

Organization: Mad River Valley Chamber of Commerce

Location: New Visitor Center

Date: October 3, 2017

Time: 9:00 to 11:00 am

Presentation Takeaways

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce and the Vermont Futures Project presented data on the workforce challenges experienced by Vermont employers and showed the attendees that about 11,000 more people are needed in the workforce. The attendees engaged in the exercise of providing solutions to narrow this workforce supply gap.

Why Vermont?:

Attendees were asked “Why Vermont?” as they entered the room and were instructed to write their answers on post-it notes. When answering this question, Mad River Valley attendees fell into two general categories: Quality of Life and Family/Friends.

Specific notes: Born and raised; Followed husband here; Natural – lots of dirt roads and wild animals, Friendly – we greet strangers and pay attention to each other; Skiing and local food; Fresh air and outdoor fun; Pristine nature and authentic people; Quality of life, beautiful landscape; agriculture – organic especially, wonderful people, progressive politics and can-do attitude.

Focus Areas

Attendees were prompted to identify populations that Vermont could recruit from for more workers to close the workforce gap. Some categories were supplied and some were added by the attendees. Attendees made the following recommendations:

1. **New Americans** – The state needs to make new Americans feel welcome in Vermont given that the state has very little diversity and a lack of a social or support structure to help immigrants stay here.
 - a. We should replicate the Burlington/Rutland immigration assistance program throughout the state to enable a variety of assistance programs.
 - b. We should establish pilot programs whereby English as a second language is taught in various communities as well as other language classes (French, Romanian, Spanish, etc.) to assist those already in the community with interacting with our new Americans.
 - c. We should implement workforce training, mentorships, and other programs geared toward helping new Americans feel that they are a part of the larger community.

2. **Corporate Refugees** – Vermont should focus efforts on executives from surrounding states who, because they are top earners, are being replaced with younger, lower wage individuals.
 - a. Focus on the 50+ year old who still have several years remaining in the workforce, but are looking for a change in lifestyle from a large metropolitan area to Vermont. Focus on those individuals who have quality of life as a priority rather than pay.
 - b. Collaborate with transition coaching companies to locate those individuals who are being pushed out/looking for a change.
 - c. Focus on presenting employment, housing, and other opportunities to the spouse as well since we need to make sure that there is availability for them to relocate to Vermont.

Solutions:

1. Create more student internship opportunities which will lead to employment with the company.
2. Create and tailor college majors that are more geared towards our current workforce needs within the state.
3. Change business hierarchy/culture and allow for more employee part-owner (co-op) type of opportunities to encourage employee partners.
4. Reassess the benefits structure and remove the disincentives not to work.
5. Create a more vibrant social life and social culture to attract people, including involving Vermont social groups to get the message out and assist in connecting people more.
6. Improve our transportation network to enable people to get around the state.
7. Create more telecommuting and remote worker options for workers.
8. Host a statewide job board (similar to Maine).
9. Create a college tuition loan forgiveness program for students if they live and work in the state for at least two years after college.
10. Get people to visit here first and then get them hooked – target markets within a day's drive away and create a conversion training program whereby the hospitality industry can ask one or two questions that will gauge the tourist's interest in making Vermont home and if yes, create and utilize a more targeted plan to convert them to Vermonters.
 - a. Create a message or flyer that can go into our Vermont visitor guides to help tourists recognize they can create a life here and if they like us once, they should try us for a lifetime.

Workforce Discussion:

Attendees were asked to state what they believed are the obstacles to population/business growth in Vermont:

1. Lack of affordable housing (Mad River Valley Employer survey found 50% respondents said housing inadequate – a one-bedroom apartment in MRV requires someone making minimum wage to work 93 hours per week to afford the costs and if you work 40 hours per week you must make \$22.26.).
2. Taxes – property taxes, food and meals tax.

3. Lack of adequate child care providers.
4. Motivating people to get off unemployment and take a job that may not be their “perfect” job, but will enable them to work while still searching for their perfect job.