

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

**July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022**

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

## Local Title I WIOA Instructions

### Introduction

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires each Workforce Development Board (WDB) to develop and submit, in partnership with the local chief elected official, a comprehensive four-year plan. Four-Year Plans were submitted in May 2020. In North Carolina, annually, each WDB is to provide updates to the Comprehensive Four-Year Plan. The WIOA Program Year (PY) 2021 Plan is to provide current information and be effective July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022 and will include all current local policies. The local plan will support the alignment strategy described in the 2020-2024 NC Unified State Plan in accordance with WIOA Section 102(b)(1)(E), and otherwise be consistent with the NC Unified State Plan. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper's mission is to ensure North Carolinians are better educated, healthier, and have more money in their pockets so that they can live more abundant, purposeful lives. The cornerstone to achieving this goal is to help people get good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families. Through NC Job Ready, Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative, North Carolina is working to build a stronger and better workforce. NC Job Ready is built on three core principles: education and skills attainment are the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce; an employer-led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job ready workforce; and local innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system. In addition, WDBs shall comply with WIOA Section 108 in the preparation and submission of the plan.

Through its strategic planning efforts, the NCWorks Commission developed a vision and mission for North Carolina's Workforce System. This vision is to build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy. The mission of the state's workforce development system is to ensure North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity, and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation.

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

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

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

### Plan Submission and Due Date

The Local Area Plan must be submitted through Workforce Information System Enterprise (WISE), the Division's web-based financial system. The due date is **May 7, 2021**. Each attachment must be submitted and labeled separately in either Word or PDF format. Attachments not submitted separately will not be accepted. Forms requiring original signatures may use DocuSign® and may be uploaded in WISE. If original signatures are obtained, forms must be mailed to the Local Area WDB's assigned Planner at: N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions, 4316 Mail Services Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4316.

## I. WDB Overview

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

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

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

### Gaston County Workforce Development Board

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

N/A

2. Provide the Local Area's Workforce Development Board's official name.

### Gaston County Workforce Development Board

If the local Board officially changed its name, please attach a copy of the Status of Incorporation, attorney's letter, or other document.

3. Provide the name, title, organization name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the Workforce Development Director.

<b>Name:</b> Angela Karchmer	<b>Title &amp; Salutation:</b> Workforce Development Board Director – Ms.
<b>Organization:</b> Gaston County Workforce Development Board	<b>Address:</b> 330 Dr Martin Luther King Jr Way, Gastonia, NC 28052
<b>Phone number:</b> (704) 862-7930	<b>Email address:</b> angela.karchmer@gastongov.com

4. Provide the name, elected title, local government affiliation, address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the Local Area's Chief Elected Official.

<b>Name:</b> Tom Keigher	<b>Elected Title &amp; Salutation:</b> Board of Commissioners Chair – Mr.
<b>Government:</b> <b>Gaston County Board of Commissioners</b>	<b>Address:</b> P.O. Box 1578, Gastonia, NC 28053
<b>Phone number:</b> (704) 813-1902	<b>Email address:</b> tom.keigher@gastongov.com

5. Provide the name, title, business name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the individual authorized to receive official mail for the Chief Elected Official, if different than question 3.

<b>Name:</b> Kim Eagle	<b>Title &amp; Salutation:</b> County Manager – Dr.
<b>Business Name:</b> Gaston County Government	<b>Address:</b> P.O Box 1578, Gastonia, NC 28053
<b>Phone number:</b> (704) 866-3101	<b>Email address:</b> kim.eagle@gastongov.com

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

<b>Name:</b> Gaston County Finance Office	<b>Title &amp; Salutation:</b> N/A
<b>Organization:</b> Gaston County Government	<b>Address:</b> P.O. Box 1578, Gastonia, NC 28053
<b>Phone number:</b> (704) 866-3037	<b>Email address:</b> N/A

7. Provide the name, title, organization name, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the Administrative/Fiscal Agent’s signatory official.

<b>Name:</b> Kim Eagle	<b>Title &amp; Salutation:</b> County Manager - Dr
<b>Organization:</b> Gaston County Government	<b>Address:</b> P.O Box 1578, Gastonia, NC 28053
<b>Phone number:</b> (704) 866-3101	<b>Email address:</b> kim.eagle@gastongov.com

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

*\*See Attachment #1 \**

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

*\*See Attachment #28\* DUNS # Exp:*

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. ([PS 07-2018](#))

*David Gunderman, 704-862-7536*

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

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

See [Appendix D](#) for Local Area WDBs’ membership requirements.

**Note:** Check the block on the form provided certifying compliance with required WIOA local Area WDB business nomination process.

If a Board list is not in compliance, please provide that list and state the expected date that a compliant list will be provided.

**\*See Attachment #2\***

Use and identify categories as indicated on the form. Do not change required category names except to clarify those with multiple categories and do not count those names twice.

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.

*The Chief 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 Board 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](#).*

Our Clerk to the Board-Merissa Mitchell works directly with the Gaston County Board of Commissioners Office & Clerk to the Board of Commissioners – Donna Buff, as well as the Gaston County WDB Business Services Representative – Chelsea Hawley Valentine to make necessary referrals, of potential candidates for vacant board seats, to our Chief Elected Official -Tom Keigher, Chair for the Gaston County Board of Commissioners. The referrals received are for potential board member candidates are those who possess decision making power, HR level authority, etc within local businesses and can complete the necessary application to serve as a Gaston County Workforce Development Board Member on their company's behalf.

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

**\*See Attachment #3\***

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

**\*See Attachment #4\***

*Sunshine Provision - The Local Board shall make available to the public, on a regular basis through electronic means and open meetings, information regarding the activities of the Local Board, including information regarding the Local Plan prior to submission of the 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 Board. [WIOA Section 107(e)]*

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

The Gaston Co Workforce Development Board makes copies of the proposed (draft) Local Area Plan available to the public through hard copy at the Gaston County DHHS Building – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor for 30 days, after approval by the DWS planner, for public comment. It also makes copies of the proposed (draft) Local Area Plan available through electronic means for 30 days, after approval by the DWS planner, by posting a weblink to the document on the Gaston County WDB website: [www.gastonworks.com](http://www.gastonworks.com). On the homepage, the announcement of the PY2021 Local Area Plan is located under “News & Events” on the left side of the screen. Clicking the announcement takes the public to the News tab on the website. The public is instructed to click on the blue link named “PY2021 Gaston LA Plan ver 5.25.21” to review the PY2021 Gaston County Local Area Plan AND if they have comments to email them directly to the Gaston County WDB Director, Angela Karchmer at [angela.karchmer@gastongov.com](mailto:angela.karchmer@gastongov.com) (cc: [ssheglar@gastongov.com](mailto:ssheglar@gastongov.com)).

*Public Comment - The 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 plan is made available; and, include with submission of the Local Area Plan any comments that represent disagreement with the Plan. [WIOA Section 108(d)]*

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

**\*See Attachment #5\***

17. Complete the following chart for the PY2021 Local Area WDB’s planned meeting schedule to include time, dates, and location. *[Expand form as needed]*

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

Date	Time	Location (include address and room #)
July 15, 2021	12 noon	Virtual
October 21, 2021	12 noon	In-person > Gaston County DHHS Building - 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Auditorium at 330 Dr Martin Luther King Jr Way, Gastonia, NC
January 20, 2022	12 noon	Virtual
April 21, 2022	12 noon	In-person > Gaston County DHHS Building - 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Auditorium at 330 Dr Martin Luther King Jr Way, Gastonia, NC

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

**\*See Attachment #6\***

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

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

**\* Signature of (CEO) Board of Commissioners-Chair pending – Will be Attachment #28**

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

## II. Local Area Strategic Planning

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

*Locally, WDBs are creatively working to address the new challenges of job growth and expansions. Boards continue to have a shortage of middle-skilled level workers. As a Board and workforce system, Boards 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, Boards are paving the way for an even stronger economy through sector partnerships and career pathways initiatives.*

1. Provide a description of the WDB's strategic vision and goals for preparing an 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 in order to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. [WIOA Section 108(b)(1)(E)]

The Gaston County WDB has continued a vision of enhancing skills with the existing and emerging workforce to meet the needs of regional employers and improve the economic conditions of its residents while encouraging business development and expansion through entrepreneurship and innovation. Participants are provided with intensive case managers for assistance with individualized career services and also training services, with emphasis on educating the emerging workforce, Gaston County will enable its workforce to be more skilled and increase employers competitiveness in the global job market while meeting the changing needs of employers, Gaston is focusing on better career exploration through increased interest assessment testing and job shadowing prior to enrollment in training. Additionally, expanding the number of individuals receiving FLG supportive services to enable existing students to remain in school, thus producing a higher number of post-secondary credential completers that will have an easier time finding and retaining self-sufficiency employment that meets performance requirements. Apprenticeship and Work based learning programs are an integral part of the student with barriers to employment having successful outcomes in finding and retaining a self-sufficiency job, in their career field, after completion of their training.

2. Provide a description of how the 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 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. [WIOA Section 108(b)(3)]

Gaston County has developed an extensive referral system with NC Services for the Hearing Impaired, NC Services for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation offices and other community partners for WIOA participants or individuals seeking information through the NCWorks Career Centers. Information pertaining to these entities is also included in Rapid Response Activities as well as any other community service that the requesting party has expressed an interest in providing to their labor force. All Centers (certified and non-certified) including the Youth Center are ADA accessible.

The WDB works closely with the Gaston County Department of Health and Human Services-Social Services Division to provide job search assistance and skills assessment for TANF recipients. Gaston County currently has designated staff that manages the referral process and in most cases can provide immediate services to the TANF recipient.

In response to changes requiring FNS recipients to engage in employment, training or alternate work such as volunteer service, additional outreach has taken place to insure this targeted population has information on services provided through NCWorks centers in Gaston

3. Describe the WDB's use of initiatives such as incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, customized training programs, industry and sector strategies, career pathways initiatives, utilization of effective business intermediaries, and other business 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)]

The Southwestern Region has numerous large employers who could not possibly get their entire workforce from just the local area where their business is physically located. Some of these regional businesses include Daimler Trucks, Amazon, Charlotte Premium Outlets, Duke Energy to name a few. Therefore, our BSRs in the region work in unison while collaborating to the meet the employers' needs for skilled talent through activities such as development of OJT, WEX, Apprenticeship opportunities as well as specialized employer-specific recruiting events and multi-employer job fairs via virtual, drive-thru, and in-person venues.

Businesses also need professional development and continuous improvement opportunities for existing employees to support employee opportunities such as pay increases (wage gains) and promotions (skills progression), while supporting the company's expansion opportunities and insuring they stay competitive in the global market. The Southwestern Region accomplishes this through incumbent worker trainings that are sponsored by the workforce development boards and reimburse employers for dollars spent to training providers for employee training. The Southwestern Region also accomplishes this through customized trainings, most of which are offered to employers through partnerships with local colleges and/or private training providers in the region.

The Southwestern Region has collaboratively developed several Career Pathways including Advanced Manufacturing, Medical, and Energy. Regional employers, educators, economic developers, and other essential workforce partners are invited to participate and encouraged to give needed input during Regional Career Pathway developments. The success of the Career

Pathways relies heavily on all workforce partners receiving invaluable buy-in from the regional employers through hearing what their struggles are, what level of un-met demand they have for talent, and whether or not the talent that is being sent to them by the career centers and workforce partners possess the knowledge and hands-on skills that are needed to be a high-performers for their businesses.

Industry and Sector Strategies will be achieved through the creation and development of small sector-based groups, developed with similar industry sector employers, who are brought together for an initial meet-and-greet session with each other by the Gaston County WDB. The development of these meetings is having to be overhauled to switch from the initial plan for Employer Breakfast Sessions to a virtual-based Employer Chat Session. It is our hope that these meetings will eventually be able to be converted to the original in-person plan and will evolve in to Industry-led Sector-based “Think-Tank Sessions” on a regular scheduled basis, if employers are interested in being the drivers for these ongoing sector-based discussions.

The Gaston County WDB will continue moving forward with its Gaston’s BEST members and utilize each of their common connections with regional employers. Each partner at the table, whether from the Gaston County Workforce Development Board, Gaston County Economic Development Commission, the Gaston Regional Chamber, Gaston College, Vocational Rehabilitation, Gaston Literacy, or other valuable partners will solidify new and existing relationships with employers to expand the foot print of services to business in our region.

