

North Carolina Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program

Scope of Work

I. BACKGROUND

Young adults who age out of foster care or who are adopted as adolescents are among the highest risk populations for negative outcomes in adulthood. They are disproportionately underemployed or chronically unemployed and dependent on an array of public services over the course of their lifetime. In the United States of America, less than 3% of youth raised in foster care complete a four-year college degree. About 50% of foster care young people graduate from high school or an equivalent program, and about 20% of those who graduate from high school pursue college.

ETV: The Education Training Voucher (ETV) Program is a federally funded, state-administered program designed to help youth who were in U.S. foster care. Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year for qualified school related expenses. Funding is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis to eligible students. Applicants must complete the ETV application which includes documentation each semester that is sent directly from the school to ETV confirming enrollment, the cost of attendance (COA) and unmet need. The ETV program offers a system of support that helps youth stay focused on earning a credential, moving into the workforce, and becoming self-sufficient students.

NC Reach: NC Reach is for young people who age out of foster care at the age of 18, exit foster care through the KinGAP guardianship program after the age of 14, or who are adopted after the age of 12 as adolescents are among the highest risk populations for negative outcomes in adulthood. They are disproportionately underemployed or chronically unemployed and dependent on an array of public services over the course of their lifetime. Recognizing that postsecondary education and training can change the trajectory for these youth, the 2007 North Carolina state legislature established a comprehensive scholarship program to benefit this unique population of high-risk, vulnerable youth. The NC Reach program combines funding with intensive, age-relevant case management. Funds can be used to pay tuition, fees, books and supplies, and room and board for qualifying students who attend one of North Carolina's public universities or community colleges and provides students with needed case management to support their emotional and academic development.

There is increasing awareness that youth who transition out of foster care need financial assistance and consistent, accessible and targeted support so they can pursue post-secondary education and training, earn a credential, and enter the workforce. The NC Reach program, NC LINK services and the federally-funded, state-administered NC

Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV) are a coordinated response to providing these needed supports. The state further committed to the well-being of these young people in Session Law 2015-241, which permits DHHS to provide housing support until age 21, through county services.

These complementary initiatives are substantially increasing the number of students who enroll and attend colleges across the state. With designated housing assistance and county services, youth have the much-needed stability to progress in an academic or career/technical setting. Braiding together the streams of financial and social/emotional/developmental support will increase NC Reach recipients' well-being so they truly benefit from the state's investment in their adulthood.

Most young people rely on their parents for support and guidance throughout college and beyond. Foster youth, unlike their peers, may not have the opportunity to rely on family members to help them address their accumulated knowledge gaps and emotional and financial needs, therefore, NC Reach case managers are critical during their transitional years. With case managers' consistent and relevant support and adequate financial aid, NC Reach students can make progress and succeed. Case managers help students understand the link between education and a profession, how to study and utilize on-campus academic supports, take the right sequence of classes that lead to a degree, navigate the financial aid system, and balance personal life not only with school but with work and complex family responsibilities.

The students who comprise the target population for the NC Reach program are young people aged 18 to 26 who are legal residents of the state of North Carolina, who have aged out of foster care or were adopted from state care after the age of 12, and who have graduated from high school or earned a high school equivalency credential by taking the General Educational Development (GED) test. Approximately 700 eligible youth apply annually.

An agency's program management would need to include fiscal oversight, student support, and developing awareness of education and employment issues in the larger foster care community.

- Accepts and processes online applications;
- Confirms and documents program eligibility with DHHS, including rapidly solving eligibility issues – name changes, etc.;
- Coordinates and collaborates with LINKS Independent Living workers/county designees;
- Provides an online, secure portal to the financial aid office of each of North Carolina's public institutions to collect and document accurate student financial aid information;

- Works closely with financial aid offices to ensure appropriate allocation of funding, minimize and/or reduce student loan borrowing, and prevent the duplication of other federal and state grants which could result in students owing money because there are over the cost of attendance;
- Each semester, coordinates individual students' Reach funding with NC ETV;
- Twice monthly, transmits to the program's fiscal agent - the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) and NC DHHS student allocations data using a secure drop box;
- Monitors that NCSEAA has received DHHS funding and has forwarded funds to colleges;
- Ensures that participating students are aware of the range of supports available to them through the NC Reach program that will help them progress and achieve their academic and career goals;,
- Provides appropriate individual case management services; and,
- Guides students as they prepare to enter the workforce after earning a credential

Overall, by providing funding and case management support for ETV and NC Reach programs to current and former North Carolina foster care young people who desire to pursue post-secondary education, it helps to improve their overall well-being within their personal lives and in society.

Education Training Voucher:

PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

A. Provide Education and Training Vouchers: The Contractor shall award Education and Training Vouchers to young people who meet eligibility criteria in one of the following categories:

1. Applied or Enrolled in School:

- a. Young person was adopted from foster care after attaining 16 years of age; or
- b. Young person exited foster care to guardianship after attaining 16 years of age; or,
- c. Young person was in foster care on or after their 17th birthday; and,
- d. Young person is a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen.

B. Program Outreach: The Contractor shall perform the following tasks:

1. Produce and distribute written and web based ETV materials on your agency's website, including a brochure that will be disseminated statewide to social workers and agencies working with current and former foster youth.
2. Maintain a unique toll-free number that youth and stakeholders in North Carolina can call for information or assistance related to the ETV program or application.
3. Work with college financial aid offices and student services to make them aware of the ETV program.
4. Coordinate funding and youth services with the NC Reach program to ensure that youth, who are eligible for both NC Reach and ETV, receive funding and services through both programs.
5. Work with county LINKS workers to compliment and coordinate services and funding youth may be receiving through the Foster Care 18 to 21 or KinGAP programs.
 - a. Foster Care 18 to 21 Program: A service provided to young people who are aged out of foster care at the age of 18 where young people can voluntarily sign up to receive foster care services until the age of 21.
 - b. KinGAP Program: The Kinship Foster Care and Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) offers financial assistance and Medicaid for youth who are determined to be in a permanent family setting and unlikely to obtain permanency through reunification or adoption. The child/youth has been placed in the licensed home of the prospective legal guardian for a minimum of six (6) consecutive months. The youth is at least 14 years old OR The child is a younger sibling of a 14+ year old and is placed in the same guardianship arrangement. A Guardianship Assistance Agreement has been signed by both the guardian and the agency prior to guardianship being awarded.

