



NORTH DAKOTA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL REPORT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

December 2024





FACTS

81

SCHOOL DISTRICTS
 SUPPORTED BY AREA CAREER
 & TECHNOLOGY CENTERS

4,000+

JOBSEEKERS IN FIND THE
 GOOD LIFE PIPELINE

3,247

WIOA PARTICIPANTS IN
 PROGRAM YEAR 2023

110

LOCALLY-LED
 WORKFORCE
 INITIATIVES SUPPORTED
 SINCE 2022

For more information,
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ROLE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The role of the North Dakota Workforce Development Council is to advise the governor and the public concerning the nature and extent of workforce development in the context of North Dakota's economic development needs and how to meet these needs effectively while maximizing the efficient use of available resources and avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort.

The Workforce Development Council consists of more than 30 members, with representation from industry; K-12, post-secondary and career and technical education; organized labor; Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) state workforce partners and local and state elected officials.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

As chair of the North Dakota Workforce Development Council, I am pleased to forward nine recommendations and fourteen endorsements that the council believes can help address the greatest workforce challenges faced by the state of North Dakota today and in the coming years.

These recommendations fall under four themes: earlier and more diverse career exploration, addressing the technical skills gap; removing barriers to employment; occupational licensing reform; and recruitment and retention of North Dakota workers.

Candice Griffin

WDC MEMBER LOCATIONS



Council members represent large and small communities across the state

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND ENDORSEMENTS

2024 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Workforce Development Council (WDC) is pleased to put forth the following recommendations for consideration by the Governor and 69th Legislative Assembly for adoption during the 2025-2027 biennium. The recommendations aim to enhance career exploration, bridge technical skills gaps, remove employment barriers, improve occupational licensure reform, and strengthen worker recruitment and retention in North Dakota.

The Council has previously recommended several initiatives that continue to successfully address workforce needs in each of these areas. These previous recommendations remain top priorities for the WDC and are included in the endorsements section of this report.

1. The Workforce Development Council recommends amending the Technical Skills Training Grant (TSTG) to allow for funds to support student learner on-the-job training opportunities facilitated by or in partnership with employers that align with the in-demand jobs list.
2. The Workforce Development Council recommends the introduction of a comprehensive apprenticeship packet.
 - a. State agency support for the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship.
 - b. Development of an Apprenticeship Scholarship.
 - c. Support to develop and expand quality pre-apprenticeship (QPA) programs at area career and technology centers and comprehensive high schools.
 - d. Develop marketing to increase awareness and utilization of apprenticeship pathways.
3. The Workforce Development Council recommends support for the following opportunities identified with the Office of Legal Immigration:
 - a. Pilot relocation and job placement efforts for qualified candidates residing within the United States.
 - b. Develop a pilot grant program that would cost share transportation to North Dakota and temporary housing to support the relocated.
 - c. Integrate talent attraction advertising campaigns targeted to foreign-born workers within the Find the Good Life framework.
4. The Workforce Development Council recommends \$75,000 in funding for Adult Learning Centers to provide transcript and curriculum translation services to New Americans and Immigrants.
5. The Workforce Development Council recommends appropriating funding for development of an Accommodation Fund for ND employers to provide disability related accommodations to qualifying employees.
6. The Workforce Development Council recommends the development of a pilot grant program to support North Dakota employers implementing AI business solutions that create efficiencies and increase productivity for small-business, non-profits.
7. The Workforce Development Council recommends creation of a competitive pilot grant program to fund digital skilling initiatives.
8. The Workforce Development Council recommends forming a task force to develop a State as a Model Employer framework.
9. The Workforce Development Council recommends the development of a clearing house within the Department of Commerce for professionals and employers to file concerns and complaints related to occupational and professional boards and licensing process challenges.

DETAILS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND ENDORSEMENTS

RECOMMENDATION #1

The Workforce Development Council recommends amending the Technical Skills Training Grant (TSTG) to allow for funds to support student learner on-the-job training opportunities facilitated by or in partnership with employers that align with the in-demand jobs list.