4. Provide a description of how the WDB coordinates workforce investment activities carried out in the Local Area with the provision of Adult Education and Literacy activities. [WIOA Section 108(b)(13)]

The Gaston County WDB partners with Gaston Community College, Gaston Literacy Council, and others to coordinate and provide GED access for older youth and adult learners. We partner with Gaston College’s GED & AHS Programs, as well as the Gaston Literacy Council and Vocational Rehabilitation to do co-enrollments and provide services to individuals with basic skills deficiencies, learning disabilities and/or other barriers to employment. Gaston College provides TABE testing to any adult, dislocated worker, or youth with a potential basic skills deficiency or learning disability. Contracted WIOA Adult/Dislocated Worker staff and WIOA NextGen Youth staff partner with the Gaston College ABE program during their GED and Adult High School orientation classes. The allow WIOA staff to share with students the opportunities that are available through the WIOA program. The Pre-WIOA intake process can be initiated, if the student is willing and makes the choice to receive this type WIOA service. Once eligibility for WIOA has been determined and a WIOA enrollment in to NCWorks completed, the participant receives career guidance, counseling, assessments, supportive services, and additional tutoring (if needed) to make an appropriate measurable skill gain and eventually be able to successfully complete their Adult Education and/or Literacy component.

Additionally, the WDB collaborates with Gaston County Schools to provide support for career exploration activities such as an annual career expo which focuses on STEM/STEAM careers and targets middle school students. In part, the goal of the collaborations is to encourage the older youth/adult learner to take advantage of other career-based offerings available through the community and college system (such as apprenticeship programs) or even training programs

available through other providers, as well as achieve their adult high school diploma or GED credentials if applicable. English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and programs that encourage parents to read to their children are additional offerings made available through the Literacy Council.

5. Provide a description of cooperative agreements, as defined in WIOA Section 107(d)(11), between the 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 services 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)]

Gaston County has developed an extensive referral system with NC Services for the Hearing Impaired, NC Services for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation offices and other community partners for WIOA participants or individuals seeking information through the NCWorks Career Centers. Information pertaining to these entities is also included in Rapid Response Activities as well as any other community service that the requesting party has expressed an interest in providing to their labor force. All Centers (certified and non-certified) including the Youth Center are ADA accessible.

The WDB works closely with the Gaston County Department of Health and Human Services-Social Services Division to provide job search assistance and skills assessments for TANF recipients. The contracted WIOA Service Provider currently has designated staff that manages the referral process and in most cases can provide immediate services to a TANF recipient.

In response to changes requiring FNS recipients to engage in employment, training or alternate work such as volunteer service, additional outreach efforts were made to insure this targeted population has information on services provided through NCWorks centers in Gaston County.

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

The need to insure relevant services are provided timely and efficiently is managed via goals and performance requirements located in each WIOA Service Provider and One Stop Operators contract, as well in the MOU for the the NCWorks Career Center – Gaston. This has proven to be a productive maneuver and has allowed ISD to work within the Career Centers in a more seamless fashion while increasing the % of met performance measures and serving the most disadvantaged populations. The contracts have a provision that allows the Board to base profit payments paid out on performance outcomes met on a quarterly basis. If quarterly performance goals are not met, the contractor is allowed the opportunity to receive those profit dollars at year end if the annual negotiated performance measures are met. The contract requirements for WIOA services and One Stop Operator Services shall be consistent with the factors developed by the NCWorks Commission and Strategic Planning

Gaston has a designated Performance Accountability Specialist whose primary job function is to review activities within NCWorks and oversee adherence to contract goals, performance measures, and outcomes. Both the Performance Accountability Specialist and the WIOA Coordinator

announced and/or unannounced monitoring of contracted services. Additionally, the WDB is updated at each monthly Contracted Program Manager meeting on the current performance data.

As follow up to each monitoring, WDB staff meets with Contracted Program Managers and Contracted Career Center Managers to review the findings and, if needed, makes recommendations for improvement and or additional training needs.

7. Provide details on how the region is prepared to respond to serve victims of national emergencies or weather disasters and utilize special grants efficiently.

The Southwest Region utilizes special grant funds for national disaster recovery purposes to allow individuals the opportunity for Disaster Relief Employment or Career and Training Services. This enables individuals who are temporarily or permanently dislocated, due to a national disaster, to obtain paid work experience positions in areas related to Humanitarian Assistance or Clean Up and Recovery efforts. Each of the Workforce Development Boards in our region maintain an list of emergency contact organizations across the area for quick assimilation of needed services and solutions utilized when a crisis happens. Dislocated Workers can also be served, utilizing dislocated worker funds, for those needing financial assistance with training or upskilling and meet dislocated worker eligibility criteria.

### **III. NCWorks Commission**

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

*The Commission is designated as the state's WDB under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Led by a private sector chair, the 33-member Commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders. All members are appointed by the Governor.*

*Mission of the NCWorks Commission: To ensure North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity; and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation.*

*Employer-led job training programs have the best career outcomes. Employers know best what skills their workers need, and employer involvement is key for workforce development and job readiness. Businesses that invest in developing North Carolina's workforce will benefit from well-trained employees and a more innovative and diverse workplace that better reflects its community.*

1. Briefly describe how the Local Area WDB engages with local employers and informs them of the wide array of business services offered.

Our Business Services Representative engages with local employers by participating in networking

events, participating on local task forces, and serving/leading committees or teams in which employers are involved with as well. One such local workforce team that we lead by the Gaston County WDB is Gaston's BEST (Business and Employer Services Team). This team consists of all workforce partners that serve Gaston County employers. They have created a Business Solutions Catalogue that is printed in color, with a magazine styling, and distributed by its members to local employers either in digital form or through delivery of a printed version. In this catalog the team has listed the array of solutions they offer to address employers' needs. The contact person's information for each solution source is also provided. Additionally, we utilize our websites and social media platforms to promote programs, services, solutions, events, and resources.

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

The Gaston County WDB is planning to partner with our local community college and school systems to bring awareness to the students and their families or friends about local career centers (both adult and youth career centers), services, and opportunities attached to NCWorks brand. We will proceed with the creation of a social media-based campaign, which will proudly display the NCWorks brand, and will revolve around different parts of Gaston County's workforce and include the many opportunities that exist for its citizens and businesses, especially those that receive public assistance, are low-income, and/or are considered be an at-risk youth. Career awareness events will be sponsored by the Gaston County WDB and/or its partners with event assistance offered by the career centers and/or workforce partner staff. Therefore, printable materials and outreach efforts will include the NCWorks brand. These events will be targeted toward Gaston County High Schools' seniors and local college students. The purpose of these events is to bring awareness to the kinds of career opportunities that are available here locally - in addition to the associated education, formal training, and/or hands-on skills that employers require for each.

Our current partnership with Gaston County Public Library also affords us the opportunity to provide career services in an environment that is frequented by customers, some of whom do not utilize the NCWorks Career Center. This allows us to promote the NCWorks system and brand through career center service provided to library patrons and sharing orientation materials and outreach printables containing the NCWorks Brand with these individuals.

The Gaston County WDB maintains temporary and/or permanent signage, for branding purposes, at all certified career centers.

The Gaston Co WDB conducts outreach to promote services available to customers and businesses alike through several avenues including (but not limited to): Board-Sponsored Websites; Social Media Outlets (including Facebook, Twitter, & Instagram); through delivery of our Business Solutions Catalog to new employers, ongoing collaboration with local WIOA partners and Gaston's BEST (Business and Employer Services Team) members, and partnerships with EDC to meet with new and expanding businesses to link them to the NCWorks Career Center Services.

3. Describe how the Local Area WDBs and partners identify and address local challenges for job growth and business expansions?

The Gaston County WDB gathers and analyzes local & regional data annually (but more often if necessary based on economic conditions) utilizing key data sources of labor market information,

trends, projections, and statistics through such sources as: JobsEQ; various NC Commerce Labor Market Data & Tools; US Census Bureau Reports & Maps; and more which helps in identifying the outlook of occupational areas, industries/sectors with anticipated job growth, as well as areas projected to be of current or future concern with potential adverse impacts on our local economy. With the easing of the COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions on in-person contact, Gaston's BEST is planning to organize small groups of key stakeholders/employers by industry sector to have scheduled "chat sessions" to identify challenges and develop their own strategies to address these within their sector. Current employer challenges include: skill gaps including lack of soft skills (good communication & customer service) and lack of basic employability skills (dependability, honesty, punctuality, strong work ethic); lack of required education or training; and lastly, succession plans for their seasoned employees who are planning to retire over the next 5 years. The Gaston BEST members have the ability to offer up additional solutions to address these local businesses' needs, most of which are offered at NO cost to the business.

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

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

The Gaston County Workforce Development Board has always been a significant supporter of solutions that allow for our county to be innovative in its approach to offering job seeker and training assistance to its citizens as well as solutions to businesses for challenges they face or needs that are identified.

One of the most recent periods that required the development of local innovative solutions was during the COVID-19 Pandemic, which began in early 2020 and still presents residual impact to our communities over a year later in to mid-2021. The Gaston County WDB was able to lead the local career centers, onsite program partners, and associated contractors away from an in-person model of integrated service delivery and pivot to a virtual integrated service delivery model for their customers, on-site partner programs participants, and local employers. This was accomplished by completing research and testing of virtual meeting platforms, electronic signature platforms, and even e-supportive service sources - all while maintaining compliance with existing federal and state policy. Additionally, it required the development and implementation of new procedures both at the board level and at the career center level based on federally authorized waivers to some areas of federal law/regulations or clarification of what authorities that states could utilize with its policies due to the national disaster caused by the pandemic. The Gaston County WDB was able to request and utilize Technology Grant Funds offered by the state through federal WIOA funding to assist WIOA contractors with purchasing equipment that would allow for the needed transition to virtual intensive services.

We utilize social media strategies and virtual events to provide additional support of local workforce and its growth. Over recent years, technology has been both a contributing factor in the economic growth in this area also has contributed to the slowdown of the local workforce system. Our local area has displayed a gap between existing workforce system knowledge and ability to use

technology and the level of understanding of technology that it needs to have to remain competitive. Our plan to address this area of deficiency is to partner with the local community college and/or other training providers to offer technology-based workshops to customers through our career centers. These workshops will teach participants how to utilize virtual platforms for attending virtual job interviews in addition to virtual job fairs and other virtual career or resource related events.

5. Briefly describe how the Local Area WDB plans to enhance work-based learning projects to a broader range of local employers.

The Gaston WDB regularly evaluates the various industry sectors in our Local Area and the Southwestern Region for sectors that are anticipated to see an increase in demand over the next 4 years, using their 5 year outlook for growth. Once identified, the Business and Employer Services Team in the Gaston Local Area actively seeks out new and existing employers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly slowed our planned strategies to create partnerships with new employers. The Gaston WDB and its partners were planning a face-to-face “meet and greet” event for local employers which would allow them to meet others, network, and receive information on Work-Based Learning opportunities. We have had to make changes and plan this as a virtual event instead. Gaston’s BEST members share the Gaston’s BEST Business Solutions Catalogue, which is sponsored by the Gaston County WDB, with all appropriate employers (new and also existing) in Gaston County. This allows the employer to refer to it anytime they have a need or are experiencing a challenge. The Business Solutions Catalogue provides them with a list of solutions and contact information for each specific resource, as well as a brief synopsis of each solution offered. No matter with member(s) of Gaston’s BEST meet(s) with an employer, each can provide a “soft hand off” of the company to another member who can provide additional needed solutions.

#### IV. NCWorks Career Centers

*North Carolina’s workforce system includes multiple agencies, programs, and funders. Collaboration, policy alignment, systemic communication, integration, and modernization of the workforce system will ensure a strong and healthy workforce system that can adapt to a changing economy.*

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

1. Identify NCWorks Career Center location(s) including Tier 1, Tier 2, Affiliate, and Specialized sites; On-site partners; how NCWorks Career Center operator(s) are designated; provider(s) of WIOA career services and method of selection; whether youth services provider is on-site and, if so, youth services offered. Use the NCWorks [Career Center Chart](#). [WIOA Section 121(b)(1)(A) and (b)(1)(B)] Name document: Gaston WDB Career Centers.  
**\*See Attachment #7\***
2. Provide a brief description of how Career and Training Services are provided. [WIOA Section 121(e), 134(c)]

Services are delivered according to the one-stop delivery system's provision of career and training services. Integrated services are offered by three major functional teams: Welcome, Skill Development, and Employment services. Customers are served based on priority of service with Veterans given the highest priority. Career services begin with a registration in NCWorks online and an initial assessment and may lead to skill assessments, job development, career counseling, workshops, or job readiness activities. Customers are also provided basic career services through a Wagner Peyser application, to include a resume, virtual recruiter, 3 job referrals, and appropriate referrals to community partners. Customers are informed about WIOA Individualized & Training services and offered the opportunity to talk with a WIOA staff member and/or attend a WIOA orientation. WIOA case managers meet with customers in person or virtually to discuss the availability of training opportunities or job search assistance. If training services are requested, the case manager assists with exploring training providers, providing course information, registration, and program costs. To receive WIOA funded training, the customer must meet eligibility requirements, the training provider's requirements and be determined to need training as outlined in the training justification form. The case manager is required to develop an individualized plan with the participant, identify the participants goals along with appropriate objectives, and the decide (with the participant) which combination of services is most appropriate for him/her to achieve his/her goals. Individual counseling, career planning, case management, and job readiness activities are key components to aid in a participant's success. The selection of a training program, training provider, and/or type of WIOA services should always take in to account the goals and interests of participant, as well as the demand for the specified occupation in the local area. Training providers and programs are linked to occupations in demand and provided in a manner that maximizes informed consumer choice in selecting an eligible training provider. ITAs are issued for those seeking training- related financial assistance not covered by financial aid. Career and Training Services are provided until the customer has successfully reached their employment goal.

