

High Country Workforce Development Board

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act**

**Comprehensive Four-Year Title I Plan**

**July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2028**

North Carolina Department of Commerce  
Division of Workforce Solutions  
313 Chapanoke Road, Suite 120  
4316 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-4316

## **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 (CLEO), a comprehensive four-year plan.

The WIOA Comprehensive Four-Year Title I Plan is to provide current information and be effective July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2028 and will include required current local policies. The Local Area Plan will support the alignment strategy described in the 2024-2025 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.

The NCWorks Commission developed the strategic vision and mission for North Carolina's Workforce System based on Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready Initiative. 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.

Plans are reviewed by the Division of Workforce Solutions and NCWorks Commission staff. Upon completion of Plan reviews and the resolution of any concerns, as applicable, fully compliant Plans will be given Final Approval. Approval letters are distributed through Workforce Information System Enterprise (WISE). Local WDBs must have a compliant workforce board in place to receive Final Plan Approval and distribution of formula WIOA program year funding. [WIOA Section 108(e)]

## **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: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta>.

North Carolina policy information is available at: <https://www.commerce.nc.gov/jobs-training/workforce-professionals-tools-resources/workforce-policies>. Local Area WDBs should reference the North Carolina WIOA Unified State Plan to be posted March 2024.

### **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 Program Year 2024 - 2028 Plan is Due:  
May 1, 2024**

Each attachment must be clearly labeled in either Word or PDF format. Forms requiring original signatures may use DocuSign® (or similar) and may be uploaded in WISE.

If original signatures are obtained, forms may be mailed (and must be uploaded in WISE) to the Local Area WDB's assigned Planner at:

Division of Workforce Solutions  
313 Chapanoke Road, Suite 120  
4316 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-4316

## I. Local Area Workforce Development Board (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.*

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

2. List the counties served by the Local Area WDB.

Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey.

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 Name: 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 **Chief Local Elected Official (CLEO)**.

Name: <a href="#">Dr. Greg Minton</a>	Elected Title & Salutation: <a href="#">County Commissioner</a>
Government Affiliation: <a href="#">Wilkes County</a>	Address: <a href="#">1676 Skyland Drive, Wilkesboro, NC 28697</a>
Phone Number: <a href="#">828-386-7280</a>	Email Address: <a href="mailto:gaminton413@wilkescc.edu">gaminton413@wilkescc.edu</a>

5. Provide the name, title, business name, address, phone number, and email address of the **individual authorized to receive official mail for the Chief Local Elected Official (CLEO)**, if different than question 4.

Name: <a href="#">Dr. Greg Minton</a>	Title & Salutation: <a href="#">County Commissioner</a>
Business Name: <a href="#">Wilkes County</a>	Address: <a href="#">1676 Skyland Drive, Wilkesboro, NC 28697</a>
Phone Number: <a href="#">828-386-7280</a>	Email Address: <a href="mailto:gaminton413@wilkescc.edu">gaminton413@wilkescc.edu</a>

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: <a href="#">Ms. Julie Wiggins</a>	Title & Salutation: <a href="#">Executive Director</a>
Organization Name: <a href="#">High Country Council of Governments</a>	Address: <a href="#">468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607</a>
Phone Number: <a href="#">828-265-5434, ext. 125</a>	Email Address: <a href="mailto:jwiggins@hccog.org">jwiggins@hccog.org</a>

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

Name: <a href="#">Ms. Julie Wiggins</a>	Title & Salutation: <a href="#">Executive Director</a>
Organization Name: <a href="#">High Country Council of Governments</a>	Address: <a href="#">468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607</a>
Phone Number: <a href="#">828-265-5434, ext. 125</a>	Email Address: <a href="mailto:jwiggins@hccog.org">jwiggins@hccog.org</a>

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](#).
- [Attached](#).

9. Provide the **Administrative Entity’s Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)** number and assurance that the ‘System for Award Management’ (SAM) status is current. Administrative Entities must register at least annually on the SAM website <https://sam.gov/content/home> to receive Federal funding [required by Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Section 4.11 and Section 52.204-7].

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Current with Annual Renewal Date of 1/28/25.

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, Change 1)

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 D](#).

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*.
- [Attached](#).

- 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). Do not change required category names except to clarify those representing multiple categories. When determining the total number of members, representatives serving in more than one category must be counted and listed only once on the form. Identify any names representing a dual category with an asterisk (\*).

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**Notes:**

- *Please complete the entire form. Check the block on the last page of the form certifying compliance with required WIOA Local Area WDB business nomination process.*
  - *Representatives with expired terms will not be included in the counted list of Board members. Board member terms must stated in a month/date/year format.*
  - *Plans that do not have a compliant workforce Board will not receive Final Approval. Formula funds will not be awarded until the Local Area WDB has a compliant workforce Board. Exceptions are allowed only when realignment is occurring in the upcoming program year.*
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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 to include recommendations, terms, and expectations. Official approval is made by the Consortium/local elected officials.

*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](#) and [Appendix C](#).*

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.
- [Attached](#).

14. To demonstrate that the attached Local Area WDB By-Laws comply, complete By-Laws Required Elements – Crosswalk chart (form provided).

*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, as well as individual’s contact information for distribution of Plan. [WIOA Section 108(d) and 108(b)(20)]

The plan will be posted on the HCWDB’s website for at least 30 days before June 30, 2024. 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. The WDB site is [www.highcountrywdb.com](http://www.highcountrywdb.com). Those wishing to submit comments should submit in writing via email to the WDB Director, Misty Bishop-Price at [misty.bishopprice@highcountrywdb.com](mailto:misty.bishopprice@highcountrywdb.com).

*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) and 108(b)(20)]*

16. Attach a copy of the Local Area WDB’s organizational chart with an ‘effective as of date.’ Include position titles, names, and contact information.

- Name document: Local Area WDB Name Organizational Chart.
- [Attached](#).

17. Complete the following chart for the PY2024 Local Area WDB’s planned meeting schedule to include, date, time, location, and virtual link (if applicable). (Expand form as needed)

Date	Time	Location (include address, room # and virtual link)
July 11, 2024	2:30 PM	High Country COG, 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 in Board Room. Virtual link to be created.
September 12, 2024	2:30 PM	High Country COG, 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 in Board Room. Virtual link to be created.
November 14, 2024	2:30 PM	High Country COG, 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 in Board Room. Virtual link to be created.
January 9, 2024	2:30 PM	High Country COG, 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 in Board Room. Virtual link to be created.
March 13, 2025	2:30 PM	High Country COG, 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 in Board Room. Virtual link to be created.



May 8, 2025	2:30 PM	High Country COG, 468 New Market Blvd., Boone, NC 28607 in Board Room. Virtual link to be created.
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*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](#).*

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*The Comprehensive Four-Year Plan is developed in partnership with the chief local elected official and approved by the Local Area WDB. This approval should be reflected in the Local Area WDB meeting minutes as an Action item.*

18. Provide the Month and Date of the Local Area WDB meeting that the Comprehensive Four-Year Plan was approved. Attach a copy of the Local Area WDB minutes that reflect this action item.

- Name document: *Local Area WDB Name Plan Approval Minutes*.

Approval of the Comprehensive Four-Year Plan is on the agenda for the May 9, 2024 board meeting. Draft minutes will be made available following the meeting as those minutes will not be formally approved until the board meets on July 11, 2024.

19. Attach a copy of the signed ‘Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and other Responsibility Matters – Primary Covered Transactions’ Form (*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*.
- *Attached*.

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  
 313 Chapanoke Road, Suite 120  
 4316 Mail Service Center  
 Raleigh, NC 27699-4316

20. Submit the original Local Area WDB and Chief Local Elected Official (CLEO) Signatory Page (*form provided*), bearing the original signatures of the CLEO(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.
- [Attached](#).

If using original signatures, mail the Signatory Page to the assigned DWS Planner at:

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## II. Local Area WDB Strategic Planning

*The Local Area WDB is required to keep the Local Area Plan up to date and adaptable 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: **skills and education 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.*

*At the local level, the Local Area 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 in-demand 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) federal law that governs the state, local governments, and workforce board funding and policy development. The Board will continuously evaluate and enhance workforce services in our region based on meeting the needs of job seekers and employers. The expansion and increase of services will be determined and possible with increase of workforce funding and workforce allocations while expanding partnerships to enhance service delivery to youth and individuals with barriers to employment.

The Board will continue to foster new and existing partnerships at the federal, state, and local level while promoting the High Country WDB/NCWorks Career Centers workforce services.

The High Country WDB will continue to expand and adapt its organizational capacity to meet local and regional needs by helping employers meet their workforce needs and help individuals build careers, and strengthen the local economy while meeting the challenges of global competition. Utilizing workforce programs such 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 with services that enhance the skills and education level that prepare them for jobs in the workforce and the global economy while also obtaining 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. Services align with the goals of myFutureNC and NC Job Ready as we strive to increase the preparedness of customers to meet employer/industry sector needs.

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 services 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 are 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 via the community college and NCWorks. Also, in support of skill development and credential attainment, staff stay abreast of current training programs and provide services to customers around credential attainment outcomes in partnership with continuing education and curriculum programs.

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 local community action agencies and other partners to target low-income individuals for skill upgrading and placement into employment. It is anticipated that this partnership will increase to achieve the goal 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. Staff have also increased partnerships serving those in recovery and expanding service delivery to this population.

Board and career center partnerships with local Vocational Rehabilitation staff have been close, resulting in dual enrollments to meet customer needs when appropriate. Dialogue between Vocational Rehabilitation and

service providers results in ongoing 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 the services and needs of the community. This has resulted in a partnership with Wilkes Recovery Revolution and Watauga LEAD to partner on services related to employment for those in recovery and the implementation of the Recovery Friendly Workplace initiative in Wilkes with the potential to expand in surrounding counties. Customers enrolled in WIOA may receive supportive services as assessed when they support their goals and employment plans.

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 continue to stay aware of Career Pathways to increase their knowledge and application of information as part of case management services during center certification. 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 representatives 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. Staff also engage in various business and industry committees across the region to increase awareness of workforce services and partnerships.

3. Considering the analyses described in the Regional Strategic Planning Section III, describe strategies to work with the entities that carry out the core programs that align resources available to the Local Area to achieve the strategic vision and goals. [WIOA Section 108(b)(1)(F)]

The High Country Workforce Development Board will use multiple strategies to work with entities that carry out the core programs that align resources available to the local area to achieve the strategic vision and goals. We will continue working collaboratively with our local community colleges and other training providers to continue to increase the work-ready skills of those in training through in-demand training programs (short-term and curriculum programs) that lead to successful employment outcomes. Staff will also continue to engage in communications with business leaders and community partners and assess training that enhances the workforce to meet employer needs. We will continue to use/administer services such as work-based learning,

with a focus on work experience and OJT. This will also include the promotion of incumbent worker grants to assist employers with meeting training needs with their current workforce.

Maintaining communication on service delivery with partners such as VR and Basic Skills remains critical to carrying out programs successfully. Staff frequently attend community partner meetings that allow collaboration and coordination and dual serve customers as appropriate. Staff also serve on various committees such as business advisory with CTE and with Chamber/EDC to enhance partnerships and service delivery to support regional efforts. When appropriate, updates are also provided at WDB meetings on partnerships and resources to support service delivery in the region. Meetings also often include updates from the DWS Regional Operations Director on relevant topics.

The High Country WDB will continue to use Memorandum of Understanding and the Infrastructure Cost Agreement as tools to discuss partner roles and align resources in the region.

4. Provide a description of strategies concerning maximizing coordination of services provided under the Wagner-Peyser Act and services provided in the Local Area through the NCWorks Career Center system. Include how this coordination of services improves service delivery and avoids duplication of services. [WIOA Section 108(b)(12)]

Wagner Peyser services continue to be coordinated in the area and work closely with WIOA providers. Currently, we have three (3) Tier 1 certified NCWorks Career Centers in which DWS serves as the Operator and have identified center managers to implement integrated service delivery between WIOA and DWS staff. Other locations operate using a functional approach with all staff being trained in career service delivery, referrals, and resource assistance. Wagner Peyser and WIOA staff will continue coordination and integration to avoid duplication and continue to partner on service delivery and community partnerships. Both DWS and service provider management believe that staff engagement is important and work together on center coverage and participation in events such as career fairs, outreach opportunities, and business engagement. Both provide regular updates at WDB meetings highlighting successes and service delivery.

5. Describe how the Local Area WDB implements **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 and supports layoff aversion as employers receive better-trained employees. Work Based Learning opportunities increase 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 allow them to be more productive by increasing the 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 opportunities 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 throughout the community. The holistic approach of business services promotes the use of all the above initiatives and the regional strategy to meet the needs of business.

While incumbent worker training has been limited in the region, staff continue to promote the benefit of these training services during employer engagement opportunities. On-the-job training has increased in the region and continues to be a focus especially as we implement the ARPA work-based learning grant for small employers. We have also seen increased success with youth work experience and an increased interest in this service from employers. Employers seeking services related to customized training are referred to the local community college business and industry staff. All work-based learning opportunities support successful career pathways for customers and increase skill development to assist in employment outcomes.

The HCWDB has certified career pathways in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and human services as they continue to be identified as in-demand sectors in the High Country region. NCWorks staff have participated in a Career Pathways training to increase their knowledge and application of information as part of case management services as well as engage with employers through local hiring events and business tours to gain first-hand knowledge of skills and knowledge needed for local jobs. Career center staff regularly present updates on the delivery of services during the WDB meetings providing opportunities for board members to engage in questions and information sharing regarding priorities. The WDB staff and career center staff partner with the local K-12 school systems staff for outreach and career pathways awareness in events such as high school, middle school, and elementary school career days. In addition, the HCWDB engages with local community colleges and reviews the Workforce Development Alignment Summary for Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute, Mayland Community College, and Wilkes Community College in which Goal 2 specifies *“understand and utilize each other’s work on career pathways to support training programs aligned with employer needs.”*

Locally, staff participate in regional business services team meetings to discuss best practices around service delivery, challenges, and opportunities. Staff engagement in the upcoming Business Services Forum will provide a greater framework as we continue to serve our business customers and enhance work around sector partnerships.

