As market demand for labor rapidly evolves, so too do the demographics of North Carolina’s labor force. As these two trends converge, North Carolina must rethink its approach to future job creation.

To identify opportunities that North Carolina must leverage today to successfully navigate the transformational employment market changes ahead, the Institute for Emerging Issues convened two groups: a Working Group comprised of representatives of workforce and economic development organizations, industry, and education systems plus policy makers, current and future employees, and other key stakeholders; and our Forum Ambassadors, who are career counseling professionals in high schools, community colleges, universities, NCWorks Career Centers, and other locations.

These efforts of these two groups yielded five responsive strategies, which we have organized thematically in two clusters (below). We offer these five strategies for consideration by participants at the 2016 Emerging Issues Forum, FutureWork.

ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT AMONG COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS, ESPECIALLY BUSINESS

Context: Currently, job seekers often have difficulty accessing sufficient information concerning employment and career opportunities. Various barriers, including imperfect information networks, fragmented talent-development pipelines and long transportation commute times, can limit access to opportunity. These barriers stymie growth opportunities for job seekers and employers alike. A better understanding of community assets can identify such obstacles and help determine where to target investments. Of particular importance, as businesses are confronted with accelerating rates of change that must be met with responsive
strategies and constant organizational restructuring and retraining, the risk of disconnections between industry and community partners increases. Business must be capable of identifying and establishing pathways to career opportunities, and education partners must recognize that increasing automation will drive a need for more differentiated education programs.

**Strategy 1: More Differentiated Programs:**
Employers must identify the technical and differentiated skills they require and make those known to the higher education system, which must in turn be expeditious and flexible in their responses (i.e., tailoring differentiated programs to smaller groups, as compared to general programs for larger groups). Industry needs must be reflected in the way higher education structures and pays for its education programs.

**Strategy 2: Enhanced Career Pathways Initiative:**
Within five years, the North Carolina Department of Commerce, education system (from K-12 through higher education), workforce and economic development groups, Chambers of Commerce, and non-profits should work together to create an enhanced Career Pathways initiative. The initiative should encompass the life course of the individual, beginning with pre-K programming. Individual life course plans should identify student interests and take inventory of possible career exploration activities. These activities can be developed regionally via collaboration by industry and community colleges, or through non-profits serving as brokers between students and industry.

**Strategy 3: Project-Based Learning:**
Employers should provide students with project-based learning opportunities that extend beyond the learning outcomes mandated by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

*Clarification:* The NC Department of Public Instruction does not mandate project-based learning strategies and outcomes. Instead, each local education agency develops their own curriculum to address a uniform set of state learning standards.

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PROMOTE INNOVATIVE LEARNING AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Context: Continued changes in the job market will mean that people will switch jobs, and even industries, multiple times throughout their careers. This new job market will demand new and faster options for training that go well beyond today’s existing degree and credential models. Our current learning models are designed for 19th-century workplaces and assign disproportionate responsibility and risk to the education system without sufficient integration with and buy-in from industry. Many argue, as well, that we are experiencing a crisis of innovation and are unable to produce enough entrepreneurs to move inventions to market and thereby create jobs.

Strategy 4: Increase Education System Equity: Within five years, state leaders, including the legislature, cabinet, and Governor’s office, should develop a comprehensive plan to increase education system equity. This plan must support the development of a fully representative (race, gender, age) workforce that possesses the skills and talents desired by tomorrow’s industries. The plan should address accessibility of education from pre-K to higher education; diversity in participation across the system; resource allocation; and the achievement gap.

Strategy 5: Self-Ownership of Career Development: Within 10-15 years, create and promote a new mindset and culture in North Carolina’s future workforce aimed at empowering and encouraging young people to be innovators, creators, and active agents of change in their lives and beyond. This effort, to be driven collaboratively by parents, the K-12 education system, and 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, will result in enhanced self-advocacy and self-determination, with future workforce members assuming greater ownership of their life and career trajectories.