

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE PROGRAMS COMMITTEE OF
THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
OF
THE GOLDEN L.E.A.F. (Long-term Economic Advancement Foundation), INC.**

The regular meeting of the Programs Committee of the Board of Directors of The Golden L.E.A.F. (Long-term Economic Advancement Foundation), Inc. (the “Foundation”), was noticed for and convened on August 5, 2026, at the Lawrence Davenport Retreat Center located at 301 N. Winstead Ave., Rocky Mount, NC 27804. Committee members participating in the meeting were Barry Dodson, Michael Easley, Jr., Don Flow, Randy Isenhower, Buddy Keller, Jeffrey Lee, Laurence Lilley, Brian Raynor, Bobbie Richardson, David Rose, and Ralph Strayhorn (Chair). Also present were Scott T. Hamilton, President, Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation; Ted Lord, Senior Vice President/ General Counsel of the Foundation; Kasey Ginsberg, Vice President/ Chief of Staff of the Foundation; J.P. Boyd, Vice President of Investments of the Foundation; Marilyn Chism, Director of Programs of the Foundation; Ginger Mustamaa, Director of Programs Administration of the Foundation; Jenny Tinklepaugh, Communications Manager of the Foundation; Brynn Fann, Program Officer and AV/ Tech Coordinator of the Foundation; and Byron Kirkland, legal counsel to the Foundation. Jenny Tinklepaugh served as secretary of the meeting.

Mr. Kirkland called the roll of the Programs Committee members.

Mr. Strayhorn called the meeting to order, declared a quorum to be present, and identified Ms. Tinklepaugh as secretary of the meeting.

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the open and closed sessions of the June 3, 2026 meeting of the Programs Committee. The motion was seconded and carried.

Mr. Strayhorn asked members of the Committee to disclose individual interests related to matters to come before the Committee.

In accordance with the Foundation’s Conflicts of Interest Policy, the following standing disclosures and disclosures related to matters to come before the Committee were made or confirmed:

- Mr. Lilley disclosed that his son is Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Commerce and Mr. Lilley will abstain from the discussion and vote regarding projects for which the Foundation knows the Department of Commerce will or may provide funding.
- Mr. Flow has disclosed that he serves on the Board of Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist and he will abstain from the discussion and the vote regarding the application from Wingate University.
- Mr. Keller has disclosed that his son serves on the Board of the Sanford Area Growth Alliance and Mr. Keller will abstain from the discussion and the vote regarding the application from the City of Sanford for the Project Sol Water Project.

In these minutes, where it is noted with respect to a matter that a director “would abstain” or “abstained,” the subsequent vote is subject to all such abstentions.

Mr. Strayhorn informed members of the Committee that the Committee would organize its discussions and actions regarding proposals and other items by reference to the recommendations sheet distributed to the Committee prior to the meeting. The recommendations sheet reflecting the actions of the Committee is included in these minutes as Attachment A.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Mr. Lord to present the applications received in the Economic Catalyst Program. After the presentation, recommendation, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board award a grant of \$1 million to the City of Sanford for the Project Sol Water Project, subject to the following special conditions:

1. Golden LEAF funds are to be used for expansion or improvement of public water to support the location of STERIS or its affiliates or subsidiaries (the “Company”) at its planned facility in Sanford and that has the capacity to serve the Company and others.
2. Release of funds is contingent on the Grantee providing evidence that the Company has agreed to allow the Grantee and Golden LEAF to verify the Company’s capital investment, job creation and retention figures, wages, and benefits by reviewing Company reports, NCUI-101 forms, and/or through other means satisfactory to Golden LEAF.
3. Release of funds is contingent on the Grantee providing evidence of an inducement agreement, performance agreement, or similar agreement demonstrating that the Company is obligated to create at least 301 new jobs with average annual wages of at least \$63,900. The deadline for creation of the new jobs must be no later than December 31, 2029. The jobs must be located at the new manufacturing facility the Company will establish in Sanford. The agreement must include appropriate consequences should the Company fail to satisfy its obligations. The President of Golden LEAF may approve minor variations from these requirements.