C. Identify Qualified Applicants: The Contractor shall perform the following tasks:

1. After an ETV program application is submitted electronically, the Division confirms that the applicant is eligible to participate in the NC ETV program based on their foster care/adoption dates. The Contractor shall process the application and confirm that the applicant meets the requirements of the NC ETV program (enrolled, attending and in good standing, and under the Cost of Attendance – COA).
2. If an applicant is deemed ineligible, a reason for the decision is entered in the agency's application system. For applicants deemed ineligible, the Contractor shall contact the applicant to determine if they made an error (for example, wrong DOB, used

a different name), to ensure that no eligible youth is denied services. Applicants who are confirmed ineligible will be sent information on scholarships, etc.

3. Ensure that the completed applications include a personal statement, confirmation of enrollment from the institution and financial aid information, and an official transcript if the student previously received ETV funding.

4. In compliance with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), provide the capability of the applicant to provide a digital signature authorizing post-secondary institution to provide the applicants' financial aid information and enrollment and graduation data through the National Student Clearinghouse to both the Contractor and the Division.

5. Contractor shall accept applications from the entirety of the contract performance period to coincide with the academic year – fall, spring, and summer semesters as well as winter and mini-sessions that many post-secondary institutions offer.

6. Host student data, providing the Division Contract Administrator, Independent Living Coordinator (ILC) or other approved administrators with the ability to oversee the statewide program in real-time.

7. Track all application data annually as well as be cohort for historical continuity.

D. Provide Operations and Maintenance Support: The Contractor shall provide an IT solution to enable applicants to submit their application for the NC ETV Program electronically.

1. The Contractor shall operate and maintain a website and a database ("System") for accepting online applications, performing the following tasks:

a. Provide 24x7x365 monitoring of the production environment for unusual behavior, error conditions, and hardware, System, and operating systems' failure, excerpt during planned or unplanned maintenance periods;

b. Ensure the web and database servers are operational and available 24x7x365, and that there is a 99.9% uptime Production availability, with unplanned downtime equal to or less than nine (9) hours annually;

c. Provide ongoing maintenance and support for the System. This includes maintenance, support, hosting, and periodic updates based on new product versions or changes in assessment requirements. Maintain the necessary and existing hardware and software currently supporting the hosting of the System;

- d. Troubleshoot and correct defects and maintain the System's performance as defined in this Contract and maintain compatibility with all other elements in the technical environment to ultimately ensure that the System continues to operate as designed;
- e. Perform routine database analysis, and troubleshoot, review, and upgrade the technical architecture (servers, operating systems, utility software, application software, and SAN storage) as needed to ensure continual compliance/conformance (as applicable) with federal, State, and DHHS architectural, privacy, and security policies and standards;
- f. Host the System's application and database hardware, operating systems, and the Division's Confidential Information at a secure facility;
- g. Perform automated full nightly encrypted backups of all the System data files with full and incremental methodology and maintain the System and database backups;
- h. Perform software and hardware updates/upgrades for the disaster recovery servers and maintain them to store off-site back-ups, as needed;
- i. Maintain security and discovery/recovery protocols in compliance with the Division's approved security plan and disaster recovery plan to ensure the Division's Confidential Information is transmitted and stored securely;
- j. Perform disaster recovery testing at least annually;
- k. Clearly delineate and maintain the development, testing, and production environments and a physical separate of hardware, where necessary for security and enhancement purposes;
- l. Provide a helpdesk support for users by offering 24-hour toll-free telephone number to respond to inquiries about the program; and,
- m. Provide and update all documentation, including but not limited to System and user documentation, training materials, TASD, etc., related to the use and security of the System.

E. Host Division's Confidential Information: The Contractor or its hosting service provider shall host the Division's Confidential Information. The Contractor shall comply with and ensure the following:

1. Database

- a. A breach or compromise to another database on the Contractor's database server must not subject the Division's database/Confidential information to a breach or compromise;
- b. The database server shall contain full redundancy, memory, dual power supply and disks; and,
- c. In the Contractor's virtualized environment, the System storing the Division's Confidential Information shall be partitioned such that the database and the Division's Confidential Information shall be separated and inaccessible to all individuals with no need for access.

2. Hosting

- a. The System stores the Division's Confidential Information. The Contractor and its System shall comply with FERPA, State, and NC DHHS privacy and security regulations, statutes, policies, and standards. The Contractor shall also ensure that its sub-contract with the hosting service provider subjects the sub-contracting parties to the same obligations outlined in this Contract and acknowledges the third-party rights of the Division to the Confidential Information hosted on behalf of the Division. Upon request by the Division, at any time prior to or after execution of this Contract, the sub-contract with the hosting service provider may be reviewed by the Division. Recommendations for changes to any deficiencies in the sub-contract made by the Division will be referred to the Contractor for correction and amendment. The Contractor will be required to provide any other documentation the Division requires to certify the Contractor's compliance with this requirement;
- b. If the Division determines that any services or activities within the scope of this Contract are subject to applicable State and federal statutes and regulations, the Contractor must ensure that the System application is and can be maintained by the Contractor to be in compliance with these legal requirements at no additional cost to the Division;
- c. The hosting service provider's facility will be required to maintain controlled access for its employees and any third parties. Hosting facilities must be FERPA compliant;
- d. The Contractor shall continue to maintain full compliance with the North Carolina Statewide Technical Architecture (STA). The STA consists of a series of domain documents describing objectives, principles and best practices for the development, implementation, and integration of business systems. The STA is located on the following website: <https://it.nc.gov/programs/enterprise-strategy/strategy/business-architecture>.