PURPOSE

Career exploration and hands-on job exposure for students are vital parts of North Dakota's workforce development and talent retention strategy. These opportunities should be integrated throughout students' education, beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school. By the time they graduate, students should be well-prepared and equipped to select the career path that best fits their interests and skills. Many times, students are not provided the opportunity for quality hands-on work-based learning opportunities in rural North Dakota. Models for specific industries including healthcare have been successful tools for educating youth about the opportunities in that job field and advancement related to education or training requirements. Expanding the model to include other industries and occupations in partnership with employers would ideally increase interest in pursuing those types of jobs and utilization of a qualified pre-apprenticeship program or registered apprenticeship program for participants. This proposal is to amend Technical Skills Gap Policy to allow for the use of funds to support student learner career exploration opportunities that are in compliance with the [Child Labor Provisions for Nonagricultural Occupations under the Fair Labor Standards Act \(https://rebrand.ly/ChildLabor/NonAg\)](https://rebrand.ly/ChildLabor/NonAg). Career exploration and advancement-based opportunities for student learners offer numerous benefits to participants:

1. **Early Career Advancement:** Accelerate a student learner through a post-secondary program such as an apprenticeship.
2. **Hands-On Experience:** Offer hands-on training, workshops, and projects. This practical experience allows participants to gain hands-on experience to advance their skill path.
3. **Skill Development:** Participants are given the opportunity to develop and strengthen valuable skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and leadership through interactive activities and challenges.
4. **Networking Opportunities:** Bring together students, educators, professionals, and mentors, providing participants with valuable networking opportunities. Building connections with professionals in different fields can open doors to internships, mentorship, and future career opportunities.
5. **Inspiration and Motivation:** Interacting with professionals who are passionate about their work and hearing success stories can inspire and motivate participants.

Overall, work-based learning opportunities for youth play a valuable role in preparing young people for the future workforce and post-secondary training and education.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- North Dakota Department of Commerce*
- Job Service North Dakota
- ND Department of Career and Technical Education
- US Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship
- North Dakota's Building Trades Unions

FUNDING

No additional funding to recommended to \$2M TSTG request within the Department of Commerce budget.

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Number of opportunities funded through grant opportunity during the 2025-27 biennium.
- Number of student learner participants work-based learning opportunities during the 2025-27 biennium.
- Increasing enrollment in CTE programs.
- Increasing enrollment and retention of participants into a quality pre-apprenticeship program within 3 years.
- Increasing placement into registered apprenticeships.
- Increasing completion of registered apprenticeships within 4 years.

RECOMMENDATION #2

The Workforce Development Council recommends the introduction of a comprehensive apprenticeship package.

- a. State agency support for the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship.
- b. Development of an Apprenticeship Scholarship.
- c. Support to develop and expand quality pre-apprenticeship (QPA) programs at area career and technology centers and comprehensive high schools.
- d. Develop marketing to increase awareness and utilization of apprenticeship pathways.

PURPOSE

Apprenticeship is a tried-and-true workforce development tool. State investments can help accelerate scaling opportunities in North Dakota. Similar in concept to dual-credit courses between high school and colleges/universities, QPA programs seek to credit students for a registered apprenticeship program while in high school, ideally as a 16- and/or 17-year-old learner. The instruction is formulated around the skills, education, and training required in an established registered apprenticeship program with the Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship in North Dakota.

A QPA will include a collaboration of partners with employers and/or industries with the goal to educate, train, and develop pre-apprentice candidates for direct entry into registered apprenticeship programs after high school graduation. The credit earned by the pre-apprentice while in the QPA should be reflected in such forms as Related Technical Instruction advancement, credit for any on-the-job hours via work based learning, real or simulated, and advancement on any apprentice pay schedule. All QPA's shall consult with the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship to ensure quality and compliance for student learners for proper credit in a registered apprenticeship program.