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

- Release request for proposal - 9/22/2020
- Question submittal deadline - 10/2/2020 Noon
- Q & A document - provided at Virtual Bidder's Conference - 10/6/2020 10am
- Proposals due - 10/21/2020 4pm > *Amended - Proposal Due Date 11/6/2020 4pm*
- Proposals Evaluation Committee Meeting – 11/10/2020
- Gaston Workforce Development Board Vote on Recommendation – 12/4/2020 12pm
- Notification of Award to Awardee– 12/4/2020
- Posted to Board Website for Public Comment – 12/10/2020
- Proposed Start date for contract /services - 1/11/2021

On 9/22/20 an RFP was released to the public with a due date for proposals being set for 10/21/2020. Interested entitites were asked to submit a request for the link and password for the virtual Proposer (Bidders) Conference and to also submit any questions related to the proposal package no later than noon on 10/2/2020. Numerous individuals from two entities requested access to the virtual Proposer's Conference and also attended it at 10am on 10/6/2020. Written answers to the questions, submitted by the deadline, were provided to the conference attendees. On the proposal due date of 10/21/2020 at 4pm, no proposals were received. The maximum contract amount allowable was \$45,500. Both entities that attended the conference had submitted questions regarding what period of time the \$45,500 would normally be intended to cover – just the

remaining 7 month period (12/1/2020-6/30/2020) left in the current program year or an entire 12 month program year period. Originally, the Gaston County WDB had responded to the question and stated that the maximum contract amount would be for a period of 12 months, which meant that the monthly billable maximum would be much lower than if it were to be for just the 7 month period remaining in the current contract year. After no bids were received, the board reconsidered the response given. The Gaston County WDB contacted state DWS staff and obtained approval to contact the two entities that attended the conference, clarify the answer to the question would be that the \$45,500 would be the maximum contract amount for a 7 month period not a 12 month period, therefore increasing the “monthly” maximum payment allowable under the contract. Both entities said that they would consider submitting a proposal with this new information presented. An amended proposal due date of 11/6/2020 at 4pm was issued and amended instructions given for the Proposal Packages. On 11/6/2020 at 4pm, only Two Hawk Services followed through with submitting a proposal for the One-Stop Operator-Career Center Manager. The RFP Review Team reviewed the 1 bid on 11/10/2020 that was received. The Gaston County WDB approved the committee’s recommendation of Two Hawk Workforce Services for the One-Stop Operator-Career Center Manager Contract. The awardee was notified 12/4/2020 and the public announcement was made on 12/10/20 with a request for public comments to be provided by 1/11/2021. No public comments were received.

The initial period of one-stop operator performance under this contract/award could have commenced on December 2020 to end June 2021 - subject to availability and appropriation of funds. However, Two Hawk Workforce Services had to secure the appropriate candidate for their Career Center Manager position first. They were able to hire a career center manager to begin work February 2021. This required an adjustment to the total amount of the contract, in the contract negotiations, that would be needed due to the shorten period of time the contract would need to cover. Two Hawk also decided to only charge indirect cost and not profit payments, due to prior history with the board and knowledge of our limited funding available for a One-Stop Operator-Career Center Manager. The Gaston County Workforce Development Board has reserved the option to extend or renew this award for Program Year 2021 (July 1, 2021 thru June 30, 2022) and then again for Program Year 2022 (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023) not to exceed a total of 3 years in the overall award under the executed contract contingent upon contractor meeting established performance measures and/or contract goals (as appropriate).

The One-Stop-Operator was a competitive procurement process due to the initial “Intention to Bid” made by two entities – Two Hawk Workforce Services & Eckerd when they contacted the board with interest to bid, confirmed by their request & attendance of the Proposers (Bidders) Conference. PY2021 OneStop Operator Competitive Procurement Contract Extension process completion is pending. DWS will be notified once the PY2021 One-Stop Operator Competitive Procurement Contract Extension is finalized.

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

Training services shall be made available to Adults, Dislocated Workers, or Out-of-School youth who:

- 1) Have met the eligibility requirement for training services, met the LA definition of self-sufficient for seeking training, and who are unable to obtain or retain employment. For customers wanting retraining, under a new career path, he/she must lack marketable skills in an OID related

field.

2) After a case manager completed interview, WIOA initial assessment, and career planning, the participant is determined (by a WIOA service provider) to be in need of training services and possess the skills and qualifications to successfully participate in the selected training program. A Training Justification Form is completed on all WIOA Training Service recipients to ensure that participants meet the conditions for WIOA funding.

3) Select programs of training on the ETPL that are directly linked to occupations in demand in the local area or in another area in which the workers (receiving such services) are willing to relocate.

4) Meet the education provider's minimum qualification requirements, and

5) Are determined to be eligible in accordance with the priority system (Adult Only), or

6) Are members of a worker group covered under a petition filed for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and are awaiting a determination. If the petition is certified the worker may transition to TAA approved training. If the petition is denied, then the worker will continue training under WIOA.

7) Are determined to be in need of training services to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency or wages comparable to, or higher than, wages from previous employment.

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

The provision of follow up services is reviewed with customer at or before WIOA enrollments. A WIOA "Follow-Up Agreement Form" is signed by both the customer and case manager. Follow-up Services are provided at least once quarterly to all WIOA participants who have soft exited, for up to 12 months after the first day of employment or entrance in to post-secondary education, to ensure that the participant remains successful with their long-term goal. When appropriate, the customer is scheduled to come in monthly to meet with their case manager to allow the case manager to determine if the customer continues to work in unsubsidized employment or continues to participate in post-secondary education AND whether or not the participant needs additional assistance. If the participant is working or not able to meet with his/her case manager through traditional means, the case manager is allowed to utilize un-conventional methods to follow-up with the participant: NCWorks Internal Message, Fax, Mail, Email or virtual meeting (through an approved source/platform). A copy must be scanned in to the participant's Staff Documents Tab in NCWorks.

Follow-up services in the Gaston LA may include: additional job search assistance, job retention information, conflict resolution/work place counseling, individual counseling, and/or supportive services in some cases (refer to LA Policy for Support Services to see what is available and to which program's participants)

Gaston LA does not require follow-up services on participants who meet the requirement(s) for hard exit (due to global exclusion). Neither does it require follow-up services on participants who soft-exit due to at least two “unsuccessful attempts to locate” completed in writing.

6. Describe how a) new NCWorks Career Center staff are trained in the integrated services delivery system model, b) at what point do they have full access to [NCWorks.gov](https://www.ncworks.gov), c) the timeline for accomplishing the training for new staff, and d) describe the staff development activities that reinforce and improve the initial training efforts.

The onboarding process begins with a review of all LA Policies and Procedures, followed by an extensive overview of the NCWorks Online System and how it is used to track customer activities, services, and documents. Then, the staff member receives an overview of programs, and an introduction to Integrated Service Delivery via the NC Workforce Training Center’s Welcome to Workforce Module and by observing the welcome team, skills team and employment team services. After that, the Career Center Manager is responsible for reviewing policies and procedures for completing RESEAs, EAls, Front Desk Greeting, and Career Resource Center. Once complete, the onboarding training plan is initialed and signed by the Program Manager, Career Center Manager, and/or Super user depending on which part of the training plan is being completed. Once the training record is submitted to the WDB, NCWorks Online training is set up for trainee with WDB staff. This training usually scheduled for the next week and is completed within 1-2 days. NCWorks Online Access is given by the WDB Super user after the LA Policy & Procedures and NCWorks Online training has been completed. Beyond initial training, staff are asked to participate in training site webinars/workshops, local area training or other pertinent staff development provided throughout the program year. Verification of staff training for new hires and seasoned staff are provided to the Gaston WDB WIOA Coordinator and kept on file for future reference, should the need arise.

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

Trade Adjustment Act customers are referred by the TAA Career Advisor to the WIOA Case Manager for dual enrollment. TAA and WIOA staff coordinate appointments to avoid inefficient service delivery for the customer. The student’s training documents are uploaded in NCWorks online and may be used by both programs. TAA will sponsor the participant’s training cost such as tuition, books, and school fees while WIOA assists with transportation or other supportive services, if they are not already covered by the TAA program. The participant’s case remains open in NCWorks until the last program keys the last date of service is received by the participant.

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

Veterans are identified at the front desk based on self-identification. Veterans are thanked for their service and made a priority to be seen by appropriate staff to meet their needs. Each veteran fills out a Veterans Intake Form to assess needed services. The DVOP at the NCWorks Career Center - Gaston receives the intake form to assess eligibility for services under “Special Barriers to Employment”. If barriers (such as lack of housing) is identified, the DVOP will serve this customer through their program but at any point can refer the customer to WIOA or other partner services for

further assistance if requested. The customer can be dual enrolled in services and coordinate appointments with the DVOP and WIOA case manager to avoid inefficient service. Veterans are provided with career development services, job search assistance, and community resources. Active Military personnel who are transitioning back into the civilian workforce can also receive assistance with their resume to correlate their skills and training received in the military to the training and skills requested by employers for job positions. They are also provided with both individual comprehensive guidance and career counseling.

The Career Center serves veterans under Priority of Service.

**LA Priority of Service Order:**

1. First – covered persons with an additional barrier to employment that meets ‘statutory priority’ requirements (public assistance individual, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient) for WIOA Adult formula funding.

2. Second - non-covered persons who have an additional barrier to employment that meets ‘statutory priority’ requirements (public assistance individual, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient) for WIOA Adult formula funding.

3. Third – covered persons without an additional priority to employment that meets ‘statutory priority’ requirements (public assistance individual, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient) for WIOA Adult formula funding.

4. Fourth - additional priority populations established by either the Governor and/or the Local WDB including (in order):

- a. Disabled
- b. Offender
- c. Not Self-Sufficient

5. Fifth – additional non-covered persons who are "individuals with barriers to employment" identified in WIOA sec. 3(24)

6. Last, non-covered persons who do not have an additional barrier to employment that meets ‘statutory priority’ requirements (public assistance, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient) for WIOA Adult formula funding....in the order specified by the Local WDB.

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

All Career Centers are ADA compliant and have access to auxiliary aides upon requests. Center Staff have a quick reference guide which includes contacts and phone numbers for organizations that are certified to assist individuals with disabilities. Additionally, staff is trained annually to comply with EO mandates by providing equal opportunity to consumers and is cognizant of serving all consumers accordingly.

As a part of the state Career Center Certification process, the NCWorks Career Center must pass an ADA compliance inspection of both the parking lot and building with regards to appropriate access for customers with disabilities. Customers self-identify disabilities and if reasonable accommodations are needed (such as large print or hearing-impaired services, etc) those are provided. Career Center staff provide partner referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation. WIOA

serves persons with disabilities under the LA Priority of Service.

The NextGen Youth Center at Gaston College is ADA accessible and also refers to Vocational Rehab for co-enrollment.

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

All Center staff who are responsible for Wagner-Peyser and WIOA services assist with RESEA and EAI customers by providing assessment, resume updates, job placement services, information on workshops and skills upgrades specific to UIB recipients and information on the use of the NCWorks system. UIB recipients are encouraged to follow up with more intensive job placement assistance available at the Career Centers or independently access NCWorks from their mobile devices or home computers.

11. Attach a flow chart for services to include initial one-on-one interviews with customers, including NCWorks.gov dual registration, skills assessments, and determination of further services. Name document: Gaston WDB Service Flow Chart 2021.

*\*See Attachment #30\**

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(b)(A) (iii)] Name document: Gaston WDB NCWorks Career Center MOU.

*\*See Attachment #31\**

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)]

The WDB conducts NCWorks Career Center Leadership and Management Team Meetings on a bi-monthly basis with all center partners represented at the table. Discussion is focused on improvement of services, maintaining high customer approval, initiatives and opportunities within the Local Area that would allow for increased exposure of Career Center services and enhance public awareness of the extensive services offered and ensuring that services and activities conducted within the Centers or by center staff is meeting job seeker and employer needs.

