NORTH CAROLINA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC-DHHS) Division of Aging under the designation of the Governor is responsible for the development and submission of North Carolina's Senior Community Service Employment Program's (SCSEP) 2024-2027 State Plan. The four-year plan is developed for the statewide provision of community service training and other required activities for eligible North Carolinians who are unemployed, who have low incomes, and who are aged 55+ with diminished prospects of meaningful and economically sustaining employment.

The SCSEP State Plan is designed to lay out strategies that foster short and long-term coordination of services among state and national grantees and their sub-recipients. It was created to facilitate the active involvement of key stakeholders, such as workforce development boards under the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). It also seeks to serve as a bridge between the public and private sectors of the workforce. The Plan will engage for-profit, non-profit, and governmental entities in efforts to broaden and enhance the training and potential employment opportunities for participants. The State endeavors to do so by utilizing this strategic plan.

The Division develops the Plan and administers SCSEP under an annual grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). DOL determines the number of individuals who can be served in a year and assigns placements of these individuals to state and national grantees. The grantees and their sub-grantees in turn provide direct hands-on training for participants through a wide, and robust network of agencies and organizations. These groups serve as host agencies for participants as they undergo training in preparation for their placement in the employment of their choice. Placement within host agencies is determined by the expressed interest of participants and is captured in their customized employment plan which maps out the steps necessary to achieve their desired outcome.

By implementing our Strategic Plan, we expect to:1) Elevate the presence of a sizeable and distinct segment of the general population that is often overlooked and untapped in the development of workforce initiatives, 2) Develop greater bonds with workforce development boards across the state to provide more focus on mature workers, and 3) Expand the network of organizations that partner with the Program. These goals will be met by disseminating information to those in policy and decision-making roles at all levels of government, industry, and business. A greater emphasis will be placed on participation in regularly scheduled meetings and activities of workforce development boards. Finally, the Program will introduce services to organizations that have not been previously approached to be host agencies. We will also encourage and continue to build on the relationships we have cultivated. These efforts will draw attention to the ways and means in which our state implements creative and innovative methods to address the needs of employers.

Governor Roy Cooper has made it his mission to ensure all North Carolinians are better educated, healthier, and have sufficient income to live meaningful and purposeful lives. The primary way to attain this goal is to prepare individuals to acquire the types of jobs that afford them the salaries to support and maintain their families. An emphasis is placed on talent and workforce development. The plan recognizes that North Carolina is well-positioned to remain competitive for economic development opportunities in our targeted industry sectors. It calls for a renewed focus on recruiting and retaining the talent necessary to meet current and future workforce needs. SCSEP intends to be an integral part of this vision for the future.

Senior Community Service Employment Program

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is the only federally mandated and funded job training and employment program for older adults aged fifty-five and over. It is an Older Americans Act Program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The program is designed to serve low-income adults who live at or below 125% of the federal poverty level with the goal of re-entry into the workforce. The foundational goals of the Program are twofold; to foster economic self-sufficiency through the attainment of unsubsidized employment and to strengthen the aging network through purposeful community service efforts. The State of North Carolina has accepted this charge willingly and upheld these twin tenets for the past four decades. The Program is administered by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC-DHHS) Division of Aging (the Division)

The Division operates the Senior Community Service Employment Program through a sub-grantee contract with AARP Foundation. The allocation of slots is assigned on an annual basis and is determined by DOL. DOL has allocated 216 slots in 24 counties to the Division.

In addition to the 216 slots assigned to the Division, three national grantees also operate the SCSEP in North Carolina:

1. National Caucus and Center on Black Aging (NCBA) **178 slots**

2. National Council on Aging (NCOA) **214 slots**

3. Center for Workforce Inclusion (CWI) **450 slots**

The SCSEP state and national Grantees operate the Program in 99 of the 100 North Carolina counties. Hyde County (outlined in blue) is the *only* North Carolina County in which SCSEP does not have participants based on DOL designations.
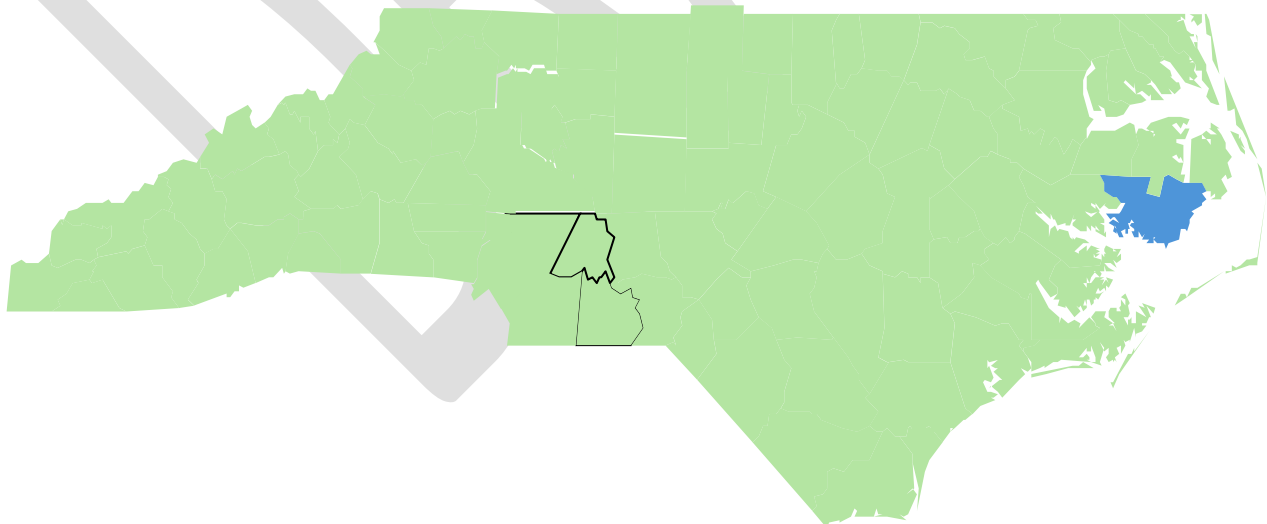
To qualify for the SCSEP Program, an individual must be 55 years of age or older, unemployed at the time of enrollment, their family income must be at or below 125% of the poverty level and the applicant must reside in the county in which services are provided. Priority of service is provided to the following individuals:

- Veterans and qualified spouses
- Individuals who are over the age of 65
- Have a disability
- Have low literacy skills or limited English proficiency
- Reside in a rural area
- Homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Have low employment prospects, or have failed to find employment after using services through the NC One-Stop System
- Justice involved individuals within the last 5 years

Each SCSEP participant is assessed based on their current skill set and interests. A person-centered individual employment plan is created which outlines a participant's specific training and employment goals. Participants typically train in their host agencies for 20 hours per week and receive minimum wage as a training stipend for their participation. An individual can be enrolled in SCSEP for a maximum of 48 months. Most individuals average 27 months before obtaining the skills, training, and confidence necessary to obtain competitive wages in the current workforce.

SCSEP Training is provided through a network of host agencies which are non-profit or public agencies and organizations. Examples of training partners include organizations such as the United Way, the Salvation Army, and Goodwill. Participants also gain work experience at their host agencies which include, but are not limited to, senior centers, schools, town offices, libraries, hospitals, child enrichment programs, and community-based senior-related programs and services.

The SCSEP Program promotes healthy aging by offering employment opportunities for low-income older NC residents. It also assists the larger community by enabling social service programs and providers to expand their reach by having more individuals available to aid in direct service and outreach efforts.

Characteristics of North Carolina's Aging Population

North Carolina's total population was 10.7 million in 2022. North Carolina has continuously ranked 9th nationally, both in total population and in the number of residents 60 and over. In 2022, there were 2,543,891 residents (24% of the population) over the age of 60. By the year 2042, the number of North Carolina residents 60 and over is projected to increase to 3,533,490 (27%) of the projected total population of 13,242,528.

According to the NC Office of State Budget and Management, North Carolina's overall population is projected to reach 11.7 million people by 2030, and by 2050 it is projected that the population will be 14.2 million people. That is an increase of 3.8 million people since 2020 (from 10.4 million)– with most of the growth in North Carolina's six largest counties - Wake, Mecklenburg, Durham, Forsyth, New Hanover, and Guilford.

It is expected that more people will continue to arrive from other states and nations. Future growth in NC will be from more people moving to the State than leaving *(net migration)*. Estimates project a shift towards a natural decrease (*more deaths than births*). According to the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS), approximately 46% of North Carolina's current population was born outside of North Carolina – including nine percent who were born outside of the United States. These projections indicate that native-born Carolinians may become a minority within the North Carolina workforce. Additionally, the projections speak to the fact that North Carolina is a state with a bright economic future and will attract individuals from a wide variety of geographical locations.

