



NC Community Colleges  
Hope • Opportunity • Jobs

Dr. R. Scott Ralls, President

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **North Carolina Community College System Receives \$1.6 Million Grant from Jobs for the Future's Accelerating Opportunity Initiative**

#### ***Award will Support Efforts to Provide Adults with Skills Needed for Today's Jobs***

RALEIGH – Helping adults in North Carolina earn the credentials and skills they need to succeed in family-sustaining jobs is a key to fueling the economy and boosting employment. Jobs for the Future (JFF) announced that the North Carolina Community College System has been awarded a \$1.6 million grant to support efforts to ensure more workers have the skills they need through innovative adult education that provides a valuable credential. The three-year grants are part of [Accelerating Opportunity: A Breaking Through Initiative](#), supported by a strategic partnership of five of the nation's leading philanthropies.

Nationally, over 26 million adults lack a high school diploma. While just over 2.5 million of these individuals are enrolled in adult basic education programs, many leave after a semester or two, and only 3 percent actually earn a postsecondary credential. In North Carolina alone there are over one million adults with low literacy and it is predicted that, by 2018, 59 percent of all jobs in the state will require workers with some form of postsecondary credentials. This will only exacerbate the current difficulty N.C. employers report in finding qualified workers who can fill skilled positions.

“In order to be competitive not just with other states, but with other countries, it's imperative that North Carolina's workforce have the skills necessary to meet employers' needs,” says Dr. Scott Ralls, N.C. Community College System President. “This grant will provide the foundation to allow our community colleges to implement seamless education and training programs, allowing adult learners to attain the education and skills they need and enter the workforce at a much faster pace.”

Accelerating Opportunity seeks to change the way adult basic education is delivered by putting adult students on track to earn a postsecondary credential so they can seize the opportunity to earn family-sustaining wages and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

The N.C. Community College System Office will share the \$1.6 million grant with eight participating community colleges: Blue Ridge Community College, Central Piedmont Community College, College of The Albemarle, Davidson County Community College, Richmond Community College, South Piedmont Community College and Wake Technical Community College, with Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute and Wilkes Community College working as a consortium. Over the next three years, the colleges, in partnership with the System Office, will implement structured pathways for basic skills students to dual enroll in certificate and workforce training programs.

"In order to ensure that more workers have the skills they need for today's good jobs, a change is needed in the way adult basic education is structured and delivered at the state and institutional levels in this country," says JFF President and CEO Marlene B. Seltzer. "With the support of our funders, partners and participating states, we will focus on redesigning these programs to significantly increase the number of adults obtaining credentials that lead to family-sustaining jobs and long-lasting career opportunities."

North Carolina was one of eleven states awarded a \$200,000 design grant in August to support efforts to redesign adult basic education and postsecondary programs. After the design stage, the N.C. Community College System was eligible to compete for the implementation grant. Educational pathways to higher skills, credentials, and employment will be rigorously tested and independently evaluated. This evidence will be provided to philanthropy, labor, employers, adult education planners and other stakeholders in North Carolina and around the country to help them provide adult education programs that lead to postsecondary credentials with value in today's workforce.

Accelerating Opportunity is informed by JFF's *Breaking Through* initiative, which has promoted the support of 41 community colleges in 22 states, including North Carolina, to improve career pathways and postsecondary education for low-skilled adults.

"Accelerating Opportunity is expanding the professional horizons of Americans across the country – regardless of age or background – by helping them earn credentials and learn skills that have real value to employers," says Maria Flynn, JFF vice president, Building Economic Opportunity. "Accelerating Opportunity meets workers where they are regardless of skill level or language proficiency, preparing them for today's labor market by helping to develop foundational skills that create better opportunities for employment."

Accelerating Opportunity: A Breaking Through Initiative is a multi-state effort managed by Jobs for the Future that promotes improved academic access and economic opportunity for low-skilled adults. This effort seeks to reform adult basic education and postsecondary systems by integrating basic skills with occupational training and adequate institutional support for adult learners, ensuring they receive the postsecondary credentials needed to succeed in high-skilled jobs and break the cycle of poverty in their communities. Accelerating Opportunity is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and the Open Society Foundations. For program and implementation expertise, Jobs for the Future (JFF) has engaged the National Council on Workforce Education, National College Transition Network and the Washington State Board of Community & Technical Colleges as partners.

For more information, visit [www.acceleratingopportunity.org](http://www.acceleratingopportunity.org).

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