

Hi, just a reminder that you're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in Western Piedmont Council of Governments. Don't forget to add [jason.toney@wpcog.org](mailto:jason.toney@wpcog.org) to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.



## WPCOG - Newsletter

April & May 2021

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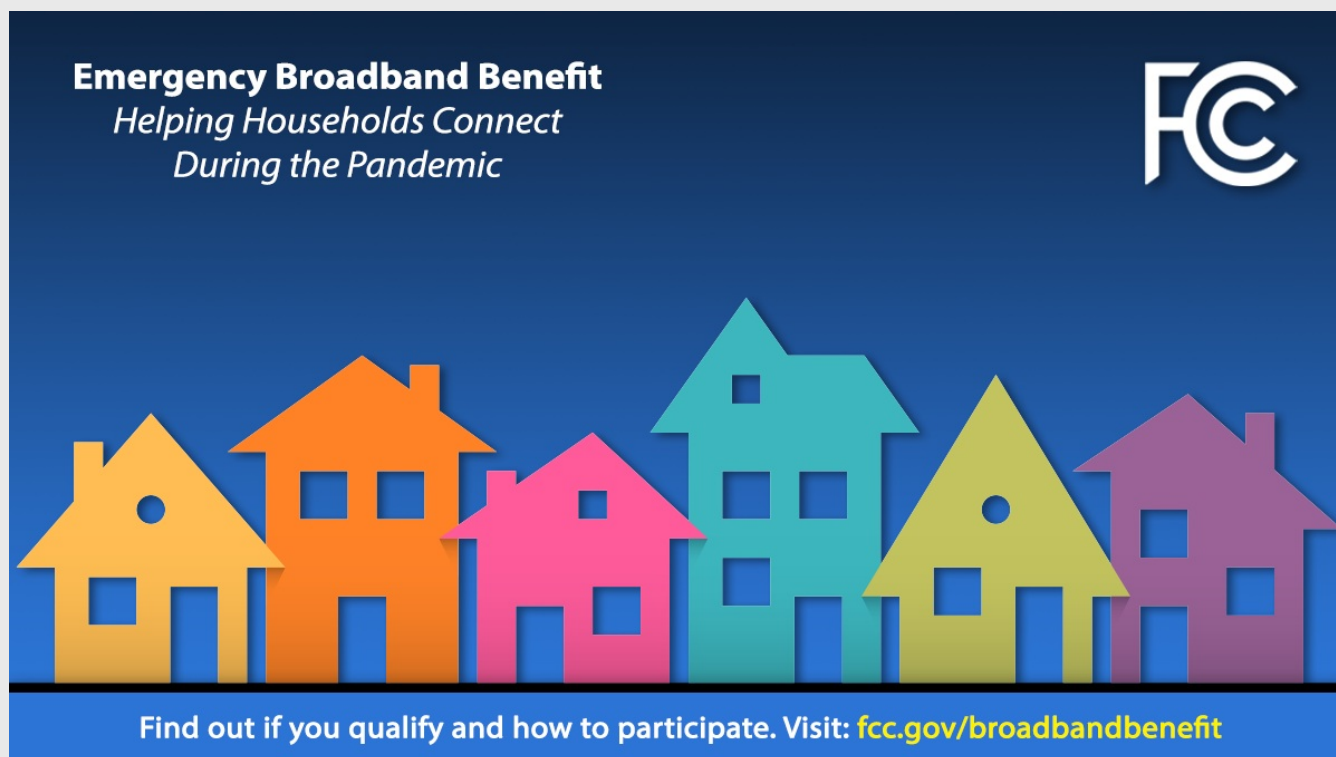
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### Economic Broadband Benefit Program

A graphic for the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. It features a dark blue background. At the top left, the text reads "Emergency Broadband Benefit" in white, followed by "Helping Households Connect" and "During the Pandemic" in a smaller, italicized white font. At the top right is the FCC logo in white. Below the text is a row of six colorful house silhouettes in shades of orange, pink, teal, yellow, and purple. At the bottom, a blue banner contains the text "Find out if you qualify and how to participate. Visit: [fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit](https://fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit)" in white and yellow.