NC's Projected Population 2022-2042

Age	2022		2042		% Change 2022-2042
	#	%	#	%	
Total	10,705,403		13,242,528		24%
0-17	2,265,759	21%	2,651,547	20%	17%
18-44	3,839,982	36%	4,556,697	34%	19%
45-59	2,055,771	19%	2,500,794	19%	22%
60+	2,543,891	24%	3,533,490	27%	39%
65+	1,876,555	18%	2,772,505	21%	48%
85+	202,169	2%	432,551	3%	**114%**

Source: NC Office of State Budget and Management, Standard Population Estimates, 2022; Population Projections, Vintage 2023, www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/population-demographics

Although North Carolina expects to see the number of people in each age category grow over the next twenty years, NC's population is growing proportionally older over time. By 2042, one in every five North Carolinians will be at least 65 years old and there will be more older adults (age 65+) than children (ages 0 through 17) in North Carolina. The largest proportional growth in our population will be for people who are at least 85 years old.

Among the adult population, the "young old" (ages 65-74) and "older old" (ages 75-84) together account for 89% of North Carolina's aging demographic. This is important to note because older adults who are still active and engaged in the workforce after the" normal retirement years" will have an impact on future aspects of policy and planning. They will influence decisions related to healthcare, social services, retirement planning, and senior housing. This shift also offers opportunities for increased workforce participation and community engagement, promoting equity and developing age-friendly environments.

North Carolina's population is expected to become more racially and ethnically diverse. Since the 1990s, rapid growth in the Asian and Hispanic/Latino populations has changed to composition of NC residents. These two groups have a younger age profile – meaning that even without migration we expect these groups to continue to grow and our population to become more diverse. In 2020, 39% of the State's population was either Hispanic, American Indian, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, or Multiracial. By 2050, the same groups will account for 48% of North Carolina's overall population. Historically, minorities have held front-line positions that many in the majority culture were not willing to do. Should these workers choose to "opt-out" of these types of positions, this would have a serious impact on North Carolina's economy.

Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin, 2023

Race/Ethnicity Elders 65+	NC	US
White	77.8%	65.9%
Black or African American	16.0%	12.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.8%	0.8%
Asian	1.6%	5.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders	0.0%	0.2%
Some other race	1.1%	6.0%
Two or more races	1.9%	8.8%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	2.5%	18.8%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	77%	59.8%

Source: NC Office of State Budget and Management, Facts and Figures, 2023

In 2020, 65% of all North Carolinians (or 6.8 million people) lived within 22 urban or regional center/suburban counties, with the remaining 35% (or 3.7 million people) living in 78 rural counties. Continued rapid growth in the Piedmont region and in and around major urban areas will lead to more rural counties in this region increasing in population size and density.

The data detailed below shows how social/economic determinants impact the lives of older adults. These individuals face many barriers, and economic security is one of them. Many low-income older adults must remain in the workforce longer than what is typically thought of as retirement age or return to the workforce again after a brief interlude from employment.

Socio and Economic Factors for Adults 65+	NC	US
Living alone	27%	43%
Veterans	16%	15.4%
Speak English less than "very well"	3%	8.6%
Have a disability	34%	33.3%
Have less than a high school education	13%	13.2%
Have high school, GED/Alternative Education	30%	30.3%
In labor force	17%	18.7%
Income is below the poverty level	10%	10%
Income is between 100%-149% of the poverty level	20%	18.6%
Median household income	$49,257	$50,290

Source: NC Office of State Budget and Management, Facts and Figures, 2023

In 2023 the number of people age 55+ in the workforce totaled 1,114,757. All these factors are taken into consideration when the priority of service is being determined for new SCSEP participants.

I.   Economic Projections and Impact

A. Discuss long-term projections for jobs in industries and occupations in the State that may provide employment opportunities for older workers. (20 CFR 641.302(d)).

North Carolina is defined by expansive geography that covers over 53,000 square miles and spans from the mountains in the west to the Piedmont region in the State's center, to the coastal plain region in the east. This expansive geography contributes to the State's diverse mix of rural communities, small towns, cities, metropolitan areas, and regional economic centers, each with its unique industrial composition. Part of North Carolina's economic development strategy includes the organization of the State's one hundred counties into eight multi-county regions called Prosperity Zones, which are intended to help ensure economic growth across all areas of the State by leveraging regional economic, workforce, and educational resources. Overlaying the eight Prosperity Zones are North Carolina's 23 local workforce development board areas that help facilitate the delivery of workforce services to the State's citizens and employers.

Dispersed across the State's industry sectors are a diverse set of occupations that help to fuel the State's economic diversity. North Carolina's occupational employment is concentrated across seven major occupational groups which makes up 60% of the jobs in NC. They are:

- Office and Administrative Support Occupations (12.0% of total jobs in the State)
- Sales and Related Occupations (10.0%)
- Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (9.8%)
- Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (8.7%)
- Production Occupations (7.0%)
- Business and Financial Operations Occupations (6.5%)
- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (6.4%)

North Carolina's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) produces both Industry and Occupational Employment Projections. Long-term projections applicable to this plan are the 2021-2030 cycle. Based on the latest industry projections, North Carolina's industry employment is expected to reach over 5.3 million jobs by 2030, a projected growth of 445,729 jobs compared to the State's 2021 employment level (4.9 million).

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of all projected net job growth will be concentrated in six major industry sectors: <u>Health Care and Social Assistance</u>; <u>Accommodation and Food Services</u>; <u>Professional, Scientific & Technical Services</u>; <u>Transportation and Warehousing</u>; <u>Administrative Support and Waste Management Services</u>; and <u>Educational Services</u>.

The State's overall projected employment expansion of 445,729 jobs corresponds to a 9.1% growth rate; however, not all regions of the State are expected to grow at the same rate. Among the 16- prosperity zone sub-regions, The Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham regions will continue to lead the State in total employment and net job growth. In terms of job growth, Raleigh-Durham is expected to experience the fastest job growth (11.4%), followed by Charlotte (11.2%), Wilmington (9.9%), and Waynesville-Franklin (9.1%). The remaining 12 regions are projected to grow at a slower rate than the State, with the Goldsboro/Kinston region expected to experience the slowest job growth at 3.8%.

The Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham regions will continue to lead the State in total employment and net job growth. While total projected job growth provides a measure of the relative strength of the regional economies, changes in the underlying industry sectors will continue to drive economic diversification within each of the prosperity zones and prosperity zone sub-regions. Both service-providing and goods-producing industries are projected to gain jobs across each region.

North Carolina will experience demand for workers due to separations from individuals exiting the labor force as well as individuals transferring to different occupations. These separations are driven by several factors including employee turnover, job successions, and worker retirements due to an aging workforce. Several of the State's major occupational groups are projected to experience demand for workers due to both job growth and separation needs, including Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations as well as Sales and Related Occupations – with projected job openings above 800,000 and 720,000, respectively, from 2021 to 2030. In eight of the sixteen regions, Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations are projected to have the highest net new jobs and openings. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations are projected to grow by approximately 500 jobs in the Pinehurst-Rockingham area to more than 15,000 in the Raleigh-Durham area by 2030, while total openings in these occupations will range from nearly 9,800 openings in the Pinehurst-Rockingham area to almost 176,000 in the Charlotte area.

While the pandemic brought major economic challenges, North Carolina's State and local areas have been on a path to economic recovery. By October of 2021, the State's seasonally adjusted total nonfarm employment rebounded to 4,663,700 reflecting an increase of 37,800 jobs above the February 2020 pre-pandemic employment level (4,625,900). By December of 2022, total non-farm employment reached 4,852,500, more than 226,000 jobs above the February 2020 level.

Between December 2022 and November 2023, the State added 96,800 total non-farm jobs, an increase of 2.0%. During this same period, the State experienced 10 out of 11 months of positive monthly job gains. By November 2023, North Carolina's seasonally adjusted total non-farm employment reached 4,949,300 which was 323,400 jobs or 7.0% above the February 2020 pre-pandemic employment level.