6. 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 – is carried out in the Local Area with the provision of Adult Education and Literacy activities. [WIOA Section 108(b)(13)]

The WDB maintains its commitment to collaboration and partnership with Adult Education to streamline services and prevent duplication. This collaboration involves close coordination between career center staff and Adult Education, including dedicated time spent within Adult Education to outreach and participate in student orientation sessions in some counties. Additionally, coordinated efforts may include referrals to other services and assistance with testing fees to support credential completion while avoiding duplicate testing.

This partnership often results in students being enrolled concurrently in WIOA programs where appropriate. Regular joint partner or regional meetings involving staff from Adult Education, NCWorks, and the WDB facilitate updates and coordination of events. Furthermore, the WDB conducts reviews of local Adult Education proposals for service provision in the High Country area to ensure alignment and effectiveness.

Each local plan for Caldwell, Mayland, and Wilkes community colleges outlines our program's approach to delivering Adult Education and Literacy activities. This includes detailed strategies for instructional practices, ensuring robust student engagement, offering effective transitional support, providing ongoing professional development to staff members, implementing continuous improvement measures, and ensuring seamless alignment of our services with those of other WIOA partners.

Shari Brown, the Director of Transitional Studies also serves on the WDB and provides a direct linkage with adult education programs and service delivery.

7. Describe the Local Area's workforce development system. Identify the following: the programs that are included in the system, how the Workforce Development Board will work with the entities administering core programs and other workforce development programs to support alignment and provision of services, and the programs of study authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.). [WIOA Section 108(b)(2)]

Due to the rural nature of the High Country region - its local communities; the variety of staffing and office resources available from partners - each NCWorks Career Center has a unique set of relationships between partners. Board and career center staff are always looking for additional ways to partner and provide more seamless services to customers. Our system includes partnerships with education (secondary and post-secondary), community partners, economic development, other workforce boards, employment services, and local officials to support workforce needs of job seekers and employers. This is done in a variety of ways in which support from one another is critical to our success. Through these partnerships and shared vision of enhanced delivery we are supporting the development of a better-prepared workforce and seeing success in training and employment goals of our customers.

**Community Colleges:** Mayland Community College currently serves as one of our WIOA service providers for three of our seven counties. Both Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute and Wilkes Community College have also been previous service providers. This institution's history provides for a strong relationship with our community colleges in the counties we serve. In many cases, HRD staff from the community colleges are closely connected to our NCWorks Centers through their assistance of our job seekers. Other staff from the community colleges are more focused on business customers and participate in our regional business engagement network.

**Secondary Schools and CTE Programs:** Workforce Board staff have invested considerable time building relationships with the region's secondary schools. The Board began this effort over 10 years ago when hosting a CTE regional forum to share information and best practices. This forum has led to many developments throughout the region between the public schools and the NCWorks system. Staff from the



career centers regularly attend career days at the local high schools as well as present to various CTE classes to discuss and demonstrate NCWorks and to help students become registered. Staff also serve on local committees to support the work and goals of CTE and employer engagement. CTE also engages with WDB meetings and serves as a representative on the board.

**Appalachian State University:** We continue in conversations with ASU's career development center to explore ways NCWorks can partner and build on its services. Staff continue to have engagement with the University in various ways such as assistance with grants to enhance service delivery. Most recently this involved Board staff assisting with connecting university and community college staff in coordination of a grant related to expanding careers in healthcare. We also will continue coordination on work related to Gear Up as appropriate to increase awareness among high school students and support employer engagement at events.

**Senior Employment Programs:** In the past, several centers in our region partnered with Urban League to host the Senior Service Employment program. Participants also utilize services offered through the center. When appropriate, senior participants are placed at the career center as a worksite to enhance their skills during program participation.

The WDB continues to partner and build on relationships established with NCWorks partners, secondary schools, community colleges, etc. to support the in-demand training needs of students and employers. The High Country WDB continues to stay connected to the local CTE programs in an effort to align NCWorks system activities to support local CTE initiatives whether through presentations at Workforce Development Board meetings or participating in CTE career fairs or other student engagement opportunities. In addition, the HCWDB being the regional convener for Certified Career Pathways development strengthened these partnerships.

8. Provide a description of (a) 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 appropriately 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 High Country 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 raise 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 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 centers and local partners providing those services to local businesses.”

There are currently no specific cooperative agreements with employers.

**9. 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 job seekers, employers, agency partners, stakeholders, and elected officials on the local, state, and federal levels to promote the board and make the public aware of its existence and of the services available to help meet the needs of job seekers and employers/business and industry.
- In line with this commitment, the High Country WDB will actively provide staff-assisted services to the local labor force and private employers, ensuring that the diverse needs of our customers, including job seekers and employers, are met.
- Recognizing the significance of small businesses with fewer than 100 employees to our economy and workforce, the High Country WDB prioritizes serving this sector to maintain a vibrant workforce within our communities.
- Addressing the skills gap in our region is a top priority for the High Country WDB. Through various initiatives such as classroom training, on-the-job training, and other training services, we aim to equip adult, dislocated workers, and youth participants with the necessary skills to meet the demands of employers and industries. The WDB is committed to engaging youth in the WIOA youth program through work-based learning activities, fostering the development of a skilled workforce and meeting the 20% expenditure expectation.
- To meet the high demand for skilled workers in key sectors such as Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, and Human Services, the High Country WDB has established three NCWorks Certified Career Pathways. These pathways, identified based on employer demand, contribute to

economic growth offering sustainable wages, expanding job opportunities, and meeting the employment needs of jobseekers.

- Ensuring compliance with state and federal guidelines, the High Country WDB is dedicated to achieving 100% certification of our comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers by the NCWorks Commission. This certification underscores our commitment to effectively meeting the workforce needs of North Carolina's citizens.

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

NCWorks staff continuously engage with partners and community events to engage all populations including promoting services, faith-based partnerships, and memberships in DEI groups. Expanded efforts include partnerships with Step Ahead, Wilkes Recovery Revolution, Homestead Recovery Center, and Freedom Life Ministries. These partnerships have created additional referrals and services for our customers, and training opportunities for staff as they assist individuals in recovery looking to reenter the workforce. Efforts include the following:

- Dislocated workers: recruitment and referrals through EAI appointments and those seeking assistance with unemployment. Dual enrollment with TAA.
- Disconnected youth/dropouts: College learning labs, teen crisis partners, 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 and refer to the New Opportunity School for Women.
- People of color: community service organizations, health departments, DSS, promotion to community leaders of color.
- Individuals with disabilities: recruit and partner with Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Justice involved: increased partnerships with recovery agencies and Freedom Life; attendance at child support court for referrals; reentry staff specialist who stays up to date on best practices and service delivery.

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 along with increased engagement of our community partners.

11. Provide a description of how the Workforce Development Board coordinates workforce investment activities carried out in the Local Area with:

- a. statewide rapid response activities as described in WIOA Section 134(a)(2)(A).

- b. specifically describe the coordination and delivery of services to businesses to include systems that are used to determine economic trends and partners within your Early Warning Network to help identify those businesses that are expanding and/or struggling. [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. Growing companies may be the right fit for an OJT candidate, and 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. Staff will contact the state DWS rapid response unit staff as soon as staff are made aware of the layoff/closure event or announcement. If the event requires state-level participation, then WDB staff work closely with the state to set up the rapid response meeting with the company and communicate this to the appropriate center staff that will need to participate in the company meeting.

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. Staff also coordinate with TAA services for dual enrollment to better service dislocated workers.

12. 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 diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

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. Staff attend information sessions on programs of study and events where they engage with local providers to increase knowledge of services and programs. In general, the majority of training and education attainment occurs via the local community college system per customer choice.

Customers are also referred to other local areas that may be training in an institution outside of the High Country service area. Staff also engage in opportunities with presentations about workforce development to educational groups, assist with grant work, partnership building, and community connections.

Staff have been participating in training opportunities focusing on equity and inclusion that will help them better serve customers and increase awareness. Many programs/partners are increasing outreach efforts to underserved populations to increase equity and inclusion in their service delivery. Staff utilize data to

determine what demographic groups are underserved so outreach can be increased to those groups. Outreach and recruitment involves a variety of organizations and agencies to ensure reaching as many different groups as possible including NC Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (formerly NC Vocational Rehabilitation), departments of social services, health departments, schools, etc. in order to reach customers with disabilities, all races, ages, ethnic groups, gender identities, etc.

13. Based on the history of economic development projects in the Local Area, how many projects does the Local Area WDB expect to engage in during the upcoming program year? Please indicate the type of services the Local Area WDB expects to provide.

It is expected that Board staff and career center staff will continue to attend and partner on economic development events that include special summits and regular meetings, and job fairs that are often held in conjunction with local economic development commissions. As opportunities arise, the WDB partners with various projects and planning efforts such as the current Watauga and Wilkes Childcare study, the annual Vision Northwest Workforce Summit, and MyFutureNC planning events coordinated with economic development. Currently the WDB Director services on committees related to this work. Staff and centers also support the economic development of expanding businesses to address hiring needs by hosting specialized hiring events in the career centers, such as for the North Wilkesboro Speedway and partner with service delivery in the event of downsizing. Staff and economic development may also serve on joint committees that allow for greater interaction such as the local Business Advisory Committee and STABLE Workplaces. The WDB is fortunate in its relationship with economic development in the region and has an engaged 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. Board staff also provide economic forecasting data through Chmura's Jobs EQ on request to economic developers and partners.

While much of the work of expansion and economic development projects is confidential, staff engage and partner where possible once information is available. Services may include joint meetings to discuss workforce needs and strategies to address. Centers are always made available to develop and assist with hiring events to meet new and expanding business needs. Centers generally host monthly to weekly events for employers trying to meet their workforce needs. The Wilkes EDC completed the development of a Commercial Business Center where staff were engaged in the opening celebration and on-site to meet with a new employer stating their intent to locate in the new facility. Staff are also assisting in the hiring of employees for one of the largest economic impact opportunities related to the reopening and ongoing events at the North Wilkesboro Speedway. Another example is a local plant facility expansion and meeting hiring needs by hosting multiple hiring events on-site. While we do not have a specific "number" these are the types of services provided and that we will continue to engage in moving forward.

14. Provide a description of how the WDB is employing sector strategies by creating industry-led sector partnerships to facilitate engagement of employers and better coordinate workforce development services, training, and economic development activities. Include a brief example(s) of existing industry sector

initiatives / partnerships or describe the strategy to implement them for evidence-based in-demand industry sectors for the region [WIOA Section 106 (c)(1)(C), Section 107 (d)(4)(D)]

Board staff, service provider staff, center staff, and other community partners work together to develop sector strategies for the region. Opportunities exist in various sectors around occupational skills training and work-based learning opportunities. The healthcare sector continues to be our region’s most in-demand for training. Recently the Board participated in work related to expanded healthcare careers in partnership with Appalachian State University. Relationships that were built as a result of career pathways development assist the flow of conversation about needs – whether for employees or types of training. In the past staff have taken part in the multi-region Energy Sector Partnership grant and continue to participate in more localized gatherings of businesses (Advanced Manufacturing Association in Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties) or groups with a broader focus (Business Industry Education Forum in Wilkes County). The High Country WDB has partnered with NC Tech Paths, a program dedicated to helping those in Northwestern NC gain access to technology jobs locally within the region and in neighboring regions through education and certification. In addition, the High Country WDB co-hosted a virtual event (January 2023) for small businesses within the region creating an opportunity for the small businesses sector to engage with local board and career center staff and anticipates similar types of events in the coming year.

The WDB is also engaged in the current manufacturing sector grant with an emphasis on data collection to gain a broader understanding of this sector related to workforce needs and industry focus. This will engage local staff within the sector as we collect data from employers and partners.

15. 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	666
Welding/Advanced Manufacturing	N/A	2018	69
Human Services	Foothills & Western Piedmont WDBs	2021	132

\*Data pulled from NCWorks: Participants by Training Occupation and Geography Area

16. 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.
- b. Explain how career pathways in the local area are in alignment with other partners/stakeholders’ (Department of Public Instruction (DPI), community colleges, myFutureNC, universities, etc.) existing pathways or if they are duplicates.

- c. Describe the strategy to avoid duplication efforts.
  - d. Describe the strategy to promote pathways and recruit participants.
- a. At this time the WDB has no plans for a new career pathway; however, as pathways are evaluated and needs are identified, additional pathways may be explored.
  - b. Pathway development engages local partners to ensure alignment of training needs. During our development of pathways, partners were at the table sharing relevant data and support. Career advisors keep up to date on relevant training programs offered via training partners that offer career pathways meeting customer needs. Staff attend or are part of planning meetings that discuss pathways for students at all levels of education. This may include advisory meetings, credential attainment planning with myFutureNC, or work on special initiatives. Staff also attend open houses and orientations related to training programs that support career pathways.
  - c. Engaging partners in work related to pathways will assist in avoiding duplication. However, we have seen that our education partners continue to review and modify their pathways based on feedback and demand and often receive special funding for their pathway work.
  - d. Pathways are promoted to customers who seek training assistance. Staff review in-demand career areas and provide data related to pathways to include credentials, wages, and employment opportunities. Staff often engage in open houses and attend orientations to meet prospective students interested in the training pathway. Staff also work closely with the training providers for referrals when appropriate and in some cases have set hours when the career advisor is available on the community college campus to recruit and serve students.

17. Provide a description of the Local Area WDB’s capacity to provide workforce investment activities to address (a) education attainment and skill needs of high-demand fields (b) 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 (c) supportive services for hard-to-reach communities. (d) Explain strategies that include NextGen, NCCareers.org and any awareness models for success. (e) Explain strategies to align work across the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and (DPI) to increase youth apprenticeships or assist businesses in hiring youth apprentices.
- a. NCWorks in partnership with local training providers and partners can 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 for students in basic skills, short-term training and curriculum programs. Training generally falls within pathways that are in local high-demand fields and are likely to lead to employment.
  - b. Centers promote training programs via social media and other sources provided by the provider and also engage in open houses for training programs to stay abreast of program offerings. 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 and hosting special outreach events. 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, OJTs, and incumbent worker training. Staff continue to promote learn-and-earn opportunities as part of service delivery.