The Local Area conducts a formal monitoring of their WIOA Service Providers at least annually including areas of financial accuracy and records, programmatic implementation, WIOA & LA Policy Adherence, data validation & program eligibility.

E.O. compliance, and ISD processes.

Additionally, the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Service Providers & Career Centers will be expected to complete monthly (at minimum) random quality checks of each of their team member activities (WP & WIOA Intakes, WIOA Active Cases, WIOA Exits, and Follow-up Cases.

To improve the Board's understanding and ability to ensure services are meeting consumer need, it procures a survey platform to capture customer (participant & businesses) and partner responses.

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

COVID-19 created obstacles for communicating and serving our customers while working remotely. We were tasked with finding new ways to interact with potential customers, providers, participants, employers and partners. Due to the need to telework and provide virtual services, we had to rework almost every aspect of our service delivery and outreach strategies. We quickly adjusted our perspective on how to best serve our customers with the use of technology and with each case manager having a laptop, scanner, document signing software and video conferencing technology, WIOA services can be provided wherever there is a need. The primary goal is to provide services to each of its customers in a manner that is most conducive to meeting the customer's needs and expectations for receipt of a valued service. Management and staff inquire with the customer as to whether they are computer comfortable. If the customer is not computer comfortable, other methods of providing services can be utilized. It is customer choice to utilize either virtual technology or in person activities. Virtual technology is used to provide basic and intensive intake/enrollment services, counseling and career services, monthly workshops and the sharing of community resources. Customers are instructed on how to upload documents correctly into NCWorks to avoid PII information being shared through email. WIOA staff are using Adobe to sign pre-intake documents, ITAs, and supportive service requests. Virtual meeting platforms are utilized to conduct customers' pre-intake, enrollment and follow up services. Work cell phones also allow for quick and efficient engagement with customers. Outreach, recruitment, and workshops can also be provided using virtual platforms.

## **V. Employer Services**

1. Please briefly describe the efforts of the Business Services Representatives and/or Employer Services staff in the following areas:
  - Utilizing regional and local employer data to inform priorities;
  - Making regional and local employer referrals to Agricultural Services and/or Foreign Labor staff;
  - Reaching out to education partners and economic developers; and
  - Including persons with disabilities.

#### Utilizing Local & Regional Data:

Our Business Services Representatives, Employer Services Team, and other members of Gaston's BEST work diligently on behalf of all Gaston Local Area employers/businesses to listen to their challenges and provide solutions to their needs. A part of being prepared to do so, is by insuring we are educated on local and regional employment and occupational related data and statistics including labor market information, trends, occupational outlooks, and others. The Gaston County WDB utilizes JobsEQ data and US Census Reports and Maps as well.

#### Partnering with educators and economic developers:

Gaston's BEST members participate in the Apprenticeship 321 quarterly meetings at Gaston College where employers, Workforce Development Boards, and Economic Developers from various local areas meet. The Gaston County WDB has presented at previous meetings and discussed how the partnership between Apprenticeship 321 and our On-the-Job training program works and benefits both apprentices and employers.

#### Making referrals to Agricultural Services and/or Foreign Laborstaff:

Gaston's BEST members partnered with our local Economic Development Commission to create an industry-based group called GCAM (Gaston County Advanced Manufacturing). It is comprised of local manufacturing companies and workforce development partners. Our goal has been to create a space for employers to have questions answered regarding training, tax incentives, recruitment, and economic development. Additionally, Career Center Staff can make referrals to Ricky Boyd, Agricultural Services Employment Service Consultant for employers requesting Ag Services and/or Foreign Labor. Ricky Boyd recently provided a program overview and staff training on September 11<sup>th</sup> to all Career Center Staff

#### Employer Engagement & Outreach:

We are currently in the planning stages of an Employer Engagement Meet-and-Greet, in which we host employers from across the county and present all of the services and work-based learning programs that are available to them. In addition to this presentation, we are providing each with a copy of the Business Solutions Catalogue with contains Board Sponsored services, the local Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development, NCWorks, the local community college and others and includes contact information for each of them. Another business outreach tool that we utilize is individual flyers for services including On-the-Job training, Work Experience, and Incumbent Worker Training. We have also created flyers to distribute to employers at career fairs, Rapid Response sessions, and other outreach efforts. Each Gaston's BEST member promotes ALL work-based learning opportunities available through all workforce development partners to local employers

#### Career Awareness:

Gaston's BEST Members serve on the WSAT (Workforce Solutions Action Team) and assist in coordination, planning, and execution of the annual Career Expo in partnership with the Gaston County School System. Middle and High School students get to experience a hands-on event and see presentations from local employers to learn about each participating company and what they manufacture. It is an opportunity for the students to speak to employers and get an idea of what direction they would like to take in their careers. Each employer contributes and that

money is used to award scholarships to a few students at the local community college. The event sees over 800 students in a day with around 15 employers participating. We have also previously hosted events to celebrate Advance Manufacturing week in which we hosted high school senior career and technical education students. They are again offered a hands-on experience with local manufacturers. The employers bring samples of their products and even bring employees to speak with the students.

Working with Person's with Disabilities:

Our Business Service Representative works closely with Vocational Rehabilitation and several local employers to serve persons with disabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation Business Relations Representatives are members of Gaston's BEST. The Gaston County WDB has a close working relationship with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and fully supports the Employment First movement. The focus for the unified business strategy includes listening to employers; utilizing needs assessments and data to guide efforts; promoting and marketing business services (especially those of VR such as job coaching, adaptability studies, ADA compliance reviews); and using sector strategies to provide a high-level of customized service to key industries. We work with VR and their clients and view each person as a talented individual who can provide a local employer with employee they need to succeed.

2. Please describe the efforts the WDB has made to deliver business services on a regional basis.

We have previously partnered with an employer from another local area to provide work-based learning opportunities for former offenders that were currently serving their sentence and were within six months of release. We reached out to the other Workforce Development Board prior to entering into an agreement with the employer.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has forced us to pause the re-entry program but hopefully will start again at some point in the future.

Gaston County WDB Business Services Representatives and NCWorks Career Center's Employer Services team members participated as a regional group with some other local areas and even some employers in an effort to explore viable virtual platform options that would work efficiently for virtual job fairs & recruiting sessions, but at an affordable cost to the boards considering a cost-sharing option. Even though the cost sharing piece didn't work out, we were able to share valuable cost information for the different virtual services that various virtual platforms provide. This allowed the Gaston County WDB to decide on the virtual platform that our Board decided to pursue.

The Gaston County WDB and other boards in the Southwestern Region have collaborated to effectively implement three Career Pathways that are relevant to our region and will continue to do so as needed.

3. Please describe business services partnership efforts in the areas of education, economic development and with employers.

The Gaston County WDB's Business Services Representative leads Gaston's BEST (Business Employer Services Team) which is a group of workforce partners who are dedicated to providing local businesses an edge in today's global economy. Our goal is to provide our employers with information on solutions to their needs including (but not limited to): how to access money for training; financial incentives; human resources services; recruitment assistance; no cost advertising; and community partnerships. Member agencies can include (but are not limited to) the following: Gaston County Workforce Development Board, NCWorks Career Center - Employer Services, Gaston College, The Small Business Center at Gaston College, NC Vocational Rehabilitation, Gaston County Economic Development Commission, Gaston County Schools, Gaston Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Gaston Business Association.

Being well versed, in an overview capacity, of all business solutions available through each partnering workforce development member enables Gaston's BEST to work together as a cohesive team, in unison, on behalf of local employers and without regard to which workforce partner receives the acknowledgement of efforts. Each of these core ideals is key to the success of not only Gaston's BEST but also to the success of our local businesses and nurturing a growing economy.

We partner with Gaston County Schools and the Economic Development Commission to sponsor an annual Career Expo in which several local employers present their products to local students.

## **VI. Performance**

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 Workforce Board's current Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth performance on the Federal Primary Indicators of Performance for PY 2020 and prior Program Years. (Reports available via FutureWorks).
  - a. What are some of the factors in the Local Area that impact performance levels (both positively and negatively)? Be sure to consider factors such as the unemployment rate, factory closures/openings, weather events and natural disasters that may have impacted the area, as well as internal operational factors that may impact the Local Area's performance.

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

### **Positive Factor:**

Companies are increasingly turning to NCWorks for their hiring needs which has led to better performance outcomes. A lot of companies are offering incentives such as sign-on bonuses and

all shift working hours to extend the need of employment with in the LA WDB. Gastonia has become a growing area for manufacturing companies. Swedish company Polykemi AB has made an \$11.8 million investment and open its North American headquarters in the Gastonia Technology Park, north of downtown Gastonia. This will bring in 22 new jobs within the first year and the company plans to add up to 100 more within the first five years' salary averaging \$50k and up. DYMAX Corporation, based in Connecticut, has purchased approximately 16 acres of land located on Chief Court in the Gastonia Technology Park. The company plans to make a \$21.5 million investment here and create approximately 59 new jobs within the next five years, which will pay an average salary of \$59,814 per year. In a period of high employment, a lot of companies have been open to hiring candidates with inconsistent work history, criminal charges, and lack of education in order to fill the gap and promote open positions to those who are willing to work.

**Positive Factor:**

Case managers provided exemplary assistance during the new virtual pre-intake process. If a customer was seeking training or intensive services the case manager helped guide the customer through obtaining eligibility documents, completing pre-intake, career assessments and discussing any barriers that could lead to a customer not being successful in the future. They also learned to provide virtual counseling post-enrollment. This allowed for any hurdles on the part of the participant, caused by the pandemic, to be identified and addressed quickly so that supportive services or proper referrals could be given and the participant could attempt to be successful. Customers have eventually learned to adapt virtually and have resumed or decided to try occupational skills training or education via online formats. The Youth Program was eventually able to get a few donated laptops for their most needy students.

**Negative Factor:**

Gaston County WDB ranks #7 in the state with an unemployment rate of 5.0% as of March 2021. Gaston County has 5,474 people unemployed, and 104,728 people employed. When the Covid pandemic hit, much like other counties, Gaston took a major hit in its labor market. Mandates through Executive Orders which required non-essential workers to "stay at home", and business closures due to the pandemic, left a lot of the workforce at a standstill. Many people became unemployed, and a lot of businesses closed temporarily and/or permanently. Companies such as Bi-Lo and Gastonia-based yarn manufacturer Parkdale Mills laid off thousands. There has since been an employer/employee disconnect as many individuals are continuing to draw unemployment even after the employers have begun to hire again, thus making it difficult to fill positions in a timely manner.

With supplemental unemployment checks offered by the federal government, in addition to state unemployment benefit amounts, unemployment income exceeded some weekly wage amounts that workers normally would normally bring home in their paychecks.

**Negative Factor:**

Negative factor-The center was closed to the public for close to a year and was slowly able to open on a very restricted basis. This caused customers to have to seek out referrals to WIOA and other programs in different ways instead of the customer being able to just walk into the center. This has also served as a barrier for those with limited computer access or lack of computer knowledge. As we moved into a virtual platform it made it hard for youth to keep in touch due to lack of access to technology-related items and services, such as computers and internet services. A lot of youth were socially isolated, which affected their level of motivation. With youth

having limited or no in-person

access to our Youth program case managers, the youth program saw a drop in both enrollments and completion of credentials. The full spectrum of comprehensive services and programming went through a short period, almost at a stand-still, while the state, board staff, and program managers worked together to implement a plan for virtual services. Our youth were also limited to access to work experiences needed to obtain higher educational skills and wages for permanent employment placement due to the Stay At Home Order caused by the pandemic.

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

COVID-19 brought about a need for a Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker grant which targeted individuals who have lost employment due to the pandemic. The grant funds were only used to provide temporary employment and the supportive services needed to begin that employment such as uniforms, shoes, etc. They were also provided a one-time gas stipend.

We do see a difference in participants that were enrolled due to being impacted by COVID-19. We are serving many customers who are seeking career changes due to COVID layoffs. We are also serving those with employment barriers due to homeschooling their children and not being able to work regular hours. We continue to have customers interested in the medical field and also transportation, as both of these fields have continued to be in high demand despite the pandemic.

COVID-19 has also brought unique challenges requiring a shift in service delivery. Between March and June 2020, the majority of training services were interrupted by the training providers. This caused participants to not be able to complete their courses or graduate on time. We have also seen participants are more apt to withdraw from training or employment services which have subsequently affected our performance.

As a result of COVID-19, enrollments have been different largely because offices had to be closed during the height of the pandemic and ALL services were transitioned to online ONLY. Prior to the pandemic, the Youth program had an open door walk-in policy to allow for potential participants to inquire about program services and/or enroll in program at any time.

