

5. Provide a description of cooperative agreements, as defined in WIOA Section 107(d)(11), between the Local Area WDB and other local entities described in Section 101(a)(11)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)(B)) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of service to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts to include cooperation, collaboration, and coordination. [WIOA Section 108(b)(14)]

The Local Area consistently emphasizes to our service providers the need to serve customers with disabilities. Past regional Career Center meetings have included short presentations, and Career Center management teams review information and videos made available through Vocational Rehabilitation. Historically, Career Center partners have been invited to the Equal Opportunity training held by the Local Area for service providers. Marketing efforts are always inclusive of persons with disabilities. It is common to co-enroll customers being served through Vocational Rehabilitation to meet these customers' needs. The WDB's regional representative for Vocational Rehabilitation serves on the Board and has become directly involved in many of the centers around the region as well as engaging in community partner meetings. His presence and attention always raises the awareness of center staff about serving customers with disabilities. Some career centers have Vocational Rehabilitation staff onsite (typically part-time) to assist with referrals and placements.

The WDB recently (March 2022) coordinated a regional joint meeting with service providers and VR staff for information sharing on services and referrals – whether potential participants or business customers.

The High Country WDB's Memorandum of Understanding directly references methods of referrals in Section VI:

"Methods to ensure the needs of workers and youth, and individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, are addressed in the provision of necessary and appropriate access to services, including access to technology and materials, made available through the one-stop delivery system. Partners will utilize methods of referrals of individuals between one-stop operators and one-stop partners for appropriate services and activities."

The High Country WDB's Memorandum of Understanding also addresses cooperation among partners and how they work with employers in Section III (G):

"Coordinate business services activities and employer visits with other center and local partners providing those services to local businesses."

There are currently no specific cooperative agreements with employers.

6. Provide a brief description of the actions the Local Area WDB will take toward becoming or remaining a high-performing Local Area WDB, consistent with the factors developed by the NCWorks Commission. [WIOA Section 108(b)(18)]

The High Country Workforce Development Board will take the following actions toward becoming or remaining a high-performing Board, consistent with the factors developed by the NCWorks Commission:

- The High Country WDB will continue to outreach to jobseekers, employers, agency partners, stakeholders, and elected officials on the local state and federal level to promote the Board and make the public aware of its existence and all of the services available to help meet the needs of jobseekers and employers/business and industry.
- The High Country WDB outreach will include providing staff assisted services to a percentage of the labor force to ensure we are meeting the needs of our customers. We will also provide a staff-assisted service to private businesses in the counties served by the Local Area and to private businesses that are new customers; however, this may not always be possible because new businesses and industries are not always opening or locating in the region.
- The High Country WDB will always reach out and serve small businesses with fewer than 100 employees because they are a vital part of our economy and employ people in our communities that keeps our local workforce viable. Therefore, the High Country Workforce Development Board will provide private businesses with staff-assisted services to businesses with fewer than 100 employees.
- The High Country Workforce Development Board is working on improving the Skills Gap in our area by providing classroom training, on-the-job training, and/or standardize training services to the adult participants to ensure we are developing a qualified highly skilled workforce to meet the needs of employers and business/industry. The WDB will strive to enroll youth in the WIOA youth program in a work-based learning activity to help develop and sustain a skilled trained workforce to meet the needs of business and industry.

- The High Country Workforce Development Board has created three NCWorks Certified Career Pathways in the area of Healthcare, Advance Manufacturing, and Human Services because these were the high demand employment areas with employers in our region. We will continue to develop and support these areas because this is where the job growth and demand to hire employees exist. These pathway areas strengthen the economy by paying a sustainable living wage; expanding jobs; and creating employment opportunities for jobseekers.
- The High Country Workforce Board will have 100% of our comprehensive NCWorks Careers Centers certified by the NCWorks Commission to ensure we are providing workforce services in compliance with state and federal guidelines to ensure services and needs of the citizens of North Carolina are being met.

7. Explain the strategic plan for how the region will respond to national emergencies (such as the Covid-19 pandemic) or weather disasters to serve victims (such as aversion activities) and utilize special grants efficiently throughout the recovery period.

While being at the western end of NC typically does not have us seeing widespread hurricane disasters, the recent COVID-19 pandemic is requiring us to take action in ways we have never had to respond. In response to the national emergency of COVID, we have increased the use of virtual services via online and telephone. Remote services have allowed us to continue to provide services, employment reviews, and virtual workshops during a time of limited face-to-face opportunities. Staff received the necessary equipment to continue services, and we are more prepared for future response if necessary. Should special grants become available, High Country would evaluate local needs and implementation process to utilize efficiently.

8. Discuss the increase and expansion of service delivery and awareness efforts to reengage individuals with barriers (include dislocated workers, disconnected youth/high school dropouts, women, people of color in hard to reach communities, individuals with disabilities) to help reconnect the disconnected workforce. More importantly, clarify how success is measured.

NCWorks staff continuously engage with partners and community events in an effort to engage all populations to include advertising services, faith based partnerships, and memberships in DEI groups. Expanded efforts include a partnership with Wilkes Recovery Revolution. This partnership has created additional referrals and services for our customers, and training opportunities for staff. Efforts include the following:

- Dislocated workers: recruitment and referrals through EAI appointments and those seeking assistance with unemployment
- Disconnected youth/dropouts: College learning labs, teen crisis centers, connections with dropout prevention staff and school committees
- Women: recruit and present services to classes tied to vocations that are predominantly women (nursing, human services); pregnancy centers and other organizations that serve women
- People of color: community service organizations, health departments, DSS, promotion to community leaders of color
- Individual with disabilities: recruit and partner with Vocational Rehabilitation

Success is measured by increased awareness of our workforce services and an increase in the number of individuals with barriers using our services and coming into the NCWorks Career Center. Success also occurs if an individual with barriers receives services from our community agency partners. For example, NCWorks staff conduct Working Smart classes at Eckerd Connects (court mandated housing for young males who are justice involved). Upon completion of the 24 hour course participants receive a certificate of completion, which can build a positive foundation on which the pursuit of education or career can be built.

9. Provide an overview of how the region partners with NC Community Colleges, UNC institutions, and independent colleges in the local areas to prepare workers to succeed by using skills and education attainment with a focus on equity and inclusion.

Customers are made aware of the various training providers in the area and across the state as requested. Staff assist as appropriate with enrolling, financial aid, and program awareness. In general, the majority of training and education attainment occurs via the local community college system per customer choice. Staff have been participating in training opportunities focusing on equity and inclusion that will help them better serve customers.

10. Please describe how the Local Area WDB engages with local and regional Economic Developers.

Board staff and career center staff attend economic development events including special summits and regular meetings, and job fairs are held in conjunction with local economic development commissions:

- WDB staff and NCWorks staff assisted the Wilkes EDC with its Workforce Summit in coordination with the Wilkes EDC and other various community partners.
- NCWorks staff worked closely with the Yancey EDC on its Visit NC Dream Big project (recently awarded by the NC Department of Commerce) that encourages tourism and small business creation/opportunities in small towns.
- WDB Communications and Business Services Coordinator presented, in conjunction with the High Country COG GIS Planner, to the region's economic developers on labor market data and the types of data available through the JobsEQ software subscription service utilized by the HCWDB.
- Economic data is regularly provided by request - either general overviews or to answer specific questions or projects or as a referral to another entity.

The WDB is fortunate in its relationships with economic development in the region and has a great working relationship with its economic development representative who serves on the board. In addition, the Watauga NCWorks Career Center is located in the Appalachian Enterprise Center, a business incubator run by the Watauga County EDC.

11. How many new/expansion economic development projects has the Local Area WDB engaged in during the previous program year? Please indicate the type/number of services provided.

Within the previous year, the WDB has not had many opportunities to engage in new projects. However, as businesses began getting back up to speed after the COVID-19 lock downs, some businesses began expanding and not only bringing back workers but also needing more. Career center staff have assisted in multiple hiring events and job fairs with those numbers increasing. In the coming year, the WDB and the local NCWorks Career Centers will be involved in the upcoming new projects with Structall (Avery County), the North Wilkesboro Speedway reopening (Wilkes County), and the Suncap Distribution Center (Wilkes County).

12. Identify the Career Pathways developed by the Local Area. Complete the chart below.

Pathway Name	Partner WDBs	Year the pathway was developed	Number of trainees (to date) who have utilized the pathway *
Healthcare	N/A	2018	490
Welding/Advanced Manufacturing	N/A	2018	21
Human Services	Foothills; Western Piedmont WDBs	2021	35

* NOTE: Numbers are based on NCWorks training activities beginning 01/01/18 to 04/19/22.

13. In addition to facilitating the development of career pathways, also describe the review process for in-demand career pathways to determine if new pathways are needed, or if current pathways should be updated or removed based on the needs of the industry.

a. Include plans for new career pathways.

Currently the WDB is evaluating current pathways and will investigate the potential/need for new pathways. Given the current development and interest in tech careers, a pathway related to tech careers may be explored.

b. Explain how career pathways in the local area are in alignment with other partners/stakeholders' (DPI, community colleges, myFutureNC, universities, etc.) existing pathways or if they are duplicates.

During the development of our career pathways, employers, along with education and community partners were at the table in support of the regional development and application. Healthcare continues to be a growing and in demand career path in the High Country. This continues to be our most in demand training program and is primarily provided via the local community college system. While numbers are lower in manufacturing and human services, these are still in demand sectors that consistently have hiring needs in the region. Stakeholders also engage via community meetings and participating in employer tours.

- c. Describe the strategy to avoid duplication efforts.

During the development of our career pathways, employers, along with education and community partners were at the table in support of the regional development and application. This strategy will be repeated with each potential new pathway explored and/or created.

14. Provide a description of Local Area WDB's capacity to provide workforce investment activities to address education attainment and skill needs of high-demand fields - strategies for awareness and cultivation efforts to increase access to education and postsecondary credentials and certificates, availability of learn-and-earn opportunities (internships, apprenticeships, summer employment) and supportive services for hard-to-reach communities.
 - a. Explain strategies that include NextGen, NCCareers.org and any awareness models for success.

NCWorks in partnership with local training providers and partners has the capacity to serve customers with education attainment and skills development. Educational and skill attainment is a top priority for workforce development. Close partnerships with local community colleges, Wilkes Recovery Revolution and Goodwill for example, allow opportunities to serve customers and offer dual enrollment. One example is a recent partnership with Wilkes Community College and NC Tech Paths that has a focus on building skills in the tech industry. Specialized classes and opportunities are promoted within the NCWorks Career Center and via social media. Preparing a skilled workforce involves activities such as certificates, short term and long term training programs, along with work based learning opportunities such as internships, OJT's, and incumbent worker training. Work based learning is a current priority with NextGen as youth are placed in work experience and OJT's that provide opportunities for skill building and entering employment. All activities tie into the goals of MyFutureNC and First in Talent to support the increase of credential attainment in the area. Staff stay up to date on training programs offered in the area, along with the needs of employers via community partner engagements. Staff utilize NCCareers.org to assist in working with customers on career exploration and LMI for career ladders. Currently at the community college level and with the partnership of NCWorks, there are numerous opportunities for scholarships to increase access to training in the community and with supportive service funds via local partnerships, Finish Line Grants, and WIOA to meet the needs of students to assist them to credential attainment.

