

To: House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
From: Sarah Buxton, State Director of Workforce Development
Date: February 18, 2020
Re: Testimony on Governor's FY2021 Recommendations: VDOL Workforce Development

A. \$150,000 FOR NEW AMERICAN WORKFORCE SUPPORT

Brief Description: \$150,000 in one-time funding to support career access and advancement of New Americans and to fund grants to one or more communities to create local systems that support the relocation of New Americans.

Budget Reference:

Sec. B.1100 FISCAL YEAR 2021 ONE-TIME GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATIONS

(a) In fiscal year 2021, funds are appropriated from the General Fund as follows:

(11) \$150,000 to the Vermont Department of Labor for the following initiatives:

(A) \$50,000 to support the development of community-based systems for settling New Americans in partnership with the State Refugee Resettlement Office:

(B) \$100,000 to work with state and community partners to grow the state's workforce by recruiting and retaining New Americans.

Policy Proposal:

Sec. 1 Community Relocation Grants

- a. The Vermont Department of Labor, in consultation with the State Refugee Resettlement Office, shall administer one or more grants, totaling \$50,000, to support the development of coordinated community-based systems, with consideration of regional networks and resources, to assist in the relocation of refugees, asylum-seekers, and other legal immigrants into the community.
- b. Grant funds may be allocated for communities to assess, plan, and prepare to become better positioned to receive refugees, asylum seekers, or other legal immigrants into the community.
- c. Community-based New American relocation support systems should include, but are not limited to, partnerships with local education, faith, transportation, housing, economic services, employment, and human service support organizations.
- d. Grantees must make available their findings, learnings, and best practices at the conclusion of the grant for the purpose of supporting and informing other Vermont communities in developing their own New American relocation assistance systems.

Sec. 2 New American Labor Force Support and Expansion Initiative

- a. To advance the State's workforce expansion goals through increased immigration and to support currently employed New Americans, the Department of Labor, with the support of the Agencies of Human Services, and Commerce and Community Development, Secretary of State Office of Professional Regulation, and community-based service partners, shall coordinate efforts to recruit

and employ more New Americans in the state’s labor force and to support the career advancement of New Americans living in Vermont so they may more fully participate in Vermont’s economy.

- b. Activities that may be coordinated or conducted under this section include:
 - a. Expanding the enrollment of New Americans in registered apprenticeship and other training programs leading to a credential of value,
 - b. Conducting recruitment and job placement activities specific to New Americans,
 - c. Supporting the culmination and publication of employer-focused toolkits and resources currently under development by interested stakeholders,
 - d. Building a network of career mentors to assist New Americans in advancing in their career path,
 - e. Developing opportunities to expand the professional networks of New Americans, and
 - f. Other activities that support entry, retention, and advancement of New Americans in Vermont’s workforce.

- c. The Department of Labor will be appropriated \$100,000 to carry out the activities in (a) and (b) above.

Comment: This recommendation stems from findings and outreach conducted during Act 80 New American Employment research in 2019. VDOL’s report can be accessed here: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Act-80-Sec.-9-Implementation-Report-VDOL-1.15.20-VT-Department-of-Labor.pdf>

B. \$1,335,900 FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS & PROGRAMS

Brief Description: Level funding of programs and grants that were formally referred to as the Next Generation Fund.

Budget Reference:

Sec. B.400 LABOR PROGRAMS

\$1,335,900 of the General Funds appropriated in Sec. B.400 to the Vermont Department of Labor shall be for the purposes of operating, administering, and overseeing workforce development programs and initiatives throughout the State. The Department will use the funds to support the Vermont Internship Program, the Vermont Returnship Program, the Vermont Youth Employment Program, Vermont Training Grants, the Vermont Relocation Assistance Program, adult postsecondary career and technical education, and as authorized in 10 V.S.A. 543 and in performance of its duties under 10 V.S.A. 540.