- c. Hard-to-reach communities are done through the network of partners in various outreach events and service delivery. Engaging in events that connect with hard-to-serve populations has been successful. Customers then enrolled are offered supportive services as funding allows them to assist in goal attainment.
- d. Work-based learning is a current priority with NextGen as youth are placed in work experience and OJTs that provide opportunities for skill building and entering employment. Staff continue to be aware of apprenticeship opportunities and engage in training when available. All activities tie into the goals of MyFutureNC and First in Talent to support the increase of credential attainment in the area.
- e. In general youth apprenticeships are limited in the region, however, we continue to support and utilize the Apprenticeship NC partner as appropriate to connect partners and employers. Examples include connections with a recent grant application regarding healthcare apprenticeships with Appalachian State University and staying informed of pre-apprenticeship opportunities such as the Surry Yadkin Works program. We have also engaged in hosting an Educator Apprenticeship informational session with our educational partners in an effort to explore ways to meet the teacher shortage.



### **III. Regional Strategic Planning:**

*North Carolina is defined by an expansive geography that covers over 53,000 square miles and spans from the mountains in the west, to the piedmont region in the state's center to the coastal plain region in the east. This expansive geography contributes to the state's diverse mix of rural communities, small towns, cities, metropolitan areas, and regional economic centers, each with its own unique industrial composition. Part of North Carolina's economic development strategy includes organization of the state's 100 counties into eight multi-county regions called Prosperity Zones, which are intended to help ensure economic growth across all areas of the state, by leveraging regional economic, workforce, and educational resources. Overlaying the eight prosperity zones are North Carolina's 20 Local Area WDBs that facilitate the delivery of workforce services to the state's citizens and employers.*

*Local Area WDBs are to continue, or begin, formal interaction based on these regional geographies. The following regional configurations will be used for submission of this Regional Plan:*

- *Western Region: Southwestern, Region C (Foothills), and Mountain Area WDBs;*
- *Northwest Region: High Country, Western Piedmont, and Region C (Foothills) WDBs;*
- *Piedmont Triad Region: Piedmont Triad Regional and GuilfordWorks WDBs;*
- *Southwest Region: Centralina, Charlotte Works, Region C (Foothills), and Gaston County WDBs;*
- *North Central Region: Kerr-Tar, Durham County, Turning Point, Mid-Carolina, and Capital Area WDBs;*
- *Sandhills Region: Cape Fear, Lumber River and Mid-Carolina WDBs;*
- *Northeast Region: Rivers East, Northeastern, and Turning Point WDBs; and*
- *Southeast Region: Eastern Carolina and Cape Fear WDBs.*

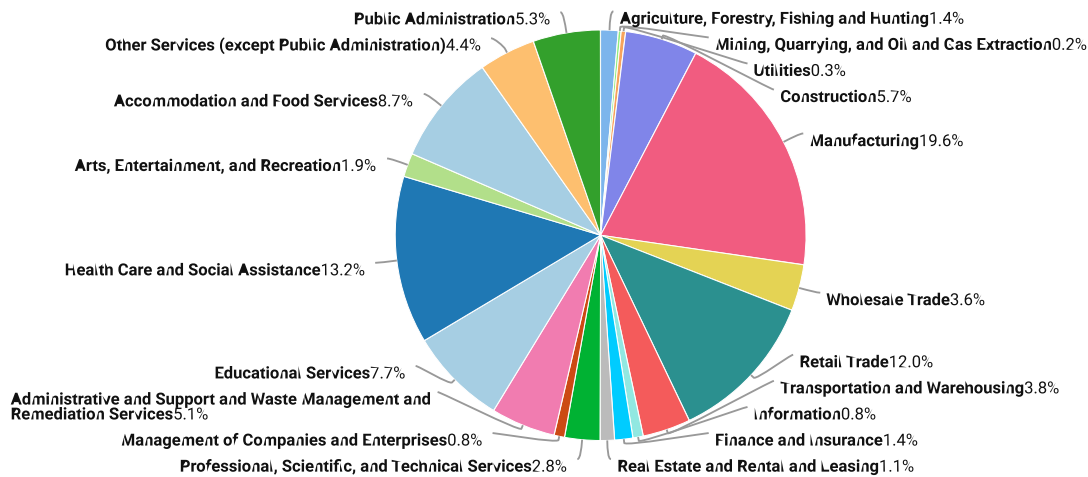
1. Provide an analysis of the regional economic conditions to include: a) existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations; as well as conditions that contribute to potential layoffs and closures and, b) knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of employers in those industry sectors and occupations. Include sources used and business involvement in determining needs. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(1)(A)(i)(ii) and (B)].

a) Existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations data are shown:

## Industry Snapshot

The largest sector in the Future Workforce Alliance is Manufacturing, employing 64,701 workers. The next-largest sectors in the region are Health Care and Social Assistance (43,541 workers) and Retail Trade (39,365). High location quotients (LQs) indicate sectors in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The sectors with the largest LQs in the region are Manufacturing (LQ = 2.45), Retail Trade (1.21), and Public Administration (1.15).

Total Workers for Future Workforce Alliance by Industry



Source: JobsEQ® Data as of 2023Q4

Employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2023Q3 with preliminary estimates updated to 2023Q4.

Sectors in the Future Workforce Alliance with the highest average wages per worker are Utilities (\$98,835), Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$96,505), and Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (\$74,018). Regional sectors with the best job growth (or most moderate job losses) over the last 5 years are Construction (+2,339 jobs), Retail Trade (+1,635), and Wholesale Trade (+1,585).

Over the next 1 year, employment in the Future Workforce Alliance is projected to expand by 649 jobs. The fastest growing sector in the region is expected to be Management of Companies and Enterprises with a +1.0% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Health Care and Social Assistance (+329 jobs), Transportation and Warehousing (+95), and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (+68).

Future Workforce Alliance, 2023Q4<sup>1</sup>

NAICS	Industry	Current			5-Year History		1-Year Forecast				
		Empl	Avg Ann Wages	LQ	Empl Change	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
31	Manufacturing	64,701	\$55,599	2.45	-2,994	-0.9%	6,520	2,610	3,911	-1	0.0%
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	43,541	\$55,613	0.90	-436	-0.2%	4,594	2,054	2,211	329	0.8%
44	Retail Trade	39,365	\$35,884	1.21	1,635	0.9%	5,259	2,396	3,002	-139	-0.4%
72	Accommodation and Food Services	28,807	\$20,639	1.01	641	0.5%	5,133	2,293	2,795	45	0.2%
61	Educational Services	25,367	\$46,944	0.96	-681	-0.5%	2,455	1,172	1,216	67	0.3%
23	Construction	18,814	\$51,660	0.95	2,339	2.7%	1,651	660	966	26	0.1%
92	Public Administration	17,488	\$49,053	1.15	209	0.2%	1,617	710	899	8	0.0%
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	16,729	\$36,088	0.81	-362	-0.4%	1,954	826	1,093	35	0.2%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	14,645	\$27,273	1.05	-245	-0.3%	1,701	730	942	29	0.2%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	12,413	\$52,080	0.76	1,213	2.1%	1,455	593	766	95	0.8%
42	Wholesale Trade	11,997	\$68,763	0.97	1,585	2.9%	1,197	487	726	-15	-0.1%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	9,082	\$66,275	0.38	618	1.4%	809	301	441	68	0.7%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	6,101	\$29,597	0.93	691	2.4%	949	385	524	40	0.7%
52	Finance and Insurance	4,716	\$66,218	0.36	142	0.6%	411	166	229	16	0.3%
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	4,538	\$35,139	1.11	-428	-1.8%	521	264	277	-20	-0.4%
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	3,756	\$52,675	0.64	391	2.2%	375	173	189	12	0.3%
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	2,725	\$96,505	0.53	-1,791	-9.6%	262	95	138	28	1.0%
51	Information	2,664	\$69,805	0.41	-395	-2.7%	252	94	145	13	0.5%
22	Utilities	1,120	\$98,835	0.66	-67	-1.1%	90	40	58	-8	-0.7%
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	770	\$74,018	0.64	-151	-3.5%	73	27	44	1	0.2%
<b>Total - All Industries</b>		<b>329,341</b>	<b>\$47,331</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1,913</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>36,585</b>	<b>15,848</b>	<b>20,088</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>0.2%</b>

Source: [JobsEQ](#)  
Data as of 2023Q4

Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.

1. All data based upon a four-quarter moving average

Exits and transfers are approximate estimates based upon occupation separation rates.

Employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2023Q3 with preliminary estimates updated to 2023Q4. Forecast employment growth uses national projections adapted for regional growth patterns.

## Occupation Snapshot

The largest major occupation group in the Future Workforce Alliance is Production Occupations, employing 40,181 workers. The next-largest occupation groups in the region are Office and Administrative Support Occupations (33,537 workers) and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (33,132). High location quotients (LQs) indicate occupation groups in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The major groups with the largest LQs in the region are Production Occupations (LQ = 2.19), Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (1.15), and Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations (1.11).

Occupation groups in the Future Workforce Alliance with the highest average wages per worker are Management Occupations (\$107,000), Computer and Mathematical Occupations (\$92,300), and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (\$91,100). The unemployment rate in the region varied among the major groups from 0.8% among Legal Occupations to 5.2% among Transportation and Material Moving Occupations.

Over the next 1 year, the fastest growing occupation group in the Future Workforce Alliance is expected to be Healthcare Support Occupations with a +1.1% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (+155 jobs) and Healthcare Support Occupations (+151). Over the same period, the highest separation demand (occupation demand due to retirements and workers moving from one occupation to another) is expected in Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (5,038 jobs) and Production Occupations (4,268).

Future Workforce Alliance, 2023Q4<sup>1</sup>

SOC	Occupation	Current					5-Year History			1-Year Forecast				
		Empl	Mean Ann Wages <sup>2</sup>	LQ	Unempl	Unempl Rate	Online Job Ads <sup>3</sup>	Empl Change	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
51-0000	Production	40,181	\$42,700	2.19	1,779	3.9%	716	-3,029	-1.4%	4,168	1,758	2,510	-100	-0.2%
43-0000	Office and Administrative Support	33,537	\$41,200	0.84	1,089	2.7%	870	-1,117	-0.7%	3,514	1,754	1,970	-209	-0.6%
53-0000	Transportation and Material Moving	33,132	\$40,900	1.15	2,131	5.2%	1,137	2,095	1.3%	4,404	1,724	2,525	155	0.5%
41-0000	Sales and Related	30,808	\$43,600	1.06	1,412	4.0%	1,358	662	0.4%	4,045	1,899	2,254	-109	-0.4%
35-0000	Food Preparation and Serving Related	27,852	\$29,100	1.04	1,711	5.0%	1,542	393	0.3%	5,082	2,263	2,775	45	0.2%
11-0000	Management	21,334	\$107,000	0.86	335	1.5%	881	1,734	1.7%	1,763	690	985	87	0.4%
29-0000	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	17,921	\$91,100	0.93	244	1.3%	2,825	693	0.8%	1,154	572	458	124	0.7%
25-0000	Educational Instruction and Library	17,815	\$50,600	1.01	358	2.1%	708	-568	-0.6%	1,637	807	763	67	0.4%
47-0000	Construction and Extraction	14,748	\$46,600	0.98	905	4.6%	196	743	1.0%	1,295	509	751	35	0.2%
49-0000	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	14,202	\$51,700	1.11	393	2.1%	609	741	1.1%	1,298	557	689	52	0.4%
13-0000	Business and Financial Operations	14,006	\$73,200	0.67	321	2.1%	343	1,138	1.7%	1,207	433	711	63	0.5%
31-0000	Healthcare Support	13,566	\$32,700	0.91	478	2.9%	818	-881	-1.3%	2,068	884	1,033	151	1.1%
37-0000	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	11,294	\$33,400	1.05	646	4.5%	491	123	0.2%	1,531	694	815	22	0.2%
33-0000	Protective Service	7,098	\$41,900	1.00	181	2.3%	176	5	0.0%	712	320	391	1	0.0%
39-0000	Personal Care and Service	6,746	\$34,000	0.83	280	3.6%	189	264	0.8%	1,267	482	741	45	0.7%
21-0000	Community and Social Service	6,147	\$51,500	1.03	135	2.4%	496	-179	-0.6%	588	248	297	43	0.7%
15-0000	Computer and Mathematical	5,267	\$92,300	0.50	114	1.9%	231	-79	-0.3%	378	120	200	58	1.1%
27-0000	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	4,487	\$55,000	0.74	121	3.2%	230	-93	-0.4%	469	198	256	16	0.4%
17-0000	Architecture and Engineering	4,189	\$82,700	0.79	81	1.9%	181	116	0.6%	325	124	164	37	0.9%
19-0000	Life, Physical, and Social Science	2,331	\$69,700	0.81	48	2.5%	154	64	0.6%	221	50	154	16	0.7%
45-0000	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	1,398	\$35,400	0.72	81	4.9%	35	-40	-0.6%	198	76	125	-4	-0.3%
23-0000	Legal	1,282	\$89,900	0.48	12	0.8%	34	-19	-0.3%	88	38	43	7	0.5%
<b>Total - All Occupations</b>		<b>329,341</b>	<b>\$51,400</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>12,856</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>14,221</b>	<b>2,766</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>37,446</b>	<b>16,201</b>	<b>20,610</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>0.2%</b>

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

Data as of 2023Q4 unless noted otherwise

Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.

1. Data based on a four-quarter moving average unless noted otherwise.

2. Wage data represent the average for all Covered Employment

3. Data represent found online ads active within the last thirty days in the selected region. Due to alternative county-assignment algorithms, ad counts in this analytic may not match that shown in RTI (nor in the popup window ad list). Ad counts for ZCTA-based regions are estimates.

Occupation employment data are estimated via industry employment data and the estimated industry/occupation mix. Industry employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and currently updated through 2023Q3, imputed where necessary with preliminary estimates updated to 2023Q4. Wages by occupation are as of 2023 provided by the BLS and imputed where necessary. Forecast employment growth uses national projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics adapted for regional growth patterns.