III. NCWorks Commission

The NCWorks Commission recommends policies and strategies that enable the state's workforce and businesses to compete in the global economy.

The Commission is designated as the state's WDB under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Led by a private sector chair, the 37-member Commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders. All members are appointed by the Governor.

Mission of the NCWorks Commission: 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.

Employer-led job training programs have the best career outcomes. Employers know best 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.

1. Briefly describe how the Local Area WDB engages with local employers and informs them of the wide array of business services offered. Include how the Local Area WDB ensures collaboration with other employer-facing workforce program representatives, such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Agriculture Services, Foreign Labor, Re-Entry, and Veterans Services, through processes and procedures for information sharing and efficient employer customer service delivery.

The High Country WDB makes local employers aware of services offered through various means:

- Promotion of the board website and state level website resources
- Promotion on social media (Board Facebook page and career center Facebook pages)
- Presentation to various civic groups and boards of commissioners
- Partnerships with economic development commissions and memberships with local chambers of commerce
- Attendance at various regional meetings and events where services are promoted to employers
- Newsletters that share success stories of other local businesses that have utilized services
- Provision of expungement workshops in partnership with Re-Entry partners
To help jobseekers clean up their criminal records

We continued to partner with Veterans Services by hosting a Veterans Job/Resource Fairs in the NCWorks Career Centers during Veterans Week, and the WDB continues the commitment of ensuring that veterans receive the workforce services they need to be successful. High Country Workforce Development Board and NCWorks Career Center staff held a joint meeting with Vocational Rehabilitation in our local area to discuss workforce services, collaboration, and

partnerships and ways to provide and improve workforce services to customers in our region. Agricultural Services staff regularly visits centers and provides staff training on the availability of employment opportunities in the area.

2. Please provide a brief overview of the business services team within the local area. Please identify the individual staff roles the Local Area WDB utilizes to conduct business services (that is Business Services Representative (Local Area WDB staff), contractor staff, Business Engagement Coordinator, NCWorks Career Center Manager, DWS staff, Disabled Veterans Outreach Program, identify who makes regional and local employer referrals to Agricultural Services and/or Foreign Labor staff, etc.)

The local Memorandum of Agreement specifies that required center partners coordinate business services activities and employer visits with other center and local partners already providing those services. Business services within the High Country region are coordinated at two levels: board level and service provider level.

The WDB's Communications and Business Services Coordinator coordinates trainings, outreach information, labor market information, and policy information for the region as a whole. At the career center level, the contracted business services representative works in conjunction with NCWorks Career Center Managers and Operators and DWS partners to respond and outreach to local businesses - whether for hiring events at the center, multi-employer job fairs, one-on-one assistance, on-the-job training, or work experience placement. In addition, business services staff work with other center staff to communicate business needs (hiring, training needs, application requirements, etc.). This can make it very effective in placing a work experience or OJT quickly. Center operators and center managers play important roles in ensuring the collaboration and organization of employer visits, center job fairs, and participation in community events to network with businesses. Staff for the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program are housed within local centers and are included in staff meetings and regional meetings making communication effortless. Agricultural Services staff regularly visits centers and provides staff training on the availability of employment opportunities in the area.

As a rural region with several counties and limited staff numbers, the WDB expects staff in the centers to be trained so they are comfortable providing basic employer services in order to meet the immediate needs of business when designated staff are unavailable.

3. Briefly describe how the Local Area WDB plans to increase NCWorks brand awareness at the local level (consult NCWorks Commission new 2021 Strategic Plan).

Goal 4 of the NCWorks Commission Strategic Plan states, *“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.”*

The High Country will continue to use various methods to increase NCWorks brand awareness. Staff regularly promote NCWorks throughout the community in their day-to-day work with customers and partners. New signage incorporating the new branding at local career centers coupled with print material have also assisted with brand promotion.

Social media promotion continues to be extremely effective in promoting center activities and will be a focus of efforts moving forward. An unintended consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and customers being unable to obtain assistance from DES in the early days of the crisis was more awareness of local centers on social media. Even though social media account administrators could not always help with particular details of claims the personal contact, support, and encouragement to those in crisis will be remembered and hopefully shared via word of mouth with family and friends.

Activities such as monthly workshops, community events, or job fairs are shared with community partners as NCWorks services, with materials such as schedules, flyers, and table coverings displaying the NCWorks brand.

4. Describe how the Local Area WDB and the partners identify and address local challenges for job growth and business expansions.

The Local Area WDBs and partners identify and address local challenges for job growth and business expansions by communicating and engaging with Economic Development Commissions, Chambers of Commerce, County/City Managers, EDPNC, DWS, and elected officials on the local, state, and federal level to be aware of the local challenges for job growth and business expansions through open dialogue of meetings and listen tours, the Local Area WDBs and partners identify the issue/challenge and through discussions a plan is developed and the plan is executed to resolve the challenges for job growth and business expansions. The High Country Workforce Development Board utilizes work experiences, on- the-job training, incumbent worker grants as well as our regular program dollars to train/educate and develop the skilled workforce that will produce job growth and allow business to expand which will produce a better economy.

Communities across North Carolina are developing great local models of workforce development. North Carolina should build on those successes and replicate them in more places to continue building and expanding innovative solutions.

5. Briefly describe how the Local Area WDB provides new and innovative solutions to support the growth of the local workforce system.

The High Country Workforce Development Board provides new and innovative solutions to support growth of the local workforce system by developing an enhancement grant that will address the needs of businesses and jobseekers to provide a qualified workforce. The enhancement grant allows for additional opportunities for training and to provide business services and support/develop a qualified workforce that will support growth of the local workforce system.

Through our enhancement grant there have been increased opportunities in Work Based Learning Services which has benefitted jobseekers with career and job opportunities, and employers benefit by getting a trained qualified skilled workforce. The enhancement grant has provided additional funds that has allowed the High Country Workforce Development Board to greatly expand Work Based Learning opportunities that have allowed increased opportunities for employers to provide skill upgrades, reduce the cost of training, and assist jobseekers and/or incumbent workers with skills needed to remain successfully employed. Reduced training costs for employers allows them to be more productive by increasing skills needed to perform the job.

Jobseekers learn additional skills and are more employable and more likely to earn self-sustaining wages.

The High Country Workforce Development Enhancement Grant funds increased the number of work-based learning opportunities in the form of Incumbent Worker Grants to employers; OJT's for suitable participants; and work experiences for participants. Being able to increase these services supports our local employers with a more qualified workforce and add value to the services available through the NCWorks Career Center.

6. Is the Local Area WDB engaged in work-based learning? If so, please describe how the Local Area WDB is engaged in work-based learning projects with local employers.

Yes, the High Country WDB is engaged in work-based learning. OJT and Work Experience continue to be the primary work-based learning tools utilized with customers and employers. In 2019, High Country received an Enhancement Grant with the goal to expand work-based learning opportunities in the region. These funds are specifically designated to increase the number of work experiences, OJT's, and incumbent worker training programs to a broader range of employers. Funds have been used to implement several incumbent worker grants to train twenty-three (23) employees.

Information regarding work-based learning is regularly shared with partners and employers on an ongoing basis as well as chamber events and economic development gatherings. With the emphasis on youth work experience, staff continuously seek opportunities for youth and work based learning placements that benefit both the customer and the work site.

IV. NCWorks Career Centers

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 can adapt to a changing economy.

For any documents that are missing or are unnecessary based on the response provided, please state, "No document is loaded and/or it will be loaded by the XX date".

1. Identify PY 2022 NCWorks Career Center location(s) including Tier 1, Tier 2, Affiliate, and Specialized sites; On-site partners; how NCWorks Career Center operator(s) are designated; provider(s) of WIOA career services and method of selection; whether youth service provider is on-site and, if so, youth services offered. Use the PY 2022 NCWorks [Career Center Chart](#). [WIOA Section 121(b)(1)(A) and (b)(1)(B)] Name document: Local Area Name PY 2022 NCWorks Career Centers.

See High Country Career Centers.

2. Provide the name(s) of the current service provider(s), date, and process for when the competitive procurement of the One-Stop Operator(s) occurred. Include the expected length of the contract(s) (one to four years).

The One Stop Operators for our seven (7) centers were procured through our WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Request for Proposal process that was released January 2020, followed by a bidders conference, and responses were due February 2020. The HCWDB made the recommendation of service providers and the one stop operators at its regularly scheduled meeting in March 2020. Mayland Community College (MCC) was selected as the Operator and Service Provider for Avery/Mitchell/Yancey counties. Goodwill was selected as the Service Provided for Alleghany/Ashe/Watauga/Wilkes Counties, while DWS was selected as the One-Stop Operator for these counties. Contracts are typically one year contracts with the option to renew based on satisfactory performance for up to three years.

3. Provide a brief description of how Career and Training Services are provided. [WIOA Section 121(e), 134(c)]
 - a. Provide a description of how Career and Training services are provided to adults.
 - b. Provide a description of how Career and Training services are provided to dislocated workers.
 - c. Provide a description of how Career and Training services are provided to youth.

In general, all staff participate in providing basic career services to include welcome, registration, initial assessment, and job search for all customers. Basic career services are provided either in the resource room, virtually, or by appointment. Individuals that require more one-on-one services may schedule a return visit with a Career Advisor to determine additional services and enrollment in either the adult, dislocated worker, or youth program. Customers that need skill upgrading are referred to WIOA staff for further information on training services and assessment of skills and barriers. Customers assessed and determined eligible/suitable for training services may then be enrolled in either the adult, dislocated worker, or youth program, for a training

program suitable for them. While in training, all customers receive guidance and counseling, along with supportive services as appropriate to assist in meeting their goals/service plan, from their Career Advisor. Youth may also receive other services related to the program elements as appropriate. Upon completion of training, credential verification is received and the customer is provided with employment services to assist with job search, referrals, and entering employment. Youth customers receive 12 months of follow-up services upon exit.

4. Describe how Local Area WDBs determine the need for enrollment in Training Services.

All customers receive basic career services through our NCWorks Career Centers to include registration and initial assessment. During the assessment process, customers that have been identified as appropriate and in need of skill training or upgrading, or who have expressed interest in additional training are referred to WIOA staff or a WIOA orientation session. WIOA staff then further assess the customer on current skills and employability. Other assessments are used as needed to determine the individual's appropriateness for training (such as interests, aptitudes, or basic skills). Those determined suitable for training may then be enrolled for training services.

5. Describe how follow-up services are provided through the NCWorks Career Centers. [WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(xiii)]

Follow-up services are provided by WIOA staff on a regular basis for WIOA youth and training customers to include services to assist with successful employment or the need of any additional services. Youth customers receive 12 months of follow-up while adults/dislocated workers receive follow-up services based on need upon entering employment and during exit. Staff outreach to customers by phone, email, Facebook, mailings, through the NCWorks email system, and schedule follow-up appointments as needed. Centers are consistently discussing and exploring ways to improve follow-up services for walk-in traffic to ensure needs are being met so as to encourage return visits, etc. This is accomplished via phone, email and NCWorks notices. It is the goal of all centers to define and improve follow-up services to customers.