The Broadband Infrastructure Office at the North Carolina Department of Information Technology has launched a new Economic Broadband Benefit Program webpage with program guidance information and an informational flyer that can be printed and posted at your establishment. Now we are asking for your help.

[The Emergency Broadband Benefit \(EBB\) program](#) provides households with a discount of up to \$50 a month off of a household's internet bill. That increases to \$75 a month for those living on tribal lands. Eligible households can also get a one-time discount of \$100 toward the purchase of a laptop, tablet or desktop computer through participating providers.

The program's enrollment begins on May 12 for qualifying households. A household qualifies if the household's income is at or less than 135 percent of federal poverty guidelines. A household can also qualify if at least one member:

- Participates in a federal benefits program, such as Medicaid, SNAP, or Lifeline
- Receives benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program,
- Lost a job or a significant amount of income in the past year,
- Received a Federal Pell Grant, or
- Is part of an internet service provider's low-income or COVID-19 program.

North Carolina Counties are valuable partners to the Broadband Infrastructure Office and provide a great opportunity to reach out to the important stakeholders who need this information the most. So, we are asking you to help spread the word to your community and encourage their participation.

If your organization is interested in helping spread the word about the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program and educating citizens about the program and how to participate, the Broadband Infrastructure Office has developed a new [Economic Broadband Benefit Program webpage](#) with guidance information and an informational flyer that can be printed and posted at your establishment. We also encourage you to visit the [Emergency Broadband Benefit Program's Consumer Outreach Toolkit](#) where the FCC and USAC have created a Toolkit overview and Guide with supporting educational materials to make it easier for organizations use for

educating their stakeholders.

If you have other specific materials that you need to support your outreach and education efforts, please let the Broadband Infrastructure Office know by emailing us at [broadband@nc.gov](mailto:broadband@nc.gov).

## Area Agency on Aging North Carolina Caregiver Portal



Family caregivers are unpaid family and friends who often assist or care for older adults or a person with dementia. Caring for someone's health and personal needs can be rewarding but also time-consuming and stressful. Most individuals find themselves responsible for the care of another person with little warning. In the midst of a global pandemic this past year, many caregivers found themselves needing easy access to innovative resources to assist them in their caregiving role. Caregiving can be 24 hours a day, seven days a week, leaving very little time for learning how to be the best caregiver possible.

A new caregiver support tool is now available for caregivers in North Carolina. This tool gives free online access to educational resources tailored to their specific interests and needs. In partnership with the NC Division of Health and Human Services Division of Aging and Adult Services, we are now offering an alternative for education, information, and training that caregivers can access whenever it works for them, 24 hours a day. The North Carolina Caregiver Portal, powered by Trualta, is an online learning tool designed specifically for caregivers and is available for families across North Carolina at no charge. Family caregivers can access an online library of short courses to help learn new skills to help manage senior care at home for their loved one. Lessons range from five minutes to two hours, so it is easy to fit caregiving training and education whenever it works for the caregiver. The goal is to equip family caregivers with education and caregiving information to be better prepared and confident with helping and supporting their loved one.

Each caregiver who enrolls in the free program receives a personalized learning journey based on the caregiving topics that are most relevant to their care situation.

Topics include:

- Personal Care (e.g., tips for showering, toileting);
- Dementia Care (managing difficult situations like wandering, agitation, apathy);
- Safety and Injury Prevention (identifying fall risks, safely moving and transferring) and
- Caregiver Wellness (e.g., balancing work and caregiving).

North Carolina Caregiver Portal provides:

- A wide range of topics most important to caregivers.
- Five minute educational video modules that can fit in a caregivers busy schedule.
- Easy to understand info about challenging care situations.
- Downloadable and printable tip sheets.
- Local event and support resources.

Anyone caring for an older adult can benefit from North Carolina Caregiver Portal support, whether they seek personal care training, safety and fall prevention tips, help to care for a person with dementia, caregiver wellness ideas, or other support.

If you are caring for an older adult over the age of 60, caring for someone diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia, or are a grandparent raising your grandchildren and interested in learning more information and receiving an invite to access the FREE North Carolina Caregiver Portal, contact WPCOG Area Agency on Aging Family Caregiver Support Specialist at [mary.mitchell@wpcog.org](mailto:mary.mitchell@wpcog.org), or call 828.485.4256.

