

Creating Opportunities, Hope

Buncombe County Working to Increase Access to Living Wage Jobs

The cost of living in Buncombe County can be difficult for many people. The average price for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,187 per month, and a two-bedroom apartment averages \$1,303 per month, according to April 2017 data from the real estate website Zillow. Meantime, North Carolina's minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour would provide a yearly, full-time pay of only \$15,080.

That means a worker making minimum wage and living in a one-bedroom apartment would put 94% of their pay to housing, making it nearly impossible to afford the rest of other necessary costs such as housing, utilities, medication, food, school-related costs, and other expenses.

In order to create more opportunities, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners is committed to creating a diverse community workforce as one of its six strategic priorities. This is being accomplished with a multifaceted approach that utilizes county funds, community partnerships, and innovative programs. For example:

- The Isaac Coleman Community Grants distributed grantees \$635,426 to seven community-based projects in 2017. This year, at least \$500,000 will be allocated.
- The Tipping Point Initiative provided nearly \$70,000 to 14 grassroots projects.
- Utilize economic development incentives and partnership with

the Economic Development Coalition to attract new and expanding businesses and jobs.

- Creation of the Diversity Supplier Network consortium working to make minority contractors aware of, and bid on, county and other available contracts.
- Funding of Western Women's Business Center providing small business development, technical assistance and access to capital.

A new effort, called the Workforce Development Initiative, is spearheaded by the Asheville Housing Authority (AHA) with Buncombe County and other community agencies partnering to help the effort. The goal is to help build a network of employers that will provide certified living wage jobs that also have a clear path toward salary and professional advancement.

Buncombe County living wage rates are set by the local nonprofit Just Economics. The

current rates are \$13 per hour without health insurance or \$11.50 per hour with insurance, or annual pay of \$27,040 and \$23,920, respectively. In addition, the Workforce Development Initiative will provide peripheral support such as job training, transportation assistance, and more.

The Workforce Development Initiative looks to use some of the same elements of the Skill Training and Employment Program (STEP) which is a collaborative between the County and A-B Tech.



North Carolina's minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour which would provide a yearly, full-time pay of \$15,080.

Since October 2017, STEP has:

- Facilitated training for 67 community members
- Helped 58 people get jobs with an average wage of more than \$11 an hour
- Held community-based job fairs

"There has to be a collaborative effort to offer our residents and families more opportunities and Buncombe County offers a multitude of services that low-income families need in order to reach their goals and become self-sufficient," says Housing Authority Chief Executive Officer Gene Bell. "In order to thrive as a community, all people have to be included in the opportunities and earning power."

The County and its partners are looking for more organizations and businesses to provide living wage employment opportunities and supplemental support. "Having a robust network of community allies working with Buncombe County can help make the Workforce Development Initiative a project people can point to as a game changer in take-home pay and future opportunity," says County Workforce Development Initiative liaison Aisha Shepherd. "Our hope is that these living wage job opportunities are not just beneficial to the recipients, but will also be rewarding for employers."

"In order to thrive as a community, all people have to be included in the opportunities and earning power."

*~ Gene Bell, AHA
Chief Executive Officer*

Help Provide Job Opportunities and Hope. Join the Workforce Development Initiative.

The Workforce Development Initiative is always looking to grow its network. Is your business, organization, or nonprofit interested in providing living wage employment opportunities, training, transportation, or other forms of support? If so, please contact the Asheville Housing Authority at (828) 258-1222.

Workforce Development Initiative Partners

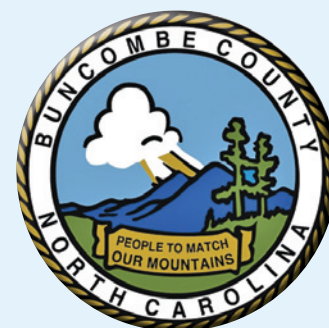
Buncombe County would like to thank and recognize the following Workforce Development Initiative partners:

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

**Asheville Housing Authority
Buncombe County**

Mountain Area Workforce Development Board

Pisgah Legal Services



www.buncombecounty.org

For more information about Buncombe County's strategic priority for creating a diverse community workforce visit BuncombeCounty.org.