6. Describe how

- a. New NCWorks Career Center staff (DWS, service providers, and partner staff) are trained in the integrated service delivery system model (include a training timeline).
- b. Long after the initial start date does staff have full access to NCWorks.gov?
- c. The staff development activities reinforce and improve the initial training efforts.
- d. Describe the specific training that staff receive around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

All center staff receive training from the WDB and/or DWS managers regarding the understanding and implementation of integrated service delivery, along with the use and expectations of NCWorks. Local super user and Regional Analyst consistently provide technical assistance to staff on an ongoing basis and provide guidance on changes and troubleshooting. New staff are typically trained within two weeks and often shadow other staff during use of the system and complete a NCWorks 101 checklist. WDB/Regional Analyst staff have also provided various training sessions to partners such as VR, libraries, and the housing authority. Once training has been completed, the RFA is submitted by WDB staff or DWS manager for staff access. Staff are also provided the NCWorks training site in order to practice using the system. WDB staff work closely with state staff regarding use of the system. The Regional Analyst also provides ongoing training based on needs of staff and refresher training. Staff also

participates in various training via the NCWorks Training Center such as the Welcome to Workforce and participate in ongoing regional training sessions. Centers also utilize time weekly to refresh on any training needs. Monthly training has also been provided on a monthly basis on relevant topics. Staff have participated in state and local DEI training sessions.

Staff complete virtual Equal Opportunity training through the NCWorks Training Center, and in previous years Mose Dorsey has completed these trainings in person. NCWorks Career Center staff have participated in regional DEI training at the Northwest Prosperity Zone's virtual training. Regional Operations Director Felicia Culbreath-Setzer regularly provides DEI training for center staff for example, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Pride and Juneteenth celebrations in June, Hispanic Heritage Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Month, among others.

7. Briefly explain coordination with the Trade Adjustment Act (TAA) to maximize resources and prevent duplicative services.

While TAA numbers in the High Country are low, coordination of services occurs to ensure the customer may receive the most comprehensive service possible. If needed, coordination of funds may be an option to assist customers successfully complete a training program. To prevent duplication of services Career Advisors coordinate services via NCWorks online and key data/notes related to services.

8. Briefly describe how the NCWorks Career Centers serve military veterans.

NCWorks is committed to providing prioritized services to military veterans and their families. The Local Veteran Employment Representatives as well as with Disabled Veteran's Outreach Program Specialists works to insure that there is a wide variety of services available to military veterans and their families and to insure that local business and employer representatives are aware of a variety of veteran related subsidies and incentives designed to encourage and accelerate the employment of military veterans. Staff also participates in regional Stand Downs in order to provide services for veterans. The WDBs work with, assist, and help coordinate these events as appropriate. Through our partnership with Goodwill, staff also have access to additional services to serve veterans.

Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) as defined in Veteran Program Letter 03-14 receive Individualized Career Services from the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) which include assessments, job readiness assistance (one on one or group counseling, resume assistance, job search assistance, referrals to other programs to assist in overcoming barriers), and job development contacts.

9. Briefly describe how the NCWorks Career Center serve persons with disabilities.

Workforce staff are made aware of expectations for maintaining non-discriminatory programs and services by the WDB staff and the administrative entity. Equal Opportunity (EO) requirements are also covered by the employing organization for new employees as part of their orientation. Customers are made aware of equal opportunity rights through placement of EO posters in each of the NCWorks Centers. Also, customers enrolled into services are given an orientation which includes an overview of equal opportunity policy. As part of the orientation, a Customer Participant Rights Form is completed by the staff person with signatures from both the

customer and the staff person. The customer is provided a copy of this form which explains the EO process and how to file a complaint if the customer feels they have been a victim of discrimination.

Staff are made aware of their right to file a complaint as well. This is typically done by the service provider organization or in the case of the WDB level staff by the administrative entity. Also, brochures, marketing materials, the Board website, letterhead, and email signatures, etc. include the EO tagline. Contracts include the state mandated EO language and service provider assurances include statements regarding compliance with EO requirements.

Staff EO training provides continual awareness that discrimination of a person with a disability (or discrimination due to their own disability) is critical to creating an inclusive environment – for staff and customers - in the NCWorks Career Center. Regular training and emphasis on equal opportunity (and how to assist **all** customers) creates a foundation of knowledge allowing staff to use better judgement as to how to compassionately help customers whether it is a need for a wheelchair accessible computer station or a sign language interpreter or use of headphones or larger print materials to knowing how to approach and interact with a customer or staff member with an assistance animal.

Centers have accessible locations and space to serve those with disabilities and partners with VR when appropriate. Staff also have resources to contact should a customer have a specific need or request.

10. Briefly describe the integrated service delivery strategy for serving employers and how the Local Area WDB staff and staff within the NCWorks Career Center coordinate outreach strategies and services to maximize resources and prevent duplicative services.

The local Memorandum of Agreement specifies that required center partners coordinate business services activities and employer visits with other center and local partners already providing those services. Business services within the High Country region are coordinated at two levels: board level and service provider level.

The WDB's Communications and Business Services Coordinator coordinates trainings, outreach information, labor market information, and policy information for the region as a whole. At the career center level, the contracted business services representative works in conjunction with NCWorks Career Center Managers and Operators and DWS partners to respond and outreach to local businesses - whether for hiring events at the center, multi-employer job fairs, one-on-one assistance, on-the-job training, or work experience placement. In addition, business services staff work with other center staff to communicate business needs (hiring, training needs, application requirements, etc.). This can make it very effective in placing a work experience or OJT quickly. Center operators and center managers play important roles in ensuring the collaboration and organization of employer visits, center job fairs, and participation in community events to network with businesses as well as asking that all business appointments are documented, which makes sharing information easy and coordinating visits easier.

Staff for the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program are housed within local centers and are included in staff meetings and regional meetings making communication effortless. Agricultural Services staff regularly visits centers and provides staff training on the availability of employment opportunities in the area.

As a rural region with several counties and limited staff numbers, the WDB expects staff in the centers to be trained so they are comfortable providing basic employer services in order to meet the immediate needs of business when designated staff are unavailable.

11. Describe Local Area WDB strategies and services that will be used to strengthen linkages between Local Area WDBs and the NCWorks Career Center system and unemployment insurance programs. [WIOA Section 108(b)(4)(A)(iv)]

Prior to COVID, customers receiving unemployment insurance continued to decrease in the region; however, with the previous surge of COVID related layoffs customers continued to need assistance related to their claim. Center staff provide general information regarding how to file a claim and provide the website and customer service number for additional detailed information.

Employability Assessment Interview (EAI) appointments have been expanded to additional centers in order to reduce transportation burdens to our customers when in person and appointments are now being held virtually. Customers receiving unemployment are informed of all center services and provided referrals as appropriate. Updated information regarding changes to unemployment benefits and processes are consistently posted to local Facebook pages and shared with staff and customers. A regional training was also held in April 2021 by DES for staff to gain a better understanding of unemployment changes and challenges.

12. Attach a flowchart for services – flowchart must include:
 - a. initial one-on-one interviews with customers,
 - b. NCWorks.gov dual registration,
 - c. skills assessments, and
 - d. determination of the need for further services.Name document: *Local Area WDB Name Services Flowchart 2022*.

[See High Country Service Flow Chart.](#)

13. Attach the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Local Area WDB and partners concerning operation of the NCWorks Career Center system. [WIOA Section 121(b) (A (iii))] Name document: *Local Area WDB Name NCWorks Career Center MOU*.

[See High Country NCWorks Career Center MOU.](#)

14. Describe the Local Area WDB's method for providing oversight to include:
 - a. the review process and the frequency of review for the NCWorks Career Center system in the Local Area, including processes for ensuring quality customer service; and

High Country WDB staff, partners, and service providers agree that customer service is top priority when serving customers. WDB staff work closely with center managers to address any concerns regarding operations or service delivery within the center or by staff on an ongoing basis. Center managers along with the Regional Operations Director often present updates at local WDB meetings regarding services and events. The WDB facilitates leadership meetings as appropriate to provide oversight of services and improve communication and processes.

- b. the roles and any resource contributions of the NCWorks Career Center partners. [WIOA Section 121(a)(3)] [WIOA Section 108(b)(6)(D)]

In the High Country, we currently have seven NCWorks Career Centers across our seven-county service delivery area. WIOA service providers and local DWS staff form the core of service delivery in our centers and contribute to them. The Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) determines the dollar value of contributions by required system partners from the state level. Below is a listing based on the PY2021 IFA, as reported on the PY 2021 MOU, of contributions of partners with a presence in the local career centers.

See following page for chart.

NCWorks Partner	Infrastructure Total Share (PY 2021 MOU)	In-Kind	In-Kind Description
WIOA Title I A/DW/Y	\$131,836.41		
WIOA Title III W-P	\$164,825.18		
WIOA Title II (shared between MCC and WCC)	\$613.00		
Carl D. Perkins (shared between MCC and WCC)	\$298.00		
NC Vocational Rehabilitation	\$7,021.00		
Northwest Regional Library System		\$5,160.00 est.	Career center in the Alleghany library includes rent, utilities, trash collection, and facility cleaning
Employment and Training programs		\$60,140.00 est.	Career center locations on Avery campus (\$19,340) and Mitchell campus (\$40,800) of MCC includes rent, utilities, IT support, phones, trash collections, facility cleaning, maintenance, and security.
Division of Services for the Blind (Shared between the two districts)	\$62.00		
Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Programs (Shared between BROC & WAMY)	\$1,640.00		
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program (Shared among all seven DSS)	\$1,100.00		
TOTAL	\$307,395.59	\$65,300.00	

15. Describe how NCWorks Career Centers are using virtual technology to provide integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information systems for programs carried out under WIOA, and programs carried out by NCWorks Career Center partners. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(21)]

All NCWorks Career Center staff utilize NCWorks for keying of and tracking participant data and activities to include dual enrollment when appropriate. All staff are trained on the system and provided technical assistance on an ongoing basis. Staff are also using the document storage features for eligibility and other program documents. New features such as the live chat feature and ability for customers to upload personal information assist with virtual services. Centers are also utilizing platforms such as Facebook, Zoom, Teams, and WebEx to connect with customers and conduct virtual workshops on interviews, soft skills, and other work readiness activities.

16. How does the Local Area WDB use data to monitor and track performance measures for serving individuals and business? Be specific about what systems are used, how regularly the Local Area WDB looks at these sources, and how the Local Area WDB might change the strategies based on the data.

The WDB consistently reviews NCWorks information and utilizes reports to assist service providers in reaching performance goals. FutureWorks is also used to view updated performance status monthly and shared with staff. Service providers also have internal tracking methods related to enrollments, goals, and expenditures to track progress.

WDB staff and center staff use numeric and anecdotal data to make decisions on services, strategies to provide those services, as well as how program dollars should be allocated. In addition, each quarter data is reviewed regarding work based learning and employer services provided to businesses not registered in NCWorks.

V. Employer Services

1. Please briefly describe the efforts of the Business Services Representative and/or Employer Services staff in the following areas:

- a. Utilizing regional and local employer data to inform priorities.

WDB staff and center staff use numeric and anecdotal data to make decisions on services, strategies to provide those services, as well as how program dollars should be allocated. In addition, each quarter data is reviewed regarding work based learning and employer services provided to businesses not registered in NCWorks.

- b. Making regional and local employer referrals to Agricultural Services, Foreign Labor and Veteran Services.

Agricultural Services staff regularly visits centers and provides staff training on the availability of employment opportunities in the area.