Occupations by Advertised Jobs Table

The table below shows the occupations with the highest number of job openings advertised online in North Carolina
(NC Works Database March 2024)

Rank	Occupation	Job Openings
1	Registered Nurses	6,425
2	Retail Salespersons	3,129
3	Customer Service Representatives	1,876
4	First-line supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	1,781
5	General and Operations Managers	1,699
6	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	1,686
7	Nursing Assistants	1,670
8	Fast Food and Counter Workers	1,618
9	Stockers and Order Fillers	1,456
10	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	1,408

Source: Online advertised jobs data

Area Profile for North Carolina

Advertised Job Skills Table

The table below shows the top advertised detailed job skills found in job openings advertised online in North Carolina
(NC Works Database February 2024)

Rank	Advertised Detailed Job Skill	Advertised Skill Group	Job Opening Match Count
1	Customer service	Customer Service Skills	56,438
2	Preventative maintenance	Maintenance Technician Skills	4,801
3	Risk management	Risk Analyst Skills	4,396
4	Developing new business	Business Development Skills	4,279
5	Inventory management	Bill and Account Collectors Skills	4,143
6	Record keeping	Bookkeeper Skills	3,488
7	Skills training	Human and Social Services Skills	3,297
8	Regulatory compliance	Chief Financial Officer Skills	3,095
9	Inventory control	Bill and Account Collectors Skills	3,036
10	Food preparation	Food Preparation Worker Skills	3,022

Source: Online advertised jobs data

Area Profile for North Carolina

Jobs by Occupation Group Table

The table below shows the occupations with the highest number of job openings advertised online in North Carolina
(NC Works Database March 2024)

Rank	Occupation Group	Job Openings
1	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	22,884
2	Management Occupations	14,037
3	Sales and Related Occupations	9,459
4	Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	7,998
5	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	6,392
6	Office and Administrative Support Occupations	6,305
7	Architecture and Engineering Occupations	6,199
8	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	5,731
9	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	5,260
10	Production Occupations	4,966
11	Healthcare Support Occupations	4,638
12	Computer and Mathematical Occupations	4,503
13	Business and Financial Operations Occupations	3,806
14	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occ	2,541
15	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occ	2,367
16	Construction and Extraction Occupations	2,144
17	Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	1,928
18	Personal Care and Service Occupations	1,844
19	Community and Social Service Occupations	1,823
20	Protective Service Occupations	1,564
21	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	547
22	Legal Occupations	414
23	Military Specific Occupations	92
24	Total other occupations	51,801

Source: Online advertised jobs data

Area Profile for North Carolina

Occupations by Projected Growth Table

The table below shows the occupations with the highest projected annual openings in North Carolina for the 2021-2030

Rank	Occupation	2021 Estimated Employment	2030 Projected Employment	2021-2030 Annual Avg. Percent Change	Annual Openings
	Retail Salespersons	123,093	127,354	0.37%	20,689
2	Stockers and Order Fillers	86,168	96,666	1.28%	18,468
3	Fast Food and Counter Workers	66,873	75,859	1.41%	18,140
4	Waiters and Waitresses	64,333	75,307	1.76%	16,947
5	Cooks, Fast Food	80,444	78,041	-0.33%	13,246
6	Cooks, Restaurant	44,767	65,162	4.25%	11,639
7	Nursing Assistants	56,814	62,506	1.06%	10,583
8	First-line supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	41,392	49,672	2.04%	8,821
9	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	54,086	53,445	-0.13%	6,480
10	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	48,896	52,870	0.87%	6,122

Source: Labor & Economic Analysis Division, Economic Analysis

The projections related to the growth and decline of a wide variety of industries will have a direct bearing and impact on the older adults who are SCSEP participants. Since the Program serves almost every county in the State, except for one, it shapes the training opportunities available as well as determines the likelihood of obtaining employment after exiting. Based on information from the North Carolina Labor and Economics Division (LEAD)and local workforce development boards, coordinators will be in a good position to review the types of occupations in their enterprise zones. They can use this information to be a driving force in recruiting participants, host agencies, and potential employers. They will be well equipped to customize their efforts and therefore maximize the resources and tools that are available to them.

According to the most recent data projected by North Carolina's LEAD, many of the identified occupations have not changed significantly during the last four years. Occupational categories, including food service, customer service, retail sales, and stock/material movers, health care continue to be in demand. These jobs are all consumer-focused, which emphasizes the need for and importance of our SCSEP participants to possess the requisite skills as defined in the top advertised job skills table. These prevailing trends can serve as a guide for SCSEP providers to actively seek to match participants' skills with the greatest needs of business owners.

Although significant attention should be focused on those occupations with the greatest number of openings, participants' strengths and interests must be considered when matching them to employment opportunities. It would be counterproductive to compel all participants to focus only on those occupations with the highest projected growth. At the same time, participants must be presented with information that will enable them to make informed decisions.

Based on the projections, many of the occupations listed above are a good fit for the types of placements SCSEP achieves annually. The bulk of unsubsidized placements obtained fall into some segment of the service industry, and most commonly, with the participant's host agency. These types of placements mirror the dual role of SCSEP in terms of simultaneously providing training and being able to give back to the community. Many of the host agencies that partner with the Program are either customer-service-based, elder- focused or human services-related. Their services and employment needs mesh well with the needs of older adults who are seeking to improve their often-limited financial resources in a dignified and respectable manner. Aside from the desire for employment, participation in the Program provides a way for them to remain connected to the outside world through physical and mental activity daily and provides satisfaction in contributing to the community tangibly and visibly.

One of the significant challenges SCSEP faces is the desire of employers to hire full-time employees, often in positions that are difficult to fill, such as those scheduled to work nights and weekends. Most participants are searching for and hope to obtain permanent part-time work during typical daytime hours weekly. There is also greater flexibility on the part of employers to consider job-sharing arrangements and work-from-home positions, which is a great opportunity for many seniors. This is a welcome change, but other barriers still exist.

Limited transportation options often prohibit older workers from being able to take advantage of new employment opportunities in faraway locales. A lack of reliable transportation, either on their own or via mass transit, discourages participants from pursuing work that would require an extended commute. Unfortunately, mass transit is not a viable option in most of our state's rural communities.

An awareness and understanding of the struggles many of the participants face are some of the key factors in how SCSEP providers select and interact with host agencies and small businesses in their communities. Although these organizations can often fill the immediate need of the Program, it is incumbent on them to explore new ways to draw in different types of businesses and organizations that can also promote and embrace the SCSEP model.

B. Describe how the long-term job projections discussed in the economic analysis section of the strategic plan relate to the types of unsubsidized jobs for which SCSEP participants will train and the types of skills training provided. (20 CFR 641.302(d))

Most of the occupations in the tables above are consistent with many of the SCSEP participants' interests and the goals of their Individualized Employment Plan. (IEP). Their IEP is a living document that lays out the necessary steps to be taken and the skills the individuals will need to acquire to obtain unsubsidized employment

Typically, SCSEP has been most successful with unsubsidized placements within host agencies where participants have received training and enhanced their skills. The most prevalent occupations for SCSEP participants include jobs in maintenance and custodial work, office and administrative support, receptionists, van drivers, senior center program assistants, retail sales associates, housekeeping, food service, and customer service representatives.

One of the crucial areas for job training and skill development is familiarity and comfort with digital technology. Regardless of the type of employment individuals seek they will have to interact with technology. It may come in the form of completing an online job application or demonstrating their ability to use a computer for a point-of-sale transaction.

C. Discuss current and projected employment opportunities in the State (such as by providing information available under §15 of the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 491-2) by occupation), and the types of skills possessed by eligible individuals. (20 CFR 641.325(c)).

SCSEP uses the information provided by the State's LEAD to develop and prepare projections for growth in employment by industry and occupation. These projections provide information as to what types of jobs are trending and give employers and job seekers guidance as to what will be necessary to meet these demands. The data gathered also informs policy and decision-making in the long term that shapes the industry, determines utilization of resources, and guides educational emphases, and workforce development.

As stated previously, the State's overall projected employment expansion of 445,729 jobs corresponds to a 9.1% growth rate; however, not all regions of the State are expected to grow at the same rate. Among the 16- prosperity zone sub-regions, Raleigh-Durham is expected to experience the fastest job growth (11.4%), followed by Charlotte (11.2%), Wilmington (9.9%), and Waynesville-Franklin (9.1%). The remaining 12 regions are projected to grow at a slower rate than the State, with the Goldsboro/Kinston region expected to experience the slowest job growth at 3.8%.

The Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham regions will continue to lead the State in total employment and net job growth. While total projected job growth provides a measure of the relative strength of the regional economies, changes in the underlying industry sectors will continue to drive economic diversification within each of the prosperity zones and prosperity zone sub-regions. Both service-providing and goods-producing industries are projected to gain jobs across each region.

NC SCSEP will use LEAD data to guide participants in making the most informed decisions related to the type of training and certification necessary to meet the jobs that will be most in demand. As the Program evolves, the information obtained from data will directly influence what types of host agencies, employers, and training opportunities SCSEP providers will pursue to ensure the services received by participants are in sync with market demands. LEAD data highlights the stability of certain occupations such as customer service, food service, healthcare, and retail. This emphasizes the importance of SCSEP participants having the skills that correlate with these job demands enabling providers to better match participants with available training and employment opportunities. These trends provide valuable guidance for SCSEP providers to effectively align participants' skills with the current needs of local businesses.

A vital resource for workforce boards to use in making these determinations is the annual report from North Carolina's Common Follow-up System (CFS), a Statewide longitudinal study that has been in place and renewed through grant funding for over thirty years. The report gives an in-depth view of the efficacy of the educational and job training programs offered in the State and if they are performing as intended. Not only is this a valuable tool for providers, but it is also a document that includes SCSEP as a contributor, allowing for ongoing feedback and critique of service provision.

In the coming years, North Carolina will see measurable employment growth and encounter demands for workers due to individuals exiting the labor force as well as those who are transferring to different occupations. These separations are spurred by several factors, primarily employee turnover, job succession, and employee retirement. Several of the State's major occupational groups are projected to experience this demand for workers. This need may just be the right opportunity for older workers to re-enter the workforce.