e. The Contractor will ensure that its platforms conform/comply with federal, State, and DHHS architectural, privacy, or security policies and standards. The Contractor will notify the Division immediately if its platforms fail to conform/comply with federal, State, and DHHS architectural, privacy, or security policies and standards and immediately upgrade its platforms to bring them into compliance with these policies and standards to prevent vulnerability to the Division's Confidential Information at no additional cost to the Division;

f. If a Technical Architecture System Design (TASD) checklist is requested by NC DIT or DHHS, the Contractor agrees to: i. Work with the State to complete NC DIT's TASD for submission to the Division or DHHS and NC DIT approval within thirty (30) Calendar Days after Contract execution. In the TASD the Contractor agrees to identify all infrastructure platforms and options under which the Contractor's product operates ("platforms") and confirms that the software is certified for each infrastructure platform listed. NC DIT and DHHS, at their sole discretion, will determine whether the Contractor's platform complies/conforms (as applicable) with federal, State, or DHHS architectural, privacy, and security policies and standards. If NC DIT or DHHS determines that TASD is required, the Contractor will be unable to host the Division's Confidential Information until the Contractor receives approval of its TASD from DHHS and NC DIT;

ii. Review and evaluate the TASD thirty (30) Calendar Days prior to the start of each new Contract Year to verify whether its platforms have changed, whether its platforms continue to conform/comply with federal, State, or DHHS architectural, privacy, and security policies and standards, and whether any of its platforms may be categorized as "end of life" prior to the start of the following Contract Year. If the Contractor's platforms have changed, the Contractor will immediately notify the Division and update its TASD for review and approval by DHHS and NC DIT at no additional cost to the Division; and,

iii. If, at any time, during the term of the Contract, the Contractor's platforms do not conform/comply with federal, State, or DHHS architectural, privacy, or security policies and standards, the Contractor will notify the Division immediately, update its prior DHHS- and NC DIT-approved version of the TASD, and immediately upgrade its platforms to bring them into compliance with these policies and standards to prevent vulnerability to the Confidential Information. In no event will any Confidential Information be hosted outside the continental limits of the United States.

g. continuous monitoring:

i. The Contractor shall maintain compliance with the State Chief Information Officer's (CIO) Continuous Monitoring Process mandate, requiring that Contractors hosting state-owned data outside of NC DIT's infrastructure environment work with state agencies to implement a risk management program that continuously monitors risk through the performance of assessments, risk analysis, and data inventory.

ii. To comply with this mandate, set forth in N.C.G.S. § 143B-1376 http://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/ByChapter/Chapter_143B.html and based upon NIST 800-137, "Information Security Continuous Monitoring (ICSM) for Federal Information Systems and Organizations", the Contractor shall perform security/risk assessments on its information systems using NIST 800-53 controls to assess its compliance with enterprise security standards as outlined below.

iii. Security Assessment:

a. Contractors providing Infrastructure as a Service, Platform as a Service, and/or Software as a Service for the Division are required to obtain approval from the DHHS Privacy and Security Office to ensure their compliance with statewide security policies.

b. To obtain such approval, the Contractor shall annually provide both a written attestation to its compliance and an industry recognized, third party assessment report such as the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP) certification, SOC 2 Type 2, and ISO 27001. The Division will be required to review these security assessment reports, assess the risk of each vendor, ensure completion of all findings using a Corrective Action Plan (CAP), and provide annual certification of the Contractor's compliance to the State CIO.

iv. The Contractor shall work with the state agency to provide a data inventory of all cloud hosted services, by assisting the Division with completing a Privacy Threshold Analysis (PTA) documenting the data classification and the data fields hosted within the cloud, offsite, or Contractor-hosted environment. The Contractor shall review a Privacy Threshold Analysis (PTA) with the NC DHHS Privacy and Security Office annually and assist with updating the PTA when changes to the Confidential Information being hosted occur.

v. The Contractor shall perform a security/risk assessment that meets the requirements outlined above prior to the execution of the Contract.

F. Adhere to System and Information Security: The Contractor shall comply with and adhere to the following System and Information security requirements:

1. System Security: The System must offer various levels of security, including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. Security controlled access to all the Division's Confidential Information to the System, as well as security level restrictions on access of functions, including inquiry-only functions, to restrict varying levels of data and function.
- b. Not permit Global access to all functions.
- c. Password protection as well as a mechanism within the System to document and record any change to a software module or function.
- d. Restrict access to the System or function within a specific logon.
- e. Not allow access to processing environment storing the Division's data unless the need for access is necessitated for the performance of services under this Contract.
- f. Must store the Division's Confidential Information securely and independently (i.e., not co-mingled with any other state's data); and include procedures for encrypting the Division's Confidential Information, so the Confidential Information will be protected during transmission and at rest.

