

# Growing The Biotech Workforce

## The National Center for the Biotechnology Workforce Joins BioNetwork

By Nick Meacham

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*– Russ Read, executive director, National Center for the Biotechnology Workforce.*

**Last October**, the North Carolina Community College System’s BioNetwork took over the funding of The National Center for the Biotechnology Workforce (NCBW). The NCCCS Associate Vice President of Innovation and Biotechnology Matthew Meyer described the move as “exceptionally important to North Carolina’s and, indeed, the country’s biotechnology infrastructure.” Many others in the life science community agreed the move was fundamental to the support of North Carolina’s rapidly growing industry sector.

In only three months, NCBW, with the support of the BioNetwork team and guidance from Forsyth Technical Community College and its President Dr. Gary Green, is fully established as a BioNetwork center. Already, NCBW is working on a tracking and networking system for students by bringing together numerous training program administrators, community college faculty and students.

“The new initiative is supported by a grant from the North Carolina Biotechnology Center. It is now vital to understanding not only our student’s needs but the companies that will potentially be employing our biotech program graduates,” said Russ Read, NCBW executive director. “Many of the students that attended our November meeting provided wonderful feedback to the group. The tools needed are networking and continuing education. In many cases, some of our graduates may be one conversation or one course away from a job.”

Under Read’s leadership, NCBW has trained thousands of students, displaced workers and incumbent workers in five regions across the U.S. The NCBW creates training requirements for individual biotechnology companies by translating their needs into skill sets, curriculum development and career pathway programs. Hundreds of students at community college level biotech programs have received extra support and on-site and remote training that has given them an advantage when looking for jobs. NCBW is experienced



and successful in a number of business and training activities such as synchronizing resources across a spectrum of strategic business sectors, serving several clients at the same time and nurturing partnerships to address industry needs by helping to identify resources and support mechanisms for training and recruitment.

BioNetwork and Forsyth Tech use the experience, knowledge and core principles adopted over the last four years. “We want to make sure that we create opportunities for all BioNetwork centers and the system office, by developing further partnerships with biotechnology colleges and organizations across the nation,” Read said.

Meyer reiterated the importance of the project. Our NCCC System Office and President Dr. Scott Ralls want to know exactly how much demand for workers is out there. We want this model so we can use it statewide and apply it across sectors. The aerospace industry, the energy field – they seek work-ready graduates as well.” **i**