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WPCOG - Newsletter

March/April 2020

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The Office is Closed But We are Still Working!

WPCOG staff is available to assist member governments working to maintain service to residents, address administrative challenges, or reduce the spread of COVID-19. General service or program-specific (Section 8, Area Agency on Aging, Workforce Development, etc.) requests can be made by phone:

(828) 322-9191, or by emailing staff directly [here](#).

Although WPCOG offices will be closed to the public, staff will be working to continue operations of vital services to our member governments and the public. In-person appointments with staff will be made on a limited basis when unavoidable.

Regional Housing Authority

New Systems, COVID-19, & Contacts

The Regional Housing Authority (RHA) is in the midst of converting to a new housing management software system. This new system allows tenants and landlords to stay updated on their monthly Housing Assistance Payments (HAP), through an online portal. The RHA is encouraging landlords and tenants to use this link <https://housing.wpcog.net/> to register for an account.

Due to the global outbreak of COVID-19, The WPCOG building is closed to the public. Regional Housing Authority staff are still processing paperwork and updating Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) participant's information and statuses. Updates to RHA staff members and their contact information are listed below. Please reach out with any questions or concerns. Due to the increased number of phone calls, clients are encouraged to email, when possible.

RHA Staff

RHA Director, Stephanie Hanvey | stephanie.hanvey@wpcog.org

Alexander and Catawba County Housing Specialist, Kala Guido | kala.guido@wpcog.org | 828.485.4282

Special Programs Housing Specialist, Elizabeth Moncrief | elizabeth.moncrief@wpcog.org | 828.485.4244

Burke and Caldwell County Housing Specialist, Ashley Dale | ashley.dale@wpcog.org | 828.485.4227

Annual Re-certifications Housing Specialist, Joann Parlier | joann.parlier@wpcog.org | 828.485.4247

Waiting List Housing Specialist, Sharday Black | sharday.black@wpcog.org | 828.485.4241

Family Self-Sufficiency/REACH Coordinator, Kim Duncan | kim.duncan@wpcog.org | 828.485.4299

Housing Inspector, By Khang | by.khang@wpcog.org | 828.485.4236

EnVision Center Career Coach, Jared Nava Salgado | jared.navasalgado@wpcog.org

Article by Kala Guido

Transportation

Keeping Public Transportation Running

Transit agencies across the country face new challenges with COVID-19. This includes our region's own lead transit provider, Greenway Public Transportation. While many must now stay home, others must still travel to their essential jobs or access food and essential services without personal transportation. Greenway continues to serve those who rely most on their service, while still assuring everyone's safety.

Already before the stay-at-home order, non-essential appointments were being indefinitely postponed. As a result, demand-response services had already decreased. Since the order took effect, Greenway has reduced hours on fixed routes in Catawba County, plus flex routes in Burke County and Taylorsville. Customers still needing essential travel outside of these hours have been able to arrange van service. In the wake of reduced ridership, Greenway is fortunate to still be able to manage operations, despite lower fare revenues. For one,

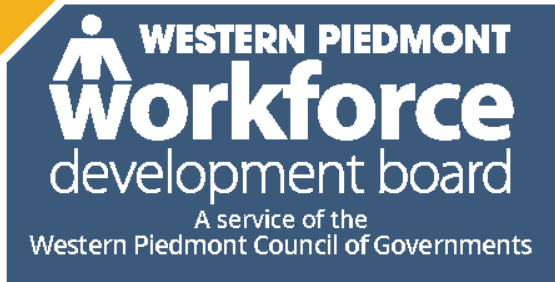
reduced fuel costs have helped offset decreased fare collection.

Public awareness has been raised with COVID-19 materials posted on all buses and Greenway's website, as well as bus operator training. Before the pandemic, Greenway already cleaned and disinfected vehicles daily. Since then, Greenway has increased the usage of additional disinfectants and focused on deeply cleaning high-touch areas more frequently. Signage on buses also provides direction to maintain distancing from the driver and others. In these ways, Greenway provides a safe form of transportation for those who most need it.