In the 2023 Legislative Assembly, the State Scholarship was amended in statute to allow recipients to utilize the scholarship award for apprenticeship related expenses. It was discovered that very few apprentices applied for or received the state scholarship due to the requirements. This apprenticeship scholarship program would be available to any indentured apprentice as documented by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship. The length of eligibility for the apprenticeship is capped at six years from the date of indenture. Many apprenticeships require upfront costs for tools and supplies that can be a financial burden, preventing qualified candidates from moving forward. In 2023-2024 over 550 apprentices were registered which is nearly a 100 person increase over average years. With intentional outreach and marketing of opportunities in apprenticeship programs and fields, this increased number is anticipated to sustain. Making an apprenticeship scholarship for students that enter directly into a registered apprenticeship will increase the number of young adults that follow the apprenticeship path into one of many high-demand occupations.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- ND Department of Career and Technical Education*
- North Dakota Department of Commerce*
- U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship*
- Job Service North Dakota

FUNDING

- \$600,000 for 2025-2027 biennium for the North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education to assist in outreach and education to increase student and employer participation in QPA and registered apprenticeship opportunities.
- \$2.2M funding per biennium for apprenticeship scholarships.
- \$300,000 appropriation to North Dakota Department of Commerce Workforce Development Division to develop and implement in-state media and marketing of apprenticeship and learning opportunities and to encourage apprenticeship participation to fill in-demand jobs during 2025-2027 biennium.

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Increased number of employer-facilitated registered apprenticeships available.
- Increased number of students participating in a QPA program.
- Number of students that complete a QPA program entering a registered apprenticeship program.
- Increased number of students that qualify for an apprenticeship scholarship.

RECOMMENDATION #3

The Workforce Development Council recommends support for the following opportunities identified with the Office of Legal Immigration:

1. Pilot relocation and job placement efforts for qualified candidates residing within the United States.
2. Develop a pilot grant program that would cost share transportation to North Dakota and temporary housing to support the relocated.
3. Integrate talent attraction advertising campaigns targeted to foreign-born workers within the Find the Good Life framework.

PURPOSE

With approximately 30,000 open jobs in North Dakota and one of the highest labor participation rates in the nation, most of the North Dakotans who can work are doing so. This means that we must proactively recruit new residents to the state to fill our job vacancies and grow our communities, while also building stronger partnerships with college and university partners to retain North Dakota, out-of-state, and international students after graduation. Effective talent attraction and retention initiatives are comprehensive and may include contracted marketing and talent attraction services, partnership with local leaders and employers, grants for local talent attraction and retention programs, staff to support a robust initiative that effectively recruits new North Dakotans, pipelines that create efficiency in national and international recruitment and leveraging secondary migration opportunities for New Americans and Immigrants already in the U.S. and more. This multi-faceted approach requires significant investment by the state and industry partners.

Currently, the Department of Commerce is administering Find the Good Life in North Dakota, a talent attraction initiative that includes a system for generating and tracking leads and connecting them with community leaders and employers. It is critical that talent attraction initiatives are data driven and trackable to demonstrate the impact of the state's investment. The Department of Commerce is also administering the Office of Legal Immigration as a comprehensive approach to talent attraction. These programs work together to leverage the existing framework and to include marketing to New Americans and Immigrants in the U.S. in addition to facilitating access for North Dakota employers to skilled foreign-born workers. Relocation costs are prohibitive for movers and is evidenced by the thousands of leads interested in relocation to North Dakota from within the United States and the cost for international relocation is a barrier for employers when qualified candidates have been identified. In an effort to be competitive with other states and markets recruiting to fill high-need positions within their areas, relocation assistance would set North Dakota apart. While this is occurring in some communities within the United States, there is currently no statewide initiative identified. This is an example of a public and private partnership that could benefit North Dakota's workforce and grow our communities simultaneously.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- Department of Commerce Workforce Development Division*
- Job Service North Dakota

FUNDING

\$4 Million

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Number of workers who relocate through Find the Good Life, citing relocation assistance as a facilitator.
- Number of full time non-seasonal jobs filled by foreign-born workers relocating to North Dakota through existing legal pathways.
- Economic impact of filled positions.

