

GRANT PROFILE

COMMUNITIES OF FOCUS

The University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, Carolina Institute on Developmental Disabilities is implementing their Community Collaborations for Employment (CCE) grant across the state, with a focus on the Triangle and Triad regions. Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) in these two regions represent 40 percent of North Carolina students with ID/DD. Two counties in these regions, Guilford and Wake, are more racially diverse as compared to the state as a whole and support the project’s goals to develop a network of culturally responsive and inclusive services. Many statewide organizations are located in the Triangle and Triad regions, so their partnerships started in this area organically. The North Carolina CCE team aims to engage employers and partners across the state, and they are currently identifying potential school districts that could serve as pilot sites.

GRANT RECIPIENT

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Carolina Institute on Developmental Disabilities)

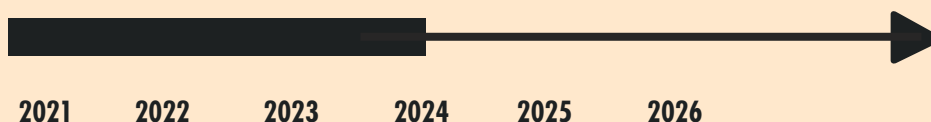
PROJECT TITLE

Work Together NC

ABOUT THE CCE GRANTS

Among transition age youth with disabilities, employment is associated with improved health outcomes, increased quality of life, greater opportunities for socialization and relationship development, and a greater sense of belonging.¹ Yet, many students and youth with disabilities do not have the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities to pursue higher education, training, and careers. To address these disparities, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) issued CCE grants to increase and enhance collaborations across existing local systems in one or more communities. CCE grants aim to maximize a seamless experience and outcome of youth with ID/DD as they transition between school and post-secondary education or competitive integrated employment (CIE) in the community. ACL awarded seven five-year CCE grants starting September 30, 2021, and ending September 29, 2026, through its [Projects of National Significance program](#). This mid-term report summarizes grant activity through February 2024.

CCE Mid-Term Report and Grant Timeline



¹ Castruita Rios, Y., Park, S., Chen, X., & Tansey, T. N. (2023). Collaborations to Support Employment Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Journal*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.52017/001c.72655>



NORTH CAROLINA CCE PILOTS/COMMUNITIES

(as of December 2023)

Community Name	Triangle and Triad Regions of North Carolina (specific pilot sites TBD)
Estimated Total Population	Population of pilot site(s) TBD

OBJECTIVES AND FRAMEWORKS

The *Work Together NC* objectives are to improve the quality of life of people with ID/DD and their families by:

1. Making it easier to navigate systems of support in the transition to adulthood; and
2. Increasing access to meaningful work, continued education, and community engagement.

The North Carolina CCE grant leverages the Collective Impact framework, utilizing tools and activities from the Tamarack Institute to inform their grant structure and approach. The framework acknowledges that partners and stakeholders bring different strengths and backgrounds to the work but embrace a shared aspiration or common agenda toward which they are all working. For example, the Collective Impact organizational structure informed their community collaborative structure, which includes a large collaborative group along with a backbone team, steering committee, and workgroups. The North Carolina CCE team draws on Collective Impact tools to inform their grant activities, such as developing their project’s common agenda and planning for sustainability.

STATE AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Variations in youth transition outcomes occur, in part, due to varying demographic, economic, political, and historical factors in each state. The following factors provide valuable context for the external conditions in which the North Carolina CCE team implements their grant.

The North Carolina CCE team received a \$4 million grant to partner with the state for CIE initiatives, which will likely strengthen the team’s partnership with the state and facilitate synergies between the two grants. For example, regular grant meetings will enable the North Carolina CCE team to connect with providers and managed care organizations. Engagement with public schools also continues to be challenging for a variety of reasons. Consistent with trends across the nation, North Carolina public schools experience teacher shortages. Piloting the community transition plan is supplementary to what teachers are already doing, and it is challenging to ask teachers to take on additional responsibility. The North Carolina CCE team is exploring a statewide approach to embed their action plans into existing systems. Finally, the team is optimistic about opportunities in postsecondary programs for students with ID/DD given there is dedicated funding from the state and a strong investment in the collaborative by these programs.



GRANT ACTIVITIES BY STAGE



COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE PILOT

Each CCE grant established a community collaborative pilot – a broad range of diverse community partners involved in all aspects of the grant and representing stakeholders across developmental disabilities, education, advocacy, and employment settings.

