

Workforce Development & Upward Mobility

FY2026-28 Strategic Plan

MECKLENBURG

TOWNSHIP 3,
STEEL CREEK

TOWNSHIP 2, BERRYHILL

CHARLOTTE*

TOWNSHIP 1, CHARLOTTE

TOWNSHIP 13, MORNING STAR

MATTHEWS

TOWNSHIP 6,
CLEAR CREEK

MINT
HILL

May 2026



MECKLENBURG COUNTY
North Carolina

Overview

- **Local workforce trends**
 - **Terminology**
 - **Barriers to success**
- **Collaborative framework**
- **Key strategies**
 - **Timelines for action**
 - **Next steps**



Key objectives

- **Establish** a strategic vision to enhance economic opportunity
- **Analyze** local workforce trends and barriers to upward mobility
- **Clarify** Mecklenburg County's collaborative framework
- **Set** specific priorities for each organizational role



Workforce trends are positive...



Poverty rates are
at historic lows
(10.4%)



Median household
income is increasing
(\$83,765)



Unemployment rates
(3.2%) are lower than state
and national averages



Ranked 2nd in U.S. metros in job growth



But disparities are increasing...

Emergence of new ways of categorizing ‘surviving but not thriving’

- **Shrinking middle:** the decline of middle-skill, middle-wage jobs—the types of jobs that historically provided stable income, benefits, and upward mobility without requiring a four-year degree.
- **Underemployed:** working but not having enough paid hours or not doing work that makes full use of skills and abilities

