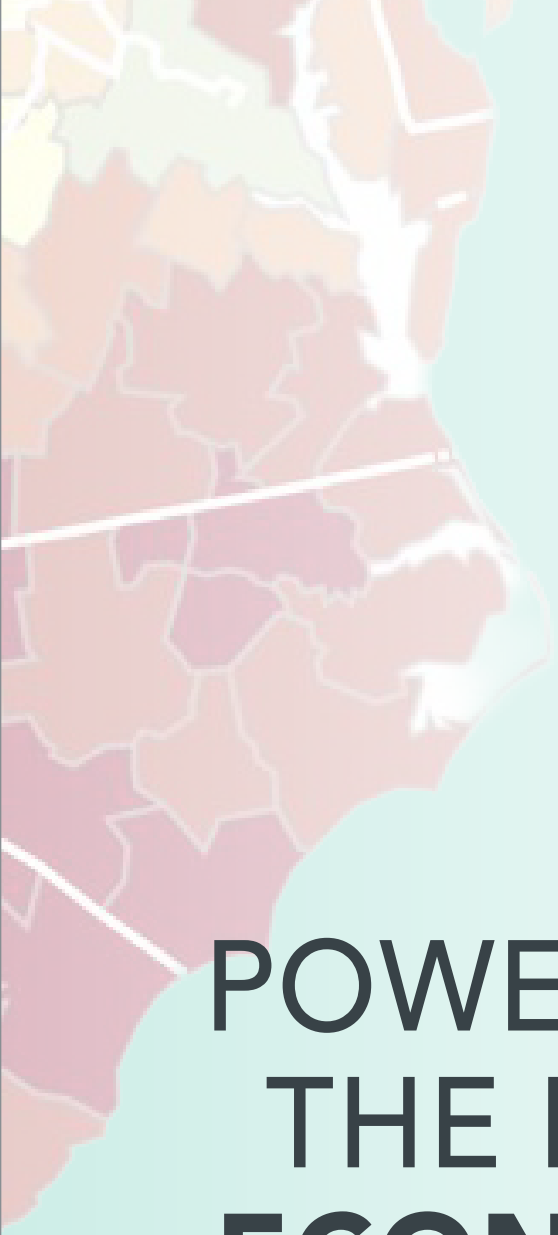


POWERING THE **NEXT ECONOMY**

Durham Tech 2026-2031 Strategic Plan: Geared to Economically Power the Region, Drive Workforce Development, & Build Prosperity

For more than six decades, Durham Technical Community College has tracked the shifting tides of the regional economy — and helped workers navigate them. As the greater Research Triangle region enters one of the most dynamic chapters in its history, the College is launching a bold five-year plan to meet the moment.

When Durham Tech opened its doors in 1961, its founders made an unusual decision for the American South: The College would be integrated from the start. That choice wasn't simply a moral statement. It was a strategic one. Business leaders and the founding Board of Trustees understood that a rapidly shifting industrial economy demanded a higher education institution built for everyone — and that the region's future prosperity depended on it.

More than six decades later, the region those founders were part of is barely recognizable. Throughout that time, the College has continued to grow and update its programs, curriculum, and technology to match a changing region. Given the nature of the economic opportunities and challenges in both Durham and Orange counties in 2026, this work may have never been as important as it is today.

Durham Tech's Backyard

Durham has shed its identity as a tobacco town and reinvented itself as one of the most dynamic innovation economies in the United States. Orange County has shifted from the home of UNC-Chapel Hill to a locale boasting an economy bolstered not just by the universities and healthcare, but by advanced manufacturing firms like ABB, Morinaga, and Medline.