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The motion was seconded and carried. Mr. Lilley declared a duality of interest because his son serves as Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Commerce and abstained from the discussion and the vote. Mr. Keller declared a duality of interest because son serves on the Board of the Sanford Area Growth Alliance and abstained from the discussion and the vote.

A motion was made to enter closed session pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 143-318.11(a)(4) to prevent the disclosure of information relating to the location or expansion of industries or other businesses in the area served by the Foundation. The motion was seconded and carried.

Following the closed session, the Committee resumed its meeting in open session.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Ms. Chism, Ms. Mustamaa, and Mr. Lord to present the applications received in Stage Two of the Open Grants Program. After the presentation, recommendations, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the actions reported on Attachment A regarding the Stage Two applications received in the Open Grants Program that are items numbered 1-6. The motion was seconded and carried.

After the presentation, recommendation, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the action reported on Attachment A regarding the Stage Two application received in the Open Grants Program that is item numbered 7. The motion was seconded and carried. Mr. Flow disclosed that he serves on the Board of Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist and abstained from the discussion and the vote.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Ms. Chism, Ms. Mustamaa, and Mr. Lord to present the applications received in Stage One of the Open Grants Program. After the presentation, recommendations, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the actions reported on Attachment A regarding the Stage One applications received in the Open Grants Program that are items numbered 8, 10, and 12-34. The motion was seconded and carried.

A motion was made to recommend that the Board take the actions reported on Attachment A regarding the Stage One applications received in the Open Grants Program that are items numbered 9 and 11. The motion was seconded and carried. Mr. Lilley declared a duality of interest because his son serves

as Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Commerce and abstained from the discussion and the vote.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Mr. Lord to present the applications received in the SITE Program. After the presentation, recommendation, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the action reported on Attachment A regarding the application received in the SITE Program that is item numbered 35 on Attachment A. The motion was seconded and carried. Mr. Lilley declared a duality of interest because his son serves as Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Commerce and abstained from the discussion and the vote.

A motion was made to recommend that the Board take the action reported on Attachment A regarding the applications received in the SITE Program that are items numbered 36 and 37 on Attachment A. The motion was seconded and carried.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Ms. Ginsberg to provide an update on the Golden LEAF Rural Internship Initiative (RII). She reported that the initiative was launched in fall 2021 to give Golden LEAF Scholars the opportunity to identify and participate in internships within rural communities, often in their home counties. She explained that the program allows scholars to work with employers, including businesses, nonprofits, and government entities, who agree to host students and meet program requirements. Golden LEAF funds both program administration and student wages. Ms. Ginsberg also shared that internships are designed to align with each student's field of study and support their intention to return to rural North Carolina. Participants earn \$16 per hour in their first year, \$17 in their second year, and \$18 in their third year, with internships typically lasting 8 to 12 weeks between May and August.

Ms. Ginsberg reported that a total of 193 scholars have participated in the RII since summer 2022. Of those, 97 are currently enrolled in college and 96 have graduated. Of the participants who have graduated and for which Golden LEAF has some post-graduate data, 16% have enrolled in graduate and postsecondary programs, 51% are employed, and, of those that are employed, 57% are working in a rural county with five employed full-time with their internship site location. She reported that 213 sites have hosted an intern and that several sites have hosted more than one intern or have had returning interns.

Ms. Ginsberg then described the program administration. Kelly OCG serves as the employer of record and handles payroll, new hire orientation, and onboarding and offboarding of students. Spiron Solutions is the program administrator, and provides intern selection (interviews, application reviews, etc.), assesses site and intern alignment, and provides general support to interns and internship sites. The Golden LEAF Scholarship Program Manager, a Golden LEAF employee, provides overall program oversight and manages the Golden LEAF application and program administration online resources. Ms. Ginsberg then provided an overview of program data for 2025 and 2026 and projected information for 2027, including the number of students active in the internship portal, the number of interns, administrative expenses, and wages to interns.

