

# Our Impact

September 2023



SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT  
ncIMPACT Initiative



*my*FUTURENC  
2 million by 2030

**myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment  
Collaboratives, launched by ncIMPACT**

**2 MILLION BY  
2030**



John M Belk  
Endowment  
ELEVATE THROUGH EDUCATION



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



## **myFutureNC**

myFutureNC is a statewide nonprofit organization focused on educational attainment and is the result of cross-sector collaboration between North Carolina leaders in education, business, and government.



## **About ncIMPACT**

The ncIMPACT Initiative (ncIMPACT) is a statewide initiative launched by the UNC School of Government in 2017 to help local communities use data and evidence to improve conditions and inform decision-making.



## **About UNC School of Government**

The School of Government aims to improve the lives of North Carolinians by engaging in practical scholarship that helps public officials and citizens understand and improve state and local government.

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# PROGRAM TIMELINE

LEAC Teams Announced ————— **June 10, 2021**

**June 24, 2021** — Program Kickoff at UNC School of Government

Let's Get Started - Peer Learning ————— **August 21, 2021**

**November 21, 2021** — Let's Build a Team for Action - Peer Learning

Opportunity Youth Network Session ————— **December 7, 2021**

**December 14, 2021** — NC First in FAFSA Network Session

Assessing the Work - Peer Learning ————— **March 8-9, 2022**

**May 12, 2022** — Tools to Support Shared Attainment Measures Session

Employer Engagement Session ————— **April 2022**

**July 20-21, 2022** — Driving Transformation - Peer Learning

Tips and Tools for Sustainability Session ————— **October 28, 2022**

**November 15, 2022** — Grant Writing Workshop Session

What's Next - Peer Learning Session ————— **December 7-8, 2022**

**June 13, 2023** — Support for the Future of LEACs Session

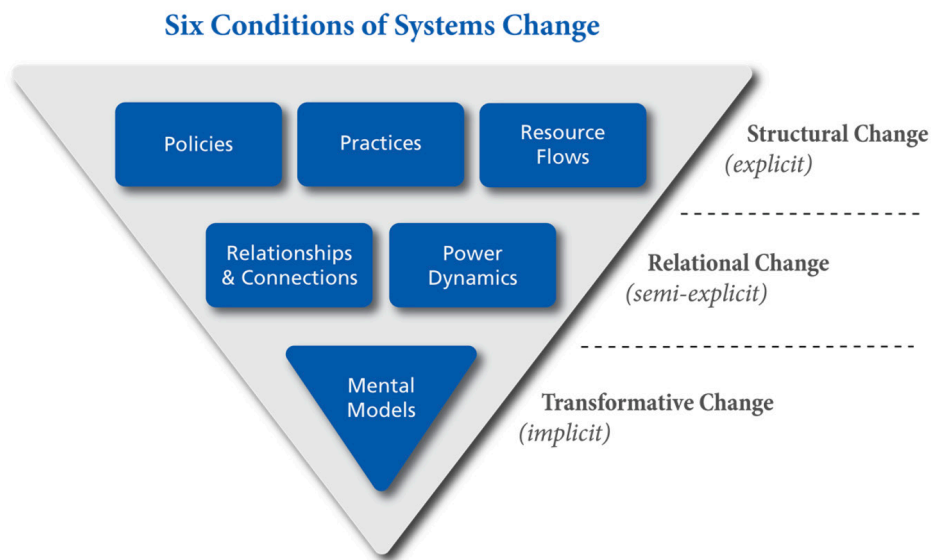
Implement, Assess, and Sustain — **Now through 2030 and beyond**

- To meet economic growth aspirations, North Carolina must increase the number of residents with high quality credentials and post-secondary degrees.
- The North Carolina General Assembly set a goal of having 2 million residents with those qualifications by 2030.

## THE VISION

In 2019 the ncIMPACT Initiative at the UNC School of Government (ncIMPACT) and myFutureNC created the myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives initiative to support local communities seeking to build the systems needed to meet their share of the statewide goal. myFutureNC is a statewide nonprofit created to encourage efforts to improve educational attainment. ncIMPACT assists communities in addressing complex challenges by providing data, evidence-informed practices, technical assistance, and facilitation.

ncIMPACT and myFutureNC issued a call for partnerships in 2021. Forty-six communities applied. Fifteen were chosen to participate. From the beginning, the collaboratives set out to demonstrate that systems improvements had to focus on policies, practices, resource flows, relationships and connections, power