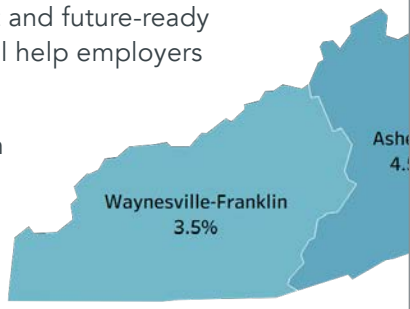
Together, Durham and Orange counties are known as a hub for careers in healthcare, research, clinical trials, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing. Duke and UNC Health have become world-class academic medical centers.

Today, the Research Triangle Park – most of which sits in Durham County – is home to more than 385 companies, from nimble startups and federal research labs to Fortune 100 multinationals.

IBM, which arrived as one of the park's earliest anchor tenants, recently marked its 60th anniversary there. Novo Nordisk, which opened its first diabetes manufacturing location in Clayton, NC in 1993, has since expanded multiple times and now has a major presence in Durham. Biogen, which celebrated 30 years in the park, announced a $2 billion investment commitment. Eli Lilly has invested $450 million to expand its high-tech manufacturing campus in RTP to help meet demand for its diabetes and obesity treatments. And in April 2026, in what Mayor Leonardo Williams called "a groundbreaking day in the Bull City," pharmaceutical giant AbbVie announced a $1.4 billion investment to build a 185-acre manufacturing campus near RTP — the largest private investment in Durham's history, projected to create 734 jobs averaging more than $118,000 per year and generate more than $8 billion in state economic activity over 12 years.

The park's roughly 55,000 workers collectively generate an annual economic impact of $25.1 billion — equivalent to more than 4% of North Carolina's entire economy. And that's before accounting for what comes next.

RTP is entering its next iteration with RTP 3.0, which outlines how the park will evolve over the next 50 years. The plan expands on how land can be used in the park, which will create more mixed-use development and future-ready infrastructure. This, in turn, will help employers attract talent.



To the north of RTP in Durham sits Treyburn Corporate Park, also known as Treyburn Industrial Park. Just off NC-501 with convenient access to Interstate 85, the park was developed in the 1980s. Today, Treyburn is one of Durham County's key employment hubs. Major companies based there include AISIN North Carolina, bioMérieux, Corning, Merck, and Novo Nordisk, together employing thousands of workers.

The park has a strong life sciences and advanced manufacturing tenant base and is an important counterpart to RTP, giving Durham County another concentration of major pharmaceutical, biotech, and industrial employers.