After the presentation, recommendations, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the actions reported on Attachment A regarding the Rural Internship Initiative, which are items numbered 38 and 39. The motion was seconded and carried.

Ms. Ginsberg then provided a report regarding Golden LEAF Scholar alumni. Key performance indicators include the percentage of scholarship recipients who are living and/or working in rural North Carolina counties following graduation. She shared that the percentage of graduates who are living and/or employed in rural North Carolina, including identifying trends or patterns that may predict return to rural communities; the percentage of our alumni pursuing graduate school; and correlation between engagement in Golden LEAF activities such as the RII and attending on-campus events and returning to rural North Carolina. She reported that staff launched a survey in the fall that was open to all alumni and conducted targeted outreach to and research on prioritized cohorts. Ms. Ginsberg reported that work allowed staff to build a reliable post-graduation profile for 966 or 41% of alumni, an increase of over 300 alumni from the sample size last year.

Ms. Ginsberg reported the following results from the data:

- Location: 51% of alumni are currently living or working in a qualifying North Carolina county. 34% are living and/or working in their home county.

- Employment: 75% of alumni are currently employed. The most common sectors of employment for alumni are healthcare (31%), followed by education (22%). Education is the most common sector in which our alumni are returning to rural counties, with 64% of alumni working in education doing so in a qualifying county.
- Graduate School: 38% of our alumni have attended or are currently attending a graduate or professional school. Healthcare is the most common field in which alumni are pursuing advanced degrees.
- Engagement: Early trends show that scholars who have attended an on-campus event and those who have participated in RII are slightly more likely to return to a qualifying county.

Committee members asked questions and discussed the information presented by Ms. Ginsberg.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Ms. Ginsberg and Ms. Chism to present the grant modification requests.

After the presentation, recommendation, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the actions reported on Attachment A regarding the grant modification requests, which are items numbered 40-43. The motion was seconded and carried.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Ms. Ginsberg and Mr. Lord to present items under Strategic Planning.

Ms. Ginsberg presented the update on Golden LEAF Schools. She reported that bi-annual reports are due to Golden LEAF on August 15 and January 15. NCDPI staff presentations to the State Board of Education are planned for November 2026 and May 2027. Monthly reports continue to be provided to Golden LEAF. Ms. Ginsberg provided an update on recent highlights, which included that the summer convening in Raleigh included 144 school staff and participants representing all 19 schools, the launch of the NC Careers Platform to support student career exploration and readiness, and a demonstration for participating schools from Zearn Math, which highlighted its alignment with Open Up Resources.

Ms. Ginsberg also reported that Golden LEAF Schools' coaching sessions led by Marzano, Open Up Resources, and NCDPI are on track and meeting expectations. Evaluation results showed strengths in professional commitment and implementation, with schools reporting stronger coaching cycles,

proficiency gains, and progress in career planning. Monthly check-ins continue to assess progress in leadership, instruction, data use, differentiation, math-career connections, and school climate. She reported that Common Formative Assessment data showed proficiency gains in Grades 6 and 7.

Specific achievements highlighted by Ms. Ginsberg included: Dunn Middle School reported strong student growth, sustained High Reliability Schools Level 4 implementation in data use, and a 15% reduction in office discipline referrals; East Rutherford Middle School submitted for High Reliability Schools Level 1 certification and achieved 100% participation in the Teacher Working Conditions Survey; Hayesville Middle School achieved 100% completion of career development portfolios for eighth graders; West Lee Middle School reported a 66% reduction in fighting incidents. Challenges included that some schools reported challenges with information overload, pacing, and the need for clearer implementation support.