Data Reference: [JobsEQ Economic Overview Report April 2024](#)

b) The continued changes and advancements in technology and automation will drive the demand for increased knowledge and skills needed to meet employment demands in all sectors. Eligible training providers such as our community college partner are updating the curriculum and adding relevant equipment to prepare tomorrow's workforce. The workforce development boards are made up of 51% private sector businesses; therefore, business involvement is constant. Not only do we receive input and engagement from our workforce boards, but each local area is also involved in its own respective business community through chambers, EDCs, and sector groups. Like the High Country, both Foothills and Western Piedmont have developed and helped grow manufacturing sector partnerships. In meeting regional needs, we have also partnered with Western Piedmont during a recent unexpected large layoff to assist in meeting with dislocated workers and staffing job fairs. Knowing many customers live on regional borders, we also held job fairs with specific outreach to those impacted. In addition, a newer partnership with Freedom Life is the development of a regional reentry council consisting of counties from High Country and Foothills. Outside of the prosperity zone, events such as the Construction Career Day hosted by Mountain Area also include employer and educational partnerships from the High Country region.

## 2. Describe how the regional strategic vision aligns with the NCWorks Commission's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan.

The regional vision of supporting and preparing a more qualified workforce for job seekers and employers can be seen in our service delivery and is aligned with the goals of the NCWorks Commission Strategic Plan.

Goal 1: Prepare workers to succeed in the NC economy by increasing skills and education attainment.

- Increase career awareness.
- Advocate for increased educational attainment.
- Promote access to job training for high-demand and high-growth fields through sustainable, long-term career pathways.
- Increase access to education for those who have barriers.

The daily work and services provided through NCWorks and by our WIOA service providers support the goal of preparing workers through the use of work-based working and with skill-enhancement opportunities. Through career advising services and coordination of services with appropriate partners, we strive to prepare workers to succeed in the economy. Career awareness is integrated into daily service delivery with job seekers and includes information related to career pathways. Careers fairs across the region support employers and provide additional opportunities for job seekers.

Goal 2: Create a workforce system that is responsible for the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership.

- Create a workforce development system that is value-driven for employers, aligns education with industry demands, prepares North Carolinians for the future, and drives economic development.
- Increase the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships.
- Enhance programs to enable employers to provide training for new and existing employees.

- Prioritize and acknowledge industry-led partnerships.
- Leverage employer data on workforce projections and training needs using tools and measures for business engagement.

Employer leadership can be seen throughout the region as we engage and partner on local activities that support employers, foster sector engagement, and meet training needs. Engagement with employer forums, business and staff engagement, business and student engagement, and an increased emphasis on work-based learning fosters employer leadership in the region. Employers serving on the WDB also engage in local activities serving in their leadership capacity as board members. The use of data supports the delivery of services utilizing JobsEQ, NC LEAD, and other relevant sources.

Goal 3: Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation.

- Advance leadership development opportunities for workforce professionals.
- Support initiatives to innovate and replicate good ideas.
- Promote local workforce initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline.

Locally we continue to seek out best practices around innovation that support our workforce delivery system. Staff continuously participate in leadership and workforce training opportunities to be as prepared as possible to meet customer and employer needs such as Chamber leadership programs and NCWorks STARS training. As additional options become available around the use of leveraging technology, this will be explored and utilized to enhance services.

Goal 4: Promote system access, alignment, integration, and modernization.

- Strengthen and support system integration and inclusive practices.
- Support increased awareness, communication, accessibility, and understanding of the “NCWorks” brand.
- Research and recommend advanced technology for outreach to adapt to new generations and marginalized populations entering the workforce.
- Measure and report on the effectiveness of the workforce development system including the usage and quality of services.

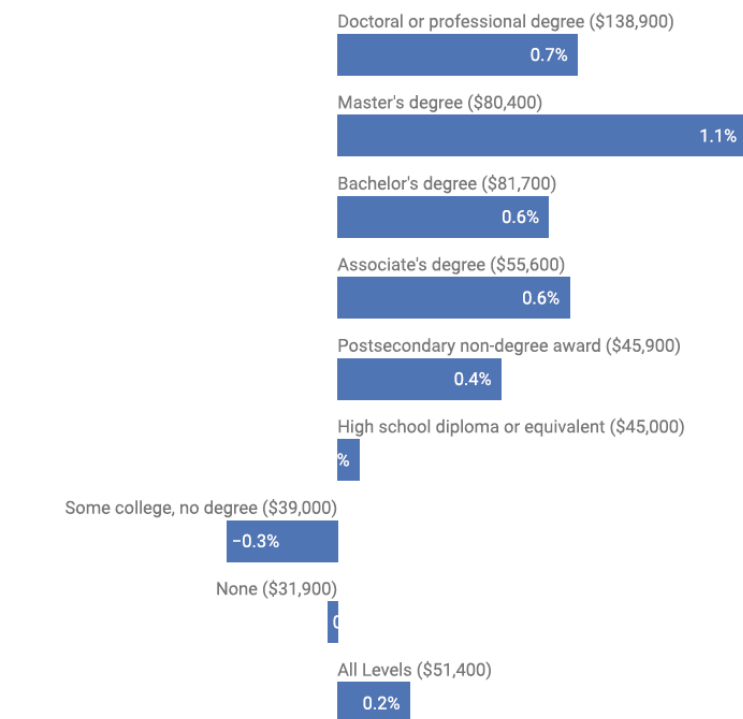
Regionally we continue to promote access to services and focus on coordination of service delivery with inclusive practices. Staff have continued to engage in diversity training and evaluate the quality of services and their role in providing them to diverse populations. This can also be seen in presentations to local workforce partners and with workforce board meetings. The WDB looks forward to the opportunity to engage in future innovative practices and funding opportunities to support success in the region.

3. Provide an analysis of the workforce in the region, including current labor force employment and unemployment data, and information on labor market trends, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(1)(C)].

The FWA region has a civilian labor force of 380,667 with a participation rate of 57.1 percent (57.1%). The unemployment rate for the FWA was 3.6% as of February 2024. The regional unemployment rate was lower than the national rate of 4.2 percent (4.2%). One year earlier (February 2023) the unemployment rate was 3.5 percent (3.5%).

Of individuals 25 to 64 in the region, 21.9% have a bachelor’s degree or higher compared with 35.8% in the nation. Expected growth rates for occupations vary by the education and training required. While all employment in the FWA is projected to grow 0.2% over the next 10 years, occupations typically requiring a postgraduate degree are expected to grow 0.7% per year, those requiring a bachelor’s degree are forecast to grow 0.6% per year, and occupations typically needing a two-year degree or certificated are expected to grow 0.6% per year.

Annual Average Projected Job Growth by Education Levels



Source: JobsEQ®  
Data as of 2023Q4

Employment by occupation data are estimates as of 2023Q4. Education levels of occupations are based on BLS assignments. Forecast employment growth uses national projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics adapted for regional growth patterns.

Data Reference: JobsEQ Economic Overview Report April 2024

Since the type of barriers to employment varies, ongoing engagement with Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Basic Education programming, English as a Second Language and Older Adults who wish to work is strengthened by local area meetings held through the NCWorks Career Centers, the Workforce Board members and the annual One-Stop Required Partner MOU/Infrastructure Funding agreement processes. Please see below for data specific to those with barriers (highlighted in yellow).

	Percent			Value		
	Future Workforce Alliance	North Carolina	USA	Future Workforce Alliance	North Carolina	USA
<b>Educational Attainment, Age 25-64</b>						
No High School Diploma	13.0%	9.8%	10.1%	52,514	529,949	17,373,867
High School Graduate	30.6%	23.6%	25.1%	123,882	1,281,862	43,176,248
Some College, No Degree	22.1%	20.6%	19.7%	89,358	1,116,672	33,916,989
Associate's Degree	12.5%	10.5%	9.2%	50,610	569,100	15,886,884
Bachelor's Degree	14.9%	23.0%	22.4%	60,170	1,244,990	38,451,123
Postgraduate Degree	7.0%	12.6%	13.4%	28,279	681,614	23,058,233
<b>Social</b>						
Poverty Level (of all people)	15.9%	13.3%	12.5%	123,686	1,357,418	40,521,584
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	13.6%	12.3%	11.5%	43,700	503,068	14,486,880
Enrolled in Grade 12 (% of total population)	1.1%	1.3%	1.4%	9,045	135,174	4,476,703
Disconnected Youth <sup>3</sup>	2.8%	2.6%	2.5%	1,216	14,868	430,795
Children in Single Parent Families (% of all children)	36.5%	35.6%	34.0%	52,761	766,687	23,568,955
Uninsured	11.3%	10.5%	8.7%	89,107	1,077,458	28,315,092
With a Disability, Age 18-64	14.5%	11.0%	10.5%	68,535	691,617	20,879,820
With a Disability, Age 18-64, Labor Force Participation Rate and Size	38.2%	42.1%	45.5%	26,211	291,022	9,492,098
Foreign Born	4.1%	8.3%	13.7%	32,679	867,946	45,281,071
Speak English Less Than Very Well (population 5 yrs and over)	2.5%	4.6%	8.2%	19,435	451,823	25,704,846

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

1. American Community Survey 2018-2022, unless noted otherwise

2. Median values for certain aggregate regions (such as MSAs) may be estimated as the weighted averages of the median values from the composing counties.

3. Disconnected Youth are 16-19 year olds who are (1) not in school, (2) not high school graduates, and (3) either unemployed or not in the labor force.

4. Census Population Estimate for 2022, annual average growth rate since 2012. Post-2019 data for Connecticut counties are imputed by Chmura.

5. The Census's method for calculating median house values changed with the 2022 data set, so pre-2022 values are not directly comparable with later data.

Data Reference: *JobsEQ Economic Overview Report April 2024*

4. Describe strategies, used to facilitate engagement of businesses and other employers, including small employers and in-demand industry sector occupations. Describe methods and services to support the workforce system in meeting employer needs. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(4)(A)(i)(ii)].

The Workforce Development Boards partner with Economic Developers, Community Colleges, Chambers of Commerce, and Industry Leaders to identify small businesses and in-demand sectors occupations. One of our workforce development resources is our Upskill Training Grant (Incumbent Worker Training). The Upskill



Training Grant is designed to offer funding assistance to small businesses and high-growth and in-demand industry sectors for incumbent worker training. This training grant offers funding resources to assist businesses with their strategies to develop talent so they can meet their current and future workforce needs.

Local area business service teams stay up to date and engage with businesses to understand business needs and help them (businesses) develop labor market intelligence that will guide their recruitment and retention efforts. Tools such as the LEAD [Workforce Board Labor Market Overview](#), Data from Chmura Jobs EQ, and the Western Piedmont [Economic Indicator Newsletter](#) support business needs and strategies. As appropriate, events and job fairs that cross regional borders are also shared with customers as potential opportunities to meet the hiring needs of employers.

5. Describe strategies and services used to coordinate workforce development programs and economic development. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(4)(A)(iii)].

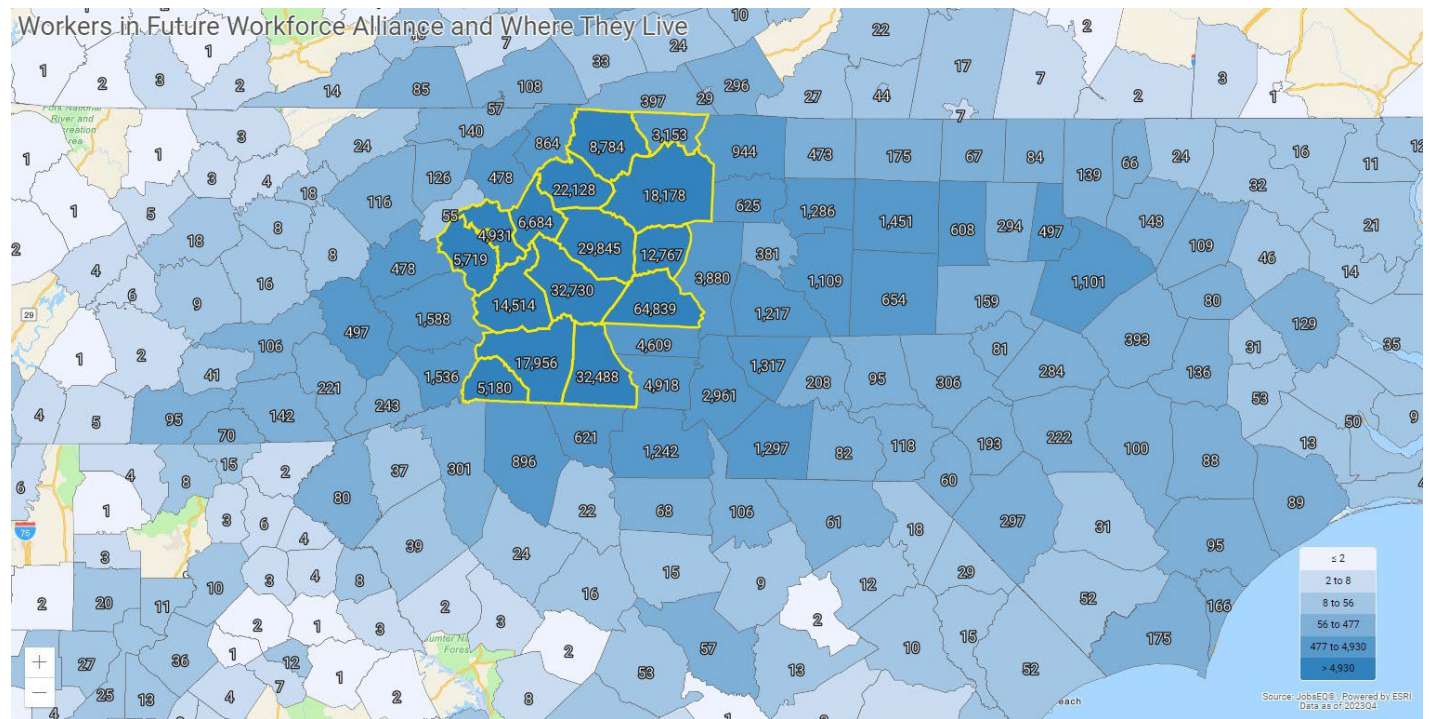
Each of the FWA member workforce entities regularly meets with local Economic Development entities to assess their needs, discuss projects, and provide support and encouragement related to both new recruitment efforts and existing industries. The FWA is completely committed to developing and maintaining relationships with Economic Development partners in order to best meet business customer needs. For the Northwest Prosperity Zone, we strive to maintain partnerships with EDPNC's Economic Development Regional Industry Manager; CTE's Regional Representative; and the regional Customized Training Representative to discuss strategies and services for workforce and economic development. We also work closely with MyFutureNC to collaborate on regional goals to support credential attainment which often involves regional meetings with key workforce partners.