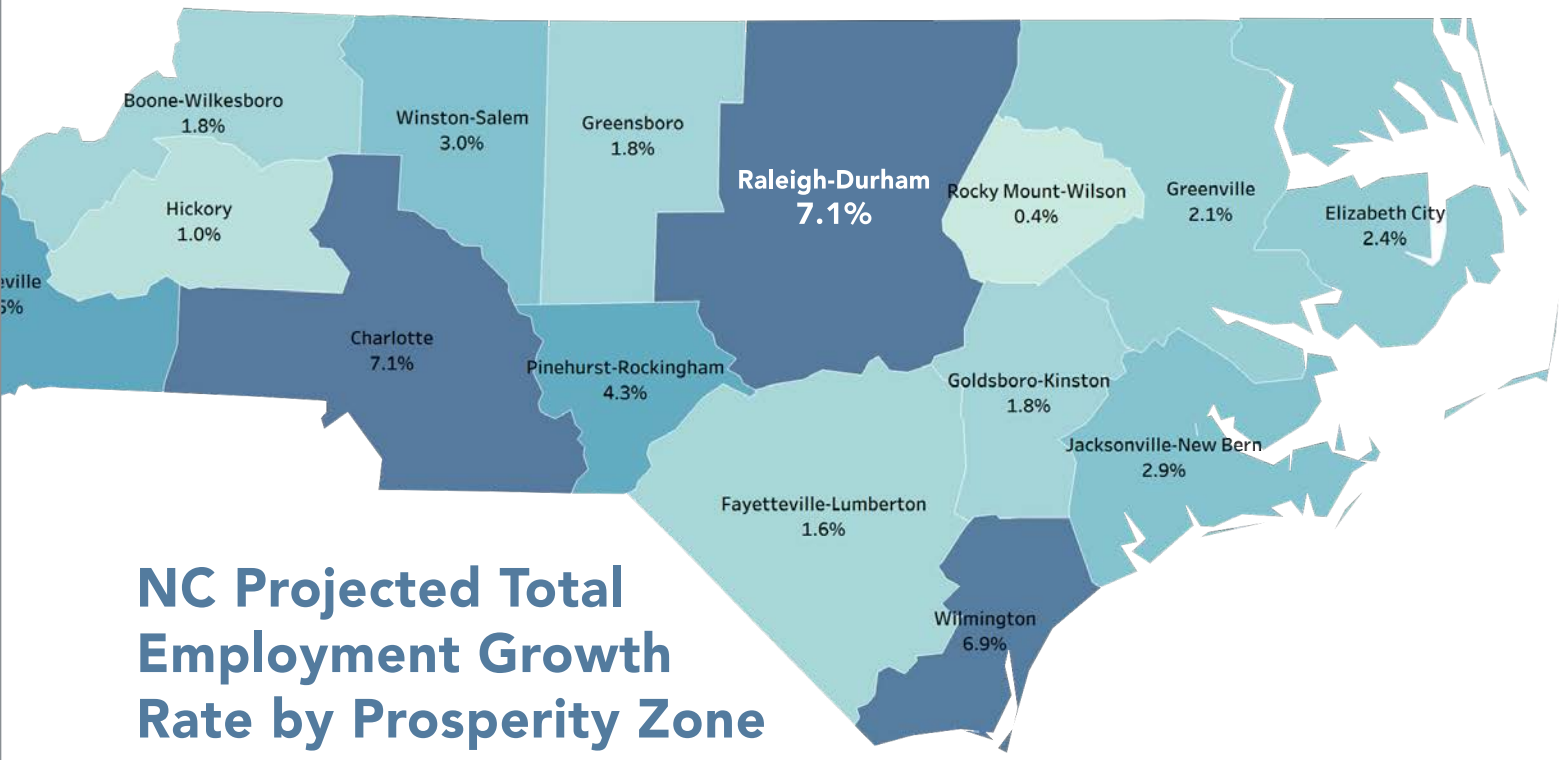
In Orange County, there has been a surge in life sciences, clinical trials, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare jobs. In addition to UNC Health and UNC Chapel Hill, the county's two largest employers, employers that include Morinaga, Medline and ABB have invested in the county.

ABB invested $40 million to expand its Mebane facility and create more than 400 jobs.

Morinaga has also increased the footprint at its Mebane facility. At the ribbon-cutting for the new expansion, Orange County Economic Development Director Steve Brantley said it will make Morinaga one of the county's largest employers, with almost 400 people and a tax base of almost $160 million.

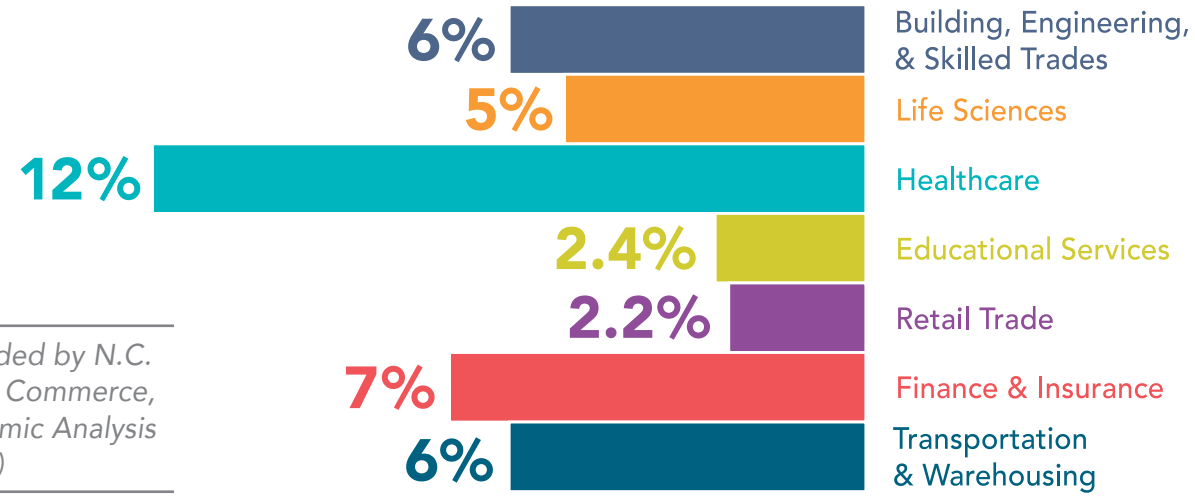
Another large employer that has invested in the county is Medline, a major medical supply hub serving hospitals and clinics throughout the Southeast, opened its 1.2 million-square-foot distribution center in Mebane in 2023.