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

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

In our local area, several industries have been impacted by COVID-19 including entertainment, hospitality, and manufacturing. Several local entertainment providers closed permanently or experienced long term closures. The hospitality industry was directly impacted by increased sanitation regulations and a decrease in the number of travelers. That industry is starting to pick back up as COVID cases decrease. The manufacturing industry was impacted heavily at first but has since seen the biggest recovery among local industries and businesses. The biggest issue to local manufacturers at this time is finding candidates to

fill vacancies. We have seen that with the additional employment benefits there tends to be a smaller candidate pool. Our Board is being more aggressive in our outreach advertising efforts to fill vacancies for local employers.

There have been layoffs from large manufacturers such as Daimler Trucks North America; businesses that have sold out to competitors (Bi-Lo) and small businesses that have closed and will more than likely not reopen due to loss of revenue during COVID-19. The Career Center has planned to have outdoor job fairs, increase community partnerships and outreach, and provide off-site staff that can provide WIOA and Basic Career Services during non-traditional hours. Now that many businesses are reopening in some capacity, employers are businesses desperate find employees to fill open positions. NCWorks Career Center and DHHS Job Fairs are going to be held more frequently to better serve the employers' current workforce needs.

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

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

Our LA Performance Accountability Specialist is responsible for tracking performance with our contractors. Our LA PAS will be utilizing NCPerforms (FutureWorks) predictive rosters to compare to NCWorks to ensure accuracy of data. In addition, all contractors are required to track performance and submit month-end reports. The Performance Accountability Specialist will review these reports as they are submitted to ensure they stay on top of performance issues and that we are on track to maintain or improve performance for all goals. The specialist will work closely with the contractors, providing technical assistance, including training, one-on-one meetings, and constant communication with staff as needed. The specialist require our program managers to run quality checks on their staff's intake and case management activities at least monthly and the WDB monitors at least annually. Program managers submit a yearly performance plan that details their planned action steps to meet performance measures and contract goals for the upcoming program year. The LA PAS will meet regularly with contractors to discuss performance measures as needed as these strategies are essential in order to maintain and improve performance in our local area. Our WDB performance is positively impacted by awareness at all staff levels. Training is conducted at least annually to review any new or revised policies. Refreshers are provided to contractors throughout the program year, and as needed when performance issues arises, in order to ensure management is able to train their staff to continue properly entering information in NCWorks Online and how the system modules correlate to Federal Performance Indicators. All WDB and Career Center staff have been formally trained on the Federal Primary Indicators of Performance and are provided a handout/summary to keep at their desk. New NCWorks Online Training and Performance Training is conducted by the Performance Accountability specialist for contracted managers and all new hires.

The following strategies are in place to maintain and improve performance: (1) the LA Super user analyzes the FutureWorks reports & predictive rosters and compares it against NCWorks

reports to ensure staff are keying performance data accurately and NCWorks is giving accurate data reports. Any deficiencies identified are communicated to the contractors. (2) Follow-up is required for all programs and this has proven beneficial for maintaining and improving performance for all programs. (3) The LA requires program managers to run quality checks on their staff's intakes and monitor NCWorks case management reports at least monthly and the WDB monitors the contractors at least annually. (4) Program managers submit a yearly performance plan to the LA which details their action plan to meeting performance measures and contract goals for the upcoming program year. (5) WIOA Staff participate in strategic meetings on a weekly basis to discuss performance, outreach, and enrollments. (6) Staff are provided quarterly program performance data and trained as needed on entering performance data in NCWorks online. All of these strategies are essential in maintaining and improving performance in our local area.

The following Youth Specific Data is tracked by the contracted Youth Program Manager:

# Intake Appointments

# WP-Appointments

# WIOA Youth Enrollment –Individualized Applications Completed

# Inquiries (Youth Interest Forms)

# Individualized Case Management (Work Experience)

# Youth Completed a Credential – GED/AHS/HS Diploma (Credential Obtained/Date/Next Steps)

# Entered Training (OJT, Apprenticeship, Truck Driving, CNA etc.)

# Completed a Credential – GED/AHS/HS Diploma (Credential Obtained/Date/Next Steps)

# Entered Post-Secondary (Name/Enrollment Date/Institution/Course of Study/Method of Paying Tuition)

# Gained Employment – Employer, Start Date, Position, Rate of Pay

# Attained Measurable Skills Gains

# Active Caseload

#Youth in Follow up

#Youth Exited & Entered Follow-Up (Youth Goal, Reason for Exit, Outcomes-Successful/Unsuccessful)

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

In the event that the local area board is not on track the WDB director is notified, and the board staff will meet with the contracted program management and one stop operators to discuss their performance measures in order to put a corrective action plan in place. All parties are aware that their signed WIOA service contracts are performance based by achieving goals and meeting their performance measures, and appropriate action will be taken. Failing to meet yearly negotiated performance goals affects the Adult/DW contractor profit payment as the program is only paid once performance measures are met. The Youth contractor is the community college system and is not a for-profit business. The WDB works in partnership with the contractor to identify strategies to improve the indicator goal current strategies include running reports from NCWorks Online, or Future Works Rosters reports to identify clients that fall into the performance cohort.

Contractor staff then follows up with those clients to ensure employment, credential attainment, and/or any other performance indicators.

If performance issues arise, the WDB Director will be made aware and board staff will meet with the contracted program management and/or one stop operator to discuss the issue, in order to put corrective actions in place to improve performance levels. Failing to meet yearly negotiated performance goals

directly impacts the Adult/DW contractor's profit payments. They are only paid for profit that is earned through achievement of performance measures AND contract goals established in their signed WIOA service contract. The Youth Contractor is the community college system and is a non-profit which does not earn profit payments. Where deficiencies are identified, required improvements will be implemented under existing contract mandates.

Proactively, Predictive Reports are used to determine areas where performance may fall short. Once these areas are identified, the staff and Manager discuss ways to implement change. This could include our approach to case management with certain target areas or contacting those that have failed to succeed in the WIOA program due to loss of contact or lack of participation. Staff are also instructed to enter MSGs, Credentials, and other performance measures as soon as they are provided by the customer or the training provider.

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

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

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

Gaston LA WDB has a designated Performance Accountability Specialist whose primary job function is to review activities within NCWorks and oversee adherence to performance goals and outcomes. The WIOA Coordinator and Performance Accountability Specialist review performance outcomes in Futureworks through reports submitted monthly. The performance reports are shared at least quarterly with its contracted program managers and one stop operator. The contracted program management would then relay the reports to their staff. This allows staff to be aware of the progression toward our performance goals and focus on areas where there could potentially be issues. Additionally, program managers are highly encouraged to utilize NCWorks predictive reports on a regular basis to further focus in areas of weakness and address those concerns with their staff accordingly. WIOA contracted staff have a reoccurring staff meeting each Friday to discuss issues with performance, enrollments, etc. This facilitates discussions about performance data and progress towards MSGs, credentials, enrollments, etc.

Performance measures are shared on paper, through email and verbally to staff by program managers and the WDB.

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

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

The measurable skill gains measure is an early indication of the student's probability of successfully completion of their credential. Additionally, the measurable skill gain indicator also helps to reveal any issues the student may be experiencing. The information from the Measurable Skill Gains has helped our service providers be more accountable for our students' progress while in training. Students with successful measurable skill gains are more likely to successfully obtain their credential and less likely to drop out of their program of study. The Measurable Skill Gains measure is a real-time performance indicator that we are working with Career Advisors on, to ensure they are entering the information in NCWorks Online. The measurable skill gain indicator helps disclose any issues the student may be experiencing. The information from the Measurable Skill Gains has helped our service providers be more accountable for our students' progress while in training. Each Career Advisor must enter at least one Measurable Skill Gains for every year the participant is active in WIOA Title I. Participants enrolled in occupational skills training will be required to have Measurable Skill Gains entered each semester in order to monitor the progress the participant is making toward successfully completing training.

In this LA, the WIOA case manager is expected to meet (or connect virtually during the COVID pandemic) with the student at least monthly for counseling services. During these appointments the case manager will discuss the student's progress and provide resources for tutoring, childcare, counseling and/or other critical needs that can affect grades. This allows staff to try to assist the student ahead of time to prevent the student from resorting to dropping out of school or failing a class, which may lead to a negative performance for the credential attained measure. The Gaston WIOA staff diligently records as many MSGs as possible throughout the course of the participant's training and when work-based training milestones reached. This allows Case Managers to keep track of the participant's benchmarks established in the IEP/ISSP.

At the end of each semester, the student will turn in a copy of their grades/transcript to their case manager and discuss their semester progress. If grades show a dissatisfactory progress, then the customer will be provided further counseling and a determination will be made whether to continue training or find a more suitable option in order for the student to become re-employed. NCWorks reports are used on a bi-weekly or monthly basis to target impending MSGs as well as record those that have been completed. This information is provided bi-weekly to WIOA case managers and by monthly reports submitted to the WDB and One Stop Operator by WIOA Program Manager. Staff also independently keep track of their individual goals, performance, and outcomes on their monthly reports.

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

The Local Area conducts a formal monitoring of their WIOA Service Providers at least annually. To ensure compliance with applicable state, federal, and local area requirements, an annual on-site monitoring review is conducted, at minimum, once per program year. Gaston's approach to programmatic and financial monitoring utilizes a combination of virtual, on-site and desk review monitoring. National or worldwide pandemics, weather related disasters, or other national disaster could affect the monitoring approach that is utilized by the Gaston Local Area. The Local Area will monitor all Service Provider activities (data collection, data entry, customer files, data validation elements, financial records, work-based learning, exits, outcomes, equal employment opportunities, integrated service delivery and other items deemed necessary by the Workforce Development Board Director or designee. The Local area will monitor in areas of financial accuracy and records, programmatic implementation, WIOA & LA Policy Adherence, data validation & program eligibility, E.O. compliance, and ISD processes. Gaston County WDB staff are involved in the monitoring of service providers. The Gaston LA WDB uses monitoring review documents to ensure that all staff are reviewed on the same type of WIOA service provider activities. Monitoring summary reports are completed along with recommendations (if necessary) for any improvements and/ or training to be completed by the contracted program managers. Additionally, the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Service Providers & Career Centers will be expected to complete monthly (at minimum) random quality checks of each of their team member activities (WP & WIOA Intakes, WIOA Active Cases), The Youth Program Manager monitors staff once a week during review of case notes and program activities keyed in NCWorks, as well as running reports to assist in the review of WIOA Exits and Follow-up Cases. WIOA Service Providers must be prepared to show documented proof of the results of these required quality assurance checks, when requested, and at a minimum annually, to the Gaston WDB Staff.

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

Gaston WDB vision for servicing the WIOA eligible Adults, Dislocated workers and our Youth services are that each strive to reach goals to ensure that adults seeking more prominent careers, dislocated workers aiming to regain employment in our workforce, and youth focused on starting on the right part in life by getting proper training and job skills that are needed for the real world. We also work close with other boards in our region, and training providers including Gaston College, and make connections with employers from a broad range of leading industries that need workers with the training, skills, and dedication to produce important products and services for a global marketplace. For both, we help guide the efforts of public and community resources to enhance North Carolina's workforce capabilities by partnering with Gaston County DHHS to refer TANF recipients, Non-custodial Parents of active child support cases, Foster Care Youth and the Food and Nutrition Services for staff assisted services at the NCWorks Career Centers. In addition, through the partnership with DHHS, the Gaston WDB operates a career & resource center located at DSS which serves the targeted populations listed above. The center staff works

closely with local judicial offices to connect former offenders to re- entry services offered at the career centers.

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The vision we have is to continue further implementing a seamless, integrated service environment, where jobseekers, workforce partners, business/industry, training providers, economic development, community organizations, and the faith community can collaborate to provide meaningful workforce related service and assistance delivered with a quality customer service focus. We intend to maximize the concepts of the One Stop as we introduce, guide, counsel, and coordinate with existing staff and partners on integrating service focus and incorporating Board expectations for Center relevance and productivity.

We recognize the need and benefit of expanding partnerships to other mandated and non-mandated partners to develop a better employment opportunity center for all customers. We have established relationships with Social Service organizations to increase employment opportunities for their Non-Custodial Parents. We work directly with their organization to provide initial appointments for assessment and service. We have developed outreach efforts with Community Economic Development Centers (CBO) to better connect their customers with adult education and training opportunities, as well as more efficient access to WIOA services. We have also developed working relationships with training providers tying emerging graduates to work-based learning opportunities in their educational related fields of study, which provided greater WIOA outreach to the community and connection to businesses that were not presently aware of the Career Center system and services.

