



RECONNECT NC FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the Institute for Emerging Issues three-year 'ReCONNECT NC' project.

\$2,000 for 2,000

One strategy to ignite new community capacity is to invest in young people who can be focused on critical local priorities. Service years – full-time, paid opportunities to work on community projects – represent a great opportunity for young people to do meaningful work in communities across our state, gaining valuable work experience, and for communities to build capacity to carry out important projects. To increase the number and diversity of service year members, as well as launch a new generation into lives of deep connection to community, we need to make it easier for communities to say yes to service year members, and for service year members to say yes to communities.

North Carolina should invest \$2,000 into each service year member and sponsor, with a goal of supporting a total of 2,000 people. Of this funding, \$1,000 would go to the organization hosting the service year member and \$1,000 in non-salary benefits (housing, food, education, etc.). Funding could come from local, state or private resources.

By increasing our capacity to support service year members, we get new capacity to communities trying to build their civic culture, give service members valuable hands-on experience and help launch many of them into lifetimes of connection to community.

North Carolina Regional Exchange

We need more intentional opportunities, outside of existing programmatic structures, to develop deeper relationships between leaders in rural, urban, and suburban communities within an interconnected region. The more connected community leaders are with one another on a personal level, the more likely they are to support one another by sharing connections to ideas, resources, and other people. That same rapport can also create a sense of trust, allowing us to share deep knowledge and ask questions that challenge us to do better. The design for this idea could initially be co-created among rural and urban serving leadership organizations and piloted with engaged alumni, with support from partners.

Wraparound support services referral program

A wraparound support services referral program located in a 2 or 4-year higher education institution within a 30 minute drive of every North Carolinian.

Adults seeking additional education or credentials must navigate a complex array of obstacles if they are going to be able to afford to return and have difficulty determining how to solve the specific challenges they face. One solution: higher education institutions can utilize technology programs, such as "Single Stop" and "Aunt Bertha," to help connect students to public benefits and resources on-campus and in their community. These programs can refer students to community-based organizations or direct support services, helping with both poverty reduction and post-secondary education attainment. Resources provided within these programs should be accessible and inclusive of students from all backgrounds and experiences, including those who have been justice-involved.

Digital Inclusion Plans

Make NC the first state in the nation where every county has a digital inclusion plan.

Earlier this year, the Institute for Emerging Issues, the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office and other public and private partners launched Building a New Digital Economy in NC (BAND-NC) to support local communities in building out their digital inclusion plans. These well-developed sets of strategies are intended to help all residents understand how to best utilize broadband through access to the internet, a device that meets their needs, and the know how to use it. Having a thoughtful plan in advance will help ensure equitable access so that no one is left behind.

Expand access to peer-operated alternatives for treatment of mental illness

To help address the urgent and growing mental health needs in our communities, North Carolina needs to develop creative ways to increase the availability of effective treatment approaches, including ones that provide a safety net and alternatives for those without access to clinical providers or for which traditional services are ineffective. Too often, traditional funding mechanisms for mental health services leave out effective programs led by "peer-support specialists" – people living in recovery with mental illness or substance use disorder and who provide support to others who can benefit from their lived experiences.

However, these programs can be replicated and scaled through public-private partnerships and by leveraging alternate funding sources.

What We're Learning

Over the past eight years, IEI has been spending more of our time listening to and learning from communities. At IEI, we believe that local communities – with their traditions, sense of place, self-reliance, willingness to work, creativity, and history of coming together in tough times to solve big challenges – are the unit of change to spark this commitment to reconnection. Through the ReCONNECT NC community cohort teams and in IEI's experience working with communities through initiatives like InnovateNC, KidsReadyNC, Service Year NC, and Rural Faith Communities as Anchor Institutions, we are learning a lot about how change happens at the local level. Here are IEI's "Three Big Things" to consider when working in communities.

#1 Bringing more diversity in the room makes conversation harder – and makes real change more likely.

#2 Success doesn't happen overnight, and it's not zero sum.

#3 Every community has something to share and something to learn.