The Triangle is expected to continue to see robust job growth in coming years. The N.C. Department of Commerce projects that one in three projected job increases across the state by 2034 will take place in the Raleigh-Durham region.



NC Projected Total Employment Growth Rate by Prosperity Zone Sub-Region *(2024-2034)*

NC Projected Job Growth by 2034



Statistics provided by N.C. Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD)



A Continuing Demand for the Bachelor's Degree

While the region's economic base diversifies, for many employers, a bachelor's degree remains a key credential for employment.

Durham Tech partners with many universities in the state, including UNC, N.C. State, N.C. Central, and most recently, Duke, to create the opportunity for students receiving their associate degree to transfer their credits to the four-year institutions to complete their bachelor's degree.

The transfer program has a proven track record of success, showing that the high-quality education students receive at Durham Tech prepares them to continue to pursue higher degree attainment.

Data show Durham Tech students perform better at these institutions than students who started off as freshmen at the same institutions, with high rates of graduation.

While companies are creating new and significant opportunities for individuals with sub-baccalaureate credentials, the bachelor's degree remains an in-demand degree for many companies and occupations and provides a strong return on investment in the Research Triangle labor market.

Major Growth Industries

Economic forecasts project major growth and demand for employees in life sciences, skilled trades, and healthcare. The College is working proactively to meet the anticipated increased need.

The College has expanded its Orange County Campus not only to enhance the EMS programs there but to add additional healthcare programs and bring Durham Tech's Building, Engineering and Skilled Trades pathway courses to that campus for the first time.

On Main Campus, Durham Tech broke ground on the Novo Nordisk Life Science Center and the Health Sciences Building in 2025, with expected completion in 2027 of the state-of-the-art facilities.

The College has launched the Durham Early College of Health Sciences in partnership with Durham Public Schools and Duke Health to prepare high school students for careers in clinical trials, surgical tech, medical assisting and nursing when they graduate with their high school diploma and Durham Tech degree.

After earning their degrees, they will be immediately eligible for employment, with Duke Health committing to hire at least 60% of the high school's graduates.