II. Service Delivery and Coordination

A. Provide a detailed description of what actions will be taken to coordinate SCSEP with other programs, including:

1) Actions to coordinate activities of SCSEP grantees with the WIOA Title I program, including plans for using the WIOA one-stop delivery system and its partners to serve individuals aged 55 and older. (20 CFR 641.302(g), 641.325(e)

North Carolina's larger workforce programs will submit a Unified State Plan (2024-2027) created to operationalize strategies to foster greater levels of cooperation and collaboration between core and mandatory partners under WIOA requirements. NC SCSEP will continue to nurture stronger working relationships with other workforce programs, services, and supports through Title I-B and Wagner-Peyser services. Other partners are included as primary components of both Plans and include the concept of the "one-stop shop" which is what makes these mandated services a welcome benefit for all clients but especially mature workers. The co-location of services enables job seekers to have many of their needs addressed simultaneously in one location. Our partners are aging services, workforce development organizations, non-profit, and government agencies that work closely with local employers, social services, and community organizations.

The Division's SCSEP sub-grantee requires that participants register with their area NC Works Career Center to ensure they are maximizing every available resource they are eligible for from their earliest days in the program. The sub-grantee has a strong working relationship with the NC Works Centers and Workforce Investment Boards in their service areas. Improving the coordination between all the NC Works Centers and Workforce Investment Boards is a goal that we would like to see every SCSEP provider in the State achieve by the conclusion of the Plan.

Although the SCSEP program is no longer housed within any of the Area Agencies on Aging, they remain an integral part of the work we do. They were specifically created to meet the needs of older adults. Participants continue to reap the benefits of being closely connected to them and the aging services they administer. Area Agencies on Aging serve as host agencies for training, and many times become the unsubsidized placement once training has been completed. The AAAs are still a key part of our network, serving as referral agents to the program and other aging-related services.

SCSEP providers will collaborate with the NC Works Centers using Memorandums of Understanding detailing each party's duties and responsibilities. The expectations may be any of the following: 1) having a physical presence in the Centers, whether it is office space at local sites with designated hours or Centers serving as training sites for participants, 2) both parties ensuring printed, multilingual information and materials promoting services are readily available for distribution to potential clients, and, 3) SCSEP providers inviting representatives of the Centers to educate and engage participants at events such as job club meetings and job fairs. The National Council on Aging has had success with its participants being placed in the Centers to be of assistance to all clients, but especially to mature workers seeking services.

Required Partners WIOA 121 (b)(1)(B)

1. Title I Adult, Dislocated Workers, Youth, Job Corps, YouthBuild, National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP) and Native American Programs
2. Programs authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act
3. Adult education and literacy activities authorized under Title II
4. Programs authorized under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
5. Activities authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965
6. Career and technical education programs at the postsecondary level authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006
7. Activities authorized under Chapter 2 of Title II of the Trade Act of 1974
8. Activities authorized under chapter 41 of Title 38, United States Code: Job Counseling, Training, and Placement Service for Veterans
9. Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act
10. Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development
11. Programs authorized under state unemployment compensation laws
12. Programs authorized under section 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007
13. Programs authorized under part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

2) Actions to coordinate activities of SCSEP grantees with the activities carried out in the State under the other titles of the OAA. (20 CFR 641.302(h)

The North Carolina SCSEP grantee will continue to strive to enhance and seek new opportunities to provide an array of supplemental services for participants. These goals will be accomplished through collaboration with well-established federal Older American Act (OAA) Programs and Services as well as those that are State and locally based. SCSEP is fortunate that it is housed within the State Unit on Aging (SUA). The location of the Program allows for the most up-to-date information on services and newly created initiatives to be shared with Program participants. They have an advantage over other seniors in the state because one of the primary roles of the SUA is the dissemination of information on all matters aging related. Because we serve in this capacity, they have access to information regarding programs and services sooner than many of the regional aging network providers. Participants have been able to benefit from many of the OAA programs such as Legal Services for the Elderly, Housing and Home Improvement, and Family Caregiver Support. Legal services an OAA program has been instrumental in most recent years in providing counseling and information on key issues such as landlord/tenant disputes and evictions to participants. They were able to be educated and empowered regarding their legal rights surrounding housing issues and they were able to receive referrals to and connect with housing programs capable of meeting their needs. This was a critical service during and after the pandemic when so many individuals had fallen behind in their payments and properties were in desperate need of repairs. Older adults were more significantly impacted economically by these changes in the housing market due to their inability to pay their rent /mortgage and the inability to pay for repairs that had been neglected for several years.

Participants were also able to benefit from knowledge about the Emergency Solutions Grant, a housing and Urban Development (HUD) program operated by the Division designed to serve individuals who are unhoused or at risk of being in this situation. Individuals who are at risk of homelessness are another one of our target populations. Many older adults, especially those who qualify for SCSEP and whose finances place them in tenuous circumstances have been served by having direct access to information about the program.

Many program participants are responsible for providing care to an aged or disabled spouse or even raising grandchildren. Program participants can avail themselves of the many resources that flow through the Division such as the Family Caregiver Support Program, the Alzheimer's Caregiver Running on Empty (CARES) Program, and other dementia-related services. They can also learn about the benefits of their loved one participating in adult daycare/day health programs. These services enable participants to remain in the Program and have peace of mind that their loved one is in a safe and structured environment while they acquire the skills for success.

The Division is proud of its ongoing support and participation in the NC Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program. SFMNP provides eligible low-income older adults with coupons to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables at their local farmers' markets. The program is designed to improve nutritional intake for older adults and reduce food insecurity. Many SCSEP participants can take advantage of this program in their local communities.

Many of the participants are fortunate to be assigned to senior centers in their local communities that serve as their host agencies. The senior centers are often the hub of activities in many communities large and small. They are the locations that most people are familiar with and trust the individuals who operate them and the services they provide. Once again, participants have an advantage over many of their peers simply based on their proximity and access to crucial information.

3) Actions to coordinate SCSEP with other private and public entities and programs that provide services to older Americans, such as community and faith-based organizations, transportation programs, and programs for those with special needs or disabilities. (20 CFR 641.302(i))

SCSEP works very closely with many human services and social services agencies and organizations across the State to overcome many of the barriers they face when entering the program. We make a concerted effort to address the most pressing issues upon entry and try to be proactive and responsive to any needs that may arise later during their program participation.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is the largest agency in State government, responsible for ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of all North Carolinians and providing assistance and resources to populations with special needs. DHHS also provides services to assist low-income individuals and families to achieve economic independence. The Department's mission is carried out by its many Divisions and directly impacts the lives of participants and their families. The SCSEP program is housed within the Division of Aging. It is important to remember that a holistic and comprehensive approach must be taken when serving participants. If a participant is worried about not having enough to eat or facing eviction, they will not be able to give their full attention to the instruction and training at hand. Our ability to connect them to the services and organizations that can bridge the gaps or shortfalls in their lives leads to better outcomes. This is one of the reasons the Department has several initiatives to address these concerns, such as Healthy Opportunities and NCCARE360. Healthy Opportunities is a Medicaid pilot program examining social determinants of health and the effects of social and environmental factors, and the behaviors that emerge as a result, influence an individual's health and ability to thrive. The primary focus is on housing stability, food security, transportation access, and interpersonal safety. NCCARE360 is designed to provide a Statewide coordinated care network to electronically connect individuals with identified needs to community resources.

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Agencies within DHHS that work closely with SCSEP:

- Division of Aging
- Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services
- Division of Services for the Blind
- Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Division of Social Services
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

In addition to State Agencies, we work with local entities to address immediate needs. Some of the key areas addressed over time and are often recurring are the need for assistance with housing, utilities, food insecurity, transportation, and payment assistance for medications which is often met through referrals to local public and private entities such as the Carter Pharmacy, Legal Aide of North Carolina. Lumber River Council of Governments, Haliwa-Saponi Tribe of North Carolina, Rutherford County Transit, Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, and Bladen County Area Transit.

The Division of Aging partners with the Veteran Services Offices within the SCSEP service territories. The State also works closely with Veterans Stand Down of Lumbee Tribe of NC and their organizations in Robeson, Hoke, and Scotland counties.

In January 2024, Governor Cooper issued Executive Order No. 303 directing coordination to improve reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals. The Order aims to improve rehabilitation and reentry services for justice-involved individuals in North Carolina. These measures include job skills training and employment preparation, which align with SCSEP's most recent priority of service for formerly incarcerated individuals. The State SCSEP program intends to strengthen its current collaboration with the NC Adult Department of Corrections and with the Robeson, Scotland, and Hoke former Offenders Coalitions.

These organizations and many others have been able to fill the gaps in the lives of participants so that they could put their full attention on their training and educational experiences. These community resources play multiple roles by providing a safety net for those who are vulnerable, serving as training sites, and cultivating relationships as future employers. Other groups also play a pivotal role in providing the foundation that participants can rely on, and they include faith-based organizations, educational institutions, and councils on aging. Each brings resources, both human and financial, allowing them to give back to their communities.

