



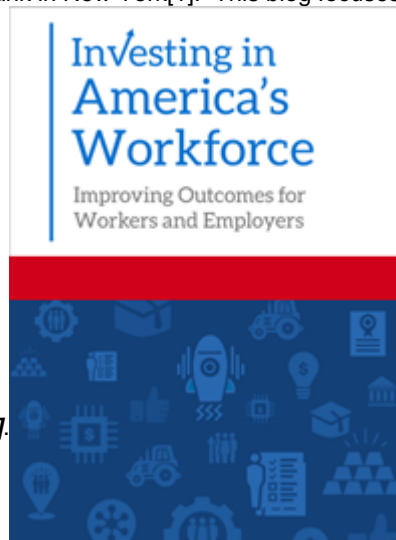
Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: The Rural Dimensions of Workforce Development

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Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/the-rural-dimensions-of-workforce-development/>

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Last month, a major three-volume book, *Investing in America's Workforce: Improving Outcomes for Workers and Employers*, was launched at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York[1]. This blog focuses on just one of the 90 chapters,



The Rural Dimensions of Workforce Development[2].

The chapter makes six main points.

1. **Broad economic forces that are radically shaping sectors, industries, and occupations, affect all parts of the country, whether urban or rural.** Increasing use of technology while leading to higher levels of productivity has reduced the overall demand for labor, especially for such occupations as skilled trades and plant, process, and machine operators. The labor market is being increasingly split between high-skilled high-paid jobs and lower-skilled low-paid jobs. The result has been widespread dislocation across the United States, including North Carolina.
2. **Certain characteristics of rural economies magnify these forces.** Lower population density and remoteness mean reduced economies of scale, higher transportation costs, and less efficient service delivery. Rural areas tend to have older populations, either because young people leave or retirees move in, and are increasingly diverse as immigrants take up low-wage jobs in agriculture, food processing, and hospitality. Rural businesses tend to be smaller and have limited capacity to engage in regional or global markets. They are constrained by a limited pool of workers with the right education, skills, and experience, and the workers are faced with fewer career progression opportunities and lower wages.
3. **There are significant differences between rural areas.** Rural economies are differentiated primarily by their distance from metropolitan areas and by the strength of their natural and cultural assets. Their labor markets are characterized by the extent to which there is a match between what employers need and what the labor force can offer, and this can change over time.
4. **The goal of rural workforce development is** to ensure that *all* workers have the opportunity and resources to enhance their economic circumstances through education and skill development. However, it is important to note that the ability of rural workers to apply newly acquired education and skills in their home communities will



determine whether they stay or migrate for urban opportunities.

5. **To achieve this goal workforce development policies must include** *distance learning* integrated into workplace, academic, and community contexts, *competency-based learning* that can demonstrate what a worker knows and can do irrespective of where and how learning happens, and *lifelong learning* to continually update and acquire knowledge and skills.
6. **Rural communities must embrace six workforce development fundamentals:**
 1. *Connectivity*: ensuring full access to high-speed internet.
 2. *Innovation*: looking for competitive niches and new ways to attract and keep young people.
 3. *Entrepreneurship*: starting and growing new businesses must be a key part of workforce development.
 4. *Assets*: identifying, protecting, strengthening, and building upon their natural and cultural assets.
 5. *Collaboration*: breaking down barriers between schools, colleges, and universities; employers and education and training providers; federal, state, and local government; and formal institutions and community and civic organizations.
 6. *Regionalism*: thinking and acting regionally unconstrained by jurisdictional boundaries.

[1] The book was the result of a two-and-a-half-year collaboration between the Federal Reserve System, the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

[2] Dabson, Brian (2018), The Rural Dimensions of Workforce Development, In Andreason, S., T. Greene, H. Prince, & C.E. Van Horn (eds.) *Investing in America's Workforce: Improving Outcomes for Workers and Employers, Volume 2: Investing in Work*. pp 183-194. Kalamazoo MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.