

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education
Belk Center for Community College
Leadership and Research



GETTING STRATEGIC ABOUT INVESTING:

HOW NC RECONNECT COLLEGES USED
FUNDING TO MAXIMIZE
RE-ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

INTRODUCTION

Colleges participating in NC Reconnect receive support from the John M. Belk Endowment (JMBE) and other partners in a myriad of ways including mini grants from JMBE and funding from the state.

To date, 15 community colleges in three cohorts across the state are part of NC Reconnect efforts to re-engage adult learners in their communities. This brief highlights how the first ten colleges, cohorts one and two, used funding from the state and JMBE to enhance the work of NC Reconnect.

NC RECONNECT COLLEGE PARTNERS



STATE FUNDING

In the most recent biennium budget, the North Carolina General Assembly allocated funding for the expansion of adult learner initiatives. The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) distributed \$50,000 to each of the ten schools in FY 2022.

The colleges were given until June 30, 2023 to spend the funds which were intended for marketing campaigns, adult learner navigators, re-engagement efforts, student ambassadors, and recruitment activities.

1 Student Access & Success

Four colleges reported using state funds for student access and success efforts. Wilkes Community College purchased 12 loaner laptops specifically for adult learners as well as a year's license for RAVE texting and emailing platform. The college utilized RAVE for initial outreach, registration at open house events, and contacting 600+ former adult learners who responded during the fall semester but chose not to enroll.

Durham Technical Community College and Pitt Community College used some or all of their funding to purchase a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which allows for more strategic and timely communication throughout the enrollment process. Additionally, Blue Ridge Community College purchased pocket translators for staff to engage with adult learners when language is a barrier.

2 Intentional Staffing & Professional Development

Central Carolina Community College used a portion of this funding to support the salary of an Adult Learner Education Navigator who works directly with students prior to enrollment and beyond, and Blue Ridge hired a part-time assistant in Student Services. Forsyth Technical Community College implemented Trailblazer Treatment Customer Service Training for 140 faculty and staff, and Pitt used these funds for targeted professional education.

3 Marketing & Recruitment

Nine of 10 colleges allocated some or all state funding for adult learner-focused marketing and recruitment. Central kicked off a community engagement campaign and purchased materials for faith-based engagements, and Pitt focused on marketing to justice-connected individuals. Several colleges used funds on videos, mailers, billboards, and on-campus events for adult learners. Lenoir Community College paid stipends to three current staff to recruit in churches, community centers and inner-city housing developments.

JMBE MINI GRANTS

JMBE provides mini grants at the beginning of each academic year the cohort colleges are actively involved with the project. To date, Cohort 1 colleges have received two rounds of \$50,000 mini grants from JMBE. Cohort 2 colleges have received one mini grant of \$75,000.

JMBE encouraged cohorts to evaluate how the funds could best serve their specific community of adult learners and colleges found unique ways to do so.

1 Direct Student Assistance

Student support and assistance provided directly to adult learners was a common use of JMBE mini grants. Blue Ridge distributed Adult Learner Starter Packs – backpacks with supplies adult students might need once enrolled – and swag items to those who successfully completed their first semester. Fayetteville Tech created the STEP to SAP program to help adult learners who lost Pell eligibility re-enroll. The program provides students with holistic coaching, academic support, and financial assistance.

Similarly, Forsyth Tech provided “welcome back” grants to adult learners that covered the cost of up to two courses per 8-week term, and Pitt utilized funds to cover outstanding balances of \$500 or less for adult learners who were re-enrolling. Forsyth Tech also used part of this funding to assist adult learner parents with childcare.

Like Fayetteville Tech, Wilkes used their funding toward a multi-pronged approach to support adult learner efforts including success coaches, outreach events, technology upgrades, and the “Earn and Learn” program, which provided stipends to adult learners who enrolled in NC Tech pathways.



2 Expanding Outreach & Access

Many colleges used this funding to expand their ongoing outreach and access efforts with adult learners. Recruiting on the go was a consistent theme, like Pitt's Mobile Enrollment vehicle which was outfitted with the technology necessary to complete admissions and enrollment processes while in the community, and Blue Ridge's purchase of tablets to use at adult learner recruitment events. Blue Ridge also printed materials and engagement packs for expanded recruitment events at community organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club, Hola! Carolina, and True Ridge, as well as local industry and manufacturing locations.

Vance-Granville hosted a series of "VG At Large" events which showcased training opportunities that might be of interest to adult learners. Funding was used to design and create materials for engagement, enrollment, and catering.

Fayetteville Tech followed Pitt's lead and established an Adult Learning Center (ALC) with a focus on supporting adult students throughout their academic careers. ALC's goal is to improve student success markers including retention, transfer, and credential completion. Using learning theory and evidence-based approaches, the ALC serves as a one-stop location for adult learners to identify and connect with academic and support services.

Pitt used a portion of their second round of JMBE funding to market their Adult Learning Center.