NC SCSEP will contribute to and carry out the recommendations and policy strategies developed by the NC Department of Commerce. Continued participation in the State's longitudinal study, the Common Follow-Up System, is a definitive way to ensure older workers are represented in the research, policy directives, and decision-making processes that occur in workforce development.

We look forward to strengthening and reestablishing our connection to the Workforce Development Training Center, which provides training and professional development services to the State's workforce leaders. We have been a member of the planning and steering committees for their annual conference that brings professionals from all over the State together. It is a good way for the various workforce providers to get to know each other better and learn about each other's programs. It has provided SCSEP with the opportunity to be conference presenters, conduct workshops, and have a more visible role in workforce development.

4) Actions to coordinate SCSEP with other labor markets and job training initiatives. (20 CFR 641.302(j))

The State recognizes the dire need for the senior population to become computer-literate and comfortable with using technology. During the last two years, concerted efforts were made to assist SCSEP participants with improving their digital skills. The need for competency in this area of job readiness became very apparent with the major shift to remote work which not only served as a stopgap measure during the pandemic but created a whole new way of expanding work efforts and productivity. This use of technology further reinforced the need to be able to access and navigate an online environment from start to finish as it relates to human resources and the onboarding of staff. The pandemic has driven workers and students into remote work and educational pursuits. It has emphasized the importance of having access to and familiarity with technology. It also elevated the possibility of working remotely, which can be viewed as beneficial to older workers, who may have transportation burdens.

As a result of the pandemic, the NC SCSEP Program will continue to seek low- to no-cost online training tutorials/classes designed for seniors, encourage enrollment in community college entry-level computer courses, and solicit funding and/or donations for computers and tablets. Since the pandemic, many of the NC SCSEP participants have become engaged in a variety of online, self-paced training. A few of those included NorthStar Digital Literacy, which focuses on basic literacy skills, GetSetUp, a digital community for older adults to learn, share, and socialize and GCF Global which offers free core skills and technology training. The NC providers used a variety of training modules to align with the participants' training goals and individual employment plans. One provider was able to secure funding through its local Area Agency on Aging to provide participants with laptops and wi-fi connectivity. The addition of online learning opportunities was deemed successful and continues to augment participants' SCSEP training.

SCSEP participants continue to utilize "Steps to Re-Entering the Workforce in Challenging Times" offered by Career Connections. Due to the positive feedback received from the participants, this training opportunity, born out of the pandemic, continues to be offered. Participants can discuss and troubleshoot barriers that they may encounter upon their return to the workforce and strategies to overcome such barriers. Participants update their resumes and learn traditional interviewing as well as web-based interview techniques.

SCSEP participants continue to learn Food Service Management, offered by one of the Area Agencies on Aging. This training prepares participants (and volunteers) who are currently assigned to local nutrition sites. This certification is required before participants can apply for positions within the Council of Government Nutrition Network.

One State SCSEP provider established a relationship with the State Employees' Credit Union to provide participants with personal finance training. We look forward to offering additional training related to financial management and safeguarding personal resources.

SCSEP participants receive the "Job Search after 50" training offered by Career Connections. Participants can discuss barriers to employment and how to proactively circumvent challenges. During the training, participants updated their resumes and participated in mock interviews.

Eligible SCSEP participants were referred to and encouraged to apply for the Affordable Connectivity Program for low-income individuals. The program provided $30-50 monthly discounts on high-speed Internet. We recognize a sizeable digital divide exists for people of all ages, but seniors are even more deeply impacted. The program will participate in several state-sponsored programs and initiatives to close this technology gap, especially in our rural counties.

SCSEP is a mandatory partner under the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA), and as such, it is a part of the NC Works Centers, aka American Job Centers Delivery System. SCSEP grantees are required to follow all applicable rules under WIOA (20 CFR 652) and must provide all WIOA core services. Core services include determination of eligibility; outreach, intake, and orientation; initial assessment of skills, aptitudes, abilities, and supportive service needs; job search and placement; career counseling, where appropriate assistance in establishing eligibility for other social service programs and unemployment; and data or record-keeping related to employment statistics and performance measures (20 CFR 662.240). An assessment or Individual Employment Plan (IEP) completed by the SCSEP satisfies the condition for an assessment, service strategy, or IEP completion at an NC Works Center. This reciprocity is an added benefit for participants regardless of how they access the Program; their initial screenings can be conducted seamlessly.

As WIOA has developed and set the standard for improved interaction and communication between partners, the use of a Memorandum of Understanding and Cost Sharing measures has led to greater accountability. The State workforce system crafted language for use in what can be considered universal MOUs for its 23 governing boards.

The Division's sub-grantee benefits from having a satellite office located within the NC Works Center's Rocky Mount office. This affords SCSEP program visibility and direct access to NC Works services, employment events, and center staff. This arrangement facilitates pre-employment assistance at direct hiring events. Each SCSEP participant is mandated to register with the local NC Works Career Center and utilize its services to enhance the chances of securing unsubsidized employment. NC SCSEP program coordinators will maintain contact with the workforce development board executive team, attending monthly or quarterly meetings to ensure coordinated efforts and remain updated on workforce services.

The State providers will continue to seek opportunities to form partnerships with area employers to promote the SCSEP Program and its participants. The State has continued its partnership with Circa (formerly Local Job Network) which provides weekly job postings in the SCSEP service territories. The State also partnered with CVS Workforce Initiatives, which provides retail and healthcare positions for our work-ready participants. North Carolina SCSEP has partnered with Spectrum Internet and Cable Services since 2018. Spectrum has assisted in identifying participants with desirable or transferable skills for open positions, assisted participants in completing applications, and provided program directors with an updated weekly list of available positions. Spectrum has presented at monthly job club meetings and met with interested participants to identify those who were strong candidates. Participants are encouraged to apply for openings and are introduced to people working in the various positions applied for, so there are opportunities to engage in conversation about and learn more about specific positions. Spectrum has shown its commitment by hiring participants in positions that pay well.

NC SCSEP has partnered with Medical Careers, Inc. to provide four weeks of On-The-Job Experience (OJE) for participants who are open to learning new skills to meet the needs of this employer. Medical Careers, Inc. provides a weekly outline of training and development activities for the OJE participant and works daily, with the participant, to ensure success. Participants are provided with hands-on training in every aspect of the job and are mentored and educated by the business owner and executive director. A full-time Administrative Assistant was hired through this partnership. Medical Careers is expanding its operations and NC SCSEP plans to partner with them again to provide OJE training and possible employment with Medical Careers, Inc.

The State program will continue to utilize all the resources at its disposal in working with employers to prepare participants to obtain unsubsidized employment. Our ability to promote and implement this career-ready practice will give participants who are in their last phases of training the confidence and exposure they will need to make the necessary transition. The options we typically offer give potential employers a great deal of flexibility in bringing participants into their organizations for trial exposure. We will also connect with employer groups that have a desire to attract older workers in the following ways.

NC SCSEP has a goal to improve employer engagement by 20% over the years of this strategic plan. We are considering the following strategies to boost engagement:

- Identify potential employers through direct marketing and referrals
- Meet with employers in person to determine their needs
- Send surveys to employers who have hired former participants semi-annually to gain feedback for continuous improvement
- Include employers in training activities for participants
- Establish a "Shadowing" or "A Day in the World of…" enabling participants to experience their chosen career path in a real-world setting
- Prepare participants who have met their IEP goals to interview with the selected employers
- Reward and acknowledge employers committed to employing mature workers by highlighting them on agency web pages, through social media, and listing their organizations in marketing materials
- Reimplement the Host Agency and Senior Business Employer of the Year Award

One of the key long-term strategies for strengthening the Program is greater utilization of the On-the-Job Experience option for employers. It is an ideal opportunity for participants to transition from the Program into the world of work. This is an area that has been underutilized by Program providers regularly. It is an ideal chance for participants to put into practice the skills they have acquired, while potentially earning a higher wage than their training stipend. It also provides insight into whether a participant is truly ready to enter the workforce in the occupation of their choosing. In turn, businesses benefit by receiving the assistance they need while determining if the participant is a "good fit" for their organization. This approach can be a "win-win" situation for all parties because it encourages participants to go outside of their comfort zones and employers to embrace an entirely new population of capable individuals they may have been overlooking.

North Carolina Labor Force Participation Rates by Age

	North Carolina	United States
Age 16-19	38.7%	38.0%
Age 20-24	74.5%	74.6%
Age 25-29	83.1%	82.6%
Age 30-34	82.5%	82.6%
Age 35-44	82.7%	82.6%
Age 45-54	79.5%	80.5%
Age 55-59	70.2%	72.3%
Age 60-64	53.1%	56.4%
Age 65-74	23.1%	25.7%
Age 75+	6.3%	6.6%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates

As the long-term trend reveals, North Carolina, like the rest of the nation, is challenged with drawing more people into the labor force to meet the hiring needs of employers. This creates opportunities for those with historically higher rates of unemployment such as the formerly incarcerated, those with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, individuals with less formal education, youth, older workers, and minority populations.

