

**Organization:** Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce  
**Location:** Southwest Vermont Career Development Center – 321 Park St.  
**Date:** October 26, 2017  
**Time:** 11:30 am – 1:30 pm

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, Bennington County attendees fell into two general categories: Quality of Life and Community.

*Specific notes:* Small enough to be a demonstration project (compared to other state populations); Vermont is alive with history. It is a great community with many great opportunities. It's never a bad day to be in VT; Good agency, good bones, growth potential and great work/life balance; It's beautiful; Peace; I was born here, move away and moved back; Creative and open-minded; We came to VT 12 years ago b/c its “Vermont” and (that's why we stay); I chose to come, attitude; Opportunity for a good life; Vt is the best place to raise a family on a small farm; Unique state – community oriented, nature oriented, clean and safe, humanitarian policies, accessible leaders, strong cultural orientation; Quality of life; Quality of life, sense of community; Vermont is a state of mind as well as a state of geography; 250 years of authentic brand; Life-long resident committed to my community. Has great opportunities; Environment, sustainability, local culture, local food, beauty, BEER!, arts and community.

**Focus Areas**

Attendees were prompted to identify populations that Vermont could recruit from for more workers to close the workforce gap. Attendees made the following recommendations:

1. Improve statewide effort regarding educational curriculum including an emphasis on environmental studies and history – enable the ability to connect to the land physically and educationally.
2. Collaboration amongst the various groups within the state that are dealing with the same workforce issues, rather than approaching these issues alone.
3. The “sophomore summit” conducted by the McClure Foundation which exposes sophomores to the *Pathways to Promising Careers* which identifies Vermont's high-pay, high-demand jobs and their training and education pathways should be replicated throughout the state and maybe should include grade schoolers.

4. The state should subsidize/incentivize the workforce for youth who want to come to Vermont to work in internships or other jobs.
  - a. More formalized internship program to make them stay in Vermont
  - b. Open college campus dorms in the summer to house the youth coming here.
5. The state needs to do a better job training and matching the skill level with the available jobs. Ensure those individuals we are currently training are acquiring those skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.
6. Improve Vermont housing stock. Housing stock availability is of concern throughout the state and about 20% of Bennington college students want to stay here, but only about 4% end up staying because of their inability to find adequate housing that they want to stay in.
7. Improve child care access. There is serious concern about the lack of child care providers and the new regulations imposed on providers to complete at least 21 college credits is further exacerbating the problem as providers are closing their doors rather than satisfying these new requirements.
8. Vermont needs to provide better resources/opportunities for the trailing spouse – how can the state assist them to feel better acclimated, or obtain a job.
  - a. Create a more formalized network (hospital example).
9. The state needs to help promote self-empowerment to transition people from relying on state/federal assistance, to relying on themselves to accomplish something.
  - a. Replicate Goodwill Bennington example which puts people to work who have barriers to employment in other settings – creating the first rung of the ladder to better train these individuals so they can be gainfully employed elsewhere up the ladder.
    - i. The state should create a program whereby employees participate in training individuals and moving them along the ladder to other employers to gain greater and greater skill. Incentivize the employer for participating in this program in some way.
10. There is an issue of low density of population in the state and many of the potential solutions Vermont is looking to are based on greater densities to be effective and the state needs to be aware of this lack of density as it moves forward in creating solutions.
11. The state needs improve the diversity within the state as well as the response to these groups. Vermonters need to make an effort to make these individuals feel welcome. This is a problem in Southern Vermont College where about 30% of the students are minorities and often receive frost receptions from residents. This cultural problem is significant in Vermont and needs to change to be more welcoming to minority populations.
12. The state needs to make wi-fi readily available throughout the state to attract millennials to Vermont.