



## GASTON COUNTY

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## County Manager's Office

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The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Providing Opportunities for Workforce development and Energy Readiness in North Carolina (powerNC)** application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) 2023 Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) Community Grant Program. This project is the result of a collaborative partnership between the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), STEPs4GROWTH, and the North Carolina Community College System to install new electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at 10 community colleges across the state. This new infrastructure will equitably expand community-based EV charging and fill gaps in access, while also supporting high-quality workforce development programs at these schools.

One of the primary challenges facing North Carolina's clean energy transition is the lack of convenient, affordable, reliable, and equitable networks of EV charging stations across communities, particularly in North Carolina's rural areas. These access barriers are compounded by emerging skills gaps, and concerns that the workforce needed to support the clean energy transition will not have the knowledge and qualifications to install, maintain, and repair EV charging infrastructure. Recognizing this challenge, the US Department of Commerce funded a four-year, \$23.7 million comprehensive clean energy workforce development project called STEPs4GROWTH.

PowerNC will leverage this investment to expand public access to EV charging solutions while providing students at the participating schools opportunities for hands-on experience and instruction, under the supervision of certified professionals, during to the Project's development phase activities, construction and installation, and ongoing operations and maintenance. Led by the Center for Energy Research & Technology at NC A&T State University, STEPs4GROWTH will provide EV-related curricula, facilitate apprenticeships and job placements, and provide wrap around support services for students at the participating schools. NCDOT and STEPs4GROWTH will partner to perform robust community outreach in the surrounding communities, targeting K-12 students as well as non-traditional students to build a pipeline of workers to pursue hi-tech and good-paying careers in the clean energy sector. These engagement activities will be aligned with NCDOT's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) mission to serve the state's disadvantaged and underserved communities. OCR has been recognized federally for workforce development initiatives provided and coordinated by its On-the-Job Training and Supportive Services (OJT/SS) and Business Opportunity and Workforce Development (BOWD) units. Expanding the workforce for installing and maintaining EV chargers — from trenchers to electricians — is something NCDOT,

STEPs4GROWTH, and the North Carolina Community College System are uniquely positioned to do through this partnership.

Equity and the goals of the Justice40 initiatives were a major consideration in the identification of participating schools and campuses. Six of the 10 participating schools are located in Tier 1 economically distressed counties according to the NC Department of Commerce, while 8 participating schools will deploy new EV charging stations in Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) according to the EV Charging Justice40 map. All the participating schools are within 5 miles of underserved and overburdened populations and serve communities with pockets of transportation disadvantage. By deploying new EV charging infrastructure and workforce development resources in DACs, the Project will support state and national efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector and address disproportionate negative impacts of climate change and pollution on disadvantaged communities.

The Project fulfills the CFI Program vision by expanding the deployment of EV charging infrastructure at publicly accessible locations within community college campuses that are in or adjacent to parking facilities, multimodal hubs, workplaces, housing developments, and other frequented locations in local communities. This Project's equitable approach will provide convenient access to EV charging in urban and suburban areas and multipurpose charging solutions in rural areas to address unmet needs for workforce development and EV charging needs. Moreover, the location and design of powerNC's EV charging stations will support local transit agencies transition to EVs and seek to develop multimodal hubs at the participating community colleges that promote safety for all users, in accordance with the National Roadway Safety Strategy's Safe Systems Approach.

Gaston County is in the southern Piedmont region of North Carolina, adjacent to the state's second largest county, Mecklenburg. According to the 2020 census Gaston County's population is 227,943. With close proximity to the City of Charlotte, major interstate highways like I-85, I-77 and I-40, and the likelihood of continual growth in the future, workforce development and energy readiness will continue to play a large role in shaping the County's future. Gaston County is home to Gaston College which is the 10<sup>th</sup> largest college in the North Carolina Community College system. The programs and expertise already in place at Gaston College are well suited to offer training and opportunities to meet the growing demand for skilled employees and support for EV vehicles

The statewide installation of these EV chargers has been years in the making for community colleges in North Carolina. By integrating the deployment of EV charging stations with vocational training, job placement, community outreach, and transit electrification needs, powerNC will equitably expand public access to community-based charging solutions in both rural, suburban, and urban areas while promoting the development of multimodal hubs on community college campuses.

Thank you for considering the powerNC grant application for CFI program funding.

Sincerely,



Ray Maxwell, PE  
Infrastructure & Asset Manager  
Gaston County Government