GROW

CATAWBA COUNTY

GROWING & RETAINING OUR WORKFORCE

CATAWBA COUNTY TALENT STRATEGY

Case for Investment

OUR ROLE

–THE CATAWBA COUNTY CHAMBER FOUNDATION'S ROLE–

A Lasting Community Asset

The Catawba County Talent Strategy is The Foundation's first major initiative—***but not its last.***

The Chamber Foundation was created to provide our community with the long-term capacity to solve complex economic challenges by:

- **Convening cross-sector leaders** around shared priorities.
- **Funding and empowering partner organizations** to lead implementation.
- **Aligning resources and measuring progress** toward shared outcomes.
- **Building the long-term capacity** to strengthen Catawba County's economy.

Partners Advancing the Work

Economic Dev. Organizations	Educational Institutions	Workforce Agencies	Community Non-Profits	Local Government

–PLANNING TIMELINE–

How We Got Here

A deliberate, data-driven path—listening to the data, then the business community, then building a shared strategy.

1 DECEMBER 2023

Workforce Scan

What does the data say about the depth and quality of our workforce?

2 APRIL to JUNE 2024

Talent Priorities

What are the business community's top priorities for workforce and talent?

3 DECEMBER 2024 to JULY 2025

Talent Strategy

How can we work across sectors to make an impact on workforce and talent?

–DEFINING THE NEED–

The Urgency.

Our Workforce is Aging

With an older population than many peer communities, Catawba County faces increasing workforce shortages as experienced workers retire. Sustained growth depends on attracting and retaining more working-age adults.

Talent is Limiting Business Growth

Employers across key industries continue to struggle to find qualified workers. Without a stronger talent pipeline, business expansion, investment, and long-term competitiveness will be constrained.

Housing & Child Care Are Workforce Infrastructure

Limited workforce housing and inadequate childcare capacity make it more difficult to recruit, retain, and fully engage the workforce employers need to compete.

The Time to Act is Now

After two years of research and engagement with hundreds of business and community leaders, Catawba County has a clear, community-driven Talent Strategy. The opportunity now is to move from planning to implementation.

OUR OBJECTIVES

01 Catawba County Talent Pipeline Partnership

Establish and lead **a cross-sector collective impact partnership** that aligns employers, education providers, workforce agencies, and community organizations around shared priorities for developing homegrown talent.

- **Establish the partnership's governance structure**, advisory board, and cross-sector working groups.
- **Establish shared goals, metrics, and data-sharing practices** to track progress and continuous improvement.
- **Develop a shared understanding** of the local talent ecosystem, education pathways, and employer engagement.
- **Coordinate early pilot initiatives and employer engagement** that strengthen career pathways and alignment.

This work will be led by the **Vice President of Talent**, funded by the Catawba County Chamber Foundation.

The partnership builds on the success of the K-64 initiative, while transitioning to a broader, business-led structure that strengthens cross-sector coordination and system alignment.

Implementation Actions

- **Strengthen career exploration** by expanding career awareness, workforce navigation, and access to career pathways through tools such as Xplore64.com and other partner-led initiatives.
- **Fund innovative pathway programs that remove barriers and create pathways** for individuals facing barriers to employment—including veterans, justice-involved individuals, disconnected youth, and others seeking to reenter the workforce.
- **Provide credential scholarships** that help adults upskill into high-demand careers identified by local employers.
- **Make strategic investments to increase participation in work-based learning** by strengthening employer engagement and expanding opportunities for K–12, community college, and university students to participate in internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and other career-connected experiences.
- **Fund career connection events and outreach** that connect students, job seekers, educators, and employers while increasing awareness of local career opportunities.

Digital and technology proficiency | **Transferable and workplace skills** | **Employer engagement and training partnerships**

Work-based learning and career pathway alignment | **Workforce upskilling and career mobility for adults**

02 Targeted Talent Marketing

Attract new residents—particularly working-age adults and families—by aligning partner messaging and deploying coordinated campaigns that promote Catawba County's value proposition.

Establish a Regional Talent Marketing Collaborative

Convene a working group of communications and marketing leaders from partner organizations-including the Hickory Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau, local governments, the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation and The Chamber **-to coordinate messaging and deploy shared resources that promote Catawba County as a place to live, work, and build a career.**

Other Implementation Actions

Ad Spend

Regional Ad Spend

Provide ad spend when promoting Catawba County as a place to live, work, and build a career.

Employer Toolkit

Talent Marketing Partner Toolkit

A centralized online resource hub with messaging guidelines, pitch decks, photography, video, and social templates to equip employers' recruitment efforts.

HKY4VETS

Attract Veteran Talent Through HKY4Vets

Continue to strengthen Catawba County's identity as a veteran-ready community.

Incentive

Commercial Airline Service Incentive

Provide a marketing incentive for the City of Hickory to attract and retain a commercial airline service at the Hickory Regional Airport.

03 Expand Attainable Housing + Strengthen Quality of Place

Strengthen talent attraction and retention by expanding attainable housing options and investing in vibrant places, amenities, and experiences that enhance quality of life.

