



College of the Albemarle

NC RECONNECT KICKOFF EVENTS:

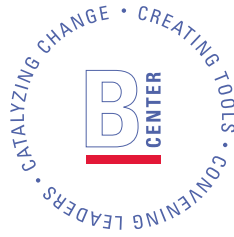
HOW NC RECONNECT COLLEGE LEADERS
KICKSTART THEIR ADULT LEARNER EFFORTS

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NC STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education
Belk Center for Community College
Leadership and Research





ABOUT THE BELK CENTER

Creating tools, convening leaders, and catalyzing change: the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research works with educators, researchers, and policymakers to further evidence-based community college outcomes in North Carolina and across the nation. We equip community college leaders with actionable insights and create opportunities for collaboration as we tackle the most pressing issues facing students and campuses to build stronger, more resilient communities. The Belk Center is housed in the College of Education at North Carolina State University, a land-grant university that shares our commitment to community colleges and the critical role these institutions play in creating and expanding opportunities for all North Carolinians. Since 2021, the Belk Center has served as the official research partner of NC Reconnect, a state-wide effort created and led by the John M. Belk Endowment (JMBE) designed to recruit and support adult learners in North Carolina’s community colleges.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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SUGGESTED CITATION

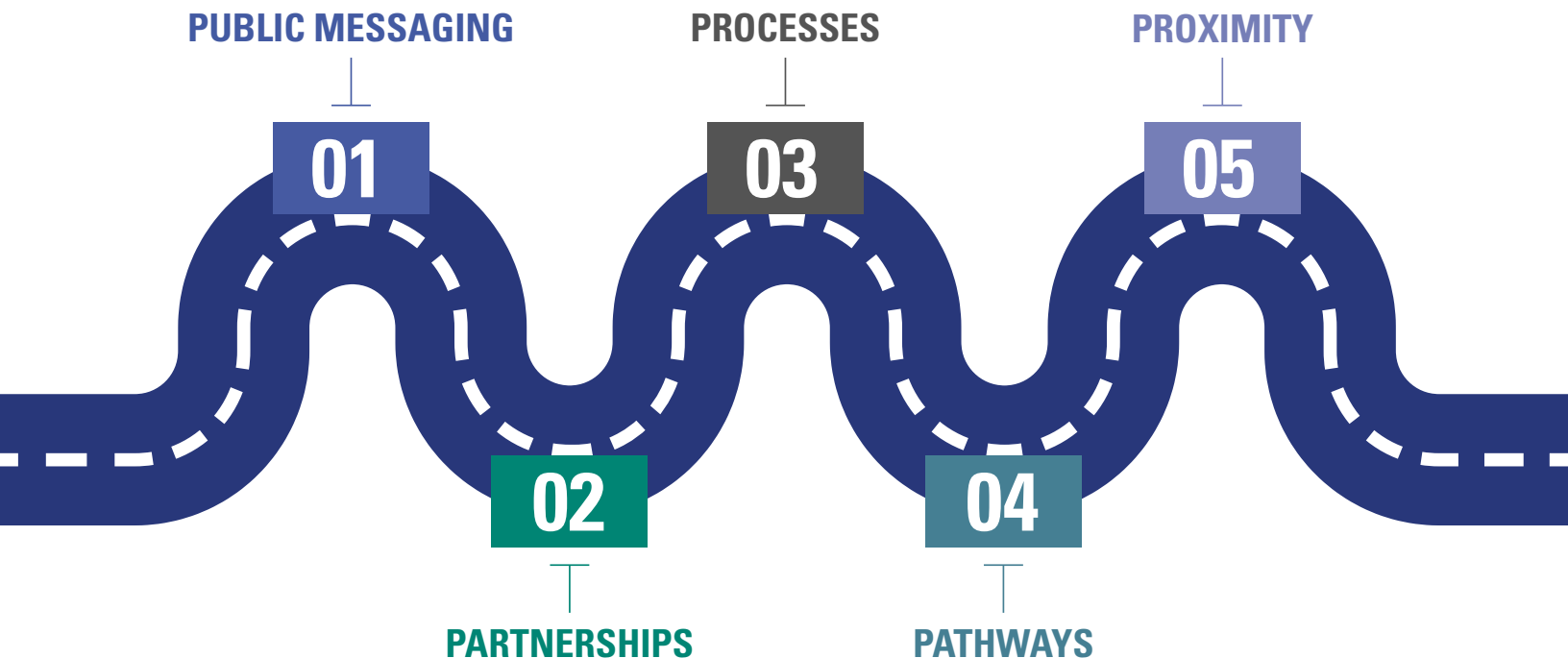
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OVERVIEW

Since the [John M. Belk Endowment \(JMBE\)](#) launched [NC Reconnect](#) in 2021, Reconnect college leaders selected for the program have often organized kickoff events on their campuses to garner support and raise awareness for their efforts to recruit and retain adult learners. All five colleges in Cohort 4 – [Central Piedmont Community College](#), [Haywood Community College](#), [James Sprunt Community College](#), [Robeson Community College](#), and [Wayne Community College](#) – hosted kickoff events on their campuses to build excitement, secure buy-in from faculty and staff, and clearly communicate the purpose of NC Reconnect. Using the Five P Framework for adult learners, we highlight the work happening on NC Reconnect campuses to kick off their Reconnect efforts.

THE FIVE P FRAMEWORK

[The Five P Framework](#) encapsulates the holistic journey of an adult learner through their community college experience. Presidents and NC Reconnect leads incorporate components of the Five P Framework – public messaging, partnerships, processes, pathways, and proximity – into their kickoff events to communicate the importance of NC Reconnect and supporting adult learners on their campuses. For example, [Blue Ridge Community College](#) (Cohort 1) kicked off its fall semester by providing adult learners with backpacks with information about the college and school materials for their classes, [Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute](#) (Cohort 2) partnered with external speakers for their employee kickoff meeting, and [College of the Albemarle](#) (Cohort 3) created TV commercials that brought together employees and community partners to spread messages about the importance of supporting adult learners.