3 Partnerships

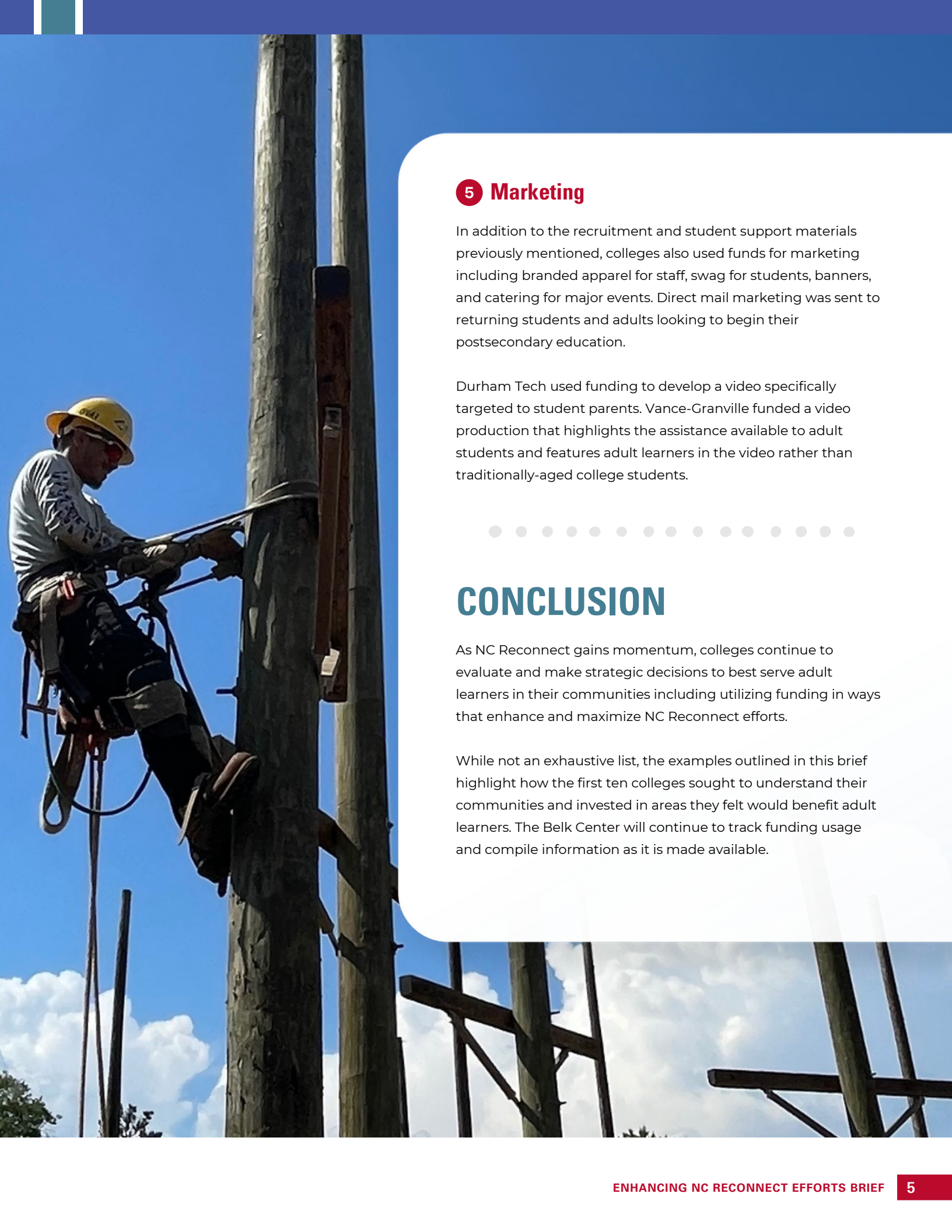
Some colleges used funding to expand partnerships in their communities and with business and industry partners. Central focused on faith-based partnerships and outreach efforts to historically excluded communities, and Pitt focused on increasing their community stakeholders and business partnerships for on- and off-campus events for adult learners.

Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute sought input from the Latinx community and launched a project to address postsecondary attainment barriers for the Latinx populations in Caldwell and Watauga counties. This will be a multi-layered approach to increase access and student success, including expanded outreach, financial aid opportunities, and hiring two construction trades instructors who can fluently communicate in English and Spanish.

4 Intentional Staffing

Several colleges utilized JMBE funds to hire new roles and offer professional development to existing personnel. Pitt provided professional development for Adult Learner Center staff, advisors, and counselors focused on expanding their tracking procedures from student entry/intake to career services exit. Blue Ridge offered faculty incentives for those who consistently used Watermark's (formerly Aviso) academic early alert system.

Durham Tech, Vance-Granville, and Lenoir put funding toward hiring new positions including evening and weekend advisors focused on non-traditional students, enrollment specialists and success coaches. Vance-Granville created a new position of Outreach and Student Support Coach to implement NC Reconnect marketing and engagement efforts.



5 Marketing

In addition to the recruitment and student support materials previously mentioned, colleges also used funds for marketing including branded apparel for staff, swag for students, banners, and catering for major events. Direct mail marketing was sent to returning students and adults looking to begin their postsecondary education.

Durham Tech used funding to develop a video specifically targeted to student parents. Vance-Granville funded a video production that highlights the assistance available to adult students and features adult learners in the video rather than traditionally-aged college students.



CONCLUSION

As NC Reconnect gains momentum, colleges continue to evaluate and make strategic decisions to best serve adult learners in their communities including utilizing funding in ways that enhance and maximize NC Reconnect efforts.

While not an exhaustive list, the examples outlined in this brief highlight how the first ten colleges sought to understand their communities and invested in areas they felt would benefit adult learners. The Belk Center will continue to track funding usage and compile information as it is made available.