6. Outline regional transportation issues related to workforce development and ways the region is/will address needs identified. Include a description *and* map of the regional commuting patterns. [WIOA Section 108(b)(11)].

Most of the FWA are rural areas and local transportation is one of the biggest challenges. While it has improved, in most cases mass transit still does not exist. Many rural counties have local transportation authorities that may be utilized when necessary; however, often the cost of utilizing these services is prohibitive. Transportation to and from training institutions poses a significant obstacle for many customers striving to access the training and education necessary for securing meaningful employment. The regional WDBs and career centers remain actively engaged in ongoing discussions, initiatives, and strategic plans aimed at enhancing transportation throughout the region. Furthermore, service provider staff diligently work to offer customers supportive services tailored to addressing transportation barriers whenever feasible; including but not limited to vehicle repairs, gas cards, and cost of rideshare resources as it aligns with the local area supportive services policy.

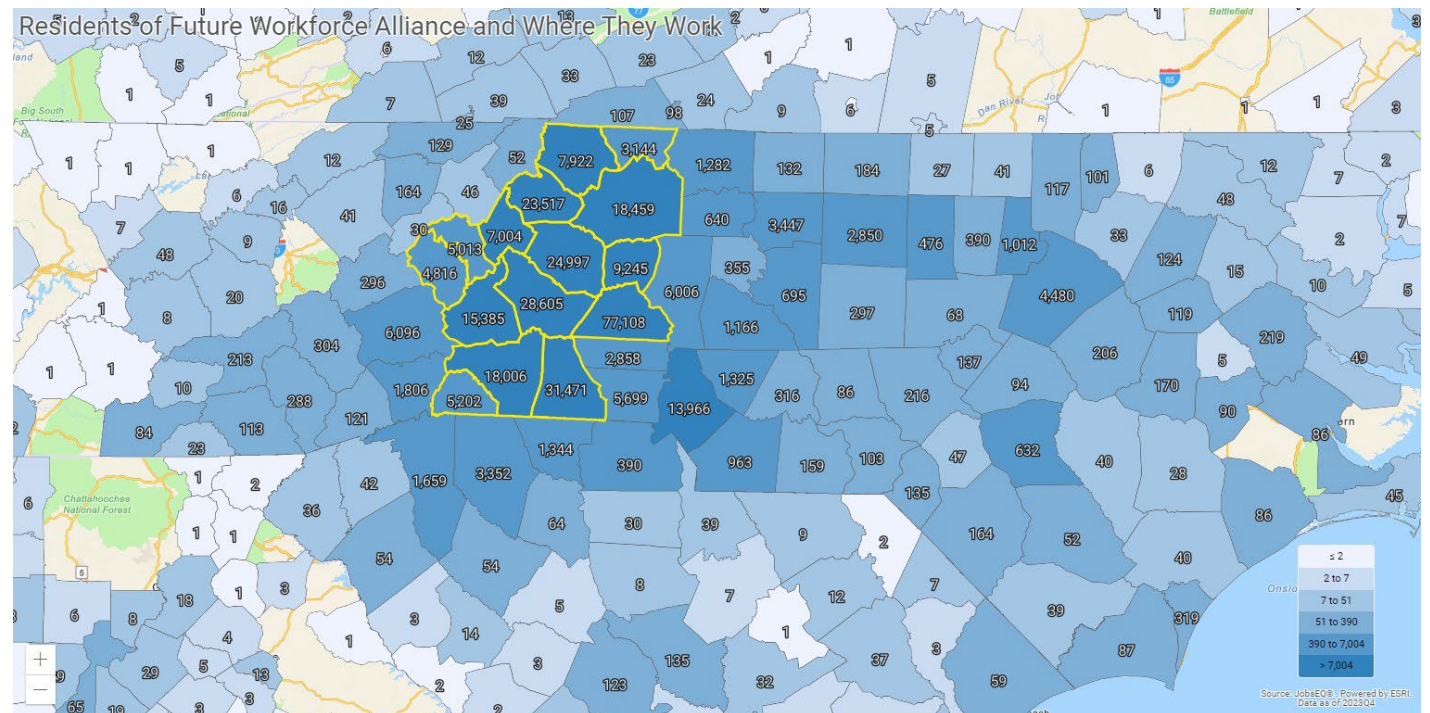
## Map 1: Workers in the Future Workforce Alliance and Where They Live

Source: JobsEQ – ESRI Data as of 2023Q4



## Map 2: Residents in the Future Workforce Alliance and Where They Work

Source: Jobs EQ – ESRI Data as of 2023Q4



7. Briefly provide a description of how the Local Area WDB will coordinate education and workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services. [WIOA Section 108(b)(10)].

The Workforce Development Boards in the High Country, Foothills, and Western Piedmont have worked together as members of the Future Workforce Alliance (FWA) for many years. Each of the FWA Workforce Development Boards benefits from regular collaboration and consistent communication with local community college providers.

Currently, eight community colleges in the FWA service region are members of the N.C. Community College system (Caldwell, Catawba Valley, Cleveland, Isothermal, Mayland, McDowell Technical, Western Piedmont, and Wilkes). The prevalence of these institutions of higher learning allows the FWA providers to collaboratively work in developing training programs that support high-growth occupations and in building career pathways that can support local business needs and foster growth. It also allows the FWA to regularly act as a convener to share ideas and program of instruction examples between training entities, thus ensuring that there is an effort to minimize duplication. We have engaged in ongoing communication with Community College providers to build and monitor training programs for viability and effectiveness. When appropriate customers may enroll in neighboring training programs to meet customer choice.

Furthermore, the FWA remains very involved with Public School officials regularly. This allows for Career pathway development to be targeted at specific sectors and to ensure that all applicable representatives are involved in the planning and execution of building such initiatives. STEM West continues to promote science, technology, and math in secondary schools by providing tours, doing summer camps and events, and providing opportunities for teachers to tour businesses and see STEM at work in industry. It also provides opportunities for teachers to develop partnerships with local businesses for classroom projects and presentations. The STEM West initiative involves many of the school systems in the FWA area. Our CTE programs also fall under a regional Northwest CTE Director who assists in the coordination and shared communication of best practices.

Other examples include working closely with My FutureNC on regional attainment goals to support NC's goal of credential attainment and previous work around career pathways that also involved educational partners across the region.

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

NCWorks is dedicated to offering prioritized services to military veterans and their families. Our local Veteran Employment Representatives, along with Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists, ensure a wide array of services is available to veterans and their families. They also work diligently to inform local business and employer representatives about various veteran-related subsidies and incentives aimed at promoting and expediting the employment of military veterans. Staff members actively participate in regional Stand Downs to provide services for veterans, with the High Country WDB offering assistance and

coordination as needed. Furthermore, through our partnership with Goodwill, staff have access to additional services tailored to veterans.

Veterans facing Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE), as defined in Veteran Program Letter 03-14, receive Individualized Career Services from the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP). These services encompass assessments, job readiness assistance (including one-on-one or group counseling, resume support, job search guidance, and referrals to other programs to overcome barriers), as well as job development contacts.

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

Typically, as the western end of NC experiences fewer widespread weather disasters, occurrences of such emergencies are rare. However, should such an event arise, whether weather-related or stemming from national emergencies like COVID-19, regional staff would promptly convene to assess the situation and needs. Subsequently, they would devise a comprehensive plan to effectively address the needs of both customers and staff. Community partners would play a vital role in this process and would be integrated into the service delivery plan.

In the event of special grants becoming available, the local area would evaluate the regional demand for services and additional funds. Collaboratively strategizing with service providers, we would ensure successful delivery while optimizing resource utilization through best practices.

Increasing the use of virtual services through online platforms and technology allows us to continue offering services, conducting employment reviews, and facilitating virtual workshops. Staff members have been equipped with the necessary tools and technology to sustain service provision, thereby enhancing our preparedness for potential future emergencies.

## IV. NCWorks Commission

*The NCWorks Commission recommends policies and strategies which value diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility while enabling the state's workforce to compete in the current and future global economy. The commission leads, builds partnerships, forms alliances, and is accountable for strengthening North Carolina's innovative, inclusive, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system.*

*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.*

*After extensive stakeholder work and programmatic reviews, the following systemwide goals and objectives were created for the workforce development system:*

- *Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy by increasing skills and education attainment.*
- *Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership.*
- *Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation.*
- *Promote system access, alignment, integration, and modernization.*

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 (a) ensures collaboration with other employer-facing workforce program representatives, such as (b) Vocational Rehabilitation, (c) Agriculture Services, (d) Foreign Labor, (e) Re-Entry, and (f) 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 the following means: 1) promotion of the board website and state-level website resources; 2) promotion on social media (WDB Facebook page and career center Facebook pages); 3) presentations to various civic groups and boards of commissioners; 4) partnerships with economic development commissions and memberships with local chambers of commerce; 5) attendance at various regional meetings and events where services are promoted to employers; 6) newsletters that share success stories of other local businesses that have utilized services; and 7) provision of expungement workshops in partnership with re-entry partners to help job seekers clean up their

criminal records. There is also a designated Re-entry specialist to provide more specialized services to this population and increase awareness of services such as bonding as well as a re-entry program with our Goodwill partner.

We continue to partner with Veterans Services by hosting 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. Veterans staff visit employers to promote the hiring of veterans and highlight veteran skills. High Country Workforce Development Board and NCWorks Career Center staff have regular interaction with Vocational Rehabilitation in our local area to discuss workforce services, collaboration, and partnerships as well as 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. Agricultural staff are also exploring ways to increase service delivery opportunities via NCWorks and recently participated in a tour of local Christmas tree farmers, who often utilize foreign labor services. Center staff are in ongoing communication regarding the delivery of business services and coordination of delivery and engage frequently with work-based learning services to meet workforce needs.

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 training, 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 (DVOP) 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. Services related to agricultural or foreign labor are referred to the agricultural services staff.

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 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 2023-2025 Strategic Plan).

In general funds and guidelines around brand awareness often limit local outreach efforts. However, 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. Signage is located at each local career center and logos are included on all print materials or other supplies such as pens. Staff also wear name badges displaying NCWorks logo and often wear NCWorks apparel.

Social media promotion continues to be extremely effective in promoting center activities and will continue to be utilized by posting information and creating events online. 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. Staff consistently engage with community partners promoting the use of NCWorks at various events, meetings, and community gatherings.

*Communities across North Carolina are developing strong 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.*

4. Describe how the Local Area WDB and the partners identify, address, and provide new and innovative solutions to support the job growth and business expansions of the local workforce system while including Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.

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 an open dialogue of meetings and listening tours. The Local Area WDBs and partners identify the issue/challenge and through discussions, a plan is developed and 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. Local staff engage with new businesses through Chamber and EDC events and discuss service delivery options. The Board continues to apply for funding opportunities that will support local job growth and business expansion such as the awarded ARPA small business grant for work-based learning as well the previous Enhancement Grant. Staff continue to engage in training related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility to enhance service delivery throughout the region.

*The U.S. Departments of Commerce and Labor have jointly identified Recruitment and Hiring; Benefits; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility; Empowerment and Representation; Job Security and Working Conditions; Organizational Culture; Pay; and Skills and Career Advancement as the eight key principles of a good job. Refer to Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 07-22 for details.*

5. Describe the Local Area WDB's strategy for:

- a. incorporating job quality principles into ongoing workforce development activities, to assist with identifying and creating long-term partnerships with employers offering good jobs;
- b. creating strategic, flexible career pathways to good jobs that respond to local labor market needs.

Connections with employers that offer good jobs and benefits to assist customers are a priority for staff. Through our work-based learning services, customers are placed at worksites that offer career pathway opportunities and the principles often considered to be a good job. Many employers are considering options to expand benefits and opportunities being sought by job seekers to assist in meeting hiring needs such as hiring and retention bonuses, increased wages, consideration of childcare, and more flexibility. Staff continue to develop partnerships and outreach in the community to expand services to customers from underserved and underrepresented communities and offer supportive services that may assist this population in successful goal attainment and employment. The quality of good jobs is often also a topic with economic development and Chamber partners.

6. Describe how the Local Area WDB ensures that individuals from underserved and underrepresented communities have equitable access to the services of the workforce system and the jobs created in the economic growth spurred by federal investments.

Staff maintain close relationships with partners that also serve these populations and often have frequent referrals to and from these organizations. Partners such as those who specialize in recovery and reentry have resulted in expanded service delivery to this population to support employment goals. Our ARPA SUD grant has also strengthened these partnerships as it has increased our capacity to serve this population. Engaging in community events to expand outreach services has also increased awareness of access to services. Staff frequently engage in community partner events to expand awareness and access.

7. Describe how the Local Area WDB is engaged in work-based learning projects with local employers.

OJT and Work Experience continue to be the primary work-based learning tools utilized with customers and employers with an increased emphasis in the region. Our previous Enhancement Grant allowed us to expand work-based learning opportunities in the region through work experiences, OJTs, and incumbent worker training programs. We are now able to continue this work due to being awarded ARPA grant funds designed to serve small businesses with work-based learning activities. Work experience for youth and adults continues to be a successful service provided to customers.

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.