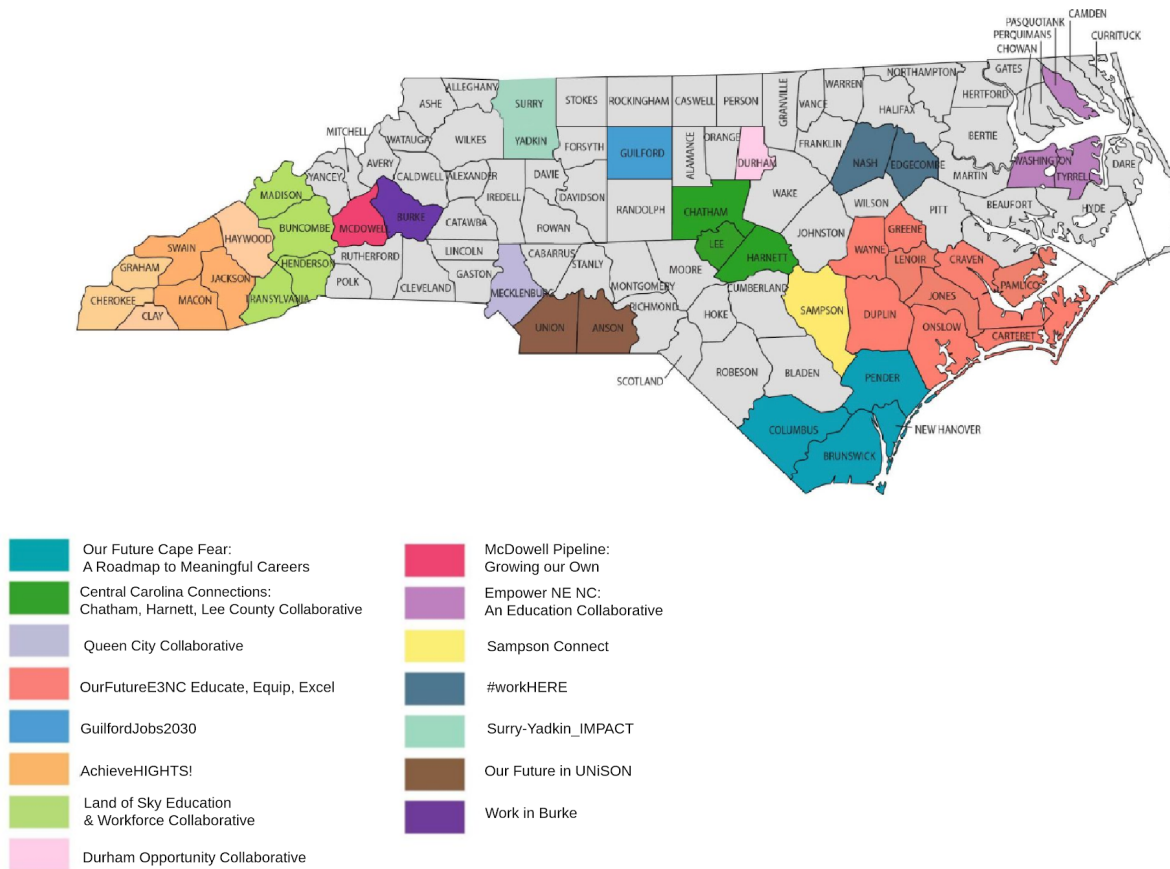
The Water of Systems Change by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge

Each team came to the work as part of a developing cross-sector collaborative, all with a clear recognition that no one organization or sector could solve the challenges to educational attainment. Instead, they sought to leverage local leadership, existing initiatives, and partnerships to improve outcomes. By the shift to a community systems transformation approach supported by state-level resources, the teams worked to address educational attainment across the lifespan of residents.

# THE RESULTS

The LEAC initiative created a cross-sector network built on an innovative peer-learning model delivered through a series of convenings (e.g., “Forums”). For the two-year project, ncIMPACT provided backbone support and designed development activities for the 15 -LEACs, alongside myFutureNC, Carolina Demography, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, and others that made up the initiative’s steering committee. The focus was on building local capacity and infrastructure so that LEACs would be prepared for sustainable and transformative change when the program ended.

## Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives



The initiative embedded evidence-supported experiential and applied practice learning informed by an integrated Strategic Doing™ and Collective Impact model for community planning and change. The steering committee closely linked the integrated model with ongoing coaching and technical assistance support offered to the LEACs.

# KEY OUTCOMES

A third-party evaluation and individual case studies of the teams six months after the initiative ended demonstrated the following outcomes for conditions of systems change and program impacts:

## POLICIES

**All LEACs were able to identify local and state policies that stood as barriers to educational attainment.** For example, GuilfordJobs2030 in Guilford County recognized issues like access to childcare and housing as key barriers and designed hyperlocal pilot programs to address students' needs. McDowell Technical Community College, a member of McDowell Pipeline, rewrote certificate pathways to incorporate students' existing credentials from high school. STEP #workhere in Nash and Edgecombe Counties reported that the ability to share challenges and best practices among LEAC members pushed individual organizations to identify practices that would impact the community's collective educational attainment efforts

## PRACTICES

**Despite launching in a pandemic, after one year of programming LEACs had expanded their reach by 39 percent, including model programs for student career planning and training for high demand jobs.** The collaboratives report supporting over 2,000 people in increasing educational attainment in less than a year by being responsive to student and workforce needs. Partnerships like Sampson Connect have expanded their reach by finding new ways to support their Spanish-speaking students, including materials translation and hiring bilingual instructors. Durham Opportunity has focused on organizing resources to meet emerging workforce needs in high-growth fields like biotechnology.