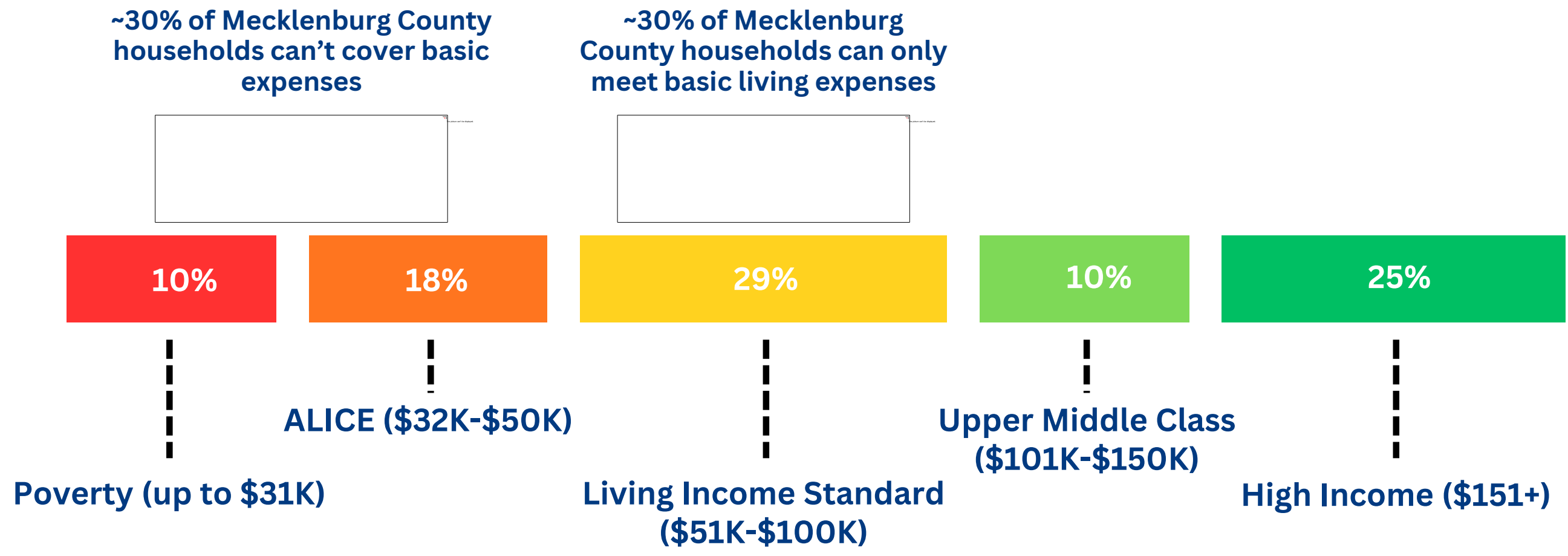


Cost-of-living increases

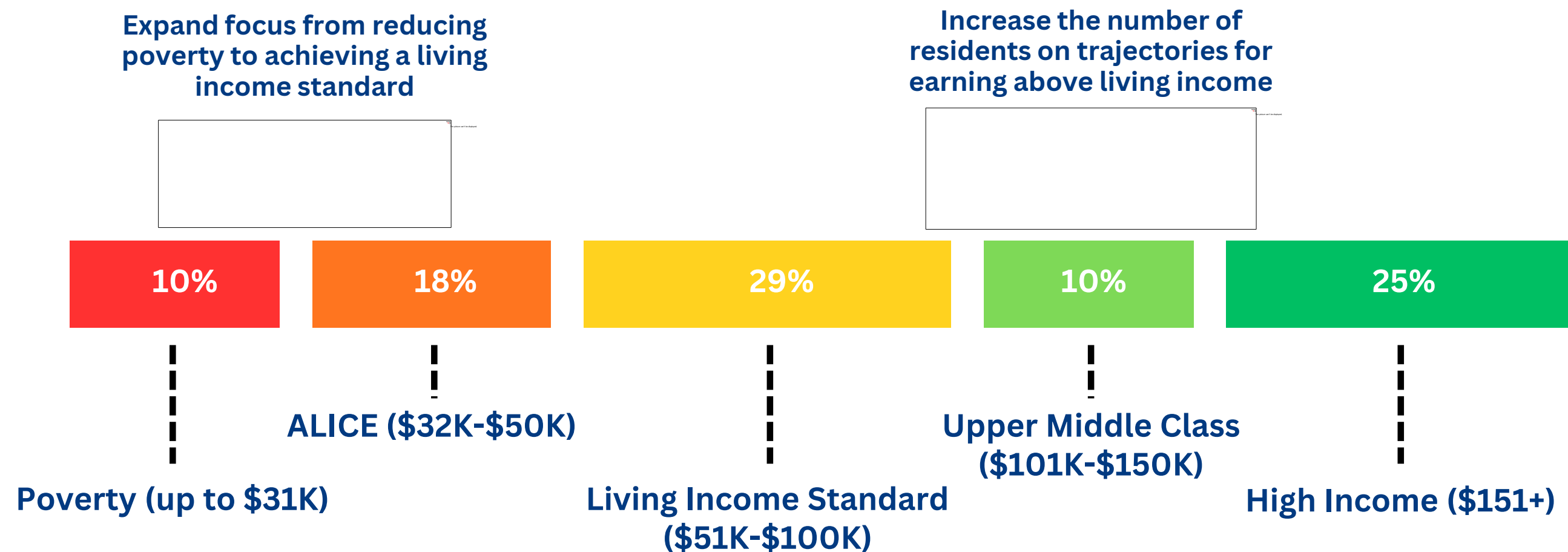
- **Wage growth has failed to keep pace with rising costs**
- **Living Income Standard:** Earnings required to cover essential household needs
- **ALICE:** Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – earning above the Federal Poverty Level, yet struggling to afford basic expenses



Reducing poverty can no longer be the sole focus



Improved economic mobility requires a dual focus



Current State



Future State



Reduced ALICE + poverty levels



More residents are earning a living income

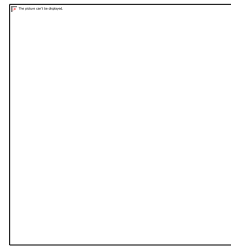


More residents are moving into middle- and high-income careers



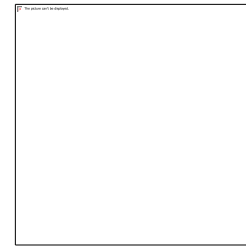
Barriers to upward mobility

Access to Opportunity



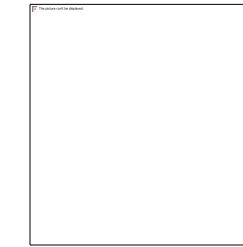
Career paths that match residents' skills and interests are not always clearly communicated or accessible.

Program Navigation



The workforce landscape is complex, and many don't know where to turn for coordinated support.

Aligning Careers and Talent



Employers struggle to find job seekers with interests and skills that align with job vacancies.