We have greatly increased our outreach and social media presence so that customers can find and be referred to our services on a frequent basis. We have partnered with the library to have an off-site presence that offers WIOA services and WP services during non-traditional hours. We have built relationships with our partners such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Gaston College, Cathy Mabry Cloninger Center, Hope United, Catherine's House, Recovery Court and many others to ensure growth and exposure to groups that have not been reached in the past. Coordination with Division of Workforce Solutions is paramount in order to reach dislocated workers with this outreach to this customer base occurs in the Career Center and Rapid Response sessions. Customers that are currently receiving UI are provided WIOA service information through the welcome team.

We offer you the illustration below of our general concept of customers and outcomes in a successful Center.

Target Customers	Integrated Connective Services	System Outcomes & Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All Job Seekers</li> <li>▪ Individuals w/barriers to employment</li> <li>▪ Youth</li> <li>▪ Business/industry customers</li> <li>▪ Economic Development groups</li> <li>▪ Local officials, CBO's, Chambers of Commerce, etc.</li> <li>▪ GCWDB</li> <li>▪ Educational Systems/Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ WIOA Career &amp; Training Services</li> <li>➤ Supportive Services</li> <li>➤ Business Services &amp; Outreach</li> <li>➤ Public Relations/marketing</li> <li>➤ Labor Market Information</li> <li>➤ Outreach &amp; coordination with communities</li> <li>➤ WIOA Youth Services</li> <li>➤ Partner Services &amp; cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Employment</li> <li>✓ Improved Retention</li> <li>✓ Increased credentialing</li> <li>✓ Improved penetration in Employer Market</li> <li>✓ Better recruitment opportunities through the Centers</li> <li>✓ Increased usage of Centers by customers</li> <li>✓ Relevance &amp; high value perception by communities</li> </ul>

## VII. Equal Opportunity

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

Gaston County WDB staff conducts EO training for all center staff annually and as needed. Gaston County WDB staff operates its program, services, and activities in compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws. No person shall, on the basis of race, color, national origin (including limited English proficiency), disability, religion, sex, or age, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any of our programs. WDB staff completes random case monitoring on a monthly basis to ensure that individuals are being provided proper access to services without discrimination. The WDB also requires that it be provided with a copy of any claims of discrimination by consumers within two business days and follow up immediately to investigate and/ or resolve any issues. Each Career Center staff must post EO guidance and information for consumers to follow should they feel that discrimination has occurred. The WDB does not tolerate discriminatory conduct of any kind. The WDB require all staff to adhere to EO policy and would recommend disciplinary action up to and including discharge of any individual or contractor determined to have willfully engaged in discriminatory actions.

Gaston County WDB staff conducts EO training for all Center staff annually and as needed. Compliance of Center staff to EO policy is mandated and expectations are clearly defined. WDB staff also randomly select records to review and to guarantee that individuals are provided access to services without discrimination. The WDB also requires that it be provided with a copy of any claims of discrimination by consumers within two business days and follows up immediately to investigate and/or resolve any issues. Each Career Center staff must post information within their work area regarding EO guidelines and information for consumers to follow should they feel that discrimination has occurred. Annually, the Career Center must verify each work area has the EO policy posted. Career Center staff are required to participate in EO training as it is conducted by state EO compliance officer.

The WDB does not tolerate discriminatory conduct of any kind, requires staff to adhere to EO policy and would recommend disciplinary action up to and including discharge of any individual or contractor determined to have willfully engaged in discriminatory actions.

2. Attach the Local Area's current Equal Opportunity (EO) Complaint Grievance Procedure to address EO requirements [29 CFR Part 37.71]. Name document: Gaston WDB EO Complaint Grievance Procedure.

***\*See Attachment #17\****

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

Dave Gunderman - Gaston Local Area Equal Opportunity Officer and the Gaston County WDB work to insure that Gaston County Workforce Development Board Staff, Programs, and Career Centers are operated according to EO statutes and that proper notification and/or training is provided to all staff and customers.

The State EO Officer – Mose Dorsey previously provided the Gaston County WDB Staff, NCWorks Career Center – Gaston Staff, and DHHS Career Resource Center Staff with Annual EO & LEP Training. However, effective 2021, the NCWorks Training Center is making available EO & LEP online training for local areas to use annual or when new hires are brought in.

Mose advises the board of any changes that have been made to the state or federal EO Requirements so that Local Area Policies and Procedures can be revised with the most recent EO criteria so that participants can be provided with services in a manner that supports EO compliance. If any updates are made to the EO policy, the new information is provided to program and career center managers to train staff and distribute as well as post in centers for reference.

## **VIII. Adult and Dislocated Worker Services**

1. Provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of existing Adult and Dislocated Worker education and training services. 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. Describe plans to address any weaknesses identified. [WIOA Section 108(b)(1)(D)]

Case managers meet with customers to discuss interest training or employment services, collect eligibility documents, and complete all WIOA documents. The Case manager determines need and ability to complete training through interview, assessments and career counseling during the pre-intake process. Case managers will also review whether customer already possesses marketable skills. The customer completes a training checklist to include program information and how he or she plans to be self-sufficient during training. Transportation, childcare and other barriers are also addressed during this time. Customers are required to apply for Federal Pell Grant if the training they are requesting qualifies for Pell. The training that is being requested must be approved as an Occupation in Demand and the provider that the customer chooses must be approved by WDB. If not, the training request is forwarded for approval. If approval is given, the customer continues in pre-intake process. If training is not approved, the customer may pursue other training options or individualized services. Customer must provide proof of acceptance into a training program as well as information concerning length, cost, books, and required supplies for the program. An ITA is completed based on the registration and program cost information provided by the training provider. Training Cost Analysis, Student Handbook, and any supportive services that are required are also completed before start of training. A Training Justification Form is completed through NCWorks before training code can be entered. If a customer is TAA eligible, they can be dual enrolled in WIOA, with TAA paying tuition and WIOA paying transportation supportive services. For On-the-Job Training, assessment testing is required before referral form can be completed and forwarded to Business Services Representative. If the customer is selected for interview, the case manager will help prepare customer through mock interview and resume assessment. If the customer is offered the OJT position, the case manager will work the customer and the BSR will coordinate with employer to make sure all supportive services are addressed, contracts are signed, and customer is prepared to start position. Once the customer starts, he or she will meet with case manager monthly to assess issues/questions concerning training. Once the training is completed, if

customer stays with employer, job retention tips will be provided and if they do not stay Individualized services will be provided until customer enters other employment. We feel our methods of meeting with customers and providing counsel is strong and we will continue to be thorough with our customers from pre-intake to follow up.

2. Provide the date and process for the competitive procurement of the Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs that ensures an arm's-length relationship between the WDB and service delivery. Identify any service provider contract extensions.

The Gaston WDB released a Notice of Request for Proposal Announcement on April 22, 2021 and a the RFP Package on 4/23/2021, which included program requirements and advised of a Virtual Proposer's Conference to be held on Friday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 11am. Attendees were provided with program related information & detailed information on submission requirements. Request for questions was presented but no questions were asked by the attendees, following the structured presentation. Several individuals from 2 entities attended the Proposer's conference. There was only intention to bid made by 1 entity each for the two WIOA Programs (1 for Adult/Dislocated Worker – Two Hawk Workforce Services and 1 for Youth – Gaston College).

The deadline to submit additional questions was May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and the deadline to submit a proposal for consideration was May 14, 2021 at Noon. Any submissions that failed to meet the deadline were not considered for funding. Only 1 Adult WIOA Program proposal was received by the Board. Only 1 Youth WIOA Program proposal was received by the Board. The proposals were reviewed by the Proposal Review Team and were scored. Approval of recommendations by the board members and notice of award to the public are pending at this time.

We will attempt to negotiate and execute a contract through Gaston County for WIOA Services with the proposal received for the youth program and also the same for the proposal received for the Adult/Dislocated Worker Programs for PY 2021. A new RFP competitive process will be completed for PY2022 WIOA contracts.

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

3. Attach the Local Area WDB's Adult and Dislocated Worker (DW) service providers chart effective July 1, 2021 using the [Adult/Dislocated Worker Service Provider List](#) provided. Name document: *Gaston WDB Adult and DW Providers 2021*.

*\*See Attachment #8\**

4. Describe how and when eligible training providers are reviewed at the local level and how customers are informed they have choices in choosing their providers. Define what "significant number of competent providers" means in the Local Area. Include whether the Local Area WDB uses more strict performance measures to evaluate eligible training providers. Attach if a separate policy. *Gaston WDB ETPL Policy*. Eligible Training Providers are reviewed at the local level when one of two situations arise: the customer chooses a provider that is not currently on the list and wants them to be added OR a local area provider contacts us to be added to the ETPL. Additionally, we evaluate Apprenticeship providers to be added to our LA ETPL. The Provider Review Team evaluates new providers' eligibility weekly (if applicable).  
Gaston LA WDB has a "Provider Review Team" that consists of the Provider Specialist,

Merissa Mitchell and the WDB Supervisor, Apryl Smith. As the Provider Review Team is notified by NCWorks that a provider has registered in NCWorks, the Provider Specialist notifies the provider of what verifications are needed to determine if they are a legitimate provider whether they can be added to ETPL list as an 'Approved Provider'. Once the requested documents are returned, the provider specialist schedules a meeting date for the Provider Review Team to review the documents and any prior performance of the provider. This is required for every program that the provider offers. Each program is reviewed separately. If the provider or their programs are denied, a provider case note is added and a notice is sent to the provider.

When the customer completes their Intensive Service application, training customers and the contracted Service Provider are both required to sign a “Customer Choice Form” which states that the contracted Service Provider has given ‘the customer’ the choice of which training provider he/she uses for services. The Local Area makes the entire ETPL available through NCWorks to each training customer, with the understanding that each customer is responsible for travel cost incurred that exceeds the allowable amount to be paid by the Local Area Service Provider through supportive services. In the Gaston Local Area there is more than 1 community college and private training provider (who is approved to be on the NCWorks ETPL) within a 30 minute driving distance of the NCWorks Career Center – Gaston and thus the Local Area considers that we have a “significant number of competent providers” for our local area. Competency of providers and their programs is proven when the provider meets the local area’s training provider and program requirements, which states: that they must be a proven legitimate provider; in existence for at least two years; possesses liability insurance; its programs are completed by a significant percentage of its students, resulting in credential and employment. Additionally, a percentage of program completers should obtain employment related to their training field. Annually, training providers are reviewed to see if they continue to meet the required local area completion rate standards. If their programs do not meet the local area completion rate standards, based on the rate information that the training provider is required to enter in NCWorks, the training provider will be notified that they are no longer eligible for their program(s) to be on the ETPL. If at any point the training provider meets the minimum standards, they can re-apply to have their programs placed on the ETPL.

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

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

The Gaston LA provides the following during the participant’s 12 months of follow-up:

- Additional Job Search Assistance
- Job Retention Information
- Conflict Resolution/Work Place Counseling
- Individual Counseling
- Supportive Services (refer to LA Policy for Support Services to see what is available)

Follow-up Services are provided to ALL Gaston County WIOA participants who have soft exited, to ensure that the participant remains successful in meeting their long-term

goal of self-sufficiency employment that lasts 12 months or longer. When appropriate, the the case manager schedules the customer to come in monthly to meet with them so the case manager can determine if the customer is still working in unsubsidized employment or still in post-secondary education and whether or not the participant needs additional assistance. If the participant is working and cannot meet with their case manager, the case manager is allowed to use un-conventional methods to follow-up with the participant: NCWorks Internal Message, Fax, Mail, or Email. The case manager scans the necessary proofs of these contacts in to the participant's Staff Documents Tab in NCWorks.

Follow-up results are keyed in to NCWorks, within 15 days from the last day of the each required quarter.

In the Gaston LA, we do not require follow-up services on participants who meet the requirement(s) for hard exit (due to global exclusion). Neither do we require follow-up services on participants who soft-exit due to at least two "unsuccessful attempts to locate" in writing.