- c. Participating in regional economic strategic planning and economic development recruitment, retention and expansions with employers, education partners and economic developers. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(4)(A)(iii)].

Board level staff and career center staff are in regular contact with education partners and economic developers; many times these contacts are at the same events such as career awareness activities and chamber/EDC functions.

- d. Including Historically Underutilized Businesses.

The High Country Workforce Development Board will continue working to identify historically underutilized businesses to increase its and the centers' engagements with them. Recently, two woman-owned businesses have utilized on-the-job training and incumbent worker grants respectively.

2. Please describe the efforts of the Local Area WDB staff, Employer services staff and career center staff have made to deliver business services on a regional basis in the following areas:

- a. Utilizing regional and local economic data to inform priorities [WIOA Section 108 (b)(1)(A)(i)(ii) and (B)].

Tools such as LEAD's Workforce Development Board Labor Market dashboard and NC Careers are utilized in the WDB's initiatives. In addition, the WDB maintains a subscription to Chmura JobsEQ for economic analysis data and provides data on request to education entities, businesses, local governments, and other local partners. These requests have assisted grant submissions, transportation plans, economic development planning, and wage studies.

- b. Collaborating with employer-facing partners such as Agricultural Services, Foreign Labor and Veteran Services to meet employer needs and jobseeker recruitment efforts.

Staff for the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program are housed within local centers and are included in staff meetings and regional meetings making communication effortless. Agricultural Services staff regularly visits centers and provides staff training on the availability of employment opportunities in the area. Center Managers and Operators ask that all business appointments are documented, which makes sharing information easy and coordinating visits easier.

- c. Providing local and regional Rapid Response services, including identifying struggling and at-risk businesses and providing services to help avert layoffs. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(8)]

Typically, career center managers and business services representatives will know which companies in the region are struggling or expanding and will provide direct assistance and/or referral. Struggling businesses may benefit from the expertise of the state Business Edge staff or a local incumbent worker grant.

High Country WDB staff provide regional leadership for Rapid Response activities, which in turn, are provided by local career center staff and partners. Because of the long history of working with layoffs and closures, local rapid response teams are in place for each of the workforce centers to work with the company and the affected workers. Meetings with the company and with the workers typically include High Country WDB staff, WIOA-funded service provider staff, DWS local and regional staff, DSS staff, local community college staff, and other partner staff such as language interpreters, as appropriate. In many instances, meetings with the company and meetings with the workers will be held at the workplace. In some cases, when there is an immediate closure it is not possible to have the meeting at the workplace, an appropriate facility is secured for purposes of meeting with workers impacted or the meetings are held at the appropriate workforce center. In addition because of this local layoff history coupled with tenured staff, coordination of TAA services and WIOA services is something staff are accustomed to doing.

- 3. Please describe employer-focused partnership efforts in the areas of education and training and economic development in the following areas:

- a. Enhancing the use of On-the-Job Training (OJT), Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), apprenticeships, and other work-based learning opportunities to support the regional economy and individuals' career advancement.

Apprenticeship programs are in the works in our Local Area in particular with the Apprenticeship Wilkes program and effort in Watuaga related to construction. On-the-Job Training and work-based learning in general have both been successful for individuals who have been appropriate for the programs. Both have led to individuals obtaining employment which also serves as a best practice to share with other interested businesses.

The HCWDB makes an effort to tell these stories through its Board meetings, Facebook page, and publications of its administrative entity (High Country Council of Governments) which is read by all the local governments in the region as well as state and federal

representatives. High Country has previously participated in a joint application to focus on the development of youth apprenticeship with partnership of local school systems and employers to be submitted by NC state office. High Country has also received an Enhancement Grant with funds dedicated to work based learning opportunities which has allowed expansion of incumbent worker grants in the region. Watauga County is also interested in developing a work based learning program to support the construction trades industry.

- b. Coordinating and promoting entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(5)]

These trainings are offered by a variety of organizations in our area. Local community colleges, Appalachian State University, SBTDC, Ascent Business Network, and others offer this training. The career centers refer interested customers to these services in addition to hosting some of the workshops on-site at the career centers in the past.

- c. Participating in regional economic strategic planning and economic development recruitment, retention and expansions with employers, education partners and economic developers. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(4)(A)(iii)].

Staff regularly meet with local Economic Development and community college staff to assess their needs, discuss projects and provide support and encouragement related to both new recruitment efforts and existing industries as well as provide requested data to help with class offering determinations or industry data.

The High Country WDB is committed to developing and maintaining relationships with Economic Development partners in order to best meet business customer needs - whether at the Board level or the career center level. The High Country WDB Director keeps in contact with EDPNC to discuss strategies and services for workforce and economic development.

In addition, the High Country WDB serves as the Advisory Committee for the High Country Council of Governments Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that is sent to the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) with a regional list of related needs that would positively impact economic development in the seven-county region. Both education and industry are important stakeholders in the information gathering process of the CEDS development.

VI. Performance

U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) has the following WIOA Performance Indicators:

- Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit
- Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit
- Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit
- Credential Attainment Rate
- Measurable Skill Gains
- Effectiveness in Serving Employers (system-wide measure, not program specific)

1. Examine the Local Area WDB's current Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth performance on the Federal Primary Indicators of Performance for PY 2021 and prior Program Years. (Reports available via Future Works)
 - a. What are some of the factors in the Local Area WDB that impact performance levels both positively and negatively? Be sure to consider factors such as the unemployment rate, factory closures/openings, economic development recruitment, retention and expansion efforts, regional industry growth priorities, and weather events and natural disasters that may have impacted the area, as well as internal operational factors that may impact the Local Area WDB's performance.

(Note: Provide at least two examples of positive factors and two examples of negative factors that have impacted the performance levels in your Local Area WDB, with an explanation of each).

Staff continue to learn and develop their understanding of WIOA expectations and measures. With the most recent RFP process completed March 2020, this resulted in a new service provider in four counties with a contract that began in the middle of COVID-19. Due to COVID and the long term disruption to service delivery, there were a number of challenges related to implementing a new contract with center closings and hiring of new staff, the challenges from learning workforce to transition of cases. The Local Area has worked closely with staff to develop their understanding of WIOA and local policies. Board staff continuously provide technical assistance and review files for services and keying in an effort to improve performance. With the COVID-19 pandemic, centers and staff learned to operate differently and explore new ways to provide services. We anticipate that due to the significant changes in the economy due to layoffs and reductions in force along with the transition to online learning, performance will experience a disruption and likely decline. During this transition we also saw a significant number of exits and lower enrollments over the past two years..

Prior to COVID, over the last several years due to lower unemployment rates serving numbers of dislocated workers has become a challenge. However, as we have seen with dislocated workers losing higher paying jobs finding comparable wages to replace has been a challenge especially since much of our region is heavy on the hospitality and tourism industry. While we do have several places of manufacturing there is often limited hiring. Placing dislocated workers in training is often a challenge as well due to the limited timeframe to receive UI assistance. However, we have seen success through our OJT

program in finding placements for several dislocated workers and adults which is a positive program service. Our close partnership with the community colleges programs that serve all populations assists in positive measurable skills gains and credential outcomes. With employers struggling to find employees we continue to promote employment and skill upgrading programs.

Prior to COVID-19 with such a low unemployment rate, many of those not working face more significant barriers to employment such as poor work history, transportation, substance use, etc. Many of our centers have ramped up outreach in the community to promote center services with customers and the community. A new partnership with a local partner focused on serving those in recovery will provide opportunity to explore new ways to serve this population. We have also seen success with those that provide business services resulting in partnerships that provide opportunities for increased career services, hiring events, and job opportunities.

Fortunately, the High Country region usually does not experience significant disruptions due to weather such as our boards on the east. During the winter months, snow and ice frequently cause delays or cancellations of classes and cause travel disruption for training/work. Often times, training programs build calendars with the expectation of winter weather to account for missed class time.

Lastly, a regional barrier is the lack of widespread broadband access in the seven-county region. Local providers have made efforts recently to expand services; however, there are still portions of counties where this lack of service is common. COVID-19 brought this issue to the forefront again as all types of students were trying to attend virtual classes as well as those teleworking. Hot spot boosters were placed on school buses and parked in various parts of some counties so students could complete schoolwork. Local schools and fire departments also boosted its Wi-Fi capacity so anyone needing to telework, do schoolwork, or simply need a distraction could come to the parking lot in order to access this needed infrastructure.

In spite of all the challenges, we have continued to support and provide technical assistance to assist with outreach, enrollments, and training. We have implemented a regional virtual monthly training session for all center staff to promote understanding of services. Topics such as unemployment, performance, and serving those with barriers have been covered.

With the increased emphasis on work based learning around OJT's and WEX, we anticipate this to have a positive impact on performance.

- b. Discuss whether or not participants that have been served and/or enrolled as a result of COVID-19 differ in characteristics as compared to participants who have historically been served by the Local Area WDB. If so, how do these differences impact service delivery and performance?

At this time local outreach and enrollments with dislocated workers have continued to be a challenge. While we have not seen a significant difference in characteristics, COVID has impacted more self-employed individuals and resulted in a greater demand for assistance related to unemployment and those seeking virtual services..

- c. Discuss how your Local Area WDB's industries and business sector have been impacted by COVID-19.

Since the onset of COVID, local business and industry disruptions have been substantial over the past two years. As seen statewide and nationally, businesses forced to close or reduce capacity negatively impacted income and employees. Companies also faced local outbreaks and dealing with school closings that caused great disruptions in operations and forced many to look at operating differently.

In the High Country with a large retail, hospitality and tourism industry, many places were forced to close for the season or reduce operations. Many activities, such as the ski industry for example, required online ticket sales and designated time slots for customers while closing/reducing indoor service/activities over the past two years. In 2020, local communities faced significant loss due to the cancellation of events such as Merle Fest, the Apple Festival, Christmas in July, Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, the Gem and Mineral Show, and many others. Appalachian State University football games with no fans in attendance that year severely impacted the area. Last year some of the events, but not all, made a return to form but with restrictions and vaccination requirements.

Now as most restrictions are lifted, local employers are faced with the challenge of finding employees to meet the demands of the consumers in all sectors. Locally, many businesses are still reducing operating hours and trying to identify innovative ways to attract new talent to meet their hiring needs such as sign on and retention bonuses. Some employers are also now requiring the COVID vaccine for employment.

While traffic in the centers and enrollments are slightly increasing, we still see challenges with enrolling participants due to the open job market and increasing wages being offered.

(Note: Include which industries and businesses have been permanently affected, which are recovering or perhaps are expected to recover, and how these industry changes may impact how the Local Area approaches serving its participants).

2. What strategies and methods are in place to maintain or improve performance?

(Note: Include information about tracking performance, ensuring accountability of positive performance outcomes, and training. Consider including the following information: Who is responsible for tracking performance? Which reports are reviewed? Are Future Works reports used? If so, how often? How are staff held accountable? How often is training provided to staff)?