Article by Brian Horton

Workforce Development Board COVID-19 Business Resources

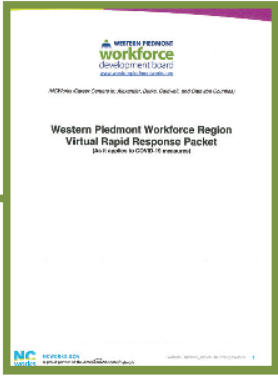
I hope we never have to experience a pandemic again in this world. As prepared as you think you are, the unprecedented life changing impacts that COVID-19 has brought about proves otherwise. There are many things we realize now we could do differently, and will in the future. For now, everyone is doing the best they can with what they have. The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board is updating facts and resources daily that can be found at www.westernpiedmontworks.org and on each of our social media outlets. Please follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to get the latest updates and resources.



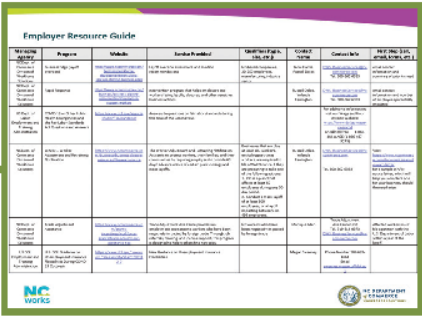
**WESTERN PIEDMONT
workforce
development board**
A service of the
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Resources are available for businesses and jobseekers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These resource guides and many other employee and employment resources are found at:


www.westernpiedmontworks.org




**Virtual Rapid
Response Packet**




**Employer
Resource Guide**




**Rapid Response
COVID-19 Q&A**



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Article by Wendy Johnson

Area Agency on Aging North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature

Several times throughout the year, the STHL convene in Chapel Hill or Raleigh to conduct business to advocate for the senior citizens of North Carolina and continue to work to advance the STHL Legislative Priorities, presented in 2019, that citizens across the state have voiced as important aging issues to be addressed by the NC Legislature this year.

Residents of Alexander County age 60 or older, if you are interested in serving as the Alexander County Alternate Member of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature, please contact Anita Roberts at anita.roberts@wpcog.org or 828-485-4265 for an application. Overnight travel to Raleigh is required three times per year for meetings, in addition to Regional STHL meetings. Travel expenses are reimbursed.

The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature was created by the North Carolina General Assembly with the passage of Senate Bill 479 in July of 1993. The Senior Tar Heel Legislature was created to:

- * Provide information to senior citizens on the legislative process and matters being considered by the North Carolina General Assembly.

- * Promote citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the North Carolina General Assembly.

- * Assess the legislative needs of older citizens by convening a forum modeled after the North Carolina General Assembly.

Each of the 100 North Carolina counties is entitled to one delegate to the Senior Tar Heel Legislature. Most counties also have an alternate delegate. Delegates and alternates must be age 60 or older. The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services provides staff support for the Senior Tar Heel Legislature in cooperation with the 16 Area Agencies on Aging, which are responsible for conducting the selection of delegates and alternates.

The STHL Legislative Priorities are:

Increase Funding for HCCBG

The North Carolina Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) is vital in assuring the availability of cost-effective home and community-based services to the elderly, malnourished, homebound, dependent and those who are socially and economically needy. This older population continues to increase; approximately 10,000 citizens are currently wait-listed for services and 1.2 million more are expected to turn 60 years of age by 2034. This rapidly increasing older adult population will place even greater pressure on an already overburdened service delivery system. **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature requests the General Assembly increase the Home and Community Care Block Grant funding by \$7 million dollars in recurring funds.**

Maintain and Increase Funding for Senior Centers

There are 171 Senior Centers in 97 counties that provide programs and services to enhance the health and wellness of older adults. These services are of significant benefit to help elders remain independent, thus delaying their potential for costlier services or housing options. Senior Center General Purpose money is vital to support critical center operations. To maintain operation, senior centers must leverage resources from a variety of sources that include federal, state, and local governments, special events, participant contributions, grants and volunteer hours. Even with leveraging, funding for senior centers has not been able to meet the needs of the state's increasing aging population who now constitute more than two-thirds of the fifty and over population. **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature requests that the General Assembly maintain the current General Purpose funding and increase this funding by a recurring \$350,000 to continue to meet the vital needs of North Carolina's growing population of older adults.**

Increase funding for Project C.A.R.E.