These basic demographic realities mean employers may have to increase offered wages and benefits, seek to re-engage workers who have left the labor force, and engage potential workers with barriers to employment such as those with criminal records, housing, or transportation issues. Working arrangements have also changed because of the pandemic, creating the need to attract more workers by offering remote and hybrid work arrangements. Although many jobs are unsuited for telework, many companies and workers underwent radical experiments with remote work over the past four years. These experiments led to an overall increase in remote and hybrid work for those companies that did not experience a loss of productivity and for those workers (including mature workers) who may prefer the flexibility and other benefits associated with remote work.

The following chart from the PY 21 U.S Department of Labor's Minority Report II illustrates NC's service to minorities in the SCSEP program:

Category	SCSEP %	Census %	% Difference
Minority Overall	74.8%	44.5%	168.1
Hispanic	1.5%	3.8%	39.5%*
Black	68.7%	34.4%	199.7%
Asian	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%*
American Indian	4.6%	4.1%	112.2%
Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%	N/A

* Denotes having a significantly lower rate of participation for a minority category only if they served less than 80% of the incidence of that minority category in the population and if the difference is also statistically significant at the .05 level.

According to the census information obtained from the DOL PY' 21 Minority Report, North Carolina is effectively reaching the Black and American Indian populations. The Asian population in NC is 1.1% and the NC SCSEP is not currently reaching the minority demographic as it is at 0.0% participation for the Asian population. The difficulty with engaging those in the Asian community may be attributed to the language barrier for Asian Americans. Also, some Asian Americans may fear being labeled as a public charge. The idea of being dependent on the government for subsistence may have hindered some low-income, Asian American older individuals from participating in SCSEP. Despite the recent removal of public charge criteria, fears about losing eligibility for citizenship by using public services may persist. Xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric may also contribute to the under-representation of Asian Americans in SCSEP.

NC SCSEP will prioritize collaborations with community-based organizations including those that specifically serve older Asian American adults. North Carolina Asian Americans Together Community Partnership Network is a group of Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations and leaders dedicated to serving the Asian community and its diverse needs. Also, Carolinas Asian American Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit organization that may be leveraged to create cooperative partnerships in which to reach the mature Asian American demographic that SCSEP serves.

The DOL PY '21 Minority Report data also indicates that the NC SCSEP is underserving the Hispanic/Latino community. NC SCSEP will make concerted efforts to utilize the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and connect with community organizations such as El Centro Hispano which focuses on economic development within the Hispanic community, and La Coalicion-Latin American Coalition which are 501(c)(3) grassroots organizations. The Chamber of Commerce can advise and connect the NC SCSEP with local nonprofits and community centers that cater to the Hispanic community. Targeted social media campaigns and materials in Spanish placed in the areas in the community that are frequently visited may improve visibility and program participation. We will also take note of the subtleties between and among various Latino populations. It is important to recognize the importance of customizing one's message within the various Latino communities and not treating it as a monolith primarily defined by a shared language.

NC SCSEP will continue to utilize all means to attract, enroll, and bolster minority participation in the Program. We intend to implement new recruitment techniques to reach minority populations whose representation remains low. We hope the low numbers are indicative of a lack of awareness regarding the Program rather than fear of the unknown. The growth of minority populations in the US has grown significantly and as such we should be seeing an increase in older minorities who have aged in place. SCSEP can play a crucial role in assuring these adults' golden years are lived to the fullest and we look forward to being a part of that reality.

D. Provide a list of community services needed and the places that need these services most. Specifically, the plan must address the needs and location(s) of those individuals most in need of community services and the groups working to meet their needs. 20 CFR 641.330)

Community service is identified as social, health, welfare, educational services, legal and other counseling services, library, recreational, conservation, maintenance, or restoration of natural resources, community betterment or beautification, antipollution and environmental quality efforts, weatherization activities, economic development, and other services essential to the community as the State may determine. The area most in need of their service projects and the areas they serve include general community services such as:

- Social Service
- Health and Hospitals
- Employment Assistance
- Education

Specific services identified as most in need for older adults included:

- Nutrition Programs
- Transportation
- Employment Assistance
- Health or Home Care

SCSEP participants assigned to community service agencies are an important part of the infrastructure of these agencies. As national sponsors and state subgrantees assess areas of community service needs, the above-identified services will be a source of information to consider when allocating positions to community host agencies. SCSEP grantees across the State are constantly on the lookout for new programs, products, and services to offer participants to enhance their quality of life. Longstanding relationships help ease this process and have earned the program respect and recognition. Our Area Agencies on Aging and Councils on Aging are invaluable resources.

E. Describe the long-term strategy to improve SCSEP services, including planned long-term changes to the design of the program within the State, and planned changes in the use of SCSEP grantees and program operators to better achieve the goals of the program. This may include recommendations to the Department as appropriate 20CFR 641.302(k))

The following actions will be taken to improve SCSEP's goals and objectives.

- Create workshops specifically geared towards older workers to be offered at the NCWorks Center and led by staff and former participants of the Program
- Develop a media kit that can be used by NC Works to incorporate information about older workers
- Convene employer events on a routine basis to hear firsthand what their needs and concerns are regarding workers
- Participation in employer-related professional organizations to recruit them as potential On-the-Job Employers
- Encourage more participants to obtain the Career Readiness Certificate and take greater advantage of the soft skills course offerings
- Seek out funding opportunities to offset the cost of advanced training or acquisition of educational degrees for participants to obtain their desired job
- Increase funding to serve more seniors based on the rapidly expanding population in North Carolina

F. Describe a strategy for continuous improvement in the level of performance for SCSEP participants' entry into unsubsidized employment, and to achieve, at a minimum, the levels specified in OAA Section 513(a)(2)(E)(ii). (20 CFR 641.302(f))

PY 2023 2nd Quarter

Common Measure	Goal/Target	Rate	L4Q
Employment Rate- 2nd Quarter After Exit	33.4%	23.1%	32.1%
Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit	24.8%	43.8%	35.9%

To ensure the State grantee meets its negotiated performance goal. The State grantee will enact the following measures to meet the prescribed goals set forth by DOL for success.

- Ongoing assessment of subgrantee performance by review of quarterly reports and other customized reports that can be queried in GPMS.

- Continuous review and assessment of the status of participant placements with specific attention focused on measures obtained in the two most crucial periods during the program year - 2nd and 4th quarters after exit.

- Continuous assessment of Statewide participant retention in employment. Review the factors that helped former participants to meet these designated benchmarks and share those with current participants.

- Continuous assessment of Statewide participant median earnings.

- Work closely with the subgrantee(s) to maintain Equitable Distribution requirements. Remind the sub-grantee to review the data in GPMS on their own and to avail themselves of all the tools offered for program management such as GPMS Office hours. Technical assistance will be offered as needed and discussions with national providers will also be part of an ongoing strategy to ensure all parts of the State are being served.

- The grantee will also carry out monitoring functions of the sub-grantee on a routine basis and if areas of poor performance are identified steps to remedy the concerns will be taken. The protocol will include additional support from the grantee as a first-level intervention and if subsequent performance does not improve the sub-grantee will need to submit a plan of action or correction dependent on the severity of the outcomes noted. If this action is required, then they will be monitored in the following program year to ensure the proposed corrective actions have taken place.

## III. Location and Population Served, including Equitable Distribution

A. Describe the localities and populations most in need of the type of projects authorized by Title V. (20 CFR 641.325 (d))

SCSEP serves 99 of the 100 counties in the State of North Carolina. The service territories are chosen based on data drawn from the Federal Census and report and calculations made by the U.S. Department of Labor. DOL decides every year the number of participant slots available throughout the State based on Equitable Distributions reports.

