



# Workforce Solutions

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**Organization:** Vermont League of Cities and Towns

**Date:** October 5, 2017

**Time:** 11:00 am – 12:00 pm

## Presentation Takeaways

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, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns Town Fair attendees fell into two general categories: Quality of Life and Community.

*Specific post-it notes:* Community, quality of life, superior workforce; Artisan and cottage industries, natural beauty year round, healthy living, low property taxes in many communities, little competition; Small town, independence, recreation; “Old fashioned”, work/life balance, family time, community; Small and cozy; Community and shared values; Vermont provides a home place where we can value each other and create our future; Community, healthy, independent; It’s my home, even when I travel away; It’s beautiful; Family; Never have been anywhere else; Recreational opportunities – skiing, hunting, fishing, etc.; Health and Fitness; Outdoor recreation, culture, open space and education; Natural beauty; It’s not NY; It’s ripe for theme park; viable socialist party - VT progressive politics; Bellows Falls is a gateway between NH and VT. My company works well this way in hiring employees, job order, etc., for myself, community minded; Green, beer, why not?

### Focus Areas

Attendees were prompted to identify populations that Vermont could recruit from for more workers. Some categories were supplied by the Futures Project and some were added by the attendees. Attendees moved into breakout sessions to brainstorm solutions for each area and then the group came together and added additional information.

#### **1. New Americans**

- Work with Vermont Refugee Resettlement program to assist with the business community, schools (language needs), transportation, housing, and community acceptance/support.
- \*Utilize Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program to recruit more people and work with current refugees and communities doing well to share their ideas.
- Utilize the current information regarding new Americans already in Vermont (i.e. what jobs are available, who is already here, why they come, what services are here, who is providing

assistance now, and at what costs are these services), to create a plan to encourage new Americans to move here.

- Recruiting efforts should focus on those nationalities that are already here because they have networks in place in Vermont already.
- Utilize social media, families already here, educational resources and college recruitment to target this population.
- \*Evaluate Federal policies that make it difficult to implement these programs to make recommendations for changes or improvements to ease this burden.
- Expand existing refugee assistance services to other towns.
- Create recruitment materials in other languages.
- Increase the amount of affordable housing available within the state.
- Increase the number of work visas available to individuals.
- Assist the broader community in understanding what it is that these groups need.
- Improve school resources, including language classes.
- Increase public transportation.
- Incorporate sports and activities that are cultural to engage a broader audience.

## **2. Tourists**

- Engage tourists as partners.
- Collaborate within the state and reinvigorate regional marketing initiatives (i.e. Rutland/Killington pooling resources – Killington Valley Initiative).
- Create more bike trails throughout the state.
- \*Ask them to stay – they don't always know they can live here.

## **3. Second Home Owner:**

- Encourage them to turn their vision toward Vermont.
- Survey them and ask their perception of Vermont and then ask them to stay.
- Improve high-speed internet availability.
- Share the story that Vermont is a viable place to work and innovate.
- Utilize their skills and create jobs for them.

## **4. New Families**

- Market Vermont as a place with community values. Use the message that Vermont is a healthy and safe place to raise your family.
- Create universal child care for 0-5 years
- Strengthen our education system so that we can proudly say that it is the best in the nation.
- Create a housing tax credit for full-time residents.
- Create a housing tax credit for fixing up your home.
- Build more housing encouraging community farms, tiny house communities and multi-generation locations.

- Create healthy and safe places; make community centric decisions; provide incentives to rebuild and repurpose buildings; and create community buildings focused around “farmsteads” – theme living.

## **5. Deferred Retirees/Currently Unemployed or under-employed**

- Encourage individuals to stay longer in the workforce as they reach 50+ rather than retire (recognize that there is a difference between those that need to work and want to work).
- Provide flexible hours and a benefits plan.
- Eliminate “paradise tax” – make it more affordable to live here (comparably as expensive to live here as Boston or Connecticut).
- Increase wages overall for working Vermonters.
- Transition away from physical labor jobs to other skill sets and create training and educational programs that will assist individuals in these new labor markets.
- Improve cell phone and broadband reception throughout the state to help people stay connected.
- Review age discrimination policies that are currently in place.
- Retrain employers to look at older applicants fairly - economic development/job seekers/employers typically want a certain age demographic.
- Align community and technical college education and skills training to be more focused on the needs of the state, both now and in the future.
- Understand employer needs better.

## **6. Leavers & Wannabes**

- \*Focus on the 30+ year old group with a family mindset who is looking to settle down (urban refugee and college students). Ask them to come back utilizing broad marketing and creating a statewide jobs bank (example VT Air National Guard/Vets reintegration). The message should include that we are two hours from everywhere, Vermont has great public safety and is a great place to raise your kids.
- Provide state incentives to encourage people to return to the state.
- Down payment assistance for home ownership.
- Create marketing initiatives targeting those who have left saying that we want you back.
- Create more job opportunities for entrepreneurs.
- Remind them of their connection to the community and the state.
- Establish a statewide job bank.
- Improve our healthcare system to make it more affordable.
- Improve connectivity to high speed internet and ensure access throughout the state.

## **The Future**

Attendees were asked, “If you fell asleep for 10 years and then woke up, how would you like to see Vermont? What would be different?”

- Upper floors in downtowns made into housing

- Re-pave my road
- More diversity
- Greater age integration
- Same as it is now... few cars, same ruralness and natural beauty
- More economic opportunities
- Another area in the state has become as robust as Chittenden county
- More transportation in rural areas
- Thriving independently owned businesses in the downtown areas
- Lower student loan debt
- Full schools

\*determined by larger group to be the priorities.