By mandate of the North Carolina General Assembly, Project C.A.R.E. (Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty) was developed by recommendation of a statewide, multi-stakeholder Task Force to address Alzheimer disease and related dementias. Funded by the state through the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Aging and Adult Services, it provides caregiver support, care management, and referrals to available services. It has become a national best practice model for providing respite services to family members who are caring at home for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. More funding is needed to assist the caregivers of the ever-growing older adult population. **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature requests that the General Assembly increase funding for Project C.A.R.E. in 2019-2020 by \$500,000 and in future years increase funding by ten percent annually for expected growth.**

Strengthen and Fund North Carolina's Adult Protective Services Program (APS)

North Carolina's Adult Protective Services Program (APS) must be strengthened and funded to respond to the accelerated growth in the State's aging population. APS is a core of services provided to vulnerable and older adults who are at risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation. By 2025, 89 counties in North Carolina are

projected to have more people age 60 years of age than 17 years and under. Many of these adults may be at risk of becoming victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation. The number of APS reports is expected to continue to increase as North Carolina's aging population increases. NC General Statute 108A, Article 6, Protection of the Abused, Neglected, or Exploited Disabled Adult Act, mandates county departments of social services provide APS to vulnerable and older adults who have been abused, neglected or exploited. In SFY 2016-2017 county departments of social services received 27,483 APS reports alleging the abuse, neglect or exploitation of vulnerable adults. In SFY 2016-17 counties expended approximately \$23.5 million, 3% state, 79% county, 18% federal, for the provision of APS. Counties are struggling to locate funding to provide these mandated services and are relying on funding from county governments and a decreasing federal Social Services Block Grant that is used to fund many services provided by counties. The need for APS has continued to increase over the years, but the only State funding, \$2 million provided for the provision of APS, was eliminated in the SFY 2010-2012 State Budget. A comprehensive evaluation/review is needed to better reflect the challenges counties currently face in meeting the changing needs of vulnerable and older adults who have been abused, neglected or exploited and are in need protective services. **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature urges the General Assembly recognize and value its vulnerable citizens by making available \$7 million in recurring funds in the State budget to meet the growing need for Adult Protective Services in North Carolina and conduct a comprehensive evaluation/review of these services to ensure this protection is adequate.**

Staff-to-Patient Ratios in Nursing Homes

The positive relationship between nurse staffing levels and the quality of nursing home care has been demonstrated widely and that increasing nurse (RN, LPN, and CNA) staffing levels facilitates enhancement of the outcomes of nursing home care. The federal Nursing Home Reform Act (NHRA), as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1987, requires minimum staffing levels for registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs), and a minimum educational training for nurse's aides (NAs), but fails to establish a specific requirement for minimum caregiver/resident ratio or a minimum standard for the number of hours per patient day that a resident should be receiving care. In a nursing home, the CNA is the true point-person when it comes to providing adequate one-on-one care to the resident. The quality of care that facilities provide to their residents is frequently evaluated across three domains including structure (resources used to provide care; e.g., staffing), process (actions used to provide care; e.g., restraints) and outcomes (end results for patients; may be bad outcomes or good outcomes). **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature recommends that the General Assembly enact legislation, which establishes either a mandatory Standardized HPPD (hours per patient daily) or minimum staff-to-patient ratios for direct patient care, including enforcement standards and consequences to ensure quality care in nursing homes in the state of North Carolina, regardless of whether they are a for-profit or non-profit organization.**

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE NORTH CAROLINA SENIOR TAR HEEL LEGISLATURE

The Division of Aging and Adult Services can be contacted at 919-855-3400.

You can find out more about NCSTHL on the WPCOG website: www.wpcog.org/senior-tar-heel-legislators and on the NCSTHL's [Facebook page](#).