As you can see in the figure below, NC is predicted to have an overall population growth, with the most growth in urban and suburban areas. In 2020, 65% of all North Carolinians (6.8 million people) lived within 22 urban or regional center/suburban counties, with the remaining 35% (3.7 million people) living in 78 rural counties. As stated previously, there is rapid growth in the Piedmont region and in and around major urban areas. By 2050, it is expected that more than 75% (10.8 million people) of the population will live in urban or regional center/suburban counties (28 counties) and less than 25% (3.4 million people) of the population will live in the remaining 72 rural counties. These changes may have a definitive impact on how slots are assigned in the future. The shifts and potential reconfigurations could determine a greater share of resources being given to more rural areas because of a perceived or legitimate lack of opportunities for employment because of their designation.
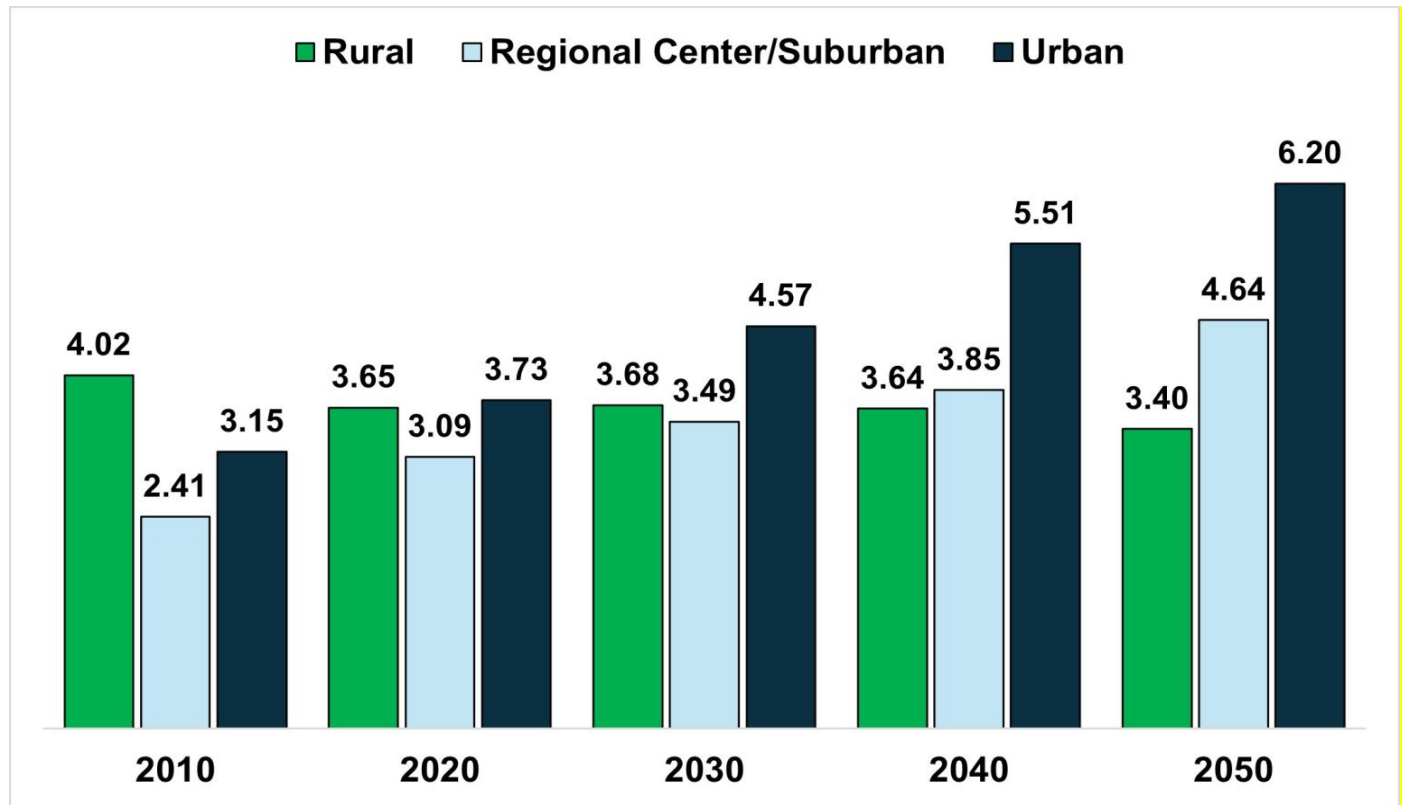
The rural North Carolina population is aging due to a growing number of older people (65 years and older) and a declining number of children (under 18 years old)

Recent population trends show that the number of young adults (18-29 years old) is falling in rural North Carolina counties and growing in urban and suburban counties. Research shows that rural counties connected to specialized regional industries (life sciences, banking, finance, etc.) experience greater economic and population growth than non-connected rural counties. Economic improvement is commonly observed in both urban and rural counties when they collaborate in specialized regional industries Covid-19 had a strong negative impact on rural employment, but employment numbers have largely recovered to pre-pandemic levels in rural North Carolina.

Covid-19 has affected all communities and people in some way or another. Rural communities, as is often the case, were hit hardest by the challenges resulting from COVID-19. An already strained healthcare system was pushed to the limit, educational instruction suffered, and small businesses struggled to remain open.

Rural communities across North Carolina have banded together to counteract these challenges, and progress has been made. Employment has started to rebound, taxable sales have increased, and some communities have even started to see population growth. Still, the long-term impact of

COVID-19 is evolving, and there will continue to be new challenges and opportunities for our rural communities.

Factors that pose significant employment barriers for mature workers

Each State is tasked with ensuring all eligible participants have equal access to the Program and its resources regardless of where they live in the State. This can be a daunting challenge when 80 of the counties served are designated as rural. A great deal of consideration is also given to participants who are considered most in need. These individuals are of particular focus for our Program because they face multiple barriers in addition to being rural residents, including being over the age of 65, having a disability, veteran status, or spouse of a veteran, limited English proficiency, low literacy skills, low employment, prospects are homeless or at risk of being homeless, and formerly incarcerated.

The participants that SCSEP focuses its attention and resources on face many barriers and impediments to their success, and each special population has its unique challenges. One of the most significant obstacles to overcome is that of poverty, especially in rural areas.

The military bases located in North Carolina are major drivers in our communities, allowing families and businesses to thrive through the synergy and partnerships that have developed between local and State government, military and defense sectors, and local businesses throughout our history. Although we have a strong military history and presence, older veterans are often overlooked and unfortunately, not always afforded the same level of attention as that of their younger counterparts. This is an area in which SCSEP is successful in "filling" some of the gaps that veterans experience in their lives. Many of these individuals are in very fragile and precarious situations when they enroll, oftentimes fitting into another specialty category - homeless or on the verge of homelessness. SCSEP grantees work closely with veteran organizations, veterans, and their families to ensure they attain and maintain a dignified quality of life.

SCSEP grantees will continue to actively serve the most-in-need participants. This commitment of time and resources means the sub-grantee will have to seek out and make connections with new community partners and employers who may not be familiar with the Program, or who have never been approached to participate. A key component of the work to be done over the course of this Plan is to attract new resources. The need to explore underutilized resources will become increasingly important to give participants a wide range of options and opportunities.

B. List the cities and counties where the SCSEP project will take place. Include the number of SCSEP-authorized positions and indicate if and where the positions changed from the prior year.

Table. NC SCSEP PY 2023

County	State	NCBA	NCOA	CWI	PY 22
Alamance		18			
Alexander				5	
Alleghany				2	
Anson	4				
Ashe				4	
Avery				3	
Beaufort			9		
Bertie			4		
Bladen	5			3	
Brunswick				17	
Buncombe	13			15	
Burke				13	
Cabarrus	14				
Caldwell				13	
Camden					
Carteret			9		
Caswell		4			
Catawba				17	
Chatham		7			
Cherokee				6	
Chowan			3		
Clay				3	+1 CWI
Cleveland	11			6	
Columbus				12	
Craven			10		
Cumberland				29	
Currituck			2		
Dare			2		
Davidson				21	
Davie				4	
Duplin			10		
Durham		21			
Edgecombe	10				
Forsyth				39	

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County	State	NCBA	NCOA	CWI	PY 22
Franklin			7		
Gaston				24	
Gates					
Graham				2	
Granville		8			
Greene			3		
Guilford		50			
Halifax	9		3		
Harnett		12			
Haywood				8	
Henderson	5			7	
Hertford			5		
Hoke	5				
Hyde					
Iredell	15				
Jackson				6	
Johnston			16		
Jones			2		
Lee				8	
Lenoir			9		
Lincoln				10	
McDowell	6				
Macon				5	
Madison				3	
Martin			5		
Mecklenburg	27			43	+1 NC
Mitchell				3	
Montgomery		4			
Moore				11	
Nash	8		5		
New Hanover				24	
Northampton	5				
Onslow				12	
Orange		8			
Pamlico			2		
Pasquotank			6		
Pender				7	
Person		5			

County	State	NCBA	NCOA	CWI	PY 22
Perquimans			3		
Pitt			17		
Polk	3				
Randolph		17			
Richmond	5			3	
Robeson	15			9	
Rockingham		12			
Rowan	16				
Rutherford	10				
Sampson			9		
Scotland	6				
Stanly	6				
Stokes				6	
Surry				12	
Swain				3	
Transylvania	2			2	
Tyrell			1		
Union	7			5	
Vance		8			
Wake					
Warren		4	52		
Washington			2		
Watauga				5	
Wayne			15		
Wilkes				12	
Wilson	9		3		
Yadkin				5	
Yancey				3	
TOTALS	**216**	**178**	**214**	**450**	**2**

C. Describe any current slot imbalances and proposed steps to correct inequities to achieve equitable distribution.

The North Carolina SCSEP providers make every effort to recruit according to the guidelines of equitable distribution. Recruitment efforts are made with applicants most in need of SCSEP services, areas with viable job opportunities, areas with the availability of host agency training sites, and areas that have income-eligible participants.