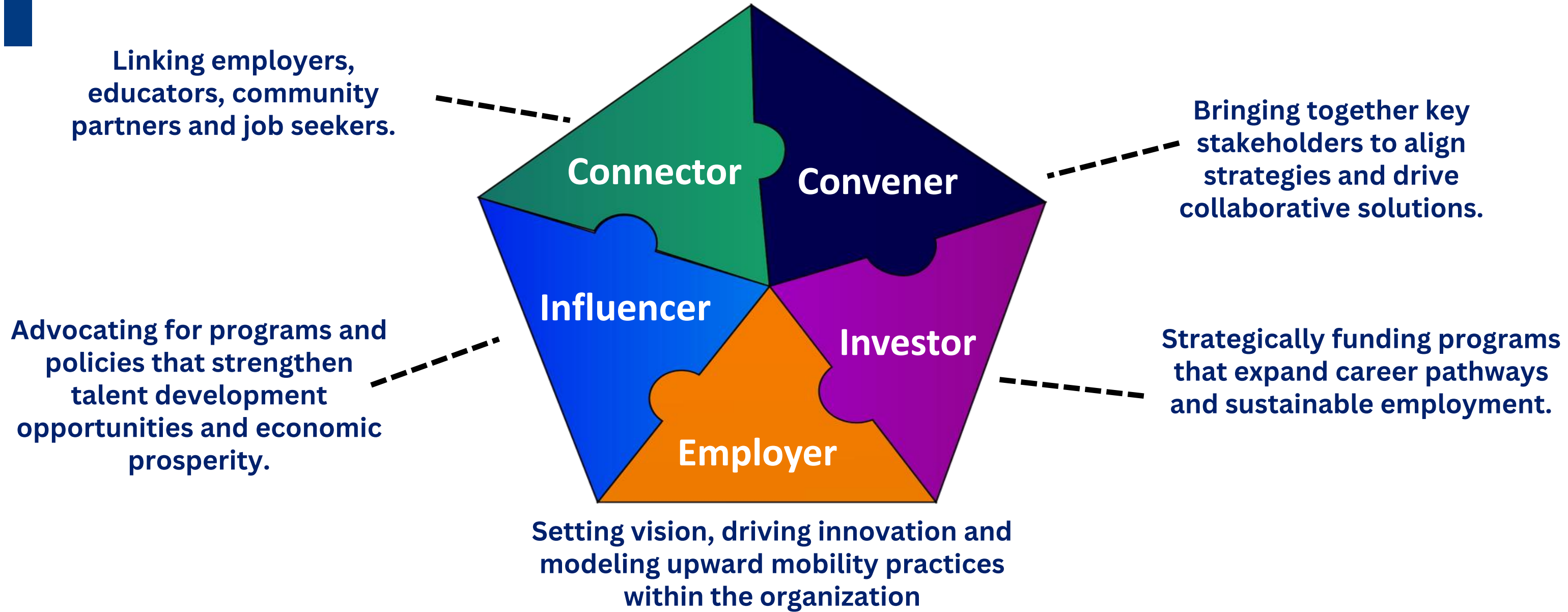


What do we need to do differently?