For more information about the North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature, please contact your county's Delegate or Alternate or the following executive members:

Alexander County

Delegate: Paulette Huffman -Email: huffmanp64@gmail.com

Alternate - Vacant

Burke County

Delegate: Karen Robinson - Email: kjcr@charter.net

Alternate: Maxine Childress - Email: maxinechildress@gmail.com

Caldwell County

Delegate: Trilla Annas - Email: trillaannas@gmail.com

Alternate: Linda Vitsyn - Email: vitsyn7@bellsouth.net

Catawba County

Delegate: Gail Miller - Email: gdbrmiller@charter.net

Alternate: Richard Smith - Email: smithrpsjr@gmail.com

Speaker - Norma Duncan
Mitchell County
59 Chestnut Street
Spruce Pine, NC 29777

Pro Tempore - David Boone
Pasquotank County
901 Cedar Point Circle
Elizabeth City, NC 27909

Deputy Speaker Pro Tempore - Annette Myers
Granville County
PO Box 461
Oxford, NC 27565

Secretary - Sherry Perry
Madison County
PO Box 844
Marshall, NC 28753

Article by Anita Roberts

Community & Economic Development

ARC Accepting Pre-applications for FY2021



The Appalachian Regional Commission currently is accepting pre-applications for the FY 2021 funding cycle through April 20.

The online pre-application is available at <https://files.nc.gov/nccommerce/documents/Rural-Development-Division/Rural/ARC/Applications/Fy-2021-NC-ARC-Pre-application-3-31-20-Online-submission.pdf>.

Grant funding of up to \$300,000 is available for construction projects, while non-construction projects are eligible for up to \$100,000. Pre-applications must meet one of the five ARC Goals as outlined in its Strategic Plan: Economic Opportunities, Ready Workforce, Critical Infrastructure, Natural and Cultural Assets, or Leadership and Community Capacity.

The grant match requirement is 50 percent for all communities and counties within the WPCOG's region. Online pre-applications must be submitted by email to Olivia Collier with the N.C. Department of Commerce by 5 p.m. on Monday, April 20. Her email address is ocollier@nccommerce.com. When submitting emailed pre-applications, please put FY 2021 Pre-Application and the Organization Name in the subject line.

The WPCOG staff is available for questions or help in developing and preparing the pre-applications. Please contact Sherry Long at sherry.long@wpcog.org; Erin Schotte at erin.schotte@wpcog.org; or Paul Teague at paul.teague@wpcog.org for assistance.

After receiving the pre-applications, ARC staff will review and select projects to proceed. Full applications will be due in July 2020.

Article by Paul Teague

Community & Regional Planning

Conservation & Recreation Access Plan Now Complete for Henry Fork & Jacob Fork Rivers



On Friday, Feb. 28, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) and Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina completed the Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Rivers Conservation Plan. The plan, developed by WPCOG over a nine-month research period, ultimately aims to conserve these two aquatic resources while also creating access points for river recreation.

The new plan identifies clear goals for the conservation of significant natural resources along the Henry Fork and Jacob Fork rivers - offering recommendations to conservation groups, local governments, state natural resource agencies and landowners - to ensure high quality drinking water, reduce water pollution from land erosion, and expand public outdoor recreation opportunities that are key to economic growth in the western Piedmont near Hickory and Newton.

With funding support from the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Catawba County, Foothills Conservancy, Beaver Foundation and Duke Energy (Piedmont Natural Gas) Foundation, WPCOG administered the planning, performed detailed analyses of resources and gathered input from stakeholder partners to create the final plan. The planning area covers both rivers' watersheds in eastern Burke and western Catawba counties, between N.C. Highway 18 and the exit for N.C. Highway 10 along U.S. 321.

"The Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Watershed Conservation Plan, with its priorities and goals, along with the future implementation efforts, will go a long way toward achieving water quality benefits," said John Wear, senior planner and natural resources administrator for WPCOG. "The identification of priority parcels for conservation and recreation will reduce surface water pollution associated with erosion and stream sedimentation and provide future access for recreational corridors. This plan is not only beneficial for the natural environment, but also for the City of Newton's drinking water intake on the Jacob Fork River near U.S. 321."

Foothills Conservancy and its partners in Catawba County formulated the preliminary study goals which included engaging stakeholders, identifying small focus areas in the study watersheds, compiling data on water quality and natural/historical/cultural resources, reviewing existing public recreation assets in the area, and mapping areas best suited to voluntary conservation activities, like trails and paddling access points.