WDB staff will continue to run performance reports from both NCWorks and FutureWorks at least quarterly to gauge how we are doing in the area of WIOA performance outcomes and service delivery. Staff will also run reports from NCWorks regularly to see which customers are in the performance pool. Staff monitor these cases in NCWorks to determine that all critical data has been keyed into the system to give us the best possible performance outcomes. WDB Staff continuously provide technical assistance to service providers in efforts to meet performance measures by assisting them with improving their understanding of keying and with the calculation of performance measures. Staff also review weekly exit reports to ensure data is keyed and request that staff review each case individually prior to exit to ensure all data and case notes are properly keyed to ensure the best possible performance outcome. As part of our regional training,

in March 2021 we held a focused session on WIOA performance measures and how services impact measures. This continues to be emphasized with all staff on an ongoing basis and are reminded of the measures with each update. Staff also engage in webinars provided by Future Works and Geo Solutions to assist in using those systems.

3. In the event the Local Area WDB is not on track to meet yearly performance indicator goals, please discuss what corrective actions/steps would be undertaken to address this situation.

(Note: This question is intended to be hypothetical and is seeking what plan the Local Area WDB has in place to address failing performance if it were to occur. Answers should address how the Local Area WDB monitors performance, communicates with staff, strategies for training and/or addressing potential issues, and follow-up accountability measures).

It is anticipated the Local Area will achieve performance goals. HCWDB staff review monthly invoices from the WIOA service providers. During this process, spending limits and expectations are reviewed to insure compliance with WIOA requirements. Corrective action plans will be developed to remedy any issues observed. Staff are continuing to learn the WIOA measures and understand how data is best keyed into NCWorks. All staff are aware of the 90% expectation for achieving measures. Staff also participate in local Super User meetings in order to stay informed of up-to-date information and attend available trainings when offered. The WDB also partners with the Regional Analyst for technical assistance and training as needed.

In the event that corrective action is needed, the board sends written comments to staff specific to any findings that need to be addressed/corrected. In most cases staff are given one to two weeks to remedy any monitoring findings and submit to the board for review. Often board staff assist with corrections related to activity dates as it is past the 15-day keying requirement. Common findings are then addressed during any regional staff meetings. Board staff have also began reviewing the soon to exit reports and reviewing cases for data entry to support positive performance outcomes.

Training on performance is held annually and is frequently discussed with staff to assist in their understanding of the measures. Performance training was held March 2021 with all center staff with DWS Director of Performance and continues to be emphasized with staff.

4. How is performance information shared throughout the hierarchy of staff? Please detail how the Local Area WDB addresses performance data in its relationship with its service provider(s) and how case managers are using performance data to drive Local Area WDB performance.

(Note: This question should address how frequently [monthly, quarterly, etc.] performance information is shared and by what method/medium [e.g. print-out, electronically, verbally through meetings, etc.], how the performance information shared may differ for the various levels of staff at the Local Area WDB, and specifically for case managers, how performance data is shared with them and how they, in turn, use this information in their roles.)

WDB staff will run performance reports from both databases such as NCWorks as well as FutureWorks at least quarterly. WDB staff will monitor cases in NCWorks to determine that all necessary data/activities are keyed correctly to ensure that we glean the best possible and accurate performance outcomes. WDB staff will meet to go over the results with contract staff and

directors to give guidance and technical assistance as needed. The WDB staff will update the board as appropriate as to where we are currently in meeting our performance measures. Contractors also provide summaries of services that assist them in knowing their data and performance impacts. Reports are provided to all staff in various mediums via staff discussions to emails that include relevant data, charts, or Excel documents. Staff also receive Soon to Exit reports monthly/weekly and review cases to ensure all relevant data impacting performance is keyed appropriately.

5. The Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) measure is a real-time indicator denoting participants who are making demonstrable progress on a track toward Credential Attainment. Please describe how the Local Area WDB makes use of the information the MSG measure provides as a means of ensuring the Local Area WDB achieves its Credential Attainment indicator goal.

(Note: For this question, describe the methods and/or strategies in using the MSG measure as a means of tracking Credential Attainment. Who is responsible for tracking the MSG performance indicator? Are the Roster Reports in FutureWorks utilized? If so, how? Who is this information provided to, and then used by, career advisors, the Local Area WDB, or other staff.)

The Measurable Skill Gains measure is real-time performance indicator that we are working with Career Advisors to ensure they are entering this information in NCWorks Online at least once per year for those participating in training services - however those in longer training we have emphasized keying a skills gain each semester to show progress towards credential completion. This allows staff to see student progress/grades in order to better provide guidance/counseling as needed that will assist towards credential completion. Board staff have emphasized the importance of keying measurable skills gains in order to assist in reaching our goal. During internal monitoring, staff review to see if skills gains have been keyed for those in training most commonly obtained through the use of report cards along the way. The Measurable Skill Gains can be used as a means to monitor a participant's progress toward successfully completing training by reviewing training progress/goals. As we continue to gain a clear understanding of how this measure is defined and what counts towards a skills gain additional guidance/training will be made available to staff. Staff also utilize the MSG Q&A found on NCWorks as a resource in this area. Future Works rosters are viewed by WDB staff and sent to staff as appropriate.

6. Describe how and when eligible training providers are reviewed at the local level and how customers are informed they have choices in choosing their providers.

To be approved in the High Country area and receive WIOA Title 1 funds, the training provider must be listed on the Eligible Training Providers List (ETPL) maintained in NCWorks.gov to include the required information following the process outlined in the Eligible Training Provider Guidelines. Once information regarding the training programs are reviewed and approved at the state level, the local area will approve programs based on local demand following career pathways and aligning with needs of employers. Potential WIOA participants are referred to NCWorks Online to search for training providers. If they are interested in a training provider or program that is not approved by the Local Area, they may request that the training provider/program be added and/or approved by the WDB. The WDB is currently reviewing the list of approved in-demand industries and occupations for training.

7. Define what “significant number of competent providers” means in the Local Area WDB. Include whether the Local Area WDB uses more strict performance measures to evaluate eligible training providers. Attach if a separate policy. *Local Area WDB Name ETPL Policy*.

The WDB has three (3) community colleges in addition to for-profit training providers. With this level of coverage, the WDB finds that we have a significant number of competent providers. Training providers who have been approved in NCWorks Online come up for review in the system every two (2) years. At this time, the provider and program are reviewed for demand for jobs in the Local Area and past successes of the program.

The High Country does not have a separate policy for eligible training providers.

VII. Equal Opportunity

1. Describe processes to ensure individuals are not discriminated against based on age, disability, sex, race, color, or national origin. [WIOA Section 188]

Local staff are made aware of expectations for maintaining non-discriminatory programs and services by the designated Equal Opportunity Officer through updates as well as annual training by Mose Dorsey, the DWS WIOA Equal Opportunity Officer. Equal Opportunity (EO) requirements are also covered by the employing organization for new center employees as part of their orientation.

Customers are made aware of equal opportunity rights through placement of EO posters, which articulate 29 CFR 38.35, in each of the NCWorks Centers. Also customers enrolled into services are given an orientation which includes an overview of equal opportunity policy. As part of the orientation, a Customer Participant Rights Form is completed by the staff person with signatures from both the customer and the staff person. The customer is provided a copy of this form which explains the EO process and how to file a complaint if the customer feels they have been a victim of discrimination.

Staff are made aware of their right to file a complaint as well. This is typically done by the service provider organization or in the case of the WDB level staff by the administrative entity. Also brochures, marketing materials, the Board website, letterhead, and email signatures, etc. include the EO tagline. Contracts include the required EO language and service provider assurances include statements regarding compliance with EO requirements.

2. Attach the Local Area WDB's current Equal Opportunity (EO) Complaint Grievance Procedure to address EO requirements [29 CFR 38.35]. Name document: *Local Area WDB Name EO Complaint Grievance Procedure*.

See High Country EO Complaint Grievance Procedure.

3. Describe the methods used to ensure local Equal Opportunity procedures are updated.

Local policies are reviewed on an annual basis, if not sooner based on new information that is provided either by DWS or USDOL. When policies are updated, the new policy is placed in the EO section of the Board's website and information regarding the new policy is sent out to all career center staff.

VIII. **Adult and Dislocated Worker Services**

1. Provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of existing Adult and Dislocated Worker education and training services.
 - a. Include how services are provided and the capacity to address the identified education and skill needs of the workforce and the employment needs of employers.
 - b. Describe plans to address any weaknesses identified. [WIOA Section 108(b)(1)(D)]

While the High Country Workforce Area is primarily rural in nature, there are a number of training options available within commuting distances of most of the communities. However, transportation to and from training institutions is one of the most serious challenges for many customers to obtain the training and education services needed to obtain adequate employment. Locally, classroom/occupational skills training and on-the-job training are the two types of training most commonly available to customers receiving workforce services within the High Country Workforce Area.

For those customers that do not qualify for Pell Grants or other financial assistance, WIOA funding provides training scholarships to eligible participants. High Country has seen a significant decrease to funding over the last several years, however due to the impacts of COVID, we have experienced reduced expenditure levels over the past two years. As services and activities return to normal, these continued decreases impact the Local Area's ability to fund training and education services at levels once provided. We will continue to try and meet financial assistance needs of our customers through the use of Pell Grants and other scholarships, moving funds between Adult and Dislocated Worker funding streams, and requesting contingency Dislocated Worker Funds as the state makes those funds available to local areas. Historically, High Country has benefited financially from multiple voluntary transfers from other WDBs. We will continue to pursue this in the future.

Due to the negative financial impacts of COVID, we are currently seeing an increase in the types of financial assistance being made available via the community college system to assist with the cost of training such as the GEER grants for continuing education students and the Education Promise Grant designed for current high school graduates.

Except for training provided on-site by the employer usually done through OJT's, the bulk of adult and dislocated worker actual occupational skills training opportunities rest with the region's three community colleges. All sites provide curriculum, HRD, and Adult Education opportunities for customers of all ages.

Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute (CCCTI) serves Watauga County; however, the bulk of their skills training must be obtained at the main campus in Hudson. CCCTI continues efforts to expand training opportunities in Watauga County. Mayland Community College (MCC) serves Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties, while Alleghany, Ashe, and Wilkes counties are served by Wilkes Community College (WCC). Surry Community College, McDowell Tech, AB Tech, and Western Piedmont Community College are commonly relied on for training, as well. Tennessee Tech also has nursing and allied health training that is easily accessible for North Carolina residents that live on the western side of the region.

Appalachian State University (ASU) serves the region with many community college students transferring to ASU to complete degree requirements. Business, nursing, education, and industrial technology are just a few of the curricular areas designed to fill skill needs. Although not often used by WIOA participants, Lees-McRae College, a private liberal arts college located in Avery County, provides another opportunity for higher education in our region. East Tennessee State University (ETSU) offers in-state tuition for North Carolina residents of counties adjacent to the county where ETSU is located and offers much easier access for residents located on the west side of the region. They have a number of high quality healthcare related programs including nursing. Popular training options among dislocated workers have been nursing and other healthcare related fields. These training areas have often provided excellent career opportunities at high wages.

The following is a broad list of training opportunities available in the Local Area. WIOA may not provide funds for all of these areas. Because economic conditions are always changing, the WDB has tried to take a flexible approach to training for WIOA customers, keeping in mind customer choice and local demands.

Most common training areas utilized through CCCTI include the following: nursing, truck driving, biomedical, and continuing education courses such as welding, nursing assistant, phlebotomy, and pharmacy tech.

