

# High School Student Competition To Generate Interest In Green-Industry Employment

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## Introduction and Need for Idea

The North Carolina Green Industry consistently needs motivated and trained employees in landscape design, installation and management (Higgins, 2018). These interest areas provide exciting and rewarding employment opportunities with upward career mobility (Goecker et al., 2015).

In response, a new initiative was developed to produce highly trained and capable employees directly from high school or through premier educational institutions across North Carolina.

## How It Works and Methodology

- NC High School Landscape Competition (two day event) is conducted in cooperation with regional industry sponsors and statewide horticulture educators.
- Offering seven landscape-related events not commonly available to students in rural areas.
- Events include plant identification, landscape irrigation design and assembly, plant problem diagnosis, landscape lighting, small engine operation and diagnosis, arboriculture tool and equipment identification, and equipment operation.
- Colleges bring students as a preparatory activity for the [National Collegiate Landscape Competition](#).
- To increase interaction with green industry professionals, a lunch was held and industry professionals hosted educational and competition-related workshops.

## Results to Date and Implications

The first NC High School Landscape Competition was held February 2020 at the NCSU JC Raulston Arboretum and Horticulture Field Laboratory.

- **7 high schools** and **7 colleges**, **164 students and educators**.
- **Seventy-nine industry professionals** were involved .
- Evaluation surveys were sent to educators and industry professionals.
- **Successes:** industry and educator buy-in, high-quality food, convenient location, collaboration between college educators and cooperation within the host school.
- **Challenges:** management of set-up, facilitation, clean-up, weather.
- **Key suggestions for improvement:** inviting more high schools, setting earlier deadlines for students, using registration software, involving more college educators in event planning, offering more high school events, creating more sponsor financial buy-in, expanding to two full days, and creating fun educator competitions.

## Future Plans and Advice to Others

**Program goal** will be targeting 100 high school and 100 college students annually for this event.

**Performance Evaluation Criterion** will include the ability of the program to attract high school students within a region of the state where the event is to be hosted, the perceived learning that takes place during the event and the movement of individuals into the industry.

**By year 5 of the event**, our goal is that 30% of high school participants enter the industry. Tracking of this data will be done through cooperating educators. Industry professionals will be asked to contribute data related to hiring and career mobility.

## Costs and Resources Needed

**\$12-15K** and include lodging, meals, publicity, t-shirts, and other promotional materials. Cost covered by event sponsors.

**Local sponsors and industry partners** provide materials and equipment needed for event.

**Host school** secures technology and plans event.

