



## North Country Regional Economic Development Council North Country Opportunity Agenda

### Program Description – 2014 Revision

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Governor Cuomo established the Opportunity Agenda program, which allows Regional Economic Development Councils to target resources and expertise to help overcome challenges that prevent poor communities, families and individuals from fully participating in the State's economic revitalization.

Poverty, unemployment and barriers to economic opportunity in the North Country are not limited to a handful of communities or neighborhoods. These obstacles to success are ubiquitous throughout the region and present challenges to individuals who are struggling to find a job; are underemployed; or lack the training, skills and/or education to better their personal economic position. Within the North Country, some of the barriers that have prevented economically distressed populations from pursuing opportunities to economic prosperity include, but are not limited to:

- Insufficient job skills, education and/or training that enable the local labor force to meet an employer's needs, or to transition to new employment opportunities;
- High School Dropout rates/value placed on education/college completion;
- Large travel distances to job training and employment opportunities/Transportation; and
- Limited availability of, and/or inadequate quality affordable early care and learning childcare services;
- Weatherization/Energy Services;
- Housing;
- Technology;

Each work group within the North Country's plan supports the Opportunity Agenda strategies for overcoming these barriers by highlighting and encouraging partnerships that promote their elimination. As such, the North Country Regional Economic Development Council (NCREDC) has developed the North Country Opportunity Agenda, a region-wide strategy that will invest new and existing CFA resources in projects that: foster a business environment that provides residents with the opportunity to enter the workforce and provide North Country residents with the tools they need to overcome economic barriers and fully participate in the state's economic revitalization. The North Country supports connecting resources within our communities and region to build long-term family sustaining jobs and an innovative economy that thrives on community partnerships that leverage our success. To implement North Country Opportunity Agenda, the Council is seeking projects that are specifically designed to assist economically distressed populations that are affected by one or more of the following criteria:

- Experienced significant job loss (either from a particular employer, plant closure or industry) in the past five (5) years;
- Experienced a loss in markets due to foreign competition;
- A poverty rate of at least 125% of the seven (7) county average poverty rate;
- At least 50% of total student population that is eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced –price lunch program;

- A March 2014 county unemployment rate greater than the NYS average (7.3%),
- Residing in a county with a seasonal unemployment rate greater than 125% of the seven County average;
- Experienced a population decline since the last decennial census (2000 to 2010);
- Residing in, or proximate to a Brownfield site, Environmental Justice Area or former Empire Zone Investment Zone area;
- Residing in, or proximate to an area where at least 15% of the total property/land within has been vacant, abandoned, deteriorated or is otherwise unavailable for industrial, commercial or retail development or redevelopment;
- Significant barriers to attracting financing and/or investment exist; or
- A median household income of 51% or less than the statewide non-metropolitan Median Individual Household Income (MHI).

Opportunity Agenda Projects that will be considered by the NCREDC must address one or more of these challenges by satisfying one or more of the following:

- Provides incentives to complete high school education and enrolling in higher education or completion of college. Advances e-learning, telecommuting, e-commerce and telemedicine and/or boosts the sustainability of long-term learning, employment and investment in distressed communities. Increase accessibility to broadband technology and provision of education opportunities to improve digital literacy skills.
- Promotes on the job training programs that include skills-gap reversal measures, apprenticeships, career awareness opportunities for middle or high school students, or promotes additional academic and professional development opportunities for high demand occupations by partnering with institutions of higher education and apprenticeship programs.
- Establishes advanced manufacturing programs to remediate skill gaps and prepare the workforce for current employer needs.
- Create collaborations within the community/region to remove transportation and quality affordable early care and learning childcare services as barriers to employment.
- Establish partnerships with banks and lending institutions to create incentives for small business startup and that support micro-business/self-employment opportunities.
- Establishes funding, services, and/or energy conservation, resource, and financial literacy education to assist low-income populations that are adversely affected by escalating costs of home heating services, home repair, quality housing, and home safety repairs.
- Benefits households where the average age is 50% or more than over 55 years of age.
- Benefits communities with an outmigration rate for persons under the age of 35 that exceeds the regional average.
- At least 13.9% of households who participate in the project are enrolled in SNAP/Food Stamps.
- Provides at least 51% of jobs that are created or saved to low-mod income individuals.

Projects that are selected as a part of the North Country Opportunity Agenda must also demonstrate the ability to: help move impoverished people into jobs; promote private-public partnerships in job investments; overcome a particular challenge to economic participation; and help revitalize distressed communities. Opportunity Agenda Projects must also demonstrate that it satisfies one or more of the Visions detailed in the Regional Council's *Transformational Plan*, and/or the *North Country Sustainability Plan*. North Country Opportunity Agenda Projects may serve a particular area or be multi-jurisdictional.

Applicants with projects that can advance the North Country Opportunity Agenda are encouraged to complete and submit a Consolidated Funding Application, a Priority Project Nomination Form, and an Opportunity Agenda Nomination Form.

The Council's Priority Project Selection Committee may consult with the Council's Opportunity Agenda Work Group and other relevant work groups as they review project proposals. The Committee will recommend Opportunity Agenda projects to the NCREDC for endorsement and be incorporated into in the Council's Implementation Agenda and Annual Report that is due in Fall 2014.