Mr. Lord presented information about the proposed NC IDEA Rural Entrepreneurship Constellation Program. He reported that the program would increase access to direct services for small business entrepreneurs in rural communities through a regional “constellation” model. Each regional constellation would include a lead organization and partners that provide coordinated business support. NC IDEA would serve as the program administrator, manage grants with regional leads, and coordinate participating organizations. He reported that the proposed framework organizes ecosystems into coordinated regional constellations. It aligns networks of universities, community colleges, economic developers, capital providers, support organizations, and community institutions to advance their region’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Mr. Lord reported that through a competitive RFP process conducted over cycles separated by at least 10 months, NC IDEA would select six regional champions for awards of up to \$500,000 to implement programs over two to three years. Each coalition would include four to six regional partners awarded up to \$250,000 each. Golden LEAF funds would be used to support the work of the Regional Champions and Constellation Partners, which could include accelerators, mentorship programs, pitch

competitions, and sector-specific programming aligned to regional economic strengths. In addition to providing services to entrepreneurs, the funded organizations may also provide limited direct financial assistance to businesses to assist with costs such as marketing and legal and bookkeeping assistance. He also reported that Golden LEAF funds would also be used for NC IDEA administrative expenses including designing the competitive RFP, coaching applicants, administering all contracts, and tracking outcomes statewide. Additional shared technology tools, capacity-building, and community outreach through library networks will be deployed across all six regions would also be included in the Golden LEAF grant. Mr. Lord presented several hypothetical examples of how the program is expected to engage with and support entrepreneurs in rural communities.

After the presentation, recommendation, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the action reported on Attachment A regarding the NC IDEA proposal, which is item numbered 45. The motion was seconded and carried.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Mr. Lord to present information about NC Ag Leads. Mr. Lord reported that The NC Chamber Foundation requested a one-year extension of the NC Ag Leads contract to continue oversight of funded projects, engage stakeholders through Imagine Ag Day and the HARVEST Series, and to identify potential updates to the strategic plan. The \$456,000 requested would support staffing, contractors, events, communications, meetings, and other expenses and represents a \$56,000 decrease from the prior year.

After the presentation, recommendation, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the action reported on Attachment A regarding the NC Ag Leads initiative extension, which is item numbered 46. The motion was seconded and carried.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Mr. Lord to present information in Other Business. Mr. Lord discussed NC State's Digital Ag Hubs project and the potential request for funding from Golden LEAF. Mr. Lord reported that NC State has proposed establishing the first regional Digital Agriculture Innovation Hub at the Tidewater Research Station and Vernon G. James Research and Extension Center in Plymouth. The Hub would help farmers evaluate and adopt agricultural technologies, support entrepreneurs and startups,

address workforce and operational challenges, and strengthen rural ag-tech partnerships. The \$7 million project includes five components focused on rural connectivity, data analysis, technology integration, equipment prototyping, and autonomous and robotic systems, as well as project management and IT support. The committee discussed the proposal and provided questions and feedback to relay to NC State.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Ms. Ginsberg to provide an update on the Housing Finance Agency project. She reported that Abbott Crossing in Goldsboro is nearing 70% completion and Oak Ridge Park in Ayden is 62% complete.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Ms. Ginsberg to provide information related to Golden LEAF Community College Scholarship eligibility. Ms. Ginsberg reported that citizenship for degree-seeking curriculum students is verified through the FAFSA and Residency Determination Service before funding is released. She reported that Continuing Education programs do not have a standardized statewide citizenship verification process, with practices determined by individual community colleges. Staff recommended applying the same citizenship criteria to workforce continuing education scholarship recipients as those receiving curriculum support. After a presentation, recommendations, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board take the action reported on Attachment A regarding the Community College Scholarship eligibility, which is item numbered 49. The motion was seconded and carried with Mr. Easley voting “no”.

Mr. Strayhorn asked Mr. Lord to present the project modification request received from Sampson Community College Foundation, Inc. for the Health Sciences Building project. Golden LEAF awarded a grant of \$1 million for the project through the Healthcare Leverage special initiative, with funding to be used for instructional equipment. The college has requested that it be allowed to use the funding for construction related costs, which are not eligible in the special initiative. The college understands that this would result in the award being funded through the Open Grants Program, and the grant being reduced to \$500,000, which is the maximum grant amount in the Open Grants Program. After a presentation, recommendations, and discussion, a motion was made to recommend that the Board approve the request to convert the grant to an Open Grants Program award, reduce the grant amount to \$500,000, and allow

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the use of Golden LEAF funds for construction of health sciences training space determined by a pro rata allocation of construction costs. The motion was seconded and carried.

