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Governor Northam Announces Expansion of Innovative Workforce Program to Help Get Virginians Back to Work

Virginia to invest \$1.7 million to scale up Network2Work initiative connecting job seekers to high-quality careers, wraparound supports

RICHMOND—Governor Ralph Northam today announced that Virginia will invest \$1.7 million over the next two years to expand the innovative Network2Work program, a unique workforce development initiative established by Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) that connects job seekers with local job networks and support services. The Commonwealth will work in partnership with the Virginia Community College System to scale up the Network2Work model in the Shenandoah Valley, Hampton Roads, and Greater Richmond regions.

“People across our Commonwealth are facing unprecedented and far-reaching impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and challenging times like these call for innovative solutions,” **said Governor Northam**. “Network2Work uses a proactive approach to workforce development, leveraging community-based networks to connect job seekers with the skills and resources they need to find employment despite barriers that might include lack of childcare, transportation, or other necessities. With the expansion of this program, we will get more Virginians back to work, help employers secure the talent they need to thrive, and put our economy in a strong position to rebound from this crisis.”

The program works with employers to post jobs with family-sustaining wages through an app-based database. Network2Work then reaches out to community-based connectors, who are well-respected individuals at the center of social networks in their neighborhoods, local organizations, schools, places of worship, and immigrant communities. Connectors help identify and refer job seekers who are a good match for the available opportunities. The program’s staff then help the job seeker chart a pathway to securing the job by tapping into work skills, life management, or health resources and additional wraparound supports through a network of nonprofit organizations and local human services agencies. This innovative, community-based framework helps families become self-sufficient by identifying employment opportunities in their reach and positioning them to secure and excel in those jobs.

“Our framework is built on a simple premise: a community thrives when its residents thrive,” **said Ridge Schuyler**, who first developed the Network2Work model and will lead efforts to expand the program in the three pilot areas. “With this exciting expansion, we will

be able to help more Virginians realize their full potential by providing them with the connections and support services they need to be successful in the workforce and in their communities.”

To date, 85 percent of Network2Work job seekers have found jobs, and 59 percent of those jobs pay more than \$25,000 annually. About 40 percent of the program’s participants are single mothers. More than 70,000 families that live within the three pilot sites are the focus of Network2Work’s expansion, including families whose employment has been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

“The new Network2Work pilot program will help ensure that every Virginian is able to access high-quality employment as we recover from the COVID-19 crisis,” **said Chief Workforce Development Advisor Megan Healy**. “By tapping into local networks of employers, service providers, and community-based connectors, the program will demonstrate its ability to meet job seekers where they are.”

“The Network2Work framework is the most innovative approach to connecting job seekers with high-quality jobs that I have seen in my 42 years of community college work,” **said PVCC President Dr. Frank Friedman**. “I have been proud to witness the program’s growing impact, which served 19 job seekers in its first year and has now reached more than 900. Our employer network has grown from four to over 90 employers, offering a total of over \$9 million in income to our program participants. We look forward to building on this strong foundation and sharing what we have learned with others to help improve the well-being of families across the Commonwealth.”

Network2Work was first developed through a partnership between the PVCC and the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce to make sure all residents in the region had support to get a job. In 2016, the program was the recipient of the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation’s inaugural Strengthening Systems Grant. To learn more about Network2Work, visit pvcc.edu/network2work.

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