## **IX. Youth Services**

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

- *Out-of-School Youth – A minimum of 75 percent of the Youth funds allocated to Local Areas, except for the Local Area expenditures for administration, must be used to provide services to OSY;*
  - *Work Experience – Not less than 20 percent of Youth funds allocated to the Local Area, except for the Local Area expenditures for administration, must be used to provide paid and unpaid work experiences; and a*
  - *Focus on Partnering – Co-enrollment encouraged where appropriate with Title II and IV.*
1. Provide a description and assessment of the *type and availability of youth workforce activities* in the Local Area, 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	For Persons with Disabilities?	Brief Assessment/Model Used	Success Rating
Work Experience	yes	Talent Central Skills Assessments – complete prior to the start and at the end of a work experience opportunity, to determine the participant’s initial level of applicable skills, and the amount/kinds of training needed to be included in the participant’s training plan. Also used to determine if the participant and employer’s training partnership resulted in the anticipated skills progression level for the participant. before & after entering a work experience opportunity Pre-Ansel Casey - Assesses behaviors and competencies	*See below
Training - Interest Assessments	yes	Holland Code used to determine areas of interest Career Cluster Match -Career/Job matching to customer interest	*See below
Job Shadowing	yes	Offered to participants prior to entering work experience or training	*See below

#### Work Experience (Skills Assessments):

Number of youth participants who have completed the Prove IT or Talent Central Skills Assessment prior to starting their WEX.

**PY 19 - 12 PY 20 - 6**

Of those - Number of youth participants who have completed the Prove IT or Talent Central Skills Assessment after completing their WEX.

**PY 19 - 6 PY 20- 2 (4 are still in WEX placements)**

Of those – Number of youth participants who showed a skills progression at the completion of WEX opportunity.

**PY 19 - 3 PY20 - 1**

#### Training (Interest Assessments):

Number of youth participants who have entered post-secondary training

**PY 19- 8 PY 20 - 12**

Of those, Number of youth participants who have completed Interest Assessments prior to starting training

**PY 19- 8 PY 20 - 12**

Of those – Number of youth participants who successfully completed their training

**PY 19 - 7 PY 20 7 (2 still in training)**

Of those – Number of youth participants who obtained employment “in their career field”.

**PY 19 - 2 PY 20- 1**

#### Job Shadowing:

Number of youth participants who have completed a Job Shadow opportunity prior to starting their WEX or Training. **N/A - We had job shadow experiences (PY19) but nothing leading to WEX placement. Job shadow experiences (PY20) were scheduled but was cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic. These will be restarted in the near future, as soon as it is safe to do so.**

Of those - Number of youth participants who have successfully completed their WEX or Training.

**N/A –**

The WDB, via WIOA Service Contractor, provides career exploration service to youth through short term Summer Youth Employment, Year-Round Employment, and Work Experience opportunities such as OJT and apprenticeships, leadership opportunities, and community volunteer activities, workshops on relevant topics such as personal health, post-secondary educational opportunities, college tours and job shadowing. Employment and training opportunities for Youth participants are identified by the Board as service priorities for the contractor, who is Gaston Community College at present. With the extensive availability of on-campus and technology enhanced programs, this contractor is a perfect fit for the WIOA Next-Gen Youth Program. With Gaston College being a state supported school, all facilities are ADA compliant. If a youth has additional disabilities, the board will work with the Youth Contractor to insure that all reasonable accommodations possible are made to assist the youth to meet his her training and employment goals. The Gaston Workforce Development Board has been a supporter of virtual learning and services for some time. It is the vision of our board to continue to provide virtual face-to-face services even after the COVID-19 pandemic has passed, in an effort to accommodate individuals with disabilities or mental health conditions including but not limited to PTSD, Social Phobia's, Sight limitations, and other impairments (as deemed necessary).

Each year the Gaston WDB sponsors up to 8 youth participants and youth case managers to attend the NC Youth Summit in Greensboro. In order for a youth participant to be eligible to attend, they must complete agreed upon goals as discussed with their case manager including attending class, completing volunteer hours or work experience activities and keep their regularly scheduled appointments with their case manager.

Additionally, interested youth participants are required to be placed in paid work experience sites that mirror their employment goals and/or areas of interest from their interest assessment(s)

2. Describe how the Local Area's broad Young Adult (NextGen) Program design is unique to include:
  - a. Providing objective assessments;
  - b. Supportive services needs; and
  - c. Developmental needs of each participant, for the purpose of identifying appropriate services and career pathways for participants. [WIOA Section 129(c)(1)(A)]

Gaston LA is committed to providing high quality services for all eligible youth and young adults. The LA's NextGen program is designed to assist youth with one or more barriers towards self-sufficiency; including preparation into secondary education, skills training, credential attainment, work place experience, financial literacy, knowledge of labor market info, etc.

To ensure seamless deliver of program services for program participants, each youth shall receive an Objective Assessment of the academic levels, skill levels and serviceneeds for the purpose of identifying appropriate services and career pathways. The assessment will include a review of:

- Basic Skills
- Occupational Skills
- Prior Work Experience
- Employability
- Interests
- Aptitudes

- Supportive Service Needs
- Developmental Needs

Furthermore, this assessments should also consider a youth's strengths rather than just focusing on areas that need improvement.

This objective assessment will help build the framework of the ISS which is jointly developed between the case manager and youth.

To relieve barriers and to receive a comprehensive array of youth services (14 elements), supportive services are made available to youth participants. To the extent possible, support services will be provided by referral through linkages to area human service agencies. Where these resources are unavailable, WIOA funds may be used for Youth. Supportive services may include assistance with transportation, Child Care & Dependent Care, Housing, Educational Testing, Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities, Uniforms or other work related attire and tools, Items Necessary for Students who are Enrolled in Post-Secondary, Payments and fees for employment and training related applications, tests, and certifications

3. How does the Local Area 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?

The local area ensures that the ISS identifies appropriate services based on the OAS by having short term, intermediate, and long term goals which steers the direction of services. It also assists the youth in achieving overall self-sufficiency. The ISS is unique to the individual from the start of intake and is revised(as applicable) as the customer is integrated into program services and activities Desired career paths are determined through interest assessment testing before plans for classroom or work-based training are solidified. This, as well as job shadowing, will help to insure that the youth participant is fully aware of what is involved in his/her career path. Being educated about the career path of their choice helps to insure completion of the training and the obtainment of employment, which will inevitably help the participant meet the required performance measures.

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

The Gaston County WDB requires youth services be provided at both the NCWorks Career Center and its Provider Offices. The Next-Gen Youth Contractor provides 1 Full- time (or equivalent) Next-Gen Youth Staff Member to provide One-Stop Basic Career Services to youth at the NCWorks Career Center – Gaston once they have been screened by a Career Center Staff member and determined to fall in the Age 16-24 with Barriers category. The board also requires that the Next-Gen youth staff member provide Basic Career Services, Intensive Youth Intake Services and Youth Case Management Services at the Gaston College – Dallas Campus.

5. Attach the Local Area WDB Youth service provider's chart, effective July 1, 2021, using the [Youth Service Provider List](#) provided. Complete each column to include specifying where Youth Services are provided. Name the document: *Gaston WDB Youth Providers 2021*.

\*See Attachment #13\*

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

The Gaston WDB requires that our WIOA NextGen Youth contractor enroll a minimum of 90% of OSY and a maximum of 10% of ISY. Currently, the Gaston Local Area does not have any ISY enrolled. Outreach efforts are achieved through social media, websites, communications across the college campus and at the Life Skills Building where GED classes are offered. The Youth Program has also completed a radio interview with the Gaston College radio station WSGE. Prior to COVID, monthly community service youth projects were taking current Youth participants out in the community to volunteer and allowed them to share about their experiences in the Youth program with other youth in the community. We are hopeful that this will resume soon, as COVID restrictions continue to be lowered or lifted completely. Gaston College also allows a NextGen Youth Staff member to attend the GED Orientation session to promote the NextGen WIOA program and recruit interested individuals for enrollment in to the WIOA Nextgen Youth Program.

Special Outreach efforts include social media, radio interview on Gaston College station WSGE, ongoing collaborations with community partners and key stakeholders.

7. Describe how the Local Area WDB partners, aligns, and leverages, as appropriate with:
- Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program resources and policies;
  - Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation program resources and policies;
  - Integrates adult education with occupational education and training and workforce preparation, as Boards and the creation of career pathways for youth. [USDOL TEGL 8-15]

The Gaston WDB partners with Gaston College's GED & AHS Programs, as well as the Gaston Literacy Council and Vocational Rehabilitation to do co-enrollments and provide services to individuals with basic skills deficiencies, learning disabilities and other barriers to employment. Gaston College provides TABE testing to anyone with a potential basic skills deficiency or learning disability.

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

The Gaston LA provides the following during participants' 12 months of follow-up:

- Additional Job Search Assistance
- Job Retention Information
- Conflict Resolution/Work Place Counseling
- Individual Counseling
- Supportive Services (refer to LA Policy for Support Services to see what is available during follow-up)

Follow-up Services are provided to ALL Gaston County WIOA participants who have soft

exited, to ensure that the participant remains successful in meeting their long-term goal – self-sufficiency employment that lasts 12 months or longer. When appropriate, the case manager schedules the customer to come in to meet with them (or meet virtually with them) so the case manager can determine if the customer is still working in unsubsidized employment or still in post-secondary education and whether or not the participant needs additional assistance. If the participant is working and cannot meet with their case manager, the case manager is allowed to use un-conventional methods to follow-up with the participant: NCWorks Internal Message, Fax, Mail, or Email. The case manager scans the necessary proofs of these contacts in to the participant’s Staff Documents Tab in NCWorks.

Follow-up results are keyed in to NCWorks, within 15 days from the last day of the each required quarter.

In the Gaston LA, we do not require follow-up services on participants who meet the requirement(s) for hard exit (due to global exclusion). Neither do we require follow-up services on participants who soft-exit due to at least two “unsuccessful attempts to locate” in writing.

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

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

If yes, attach the Youth Incentive Policy to include:

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

Name document: Gaston WDB Youth Incentive Policy.

The Gaston Local Area does provide Youth Incentives for achievements of goals.

The LA WDB requires that the Youth Contractor offer incentives to Youth participants when achieving goals on their ISS. The Youth Contractor uses WIOA funds to purchase incentives including gift cards. However, the Youth Program is also allowed to solicit donations of items that can be used for incentives also and is not required to provide the Gaston WDB record of these donations. The Youth Program case managers are required to have their program manager to sign off and approve this issuance of incentives for each participant. The participant has to sign the same Incentive Form when an incentive is received from his/her case manager. Thus showing the flow of the incentive or gift card from the Program Manager to the Case Manager and then to the customer.

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

*\*See Attachment #14\**

10. If the Local Area WDB does not offer incentives for (NextGen) youth, please explain why. **N/A**

11. Describe the Local Area 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)]

Youth who enter the WIOA NextGen Youth Program are offered a TABE test to assess their education level. Additionally, they are offered an interest assessment test to determine their area of career interest which can lead to youth enrolling in post-secondary education after completion of GED or AHS. If a youth's first priority is obtaining employment, we support the customer's choice of activity while providing them with every opportunity to further explore career development options. Thus encouraging their continued education without pushing the participant in to something they may not be ready for or willing to commit.

12. 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)]

The NextGen Youth Program strategy begins with job readiness activities with both the WEX Specialist and Case Managers. NextGen youth have the opportunity to participate in several workbased learning opportunities, including Work Experience, On-the-Job Training, Job Shadowing, Internships, and Apprenticeship. Business Services Representatives and Work Experience Specialists both develop these opportunities with employers have the potential to turn these positions in to unsubsidized self-sufficiency employment and are in careers that are in demand in our local area.

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

*\*See Attachment #10\**

14. How does the Local Area ensure that the minimum of 20% of funds is spent on work experience and is the Local Area 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)]

Through competitive procurement, the Gaston WDB selected the youth service provider, Gaston Community College, to deliver services to both in-school and out-of-school youth. The contract with Gaston College includes the requirement to expend 20% of their budget for work experience and these funds are set aside for that purpose. They have a WEX specialist on staff to assist with subsidized placement in work experience opportunities.

The amount that Gaston College bills to the Gaston County WDB for reimbursement in the Work Experience section of the invoice is keyed in to WISE to account for expenses identified as work experience by the contractor.

15. 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)]

Yes...The Gaston County WDB has a Youth Committee.

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

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

Provide the committee's purpose/vision.

To provide a holistic approach to lifting youths' barriers by sharing of information, opportunities, and resources that are available in the community for youth.

a) Provide the committee's top three goals or objectives for PY 2021.

1. Youth Outreach

2. Centralized virtual location for Youth-based news, events, and resources for all Gaston County youth and young adults ages 16-24.