2. In the protection of the Division's application information and the student record information provided by the college for the purpose of facilitating the students' participation in the NC ETV Program ("Division's Confidential Information"), adhere to and comply with the following information security requirements, which can be found online at:

- a. NC DHHS Privacy Manual and Security Manual, both located online at: <https://policies.ncdhhs.gov/departamental/policies-manuals/section-viii-privacy-and-security/>
- b. NC Statewide Information Security Manual, located online at: <https://it.nc.gov/documents/statewide-policies/statewide-information-security-manual/open>; and,
- c. FERPA, located at: <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/faq/what-ferpa>

3. At a minimum, in accessing, receiving, storing, and processing the Division's Confidential Information the provider must implement and maintain the following privacy and security safeguards:

- a. Maintain the Division's Confidential Information in the strictest confidence and carefully restrict access to the Division's Confidential Information to any other individual, employee, entity, or third party on a need to know or role-based basis, as is reasonably required to accomplish the purpose stated in this Contract;
- b. Refrain from disclosing the Division's Confidential Information to any unauthorized individual or entity, including a Third Party, without the prior written consent of the Division;
- c. Refrain from using Division's Confidential Information other than permitted or required by the Contract, as required by State or Federal Law;
- d. Terminate employee's access privileges to Division's Confidential Information immediately when their employment/assignment has been terminated or their job responsibilities no longer require access to the Division's Confidential Information;
- e. Dispose of paper and equipment containing Division's Confidential Information in a secure manner per NIST Special Publication (SP) 800-88 Revision 1, Guidelines for Media Sanitation;
- f. Implement corrective action to eliminate or negate any harmful effect that is known to the Contractor of use, access, acquisition, or disclosure of Division's Confidential Information by the Contractor in violation of the requirements of the Contract; and
- g. Ensure that its employees agree to the same restrictions and conditions that apply in the Contract to the Contractor with respect to such Division's Confidential information.

4. Maintain all Division's Confidential Information securely in the Contractor's Infrastructure, separate and apart from, and not co-mingled with all other data the Contractor hosts;

5. Secure the System network through monitoring by an Intrusion Detection System (IDS) for unauthorized access. Support access will only be through encrypted sessions and all servers will be firewall protection (IP/SEC);

6. In the event the hosting service provider is unable to continue to host, maintain or process the Division's Confidential Information (default), secure immediate and secure return of all such Division's Confidential Information to the Division. In the event of an

anticipated default, the Contractor will immediately procure temporary and secure parallel hosting until a permanent replacement hosting service provider can be hired, all at no extra cost to the Division.

7. Include language retaining the right and ability to immediately secure and recover the Division's Confidential Information, free of any liens or other claims against such Division's Confidential Information, in the event of a default or a proposed hosting change. The Contractor expressly agrees to indemnify the Division for any costs due to any such hosting change or any efforts to recover, convert, protect and/or secure the Division's Confidential Information. The Division reserves the right, upon repeated major services outages or repeated outages that were not promptly cured and corrected, to seek substitute reporting, storage, SaaS, data recovery and conversion and processing services and hold the Contractor responsible during the remaining term(s) of the Contract for any excess costs, conversion costs and fees over those provide for in this Contract as the Contractor;

8. Remote access to or the storage of Division's Confidential Information from outside the continental United States, including, without limitation, remote access to the Division's Confidential Information by authorized services support staff in identified support centers, is prohibited unless approved in advance by the DHHS Privacy and Security Office;

9. Implement and maintain a strong encryption algorithm that meets industry encryption standard criteria as defined by NIST and FERPA to encrypt all Division Confidential Information while in transit to ensure data confidentiality and security; and

10. Implement and maintain internal data security measures, environmental safeguards, firewalls, access controls, and other security methods utilizing appropriate hardware and software necessary to monitor, maintain, and ensure data integrity in accordance with all applicable federal regulations, state regulations, DHHS privacy and security policies, and local laws.

11. Disaster Recovery Plan: The Contractor will be required to adhere to and perform the following:

- a. Review and update the Division-approved disaster recovery plan with Division within thirty (30) Calendar Days of Contract execution, and thereafter, review the disaster recovery plan, at a minimum, at least once every six (6) months and update the plan as needed, at no additional cost to the Division;
- b. Ensure the Disaster Recovery System (i.e. the System functioning in Disaster Recovery mode) is functional within twenty-four (24) hours of a State-declared disaster and contains the same security and data protections as the non-disaster system;

- c. Ensure all functions are available to the Division in the Disaster Recovery system;
- d. Ensure the disaster recovery plans for the Contractor and any approved subcontractors, business associates and/or agents, are subject to approval of the Division. The disaster recovery plan must meet DHHS and State requirements;
- e. Maintain and update the disaster recovery system to reflect the current version of the System;
- f. Ensure the disaster recovery system "switch-on" is automatic in the event of a State-declared disaster;
- g. In the event a disaster affects the hosting service provider, ensure the off-site hosting provider is subject to the same disaster recovery expectations included in the approved disaster recovery plan and this Contract; and,
- h. Participate in annual disaster recovery testing if requested by the Division. After the conclusion of each disaster recovery test, if items are identified that need to be corrected, the Contractor will deliver an updated disaster recovery plan within ten (10) Business Days after the conclusion of the test. Testing methodology and requirements are established in the approved disaster recovery plan.

12. Security Plan: The Contractor will be required to adhere to and perform the following:

- a. Review and update, if necessary or requested by the Division, the Division-approved security plan within thirty (30) Calendar Days of the Contract execution, and thereafter, review the security plan at least once every six (6) months, and update the plan, as needed, at no additional cost to the Division;
- b. Present any proposed changes to the security plan, security architecture, requirement, or any other proposed changes to any facet of security during the term of this Contract to DHHS for formal review and approval. The DHHS Privacy and Security Office (DHHS PSO) will have the authority to approve the revised security plan on behalf of DHHS. The Contractor will implement any changes to its security plan that are required by the DHHS PSO;
- c. Review the security plan for the Contractor and any approved subcontractors, business associates and/or agents at least once every six (6) months and update it as needed; and,
- d. Maintain its product or service according to any new or changing federal, State or DHHS security requirements.