Article by [Mary Mitchell](#)

## Area Agency on Aging Older Americans Month - Communities of Strength



Each May, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) leads the nation to celebrate Older Americans Month (OAM). Each year the ACL distinguishes a theme used to empower, encourage, and engage older adults. This year's OAM theme, Communities of Strength, highlights the importance of communities. Communities find strength in people - and people find strength in their communities. In the past year, we've seen time and time again as friends, neighbors, and businesses have found new ways to support each other.

This year the Western Piedmont Area Agency on Aging wants to celebrate OAM by encouraging community members to share their experiences. Together, we can find strength and create a strong future.

Here are some ways to share and connect.

**Look for joy in everyday.** Celebrate small moments and ordinary pleasures by taking time to recognize them. Start a gratitude journal and share it with others via social media, or call a friend or family member to share a happy moment or to say thank you.

**Reach out to neighbors:** Even if you can't get together in person right now, you can still connect with your neighbors. Leave a small gift on their doorstep, offer to help with outdoor chores, or deliver a homecooked meal.

**Build new skills:** Learning something new allows us to practice overcoming challenges. Take an art course online or try a socially distanced outdoor movement class to enjoy learning with others in your community. Have a skill to share? Find an opportunity to teach someone, even casually.

**Share your story:** There's a reason storytelling is a time-honored activity. Hearing how others experience the world helps us grow. Interviewing family, friends, and neighbors can open up new conversations and strengthen our connections.

When people of different ages, backgrounds, abilities, and talents share experiences, we help build strong communities through action, story, or service. And that's something to celebrate!

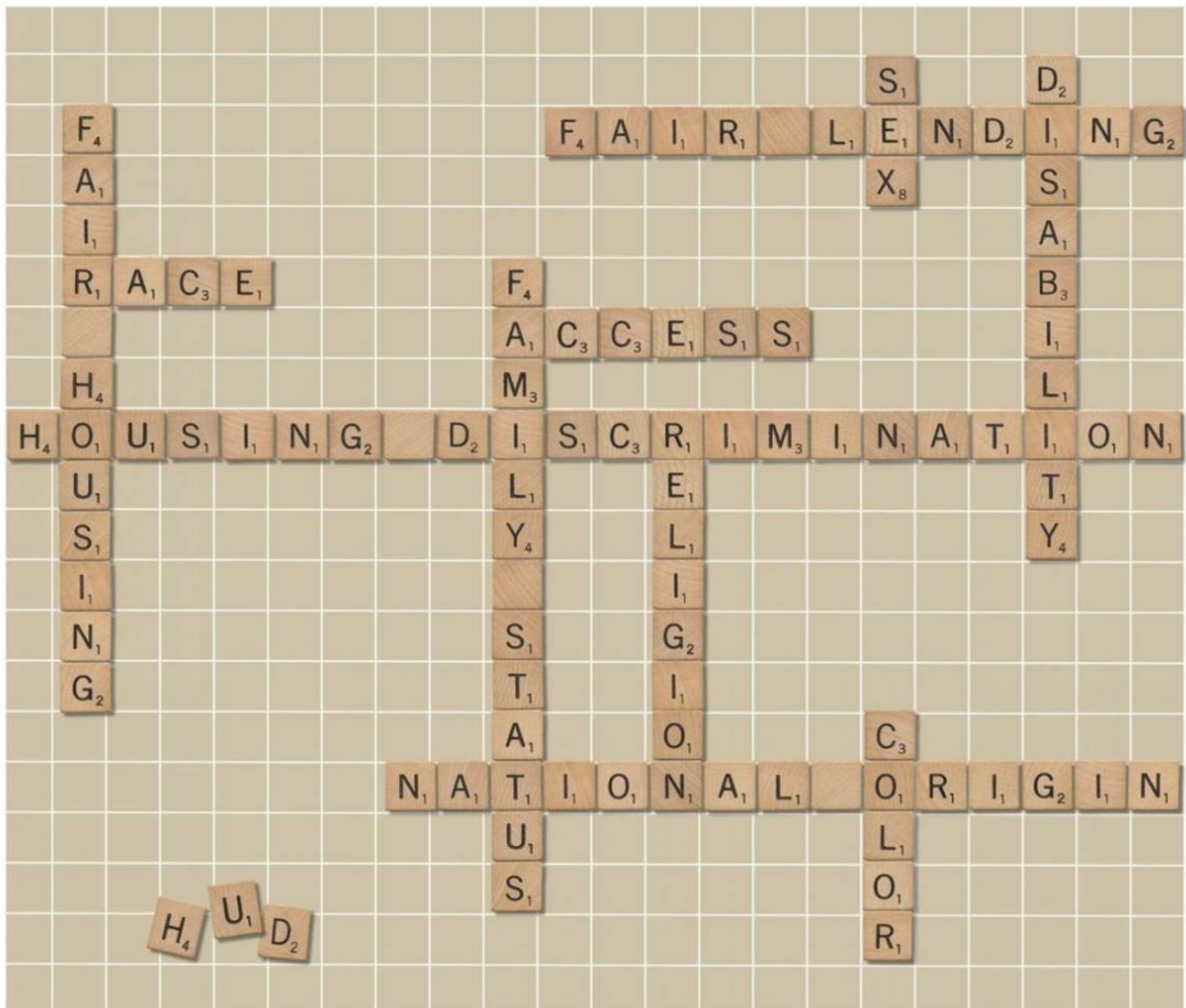
For information on how you can Make Your Mark or find other aging resources, please go to [www.wpcog.org](http://www.wpcog.org).