Community Collaborative Structure

The North Carolina CCE grant’s community collaborative includes full collaborative meetings, the backbone team, and a steering committee, as well as six topic-focused workgroups and a racial and cultural equity alliance. The community collaborative established a [common agenda and set of core values to guide their work](#).

▶ Full Collaborative

The North Carolina CCE team’s full collaborative, titled *Work Together NC*, includes over 180 community partners who meet quarterly in a virtual format to discuss the overall project and updates and gather feedback on their grant activities. The team continuously recruits new partners to their collaborative, increasing the potential reach and spread of their collaboration. These meetings serve as important touchpoints to bring together partners working to advance CIE. Meetings include opportunities for partners to share about complementary efforts, provide real-time feedback on grant activities or fill out surveys, and ask questions. Bringing together the full group aligns goals and actions and reduces potential duplication across system change efforts related to education, employment, and transition services for youth with ID/DD.

▶ Steering Committee

The North Carolina CCE team’s steering committee has about 30 members. The committee convenes monthly to assess project progress and goals and distribute resources and information within members’ respective networks.

▶ Backbone Team

A backbone support organization is a core element of the Collective Impact framework and guides the strategy and vision for the work, while supporting alignment and measurement of activities. The backbone team meets biweekly and provides support and direction across the project.



▶ Workgroups

The North Carolina CCE grant has six workgroups focused on specific topics.

- **The ID/DD Inclusive Employment Alliance:** This workgroup convenes weekly and focuses on employment and employers. The goal of the alliance is to generate opportunities for employment for youth and individuals with ID/DD. The Alliance includes the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, the North Carolina Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, six Community Rehabilitation Providers, North Carolina's Workforce Development Boards, and several public school systems. The ID/DD Inclusive Employment Alliance leads several transition plan efforts for employers, including their ID/DD Inclusive Employer Training and Certification Program and employer coffee chats.
- **The Postsecondary Education Alliance:** This workgroup meets quarterly and focuses on postsecondary education opportunities for youth with ID/DD. The core team consists of representatives from local educational agencies, state agencies, the North Carolina Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and postsecondary education institutions, postsecondary education program alumni, and family members. The workgroup's current focus is disseminating information about postsecondary opportunities in North Carolina to K-12 programs and family groups, including Spanish-speaking families.
- **The ID/DD Inclusive Transportation Alliance:** This workgroup meets every four to six weeks to discuss topics such as transportation-related survey items, transportation resources to add to the *Work Together NC* website, and transportation policy updates.
- **The Transition Planning Workgroup:** This workgroup convenes in larger workgroup meetings and several sub-group meetings to hear from various stakeholders about key priorities for transition planning. The workgroup consists of self-advocates, family members, school personnel, service providers, and representatives from state and local government and non-profit organizations.
- **The ID/DD Non-Profit Alliance:** This workgroup meets bimonthly to support increased communication, resource exchange, and collaboration across non-profit organizations serving individuals with ID/DD.
- **The Housing and Community Living Workgroup:** This workgroup focuses exclusively on the transition to adulthood and housing action plans.

▶ The Racial Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Outreach Alliance

This alliance works to establish a presence at local events to engage individuals from historically marginalized groups, predominantly Spanish-speaking families. This workgroup has an established Racial Equity Outreach Plan and works with the steering committee, other workgroup and alliance members, and the community collaborative to identify additional outreach opportunities.



Community Collaborative Members, Roles, and Diversity

The North Carolina CCE grant's full community collaborative consists of a large array of partners, including local employers, service providers, advocates, family members, and representatives from a number of local organizations including school districts, the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, the North Carolina Down Syndrome Alliance, the North Carolina Statewide Independent Living Council, and other local community organizations.

The backbone team members consist of project leaders, self-advocates, grant-funded personnel at UNC-Chapel Hill TEACCH® Administration & Research, Transition Services, Employment services, and the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work. In addition to their leadership on the project, the backbone team works to establish a presence at events and organizations in the communities in which they hope to work.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

The North Carolina CCE team aims to establish interagency agreements with state agencies involved in the transition services landscape. While state agency representatives participate in CCE grant meetings, the team encountered barriers establishing formal interagency agreements due to turnover and competing priorities within these agencies. Additionally, engagement from educators is critical to fully addressing gaps in transition services. Turnover and burnout are prevalent across school districts, and it is difficult to ask educators to take on new responsibilities for the grant. Despite these challenges, the North Carolina CCE team established a large and actively engaged community collaborative, drawing on partners engaged in all aspects of employment, transition, and education. The Collective Impact approach is instrumental in driving the structure of the roles and meetings and promoting collaboration among the organizations in support of their common agenda.



LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Landscape analyses for the CCE grants aim to assess community resources, strengths, needs, and gaps related to providing consistent and seamless services for youth with ID/DD and their families that promote opportunities for CIE, post-secondary education, and independent living.

Landscape Analysis Approach

The North Carolina CCE landscape analysis activities include four types of primary and secondary data collection.



▶ **Community Needs Assessment**

The North Carolina CCE team disseminates an annual survey, in English and Spanish, for individuals with ID/DD, parents and family members, service providers, allies, and educators to ask about the strengths, needs, and gaps in transition services.

▶ **Listening Sessions**

The North Carolina CCE team holds annual listening sessions for stakeholders, which include Spanish interpretation. Feedback from these sessions informed development of the transition plan and needs assessment survey.

▶ **Global Positioning System/Global Information System (GPS/GIS) Study**

This study aims to identify the strengths and gaps within the transition services landscape and consists of participants carrying a GPS tracker and completing daily social diaries for two weeks. So far, 11 participants completed the study and additional recruitment efforts are ongoing.

▶ **Secondary Data Collection**

To analyze community information and make informed decisions when developing and implementing their transition plan, the North Carolina CCE team also collects and analyzes secondary data. The team reviews secondary data from a variety of state and national sources, such as National Core Indicators data, state community college data, and data from the state education department.

Landscape Analysis Findings

Through their landscape analysis activities, the North Carolina CCE team identified housing and transportation as key areas of need. These priorities motivated the team to begin a housing workgroup to complement their existing transportation workgroup. The North Carolina CCE team also identified resource and service gaps, such as a lack of resources in Spanish and plain language; a lack of programs addressing sexuality and relationships; and significant duplicated efforts in organizations offering social or recreational opportunities, employment services, and self-advocacy or leadership. Overall, the landscape analysis findings confirmed many of the gaps the team and their partners observed through their previous experience, and the team is working with partners to examine ways to address duplication within the system.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

The North Carolina CCE team developed the [Transition Services Database](#) featuring over 267 services and programs statewide, where users can filter by topics such as transportation, sexuality and relationships, and geographical area served. Each service in the database includes a description of specific offerings, cost, eligibility criteria, and contact information. They also developed the [Transition Resource Database](#)



with hundreds of publicly available PDF, audio, video, and web-based transition resources organized by categories such as housing, employment, or higher education, which are available to filter by audience, topic, type, or language, as some are available in Spanish. The team continually updates these databases, which complement their transition plan efforts.

The North Carolina CCE team designed and launched the innovative GPS/GIS study, which aims to collect primary data about the strengths and needs within the landscape of transition services directly from the individuals served. Newly hired team members continue to recruit members for this study. The team enhanced the qualitative interview aspect of the GIS/GPS study to capture information from family members and caregivers at the same time rather than through separate focus groups. The North Carolina CCE team plans to expand the age range and geographic reach for this study to capture broader experiences. In the initial phase, they limited participants to youth who were 18 to 26 years old and lived in the Triangle.²



Transition Plan Development and Implementation

Informed by landscape analysis findings, CCE grant recipients must develop and implement transition plans to address the needs of youth with ID/DD and their families. Each grant recipient develops and implements a unique transition plan approach, tailored to their community or communities' needs, to achieve their intended outcomes.

Transition Plan Development Approach

For their transition plan, the North Carolina CCE team first developed transition plan interventions and plans to pilot them in the community. During the initial transition plan activities' development process, the team gathered feedback from community collaborative members, youth, and their families. For example, the team distributed the draft Action Plan Tool to representatives from schools, organizations, and other stakeholders. Using this feedback, the team finalized a draft of the Action Plan Tool, published it on their website, and will continue revising the tool over the course of the project.

Transition Plan Characteristics and Activities

The North Carolina CCE team developed general transition plan activities and plan to pilot them across the state. So far, the team successfully launched three transition plan projects, the Community Transition Plan, the ID/DD Inclusive Employer Training and Certification Program, and Employer "Coffee Talks."