13. Data Retention: The Contractor will be required to adhere to and perform the following:

- a. Comply with all federal and NCDHHS data retention requirements for the Division's Confidential Information. If any litigation, claim, negotiation, audit, disallowance action, or other action involving this contract has been started before expiration of the retention period described above, the Contractor must retain these records until completion of the action and resolution of all issues which arise from it, or until the end of the retention period described above, whichever is later;
- b. Retain the full revision history of all operational Division's Confidential Information collected, stored, and maintained by the System;
- c. Not destroy, purge, or dispose of the Division's Confidential Information without the express written consent of the Division. Requests to destroy, purge, or dispose records must be sent in writing to the Contractor by the Division; and,
- d. Follow all other regulations of the NIST Special Publication (SP) 800-88 Revision 1, Guideline for Media Sanitation found at <https://www.nist.gov/publications/nist-special-publication-800-88-revision-1-guidelines-media-sanitization> when destroying, purging, or disposing of the Division's Confidential Information.

14. Transition in the Event of Contract Expiration or Termination: For ninety (90) Business Days either prior to the expiration date of this Contract, or upon notice of termination of this Contract ("Termination Period"), provide the Division, upon written request, with transition assistance. The Contractor's transition assistance will help facilitate uninterrupted flow of services, facilitate the orderly transfer of such services to the Division or its designees, and ensure the secure return of all Division's Confidential Information to the Division. Such transition assistance will be governed by the terms or conditions that do not reasonably apply to such transition assistance.

The Contractor shall perform the following tasks during the Transition Period:

- a. In the event transition assistance becomes necessary, the parties will meet to discuss transition, including data retention expectations, turnover procedures, data conversion, and migration procedures, if applicable; data dictionaries for all tables/data bases; transition meeting schedule; data formatting, extraction, and transition; and any risks, barriers, assumptions, and mitigation strategies for transition;
- b. During the Transition Period, the Contractor shall continue to provide services to the Division without cessation or alteration. The Transition Period may be

modified as agreed upon in writing by the parties in a Contract amendment, including adding additional transition services;

c. The Contractor acknowledges and agrees that any Division's Confidential Information provided by or for the Division remains the property of the Division and may not be marketed or sold by the Contractor without the express written consent of the Division at any time, either during the term of this Contract, or during the retention period, if any, while the Contractor still stores the Division's Confidential Information after the Contract has terminated or expired;

d. During the Transition Period, the Contractor will extract and/or transition to the Division a full backup of all Division's Confidential Information collected, stored, and maintained by the System in an agreed upon usable format. The Division's Confidential Information will be delivered to the Division no later than sixty (60) Calendar Days after the start of the Transition Period. At the request of the Division, the Contractor will be required to provide technical support for at least thirty (30) Calendar Days after delivering the Division's Confidential Information to the Division for the purpose of assuring the format and contents of the Division's Confidential Information are accurate and meet the needs of the Division. The Division's Confidential Information must be organized by Entity Relationship Diagram (ERD) and accompanied by the following documentation:

- i. Diagram of all the System tables and data bases;
- ii. Data dictionaries for all tables/data bases; and,
- iii. Related reference files and coding guides.

e. Upon receiving written notice from the Division, the Contractor will destroy or purge any Division's Confidential Information provided by or for the Division during the Contract term, from all Contractor databases, electronic files, or paper files (including backups). This destruction or purge should only occur following both the Contractor's receipt of the Division's written request and the Division's confirmation that the Division's Confidential Information has been delivered and received in a usable, archivable format. When the Division directs the Contractor to destroy or purge all Division's Confidential Information within its and its hosting provider's infrastructure and possession, in electronic or paper form, the Contractor and the hosting service provider will be required to certify in writing within thirty (30) Calendar Days of the Contractor receiving such written notice that all Division's Confidential Information referenced above has been destroyed or purged.

f. The Contractor will be required to ensure that its hosting service provider, if any, also complies with the Transition Period obligations in this section.

g. Until the Contractor has certified the completion of the data destruction or purge, the Contractor will continue to comply with all data security sections within this Contract even after the Contract has terminated or expired.

G. Award ETV Funding: The Contractor shall perform the following tasks:

1. For eligible applicants enrolled in a Title IV post-secondary institution:
 - a. Ensure that eligible applicants, who receive ETV funding, are enrolled, and in good standing at a Title IV post-secondary institution, and have unmet need not exceed the Cost of Attendance (COA);
 - b. Prior to awarding ETV funds, confirm each student's enrollment at their institution, their COA, and their unmet need for the current semester. Each semester, review the student's financial aid information entered directly into the Contractor's System by the public institution, providing the NC ETV program with accurate student financial aid information – tuition and fees, full-time or part-time enrollment (attempted number of credits), the cost of room and board (if living on campus), and the amount of scholarship and grant funding students are receiving;
 - c. Work directly with students to help prevent them from accepting unnecessary or excessive student loans;
 - d. Ensure that no eligible student receives more than \$5,000 in an academic year, and prevent ineligible students from receiving funding;
 - e. Monitor funds daily, both available and allocated, to be responsive to students' needs in real-time and provide the Division with accurate fiscal expenditure reports.

H. Award ETV Funding throughout the Academic Year: The Contractor shall perform the following tasks:

1. Ensure the only youth are allocated funding in compliance with the NC ETV Program Plan;
2. Confirm via the Department of Education's Federal School Code list that post-secondary institutions identified by eligible applicants are Title IV schools;
3. Ensure funding is allocated, as per the Higher Education Act, which defines the expenses and categories designated as Cost of Attendance;