Article by Sarah Stamey

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## Community & Economic Development Fair Housing: More Than Just Words

# Fair Housing: MORE THAN JUST WORDS



**FAIR HOUSING:** More than just words on a gameboard, **IT IS THE LAW.**



**KNOW  
YOUR  
RIGHTS!**

If you feel you have experienced housing discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, and family status, contact HUD at **1-800-669-9777** (voice), **1-800-877-8339** (Federal Relay), online at [www.hud.gov/fairhousing](http://www.hud.gov/fairhousing), or your local fair housing organization.

The WPCOG Community and Economic Development staff, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), marked Fair Housing Month in April.

April of 2021 marks the 53rd anniversary of the Fair Housing Act signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on April 11, 1968. The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, and family status.

WPCOG staff regularly work with counties and municipalities to update fair housing studies, promote fair housing education through advertisements and meetings, and work with lending institutions. For more information about the Fair Housing Act, go to the HUD website at [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov).

## Community & Regional Planning

### Update on Census Bureau's Count Question Resolution Program & Census 2020 Data Releases

The purpose of the 2020 Census Count Resolution (CQR) program is to provide a mechanism for governmental units to request a review of their official 2020 Census results and to help ensure that housing and population counts are correctly allocated to 2020 census tabulation blocks.

On May 13, 2021, the US Census Bureau announced that the CQR operations will be delayed for several months.

The current schedule is as follows:

- Fall 2021: Federal Register notice announces the beginning of a 30-day comment period for the public.
- December 2021: The Census Bureau plans to officially notify tribal, state, and local government officials eligible to file CQR cases.
- January 2022: The Census Bureau begins accepting CQR cases for processing from eligible tribal, state, and local governments.
- June 30, 2023: Deadline for governments to send CQR cases to the Census Bureau.
- September 30, 2023: Deadline for the Census Bureau to provide results to impacted governmental units.

Please note that the dates are subject to change.

In addition to schedule changes, the Census Bureau is exploring options and the feasibility of expanding the scope of the CQR program. If the Census Bureau decides to expand the scope of acceptable inquiries, it will communicate this decision through a Federal Register notice that will be issued in fall 2021. For more information on previous CQR programs, visit [census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

The release of 2020 Census Data has also been delayed by several months. Below is the latest timeline for data releases from the US Census Bureau.

**By August 16, 2021:** States will receive the data they need to begin redistricting in August. The Census Bureau will also share this information with the public. However, the data will be in a format that requires additional handling and software to extract familiar tables. COVID-19-related delays and prioritizing the delivery of the apportionment results delayed our original redistricting data delivery plan.