Skills training opportunities at MCC include the following: accounting, electrical/electronics technology, electronics engineering technology, welding, nursing, auto body repair, horticulture, basic law enforcement, industrial maintenance, business administration, information systems, cosmetology, manicuring instructor, cosmetology instructor, nursing assistant, human service technology, criminal justice technology, office systems technology (with or without medical concentration), early childhood associate, aesthetics technology and esthetics technology instructor, marketing and retailing, forest management technology, computer engineering technology, medical assisting, physical therapy and physical therapy assistant, carpentry, and plumbing.

Wilkes Community College offers academic programs in the following disciplines: Arts & Sciences, Business & Public Service Technologies, Health Sciences, and Industrial Engineering. A sampling of course offerings within these divisions includes the following: accounting, architectural technology, business administration, computer science/information systems programming, auto body repair, nursing, basic law enforcement, culinary technology, criminal justice, corrections, early childhood associate/operator, hotel and restaurant management, information systems, dental assisting, human service technology, medical assisting, speech-language pathology, automotive systems, broadcasting and production, building construction, horticulture, industrial maintenance/controls, electronics engineering, heavy equipment and transportation technology, heating/ventilation/air conditioning, machining technology. NC Tech Paths is a new initiative underway in response to the demands of employers needing technology skills. This program in partnership with Per Scholas, is offering a variety of tech courses and serving as a tech hub for the region.

In an effort to train the workforce for the skills needed for future employer needs, all three community colleges have expanded their course offerings in green technology and have incorporated these skills in a number of classes. Local career advisors are encouraged to utilize those course offerings, when appropriate, with their customers.

Just beginning is the implementation of NC Reconnect at Wilkes Community College and Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute. This program is designed to re-engage students who have completed at least 50% of a training program, but did not finish over the last three years in an effort to re-enroll students and obtain credentials needed by employers.

Finish Line Grants are also available at the local community colleges to assist students with financial emergencies in effort to assist them with completing training.

General observations over the last several years:

- Less long-term curriculum training and more short-term training is being provided.
 - Many customers in long-term training qualify for Pell Grants or other financial assistance so the Local Area is paying fewer actual training costs.
 - More funds are being expended on supplies/tools needed within their training programs and other ancillary costs such as background checks, physicals, immunizations, drug screening, testing and test preparation costs, and licensing.
 - Due to COVID, many students have struggled with transitioning to online/virtual learning.
2. Provide the date and process for the competitive procurement of the Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs that ensures an arm's-length relationship between the Local Area WDB and service delivery.
- a. Identify any service provider contract extensions.

The WDB completed competitive procurement of Adult/DW services March 2020. An RFP was released January 2020, with proposals due February 2020 and the review/selection during March 2020. As identified in the Provider Chart, the WDB selected Goodwill Industries and Mayland Community College as the service providers for PY20. Please note: due to COVID-19 issues, ResCare Workforce Services received a contract extension for A/DW/Y services from July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020 to allow for an organized transition with Goodwill Workforce Services. Goodwill contract began October 1, 2020. Contracts were extended for a second year.

Note: While Final Regulations Section 679.410 (b) and (c) provide exceptions to the competitive procurement process, Local Area WDBs *must* have an arm's-length relationship to the delivery of services.

3. Provide the date and process for when the competitive procurement of the One-Stop Operator(s) occurred. Include the expected length of the contract (one-four years).

The One Stop Operators for our seven (7) centers were procured through our WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Request for Proposal process that was released January 2020, followed by a bidders conference, and responses were due February 2020. The HCWDB made the

recommendation of service providers and the one stop operators at its regularly scheduled meeting in March 2020. Mayland Community College (MCC) was selected as the Operator and Service Provider for Avery/Mitchell/Yancey counties. Goodwill was selected as the Service Provider for Alleghany/Ashe/Watauga/Wilkes Counties, while DWS was selected as the One-Stop Operator for these counties. Contracts are typically one year contracts with the option to renew based on satisfactory performance. Contracts were extended for a second year, of the three year cycle.

4. Attach the Local Area WDB's Adult/Dislocated Worker Service Provider list effective July 1, 2022 using the PY 2022 [Adult/Dislocated Worker Service Provider List](#) provided. Name document: Local Area WDB Name PY 2022 Adult/Dislocated Worker Service Provider List.

[See High Country PY 2022 Adult/Dislocated Worker Service Provider List.](#)

5. Describe the Local Area WDB's vision for serving the WIOA eligible Adults and Dislocated Workers to include high level goals, outreach strategies, services delivery, and expected outcomes.

The WDB's vision for serving adults and dislocated workers includes providing excellent customer service while meeting the needs of customers via career and training services while meeting the performance goals set by DWS. Outreach strategies include ongoing partnerships with training providers and community partners to increase brand awareness and referrals. Expected outcomes include a better trained workforce, earning credentials, and better employment opportunities while meeting the needs of employers.

6. Describe the Local Area WDB's method for ensuring that a sufficient number of adults receiving individualized career and training services in the Local Area are from one of the following priority of services categories: public assistance, low-income individuals and individuals who are basic skills deficient. [134(c)(3)(E), 3(24)]

Our strong partnership with community programs results in awareness and referrals of individuals that fall with the priority of service categories. Partnerships with local training providers, substance use recovery, food pantries, DSS, vocational rehabilitation, etc. ensures that a sufficient number receive services within the identified categories.

7. Describe follow-up services provided to Adults and Dislocated Workers.

Per Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 19-16 and Section 134(C)(2)(A), funds described shall be used to provide career services, which shall be available to individuals who are adults or dislocated workers through the one-stop delivery system and shall, at a minimum, include - (xiii) follow-up services, including counseling regarding the workplace, for participants in workforce investment activities authorized under this subtitle who are placed in unsubsidized employment, for not less than 12 months after the first day of the employment, as appropriate.

Follow-up services are provided by WIOA staff on a regular basis for WIOA youth and adult/dislocated worker training customers including services to assist with successful employment, training completion, or the need of any additional services to assist the customer in completing their service plan. Staff reach out to customers by phone, email, Facebook, mailings, the NCWorks email system and schedule follow-up appointments as needed. Centers continue to discuss and explore ways to improve follow-up services for walk-in traffic to ensure needs are

being met so as to encourage return visits. It is the goal of all centers to define and improve follow-up services to customers.

8. Please describe the process for monitoring the service provider in the Local Area WDB. Include details such as how it is conducted, who is involved, and how often.

Service providers are monitored informally on an ongoing basis by WDB staff via NCWorks and their monthly financial invoices. Informal monitoring occurs almost weekly during file discussions, review of NCWorks keying, review of financial documents, and technical assistance meetings and training. Formal monitoring occurs annually by an in depth review of NCWorks to include review of eligibility, documentation, and case notes. Findings are documented and sent to staff for corrections with a requested response within two weeks.

IX. Youth Services

USDOL provides funds to states who in turn provide local workforce areas resources to deliver a comprehensive array of youth services that focus on assisting out-of-school youth and in-school youth with one or more barriers to employment prepare for post-secondary education and employment opportunities, attain educational and/or skills training credentials, and secure employment with career/promotional opportunities. USDOL and North Carolina's priorities are:

- *Out-of-School Youth (OSY) – A minimum of 75% of the Youth funds allocated to Local Area WDBs, except for the Local Area WDB expenditures for administration, must be used to provide services to OSY;*
- *Work Experience – Not less than 20% of Youth funds allocated to the Local Area WDB, except for the Local Area WDB expenditures for administration, must be used to provide paid and unpaid work experiences; and a*
- *Focus on Partnering – Co-enrollment encouraged where appropriate with Title II and IV.*

1. Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce activities in the Local Area WDB, including activities for youth who are individuals with disabilities. Include identification of successful models of such youth workforce investment activities being used and/or planned. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(9)]

The High Country region has greatly increased its partnerships with the local schools and community colleges in regards to serving youth system-wide. Staff maintain frequent contact with Adult Education and other training programs to identify potential enrollments and appropriate services. Other partnerships include activities such as the Wilkes County Schools Business and Industry Education Forum (BEIF), Apprenticeship Wilkes, soft skills training at Eckerd Youth Camp, assisting with planning and carrying out of Avery's Grade 8 program and Blue Ridge Academy, and Mitchell and Yancey's career days and senior NCWorks registrations, along with various other career days and events. Youth staff work closely with VR for appropriate referrals both to and from for appropriate enrollments. These efforts continue to grow stronger as WDB and provider staff engage with additional projects and partners through various partner meetings and participate when possible in community events and school presentations.

See chart on the following page.

Youth Workforce Activity	For Persons with Disabilities?	Brief Assessment/Model Used	Success Rating
Tutoring, Study Skills Training, Dropout Prevention	Yes	Learning labs via community colleges; public school systems	Good
Alternative Secondary School & Dropout Services	Yes	Adult Education program via community college; person centered; in person and virtual options	Good
Padi/Unpaid Work Experience	Yes	Local employers interested in supporting work readiness and building workforce	Good
Occupational Skills Training	Yes	Community colleges/University system via in person and virtual training	Good
Education offered concurrently with workforce activities	Yes	Community colleges/University system via in person and virtual training	Good
Leadership Opportunities	Yes	Virtual and in person with NCWorks and local partners; NC Youth Summit	Limited
Supportive Services	Yes	Made available to assist with completion of goals and address barriers via WIOA and partners	Good
Adult Mentoring	Yes	Informal mentoring by staff/referrals/employers	Lack of formal mentoring programs
Followup Services	Yes	Provided for 12 months to assist with success and retention	Good, often depends on interest of youth
Guidance/Counseling	Yes	Provided to guide youth on completion of goals to complete training and enter employment	Good
Financial Literacy	Yes	Provided to assist youth in the reality of wages and cost of living via staff and Reality Check	Good
Entrepreneurial Skills	Yes	As appropriate provided by referral	Good
LMI	Yes	Provided to assist youth understand local data and options using NCWorks and NC Careers	Good
Transition Activities	Yes	As appropriate by staff	Good

2. Describe how the Local Area WDB's broad Young Adult (NextGen) Program design is unique to include:

- a. providing objective assessments;
- b. supportive services needed; and
- c. developmental needs of each participant, for the purpose of identifying appropriate services and career pathways for participants. [WIOA Section 129(c)(1)(A)]

In the High Country our target population is out of school youth with barriers to employment and/or education. However, with the youth expenditure waiver allowing for an increase of in-school youth, we may experience greater numbers of this population. Following WIOA eligibility guidelines, youth meet with a career advisor to determine eligibility, complete an objective assessment, and develop a plan for services. Identified needs will be addressed directly or by referral when possible. Youth receive guidance and counseling to assist them in completion of a credential and/or to enter employment. Youth services are housed within the career center and benefit from all center services. Youth benefit from training assistance, supportive services most often in the form of transportation and childcare assistance, and work experience. Staff work with a number of partners to address the needs of participants. During case management services staff are aware of meeting the needs of youth based on where they are developmentally by considering current skills, gaps, and supports available to them.

3. How does the Local Area WDB ensure the Individual Service Strategy (ISS) identifies appropriate services based on the objective assessment and is linked to youth performance indicators, career pathways, and program elements? [WIOA Section 129(c)(1)(B)] How does the provider ensure the ISS is unique to the individual?