4. Issue an electronic award letter to students and financial aid offices, confirming the amount and allocation of ETV funding for the semester along with a distribution schedule. The award letters shall be stored electronically in each student's record, and the student or the Division shall be able to review the award letter at any time;
5. Issue ETV funds directly to the post-secondary institution for the cost of tuition and fees, books, and housing;
6. Send funding directly to the student for school-related expenses; as per COA may be disbursed throughout the semester with a budget plan, preventing students from receiving a single large check;
7. Ensure ETV funds are awarded to students who demonstrate satisfactory progress towards earning a degree or credential, and who remain in good standing with their school. In addition to reviewing a student's GPA, review the transcript to determine if the student has a pattern of dropping classes or earning D/F grades;
8. At the discretion of the Contractor and the Division, ETV funds may be awarded for one semester to a student who is struggling academically or who faced extenuating circumstances during the previous semester. During this 'probation semester,' the Contractor will attempt to provide appropriate support and guidance to help the student succeed or make a wise decision that leads to success. At no time will suspending ETV funding be a punitive decision; the goal shall be to help the student understand their options and responsibilities and develop achievable goals;
9. Help students understand the funding they receive, including non-cash assistance, the Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant FSEOG, work-study, state grants, stipends, scholarships, and other sources of support. By helping students put these funds together and develop a realistic budget, they can successfully earn a credential and enter the workforce without incurring substantial debt;
10. Coordinate the federally funded ETV program funding with NC Reach and state-funded college grant programs;
11. Work closely with county LINKS workers to assure that students have the funding needed to attend school without excessive student loan borrowing; and,
12. Have individualized budget conversations with students to enable staff to appropriately allocate ETV funding and increase students' financial literacy.

I. Monitor and Support Student Progress: The Contractor shall perform the following tasks:

1. Collect and record data from students' fall, spring, and summer transcripts;
 - a. Transcript documentation is a manual process because the format varies widely by institution; and,
 - b. Information about classes, including remedial courses, withdrawals, grades, credits attempted, credits earned, and semester and cumulative GPA are recorded and accrue from year-to-year in students' records.
2. Using a distance model, combining phone calls, email, and text messages to communicate with on-the-go, busy students;
3. At a minimum, conduct monthly phone meetings with each student to discuss progress and problems, academic challenges, information gaps, and to reinforce attitudes and behaviors of successful students;
4. Send students text messages throughout the month/semester and as a supplement to phone calls and emails;
5. Use appointment scheduling software to schedule phone meetings with students. Students will be sent a link to the meeting. This time-management tool helps students learn to proactively plan their day and schedule calls at mutually convenient times and facilitates more frequent and productive calls because the coordinator has time to plan the conversation;
6. Contact applicants and students using text messaging, Facebook and secondary contacts listed in their application;
7. Notify the Division and the LINKS worker immediately, if the Contractor discovers that students in the custody of DSS identify a crisis or barriers to post-secondary success such as homelessness, serious illness or injury, or similarly time-sensitive issues;
8. At no cost to the Division, ETV recipients are sent a Valentine's Day care packages in February containing themed gift items;
9. Work with state, county, and private agencies that can further students' academic goals and provide personal support and enrichment opportunities;
10. At times, information obtained through ongoing communication with students will highlights a need for more intensive supports - including those related to academics, health, or mental health:

- a. For students in DSS custody, direct students to speak to their social workers; and,
- b. For students who have aged out, direct students to campus and community resources as these issues are beyond the scope of the NC ETV program.

IV. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The Contractor shall:

1. Document the number of recipients assisted by the NC ETV program monthly.
2. Document the number of recipients who are retained by the NC ETV program monthly (65% retention cumulative for the year).
3. Document the number and percentage of recipients graduating or successfully completing their academic or vocational program.
4. Demonstrate at least 85% participating in annual satisfaction survey are satisfied with the NC ETV program; and,

V. PERFORMANCE MONITORING / QUALITY ASSURANCE PLAN

1. The Division shall monitor the Contractor according to the NC DHHS/NC DSS Sub-Recipient Monitoring Plan, which may be accessed at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/county-staff-information/monitoring> and with the Code of Federal Regulations (CRF) Title 2 Part 200 specifying federal areas of compliance: https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200_main_02.tpl
Program Compliance Supplement: <https://www.nctreasurer.com/divisions/state-and-local-government-finance/lgc/local-fiscal-management/annual-audit/compliance-supplements-and-resources/state-compliance-supplements>
2. In addition, the following attachments shall be used to monitor the Contractor:
 - a. Organizational Chart.
 - b. Board Member Profile; and,
 - c. Job Descriptions
3. The Contractor shall submit the following reports to the Division at the following intervals:

a. Monthly

i. DSS-1571 III Administrative Costs Report with General Ledger by the 10th of each month, even if no costs are incurred.

ii. A monthly report including the recipients' name, disbursement amount, purpose of funding (i.e. for tuition, living expenses, housing, etc.), a list of funding allocated per county and retention information

b. Quarterly

i. Completed Performance Status Report, submitting the first quarter report no later than 10/15/2025; the second quarter report no later than 1/15/2026; the third quarter report no later than 4/15/2026; and the fourth quarter report no later than 7/31/2026.

c. After Each Semester

i. Provide a status report on the number of applicants, students and recipients and a listing of the colleges and the amount allocated to students ETV recipients.

d. Annually

i. Submit a final report to the Division Contract Administrator no later than August 31st which includes:

1. Total number of applicants
2. Number of funded students
3. Number and reasons applicants are ineligible
4. Number of returning students
5. Number of new students
6. Students receiving both ETV and NC Reach
7. Students only receiving ETV
8. Demographics such as:
 - a. Gender
 - b. Race/Ethnicity
 - c. Parenting Status
 - d. Current residence. Education level of students/year in school
 - f. Student enrollment status
 - g. Student employment status
9. School information, such as:
 - a. Type of school students attended
 - b. NC ETV funded institutions
10. Summary of expenditures and funding by county
11. Total ETV funding awarded to North Carolina youth

12. Average funding per youth
13. ETV retention and graduation rates
14. Student progress and achievements, including information about number of students who have made satisfactory progress during the academic year
 - a. The submission date of August 31st allows for inclusion of transcript information.
 - b. Deliverables shall be monitored by site visits and required reports. The Contractor agrees to participate in periodic site visits as needed (minimum of one per year) as determined by the Division Contract Administrator.