01. Public Messaging (Marketing and Communications) - Public messaging focuses on intentional communications happening at the college to recruit adult learners.

02. Partnerships (Collaboration) - Community colleges foster a number of external partnerships with community entities, employers, and government agencies, as well as internal partnerships with cross-institutional teams and departmental collaborations.

03. Processes (Shifting the Approach) - Community colleges can no longer take a one-size-fits-all approach to serve students. It's essential to shift existing processes to meet the needs of adult learners and reduce barriers to their success.

04. Pathways (Academic and Career Advising) - Colleges are building academic and career pathways for students to decrease their time-to-degree and guide them on career options that lead to family-sustaining living wages.

05. Proximity (to Access and Completion) - Adult learners face a myriad of barriers when deciding to return to college. When thinking about proximity to the community college space, distance, time, and relationships with others can expand or close an adult learner's proximity to their degree. Improving access to college and improving support during college can afford adult learners a clearer pathway to a credential or degree.

Colleges should incorporate all Five Ps into their kickoff events to touch all points of the adult learner journey. Below are examples of how Cohort 4 colleges have included the Five Ps within their kickoff events.

PUBLIC MESSAGING

Colleges employed a variety of communication methods to promote NC Reconnect, including speeches, emails, and videos. A strategic decision across all colleges was to have the college president highlight the importance of NC Reconnect and support for adult learners, which underscored the colleges' commitment to this student population. Following their kickoff event, Haywood Community College (Haywood) distributed a survey to faculty and staff to gather input on the utilization of the mini-grant provided by JMBE. This email also included the latest version of the [Adult Learner Guidebook](#) and a thank you note for their participation. Survey responses indicated that kickoff attendees were enthusiastic about

NC Reconnect and valued their inclusion in adult learner-focused efforts. The event concluded with a celebratory cake branded with the NC Reconnect logo.

Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) opted for a different approach by producing a video that included messages from the president, CPCC's NC Reconnect campus lead, and a senior advisor from JMBE, emphasizing the collective campus commitment to NC Reconnect. Due to the logistical constraints of their multiple campus locations, this approach replaced an in-person engagement. The video was shared with faculty and staff via email, encouraging them to watch and revisit the video as a reminder of the importance of supporting adult learners.

PARTNERSHIPS

Several of the colleges embraced the external partnership with JMBE by having one of their staff members speak at their kickoff event or in their video. Haywood planned a campus-wide lunch meeting with an invitation from their president and a presentation from one of JMBE's senior advisors who spoke about the success of NC Reconnect and the importance of faculty and staff engagement in college work, particularly NC Reconnect. James Sprunt Community College (JSCC) also invited a JMBE representative to speak at their campus-wide meeting about supporting adult learners. They established a steering committee of faculty and staff, many of whom were adult learners themselves, to plan the event. This intentional partnership and inclusion of staff who understood the adult learner journey helped foster deeper connections with and understanding of returning adult learners.

PROCESSES

Wayne Community College (WCC) incorporated a professional learning opportunity into its kickoff event. The presentation included data about WCC's adult learners and introduced key players on campus for sustaining momentum. WCC also included several campus partners to assist with kickoff logistics, like their Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Executive Director of the WCC Foundation, and Dean of Public Safety. Their lead reported positive feedback, noting that many faculty and staff gained valuable insights into the experiences of adult learners as a result of this professional learning. This approach equips faculty and staff with the knowledge needed to support adult learners, signaling a cultural shift within the college toward prioritizing their unique needs.



PATHWAYS

At JSCC's kickoff event, the president emphasized the crucial role of faculty and staff in guiding students through their community college journey. He framed NC Reconnect not just as a student services initiative, but as a cultural shift aimed at making academic and career pathways more accessible for adult learners. He stressed the importance of every interaction, whether with admissions counselors, food service staff, custodial staff, or the president, in helping adult learners achieve their goals. Other colleges similarly invited their entire campus communities to their kickoff events, highlighting the collective responsibility for adult learners and NC Reconnect.

PROXIMITY

Robeson Community College (RCC) held the earliest kickoff event in October, nearly six months before the official launch of NC Reconnect. This timing was deliberate to build engagement early while sustaining momentum through the formal launch the next spring. RCC leadership emphasized the importance of multiple touchpoints with employees throughout the adult learner journey. The college is developing champion teams across student support services, workforce development, and other key areas to maintain this momentum. They hosted part of their kickoff event in RCC's student center, a central space for adult learner success.

SUSTAINING MOMENTUM THROUGH THE FIVE P FRAMEWORK

These kickoff events are pivotal in generating excitement and awareness about NC Reconnect, encouraging many adult learners to return to college. They also remind faculty and staff of their critical role in overcoming barriers for these students. However, these events are just the beginning. Cohort 4 colleges discussed regularly convening smaller committees of faculty and staff from various divisions to support adult learners.

While colleges are concentrating on public messaging, partnerships, and pathways, further work is needed on processes and proximity. Understanding the barriers that

adult learners face through college processes and policies is important to their success. Through secret shoppers, adult learner focus groups, student surveys, and engagement with the Adult Learner Guidebook, college personnel can increase their awareness of the adult learner journey. The fifth P - Proximity explains that the adult learner journey requires attention to how the college builds relationships with adult learners. That relationship starts well before the kick-off and continues through graduation. Continuing to think about how the college supports adult learners in increasing their proximity to the college is important to their success.



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