RECOMMENDATION # 4

The Workforce Development Council recommends \$75,000 in funding for Adult Learning Centers to provide transcript and curriculum translation services to New Americans and Immigrants.

PURPOSE

Foreign-born professionals from other countries who have a high school diploma or college/training transcripts from other countries can be overlooked or not recognized in North Dakota colleges/universities or with employers due to being in a language other than English. These individuals cannot apply for college in North Dakota without a high school transcript or GED which typically must be provided in English. This creates a barrier for educated and highly skilled or trained professionals from continuing education, obtaining certification or licensure, or working at their highest capacity.

In order to allow foreign-born individuals to enter the workforce more quickly or pursue training or continuing education, there is a need for translation of these documents into English and a need for thorough credit review with interpretation of credits/training received/earned to upskill or allow for promotion for foreign born individuals in North Dakota.

Some North Dakota Adult Learning Centers (ALC) have observed and assisted clients who need these services to connect to service providers, but the cost can still be prohibitive to individuals who may be unemployed or low income. It costs approximately \$110 to translate a high school diploma and validation is around \$95 per credit. This is costly for students and ALCs do not have the funding to pay for this service. Being able to provide this service will reduce the number of foreign-born individuals required to complete a GED program which can cost approximately \$150 for the exams, plus additional preparation courses and other learning. This will allow these individuals to focus their time on English language learning and obtaining gainful employment or applying for higher education in North Dakota.

Curriculum validation of post-secondary education and training can cost significantly more, but these individuals can fill highly skilled or certification/licensed positions more quickly and without redundant education and training if transcripts and credentials can be validated. This validation process is more costly due to the extensive requirement to translate the documents and validate the curriculum of the training institution to the coursework requirements in North Dakota. Often these individuals may still require certain coursework or training to work in those capacities in North Dakota, but this would still expedite their participation in our workforce in highly skilled occupations that are experiencing shortages including trades, healthcare, information technology, and many professional services like accounting, human resources, and other technicians.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- Department of Public Instruction*
- ND Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Commerce

FUNDING

\$75,000 per biennium for transcript translation and curriculum validation services provided by Adult Learning Centers.

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Reduce the number of New Americans and Immigrants completing a GED program if there is already a completed secondary school transcript.
- Reduce the length of time it takes for New Americans and Immigrants to receive services at Adult Education Centers and enter the workforce.
- Increase the number of New Americans and Immigrants that utilize Adult Education Centers for language and other job training.

RECOMMENDATION # 5

The Workforce Development Council recommends appropriating funding for development of an Accommodation Fund for ND employers to provide disability related accommodations to qualifying employees.

PURPOSE

A centralized accommodation fund has been used by other states to help cover the cost of reasonable accommodation requests made by current and potential employees with disabilities. Most reasonable accommodations have been found to have little or no cost, but tight employer budgets can be both perceived and real obstacles for employers.

Centralized accommodation funds can cover the cost of reasonable accommodation requests, removing a barrier for people with disabilities and allowing them to fill job vacancies or maintain current positions. The fund does not absolve an employer's responsibility to respond to requests for accommodations, but instead supplements their funds when they cannot absorb the cost without financial hardship.

Administering a centralized accommodations fund can more effectively provide consultation to employers on locating, purchasing, and implementing reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. This approach ensures consistency and flexibility for both employers and employees.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- ND Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Commerce

FUNDING

\$100,000

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- An increase in the number of individuals with disabilities working in North Dakota.
- Decrease in the number of job vacancies across the state due to being able to maintain employees with disabilities.
- Decrease the number of ongoing vacancies by providing accommodations to applicants during the hiring process to allow employees to see their value.