NC Reach:

The agency shall do the following:

1. Educate stakeholders (potential NC Reach applicants, foster/adoptive parents, secondary and postsecondary education staff, and youth-serving agencies/organizations) on the NC Reach program, its benefits, and how to access it. Records will be kept:

- a. The number and type of events/presentations during which the agency educates the community on the NC Reach program;
 - b. The number of University of North Carolina and NC community college campuses visited by the agency's staff, and the number sent promotional materials;
 - c. The number of NC colleges trained to use the portal, including ongoing outreach and training current and new financial aid officers, data management, and identifying mistakes and incomplete data entry by colleges; and,
 - d. The rapid coordination and ongoing communication with colleges to reduce or eliminate student loan disbursements and prevent schools from over-awarding funding which would result in students' owing the college money.
2. Proactively increase NC Reach participants' understanding that economic security can be achieved by pursuing multiple pathways, including career and technical training. The goal is to increase their awareness of academic majors, not duplicate that information.
- a. The agency will have an interactive website during the academic year. It should be an interactive website designed to improve student advising

through the use of labor market data and self-evaluations to identify strengths, aptitude and circumstantial needs and goals;

- b. The agency will provide an online tool on their website for NC Reach case managers, adult advisors and supporters, and young people. A virtual career advisor will help them align their goals with work credentials leading to more post-secondary success and increased self-determination and autonomy;
 - c. The online tool on the agency's website will help young people understand what employers expect from an applicant and employee. Having a degree is not enough, most employers rely on tangible experiences such as internships, paid employment, meaningful volunteer work and self-directed learning to demonstrate hard and soft skills;
 - d. Establishing a bridge between starting post-secondary and earning a credential is vital because NC Reach recipients will need to continually adapt to a changing economy. Young people must be aware of how rapid changes in automation, artificial intelligence and the global economy impact the workforce and society. Our goal is to help students recognize that now, with the state's economic investment, that they have the opportunity to define their own future.
3. Promote retention and progress toward degree completion of NC Reach participants as evidenced by at least 65% of eligible students enrolling in subsequent semesters. The agency will:
- a. Provide case management support to students and document regular contact and supportive services provided to each student;
 - b. Work with each student to increase their utilization of on-campus resources to help them academically progress and socially mature;
 - c. Proactively coach students to understand the NC Reach GPA requirements and the negative consequences associated with low academic achievement;
 - d. Attempt to actively engage students at risk of losing their eligibility (those in remedial course work, with a GPA lower than 2.0, parenting students and those identified by LINKS workers in planning and decision making that resonates with them);
 - e. Record end-of-term transcripts and encourage students to review their academic records on a regular basis for accuracy and completeness; and,

- f. Track the number of communications with students via phone calls, emails, and text messages.
- 4. Ensure that 100% of student funding from all sources is considered to meet the Cost of Attendance (COA) which includes tuition, fees, etc. as well as stable housing and reliable transportation. The agency shall:
 - a. Make NC Reach funding allocations within five days of having completed information in the school portal;
 - b. Export student allocations weekly to NCSEAA, which is responsible for the transfer of funding to colleges, on a weekly basis;
 - c. Continually communicate with financial aid offices to monitor that they are returning unused funds to NCSEAA, and when informed that funding has been returned, notify NC DHHS and NCSEAA so adjustments can be made to the fund balance;
 - d. Throughout the semester, coordinate NC Reach funding with college financial aid officers to address issues that may affect a student's financial aid award;
 - e. Work with LINKS/counties to prevent the duplication of funding for specific expenses;
 - f. Prioritize money management education and assist students each semester to develop a realistic budget that includes all funds and assistance which may change throughout the year;
 - g. Within 30 days of students being approved for funding, ensure that they have housing during school breaks;
 - h. Work with students who are not receiving Voluntary Placement Assistance (VPA) through the NC Foster Care 18 to 21 Program, to prevent homelessness by putting a realistic budget in place and continually helping them develop money management skills; and,
 - i. As needed, on a case-by-case basis facilitate emergency funding for students in a timely manner that allows the emergency to be resolved.
- 5. Demonstrate at least 85% of NC Reach students are either highly satisfied or satisfied with services. The agency shall:
 - a. Provide timely and comprehensive information, services and support through ongoing contact with students; and

- b. Address student needs, issues or complaints immediately upon notification. Routine matters within our control will be resolved within four business days; however more time may be required depending upon the complexity of the need, issue or complaint. The agency will coordinate with LINKS staff and the Independent Living Coordinator to resolve student issues when necessary. The agency will document efforts to coordinate with other agencies/stakeholders.
 - c. NC Reach funds are disbursed by NCSEAA through the college financial aid office; the time it takes colleges to issue students refund checks varies greatly, which can be financially problematic for students and is a cause of frustration that the agency cannot resolve.
 - d. The agency will administer an annual satisfaction survey to NC Reach students and report results to NC DSS Contract Administrator in the year-end report.
- 6. Demonstrate that 100% of NC Reach caseworkers are skilled and trained as evidenced by their degrees in social work or psychology and experience with the foster care population. The agency will:
 - a. Have on record job descriptions and resumes for each NC Reach caseworker;
 - b. Submit job descriptions and resumes to the NC DHHS Contract Administrator;
 - c. Balance caseloads between NC Reach caseworkers to ensure that loads are commensurate with their ability to support the NC Reach program and student needs; and,
 - d. Conduct performance evaluations on NC Reach caseworkers semi-annually to reflect accomplishments of program goals and objectives.
- 7. Actively work with 60% of students to develop a proactive Aim Higher, Student Success plan with the goal of helping youth develop the self-efficacy necessary to progress academically and prepare for challenges in the workplace. The other 40% may have a parent or advisor who is actively engaged in their development, or they may not be interested or ready to develop a plan. The agency will:
 - a. Offer all students materials and interactive tools to help them at every stage of their education to develop realistic plans that may include skill-building volunteer work, internships, and entry level employment;