## RESOURCES

**Some LEACs reported changes in resource flows due to the expanded partnerships with local workforce development boards, economic development groups and other local collaborators (including local governments).** Work in Burke uses their aggressive grant-seeking activity to not only generate additional resources but also to spur additional interest in their program. For Surry-Yadkin Impact, Surry County Commissioners fund students to complete an internship in a local business, and gain valuable real world experience, while earning high school credit, college credit, or an industry recognized credential. Similarly, for Durham Opportunity, Durham County's Board of County Commissioners is a key funder of the community's Bull Life Sciences Academy, which prepares young people for jobs in BioPharma manufacturing.

## RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

**Project activities facilitated trust (and trust building) among LEAC participants, and between individuals and their governmental partners.** Dedicated, persistent attention to relationship building was cited as one of the top success factors. Stakeholders from Empower NE NC reported that local organizations in their region shifted from competitors seeking the same grants to collaborators working together. Our Future ENC has established collaborative relationships across a nine-county region with a previously limited history of partnerships.

## POWER DYNAMICS

**Few LEAC reported significant changes in power dynamics.** One example of these shifting dynamics is Our Future in UniSON, a collaborative partnership between Union and Anson Counties, where the neighboring counties now collaborate across differences including the rural-urban divide.

## MENTAL MODELS

**All LEACs changed mental models.** Organizations in the Queen City Collaborative have taken steps not to establish new goals or programs but instead to assess how well partners are aligned toward existing goals and minimize duplication of efforts. Central Carolina Collaborative shifted how they focused on program design from catch-all programs to targeted ones that allow students more flexibility and career exploration opportunities. Achieve HIGHTS shows how increased trust in partnerships allows individual organizations to conserve resources and focus their capacity on their core mission.

## DATA

**Collaboratives increased their use of data to inform program decision making in their communities and sustain effective systems improvements.** For example, Our Future Cape Fear developed a database of organizations focused on educational attainment to help coordinate existing services. The Land of Sky P20 Council was particularly innovative in their assessment of local programs and developed a tracking dashboard where quantifiable data is shared among partners in an accessible format.

# KEY CHALLENGES

Important lessons from the project inform future strategies as to how post-secondary educational and high-quality credential transformation efforts may be designed and delivered.

**CHALLENGES WITH DATA SYSTEM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT** were observed for most teams.

**THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** challenged efforts early on, allowing only virtual support for over a year.

**STAFF CAPACITY** was frequently cited as a barrier to collaboratives' success. Relatively modest investments in local project director staffing challenged some sites.

**ONGOING AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS AND STAFF TIME** are a concern for future sustainability in some collaboratives.



Teams leveraging initiative funding with existing local resources had advantages over others. Those LEACs tended to integrate the initiative within an existing local system transformation effort to gain broader reach and outcomes. Regional Impact Managers proved critical to providing effective technical assistance. Overall, there were high volumes of population outreach and LEAC product delivery, although individual LEACs varied in their educational pipeline focus areas.

## **Who Should Read the Report and Case Studies?**

### **Funders and Organizations Supporting Cross-Sector Collaboration**

This report offers insights for funders and other organizations interested in supporting local cross-sector collaborations envisioning systems change. Readers may benefit from learning about myFutureNC's 15 cross-sector local educational attainment collaboratives (LEACs) supported through ncIMPACT, working to increase educational attainment and postsecondary credentials in selected North Carolina communities and regions. Local cross-sector collaboration is a popular strategy chosen to address complex social problem-solving; it requires multiple financial and human capital investments from a variety of public and private entities.

Philanthropy organizations, business and industry partners, governmental resources, political champions, nonprofits, education organizations, faith-oriented leaders, and community (“grassroots”) groups are called upon for resources to support local system reform initiatives. The focus of this work addresses the value proposition of funding community-level, cross-sector educational attainment initiatives as opposed to providing resources to educational institutions. The report includes important lessons for funders and other organizations interested in local cross-sector initiatives supported through multi-level state, regional, and local partnerships.

### **Practitioners and Community Change Agents**

Practitioners and community change agents may also benefit from this report. They do the heavy lifting of community change. They solicit and apply for funding, mobilize resource development partnerships, engage leaders at multiple system levels, co-create collaborating infrastructures, deliver services, and champion local groups in support of achieving their vision.

Community change agents address crucial conversations, challenging the status quo. Along the way, key ideas such as social capital, collective impact, and equity-centered practices emerge. Effective implementation strategies, capacity building, and network enhancements are then needed by strong local leadership, teaming, and backbone supports. Well executed processes and strategic communications are required to demonstrate value to a myriad of stakeholders while reinforcing mutually beneficial outcomes.