8. Briefly describe how the local board will ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers of services through the system and ensure that such providers meet the employment needs of local employers, and workers and jobseekers. [WIOA Section 108(b)(6)(A)]

Board and service provider staff know that continuous improvement of service delivery is always a goal and it begins with well-trained staff with a desire to provide the best customer service for employers, workers, and job seekers. Staff continuously engage in training to stay aware of the newest policies and best practices to enhance service delivery. Staff are also looking for new ways to provide services such as new offerings in the center or through new partnerships in the community. Maintaining close relationships with key partners such as training providers, chambers, and economic development also remains a priority. Board and center staff have a close working relationship that allows open communication regarding service delivery and addresses any areas of concern or gaps in services.

## V. 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 a specific date".*

1. Identify PY 2024 NCWorks Career Center location(s) including Comprehensive and Affiliate 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 2024 NCWorks Career Center Chart. [WIOA Section 121(b)(1)(A) and (b)(1)(B)]

- Name document: Local Area Name PY 2024 NCWorks Career Centers.
- [Attached](#)

2. Provide the name(s) of the current One-Stop 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 and the current year the contract is (e.g., two of three years). [WIOA Section 108(b)(16)]

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 2023, followed by a bidders conference, and responses were due February 2023. The HCWDB made the recommendation of service providers and the one-stop operators at its regularly scheduled meeting in March 2023. 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 for up to three years. PY24 will begin the second year during this cycle.

3. Provide a brief description of how Career and Training Services are provided. [WIOA Section 121(e), 134(c)]

- Provide a description of how Career and Training services are provided to adults.
  - Provide a description of how Career and Training services are provided to dislocated workers.
  - Provide a description of how Career and Training services are provided to youth.
- a. In general, all staff participate in providing basic career services including 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 who 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 who 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 and then enrolled in adult services. Based on need a plan is developed outlining appropriate career or training services that lead to skills enhancement and employment.

b. Customers who are assessed and determined to be a dislocated worker are referred to WIOA staff for enrollment in dislocated worker services. Based on need a plan is developed outlining appropriate career or training services that lead to skills enhancement and employment.

c. Customers who are assessed and determined to be an eligible youth are referred to WIOA staff for enrollment in NextGen services. Based on needs, a plan is developed outlining appropriate career or training services that lead to skill enhancement and employment. Youth services are delivered through the program elements and have a focus on work-based learning.

#### 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 including registration and initial assessment. During the assessment process, customers who 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. 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 skills gaps, interests, aptitudes, or basic skills). Those determined suitable for training may then be enrolled for training services. Training may include short-term options such as continuing education or other curriculum programs.

#### 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. Information may include notification of workshops, job fairs, or other events that may be of benefit. Centers are consistently discussing and exploring ways to improve follow-up services for walk-in traffic to ensure needs are being met 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. How 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, inclusion, and accessibility.

a. All center staff receive training from the WDB, the Training Center, 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 guide changes and troubleshooting. Staff receive this training as part of onboarding and consistently reviewed during team staff meetings.

b. New staff are typically trained within two weeks and often shadow other staff during the use of the system and complete an NCWorks 101 checklist. Once training has been completed, the RFA is submitted by WDB staff or DWS manager for staff access.

c. Staff are also provided the NCWorks training site to practice using the system. WDB staff work closely with state staff regarding the use of the system. The Regional Analyst also provides ongoing training based on the needs of staff and refresher training. Staff also participate 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. Staff typically use Friday afternoons as an opportunity to focus on staff training and development opportunities that review processes, policies, expectations, and participate in employer tours.

d. Staff complete virtual Equal Opportunity training through the NCWorks Training Center, and in previous years Mose Dorsey has completed this training in person. NCWorks Career Center staff have participated in regional DEI training at the Northwest Prosperity Zone's virtual training and have been taking part in person in the multi-part training series through the NCWorks Training Center. This entails staff participating in online sessions that are then followed up by in-person, group-facilitated discussions.

7. Briefly explain coordination with the Trade Adjustment Act (TAA) to maximize resources and prevent duplicative services. Please include specific details on how case managers for WIOA and TAA programs coordinate to provide seamless services to eligible participants.

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. Customers impacted by TAA should be dually enrolled as a dislocated worker when appropriate.

8. Briefly describe how the NCWorks Career Center serves persons with disabilities.

Workforce staff are informed 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 the placement of EO posters in each of the NCWorks Centers. Also, customers enrolled in services are given an orientation that 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 with 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, 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 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 judgment 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. Staff partner with VR as appropriate for dual enrollment of customers or service delivery for those with disabilities. Recently NCWorks has also hosted VR clients as a work-based learning location as part of their service plan.

9. 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 to meet the immediate needs of business when designated staff are unavailable.

10. 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)]

Center staff provide general information regarding how to file a claim and provide the website and customer service number for additional detailed information. Packets of information are made available to customers with unemployment inquiries. In the event of layoffs, staff try to assist customers with understanding of the filing process and how to get assistance with their claims.

Employability Assessment Interview (EAI) appointments have been expanded to additional centers 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 is consistently posted to local Facebook pages and shared with staff and customers. Any information regarding processes is shared with staff so they can best provide information to customers.

11. Attach a flowchart for services – flowchart must include:

- a. initial one-on-one interviews with customers,
- b. skills assessments, and
- c. determination of the need for further services.

- Name document: Local Area WDB Name Services Flowchart 2024.
- Attached.

12. Attach the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Local Area WDB and partners concerning operation of the NCWorks Career Center system. [WIOA Section 121(c)(1)(2)(A)]

- Name document: *Local Area WDB Name NCWorks Career Center MOU*.
- [Attached](#).

13. 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
- b. the roles and any resource contributions of the NCWorks Career Center partners. [WIOA Section 121(a)(3)] [WIOA Section 108(b)(6)(D)]

- a. High Country WDB staff, partners, and service providers agree that customer service is a top priority when serving customers. WDB staff complete informal monitoring on an ongoing basis by working closely with center managers to address any concerns regarding operations or service delivery within the center or by staff on an ongoing basis including regular meetings and discussions and center visits. Annual formal monitoring is also completed using the local monitoring tool to also include a review of activities and partnerships. 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. In the High Country, we currently have seven NCWorks locations across our seven-county service delivery area, with various operating hours and staffing based on need and staff availability. WIOA service providers and local DWS staff form the core of service delivery in our centers and contribute to them while working closely with core and community partners. The Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) determines the dollar value of contributions by required system partners from the state level. See IFA funding chart for these amounts.

14. Describe how the Local Area WDB facilitates access to services provided through the NCWorks Career Center delivery system, including in remote areas, through the use of technology and through other means. [WIOA Section 108(b)(6)(B)]

The Workforce Board continues to pursue the use of technology for increased service delivery and in some cases, has implemented initial efforts. Technology usage can be challenging in rural areas where high-speed internet is not universally available, and technology literacy levels can be low in some populations. Current efforts include continued training for regional library staff in the use of NCWorks Online and providing contact information easily accessible to staff. Centers have continued outreach to local high schools on using school technology to register seniors for job search. The Board has also engaged with work around digital equity through partnering with High Country COG on the submission of a digital equity grant to increase the access and use of technology in the region. Our region also participated in a laptop distribution day with E2D to increase digital access to support training and employment. Our partner, Goodwill Industries, also utilizes

an initiative called PC's for People to assist with access to technology from which several of our WIOA customers have benefited.

Additional ways to reach more customers across the region through the use of technology will continue to be developed. The NCWorks mobile application also increases access to the local population. We are also exploring the use of NC Care 360 designed to assist with customer referrals by local partners.

With the addition of the live chat feature on NCWorks, customers will have additional means to communicate with staff and obtain information on services and jobs.

Case Managers are using Zoom, MS Teams, Facebook, and text as ways to meet and keep in contact with participants /customers to provide crucial services.

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 including youth programs, and programs carried out by NCWorks Career Center partners. What software are NCWorks Career Centers using? [WIOA Section 108 (b)(21)]

All NCWorks Career Center staff utilize NCWorks for keying 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. Features such as the live chat feature and the 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. Centers have utilized the use of virtual meetings by way of Owl technology for staff and customers. Also recently added to service delivery includes the use of a Virtual Reality platform (Transfr VR) for career exploration. This tool can be used in the centers or in the community at events such as career fairs or outreach activities.

16. Describe how entities within the NCWorks Career Center system, including Career Center operators and partners, will comply with Section 188, if applicable, and provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities. [WIOA Section 108(b)(6)(C)]

The HCWDB NCWorks Career Centers comply with Section 188 of the WIOA as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Workforce staff are informed 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 the placement of EO posters in each of the NCWorks Centers. Also, customers



enrolled in services are given an orientation that includes an overview of the 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 with 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. As a part of center certification, centers are reviewed for accessibility, and operators are made aware of their responsibility to make note of any center issues or needs that should be addressed.

## VI. Employer Services

1. 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)].
    - b. Collaborating with employer-facing partners such as Agricultural Services, Foreign Labor and Veteran Services to meet employer needs and jobseeker recruitment efforts.
    - 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)]
    - d. Coordinating with DWS TAA and Business Services staff to provide Rapid Response assistance and appropriate career and training services to workers for whom a petition has been filed. (20 CFR 618.816)
    - e. Including Historically Underutilized Businesses (OG 20-2021)
- a. 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 (both in NCWorks and Salesforce). 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. Agricultural Services staff regularly visit centers and provide staff training on the availability of employment opportunities in the area. Staff for Veteran Services (and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program) are housed within local centers and are included in staff meetings and regional meetings making communication of referrals convenient. Center Managers and Operators ask that all business appointments be documented, which makes sharing information and coordinating visits easier.
  - c. 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. Board staff also remain engaged in rapid response activities.
  - d. High Country WDB staff and Center Managers 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. While TAA numbers are low in our area, customers are dually enrolled in dislocated worker when appropriate to coordinate service delivery.

- e. The High Country WDB will continue working to identify historically underutilized businesses to increase its and the centers' engagements with them.

2. 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.
- b. Coordinating and promoting entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services. [WIOA Section 108 (b)(5)]
- 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)].

a. Apprenticeship programs are in the works in our Local Area in particular with the Apprenticeship Wilkes program and effort in Watauga related to construction. A recent apprenticeship opportunity was recently created in the hospitality industry in Watauga County. Apprenticeship consultants continue to provide outreach in this area and meet with employers. 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. Staff also recently attended an information session on the Surry-Yadkin Works work-based learning model in partnership with the school systems and community college. Should funds become available to implement, there is interest in the local area. 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 been awarded an ARPA grant to support work-based learning opportunities for small businesses in the region.

b. Entrepreneurial 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. The Masthead, a co-working space, also frequently hosts relevant events.

c. 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 to best meet business customer needs - whether at the Board level or the career center level. The High Country WDB Director connects with EDPNC at joint meetings when appropriate.

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. During the previous program year, the High Country WDB participated in the review and approval of the most recent CEDS for the region.

## VII. 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 2022-2023 and prior Program Years. (Reports available via FutureWorks BI.) What are some factors that have impacted performance levels both positively and negatively in the current program year?

a. Provide at least two examples of positive factors and two examples of negative factors with an explanation of each. Some examples to consider include:

- unemployment rate
- factory closures/openings
- economic development recruitment
- retention and expansion efforts
- regional industry growth priorities
- weather events and natural disasters that may have impacted the area
- internal operational factors

b. Are there any factors that you anticipate will impact your performance during the upcoming program year(s) either positively or negatively?

a. Staff continue to learn and develop their understanding of WIOA expectations and measures. 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. Positive factors include open communication with providers on service delivery to discuss best practices and issues that may be occurring with cases. Monitoring involves making sure outcomes are keyed correctly and those with training activities have keyed credentials and MSGs. Another positive factor involves providers conducting their own internal monitoring and being aware of monitoring concerns that are brought forward by DWS by participating in available training and presentations that impact service delivery and performance. With our increased focus on work-based learning around OJT and WEX we also anticipate this to have a positive impact on performance. Negative factors that could impact performance involve staff turnover and vacancies. This disrupts service delivery and consistent keying. Enrollments in general are lower due to lower unemployment rates and reduced funding which could also impact performance when there are smaller numbers in the performance measure pool. With smaller numbers, it can be more challenging to reach goals such as

employment retention and wages. While we have experienced few layoffs, serving dislocated workers can also present a challenge with finding new employment with comparable wages to their previous job.

- b. Currently we do not anticipate any new factors that will impact performance in the upcoming program year. However, looking over the next couple of years with more anticipated funding reductions, center locations, and staffing may be required to restructure which could further reduce enrollments and pose challenges to performance.

2. What strategies and methods are in place to meet or exceed performance goals? 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 reporting resources are used?
- Is FutureWorks BI employed? If so, how, and how often?
- How often is training provided to staff?

WDB staff along with service provider management is responsible for tracking performance and will continue to run performance reports from both NCWorks and FutureWorks and review quarterly reports to gauge how we are doing in WIOA performance outcomes and service delivery. Staff will also run reports from NCWorks regularly to see which customers are in the performance pool and identify deficiencies in the keying of data. 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 before exit to ensure all data and case notes are properly keyed to ensure the best possible performance outcome. As part of our regional training, staff are reminded of training resources such as the staff guides under Staff Online Resources. 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. DWS providing quarterly performance reports will assist in the reviewing and sharing of performance with staff.

Performance measures are also discussed during performance negotiations with DWS as upcoming measures are set for the local area.

3. Discuss what corrective action steps are in place if, at any point during the program year, the Local Area WDB is not on track to meet or exceed yearly performance indicator goals.

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,
- makes changes to Local Area WDB performance and training strategies based on reporting data,

- and utilizes 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 ensure compliance with WIOA requirements. Board staff also informally and formally review participant files for documentation and service delivery to assist in positive outcomes. 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 to stay informed of up-to-date information and attend available training when offered. The WDB also partners with the Regional Analyst for technical assistance and training as needed.

If 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 their follow-up 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. Provider staff know they can reach out to the board for specific questions regarding cases and service delivery, which helps improve overall outcomes. Board staff may also review customer reports and review cases for data entry to support positive performance outcomes. Should there be any significant concerns, board staff would provide more in-depth technical assistance. Performance is monitored by the board and provider management.