With no other business before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned.

Read and approved:

Jenny Tinklepaugh, Secretary of the Meeting

Ralph Strayhorn, Chair of the Programs Committee

Attachment A
Programs Committee Recommendations

Open Grants Program Stage 2 Proposals				
#	Organization	Project Title	Programs Cmte Recs	Comments Special Conditions
1	5&2 Training Institute Inc	Automotive Technician Workforce Development Program	\$0.00	
2	Fayetteville State University	Meeting Nursing Workforce Needs Through Capacity Expansion at FSU's Cape Fear Valley School of Nursing	\$500,000.00	
3	Goshen Medical Center, Inc.	Sneads Ferry Health Center	\$450,000.00	
4	Johnston Community College Foundation, Inc.	Respiratory Therapy Workforce Development	\$499,245.00	
5	Mitchell, County of	Mitchell County Agricultural Center	Defer	
6	Richmond Community College Foundation	Automotive Training Program	\$304,630.00	No Golden LEAF funds shall be used for outreach and marketing.
7	Wingate University	Rural Telehealth Workforce Center	\$0.00	
Open Grants Program Stage 1 Proposals				
#	Organization	Project Title	Programs Cmte Recs	Comments Special Conditions
8	Community Land Trust of Western North Carolina	Catawba Hills Workforce Housing Infrastructure	Y	
9	Eagle/Market Streets Development Corporation	Catawba Vale Innovation Market	Y	
10	Halifax Community College Foundation, Inc.	Apprenticeship Roanoke Valley	Y	
11	Town of Robbinsville	Tallulah Creek Water Treatment Plant	Y	

12	Broken Wheel Ministries	Growing Individual's and Youth Through Resiliency	N	
13	CAGC Foundation Inc	Workforce Preparedness: CAGC Foundation High School Chapters and Construction Bootcamps	N	
14	The Community Engagement and Youth Empowerment (CEAYE) Foundation, Inc.	Freedom's Grace	N	
15	The Freedom Hill Film School	The Freedom Hill Film School	N	
16	Georgetown High A Village Minded Academy	Onslow County Early Childhood Credential Pathway to Healthcare and Human Services	N	
17	Habitat for Humanity of Forsyth County	Infrastructure for Multifamily Affordable Housing Units	N	
18	It Takes A Village	Multi Program Rural Youth Development Initiative	N	
19	Journees Community Enrichment Center Inc	Community One	N	
20	Kellin Foundation	Expanding North Carolina's Behavioral Health Workforce Through Peer Support Certification	N	
21	Kingdomvision7 Corp.	Kingdomvision7 Workforce Access & Economic Mobility Initiative	N	
22	Mills Community Enhancement Center INC	MCEC Aegis Project: Agricultural Innovation & Veteran Workforce Initiative	N	

23	Nash Community College Foundation Inc	Workforce Project Name: "Shared plastinated cadavers + anatomy/simulation enhancement at NCC"	N	
24	North Carolina State University Foundation Inc	GROW Sandhills: Growing Rural Opportunity through Workforce-connected Teaching	N	
25	Operation XCEL Promoting Excellent Communities Education & Leadership	Advanced Manufacturing Skills Acquisition Initiative	N	
26	Richmond County Schools	Paxton & Patterson College & Career Ready Labs - Richmond County Schools	N	
27	RREPS	Recidivism Reduction Vocational Career Pathway Project	N	
28	Scouting America Old Hickory Council	Workforce Development through the Scouting America Merit Badge Program	N	
29	Stem Wellness Empowering Lifelong Learners -Swell-	The Spring Street Project — Landscaping Trades Workforce Training Program	N	
30	Tarboro Municipal Stadium Preservation Foundation	Tarboro Municipal Stadium Community Concourse and Workforce Development Project	N	
31	Tiny House Community Development, Inc.	Building Futures: Expanding Construction Workforce Pathways in Guilford County	N	

