



# Business Strategies to Manage Talent Pool Challenges

## North Carolina's Existing Talent Pool

Like other states, North Carolina is experiencing a tight labor market, meaning there are relatively few jobseekers per job opening. This situation is generally advantageous for jobseekers but presents hiring challenges for employers.

As of May 2021, there was only 1.0 jobseeker per job opening in NC, representing by far the most challenging hiring environment in a generation. Tight labor markets are nothing new, but the pandemic and the improving economy have added additional challenges. Concerns regarding health care or lack of child and/or senior care are holding people back from returning to work, while job openings are at a record high as federal stimulus has propped up consumer demand and driven a rapid recovery in business activity.

Low birthrates, low rates of immigration and the retirement of many Baby Boom generation workers will likely keep the labor rates tight for the foreseeable future. To address this challenge, businesses should consider strategies to expand potential talent pools and explore ways to retain talent in order to remain competitive.

## Talent Pool Diversification Strategies

While North Carolina has a diverse and highly skilled workforce, there are opportunities to expand the labor pool into traditionally untapped or underserved populations.

### ***Veterans and Transitioning Military Personnel***

Every year, 78,000 service members will transition out of the military through NC's Department of Defense installations, adding strength to the 778,000 veterans already living in North Carolina. Hiring Veterans may also qualify employers for [Work Opportunity Tax Credits](#).

- [NC4ME](#)  
A public-private partnership, North Carolina For Military Employment (NC4ME) educates business leaders on the value of hiring veterans, transitioning service-members and military spouses, and shows small businesses and human resources professionals how to hire military personnel. Businesses can connect with military talent by participating in Military Employment Summits and hiring events.
- [NCWorks Veterans Portal](#)  
Employers can post open positions at NCWorks.gov and designate jobs as Veteran-friendly to make them easier for Veterans to find, and they can utilize searchable Candidate Listings, for which Veterans have 24-hour priority. Local Veterans Employment Representatives at NCWorks Career Centers can also help employers hire veterans.

### ***Former Offenders/Justice-Involved***

Approximately 77 million Americans, or 1 in 3 adults, have a criminal record. Having a criminal record can make it difficult, or even impossible, for an individual to find work. [Federal Bonding](#) provides free individual fidelity bonds to employers when they hire "at risk" individuals, who traditionally have had difficulty finding meaningful employment. The coverage protects the employer

from acts of dishonesty such as theft, larceny or embezzlement. Hiring former offenders may also qualify employers for [Work Opportunity Tax Credits](#).

- **Work Release Program**  
Participation in the Work Release Program reduces the chance that an offender will be arrested again. The program is available at the majority of minimum-security state prisons. Employers must pay at least minimum wage, and the job plan and job site must be reviewed and approved by prison managers. The employer must also receive an orientation, agree to the rules of the program and have Worker's Compensation insurance. Employers should contact the [minimum-security prison](#) nearest their location for additional details.
- **Certificate of Relief**  
The North Carolina Certificate of Relief Act provides judges expanded discretion to reduce civil barriers to employment and other essential resources. Unlike an expunction, a certificate of relief does not obscure or change the criminal record itself. Instead, a certificate addresses a broad range of civil disabilities imposed by the state of North Carolina and shields employers, landlords, and other decision-makers from the risk of certain types of negligence liability. These protections are intended to make it more likely that employers will hire a certificate holder, while restoring opportunities for individuals to be productive, law-abiding citizens.

### **Workers with Disabilities**

- The state [Vocational Rehabilitation program](#) works with employers to provide services and resources related to hiring job seekers with disabilities. These include: recruitment; onboarding; retention; technology solutions; workplace accessibility; disability awareness training; financial incentives; and talent pipeline development.
- Hiring an individual referred by Vocational Rehabilitation, or a disabled veteran, may also qualify employers for [Work Opportunity Tax Credits](#).

### **Neurodiverse Candidates**

- Neurodiverse people — which includes those on the autism spectrum — are often highly valuable as employees, but require certain workplace accommodations. [Linking North Carolina with Innovative Talent \(LiNC-IT\)](#), a public-private partnership, is an internship program for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

### **Foreign Labor**

- The U.S. Department of Labor offers various programs to enable employers to hire foreign workers when they are unable to fill those high-demand jobs with U.S. workers. NCWorks is here to help North Carolina businesses with that process (including a special process for agricultural workers). State workforce professionals can help an employer understand the hiring regulations and requirements for listing [Foreign Labor Certification](#) (FLC) job orders, and can help with filling out the necessary forms.

### **Youth and Senior Workers**

- Younger workers can bring a fresh perspective and a willingness to learn to any business. NCWorks youth services, also known as "NextGen," programs help young people prepare for their careers, while partnering with businesses to provide work-based learning, such as paid Work Experience opportunities. This has the benefit of helping a company "try out" talent and build a pipeline of future workers. Local [Workforce Development Boards](#) oversee these local youth services.

- Older workers can bring to a business their sound judgment, experience, commitment to quality, customer service, integrity and the ability to mentor younger employees. The state's [Senior Community Service Employment Program](#) places individuals 55 and older who are economically disadvantaged into part-time community service assignments while helping them transition into unsubsidized employment. A federal grant pays the workers' wages during the limited time they are in the program; however, only certain nonprofit employers are eligible to participate.

## **Talent Retention Strategies**

It is more efficient to retain a quality employee than to recruit, train and orient a replacement employee of the same quality.

- [Customized Training](#)  
The NC Community Colleges' Customized Training Program provides education, training and support services for new, expanding and existing business and industry in North Carolina through its network of 58 community colleges, serving all 100 counties of the state. The training program seeks to foster and support three key aspects of a company's well-being, including job growth, technology investment and productivity enhancement.
- [ApprenticeshipNC](#)  
The state's apprenticeship program is uniquely advantageous for participating companies. Using a time-honored model for industrial training, employers mentor entry-level employees in company-specific skills. Through apprenticeship, a company more effectively controls its human resource pipeline and reduces turnover. Working on an employer-determined schedule, apprentices will be trained both in the classroom and on the job. To establish an apprenticeship program, a company works with the North Carolina Community College System to develop an approved written agreement. Potential employees seeking an apprenticeship may also qualify the employer for NCWorks On-the-Job Training grants.
- [NCWorks Incumbent Worker Training Grants](#)  
The Incumbent Worker Training Grant reimburses companies for the cost of training current workers (who have worked for the business consistently for at least six months), helping to improve both the skills of employees and the company's competitiveness. Upskilling can help a business retain talent, while helping employees advance in their careers. Grants can cover a variety of eligible training-related expenses.

## **Workplace Policies**

Family-friendly workplaces have a competitive advantage: They attract and retain more top talent, and their employees are more productive and more committed. Plus, family-friendly employers benefit from reduced employee health care costs, a healthier work environment, and fewer employee absences. Download Family Forward NC's [Workplace Guide](#) for policies related to paid leave, flexible scheduling, health benefits, child care and other support.

## **Other Policy Considerations**

- Consider a lesser level of drug testing, including not testing for cannabis
- Consider updating job descriptions with more modern, appealing language
- Consider enhancing employee engagement and company culture
- Consider raising minimum wages, where feasible

**For more information about talent pool strategies, contact your local [NCWorks Career Center](#).**

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