

Organization: Franklin County Regional Chamber of Commerce

Location: St. Alban's City Hall - 100 North Main St.

Date: November 8, 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, Franklin County attendees fell into two general categories: Quality of Life and Natural Beauty.

Specific notes: Quality of living/life, four seasons; Beautiful, low crime rate, community; Family; Quality of life, opportunity, community; Small population, one person can make a difference; Four seasons, schools, safety, work availability, education, recreation and the environment; Vermont is home; Born and raised (love everything VT); Great natural environment; A beautiful state! Love the mountains and the culture of independence and self-reliance; Beauty of the state and the people; Beauty and health. Clean living; The people, the landscape, shared values and community; School at first, stayed for the green, friendships, and love; Anything you could want to do in the outdoors, in nature, it's in your backyard; It's beautiful; Most beautiful state in the U.S.!!; Great place to live, generations; 1. Small scaled communities, 2. Accessible governments; Quality of life; Community-people are: independent, supportive and creative; Presence of real communities; Care about each other; Vermonters are willing to embrace and lead change and innovation; Because of talent and innovation; VT is a great place to work, shop, live and play; Excellent place for a work-life balance; Close-knit business community; Great educations – schools/colleges.

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.
 - Identify what there are for job opportunities and share that message with them.
 - Incorporate French into school curriculum and other learning centers in our towns along the border and throughout the state to attract Canadians.

2. Young Families

- Keep our environment clean to maintain our high quality of life to attract these individuals.
- Alignment of jobs in Vermont – ensure that we are offering the types of jobs that young people are looking for right now.
- Better effectively market out of state (put statements about Vermont and what we have to offer on the products that we send out around the country – Ben & Jerrys, Heady Topper, Magic Hat, Seventh Generation, etc.)
- *Improve access to positions/jobs for liberal arts students so they can have careers here and stay.
- *Find older mentors in state to assist young professionals.
- Balance out quality of life and cuts to income.
- Legalize marijuana as a funding source for these initiatives.
- Provide educational incentives including:
 - o Build in obligations to stay in Vermont for a specific time period to receive incentives to reduce student loan debt.
 - o *Create a loan forgiveness program
 - o Replace certain benefit programs with tuition repayment, child care subsidies, down payment assistance, and others – enable the individual to select which benefit they would like to receive.
 - o *Create a list of all the employers in and out of the state who are willing to hire remote workers (who will/already do reside in Vermont) and collectively market this list in some sort of website/portal.
 - *Create co-worker and incubator locations so that remote workers can come together and feel that they are part of the community and not isolated.
 - *Chambers and other business organizations should have events for these individuals to help integrate them into the community.
- Look at the family/community holistically – what does the community have to offer to achieve all aspects of the “quality of life” piece that Vermont provides and showcase these communities to attract families there.

3. Retain our Vermonters

- *Reach out to college and high school alumni.
- Reduce college debt and provide tax incentives and college tuition reimbursement to encourage people to stay.
- *Better educate those individuals and young people who do not know/believe that they can make a living here.
- *Better assist students in navigating their way through the job market, networking, etc., utilizing a regional approach.

4. Deferred Retirement

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

- Assist with taxation and cost of living so that they can “retire” from their main job, but continue to stay in the workforce as they desire.

5. Parents Returning to the Workforce

- Create an employer education component to get them to consider/recognize the value in these workers who may have been out of the workforce for a number of years – find ways to stop them from “weeding” through applications and removing these workers.
- Assist with adult education/resume tailoring to capture all the skills that these individuals have acquired as parents (i.e. learning how to budget).
- Retrain these individuals in an affordable manner to upgrade their skills.
- Improve financing access for entrepreneurs to successfully build a business here.

Workforce Discussion:

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

1. Ensure women do not feel excluded from the workforce due to a lack of available child care and sexual discrimination.
2. Cost of living barriers to staying here.
3. Wage levels need to increase and taxes need to lower.
4. The state needs to market to college seniors more about the available jobs within the state so they know that they have job choice when they graduate.
5. Improve wages and determine how to resolve the benefits cliff issue.
6. Increase WIB support and make it a continuing priority, not something where the funding disappears after a few years and interest is lost.
7. Make it mandatory for each high school to have a career center.
8. Showcase our manufacturing jobs in a better way so that people, within and outside of the state, are aware of all the opportunities here in Vermont.
9. The state needs to acquire more data on the number of people who come to college here but leave – we have never done a good job of tracking this and should know these numbers each year.
10. Remove barriers to post-incarceration, disabled, and less-skilled workers to enable them to obtain the skills needed to work up the employment ladder – create a second chance for these workers to transition back into the workforce.
11. Remove the “but-for” test in the VEGI program.
12. Improve access to short-term training/certifications.
13. Align recruitment and retention efforts when seeking workers so we not only get them here, but we keep them in the state.
14. Improve transportation access throughout the state.
15. Determine how the other models in other states have been effective in attracting workers and replicate those successful models here.
16. Enable students to feel better connected to the community so they will want to set roots here.

*Can be used in a number of categories.