

**Testimony from Lisa Ventriss, President of Vermont Business Roundtable
House Education Committee
January 18, 2017**

As reported quarterly by our members in our Business Conditions Survey, businesses increasingly have difficulty finding employees who possess the knowledge and training required to meet their workforce needs. This includes both technical skills – such as aptitude in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) – and applied skills – such as leadership, problem-solving, and communications abilities. This misalignment of skills exacerbates unemployment and stifles economic growth.

In a move that signals their concern with these systemic workforce challenges, the Roundtable’s board of directors has created a new College and Career Readiness Task Force (CCRTF) and redirected resources, staff, and member contributions to focus singularly these issues for the next indefinite period of time.

The CCRTF has two priorities:

1. Improvement in Vermont PreK-16 Education

Including, the full implementation of the intentions of Acts 166, 46, and 77, to address:

- Expanded access to high-quality early learning programs;
- Improvements in educational equity, quality, and access for all Vermont students;
- Development of career awareness, career exploration, and career preparedness activities with middle and high school students; and,
- Expanded access to and attainment of post-secondary education degree.

2. Alignment of Individual Skills with Employer Needs

The Roundtable believes a multi-faceted solution, involving public and private players, is needed to address the current skills mismatch problem. As a start, employers must send a clear, direct “demand signal” of the foundational attributes employees must demonstrate to succeed in the workplace; industry needs to sort out the large and chaotic world of industry credentials; state workforce boards and educational and training centers must understand job needs in each region and focus on helping students acquire the skills needed to fill those jobs; and human resources practices must improve across industry to identify competencies gained through valid credential programs and relevant experience.

The good news is that Vermont is making progress on these important strategies. Beginning in 2017, the Roundtable will:

- Work directly with secondary and post-secondary students, parents, and faculty to increase their understanding of the culture and expectations of the workplace;
- Support the work of teachers directly and indirectly in local classrooms;

- Clarify and strengthen organizational commitment in the education supply chain.

On that point, the Roundtable is leading an important new Talent Pipeline Management Project; an employer-led, employer-designed model of the US Chamber that addresses the workforce challenge by:

- Organizing employer collaboratives;
- Determining critical shared workforce needs;
- Communicating those needs to education and economic development partners; and,
- Measures talent flows/performance and ROI; and,
- Provide incentives to effective providers.

These strategies are intended to be coordinated as a systemic supply chain approach to workforce/talent pipeline development and management.

The Steering Committee is comprised of AOE, AEO/DED, BDCC, GBIC, SBSU, SWDB, VSAC, and VTCOC, who subsequently inform our work with their research and networks.

To date the TPM has convened a introductory meeting with 40 business leaders, education and economic development providers and received expressions of interest from 6-8 businesses interested in going forward with us.

Next steps include convening the businesses to determine those critical shared workforce needs, and send a team of economic development partners for training to lead the employer collaboratives.

We have been invited by one foundation to apply for funding for organizational support to our “network of the willing.” And our Steering Committee is stepping up for financial and in-kind support to have a strong start.

In sum, the Roundtable believes that workforce challenges are the defining issue of our time. We are taking up our role in addressing them, and believe that these strategies and public/private partnerships can begin to bend these worrisome trends. We will welcome your support in shaping the necessary policy framework for success.