

Organization: Okemo Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce
Location: Murdock's on the Green, 42 Village Green Rd., Cavendish, VT 05153
Date: October 18, 2017
Time: 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm

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, Okemo Valley Chamber attendees fell into three general categories: Quality of Life, Community/People, and Family. *Specific notes:* Family values and strong sense of community; Great people!!!; I love working in Vermont. Wonderful people; Friendly people, clean air, good politics, hard-working, best internet, good opportunities; Invested in business, family and cultures and the four seasons; Community, local; The incredible sense of community. We are so strong!; Peaceful, great people and inertia; The opportunity to be part of a new beginning; Serenity; Most beautiful state; Great rural environment in close proximity to major cities; Good government, nice people, laid back and my husband lives here; Hang with Vermont and with the real Vermonters; Why not?! Lifestyle; Why not? Born here, no reason to leave. Great place to live; Beautiful place and multi-generations; This is where I grew up; Born and raised – Love Vermont; Born and raised in Vermont and my family is here, plus it's beautiful; This is where the truck broke down.

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. Tourists –

- *Educate individuals on all the opportunities available in Vermont.
- Approach them early in their visit and let them know they can live here.
 - o Create a conversion brochure to provide them with as they are leaving.
 - o Create different campaigns to attract the employer vs. the employee.
 - o Market Vermont's assets in a positive way and let them know they can work here and find opportunities to also live here permanently.

2. Women –

- Personally invite women to the workforce and remind them that they can play an effective and important role in our workforce. Often they are not out searching for the job, so we need to bring the job to their attention.

3. Retain our Vermonters

- Plant the seeds early in the minds of our young Vermonters that they have many opportunities available to them – use Chester, VT as a model.
- Improve our youth’s work ethic to encourage them to participate more – work with both parents and schools to access children at a young age.
- Start vocational training classes – career and training at a younger age – make these programs accessible to all high school students and to junior high students as well.
- Improve youth mindset re: job versus a career where youth feel that they can hop around from job to job without settling into a career. Create incentives/encouragement to stay in the position long term.
- Employers should plug into schools more to reach out to the youth and make them aware of the career opportunities in Vermont.
- Establish a career day for 6-7th graders and earlier to spark more interest in the multitude of available jobs in Vermont.

4. Leavers/Wannabes

- Reduce the costs of higher education in Vermont and invest in brick and mortar campuses in the southern part of the state (below Randolph).
- Improve connections with communities and new comers to remove their feelings of depression or loneliness and encourage them to stay here rather than return home.
 - o Make them feel more a part of the community by creating better networks with the social groups in the community and residents.
 - o Implement a modern “welcome wagon” (originally came for the religious community) to engage with newcomers and make them feel a part of the community.

5. Deferred Retirement

- Use more effort to incentivize these individuals to remain or re-enter into the workforce. This includes job sharing, flexible hours and more time off flexibility.

6. Multi-Category Section

- Encourage more high school students to become involved in financial services – partner employers with high school students for internships.
- Become THE state as the center for automation and enable those companies to locate here and to develop the technology to automate parts of the supply chain.
- Create a further demand study drilling deeper into the workforce needs including what the positions are; where they are located; wages; and other relevant data.

- Improve access/numbers of festivals/events in Vermont – attract out-of-staters and bring communities together. Generate a community culture - replicate Okemo Valley’s efforts.
- Establish a *give back* requirement for those receiving assistance to give back to the community by working as a volunteer or otherwise for the community – assists the town in getting work done while also building skills and confidence in the assistance recipients.
- Find ways to attract businesses like those businesses out west that young people are flocking to work for (Google, Amazon, Facebook, etc.)
- Review/change VEPC incentives/requirements to make it more accessible for businesses to meet the requirements and receive VEPC incentives.
 - o Allow the employer a longer timeframe to meet the requirements – not require all these standards to be met on day one.
- Increase the minimum wage.
- Improve efforts in the southern part of the state to make them feel that their taxes are being filtered back to their community rather than going to and being used up north.
 - o Not as much is re-invested in the southern part of the state and this needs to be changed.
 - o Establish brick and mortar campuses in the southern part of Vermont.
- Increase state revenues by implementing toll roads.
- Find where we rank on the happiness meter and use those metrics to help support the position that people need to move to Vermont to be happy.
- Reduce the bureaucratic overreach that is felt and the creation of an instantly antagonistic relationship between client and the state. Find out what the state’s goals really are with Act 250 and other environmental permitting and once achieved, do not require further overreaching into the project.

Workforce Discussion:

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

1. Lack of affordable/available market-rate and middle-income housing – this includes a lack of rental property or mid-expense homes – many of the homes in the area are owned by 2nd home owners.
2. Lack of adequate child care providers.
3. Legalize marijuana to attract a younger population.
 - a. Improve drug policies.

*Can be used in a number of categories.