Implementation Actions

Support Housing Growth + Diversification

- **Promote policies and community understanding** that support the development of diverse and attainable housing options in Catawba County.
- **Fund a comprehensive housing study to identify workforce housing needs and opportunities,** creating a data-driven roadmap for housing policies, development, and investment.

Entrepreneurship & Placemaking

Strengthen Entrepreneurship that Enhances Quality of Place

Promote policies and community understanding that support the development of diverse and attainable housing options in Catawba County.

- **Establish a Director of Small Business & Entrepreneurship** to coordinate ecosystem partners and support startup growth.
- **Provide targeted programming** that helps entrepreneurs test concepts, refine business models, and prepare for growth.
- **Launch a microgrant program** supporting startups and scaling businesses that fill key community niches.

Support Placemaking in Downtowns & Activity Districts

Deploy funding to support placemaking that enhances community vibrancy, strengthens downtown districts, and improves overall quality of life.

- **Launch a placemaking grant fund** to support community-led projects—public art, festivals and events, pocket parks, dog parks, and other quality-of-life enhancements.
- **Encourage continued public investments** to renovate and enhance downtown areas and activity districts that contribute to livability and talent attraction.

04 Family + Childcare Support

Strengthen workforce participation and retention by helping employers better support working families and caregivers while expanding access to reliable, high-quality child care.

Implementation Actions

Family-Friendly + Caregiver-Supportive Workplaces

- **Become a Family Forward Certified Community** — with 25% of our total workforce employed by a Family Forward NC® Certified Employer.
- **Promote the Tri-Share Child Care Program** as a cost-sharing model that helps employers support employees with childcare expenses.
- **Increase employer awareness of the Children's Resource Center (CRC)** and encourage inclusion of CRC resources in employee handbooks and recruitment materials.

Strengthen the Early Childhood Workforce Pipeline

Expand recruitment, preparation, and retention of early childhood educators in Catawba County.

- **Provide salary supplements** through expanded participation in the Child Care WAGE$ program, helping recruit and retain early childhood educators.
- **Provide incentive bonuses** to graduates of the Early Childhood Academy who secure employment in a local early childhood education setting.

Expanding the Supply of Childcare

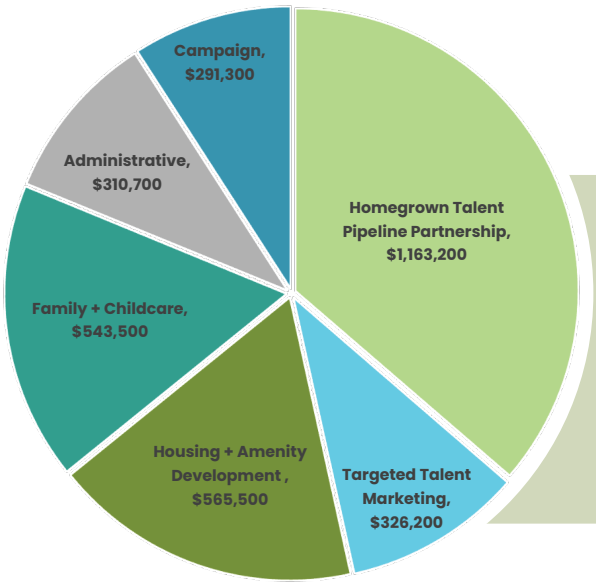
- **Increase second- and third-shift child care availability** by providing grants to support the development of Family Child Care Homes.
- **Provide start-up grants t**o help new child care providers meet state licensure requirements.
- **Provide capital grants to existing providers** *to expand enrollment capacity through facility improvements, classroom expansion, and the purchase of equipment.*

OUR IMPACT

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– 5-YEAR FUNDING STRATEGY –

Investing Across Four Priorities



01	Catawba County Talent Pipeline Partnership	$1,163,200
02	Targeted Talent Marketing	$326,200
03	Housing + Amenity Development	$565,500
04	Family + Childcare	$543,500
	TOTAL FIVE-YEAR BUDGET	**$3.2M**

– RETURN ON INVESTMENT –

A Stronger Business Ecosystem for Catawba County

These investments are projected to deliver measurable benefits across talent, families, and quality of place.

Jobs Created / Filled

100 Jobs

76 Indirect Jobs

$4,171,990 Annual Net Personal Consumption Expenditures

Return to Work / Childcare

100 Jobs

44 Indirect Jobs

$3,176,604 Annual Net Personal Consumption Expenditures

New Downtown Businesses

Total jobs created – **40**
Total wages - **$1,949,950**
Total increase in final demand - **$9,674,950**

Scenario businesses are a $3.5M insurance office, a $2M restaurant, and a $1.5M retail establishment.

3,184 Open Jobs in Catawba County as of October 2026

Homegrown Talent

A locally grown talent pipeline aligned to employer needs.

Regional Visibility

Coordinated marketing that attracts working-age families.

Vibrant places

Housing, entrepreneurship, and downtowns that retain talent.

Caregiving Support

Family-friendly workplaces and stronger care systems to retain workers.

A Seat at the Table

Direct influence over the county's talent strategy.

– JOIN THE EFFORT –

Become an Investor

Invest in Catawba County's next chapter. Your support helps the Chamber Foundation grow homegrown talent, attract new residents, and strengthen the community.

Catawba County Chamber FOUNDATION

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