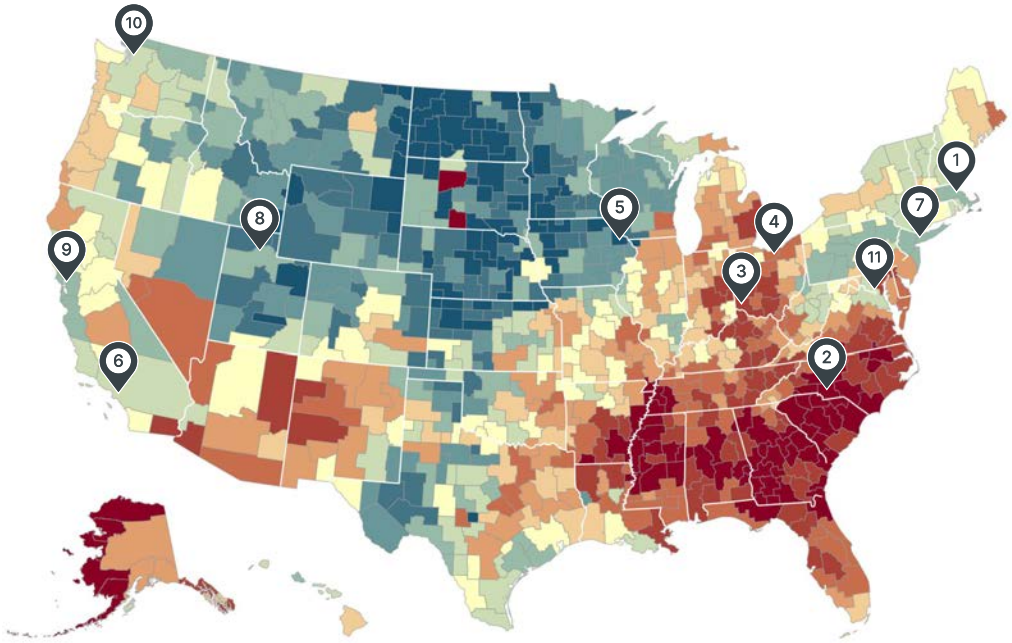
Headwinds to Overcome

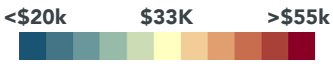
Durham Tech is fortunate to have economic growth, robust and long-standing educational and organizational partnerships, and strong governmental support that offer major tailwinds for the College. Each of these makes it possible for the College to set ambitious goals for what its students can achieve and what it can accomplish as a community institution.

However, stubborn historical headwinds exist as well. Raj Chetty, William A. Ackman professor of economics at Harvard University and the director of Opportunity Insights, has developed a map of economic mobility in the country that outlines the clear challenge for Durham Tech. His data paint a grim picture of the chances for upward economic mobility in the Southeastern U.S., among other regions, with the Triangle being no exception.

The Geography of Upward Mobility in the United States

Average Income at Age 35 for Children Whose Parents Earned $27,000 (25th percentile)





Blue = More Upward Mobility
Red = Less Upward Mobility

Source: *Chetty, Friedman, Hendren, Jones, Porter 2018*

1. Boston / $36.8k
2. Charlotte / $26.3k
3. Cincinnati / $28.3k
4. Cleveland / $29.4k
5. Dubuque / $45.5k
6. Los Angeles / $34.3k
7. New York City / $35.4k
8. Salt Lake City / $37.2k
9. San Francisco Bay Area / $37.2k
10. Seattle / $35.2k
11. Washington DC / $33.9k

CHETTY'S DATA SHOW

In **Durham County**, adults aged 35 who grew up with low-income parents earned an average household income of $24,000 per year.

- Of those adults, only seven out of every 10 graduated from high school, and approximately two out of 10 earned a college degree.

In Durham County, the average income for children born in 1992 was $25,300, or 1.1% more than 15 years earlier.

In **Orange County**, adults aged 35 who grew up with low-income parents earned an average household income of $29,000 per year.

- Of those adults, 78% graduated from high school, and 27% earned a college degree.

In Orange County, the average income for children born in 1992 was $28,200, or 1.8% less than 15 years earlier.

Lack of exposure to potential careers, networking opportunities, childcare, in addition to facing economic insecurity, and poor access to healthcare are all contributing factors.

Durham Tech is working to be part of the solution.

In addition to its academic and workforce development programming, the College is also committed to increasing access to key services like affordable housing and healthcare in underserved neighborhoods.

Recognizing transportation and financial concerns are major obstacles for many people who need healthcare, Durham Tech established the Community Health Lab, a van equipped with medical equipment and providers, which provides free services ranging from eye exams and prescription eyewear to blood pressure screenings.