RECOMMENDATION #6

The Workforce Development Council recommends the development of a pilot grant funding program to support North Dakota employers implementing AI business solutions that create efficiencies and increase productivity for small-business, non-profits.

PURPOSE

While AI has the potential to automate certain tasks and jobs, it also creates new opportunities and enhances productivity in many sectors. Estimates of the number of jobs impacted by AI vary depending on the time-frame, the specific technologies involved, and the assumptions made about how AI will be adopted and integrated into different industries.

Several studies and reports have attempted to quantify the potential impact of AI on jobs. For example, a report by the McKinsey Global Institute in 2017 estimated that up to 800 million jobs worldwide could be automated by 2030, but also noted that new jobs would likely be created as a result of AI adoption. Similarly, a study by the World Economic Forum projected that while AI and automation could displace around 75 million jobs by 2022, it could also create 133 million new jobs.

The types of roles where AI solutions may exist to address chronic vacancies for employers are those that are routine, repetitive tasks including manufacturing, production, and retail. AI can also create efficiencies in many industries including healthcare, financial services, education, and customer service.

An AI workflow is a structured and systematic process that enables the efficient execution of complex tasks through the power of automation and advanced algorithms. By leveraging AI workflow, businesses can optimize their operations, and improve productivity. Custom AI solution start up or initial implementation costs can range from \$5,000 to over \$500,000, contingent on intricacy, hardware, and resource demands.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- ND Department of Commerce
- North Dakota Information Technology (NDIT)

FUNDING

\$3M pilot grant funding.

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

Short term – Appropriation from the 69th Legislative Assembly.

Long term – Increasing number of employers implementing AI solutions to address productivity and profitability.

- Number of employees at awarded businesses that are upskilled to use AI technology.
- Number of hours reduced from repetitive or redundant tasks at awarded businesses.
- Increased employee satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATION #7

The Workforce Development Council recommends creation of a competitive pilot grant program to fund digital skilling initiatives.

PURPOSE

According to the 2022 National Governors Association Digital Equity Study that included North Dakota, there are opportunities to leverage federal funding opportunities meant to strengthen broadband access and the Digital Equity Act that created three grant programs. North Dakota has received BEAD and DEA federal funding to NDIT. In addition to these funds and NDIT's strategies from increasing broadband services to training opportunities with Tribal colleges and Job Service North Dakota (JSND), there is a gap in access. Adults that are already in the workforce or not accessing services through ALCs and JSND are a population of opportunity to expand equity and access to these programs.

Currently, digital training programs are offered in K-12, higher education, ALCs, JSND, and other institutional partners but this leaves a gap. This state-funded grant program, administered by Commerce, will better prepare our workforce by equipping them with digital skills necessary in the current and/or future work environment.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- ND Department of Commerce*
- Job Service North Dakota
- North Dakota Information Technology
- ND Department of Public Instruction

FUNDING

\$1M

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

Long term – Number of employers and organizations that take advantage of this grant program to enhance digital literacy and digital skills in the workforce.

- Number of employees that complete a training program.

RECOMMENDATION # 8

The Workforce Development Council recommends forming a task force to develop a State as a Model Employer framework.

PURPOSE

To promote employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, the State of North Dakota can lead the way by adopting State as a Model Employer (SAME) policies. There are many advantages to proactively recruiting, hiring, and maintaining employees with disabilities. Historically, many states have recognized this and have opted to implement SAME policies.