Proposed Budget Breakdown:

Program or Grant	FY 2020	FY 2021
Vermont Internship Program	\$350,000	\$350,000
Vermont Returnship Program	\$100,000	\$100,000
Adult CTE Grants	\$400,000	\$400,000
Vermont Training Grants	\$277,000	\$350,000
Ex-Offender Support Grants	\$75,000	
<i>Administration</i>	\$133,900	\$135,900
TOTAL	\$1,335,900	\$1,335,900

Comment: In FY2019, VDOL recommended setting aside a portion of the (former) Workforce Education and Training Funds (WETF) to support a pilot initiative aimed at supporting adults reentering the workforce after being in prison. VDOL continued this support in FY2020. Eliminating the specific set-aside will not prevent the Department from making similar investments in supporting ex-offenders. In returning to a combined fund, VDOL seeks flexibility in making training award determinations and anticipated that other sources of funds may be available to support work initially funded by pilot.

Vermont Internship Program: The Vermont Internship Program promotes internships by providing grants to organizations who support or connect Vermont employers with student interns from regional career and technical education (CTE) centers or post-secondary educational institutions. Funding may be used to build or administer an internship program or to provide participants with need-based stipends during the internship. In FY 2020, VDOL awarded \$350,000 in Vermont Internship Program grants through a competitive application process (see below for list of grantees).

In FY 2020, VDOL included an opportunity for organizations to apply for increased funding if they produced a program match – which could take the form of funding for program administration, intern stipends, job-related equipment or supplies, mentoring or coaching of employer or intern, and employer incentives. The purpose of the matched grant awards is to expand the availability of high-quality internships by leveraging state investment and promoting private investment in internship opportunities.

FY 2020 Grantees:

- Bennington County Regional Commission (Bennington)
- Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (Brattleboro)
- Casella Waste Systems, Inc. (Rutland)
- Cathedral Square (South Burlington)
- North Country Career Center (Newport)
- Norwich University (Northfield)
- Hannaford Career Technical Center & Addison Co. Parent Child Center (Middlebury)
- University of Vermont and State Agriculture College (Burlington)
- Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sport (Killington)
- Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (Burlington)
- Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (Winooski)
- Vermont Vehicle and Automotive Distributors Association (Barre)

Vermont Returnship Program: The Vermont Returnship Program was launched in 2018 in partnership with Associates for Training and Development (A4TD). It is designed to provide opportunities for unemployed experienced workers to reenter the workforce, particularly in a new line of work; and to promote labor force retention by allowing workers to explore new and different types of work that better suits their needs. The central elements of the program include:

- Assessing and identifying transferrable skills, job goals, and training needs of participants,
- Supporting and counseling participants in creating a new career plan for success that involves some form of work placement,
- Making individual referrals to supportive service agencies (if needed) or current job openings,
- Training or partnering to train individuals in workplace-specific skill or familiarity competencies, credentialed training opportunities,
- Delivering workshops aimed at assisting jobseekers in discovering, readying, and applying for open positions,

- Working with employers to develop temporary and long-term employment opportunities that consider returning worker needs (e.g. schedule flexibility, mentoring, technology & industry- related professional development, etc.), and
- Matching employers and participants.

In its first year from October 1, 2018 to December 31, 2019, the Vermont Returnship program received 118 applications, referred 54 applicants to employment opportunities, provided services to 106 individuals, and delivered 12 workshops.

Adult CTE Grants: Each of the 17 regional CTE centers received \$20,000 to support the delivery of career and technical education to unemployed adults, underemployed adults, and employed adults interested in increasing their skill sets through the adult career and technical education programs. This funding pays for the salary of adult program directors, staff, and instructors. Funding may also be used to support tuition or scholarships for post-secondary students enrolled in an adult program; development of adult course curriculum, supplies for classroom use, and professional development or administrative support that promotes greater collaboration among centers programs in furtherance of a coordinated adult education and training system. \$60,000 was awarded to the Vermont Adult Career and Technical Education Association (VACTEA) to support the statewide coordination, promotion, and administration of adult career and technical education (CTE) in Vermont. This will include funding for the development of statewide programs, a single site for listing adult CTE courses, work on data and metric collection, and shared marketing and outreach material.