² The Triangle is a region of North Carolina anchored by three cities: Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill.



▶ **Community Transition Plan**

The team launched their [Action Plan Tool](#) on their website in November 2023. The tool consists of three plan types: action plans for opportunities available in adulthood, action plans to help ensure smooth transition to adulthood, and action plans for self-advocacy. Individuals can select the type of plans that apply to them based on their own strengths, goals, and interests. Each item has a recommended age for when it should be completed, as well as the responsible party (e.g., individualized education program (IEP) team, collaboration between the individual and their family). Users can also add additional or personal items and goals. Next steps for the Community Transition Plan include determining pilot sites and field testing.

▶ **ID/DD Inclusive Employer Training and Certification Program**

The ID/DD Inclusive Employer Alliance developed an online course, their [Employer Training Module](#). Each employer receives a ranking among three levels, depending on how many accessibility features they self-endorse. The self-paced Employer Training Module, available on the *Work Together NC* website, covers an introduction to ID/DD inclusion in the workplace; language, misconceptions, and mindset shifts about hiring individuals with ID/DD; and common tools and accommodations. Employers who complete the online course can receive recognition through an “ID/DD Inclusive Employer” sticker for their storefront, advertising their workplace accessibility and commitment to supporting employment of youth with ID/DD (either through hiring or serving as a work-based learning or state-funded internship site).

▶ **ID/DD Inclusive Employment Alliance “Coffee Talks”**

The ID/DD Inclusive Employer Alliance hosts employer “Coffee Talk” events on inclusive employment. They held the first event in September 2023 with 40 employers, four self-advocate panelists, and representatives from Community Rehabilitation Providers, school districts, North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Capital Area Workforce Development Board. The second event focused on senior living community and assisted living facility employers and a third event was open to all industries.

RECOGNIZING ID/DD INCLUSIVE EMPLOYERS

Employers who complete the ID/DD Inclusive Employer Training Module receive recognition on the *Work Together NC* [website](#). The Inclusive Employment Alliance began recognizing employers, which so far include hotels, a museum, a bakery, and a coffee shop, among others. The ID/DD Inclusive Employment Alliance also hosts semiannual inclusive markets in December and May featuring vendors that either employ or are owned by people with ID/DD. Additionally, the North Carolina CCE team continues to recruit employers to join the Inclusive Employment Alliance.



Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

The North Carolina CCE team publicly launched three transition plan projects. They launched their website to the public, making their Action Plan Tool available to all and providing a large inventory of available resources to youth with ID/DD in their state. For their ID/DD Inclusive Certification Program, the team trained and certified a small group of businesses to promote employment opportunities for individuals with ID/DD. The multi-pronged approach of training businesses and generating a marketing tactic helps to elevate the general understanding around CIE in the community. The North Carolina CCE's team approach to transition plan implementation and development included a substantial investment up front in collating resources, designing action plans, and creating a user-friendly, public facing website. As they begin to pilot their action plans, these tools remain available statewide to support youth and families.



Each grant recipient will use process and summative evaluation techniques to analyze the delivery of project activities and determine the project's success in meeting intended outcomes.

Methodology and Approach

The North Carolina CCE team used data from their annual survey as a baseline and to establish goals and focus areas. Feedback on the website since its launch in February 2023 has been positive. The North Carolina CCE team plans to gather additional website feedback and their associated transition plan resources to inform future updates and potential sustainability options. The North Carolina CCE team continues to gather internal feedback and external feedback from the community collaborative on their measurement plan. They utilize and track process data across a variety of sources to measure success such as number of collaborative members, daily traffic to their website pages, geographic and industry diversity of certified ID/DD inclusive employers, and more.

Intended Outcomes

The North Carolina CCE team is tracking progress toward their intended outcomes in multiple ways, including surveys, monitoring policy changes in collaboration with grant partners, and tracking data on employers joining their ID/DD Inclusive Employment Alliance. They collect data for most of their intended outcomes and have some data available; additional data will be available by the end of the grant.



LOOKING AHEAD

- The North Carolina CCE team plans to identify schools or other settings for piloting their action plans.
- The team will continue recruiting employers to take their ID/DD Inclusive Employer Training and obtain certification.