32	Trucker Down	Commercial Driver Workforce Development Initiative	N	
33	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Kenan-Flagler Business School & Institute of Government	Tarheel Business Academy 2.0: Building an Entrepreneurial Culture in North Carolina's Most Distressed Communities	N	
34	Yancey County Public Library	Yancey Workforce Readiness Center	N	
SITE Programs Proposals				
#	Organization	Project Title	Programs Cmte Recs	Comments Special Conditions
Development				
35	Caldwell, County of	Foothills Regional Airport Industrial Park Sewer Extension Project	\$1,500,000.00	
36	Cleveland, County of	Farmville Road Development	\$1,500,000.00	
37	Surry County Economic Development Foundation, Inc.	Twin Oaks Business Park	Defer	
Scholarships				
#	Organization	Project Title	Programs Cmte Recs	Comments Special Conditions
38	Spiron Solutions	Rural Internship Initiative	\$110,587	
39	KellyOCG Services	Rural Internship Initiative	Extend existing contract with KellyOCG. Kelly receives a fee of 21% of the wages of the interns, so the cost varies year to year. Budgeted amount is \$600,000	

Grant Modification Requests				
#	Organization	Project Title	Programs Cmte Recommendations	Comments Special Conditions
40	City of Boiling Spring Lakes	Holly, Walnut, and Redwood Stormwater Project	Approve	
41	Town of Lillington	Harnett Street Stormwater Improvements	Defer	Recommend the Board indicate support for a future award for up to the program maximum of \$2m.
42	City of New Bern	Elizabeth Avenue Drainage Improvements	Approve	
43	The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Impacting Rural Communities Through Anchor Institutions Across North Carolina	Decline	Decline the budget modification and extension requests, which will end the grant.
Strategic Planning				
#	Topic	Programs Cmte Recommendations	Comments Special Conditions	
44	Golden LEAF Schools Update	Update only		

45	NC IDEA Rural Entrepreneurship Constellation Program	\$10,000,000	Release of funds is conditioned on: 1) Approval of criteria for Regional Champions and Constellation Partners, including characteristics of eligible regions and of Regional Champions and Constellation Partners and minimum services to be offered by each constellation. 2) Approval of outcomes that will be tracked, including definitions. 3) Approval of reporting requirements for Regional Champions and Constellation Partners. 4) Approval of parameters on use of funds awarded by Golden LEAF to make payments to businesses or individuals. 5) Approval of projected outcomes and activities to be accomplished by the time at which the second cohort would begin to apply to participate. Requirements that must be satisfied before release of funds for the second cohort: 6) Accomplishment of the outcomes and activities identified in item 5, above, and evidence of interest in participating in the initiative by qualified Regional Champions and Constellation Partners that serve Golden LEAF priority communities. (If funds are not released for the second cohort, Golden LEAF will release sufficient funds to NC IDEA to complete implementation of the first cohort.)
46	North Carolina Chamber Foundation NC Ag Leads Extension	\$456,000	Extend the NC Chamber Foundation NC Ag Leads contract for one year to provide continued oversight for implementation of the three funded projects (GroundTruth NC, the land-use assessment, the workforce assessment, and the Farmer Innovation Bridge) and any other funded NC Ag Leads projects, to continue engagement with stakeholders through Imagine Ag Day and the HARVEST Series, and to conduct a rescan to identify potential revisions of the plan.

Other Business		
#	Topic	Comments Special Conditions
47	Digital Ag Hubs Request from N.C. State	Discussion only.
48	N.C. Housing Finance Agency Update	Update only.
49	Golden LEAF Community Colleges Scholarship	Recommend that the Board adopt eligibility guidelines for the workforce continuing education scholarships that include the same citizenship requirements for students that receive curriculum support.