

# Community colleges seek to work with defense contractors

[By Rebecca Logan](#)

Staff writer

Defense contractors should feel free to pick up the phone and call their local community college president directly.

That was one message shared by representatives of North Carolina's community college system who spoke Wednesday at Fayetteville Technical Community College.

"The military is one of the most significant economic engines that we have in our state," said system President R. Scott Ralls.

And community colleges have a responsibility to help fuel such engines, he said. That was a central theme this week at the White House community college summit, which Ralls attended.

Ralls flew from Washington on Tuesday night to be among the speakers Wednesday at a breakfast at FTCC. It was organized by the North Carolina Defense Business Association, a Fayetteville-based statewide professional membership organization for businesses that operate in the defense industry.

Several campus presidents explained to the crowd what they have to offer to contractors. Some contractors then offered their perspectives on what they would like to see from community colleges. The general theme was a need for better communication.

Many programs already exist within community colleges that could meet contractors' needs, said FTCC President Larry Keen.

"Go ahead and challenge us in new ways, as well," Keen said. "We want to change the envelope."

The event wrapped up with a question and answer session. The community college crowd wanted to know whether they could get more of a heads up from contractors about specific job requirements when they're looking to hire.

"Yes and no," answered Jim McLean with NIC, an information technology, engineering and logistics company that does work with the federal government. Sometimes a company doesn't know, until it has mere weeks to fill the jobs, exactly what government-required specifications will be in play, he said.

"Even for us it's a leap of faith," McLean added.

Ralls said even if specifics might be hazy for contractors, they still have a clearer picture of what's coming down the pipeline than the educators. He urged contractors to find ways to share what they see as trends.

Neil Buie, a vice president at The Logistics Co., told the group that when it comes to filling jobs like those needed at TLC's Fayetteville headquarters, it's not hard to find good administrative assistants and accountants. It is much harder, he said, to find good ones who are familiar with the unique requirements and vernacular in defense contracting.

Buie said dealing with the military is not difficult, "it's complicated." And that, he added, is where community colleges have the chance to step in and help make things uncomplicated.

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