Vermont Training Grants: FY2020 grant awards have not been made as of the writing of this memo. See *2019 Workforce Development Report* submitted in January 2020 for detailed report on FY2019 grantees. <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/2019-WD-Annual-Report.pdf>

Ex-Offender Support Grant: With \$75,000 in funding from the VDOL, the Franklin - Grand Isle Restorative Justice Center created a one-stop program implementing a tiered employment and training program (specifically in construction) for individuals that have been or are being supervised by the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC) and individuals who have had prior convictions. The program's goal is to provide re-entry opportunities for those who have offended to repair harm done in the community and increase short- and long-term employment outcomes. This pilot encompassed a two-tiered certified work readiness and specialized training program that provides a hand-on, skills-based, paid training in the construction trades.

The Franklin - Grand Isle Restorative Justice Center staff worked closely with VDOL and VR. VDOL staff provided program orientation sessions and screened candidates for referral to WIOA and ICAN services. Federally funded services (e.g. WIOA) were made available for individuals eligible for the pilot and enrolled in the ICAN program. Upon successful completion from this paid training program, participants have had the opportunity to work with the Career Resource Center staff to find suitable permanent employment or comparable training in another field of interest other than construction trades. Collaboration with various community partners has been utilized to access additional training/education/health care resources and/or supportive services. 12 participants received comprehensive training and employment support in this pilot. Eleven completed and job readiness and occupational skill trainings and became employed with local employers.

C. \$300,000 FOR VERMONT RELOCATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (VRAP)

Brief Description: The Vermont Relocation Assistance Program (VRAP) is an integrated, coordinated, community-focused system of providing information and individualized support to facilitate the successful relocation of individuals to and within Vermont.

Budget Reference:

Sec. E.400 LABOR PROGRAMS

\$300,000 of the funds appropriated in Sec. B.400 shall be to build a relocation assistance unit.

Policy Proposal:

Sec. 1. Vermont Relocation Assistance Program

- (a) Relocation Support System. The Department of Labor shall launch and lead a coordinated information and support system to facilitate the successful relocation of individuals to and within Vermont. Services provided under this system shall facilitate and expedite the physical transition of any person into a Vermont community by providing quick, customized information, resources, referrals, and support. The system will be designed to:
- 1) Maximize available state and federal resources,
 - 2) Provide a customer support pathway to help every type of inquirer,
 - 3) Customize the support resources to fit the qualifications and needs of prospective applicant,
 - 4) Include business partnerships to maximize sharing of information about employment, opportunities and promote placements or “matching” of applicants,
 - 5) Track, share, and report information between public and private partners,
 - 6) Ensure that every inquiry is responded to in a timely, appropriate way in support of future, employment and successful relocation, and
 - 7) Evolve and respond to new needs and resources.
- (b) System Infrastructure.
- 1) The Department will establish and maintain a flexible and scalable customer relationship management system to track, manage, and report relocation support services and outcomes. The system shall be developed to integrate into existing recruitment tools and efforts, such as ThinkVT.com and the Department’s military servicemember recruitment initiative. It shall be designed to promote coordination of concierge service delivery with local partners.
 - 2) The Department will leverage its existing physical and programmatic footprint in ensuring that relocation assistance is available at the state and local level with trained staff who can provide services, information, and assistance to customers and enhance local collaboration between employers and workforce development partners.
 - 3) To the extent possible, the relocation assistance system should not duplicate or replace existing public or private recruitment programs. The Department shall work to coordinate and enhance these efforts by delivering a wrap-around system of support, information, and recordkeeping.
- (c) Coordination.
- 1) The Department shall coordinate with statewide and community-based organizations and key employer and business organizations to ensure that employment opportunities and community information is available to program staff and individuals looking to enter Vermont’s job market, through referrals or other information sharing mechanisms.
 - 2) State agencies and State-funded programs shall coordinate with the Department to ensure that services and information that could assist a person in relocating to Vermont are made available through an integrated, customer focused system.