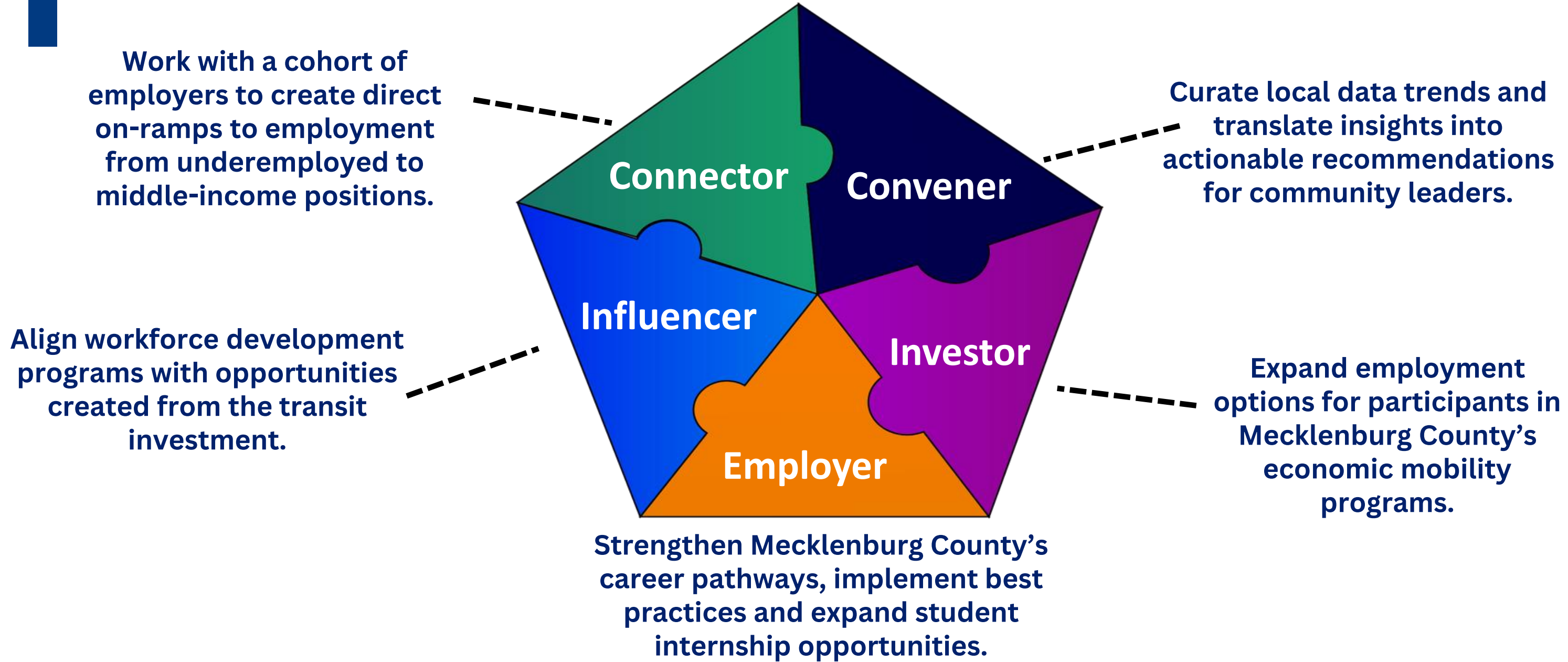
 **Maximize impact by leveraging role in new ways** 



Our leadership role



Prioritized leadership strategies



Connector



Rationale

Employers often need talent more quickly than traditional training programs can deliver. Working directly with employers can reduce some barriers that job seekers face in traditional training programs.

Strategy

Work with a cohort of employers (including business incentive recipients) to create direct on-ramps for underemployed residents to access middle-income positions, demonstrating an innovative model that can scale to other businesses.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2026					Recruit business cohort				Employer pilot			
2027	Employer pilot (cont.)			Report pilot outcomes			Recommend opportunities to scale			Recognize high performing employers		



Convener



Rationale

As workforce trends accelerate, available data must be transformed into clear insights that foster a shared understanding across the community.

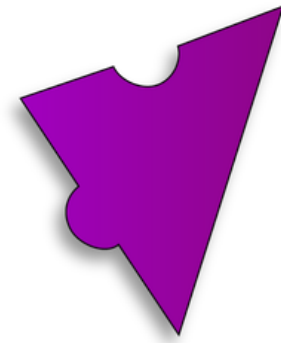
Strategy

Curate local data trends and translate insights into actionable recommendations for community leaders (e.g., business, education, philanthropy, etc.)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
2026		Establish collaborative workforce goals				Curate workforce report				Present recommendations			
2027	Pilot new workforce practices						Develop report on initial findings						



Investor



Rationale

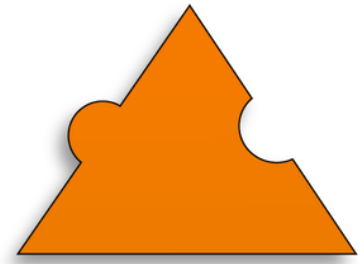
As the cost of living continues to rise, the County must strengthen partnerships with employers who provide living-wage positions and clear opportunities for career advancement for participants in County programs.

Strategy

Under the new economic mobility division, expand employment and training options for participants in Mecklenburg County's economic mobility programs – particularly offering more pathways with opportunities for higher wages and positive employment outcomes.



Employer



Rationale

Adopting best practices (e.g., living wages, internships, etc.) is more likely when employers see other local employers leading the way.

Strategy

Strengthen Mecklenburg County's career pathways, implement employer best practices and expand student internship opportunities.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2026						Compile employer upward mobility best practices						
					Assess County student internships							
2027	Expand County internships						Implement initial phase of recommendations					



Influencer



Rationale

Without a unified workforce strategy, local talent will be unprepared to fill the thousands of roles created by the upcoming \$25 billion transit expansion.