North Carolina counties that are significantly over-served are counties that have a sizable inventory of host agencies that provide valuable training, have local in-demand jobs, and have viable job opportunities that fit the skill set of our participants. These counties also tend to have community partners that provide the support necessary to assist in job placement. Most of these counties also have a poor economic base, so there is a high demand for SCSEP services. These counties are *Bertie, Gaston, Halifax, Martin, Nash, Pasquotank, Richmond, Robeson, and Rutherford.*

Some underserved NC counties have a plethora of resources, a reliable transportation system, and well-paying job opportunities. Finding income-eligible applicants for a minimum wage training opportunity has been difficult when there are viable jobs available paying significantly higher wages. The minimum wage is often not competitive enough to attract program participants. These counties *are Buncombe, Carteret, Craven, Franklin, Lenoir, Haywood, Mecklenburg, Moore, Surry, Wake, and Wayne*.

Some NC counties are more rural and difficult to reach. Recruitment in these areas has historically been difficult due to their location, lack of transportation, and the minimal opportunities for employment and effective host agencies. These counties *are Bladen, Currituck, Franklin, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Stokes, and Transylvania.*

The State of North Carolina SCSEP providers plan to engage with the communities more through recruitment and outreach events to build a strong waitlist and reduce the periods of under-enrollment.

D. Explain the State's long-term strategy for achieving an equitable distribution of SCSEP
   positions within the State that moves positions from over-served to underserved locations
   within the State in compliance with 20 CFR 641.365. and

1. Equitably serves both rural and urban areas.
2. Serves individuals afforded priority for service under 20 CFR 641.520.   (20 CFR 641.302(a), 641.365, 641.520

The State will continue to work closely with its sub-grantees, and national providers to maintain equity across all authorized slots. Overarching factors such as rurality, service to individuals most in need, and economic stability will influence how slots are managed. Due to the way allocations are made, the State does not have the authority to rearrange the slots of national grantees. Historically, all providers have worked well with one another and have been open to discussion when issues of serious inequity have arisen. The response to these issues is more frequent dialogue and exchange of best practices on at least a semi-annual basis if not quarterly.

SCSEP Grantees currently have 1,058 authorized slots in NC. The State of NC administers 216 of those positions, and the remaining 842 slots are distributed among the three national grantees. The State of North Carolina State and National SCSEP providers, collectively, need to recruit new and rebuild relationships with former host agency partners to provide more diverse types of training opportunities to job applicants. This applies, as well, to establishing new partnerships and refocusing efforts with existing referral partners such as American Job Centers, WIOA programs, and the aging community. Both stakeholder groups experienced significant turnover and operational changes since the pandemic and recovery. All providers report significant challenges with recruiting job seekers due to the low minimum wage in North Carolina of $7.25. All SCSEP providers will have to do a better job of emphasizing the training aspects of the program and the way that the supportive services offered contribute to ensuring each individual is fully prepared to excel in the workforce not just exist.

E. Provide the ratio of eligible individuals in each service area to the total eligible population in the State. (20 CFR 641.325(a))

PROVIDERS	COUNTIES	AGE 55+ At/Below 125% Federal Poverty Level	AGE 55+ At/Below 125% Federal Poverty Level
STATE OF NC	Anson, Bladen, Buncombe, Cabarrus, Cleveland, Edgecombe, Halifax, Henderson, Hoke, Iredell, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Nash, Northampton, Polk, Richmond, Robeson, Rowan, Rutherford, Scotland, Stanly, Transylvania, Union, Wilson	163,414	*17.8%*
NCBA	Alamance, Caswell, Chatham, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Harnett, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham Vance, Warren	83,308	15.7%
NCOA	Beaufort, Bertie, Carteret, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Duplin, Franklin, Greene, Halifax, Hertford, Johnston, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Nash, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Perquiman, Pitt, Sampson, Tyrrell, Wake, Washington, Wayne, Wilson	133,433	18.6%
CWI	Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Bladen, Brunswick, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Columbus, Cumberland, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lee, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Moore, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Richmond, Robeson, Stokes, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Union, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin, Yancey	244,219	16.3%

US Census. Bureau American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Data Projections

F. Provide the relative distribution of eligible individuals who:
   1) Reside in urban and rural areas within the State
   2) Have the greatest economic need
   3) Are minorities
   4) Are limited English proficient.
   5) Have the greatest social need. (20 CFR 641.325(b))
   6) Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

Individuals Afforded Priority of Service under SCSEP:

All SCSEP State and national sponsors are responsible for developing targeted strategies for the following special population groups:

- Veterans or their spouses who meet the requirements of the Jobs for Veterans Act
- A person 65 years of age or older
- A person with one of the following: ○
- A person with a disability
- A person with LEP or low literacy skills
- A person who resides in a rural area
- A person with low employment prospects
- A person who is homeless or at risk for homelessness
- A person who has been justice-involved within the last 5 years
- A person who failed to find employment after utilizing services provided under Title I of WIOA.

As of November 2023, approximately 43% of North Carolina's older adult population lives in rural counties (780,695 people). By 2041, the proportion living in rural counties will decline to 36% (986,230 people).

In addition to targeting the above-referenced priority populations, the following relative distribution of eligible individuals will also be targeted for SCSEP services:

Persons with greatest economic need: Those persons at or below 125% of the federal poverty level established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and approved by the Office of Management and Budget.

Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP): Racial and Ethnic data from the United States Census Bureau will be utilized when developing outreach plans, translating materials, or working with community partners on local initiatives. The State SCSEP providers will seek specific host agencies that will assist with targeting potential LEP participants and the willingness to have a site supervisor who can speak multiple languages and be able to assist those participants with their training needs.

Persons in greatest social need: The need caused by non-economic factors, which include persons with physical and mental disabilities; language barriers; and cultural, social, or geographic isolation, including isolation brought about by racial or ethnic status that restricts the ability of an individual to perform normal daily tasks, or threatens the capacity of an individual to live independently.

Steps will include outreach strategies to target communities where there are significant numbers of eligible persons who meet the most in-need definition. Each region has a unique strategy based on the areas they serve and what works best in the community.

Flyers, posters, and/or informational presentations allow older adults an opportunity to ask questions and discern whether the SCSEP is appropriate for them. It is also important that these outreach strategies include engagement with organizations that serve those given priority of service for awareness, relationship building, and community capacity building.

G. Describe the steps taken to avoid disruptions to service for participants to the greatest extent possible, when positions are redistributed, as provided in 20 CFR 641.365; when new Census or other reliable data becomes available; or when there is over-enrollment for any other reason. (20 CFR 641.325(i), 641.302(b))

To avoid disruptions to participants when authorized positions need to be redistributed, the State will work collaboratively with the national sponsors to identify areas considered underserved and overserved. The State and national grantees address issues regarding significant changes in enrollment directly by communicating key information as soon as it is available.

The State has become quite adept at this task in the last two years with the withdrawal of three long-standing sub-grantees who chose to end their participation in the program. We have been fortunate to partner with the AARP Foundation who also have a long and successful history with the SCSEP Program. The sub-grantee was able to ensure the continuation of the Program with minimal disruption to the participants. The most challenging and time-consuming aspect of the changes has been developing relationships with the new participants, host agencies, and geographical dispersion. Although the current sub-grantee accepted the challenge, the last two program years have necessitated them hiring more staff to be able to handle the increased demands and responsibilities for effective program management across the state.

If another change was to occur, we have put into place protocols for preparing all involved parties:

- Create a timeline for the transition
- Seek out new sub-grantee(s)
- Meet directly with participants and host agencies to inform them of the changes and keep them abreast of next steps throughout the process
- Prioritize, customize, and offer wrap-around supportive services to individuals who are closest to unsubsidized placement and those who are reaching their durational limit
- Review and receive records from departing sub-grantee
- Conduct orientation for new provider(s) and offer support and in-depth technical assistance for the first six months of operation

Slot redistributions for other reasons:

- Census data - Equitable distribution patterns will be examined by all providers and discussions regarding how to maintain or attain parity will occur within the first quarter of the transition phase
- Over-enrollment - Grantees will work closely with host agencies, potential employers, and workforce entities to prepare participants for unsubsidized placement
- Grantees will utilize the Job Experiences as one of their primary tools to encourage participants who have acquired the necessary skills, education, and credentials to make their first foray into re-entering the workforce

Conclusion

North Carolina will continue to enhance service delivery and strive to reach eligible older adults who meet the most in-need designation and desire to re-enter the workforce. We will provide training, access, and exposure to the jobs that are shaping and propelling our state's workforce forward. This Plan outlines North Carolina's commitment to future growth by engaging its largest growing segments of the population. SCSEP will continue to be an important vehicle through which mature workers can put into practice daily the dual characteristics of self-empowerment and community service. We look forward to improving the quality of life for mature North Carolinians through meaningful training opportunities that lead to their success in the workforce and life.