- b. Identify a designated advisor at college career centers who can work with students to help them be competitive applicants for resume-building opportunities and employment; and,
 - c. Work with students to help them recognize the transferable skills and knowledge they can gain through extracurricular activities.
- 8. Address 100% of NC Reach students' school, transitional and crisis needs through comprehensive case management support. The agency's case workers will:
 - a. Conduct entry interviews with students to determine needs and follow up with appropriate services and document outcomes of the interviews;
 - b. Offer information, guidance and referrals to students and document the student support; and,
 - c. Be accessible to NC Reach students via an established 24-hour, toll-free telephone number that students can use to get help in an emergency. Caseworkers will be accessible via cell phones Monday thru Friday, and rotate weekend and holiday coverage to provide emergency student support. Caseworkers will document issues and the nature of the contacts.
- 9. Meet with 75% of NC Reach students who attend classes on campus (not virtual-only) at a minimum of one time per semester to fully support their individual needs. The required meeting will be scheduled early in the semester and convenient for the student. The goal for each student's meeting will depend on their personal circumstances; these meetings are a cornerstone for establishing a trusting and positive relationship that will deepen throughout the semesters and years with consistent phone calls, text messaging, written communication and on-campus meetings.

A face-to-face meeting each semester will help students connect at a deeper level with a case manager which may facilitate more openness and candor. The earlier we know students' concerns and challenges the more options and support can be offered. In the event a student cannot or will meet on campus, a virtual meeting is scheduled via Zoom, Teams or FaceTime. Students who do not fulfill this requirement may have their funding put on hold, reduced, or cancelled. Requiring a meeting each semester that provides needed support to students receiving a state-funded grant is proactive planning; it is neither punitive nor an unreasonable requirement.

Using professional discretion, the agency case managers will identify students who can be exempt from the in-person requirement because they are not at risk academically, financially or emotionally and they are regularly in phone contact with their case manager.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The agency has developed the following program goals/performance requirements for managing NC Reach:

- 1) Improve the academic and personal outcomes of students participating in the NC Reach Program through academic and social support.** NC Reach caseworkers interact with students on an ongoing basis to identify needs, help youth plan ahead, and refer participants to academic and personal resources to enhance their potential for success.
- 2) Promote retention of NC Reach adopted and aged-out-of-foster-care youth who attend public community colleges and universities throughout the state.** Ongoing personal contact, case management support and Aim Higher, Student Success Program assistance will enhance student retention.
- 3) Braid together all funding: ETV, Pell Grants, state grants, scholarships, and housing assistance to prevent duplication of benefits while ensuring that they have the financial resources to attend college.** NC Reach works closely with the NC ETV coordinator, with college/university financial aid office personnel and county Links workers (VPA) to ensure that the combined funding available to youth meets the needs of students. NC Reach staff has and will continue to meet with school financial aid directors to provide information on NC Reach policies and procedures and clarify and resolve individual student issues.
- 4) Support the academic and personal development of NC Reach students through the agency's case management to help students become engaged learners who understand the intersection between postsecondary education and training, concrete goal planning, daily life management and career choices.** Strategies include early identification of students who are experiencing academic difficulty and referring them to local education support resources, school learning centers, and faculty advisors. The agency shall determine whether they have stable housing, reliable transportation and financial resources for food and basic living expenses. Students are offered ongoing, consistent coaching and training to develop skills in financial literacy and budgeting, time management, and other critical life skills.
- 5) Maintain a toll-free telephone number to respond to inquiries about the program.**
- 6) Maintain a website and disseminate brochures and flyers statewide.**
- 7) Increase and ensure awareness of the NC Reach program among eligible foster youth, former foster youth adopted out of care after the age of 12, adoptive parents, foster families, social workers/caseworkers/LINKS workers, North Carolina state university and community college financial aid staffs, and other program stakeholders.** The agency will provide training and participate in at least 30 events throughout the state.

8) Ensure NC Reach is managed in accordance with governing laws, regulations and standards of good practice. The agency will measure and record collaboration and communication with North Carolina Health and Human Services, NCSEAA, school financial aid directors and cashiers, and maintains a robust data system to collect, store and report on student progress and funding allocations. Good program management and comprehensive student support will be daily components of the agency's oversight of NC Reach.

Performance Monitoring/Quality Assurance Plan

The agency shall submit:

Monthly:

DSS-1571 III Administrative Cost Report, by the 10th of each month. Agencies with subcontract(s) must include monthly 1571 Reports (s) completed by the subcontractor(s). DSS-1571 Reports(s) must be submitted monthly even if no costs are incurred.

Quarterly:

The agency shall submit quarterly Performance Status Monitoring reports.

Annually:

A report summarizing expenditures, student progress and achievements, to the NC Health and Human Services Contract Administrator annually by August 31; this date allows for the inclusion of transcript information. Prior to this date, a sufficient number of transcripts will not have been submitted.

In addition, the following attachments shall be used to monitor the Contractor:

1. Organizational Chart
2. Job Descriptions
3. DSS 6844 Budget and Budget Narrative

NC DHHS shall monitor the Contractor according to the NCDHHS/NCDSS Subrecipient Monitoring Plan which includes compliance with the Federal Office of Management and Budget Circular A-133. The NCDHHS/NCDSS Subrecipient Monitoring Plan may be accessed at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/county-staff-information/monitoring>.

Deliverables shall be monitored by site visits and required reports. The agency will agree to participate in periodic site visits as needed (with a minimum of one per year) as determined by the NC DHHS Contract Administrator. If the agency is deemed out of compliance, program staff shall provide technical assistance, and funds may be withheld until the agency is back in compliance with deliverables. If technical assistance does not prove beneficial, the contract may then be terminated.

Both ETV and NC Reach services are provided in all 100 counties of North Carolina.