Training on performance is held annually and is frequently discussed with staff to assist in their understanding of the measures. Staff also have other training opportunities through workforce conferences and Workforce GPS and go-to resources to assist in understanding of performance and refer to guides under staff online resources in NCWorks. Board staff may also reach out to DWS program monitors for technical assistance when needed.

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.

Consider including the following information:

- a. How is performance tracked in your organization?
- b. How is performance information communicated with staff?
- c. How are staff/contractors held accountable?
- d. How is training provided in your organization?

As previously mentioned, WDB staff will run performance reports from both databases, such as NCWorks as well as FutureWorks, and communicate these with service providers. WDB staff will monitor cases in NCWorks to determine that all necessary data/activities/outcomes 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. Provider staff know we have open communication regarding serving customers, which also helps promote positive performance. Provider staff and board staff regularly engage in communication regarding service delivery and have ongoing opportunities for informal and formal monitoring. Service provider management/compliance specialists also regularly review staff files to ensure the most accurate keying possible and that service delivery results in positive outcomes. Training around performance is handled in various ways including being provided at service provider meetings, through the use of conferences and webinars by DWS, and other resources such as Workforce GPS.

5. Discuss the factors that contribute to the Local Area WDB's credential attainment indicator.
  - a. What are the challenges that the Local Area WDB faces in achieving its credential attainment goal?
  - b. What are some of the strategies that contribute to the Local Area WDB's success in achieving its credential attainment goal?
  - c. How do case managers make use of NCcareers.org and the NC Workforce Credentials list?

Generally the High Country has had success in meeting the local credential attainment measure. Based on customer need and service plans, customers enrolled in education/training will fall into the local credential measure. Based on completing assessments using NC Careers or other sources and reviewing the types of credentials in demand on the Workforce Credentials list that may align with their goals and local employment areas, customers receive guidance related to successful training areas and strategies for successful completion. As part of training, the Measurable Skill Gains measure is a real-time performance indicator that is entered in NCWorks Online at least once per year for those participating in training services - however, for 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 to better provide guidance/counseling as needed that will assist towards credential completion. Board staff have emphasized the importance of keying measurable skills gains 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. Measurable Skill Gains can be used as a means to monitor a participant's progress toward successfully completing training by reviewing training progress/goals. Staff also utilize the MSG Q&A found on NCWorks as a resource in this area. Also, during monitoring, training activities are reviewed for successful completion and then verified that a corresponding credential has been keyed accordingly in the "Credential" tab. We may see challenges regarding this measure when customers fail to remain in regular contact with their career advisor; however, when this occurs staff often can reach out directly to the training provider regarding their training or completion status.



6. When selecting an eligible training provider from the State Eligible Training Provider List to certify for local use, what is the review process the Local Area WDB uses to make this decision? How does the Local Area WDB ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training providers? In other words, how are customers advised that they have options in choosing their provider? [WIOA Section 108(b)(19)]

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. Board staff review and “recommend” approval of programs to the ETPL. Once information regarding the training programs is reviewed and approved at the state level, the local area will approve programs based on local demand following career pathways and aligning with the needs of employers. Staff and 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 state/WDB. Board staff work with local providers to assist in the requirement of keying their program data in NCWorks to be supported via WIOA. Center staff work with customers to identify training programs that meet their needs and utilize the ETPL for options in choosing a training provider.

7. Indicate whether the Local Area WDB has additional requirements for training providers above and beyond those requirements stated in the State ETPL policy. Does the Local Area WDB make use of USDOL’s trainingproviderresults.gov website in its evaluation of which training providers to certify for local area use? If so, how?

Currently the High Country does not have additional requirements in place beyond the state ETPL policy. Currently, we have not utilized the USDOL website in the evaluation of training providers.

- Name Document: Local Area WDB Name ETPL Policy.
- Attached.

## VIII. 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 the placement of EO posters, which articulate 29 CFR 38.35, in each of the NCWorks Centers. Also, customers enrolled in services are given an orientation that 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 with 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.*
- [Attached](#)

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.

## IX. 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 region is primarily rural, there are many 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. Local childcare options continue to be limited and often also present challenges to parenting students. 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 region.

For those customers who 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 in funding over the last several years and continues to take advantage of special grant opportunities when available. As services and activities return to the new 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 the financial assistance needs of our customers using Pell Grants and other scholarships, moving funds between Adult and Dislocated Worker funding streams as needed. Historically, High Country has benefited financially from multiple voluntary transfers from other WDBs. We will continue to pursue this in the future if needed.

We continue to see 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 grants for continuing education students and the Education Promise Grant designed for current high school graduates for tuition-free degrees. Other funding such as the NC Next scholarship and discussion around increased FAFSA amounts may also impact our use of scholarship funding.

Except for training provided on-site by the employer usually done through OJTs, the bulk of adult and dislocated workers 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.

Finish Line Grants continue to be available at the local community colleges to assist students with financial emergencies to assist them with completing training as well as making use of local supportive services via WIOA.

General observations over the last several years:

- Less long-term curriculum training and more short-term training is being provided. Options such as mini-mesters have also been developed to assist students in quicker completion.

- 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.

2. Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the local area. [WIOA Section 108(b)(7)]

The following is a broad list of training opportunities available in the Local Area. WIOA may not provide funds for all 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.

**Community Colleges:** Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute, Mayland Community College, and Wilkes Community College primarily serve the students in the High Country Local Area. However, 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 who live on the western side of the region.

Skills training opportunities and academic programs include the following: accounting; basic law enforcement; biomedical; business administration; aesthetics technology and esthetics technology instructor; architectural technology; auto body repair; automotive systems; broadcasting and production; building construction; carpentry; computer science/information systems programming; corrections; cosmetology/cosmetology instructor; criminal justice/criminal justice technology; culinary technology; dental assisting; early childhood associate/operator; electrical/electronics engineering technology; forest management technology; heating/ventilation/air conditioning; heavy equipment and transportation technology; horticulture; hotel and restaurant management; human service technology; industrial maintenance/controls; information systems; machining technology; manicuring instructor; marketing and retailing; medical assisting; nursing/nursing assistant; office systems technology (with or without medical concentration); physical therapy and physical therapy assistant; plumbing; speech-language pathology; truck driving; and welding.

NC Tech Paths (Wilkes Community College) is a newer initiative in progress in response to the demands of employers needing technology skills and the demand for remote work by customers. This program, in partnership with Per Scholas, is offering a variety of tech courses and serving as a tech hub for the region.

Continuing 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 to re-enroll students and obtain credentials needed by employers.

To train the workforce for the skills needed for future employer needs, community colleges continue to strive to meet employer needs through aligning and adjusting programs and through services of customized training and small business centers.

**Universities:** 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 many 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.

3. 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. Include the expected length of the contract(s) (one to three years and the current year status of the contract (e.g., two of three years). Identify any service provider contract extensions. [WIOA Section 108(b)(16), CPS 04-2022]

The PY23 Service Provider and 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 2023, followed by a bidders conference, and responses were due February 2023. The HCWDB made the recommendation of service providers and the one-stop operators at its regularly scheduled meeting in March 2023. 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.

For PY24, service provider contracts will be entering their second year of the contract.

**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.

4. Attach the Local Area WDB's Adult/Dislocated Worker Service Provider list effective July 1, 2024 using the PY 2024 Adult/Dislocated Worker Service Provider List provided.

- Name document: Local Area WDB Name PY 2024 Adult/Dislocated Worker Service Provider List.
- Attached.

5. Describe the Local Area WDB's vision for serving the WIOA eligible Adults and Dislocated Workers to include (a) high level goals, (b) outreach strategies, (c) services delivery, and (d) 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 and increase services to those with barriers. Expected outcomes include a better-trained workforce, earning credentials and increased opportunities for work-based learning, and better employment opportunities while meeting the needs of employers and job seekers.

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

7. Describe follow-up services provided to Adults and Dislocated Workers. [WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(xiii)]

Follow-up services are provided by WIOA staff regularly for WIOA youth and adult/dislocated worker training customers including services to assist with successful employment, training completion, or the need for 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 to encourage return visits. It is the goal of all centers to define and improve follow-up services to customers.

*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.*

8. Please describe the process for monitoring the service provider(s) 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, with the aid of the minoring tool, through an in-depth review of NCWorks to include a review of eligibility, documentation, and case notes. Additionally, fiscal monitoring occurs through an in-depth review of all financial aspects of the programs, including but not limited to the chart of accounts, general ledgers, bank reconciliations, monthly financial reports, and invoices, salaries of staff and participants, travel documentation, timesheets, etc. Findings are documented and sent to staff for corrections with a requested response within two weeks. Service providers also conduct their own internal monitoring and seek out guidance from board staff as needed.

## X. 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 general overview of the local current total population (within five years) of the Title I WIOA eligible youth by Local Workforce Development Board area. Include the following general information:

### **In-School Youth Analysis**

- a. Approximately, what number of the Youth are ages 14-21?
- b. Approximately, what percentage of these youth are low-income (eligible for WIOA In-school program)?
- c. Approximately, what number of these Youth are in the current school dropout statistics?

### **Out-of-School Analysis**

- a. Approximately what number of Youth ages 16-24 of the current total population (within five years) make up the population?
- b. Youth ages 16-24 represent what % of the population?
- c. What are the general educational levels of this age group?
- d. What is the general employment status of this age group?

Per the updated direction, the following is answered based on PY22 youth enrollment data for the region (does not include carryovers):

#### **In School**

- a. 10 in-school youth were enrolled for PY22.
- b. All in-school youth would be low-income as required.
- c. These in school would not be included as dropouts.

#### **Out of School**

- a. 48 out-of-school youth were enrolled for PY22.



- b. All enrollments fall within 16-24 years of age.
- c. In general, this population serves dropouts or those wishing to continue education.
- d. In general, this population is not working or is underemployed.

*\*NC Division of Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) is a data resource.*

2. Based on the analysis in question 1, does the local Workforce Development Board plan to serve In-School Youth?

Yes. However, in-school enrollment will remain limited to meet the expectation of out-of-school expenditure rates.

3. 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)]

Youth Workforce Activity	Activities For Persons with Disabilities?	Brief Assessment/Model Used	Success Rating
Training, Study Skills Training, Dropout Prevention.	Yes	Learning labs via community colleges; public school systems	Good
Alternative Secondary School & Dropout Recovery	Yes	Adult Education program via community college; person-centered; in-person and virtual options	Good
Pain/Unpaid Work Experience	Yes	Local employers interested in supporting work readiness and building a workforce with WEX, OJT, job shadowing	Strong
Occupational Skills Training	Yes	Community colleges/University systems via in-person and virtual training short-term and curriculum programs	Strong

Education offered concurrently with workforce activities	Yes	Community colleges/University systems 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 the 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
Follow-up Services	Yes	Provided for 12 months to assist with success and retention	Good, often depends on the interest of youth.
Guidance/Counseling	Yes	Counseling to include substance use, alcohol, and mental health, and referrals	Limited
Financial Literacy	Yes	Provided to assist youth in the reality of wages and cost of living via staff and Reality Check and career advisors	Good
Entrepreneurial Skills	Yes	As appropriate provided by referral	Good
LMI	Yes	Provided to assist youth in understanding local data and options using NCWorks and NC Careers	Good
Transition Activities	Yes	As appropriate by staff	Good

4. Describe how the Local Area WDB's Young Adult (NextGen) Program design is unique to include:
- providing objective assessments;
  - supportive services needed; and
  - 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. Following WIOA eligibility guidelines, youth meet with a career advisor to determine eligibility, complete an objective assessment to identify needs 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 the 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 several 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. Career pathways are integrated into training services and plan development with the ultimate goal of sustainable employment.

5. 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 of the customer, a plan of services is developed in partnership with the career advisor and the participant to consider which of the program elements are needed. 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 career pathways, 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.

6. 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 their 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. Staff also coordinate with community colleges to arrange office time on campus to meet with potential new enrollments and current students, as well as attend informational meetings and orientations of educational programs to stay abreast of programs and meet potential students.

Our relationship with the community colleges has offered additional opportunities to partner with and serve additional students to ensure credential attainments. Credential completion is an important element in our youth services. Close partnerships with Adult Education result in referrals and access to students who 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.

Part of our local strategy includes youth staff being present and available on-site at the community college. Staff have designated hours in various locations to assist in service delivery and referrals. Staff also engage with Adult Education staff during local partner meetings to stay up to date on program changes while also attending open houses and orientation sessions for training programs.

If determined as a need, 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.

7. Describe how follow-up services will be provided for (NextGen) youth. [WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(xiii)]

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 to assist in performance outcomes. Staff outreach to youth by phone, email, Facebook, mailings, through the 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.

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

8. Where does the Local Area WDB plan to serve the young adults (NextGen): NCWorks Career Centers 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 the center chart for statuses.

9. Attach the Local Area WDB Youth Service Provider's chart, effective July 1, 2024, using the PY 2024 Youth Service Provider List provided. Complete each column to include specifying where Youth Services are provided.

- Name the document: *PY 2024 Local Area WDB Name Youth Service Provider List.*
- Attached

10. Provide the date and process for the competitive procurement of the Youth Programs that ensures an arm's-length relationship between the Local Area WDB and service delivery. Include the expected length of the contract(s) (one to three years and the current year status of the contract (e.g., two of three years). Identify any service provider contract extensions. [WIOA Section 108(b)(16), CPS 04-2022]

The WDB completed competitive procurement of youth services in March 2023. An RFP was released in January of 2023, with proposals due February 2023, and the review/selection during March 2023. As identified in the Provider Chart, the WDB selected Goodwill Industries of NWNC and Mayland Community College as the service providers for PY23. Contracts will be renewed for PY24 (two of three years).

*USDOL granted North Carolina a waiver for Program Years 2022 and 2023, which reduced the minimum Title I Youth expenditure rate requirement for OSY from 75% to 50% and allowed the maximum expenditure rate for in-school youth (ISY) to be increased from 25% to up to 50%. NC is requesting the same waiver for Program Year 2024.*

11. 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.

