

Organization: Addison County Chamber of Commerce and the Addison County Economic Development Corp.
Location: Middlebury town offices conference room 94 Main St, Middlebury, VT 0575
Date: October 17, 2017
Time: 8:00 – 10:00 am

Presentation Takeaways

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce presented the Vermont Futures Project 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, Addison County attendees fell into three general categories: Quality of Life, Community/People, and Family.

Specific notes: Deep abiding sense of community; To be part of a community; Nice people and near nature; Because – commitment to people, small enough to reach around entire state; works for the betterment of...; Family; Great place to raise a family; Why not? Beautiful place to live, family, opportunities and good friends; Clean and safe; Beautiful, little traffic, good place to raise kids, outdoor recreation; Creative people; Vermont is what America was; Quality of life – natural beauty and outdoor recreation, strong sense of community, access to all kinds of people, and good schools. Quality of life; Great place for kids to grow up, connected to community and outdoor activities; We care about clean air, the environment, civic participation and our families; Because the people; It's my home!! we need more people to work and stay; My husband got a Vt job with awesome union benefits; We're different – like the California of the East Coast; It's people; Last outpost – clean, free and beautiful; Vermont is home; Vermont because the best place to start is where you are (a vague answer to a vague question).

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. **Tourists** - Vermont should focus efforts on converting the tourist into a lifelong resident.
 - Host job fairs on the weekends at ski areas to showcase all that Vermont has to offer.
2. **New Americans** -

- Open our doors to accept refugees into Vermont and send the message they are welcome here.
- Ignore/improve federal immigration policies.
- Communicate with those already in Vermont to assist recruiting, assimilation and creating programs and services to assist these individuals.
- Replicate the effort done in Holyoke, MA where they are conducting a massive outreach campaign to Puerto Rico residents.

3. Retain our Vermonters

- Better match the unemployed with the currently available jobs and required trainings to match the needed skill sets – overall improve our skills training.
- Reduce college debt and provide incentives to stay and work in Vermont
- Create tax incentives and college tuition reimbursement to encourage people to come and stay.
- Better educate those individuals and young people who do not know/believe that they can make a living here.
- The state needs to make more effort/take better care of the families that are already here – including offering more affordable child care options.
- Collaboration amongst employers and employees to create partnerships to meet the specific needs of the community and workforce in that community.
- *Learn to earn* programs – Go to middle and high schools to showcase/present what jobs students can get with STEM educations to encourage them to continue gaining those particular skills.
- Change our message geared at our low-income Vermonters to show that they too can make a living here that does not necessarily involve those expensive and perceived/experienced unobtainable things that VT has to offer – skiing, craft beer, B&B experiences, etc.
- *Replicate the Bennington career day where they bus students in from other states to showcase the jobs that are in Vermont.

4. Leavers/Wannabes

- Find out the reason people left Vermont in the first place.
- Target 10, 15, and 20-year college and high school reunions to provide information about options to move to VT and the ability to live, work and build a business here.

5. Corporate Refugees/Deferred Retirement

- Focus efforts on capturing these individuals and keeping them in the workforce longer.

6. Urban/Climate/Disaster Refugees

- Improve message from Vermont about what we are all about. (Perception in some cases is that people do not aspire to live in Vermont/partake in this lifestyle – viewed as subsistent.)

- Replicate past efforts of the Vermont Association and Vermont State Society which recruited ex-Vermonters and others from across the country.
- Replicate the State of Maine's efforts in recruiting those Mainer's who left.
- Advertise jobs in a catchy way in our rest areas and make information about jobs and the ability to make a living here readily available.

Workforce Discussion:

Attendees were asked what they believed are the things that Vermont needs to assist population/business growth in Vermont. Responses included:

1. Lack of affordable/market rate/middle-income housing availability and at too great a cost. How many new housing starts do we have each year and where are they located? Is this a sufficient number being built? What are our retrofit efforts?
 - a. Improve the housing process at the local level and push these determinations from the volunteer planning boards to the state level where there is expertise on the matter.
 - b. Create new housing to be completely energy efficient.
2. Lack of adequate child care providers and affordable child care options.
3. The state needs to complete an in-depth demand study to determine what jobs are available and the location of those jobs in addition to the wage expectations.
4. Increase wages and benefits in the state.
 - a. The state needs to even out wages and salaries of Vermonters with the cost of living to help resolve the gap between earnings and costs.
5. The state needs to make itself more attractive to multi-national corporations to locate here – target more progressive corporations (possibly B corps like GMP has become) that are more aligned with Vermont values.
6. Replicate the Waltham, VT housing project process throughout the state.
7. The state needs to create positions for staff/recruiters to handle the process of recruiting people to this state and retaining those already here.
8. Employers need to improve the hiring/interview process to make it easier for out-of-staters to interview and move to Vermont (ex. Police dept. has lengthy interview process requiring multiple trips to the State – if that could be condensed down to 1 weekend trip that would assist people in trying to obtain jobs here).
9. The state needs to create a pool or program to address worker's compensation and unemployment insurance costs and processes for temporary employees.
10. The state needs to improve the process enabling standing for individuals in the Act 250 process to allow for the consensus to prevail and prevent a single person from defeating/delaying a project when the general consensus is to move forward on the project.
11. The State Department of Commerce or Sec. of State, could/should host a clearinghouse for Vermont companies similar to Thomas's' Register. Many start-ups want to do business with local Vermont companies, but don't know who or what is available. A formal support for B2B within Vermont should be established.

12. Establish Boards and Commissions which encourage growth...currently it is perceived that they are there to stop it.
13. If the state could create something like an "Uninsured Motorist" pool that would cover these insurances (Workman's Comp Insurance, Unemployment Insurance), it would be very helpful. It would be a one stop shop for companies with fewer than say 3 or 4 employees. No searching for providers, one flat rate based on payroll alone as reported on the WHT 430.
14. Review and revise the entire tax structure, especially reviewing the various special taxes.
15. Improve local control and Act 250 overlap for planning decisions and make the members meet once a week to move the process along and do not make it a voluntary position that many people participate in specifically to stop growth in their communities.
16. Replicate the Arizona Tax Department initiative which offers free monthly or quarterly workshops for new business. The focus is on how to navigate all the tax forms and other compliance issues facing a startup. The frequency was determined by population density in any particular region.
17. If you're in a startup, you often don't know what you don't know, that is where the state or chamber could be most helpful.
18. When Ben and Jerry's wanted to expand nationally, they created the ice cream RV. Maybe VT should create a solar powered/assisted Bus, that would have corporate sponsorships even and drive around the US letting people know what VT is about and what it offers.

*Can be used in a number of categories.