People with disabilities represent a large, diverse, and untapped talent pool for employers which can be accessed through SAME efforts. Additionally, SAME policies can provide numerous benefits, such as improving employment outcomes, increasing self-sufficiency, enhancing quality of life, and improving community engagement, which in turn expands social and support networks for people with disabilities.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- ND Department of Health and Human Services - Vocational Rehabilitation*
- ND Department of Commerce*
- ND Human Resources Management System

FUNDING

\$600,000

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Creation of task force during 2025-2027 biennium

Longer Term:

- State As Model Employer policy implementation.
- Establish partnerships with agencies, employers, organizations, etc.
- Create a universal work environment for people with disabilities.
- Provide technical assistance to business leaders on interviewing and employing people with disabilities, and accessing information on state disability resources.
- Assist employees with disabilities, who cannot be reasonably accommodated in their current position, to relocate to a vacant position elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATION #9

The Workforce Development Council recommends the development of a clearing house within the Department of Commerce for professionals and employers to file concerns and complaints related to occupational and professional boards and licensing process challenges.

PURPOSE

The occupational licensure framework varies state by state, which can create challenges and confusion when navigating the unique nuances that exist for professionals who are looking to transfer their license to a new state. Additionally, despite good intentions, existing licensed professionals and employers may run into roadblocks when working with a board, especially as many ND licensing boards lack staff support and are managed by volunteer board members, part time staff directors, or have contracted administrators who may serve multiple clients. In an effort to create a dedicated liaison to help professionals and employers navigate the system and provide support if challenges related to the licensing process arise, the Workforce Development Council is recommending that a clearing house be created to not only meet this need, but to monitor reported concerns and challenges to inform future reform opportunities.

PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

- ND Department of Commerce
- Office of the Governor; Boards & Commissions Liaison
- ND Occupational and Professional Licensing Boards

FUNDING

No funding required.

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Development of clearing house form on Commerce and/or Find the Good Life website.
- Tracking submissions to determine themes, frequency, board trends, etc. and tracking the number of concerns addressed or alleviated through this service.

ENDORSEMENTS

The Workforce Development Council has previously recommended initiatives that continue to be successful, and are therefore included in the following agency budgets:

- Department of Commerce
 - Specific programs endorsed:
 - Find the Good Life in North Dakota
 - Regional Workforce Impact Program (RWIP)
 - Technical Skills Training Grant (TSTG)
 - Operation Intern
- Department of Career and Technical Education
 - Expansion of Area Career and Technology Centers
 - Support and training for Work-based Learning Coordinators
- Job Service North Dakota
 - JP3 program to support justice-involved individuals preparing for release.

ADDITIONAL ENDORSEMENTS

- The Workforce Development Council endorses sustaining North Dakota Department of Commerce Office of Legal Immigration implemented with the passing of Senate Bill 2142 in 2023 and changing the name to the Global Talent Office. Sustaining this office will support grant technical assistance, resource development, and administration of a grant program that supports employers and communities.
- Workforce Development Council endorses investment to increase childcare infrastructure statewide. Childcare is one of the most common barriers to workforce participation and has also prevented people from moving to North Dakota after initially accepting jobs. Increasing childcare availability is a vital strategy to increasing workforce capacity and community attractiveness.
- Workforce Development Council endorses investment into strategies that would increase availability to affordable and adequate housing statewide. Housing shortages make recruitment difficult and also prevents individuals from moving to/within the state or having an address available when seeking employment. Housing is the most impactful barrier to recruiting new workers needed to fill the thousands of open jobs in the state, especially in rural communities.
- The Workforce Development Council endorses expansion of Vocational Rehab (VR) services to justice-involved individuals with disabilities from incarceration through reentry.
- The Workforce Development Council endorses investment in tourism initiatives to create and enhance places that attract visitors and provide entertainment for residents. These types of attractions and facilities provide much needed amenities that retain individuals and families long term.
- Workforce Development Council endorses investment into community development initiatives that create safe, healthy, and welcoming communities, essential for attracting and retaining workers to North Dakota. Safety, connectedness, entertainment, walkability, and people centered communities are more attractive to individuals interested in relocation for work and provide a high quality of life.
- The Workforce Development Council endorses the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into cybersecurity education curriculum.



NORTH
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Be Legendary.

Commerce

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