3. Increase number of youth committee members from private business & cbo's

b) List of members to include members' agency/organization, one of which must be a community-based organization with a demonstrated record of success in serving eligible youth. Provide the Committee's Chair information in the first block (who must be a WDB member.) Name document: Gaston WDB Youth Committee Members. [WIOA Section 107(b)(4)(A)(ii)] and,

\*See Attachment #12\*

c. Complete the following chart for the PY 2021 Youth Committee's planned meeting schedule to include dates, time and location. *[Expand form as needed.]*

Date	Time	Location (include address and room #)
August 19, 2021	12 noon	Virtual
November 18, 2021	12 noon	Gaston County DHHS Building – 330 Dr Martin Luther King Jr Way, Gastonia, NC - 4 <sup>th</sup> floor Board Room
February 17, 2022	12 noon	Virtual
May 19, 2022	12 noon	Gaston County DHHS Building – 330 Dr Martin Luther King Jr Way, Gastonia, NC - 4 <sup>th</sup> floor Board Room

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

The Gaston WDB released a Notice of Request for Proposal Announcement on April 22, 2021 and a the RFP Package on 4/23/2021, which included program requirements and advised of a Virtual Proposer's Conference to be held on Friday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 11am. Attendees were provided with program related information & detailed information on submission requirements. Request for questions was presented but no questions were asked by the attendees, following

the structured presentation. Several individuals from 2 entities attended the Proposer's conference. There was only intention to bid made by 1 entity each for the two WIOA Programs (1 for Adult/Dislocated Worker – Two Hawk Workforce Services and 1 for Youth – Gaston College).

The deadline to submit additional questions was May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and the deadline to submit a proposal for consideration was May 14, 2021 at Noon. Any submissions that failed to meet the deadline were not considered for funding. Only 1 Adult WIOA Program proposal was received by the Board. Only 1 Youth WIOA Program proposal was received by the Board. The proposals were reviewed by the Proposal Review Team and were scored. Approval of recommendations by the board members and notice of award to the public are pending at this time.

We will attempt to negotiate and execute a contract through Gaston County for WIOA Services with the proposal received for the youth program and also the same for the proposal received for the Adult/Dislocated Worker Programs for PY 2021. A new RFP competitive process will be completed for PY2022 WIOA contracts.

## X. Local Area Innovations

1. List additional funding received by the Local Area WDB to include special grants (Enhancement, Finish Line, Innovation), National Dislocated Worker Grants (disaster), YouthBuild, Foundations, NCWorks Commission, other outside funding and others to include a brief description of the source and the amount.

Grant Name/Kind	Description	Beginning and End date	Source and Amount
FLG	Provides emergency assistance to students, who have completed 50% or more of their training, with an immediate need that could interrupt their ability to continue with their classes.	7/1/2019-1/31/2021	\$11,522.16
Business Services Grant	Provides funding for the local area to use to secure staff that will work with employers and provide employer based services, of which time spent on Incumbent Worker Training services for local employers must be 50% or more.	7/1/2019-7/30/2021	\$75,000
Technology Grant	Provided funding to purchase technology or equipment needed to transition to virtual services due to the COVID-19 Pandemic	4/20/2020-6/30/2020	\$5000.00
NDWG	Provides funding for WEX or training opportunities to individuals who have been dislocated temporarily or permanently due to a national disaster	6/11/2020-3/31/2022	\$100,000

2. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's best adult/dislocated worker program practice.

One of the ways we have shown innovation and creativity in the Gaston Adult/DW Program was through developing our new partnership with the Gaston County Library-Main location. We have assigned a WIOA staff member to be onsite each day during traditional and non-traditional hours to provide basic career services, WP services, and WIOA information. We have space available there as well for case management and WIOA orientation. This allows us to serve those with limited transportation who can't come to our Career Center as it is on the bus line. It also is good for those who frequented the DHHS site that has been closed due to the pandemic to have the library as an option. We have offered our partners and their clients the opportunity to meet with WIOA staff at the library if that is more convenient for them. Our future is exciting as we have met with Library staff and discussed ways we could expand our services to include placing WIOA staff at the other branches of the Gaston County Library.

3. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's best youth program practice.

One of the NextGen's best youth program practice is the ongoing network and partnerships with local area small businesses. Even despite the COVID-19 pandemic, NextGen still managed to eventually be able to place customer's in WEX placements again to work and sharpen their job readiness skills which aligned with their goals and objectives. Some placements started virtual and slowly transitioned to in-person but every attempt was made to insure that customers who were interested in WEX placements were able to be placed at some point. While waiting for placements they engaged in job readiness training with both their assigned case manager and WEX Specialist.

4. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's regional strategy that has yielded positive results.

The development of regionally aligned Career Pathways and Regional Occupations In Demand Lists which allows for better participant access to common training providers, programs, and pathways shared by neighboring counties.

5. Describe one of the Local Area WDB's Incumbent Worker or other business services best strategy.

We have produced flyers for Incumbent Worker Training that give a short summarization of what Incumbent Worker Training is, and how a business can benefit from it and We have included an Incumbent Worker Training section in our Gaston's BEST Business Solutions Catalog, that way if an employer needs training at any time, they can find our contact information in the catalog and utilize IWT. When we have chances to speak in front of the community, whether it be at a Rotary Meeting, Chamber meeting, etc. we speak about this program in front of these employers and other community leaders to educate them on these resources available. We share these resources on our social media pages in hopes to reach a bigger audience.

Incumbent Worker Training is a great resource for all local businesses, at some point in time. All businesses are encouraged to apply for skills enhancement. Incumbent Worker Training is especially great for employers that are categorized in our Business Edge group, as necessary training needs can be met with the assistance of the Board. Example: A company may be losing business due to not being able to produce their product in a timely manner, reason being – their setup time on a machine is much slower than it should be. The company can use IWT to train employees and decrease setup time on said machine, therefore getting their product to consumer in the appropriate time. IWT can also put employees through training and earn certificates or certifications in their industry, therefore making them more competitive and earning them more business.

Incumbent Worker training is great for hiring new entry level employees, as they train their incumbent workers to progress into a higher position, therefore allowing room for entry level candidates to backfill these positions.

Incumbent Worker Training is great for keeping a company competitive, as they train their employees to retain their job or to gain new skills to move into a new position with better pay.

## XI. Program Year 2021 Local Area WDB Plan Required Policy Attachments

- The following policies are *required* to be attached as separate documents in WISE as part of the PY2021 Plan. The Plan is not complete without these documents. Name each document: Local Area Name, Policy Name.
  - In the first column, state if it is attached or why it is missing and when it can be expected. If two of the policies have been combined, please make a notation.
  - In the second column mark “Yes” *only* if the policy has been changed/revised since PY2020 and requires a special review for PY 2021 and has not been previously submitted to the Division.
  - Do not add an empty document in WISE as a “placeholder”.

Required Local Area Policies and DWS Reference Policy	Attached (Yes/No). If no, why?	Revised for PY2021 (Yes/No) and needs review
1. Adult/Dislocated Worker Work Experience Policy (PS 10-2017)	YES	NO
2. Competitive Procurement Policy (PS 19-2017, Change 2)	Included in Financial Mgmt	NO
3. Conflict of Interest Policy (PS 18-2017)	YES	NO
4. Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity Standards and Complaint Procedures (PS 07-2018)	YES	YES
5. Financial Management Policy for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I (PS 20-2017, Change 1)	YES	NO
6. Individualized Training Account Policy	YES	NO
7. On-the-Job Training Policy (PS 04-2015, Change 1)	YES	NO
8. Oversight Monitoring Policy, Tool and Schedule	YES	NO
9. Priority of Service Policy (PS 03-2017)	YES	NO
10. Youth Work Experience Policy (PS 10-2017)	Included with Adult WEX	NO
11. Supportive Services Policy (PS 10-2020)	YES	NO
12. Sampling Policy/Self-Attestation Procedures & Monitoring Schedule	YES	NO

2. Designate whether the following local *Optional Policy* is included and used at the Local Area WDB and is included in the Plan or write “N/A” implying “Not Applicable”, the WDB does not have this policy and; therefore, does not use these services.
  - In the second column mark “Yes” **only** if the policy has been changed/revised since PY 2020 and requires a special review for PY 2021 and has not been previously submitted to the Division.
  - Do not add an empty document in WISE as a “placeholder”.

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

Optional Local Area Policies	Yes- the Board has a policy or N/A (Not Applicable)	Revised for PY 2021 (Add Yes or N/A for this column)
1. Local Area Incumbent Worker Training Policy (PS 13-2020, Change 1)	Yes	No
2. Local Area Needs-Related Policy	No	No-Removed
3. Local Area Transitional Jobs Policy	Yes	No
4. Local Area Youth Incentive Policy	Yes	No

**\*See Attached Policies\***

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	\$8000 per Year / \$12,000 Life Time
Time Limits	7 semesters
Degree or Certificates allowed (Associate’s, Bachelor’s, other)	Certificate, Degree, Diploma, Last year of a Bachelor’s Degree
Procedures for determining case-by-case exceptions for training that may be allowed	Training can be approved, even if not on OID list, if written promise of employment is received from the employer

Individual Training Accounts (ITA) Summary	
Period for which ITAs are issued (semester, school year, short term, etc.)	Semester
Supportive Services covered by ITA (provide examples such as uniforms, tools, physical exams, etc.)	None – The Gaston Co WDB does not count Supportive Services toward the participants life time max for Tuition, Books, Fees & School Supplies.
Other	Semester

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

Transportation	Childcare	Supplies (include examples)	Emergency (include examples)	Other (include examples)
Bus Tickets Gas Cards Mileage Reimbursement Contracted Trans	\$95 per week with a total family max of \$190 per week	Any additional school supplies required by the class instructor, on the class syllabus, and are not disposable. Exp: Texas Instrument Calculator.	Vehicle Expenses (Car Repairs, Car Insurance) Utility costs (cut off notice for power) Housing Expenses (Deposit, First month rent, or Amt on Eviction notice) Other Items (as appvd)	Educational or work-related: Testing fees Accommodations for indivs w/ disabilities Tools Equipment Uniforms Work/Interview Attire Work Boots/Shoes Other req'd items to complete activities

**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.

## Attachment Checklist from Plan Instructions

Please confirm all attachments are loaded in WISE. If not, provide an expected date of arrival for required documents.

- ☒ Local Area Signed copy of Consortium Agreement *(if applicable)* **N/A**
- ☒ Local Area Administrative Entity Organizational Chart *(DHHS-DSS)*
- ☒ Local Area WDB List *(form provided)* *(Current through 5/31/2021 - BOC vote for Approval of new terms (for seats expiring 5/31/21) is scheduled for 5/25/21 at Gaston County Commissioners Board Meeting)*
- ☒ Local Area WDB By-laws
- ☒ Local Area WDB By-laws Required Elements Crosswalk *(form provided)*
- ☒ Local Area WDB Organizational Chart
- ☒ Local Area Administrative Entity Certification Regarding Debarment \* *(form provided)* *(Original-Hard Copy Mailed)*
- ☒ Local Area Workforce Development Area Signatory Form\* *(form provided)* *\*\*PENDING: Gaston Co Board of Commissioners Review /Approval / Signature*
- ☒ Local Area WDB NCWorks Career Center System *(form provided)*
- ☐ Local Area Adult and Dislocated Worker Services Providers *(form provided)*
- ☒ Local Area Eligible Training Provider Policy
- ☒ Local Area 14 Youth Program Elements Chart *(form provided)*
- ☒ Local Area WDB Youth Committee Meeting Schedule *(optional)*
- ☒ Local Area WDB Youth Committee Members *(optional)*
- ☒ Local Area WDB Youth Services Providers *(form provided)*
- ☒ Local Area WDB Youth Incentive Policy *(optional)*
- ☒ Local Area Adult/Dislocated Worker Work Experience Policy (PS 10-2017)
- ☒ Competitive Procurement Policy (PS 19-2017, Change 2) *(Financial Management & Procurement is one "combined" policy in the Gaston)*
- ☒ Conflict of Interest Policy (PS 18-2017)
- ☒ Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity Standards and Complaint Procedures (PS 07-2018)
- ☒ Financial Management Policy for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I (PS 20-2017, Change 1) *(Financial Management & Procurement is one "combined" policy in the Gaston)*
- ☒ Local Area Individualized Training Account Policy
- ☒ On-the-Job Training Policy (PS 04-2015, Change 1)
- ☒ Local Area Oversight Monitoring Policy, Tool, and Schedule
- ☒ Priority of Service Policy (PS 03-2017)

☒ Youth Work Experience Policy (PS 10-2017) (Work Experience Adult Dislocated Worker & Youth policy is combined in Gaston)

☒ Local Area Supportive Services Policy

☒ Local Area Sampling Policy/Self-Attestation Procedures and Monitoring Schedule

☒ Local Area Incumbent Worker Training Policy (PS 13-2020, Change 1) (optional)

xLocal Area Needs-Related Policy (optional) **N/A**

xLocal Area Incumbent Worker Policy (optional)

x☐ Local Area Youth Incentive Policy (optional)

\* Mail signed and unfolded *originals* to assigned Division Planner at N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions, 4316 Mail Services Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4316. DocuSign® (or similar) signature pages may be uploaded in WISE.

**See attachments following this page.**