Based on the objective assessment a plan of services is developed in partnership with the career advisor and the participant. All services are documented in the service strategy to include program elements such as educational goals, employment goals, work experience, and supportive services. Goals related to training are tied to the credential performance indicator and measurable skills gain performance indicator, while goals tied to employment are related to retention and wage performance indicators. Goals related to work experience assist the local area in meeting the 20% expenditure requirement towards work based learning. Services are provided based on plans and the plans are periodically reviewed and updated when changes have occurred. The service strategy is signed by both staff and the participant and scanned into NCWorks. High Country looks forward to the upcoming guidance in regards to IEP development and expectations from DWS.

4. Describe the Local Area WDB's strategy to ensure Youth (NextGen) Program activities lead to a high school diploma or its equivalent or a recognized post-secondary credential and post-secondary education and training opportunities. [WIOA Section 129(c)(1)(C)]

Service providers continue to have a strong partnership with local community college programs that offer high school diplomas or its equivalent along with post-secondary education training opportunities. Staff often attend GED student orientations to share information about services and opportunities in the region and explore ways the partnership can better serve students. Center staff and college programs have had an ongoing relationship with the good of the students in mind. This includes assisting students with assessments, financial aid, to training completion.

Our relationship with the community colleges and the Finish Line Grant program has offered additional opportunities to partner and serve additional students to ensure credential attainments. Credential completion is an important element in our youth services. Close partnerships with Adult Education results in referrals and access to students that would benefit from enrollment. Career advisors work closely with students and Adult Education staff to ensure participants are on track to complete their diploma/equivalent. When needed, program funds are also used to support the cost of testing for students. Career advisors also work closely with community college continuing education and curriculum programs to ensure participants are on track for completion. Funds are often used to assist with tuition and fees and supportive services when needed to address barriers. Career advisors counsel students during training on successful strategies to completion and provide encouragement along the way. The local incentive policy also allows incentives to be awarded for credential completion.

As needed, per the in-school youth expenditure waiver NC received, services may also include additional in-school youth enrollments of those attending traditional secondary schools that may need additional assistance to complete their education/high school diploma.

5. Describe how follow-up services will be provided for (NextGen) youth.

Note: All youth participants must receive some form of follow-up for a minimum duration of 12 months.

All youth receive follow-up services for at least 12 months. It is expected that at least quarterly follow-up be provided by staff once a youth has exited. Staff outreach to youth by phone, email, Facebook, mailings, through NCWorks email system, and schedule follow-up appointments as needed. Follow-up services may include many services similarly provided during enrollment to assist the youth with retention and/or education completion. Services are keyed in NCWorks and any attained outcomes are keyed in the appropriate quarterly follow-up section.

6. Where does the Local Area WDB plan to serve the young adults (NextGen): NCWorks Career Centers Tier 1, Tier 2, Specialized Centers, Services Provider Offices, or Hybrid situations? Explain if it is both NCWorks Career Centers and Provider Offices or some other option.

Youth services will continue to be offered at each local career center in each county. As needed, staff may also visit local schools and community colleges to meet with students. See center chart for statuses.

7. Attach the Local Area WDB Youth Service Provider's chart, effective July 1, 2022, using the PY 2022 [Youth Service Provider List](#) provided. Complete each column to include specifying where Youth Services are provided. Name the document: *PY 2022 Local Area WDB Name Youth Service Provider List*.

See [PY 2022 High Country Youth Service Provider List](#).

8. Provide the date and process for when the competitive procurement of the Youth Programs was completed, to include any contract extensions.

The WDB completed competitive procurement of youth services March 2020. An RFP was released January 2020, with proposals due February 2020, and the review/selection during March 2020. As identified in the Provider Chart, the WDB selected Goodwill Industries and

Mayland Community College as the service providers for PY20. Please note: due to COVID-19 issues, ResCare Workforce Services received a contract extension for A/DW/Y services from July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020 to allow for an organized transition with Goodwill Workforce Services. Goodwill contract began October 1, 2020. Contracts were extended for a second year.

9. Provide the Local Area WDB's approach to meeting the required 75% minimum (NextGen) youth expenditures on out-of-school youth and include special outreach efforts and highlight planned program design. [WIOA Section 129(a)(4)(A)] (CPS 09-2021)

High Country has emphasized services to out of school youth over the past several years and continues to do so. Our RFP states that providers should plan to dedicate at least 80% of youth funding towards out of school youth. Discussion also continues with Adult Education on ways to partner and refer in order to serve dropouts or those who are basic skills deficient. Staff continue to work with partners and emphasize our target population of out of school youth. Current program design elements being considered include services/activities directly related to soft skills and career pathways, with an emphasized focus on work experience opportunities. Minimal funds are available for in-school enrollments, while the majority is transferred to out of school.

Updated 1/17/23: Per DWS Operational Guidance Number: OG 07-2022, the High Country WDB would like to make available to its service providers the youth waiver allowing an increase of in-school youth expenditures from 25%, up to 50%, should it be needed as part of service delivery. This change would allow greater connections with in-school youth and partnerships with local school programs. This waiver would allow an increased focus on educational attainment and work-based learning activities for those in-school.

10. How does the Local Area WDB ensure that the minimum of 20% of funds is spent on work experience and is the Local Area WDB expending the 20% minimum on work experience to include an estimate of expenditures that will be paid wages to youth? If the Local Area WDB has not been meeting the minimum of 20% of funds, please explain additional measures to be taken this year. [WIOA Section 129(c)(4)] (CPS 09-2021)

Contracted service providers know the requirement that a minimum of 20% of youth funding is dedicated to work experience. This amount is specified in their contracts. Staff are actively assessing youth and setting up work experiences at locations to meet the needs of youth. Contractors report each month staff time towards WEX 20%. Previous discussions with DWS monitors have assisted in clarifying the 20% guidelines. Due to COVID restrictions, WEX essentially was put on hold for PY20. In discussion with our contractors, we have emphasized that WEX should be a program focus for PY21 and PY22. This year, the WDB has had several technical assistance meetings with service providers to discuss work experience and strategies to meet the expectations.

The following are the strategies/initiatives that the service providers will take this year to try and meet expending the 20% minimum on work experience:

- Strategic outreach and engagement to partners that work with youth such as GED orientation sessions; DSS (SNAP and Foster Care programs); local pregnancy/parenting centers; Head Start; local health departments; vocational rehabilitation; juvenile justice counselors; local public schools.

- Engage local community and employers by continuously reviewing job listings/contacting employers to discuss filling positions with WEX/OJT candidates; present to local employer groups (manufacturing associations); work with customized training for referrals; present to civic groups (Rotary, Lions Club, Shriners); work with chambers of commerce and economic development commissions to promote WEX/OJT.
- Continue and maintain communication and quality relationships with current WEX providers
- Coordinate with business services staff to identify local small to medium businesses that would work well for youth internships.
- Coordinate with local school service providers to identify in-school youth that may benefit from work experience activities. This may include traditional high school and/or alternative school settings.

11. Does the Local Area WDB have a dedicated full-time Youth Business Services Representative (or similar title) at the Local Area WDB level or at the Provider level, and if so, state which level and how many?

No.

12. Does the Local Area WDB have a re-entry program for young adults? If yes, please briefly describe it.

No.

13. Describe how the Local Area WDB partners, aligns, and leverages, as appropriate with:

- a. Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program resources and policies.
- b. Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation program resources and policies.
- c. Integrates adult education with occupational education and training and workforce preparation, as Local Area WDB's and the creation of career pathways for youth. [USDOL TEGE 8-15]

The WDB continues to build and partner with Adult Education and Vocational Rehabilitation to integrate education and training as part of provided services. Center staff are closely connected with Adult Education, and in some counties have incorporated set scheduled time to spend within Adult Education to outreach to students. Adult Education and VR are both active WDB members and represent their services regionally. During the previous work related to career pathways both partners played a strong role in the planning and development of the local pathway of Health Care and Advanced Manufacturing. The WDB/center staff have partnered with VR most recently on a project that has provided training opportunities for staff regarding case management services and employment opportunities for those with disabilities. When appropriate, customers are dually enrolled to expand case management services or cost sharing for training and support. Local partner meetings are held on a regular basis that includes adult education and VR that allows additional collaboration on projects and events and serving customers.

Workforce Development Alignment Summary for Caldwell, Mayland, and Wilkes Community Colleges

Board staff and Adult Education partners recently discussed regional needs and alignment strategies for the upcoming year. Adult Education programs also provided staff training on program services and expectations. With quality service to clients and students as the undergirding motivation for all of the partners, the group decided upon the following broad priorities and alignment activities on which to focus.

Goal 1: Improve service delivery in the One-Stops.

- Continue referrals between agencies and continue to streamline the process for students, to share information, to avoid repetitious paperwork and to make tracking more efficient.
- Use similar tools for student intake, development, and assessment to allow sharing and consistency among partners (Such as “Working Smart” curriculum for soft skills and sharing of student assessments).
- Conduct regular cross-training for staff of NCWorks and Adult Education so that clients can receive accurate information from either source for a more fluid process with a goal to have two regional meetings per year along with ongoing local county meetings throughout the year.

Goal 2: Improve outreach and service to employers.

- Understand and utilize each other's work on career pathways to support training programs aligned with employer needs.
- Strengthen the partnership with the Business Services team to share information and market services and college training programs and align work-based learning opportunities when appropriate
- Coordinate services to identify On-the-Job Training, work experience, and apprenticeship programs as appropriate for employers and customers
- Align resources and tools for Labor Market Information to assist staff and students with informed decisions.

Goal 3: Engage the region’s youth.

- Maintain the MOU agreements between public schools, NCWorks and Adult Basic Education to coordinate efforts to serve dropouts, disconnected youth and graduates who are basic skills deficient.
- Convene regular meetings to facilitate communication between partners at the county level to remain engaged in program/staff changes and better serve customers.

Each local plan for Caldwell, Mayland, and Wilkes Community Colleges addresses our program’s plans to provide Adult Education and Literacy Activities, including responses to our strategies for instructional practices, ensuring student engagement, offering transitional support, providing professional development to staff, engaging in continuous improvement measures, and aligning our services with those of the other WIOA partners.

Debbie Woodard, Dean of College Readiness at Wilkes Community College serves as the adult literacy representative on the High Country Workforce Development Board for Caldwell, Mayland, and Wilkes Community Colleges. She has served on the board since July 2015. Mike Birkmire, Unit Manager at VR, serves as the local VR representative on the High Country Workforce Development Board for the region.

14. Specify if the Local Area WDB plans to offer incentives for (NextGen) youth.

If yes, attach the Youth Incentive Policy to include:

- a. criteria to be used to award incentives;
- b. type(s) of incentive awards to be made available;
- c. whether WIOA funds will be used; and
- d. the Local Area WDB's internal controls to safeguard cash/gift cards.

Name document: Local Area WDB Name Youth Incentive Policy.

Note: Federal funds may not be spent on entertainment costs.