- a) State how the WDB will achieve the 75% OSY expenditure rate and describe the steps that will be taken to comply with the WDB's programmatic goals and outcomes.
- b) Describe why there is a need to serve additional ISY in the local area region and state how the WDB will achieve the 25% ISY expenditure rate.
- c) Describe how the local area region will be able to meet the demand for youth services by using the waiver.

[WIOA Section 129(a)(4)(A)] (CPS 09-2021, Change 1) (OG 07-2022, Change 1)

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 75% of youth funding towards out of school youth and funds are distributed as such in contracts. Service delivery to youth will include services targeted towards education and employment services that will assist in meeting our programmatic goals and outcomes.

Credential attainment and MSGs will tie directly to those enrolled in education followed by services to assist youth in entering employment. We have also seen success in our work based learning services assisting youth in entering employment and will continue to make this a program goal. 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.

Currently we do not see a need to serve additional in-school youth. High Country elected to not implement the WIOA Title I Youth 75% expenditure requirement waiver for PY23 and, at this time, will not be implementing the waiver for PY24.

12. 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, Change 1)

The local area is currently exceeding this goal. 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. Service providers submit monthly reports to the board tracking all work experience expenditures related to wages and staff time and other allowed costs. Previous discussions with DWS monitors have assisted in clarifying the 20% guidelines. In discussion with our contractors, we have emphasized that WEX should be a program focus moving forward. The WDB continues to provide technical assistance to service providers to discuss work experience and strategies to meet expectations.

Following past expenditures, the WDB anticipates that roughly \$150,000 will be spent on youth wages; including WEX wages and OJT wage reimbursements; in PY24, following the same level and increase of expenditures in years prior. Wages paid for youth continue to account for roughly 30% of all youth expenditures. This, however, is only an estimate, and expenditures and successes with youth work-based learning activities continue to rise.

The following are the strategies/initiatives that the service providers have implemented to meet 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, Chambers, etc.); work with customized training for referrals; present to

civic groups; work with chambers of commerce and economic development commissions to promote WEX/OJT.

- Continue and maintain communication and quality relationships with current WEX providers while seeking new locations appropriate for youth.
- 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 who may benefit from work experience activities. This may include traditional high school and/or alternative school settings.

13. 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. If so, state at which level, how many representatives, and how this impacts the Youth Program Design?

No; there are no separate, dedicated, full-time Youth Business Service Representatives in the HCWDB region. Service provider Business Service Representatives and DWS Business Service staff fulfill this role as a part of their scope of work in partnership with career advisors.

14. Does the Local Area WDB have special programs for young adults that are Justice-Involved or have a substance use disorder? If yes, please briefly describe them.

Generally, we do not have special youth programs in these areas in our region. However, the local area received ARPA funds to assist in meeting the needs of those in recovery, which could include youth as appropriate. We do partner with our recovery and reentry partners in the region to remain aware of resources/services that may assist us in serving youth specifically in these areas as appropriate.

15. 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 TEGL 8-15]

The WDB continues to build and partner with Adult Education and Vocational Rehabilitation to integrate education and training as part of the provided services. Center staff are closely connected with Adult Education, and in some counties have incorporated a 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 pathways. 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

regularly that include adult education and VR allowing additional collaboration on projects and events and serving customers.

Board staff and Adult Education partners continue to discuss regional needs and alignment strategies. Adult Education and VR have also provided staff training on program services and expectations in the past. With quality service to clients and students as the underlying motivation for all 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 repetitive 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 the “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 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 have basic skills deficiency.
- 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.



We continue to have strong engagement of both VR and Adult Education on the Board. Previously Adult Education was represented by Wilkes Community College for several years and is now represented by Shari Brown, Director of Transitional Studies at CCCTI. Mike Birkmire, Unit Manager at VR, serves as the local VR representative on the Board for the region.

16. Specify if the Local Area WDB plans to offer incentives for (NextGen) youth. If yes, attach the Youth Incentive Policy, which should 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*.
- Yes, the local area plans to offer youth incentives. See attached policy.

*Note: Federal funds may not be spent on entertainment costs. Youth Incentive Policies should include: compliance with the Cost Principles in 2 CFR part 200; identify types of items that may be awarded (gift cards, plaques, certificates, checks); identify types of achievements/completion of activities (an inclusive list is required); practices for internal controls for safeguarding incentives, and provide a sample list of required documentation for reimbursement (diploma, evaluations).*

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

N/A

18. 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 in 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 and serve on

committees such as Business Advisory Councils and CTE sessions. 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. Staff also serve on local business and industry committees geared towards students. We have also had success with youth entering employment upon completion of a work experience and have utilized OJT when appropriate.

19. 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 of the chart to demonstrate partnerships and potential use of shared funding. Please specify partners. [WIOA Section 129(c)(2)(A)]

- Name document: *Local Area WDB Name Youth Program Elements Chart.*
- Attached.

20. 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)]

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 for best practices related to youth services. Service providers also provide updates to the local WDB at each meeting on service delivery. Staff also participate in ongoing DOL youth webinars focused on youth service delivery.

b. If yes, please provide a response to the following

a) Provide the committee's purpose/vision.

N/A

b) Provide the youth committee's top three goals or objectives for PY 2024.

N/A

Click here to enter text.

Click here to enter text.

c) Provide a list of youth committee 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)]
- N/A

c. Complete the following chart for the PY 2024 Youth Committee’s planned meeting schedule to include dates, time, and location. (Expand form as needed or mark Not Applicable.)

Date	Time	Location (include address and room #)
N/A	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.

## XI. Local Area WDB Innovations

1. List all additional funding received by the Local Area WDB (for example, to include but not limited to, special grants, NC Job Ready Workforce Investment Grants, Business Services funds, National Dislocated Worker Grants (NDWG) (disaster), YouthBuild, Foundations, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Partners for Reentry Opportunities in Workforce Development (PROWD), NCWorks Commission Local Innovation Fund Grant, and/or outside funding to include a brief description of the source and the amount received).

<b>Grant Name/Kind</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Beginning and End date</b>	<b>Source and Amount</b>	<b>Partner Organization (if applicable)</b>
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Work-Based Learning	The ARPA WBL grant initiative is to establish work-based learning opportunities targeting small- and micro-businesses (i.e., businesses with twenty-five [25] or fewer employees) to bridge the gap for business retention and expansion with funding for OJT, WEX, and IWT. This initiative focuses on historically underutilized businesses, industries most impacted by the pandemic (including manufacturing and hospitality), priority industries with substantial occupational skills gaps, and other risk indicators.	November 2, 2022 to December 31, 2026	NC Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions, \$500,000	Local employers; Chambers & EDCs
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Substance Use Recovery	The ARPA SUD grant initiative is to increase workforce participation and job retention of persons in recovery through an increase in education, knowledge, and workforce skills and by ensuring they are ready to work. These efforts include training in soft skills required in the workplace, providing access to postsecondary opportunities for training specific to high-demand employment sectors, and offering support for job retention. Grant activities also include providing direct support from the case managers	November 2, 2022 to December 31, 2026	NC Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions, \$200,000	Wilkes Recovery, HOPE House, Freedom Life, Watauga LEAD

Grant Name/Kind	Brief Description	Beginning and End date	Source and Amount	Partner Organization (if applicable)
	and supportive services (e.g., transportation, childcare, food stabilization) to assist in removing barriers to employment.			
Business Services for Industry Sector Partnership Planning Grant	To provide planning grant funding to Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to convene local and regional partners and employers, plan and develop strategies and initiatives for evidence-based, in-demand industry sector partnerships as a regional strategy to meet the needs of businesses, specifically in subsectors of Advanced Manufacturing and primarily focused on clean energy, where applicable.	January 12, 2024 to December 31, 2024	NC Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions, \$35,000	Those working with manufacturing include education, EDC, Chambers, business services staff, etc.

2. Provide a clear and detailed example of the Local Area WDB’s best or promising **Adult/Dislocated Worker** program practice that has yielded positive results with evidence, which affirms this practice is effective.

A promising approach in the High Country involves focusing on adults or dislocated workers with work-based learning activities. These customers may include those with limited skills or those undergoing or completing training who might require additional support in gaining work experience or securing employment. Students are being informed about the advantages of utilizing NCWorks services and the results of work experience and on-the-job training (OJT) services. This effort is leading to increased enrollments and heightened interest, resulting in more placements in OJT programs and employment outcomes.

3. Provide a clear and detailed example of the Local Area WDB’s best or promising **Youth** program practice that has yielded positive results with evidence, which affirms this practice is effective.

In the High Country, provider staff have collaborated effectively with partners, including GED learning labs and local employers, to raise awareness of programs and opportunities. Consequently, there has been an increase in enrollments from individuals with limited or no work experience. The incorporation of WEX services helps to sustain the motivation of youth towards GED completion, all while enabling them to earn wages and acquire essential experience and confidence. The impact of this can be assessed by tracking the number of dropouts being served and their participation in WEX activities.

4. Provide a clear and detailed example of the Local Area WDB's best or promising **regional strategy** that has yielded positive results with evidence, which affirms this practice is effective.

Positive results continue to be seen by taking NCWorks out into the community and developing intentional regional partnerships for serving the community. Partnerships with organizations such as Freedom Life, Homestead Recovery/Watauga Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), Hope House, Wilkes Recovery Revolution, local community colleges, NC Tech Paths, chambers of commerce, economic development commissions, school systems, and more have all allowed centers to make better connections and meet the needs of participants with various backgrounds and barriers to employment. Through these efforts, we are seeing more engagement opportunities and more brand recognition by our partners.

As adjoining WDBs continue to share common challenges and successes, efforts are made to ensure opportunities for collaboration and sharing best practices are occurring to better develop strategies to meet local needs. A recent large layoff in a neighboring workforce area saw High Country staff traveling to the region to assist with the large volume of customers impacted. The Vision NWNC event through the Boone Chamber of Commerce has brought staff from other boards and employers to the area to discuss common workforce challenges, highlighting the services available in the region and surrounding counties.

5. Provide a clear and detailed example of the Local Area WDB's best or promising **virtual services strategy** that has yielded positive results with evidence, which affirms this practice is effective.

The High Country WDB has made and continues to make, efforts to include more virtual services, including integrating software for electronic signatures, offering virtual services, and promoting virtual reality (VR) equipment at career fairs, enhancing engagement and accessibility. Leveraging electronic signatures streamlines administrative and service provider processes, facilitating efficient documentation and contract signing remotely. Concurrently, the transition to include more virtual services broadens reach, allowing for service delivery regardless of geographical constraints. VR equipment for career exploration has shown success across the state, offering career center or career fair attendees opportunities to explore potential workplaces, enriching experiences, and engagements with youth and adults alike. The High Country WDB continues to look for opportunities to utilize virtual services to improve service delivery in a more technologically advanced world.

6. Provide a clear and detailed example of the Local Area WDB's innovative **business services strategies** and engagement practices that demonstrated employers taking charge and driving the agenda that has yielded positive results with evidence, which affirms this practice is effective.

As a result of continued employer need and demand, local career centers continue holding monthly hiring events such as the Third Thursday (Watauga) and Working Wednesday (Wilkes). Each event consists of a group of related employers (i.e. healthcare, food service, hospitality, or retail industries) or those from different industries every month. Employers can accept resumes, have applications filled out on-site, or do a preliminary interview. This set-schedule strategy helps both employers and job seekers to have regular access to each other and speeds up the hiring process. Career center staff are on-hand to assist with any questions as well as immediately receive feedback on what did or did not work at the event and have additional opportunities for employer engagement.

## XII. Program Year 2024 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 2024 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 for the PY 2024 Plan and has not been previously submitted to the DWS.
- Revised policies should be submitted with a highlight or summary of the changes made to the local policy.
- 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 2024 (Yes/No) and needs review
1. Adult/Dislocated Worker Experience Policy	Yes	No
2. Competitive Procurement Policy	Yes	No
3. Conflict of Interest Policy	Yes	No
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	Yes
10. Youth Work Experience Policy	Yes	No
11. Supportive Services Policy	Yes	No
12. Local Area WDB WIOA and TAA Co-enrollment Policy	Yes	No
13. Eligible Training Provider Policy	Yes	No
14. Non-Criminal Complaint Procedures	Yes	Yes - New



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 for PY 2024 and has not been previously submitted to the DWS.

- Do not add a blank document in WISE as a “placeholder”.
- These policies are required to operate/offer these services
- If “Yes”, load the policy as a separate document.
- Name document: *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 2024 (Add Yes or N/A for this column)
1. Local Area WDB Guidance for Local Incumbent Worker Grants	Yes	No
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	No

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 a Bachelor’s is allowed along with other diploma/certification/or licensure programs.

<b>Individual Training Accounts (ITA) Summary</b>	
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.
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.)	These items are usually other training costs or supportive services, outside of ITA amounts.
Other	N/A

4. Provide a description of how training services under chapter 3 of subtitle B will be provided in accordance with section 134(c)(3)(G), including if contracts for the training services will be used, how the use of such contracts will be coordinated with the use of individual training accounts under that chapter and how the local board will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs regardless of how the training services are to be provided. [WIOA Section 108(b)(19)]

Training services in the High Country are generally provided to customers needing skill enhancement to enter or upskill for employment to meet the needs of the local economy. Customer choice is utilized using the state’s eligible training provider list detailing the types, availability, and costs of programs. Training providers provide updates regarding their programs in NCWorks following the state policy. We do not have contracts for training services in the High Country region. Most of the training occurs through the local community college system due to customer choice due to ease of accessibility and financial aid sources. WIOA funds may be used to assist customers with training services following the established ITA policy or through cost authorization. Supportive services may assist in other training costs such as exams/supplies to assist students with completion. Career advisors provide comprehensive guidance and counseling services to participants to assist in the training process. This includes information about available training options, potential career pathways, and the labor market demand for specific occupations and may utilize resources such as NCCareers and NCWorks while monitoring progress and addressing challenges to assist in meeting goals.

5. 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	Yes	N/A
Mileage or local provider for education and employment.	Usually local provider.	Items that may be needed to assist with training and employment goals such as uniforms.	May include costs related to utilities, car repairs, and rent.	N/A
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.

**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 and be clearly stated within the policy.