After several meetings, partners and stakeholders - including representatives from Catawba County; Burke County; the cities of Hickory, Newton and Conover; N.C. State Parks; N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission; N.C. Division of Water Resources; Friends of Valdese Recreation and the Catawba Valley Heritage Alliance - identified the following strategies to address these goals: 1) collaborate with local, county and state agencies to acquire conservation lands and public trail easements; 2) conserve a network of undisturbed stream/riparian buffers through voluntary partnerships; 3) work with interested landowners to explore potential river paddling access locations; 4) recommend reclassification of Jacob Fork River to either a higher status of North Carolina public water supply watershed or as an Outstanding Resource Waters stream; 5) highlight apparent streambank and riparian buffer restoration opportunities related to improved water quality; 6) implement blueway trails; 7) sponsor an updated natural heritage inventory of significant native plants, fish and wildlife habitats; 8) increase water quality monitoring along rivers; 9) encourage implementation of stormwater management techniques in urbanizing areas; and 10) possibly consider lower density residential zoning along Jacob Fork River.

"The North Carolina Wildlife Resources is excited to partner with Foothills Conservancy and Catawba County

to identify and promote the wonderful natural resources in the Jacob Fork and Henry Fork rivers," said District 8 Fisheries Biologist Chris Wood. "Both rivers have an abundance of wild and native aquatic species, including rare crayfish and freshwater mussels."

On the recreation benefits of the study, Wood continued: "Opportunities will expand for recreational paddlers and anglers as we identify appropriate parcels to develop public fishing and boating access areas. Anglers can expect to see redbreast sunfish, bluegill, rock bass and smallmouth bass in each river. Boaters will experience a beautiful foothills float with rocky outcrops and unique mountains-to-Piedmont forest communities. This project will help protect valuable resources for future generations to enjoy, and expand opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts. It will also help surrounding landowners and communities realize the importance of conservation efforts and how these efforts promote healthy lifestyles and enhanced economies."

Walter Clark, executive director of Clean Water Management Trust Fund and director of the Division of Land and Water Stewardship, commented on the importance of funding such a study.

"As an organization that distributes state funds to protect land for natural, historical and cultural benefit, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund places a high value on efforts to provide public access to our state's natural resources," Clark said. "By identifying parcels that can provide direct public access to streams, rivers and lakes in the Jacob Fork and Henry Fork watersheds, Foothills Conservancy and its partners help ensure that the WPCOG access plan can guide the development of safe, sustainable and popular fishing spots, trail heads, boat launches and picnic sites. Such public access to our natural world cannot help but serve our communities, further our education and keep North Carolina a special place to work and live."

Foothills Conservancy previously collaborated with the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund to complete a similar conservation plan for the two rivers farther upstream, near South Mountains State Park, in 2010.

The conservation plan report is expected to be available at county planning offices in Burke and Catawba County in April. Voluntary conservation activities and agreements are happening now.

[Article by Sophie Shelton, Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina](#)

Community & Regional Planning

Spring 2020 Economic Indicators Newsletter Highlights Residential Real Estate Trends and Computer/Broadband Access

The latest issue of the Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN) addresses Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro bank deposits, Hickory MSA Multi-Listing Service (MLS) real estate sales data and Hickory MSA internet access.

Here are a few key highlights of the EIN:

- The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate fell from 3.5% in December 2018 to 3.2% in December 2019.
- Between December 2018 and December 2019, the estimated number of employed persons increased from 168,274 to 169,337, while the civilian labor force grew from 174,462 to 174,931.
- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) summary of deposits data reveals that since June 2015, Hickory MSA bank deposits have grown by \$760 million to \$4.89 billion.
- Multiple Listing Service results reveal that the Hickory MSA had 4,593 new residential listings and 3,842 closed sales in 2018.
- Results for the Hickory MSA indicate that there were 149 more new listings and 462 more closed sales in 2018 than in 2017. The number of closed sales grew by 13.8% between 2018 and 2019, while the number of new listings increased by only 3.4%.
- In 2019, the median sales price in the Hickory MSA was \$169,000 and the average sales price was \$210,206.
- The Hickory MSA's median sales price increased 8% between 2018 and 2019, while the average sales price grew 6.3%. For the first time, the average sales price in the region exceeded \$200,000 in 2019.
- In 2019, a house was only on the market 52 days before it was purchased. By comparison, in 2018 it took 57 days on the market until the sale of the house.
- As of December 2019, the Hickory MSA had only 758 homes for sale and a 2.3 months supply of housing inventory.