[High Country does offer incentives to youth.](#)

[See High Country Youth Incentive Policy.](#)

15. If the Local Area WDB does not offer incentives for (NextGen) youth, please explain why.

[N/A](#)

16. Describe the local strategy to prepare the youth (NextGen) for unsubsidized employment, including with small employers, specifically those that include in-demand industry sectors and occupations of the local and/or regional labor markets. [WIOA Section 129(c)(1)(C)(v)]

[Youth staff engage youth customers from the beginning on career awareness opportunities in the area. This includes ongoing discussion regarding available job opportunities, jobs in demand, and training that may assist in gaining the necessary skills to become employed. Youth are often placed with small employers as they participate in work based learning opportunities or other areas of potential growth. Staff also partner with local school systems as we support local employers and continue to learn of local needs and ways to support them.](#)

[During enrollment and follow-up, career advisors provide guidance and counseling on work readiness expectations that will lead to success in the workplace. Staff also counsel youth to address barriers that may prevent employment success. Staff have and continue to develop local knowledge regarding small and large employers and engage in community activities that connect them with employers in the area. Events such as career fairs and hiring events provide staff the opportunity to meet with employers to understand their needs which assists them in serving participants. Youth staff also work closely with other center staff and partners in efforts to assist youth in entering unsubsidized employment. We have also had success with youth entering employment upon completion of a work experience and have utilized OJT when appropriate.](#)

17. Please complete the [Youth Program Elements chart](#) provided to demonstrate how the Local Area WDB ensures each of the 14 youth program elements is made available to youth participants. Be certain to complete both columns to demonstrate partnerships and potential use of shared funding. [WIOA Section 129(c)(2)(A)] Name document: Local Area WDB Name Youth Program Elements Chart

[See High Country Youth Program Elements.](#)

18. Does the Local Area WDB have a standing committee to provide information to assist with planning, operational, and other issues relating to the provision of services to youth? [WIOA Section 107(b)(4)(A)(ii)]

No.

- a. If no, describe how oversight to planning, operational, and other issues relating to the provision of services to youth will be provided.

Currently the WDB does not have a standing youth committee. Locally, youth services are provided within the career centers. Given the increased age of youth up to 24, we feel many needed services will be similar to that of our adult services. WDB staff reviews information related to services through the centers, which will include youth services and reported to the WDB as appropriate. WDB staff also serve as a Youth Lead which serves as a platform of best practices related to youth services.

- b. If yes, please provide a response to the following:
 - a) Provide the committee’s purpose/vision.
 - b) Provide the committee’s top three goals or objectives for PY 2022.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - c) List of members to include members’ agency/organization, one of which must be a community-based organization with a demonstrated record of success in serving eligible youth. Provide the Committee’s Chair information in the first block (who must be a Local Area WDB member.) Name document: *Local Area WDB Name Youth Committee Members*. [WIOA Section 107(b)(4)(A)(ii)] and,
- c. Complete the following chart for the PY 2022 Youth Committee’s planned meeting schedule to include dates, time, and location. *[Expand form as needed.]*

Date	Time	Location (include address and room #)

X. Local Area WDB Innovations

1. List additional funding received by the Local Area WDB to include special grants (Finish Line, Youth Initiative), NC Job Ready Workforce Investment Grants, National Dislocated Worker Grants (NDWG) (disaster), YouthBuild, Foundations, NCWorks Commission, and outside funding to include a brief description of the source and the amount.

Grant Name/Kind	Brief Description	Beginning and End date	Source and Amount	Partner Organization (if applicable)
Enhancement Grant	Focus on work based learning opportunities to include incumbent worker training, OJT, and WEX	October 2019 - December 2022	\$200,000 Statewide Activities Funds	
Finish Line Grant	Funds to assist students with completion of training who face financial emergencies	Currently in year four of funding.	Current funds \$36,068 Pending \$100,000 State Wide Activities Funds	Wilkes, Mayland, and Caldwell Community Colleges
Employer Services	Funds to support the increase in the number of businesses and employers utilizing NCWorks workforce solutions	July 2021- June 30, 2022	\$25,000.00 Statewide Activities Funds	
COVID NEG DW Grant	Funds to assist DW impacted by COVID	April 2020- March 2023	\$175,000.00 WIOA National Dislocated Worker Grants	

2. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's best or promising Adult/Dislocated Worker program practices that has yielded positive results. Provide any evidence that you have collected or plan to collect to suggest this practice is effective.

A local best practice in the High Country is targeting adults/dislocated workers who are in training/finishing training that may need extra assistance in getting work experience or employment. Students are hearing about the benefits of utilizing NCWorks services and the outcomes of work experience and OJT services. This is resulting in enrollments and in greater interest and placements of OJT's.

3. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's best or promising youth program practices that has yielded positive results. Provide any evidence that you have collected or plan to collect to suggest this practice is effective.

In the High Country, we have had a focused partnership with GED learning labs to increase our awareness and partnership. This has resulted in more enrollments of dropouts who have limited, if any work experience. Adding in the services of WEX, assists in keeping youth motivated towards GED completion while also earning wages and gaining that much needed experience and confidence. This can be measured by the number of dropouts being served and participating in the WEX activity.

4. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's best or promising regional strategy that has yielded positive results. Provide any evidence that you have collected or plan to collect to suggest this practice is effective.

Our partnership with Wilkes Recovery Revolution continues to develop. Through this partnership, the High Country WDB and the Wilkes NCWorks Career Center have been designated as Recovery Friendly Workplaces as part of their growing Recovery Friendly initiative. Staff from Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga, and Wilkes have participated in trainings on being recovery friendly and serving this population. As the capacity of Wilkes Recovery grows, it is anticipated that our additional centers will join this initiative. No evidence has been collected locally at this time.

5. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's innovative business services strategies. Provide any evidence that you have collected or plan to collect to suggest this practice is effective.

Over the past few years, local career center staff have been visiting local business and industry and taking site tours. During these visits, staff members are able to have conversations with company representatives and employees about positions that are available and get an up-close look at the work being done. This in-person observation helps staff better assist the employer in finding the right candidate for the openings and better inform staff of career pathway opportunities. Because all staff participate, first-hand knowledge is shared by the group as a whole. Anecdotal evidence collected shows the practice is appreciated and welcomed by staff and employers.

6. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's best or promising virtual services strategies that has yielded positive results. Provide any evidence that you have collected or plan to collect to suggest this practice is effective.

In partnership with Western Piedmont and Foothills WDB, the Northwest Prosperity Zone has partnered to offer monthly virtual workshops on a variety of topics from job search, resumes, expungement, budgeting, etc. This partnership reduces duplication in workshop preparation and presentation time for staff/centers and provides consistent scheduling and outreach for the events. Events are shared with workforce partners across the region which also assist with brand awareness. While attendance numbers have been low, we continue to hear that providing services virtually remains in demand by our customers. We will continue to evaluate evidence of attendance numbers/registrations.

7. Describe how the Local Area WDB's inform other Local Area WDB's of best or promising regional workforce practices.

WDB staff serve on various committees that offer opportunities for sharing best practices such as the Director's Council, NC Youth Leads, NCWorks Training Champions, and the Business Services Consortium.

8. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's business engagement practices that demonstrated employers taking charge and driving the agenda.

One of the tenants of business engagement in the High Country region involves how career center staff engage with businesses during on-site visits. It is the expectation that all staff who conduct onsite visits with businesses are to open the conversation about needs but are to allow the employer representative to talk about the company's concerns and pain points. When employers lead the dialogue, staff are less likely to dominate the encounter by "presenting" instead of "conversing."

XI. Program Year 2022 Local Area WDB Plan Required Policy Attachments

1. The following policies are *required* to be attached as separate documents in WISE as part of the PY 2022 Local Area Plan. The Local Area Plan is not complete without these documents. Name each document: Local Area WDB Name, Policy Name.
 - In the first column, state if the policy is attached or why it is missing and when it can be expected. If two of the policies have been combined, please make a notation.
 - In the second column mark “Yes” **only** if the policy has been changed/revised since PY 2021 and requires a review for PY 2022 and has not been previously submitted to the DWS.
 - Do not add an empty document in WISE as a “placeholder”.

Required Local Area WDB Policies	Attached (Yes/No). If no, why?	Revised for PY 2022 (Yes/No) and needs review
1. Adult/Dislocated Worker Experience Policy	Yes	Yes
2. Competitive Procurement Policy	Yes	Yes
3. Conflict of Interest Policy	Yes	Yes
4. Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity Standards and Complaint Procedures	Yes	No
5. Financial Management Policy for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I	Yes	No
6. Individualized Training Account Policy	Yes	No
7. On-the-Job Training Policy	Yes	No
8. Oversight Monitoring Policy, Tool and Schedule	Yes	Yes
9. Priority of Service Policy	Yes	No
10. Youth Work Experience Policy	Yes	Yes
11. Supportive Services Policy	Yes	No
12. Sampling Policy/Self-Attestation Procedures & Monitoring Schedule	Yes	No

2. Designate whether the following local *Optional Policy* is included and used at the Local Area WDB and is included in the Local Area Plan or write “N/A” implying “Not Applicable”, if the Local Area WDB does not have this policy and; therefore, does not use these services.

- In the second column mark “Yes” **only** if the policy has been changed/revised since PY 2021 and requires a review for PY 2022 and has not been previously submitted to the DWS.
- Do not add a blank document in WISE as a “placeholder”.

If “Yes”, load the policy as a separate document. Name documents: *Local Area WDB Name, Policy Name*. [Example: IWT Policy – Yes. Attached as *Board Name IWT Policy*.]

Optional Local Area WDB Policies	Yes- the Local Area WDB has a policy or N/A (Not Applicable)	Revised for PY 2022 (Add Yes or N/A for this column)
1. Local Area WDB Guidance for Local Incumbent Worker Grants	Yes	Yes
2. Local Area WDB Needs-Related Policy	N/A	N/A
3. Local Area WDB Transitional Jobs Policy	N/A	N/A
4. Local Area WDB Youth Incentive Policy	Yes	
5. Local Area WDB Guidance for Finish Line Grant	Yes	

3. Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) are required [Regulations Section 680.300] to pay the cost of training provided with Adult and Dislocated Worker funds and limitations on duration and amount may be included [Regulations Section 680.320]. Please provide the following ITA elements in summary:

Individual Training Accounts (ITA) Summary	
Dollar Amounts	\$4,300 annually and \$8,600 lifetime limit
Time Limits	Generally two years; however, longer as necessary based on training needs.
Degree or Certificates allowed (Associate, Bachelor’s, other)	Generally Associate’s degrees; however, as need is identified assisting with Bachelor’s is allowed along with other diploma/certification/or licensure programs.
Procedures for determining case-by-case exceptions for training that may be allowed	Service Providers typically make decisions on training programs for customers. However, often when questions come up or something out of the ordinary arises the service providers contact WDB staff for guidance.

Individual Training Accounts (ITA) Summary	
Period for which ITAs are issued (semester, school year, short-term, etc.)	Generally by semester or as needed due to shorter term training.
Supportive Services covered by ITA (provide examples such as uniforms, tools, physical exams, etc.)	N/A
Other	

4. Please specify the supportive services provided by the Local Area WDB Supportive Services Policy. List specific items under Supplies, Emergency, and Other, as identified in the Local Area WDB policy. *[Expand form as needed.]*

Transportation	Childcare	Supplies <i>(include examples)</i>	Emergency <i>(include examples)</i>	Other <i>(include examples)</i>
Yes	Yes	Yes: scrubs, school items, training materials	Yes: power, auto repairs/tires, insurance	

Note: The Local Area WDB must adequately safeguard all forms of supportive services payments (i.e., gas cards, cash, gift cards, etc.) and assure that they are used solely for authorized purposes. The Supportive Services Policy must include the Local Area WDB’s internal controls to safeguard supportive services. The internal controls must address issuance, storage, and reconciliation of supportive services throughout the area.