- (d) Community Resource Organization. The Department shall collect sets of regionalized information that includes labor market information, housing and education information, recreation information, and other relevant resources. The information will be made easily accessible to assist relocation assistance staff and customers in fulfilling preliminary information requests.
- (e) Report. The Department shall include the following metrics in addition to a progress update and any recommendations in its annual workforce development report to the Legislature under 10 V.S.A. §540:
- 1) Number of individuals served
 - 2) Employment and relocation status data on all individuals, and
 - 3) Regions of interest for relocating individuals.
- (f) Implementation. The Vermont Relocation Assistance Program shall be launched on or before August 1, 2020.

Comment:

2018-2019 – the lead-up to VRAP: In Act 189 of 2018, the Legislature tasked the Commissioner of Labor with “developing and implementing a coordinated system to recruit, relocate, and train workers to ensure the labor force needs of Vermont’s businesses are met.” It also directed VDOL and ACCD to grow the size and quality of the workforce by engaging stakeholders “to identify needs and strategies, and define success; identify targets and methods of recruitment, relocation, retraining, and retention; leverage resources available in current State and federal programs to support more workers from within and outside Vermont entering and staying in the Vermont workforce; and create metrics for tracking the success of outreach efforts and economic impact.”

In 2019, H.533 (as passed by the House) included the creation of *ReLocat802* and a \$500,000 appropriation to build out the system identified in Act 189. The Senate didn’t include the provision. In conference, the committee agreed to appropriate \$275,000 “to the Department of Labor to expand opportunities for apprenticeships, training, and postsecondary career and technical education through the workforce education and training fund created in 10 V.S.A. § 543 and to perform its duties pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 540(1).” One of the duties in 10 VSA § 540(1) is “develop and implement a coordinated system to recruit, relocate, and train workers to ensure the labor force needs of Vermont’s businesses are met.”

Activity to Date: VDOL is designing VRAP to align with existing state and community systems in order to facilitate and expedite the successful relocation into Vermont communities. VRAP will provide quick, customized information, resources, referrals, and support at the local level. With continued and permanent investment, VDOL can ensure that anyone interested in relocating to Vermont has at least one local point of contact equipped with the knowledge and information to support clients in navigating their relocation experience.

VDOL has used a portion of the funding allocated to us (noted above) to start the work of standing up a relocation assistance program. Since July, we have:

- Met with business and HR representatives to ensure we are building a system with the end user in mind
- Established an internal process for receiving referrals (and resumes), assigning staff, providing assistance and outreach, and tracking status
- Worked with ACCD to create an online form at ThinkVT.com that feeds into our shared database

- Collaborated with ADS to develop a statement of work for purchasing and standing up a customer management system (e.g. Salesforce) that can be used by state and community partners (e.g. Chamber, RDCs, etc.) to assist recruits
- RFRred an existing position into one that will manage and oversee VRAP. Position has been filled.
- Trained select regional staff in serving as relocation support specialists
- Inventoried available regional resources and started creating regional, standardized “packets” of information for staff and partners to offer interested relocators
- Attended three recruitment events at Ft. Drum; developed experience and resources specific to assisting separating service members
- Brought a pilot cohort of NEK businesses and state agency partners to Ft. Drum on Feb. 6th
- Drafted a scope of work for a demonstration project (community grant) with SVEDS/BDCC – to be executed by end of the month.
- Assisted over 150 individuals in either: job searches, job referrals, accessing labor market information, connecting with community/regional resources, etc. *NOTE: Since we are building the tracking system as we are also developing relocation assistance systems of support and resources, we do not have a reliable way (yet) to report on how many have relocated. We know of several relocation success stories, but are reluctant to give ourselves credit because referrals and data maintenance processes are not standardized yet.*

VDOL has spent roughly \$100k on initial steps of creating RAP since July. We are budgeting \$80k to be spent before July 2020 on an ADS-supported database system, and \$60k to a regional partner as a demonstration project re: community partnerships that can inform future development of our public-private VRAP partnership. Total spent on VRAP from the \$275,000 is likely to be \$240,000.