**By September 30, 2021:** The Census Bureau will deliver the final redistricting data toolkit to all states and the public. The toolkit will include digital tools that provide access to an integrated software browsing tool for official recipients and access to the online Data Explorer tool for both official recipients and the public.

Article by Taylor Dellinger

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## Regional Housing Authority

### REACH - A Family Self-Sufficiency Program



REACH, a self-sufficiency program for Housing Choice Voucher families, is grounded in these five pillars.

**Resources** - Participants share barriers they face. Then a case manager, who helps them create a plan with goals to overcome the challenges, connects participants to resources in the community. Partnerships with organizations in the four-county area are vital to providing referrals to no- or low-cost resources.

**Employment** - A mandatory requirement to graduate from REACH is looking for or maintaining employment appropriate to each individual. Participants may need training, job referrals, and even specialty services like expungement, in order to find a job with wages that support self-sufficiency.

**Advancement** - While the final goal of REACH is employment, other interim goals can be set by participants. Improving credit, completing trainings, certifications, or degrees, or participating in a session with a coach on how to improve a resume or interviewing skills, all offer tenants improvement opportunities that can advance their lives.

**Commitment** - After signing a contract of participation, clients have up to five years to work through their goals and graduate. The initial desire to join a program that not only offers advocacy and resources, but also includes a specialized savings account that the RHA deposits money into as a participant's earned income increases, must be balanced with a commitment to stick with the program and overcome barriers that might arise along the way.

**Homeownership readiness** - Homeownership readiness, one of the program's most common goals, typically requires completion of steps in several of the previous pillars - steady employment, good credit, and mortgage-sustaining wages. Additionally homebuyer education training can help tenants prepare themselves by learning about mortgage types, first-time homebuyer funding, various lending sources, and more.

If you are interested in more information about the REACH program, please contact Kim Duncan at [kim.duncan@wpcog.org](mailto:kim.duncan@wpcog.org) or 828-485-4299

Article by Kim Duncan

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## Regional Housing Authority

### New landlords Needed; Resources Clear Up Myths, Offer Guidance

Help Needed: Landlords who want to give low-income families a decent, safe place to live.

Private landlords are crucial to the operation of WPCOG Regional Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, and new ones are always needed. This year the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched an initiative to engage new landlords by increasing outreach while providing information directly to them.

HUD's HCV Landlord Resource page offers extensive information. Landlords can learn about the benefits of becoming an HCV landlord, the flow of the leasing process from start to finish, Housing Quality Inspection standards, as well as tenant obligations under the program.

In its Myth-Busting and Benefits Fact Sheet, HUD tries to dispel misconceptions such as:

- **Landlords cannot charge HCV participants the same rent as non-HCV tenants. False.** Landlords can charge the full rent no matter who the tenant is. The housing authority must determine that the proposed rent is reasonable and is not higher than units in that area with similar amenities.
- **HCV Voucher tenants are problem tenants. False.** Actually, HCV tenants are typically long-term tenants, living in a unit for 7-8 years on average. There are no documented statistics showing that HCV participants are more likely to damage units or not pay rent than non-HCV tenants. Landlords use their own screening criteria and should screen HCV tenants as they would screen any other tenant to avoid problems.
- **It is almost impossible to evict an HCV tenant when they violate the lease. False.** HCV tenants are bound by the terms of their rental agreements and are subject to eviction, as is any non-HCV tenant.

The benefits of being an HCV landlord are many. **TRUE.** They include:

- Timely and dependable payments from the public housing authority
- Regular inspections for your units
- Annual reasonable rent increases may be requested.

- A bonus: You will have the opportunity to help low-income elderly, disabled, and veteran households as well as families with children by providing affordable housing.

HUD HCV Landlord Resource web address below:

[hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/hcv/landlord](https://hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/landlord)

For more information or if you are interested in becoming an HCV Landlord, please contact

- Kala Guido at 828.485.4282 [kala.guido@wpcog.org](mailto:kala.guido@wpcog.org)
- Elizabeth Moncrief at 828.485.4244 [elizabeth.moncrief@wpcog.org](mailto:elizabeth.moncrief@wpcog.org).