- Results from the 2018 American Community Survey reveal that 88.7% of Hickory MSA households had access to a computer compared to 75% in 2013.
- About 68.7% of Hickory MSA households in 2018 had a desktop or laptop, while 79% owned a smartphone and 55.5% owned a tablet.
- About 80.1% of households in the Hickory MSA used a computer with a broadband internet subscription. The Hickory MSA was one of 11 metro areas in North Carolina in which more than 80% of households have a broadband internet subscription.

Figure 5. Hickory MSA Median Sales Price, 2018-2019
Source: Canopy Multiple Listing Services, Inc. (Canopy MLS), 2020.

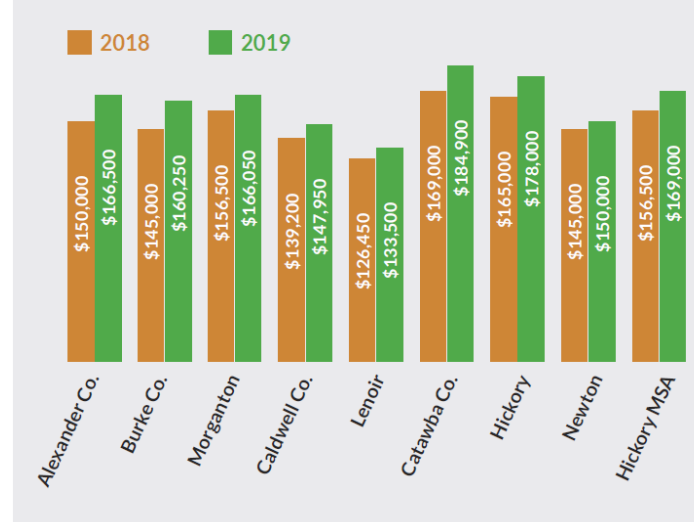
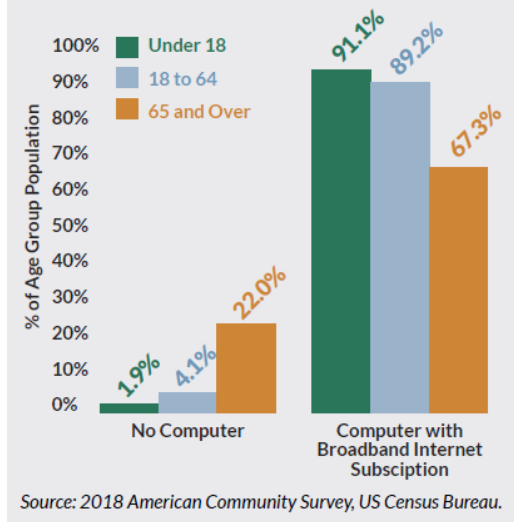


Figure 10. Hickory MSA Computer Access by Age Group, 2018



The EIN is produced quarterly and is a publication of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. The EIN is now available digitally [here](#). To join the EIN subscription list, please click [here](#). For questions concerning the EIN, please contact Taylor Dellinger, Data Analyst at 828-485-4233 or by email at taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org.

Article by Taylor Dellinger

ANNOUNCEMENTS



It is during times like this when our communities rely on their local government teams for so much, and the team at the Alliance is tremendously proud to work alongside you and support your efforts. We know there are significant demands on your teams right now, and pivots you are making in your own organizations to keep operations running. And of course, the health and well-being of you and your teammates are our top priority.

To ensure your safety, and be mindful of the shifting priorities, **AFI has been able to move the TLG 2020 conference dates to Sept. 1-4.** These four days of fiery positive energy will be a welcome inspiration and a coming together of passionate local government professionals - just what we all will need to reboot and reenergize!

Anyone who has already registered for the conference under the original dates will have their registrations automatically transferred (while the some hotel blocks will be available, hotel reservations will need to be re-booked).

If you haven't registered, registration is still open at transformgov.org/tlg2020. And as a reminder, because of AFI's partnership, members can register now with discount code WPCOG to save \$50 off the registration

cost. Follow along on Twitter at #TLG2020 to keep in touch with the latest conference updates, or reach out to our team at conferences@transformgov.org with any questions.

WPCOG CALENDAR

Due to Governor Cooper's Stay-At-Home Order, All scheduled activities are currently in flux, please stay tuned as we reschedule or provide virtual options for April (and potentially beyond) events.

Stay Connected



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www.wpcog.org