Strategy

Collaborate with local partners to align workforce development programs with opportunities created from the transit investment to ensure local talent is prepared for career opportunities.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
2026		Collaborative planning with partners						Establish investment and outcomes alignment					
2027		Assess areas of additional support for residents											



Our Strategic Framework

Connector: Partner with a cohort of employers to build direct on ramps from underemployment to middle income jobs (creating a scalable model for employers and business incentive recipients)

Convener: Curate workforce data and translate it into clear, actionable insights for business, education, philanthropy, and community leaders.

Investor: Expand higher-earning employment options for participants in Mecklenburg County's economic mobility programs.

Employer: Strengthen Mecklenburg County's career pathways for employees and expand student internship opportunities.

Influencer: Ensure residents can benefit from workforce opportunities created from the transit investment.

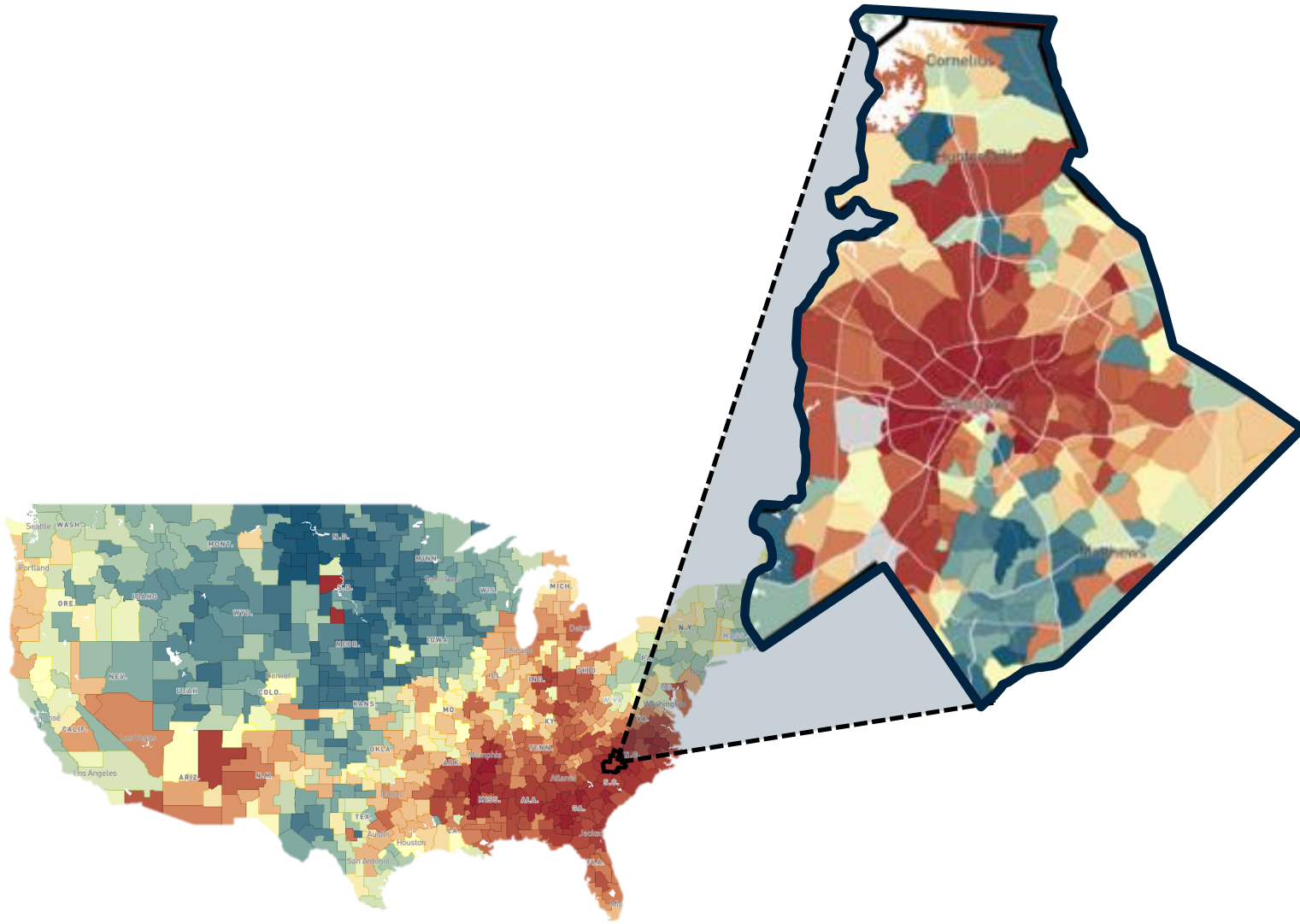


Our Partnerships

- This effort presents a framework for Mecklenburg County's systems-level approach to improve workforce ecosystems
- A clear and well-defined role enables Mecklenburg County to advance multiple strategies at the same time, producing more significant and coordinated impact
- It represents intentional collaborations across internal Mecklenburg County departments and external partners



What will this look like?