Article by Elizabeth Moncrief

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## Transportation

### New Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for Town of Sawmills

WPCOG has developed a draft Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Town of Sawmills. A citizen steering committee met three times to help guide plan development. The new plan is intended to help guide Town policy decisions concerning the network, prioritization, and implementation of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Currently, Sawmills has a core sidewalk network linking Sawmills Elementary and Baird Park. The draft plan recommends maintaining and expanding this network to Veterans Park, South Caldwell High, Spring Lake, and Cahah Mountain Road. North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) plans to modernize Cahah Mountain Road between Highway 321A and Connelly Springs Road. This funded NCDOT project will straighten curves and add five-foot shoulders, with construction expected in 2025. The new draft Plan recommends adding sidewalks and bicycle lanes inside Town limits along the NCDOT project, transitioning to a multi-use path between Mount Zion Church and Highway 321A. The recommended multi-use path would accommodate a shared space for cyclists and pedestrians, create a new accessible crossing of the Caldwell County Railroad, and connect to existing Mission Road sidewalks with a marked crossing of Highway 321A.

In addition to providing direction on NCDOT projects, the draft Plan also recommends concepts that may pursue future grant opportunities. One of these potential projects seeks to link Sawmills Elementary and Veterans Park. The draft recommendation would extend the existing sidewalk in the more residentially developed areas of Sawmills north of May Road and immediately south of Dry Ponds Road. Between May Road and Dry Ponds Road, as well as approaching Veterans Park, the plan recommends a multi-use path. The trail system in Veterans Park has recently been paved, and a loop trail is planned to be completed by Duke Energy. Enhanced crossings of Dry Ponds Road and at the Elementary School are also included in the recommended concept.

A public hearing is tentatively scheduled for June 15, 2021, at the Sawmills Town Hall. To learn more about this plan and others like it in the region, you may visit the WPCOG Bicycle and Pedestrian web page at [www.wpcog.org/bicycle-pedestrian](http://www.wpcog.org/bicycle-pedestrian)





A key gap in the existing Sawmills sidewalk network is between Sawmills School Road and Highway 321A. This view shows a sidewalk extending around the corner of 321A toward the Caldwell County Railroad. The rendering shows a new sidewalk, with an ADA-compliant railroad crossing and pedestrian ramp, extending along Sawmills School Road toward the Farmers Market Rendering by Duncan Cavanaugh.

Article by Brian Horton

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## Workforce Development Board Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Local Plan

Western Piedmont is required to make available to the public the Western Piedmont Workforce Development, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) local plan. This workforce plan will be available for the next 30 days for comment. To submit comments do so to: [matthew.xiong@wpcog.org](mailto:matthew.xiong@wpcog.org) by 5 p.m. on June 4, 2021. See [www.westernpiedmontworks.org](http://www.westernpiedmontworks.org) for the full plan.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires each Workforce Development Board (WDB) to develop and submit a comprehensive four-year plan in partnership with the local chief elected official. Four-Year Plans were submitted in May 2020. In North Carolina, annually, each WDB is to provide updates to the Comprehensive Four-Year Plan. The WIOA Program Year (PY) 2021 Plan is to provide current information and be effective July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022, and will include all current local policies. The local plan will support the alignment strategy described in the 2020-2024 NC Unified State Plan in accordance with WIOA Section 102(b)(1)(E) and otherwise, be consistent with the NC Unified State Plan. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper's mission is to ensure North Carolinians are better educated, healthier, and have more money in their pockets so that they can live more abundant purposeful lives. The cornerstone to achieving this goal is to help people get good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families. Through NC Job Ready, Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative, North Carolina is working to build a stronger and better workforce. NC Job Ready is built on three core principles: education and skills attainment are the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce; an employer-led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job-ready workforce, and local innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system. In addition, WDBs shall comply with WIOA Section 108 in the preparation and submission of the plan.

Article by Wendy Johnson

- Bi-Monthly WPCOG Policy Board Meeting - May 25, 2021 - 6:00 pm
- Please visit [www.wpcog.org/electronic-public-meetings](http://www.wpcog.org/electronic-public-meetings), to see other scheduled meetings and virtual options.

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