

## GEER II

State policymakers have much more leeway when it comes to leveraging GEER and GEER II funding to support postsecondary attainment efforts. This section contains best practice examples of how other states have used GEER funding in this way – as well as promising policy ideas that could be pursued with this latest round of funding.

### *Investing in Workforce Training for Displaced Workers*

#### **Overview and Connection to Attainment**

We know from the record high unemployment rates of the last 10 months that many North Carolinians lost jobs as a result of the pandemic, which normally causes enrollment at community colleges to increase as people seek to re- or up-skill and reenter the workforce. However, fall 2020 enrollment at North Carolina community colleges fell by four percent despite the huge increase in unemployment – an anomaly in the trend. We know that there are displaced workers in North Carolina, but they haven't yet turned to the traditional paths of workforce training programs.

Workforce training programs – including short-term certificate and credential programs – will be a major component of statewide progress toward the myFutureNC postsecondary attainment goal. If state leaders are able to connect workers displaced by the pandemic with high-quality opportunities, the state could see a surge in certificate attainment.

#### **Potential Uses of Funds**

State leaders could use GEER II funding for the following purposes related to workforce training:

#### **04. Expand tuition assistance for students who enroll in high-quality workforce training programs.**

- a. GEER II funding could be allocated to eligible students who enroll in certificate programs that are aligned with regional workforce needs.
  - i. This funding use would be an expansion of the \$15 million that Governor Cooper allocated from the GEER funding to the NC Community College system for workforce training tuition assistance.
- b. There are a number of considerations for program design, such as:
  - i. Whether the program is first-dollar (awards made regardless of other aid) or last-dollar (awards only made after other aid sources are exhausted).
  - ii. Which individuals are eligible (for example, high school seniors and/or adult learners).
  - iii. What the requirements are to stay eligible (progress toward degree, academic standing, etc.).
  - iv. What the Advisory Council, or similar mechanism, is that will determine which programs are aligned with workforce needs, and can existing groups and efforts be leveraged.
- c. The structure used to disburse GEER II funding through this scholarship program could be continued in future years with additional investment from the state legislature or other sources.

#### **05. Establish a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) framework to provide credit that can be used toward short-term certificate programs.**

- a. GEER II funding could be used to establish and support a PLA framework that would give adult learners a head start on completing workforce training programs.
- b. The funding would support a number of efforts, including:
  - i. Mapping the competencies taught by specific courses in workforce training programs (with appropriate faculty and subject expert input).
  - ii. Developing guidance on how IHEs can conduct portfolio analysis of an incoming student's background and experience and award credit accordingly.
  - iii. Creating mechanisms that allow faculty members to develop exams that allow students to earn credit for particular courses.