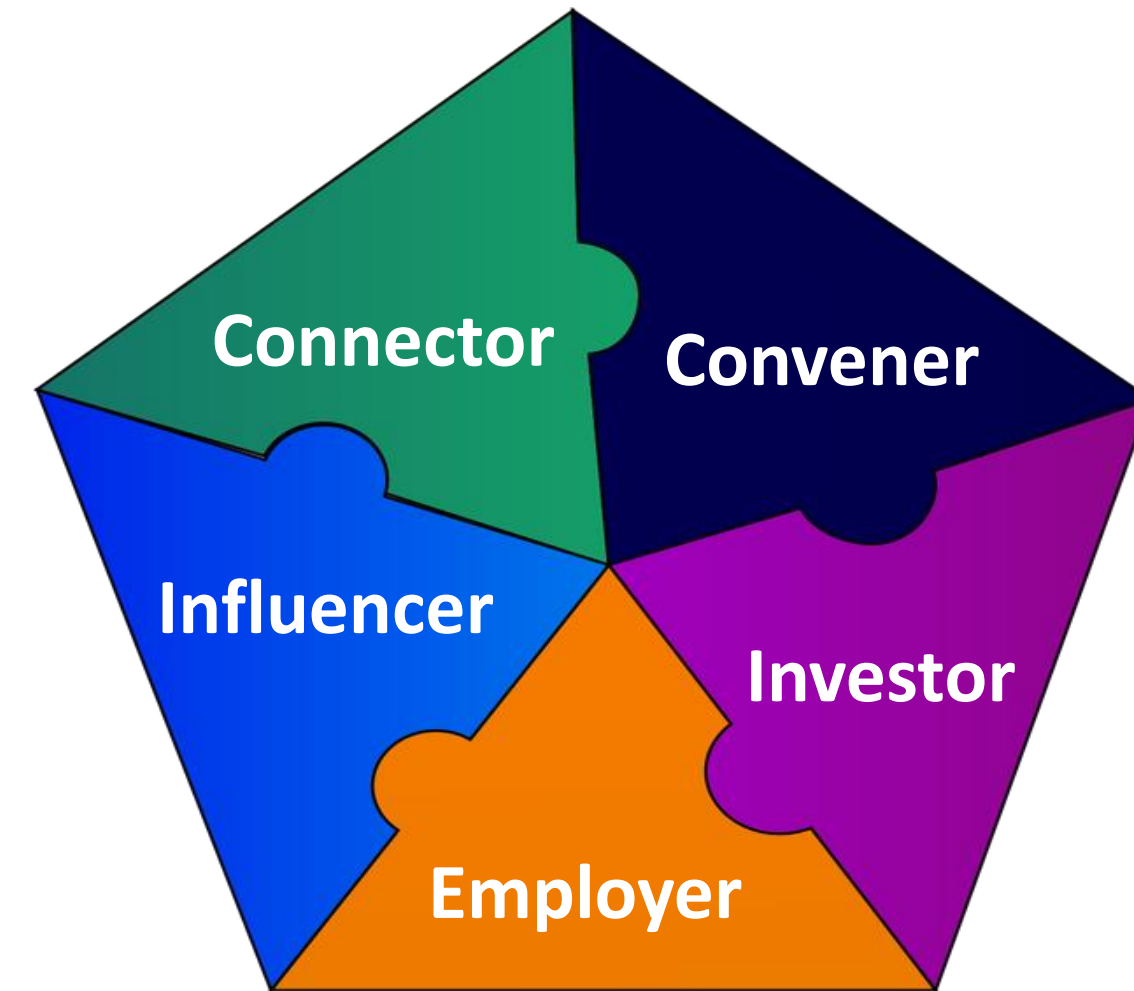


- Mecklenburg County is a national example of how transformational growth can expand opportunity and support greater economic mobility for all residents
- Employers are partnering with Mecklenburg County to create innovative paths to good paying jobs
- Public investments—like transit and business incentive recipients—translate into real training and employment opportunities for residents.



Next Steps

- Convene implementation work groups
- Finalize success metrics aligned to strategies
- Regular reports on initial progress



THANK YOU

Questions?