Here are fields that VDOL and ACCD are using for the initial (soft) launch of VRAP in the coming weeks.

1. First Name
2. Last Name
3. Mailing Address (Street)
4. Email
5. Phone
6. I’m interested in finding employment in the following occupations:
 - a. Management
 - b. Business and Financial Operations
 - c. Computer and Mathematical Occupations
 - d. Architecture and Engineering
 - e. Life, Physical, and Social Sciences
 - f. Community and Social Services
 - g. Legal
 - h. Education, Training, and Library Occupations
 - i. Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media
 - j. Healthcare Practitioners
 - k. Healthcare Support Services
 - l. Protective Services
 - m. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
 - n. Buildings and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
 - o. Personal Care and Service
 - p. Sales
 - q. Office and Administrative Support
 - r. Farming, Fishing, and Forestry
 - s. Construction and Extraction
 - t. Installation, Maintenance, and Repair

- u. Production
- v. Transportation and Material Moving
- 7. I'm interested in these areas of Vermont:
 - a. Northwest (Burlington, St Albans, Johnson)
 - b. Northeast (Newport, St Johnsbury, White River Junction)
 - c. Central (Montpelier, Waterbury, Randolph)
 - d. Southwest (Rutland, Bennington, Killington)
 - e. Southeast (Brattleboro, Manchester, Springfield)
 - f. Not Sure
- 8. Referral Source (text)
- 9. Date Assigned (date)
- 10. Staff Assigned (check-box/drop-down)
- 11. Regional Office (check-box/drop-down)
- 12. First Contacted (date)
- 13. Labor Market Information Provided (check-box/drop-down)
- 14. Resume Received (check-box/drop-down)
- 15. Referred to Job Opening (text)
- 16. Referred to Community Resource Connection (check-box/drop-down)
- 17. Referred to Business Connection Resource (text)
- 18. Status (check-box/drop-down)
- 19. Follow-up Summary (text)
- 20. Notes (Text)

The Case for an Integrated, Coordinated System of Relocation Assistance: Past efforts to attract people to move to Vermont have not yielded significant success. Even with great employment opportunities and a high quality of life, the prospect of picking up one's life and starting over elsewhere is a daunting and stressful. VRAP removes that and other deterrents by providing an individualized support system to assist interested individuals in relocating.

10 V.S.A. §540 charges the Commissioner of Labor with implementing a coordinated system to relocate workers to ensure the labor force needs of Vermont's businesses are met. As the federally designated One-Stop Operator of the state's American Job Center (AJC) network, VDOL already has the physical and programmatic footprint connecting a variety of community partners who play a vital role helping individuals and families identify and access resources to help relocate. In partnership with community-based organizations, VDOL will help supply localized expertise and support to people exploring employment opportunities and residency in new communities. Local strengths and challenges vary from one region of the state to another and will be accounted for in the program's implementation.

VRAP will be part of the portfolio of strategic initiatives supporting workforce recruitment and relocation activities of the state.

D. \$100,000 increase in Vermont Youth Employment Program (VYEP)

Brief Description: Governor recommends increasing investments (\$100,000) in the Vermont Youth Employment Program, targeting the employment of rural, at-risk youth to help them gain real-life, hands-on work experience in their own communities.

Budget Reference:
Sec. D 401 LABOR

(This is an increase to the Departments base funding)

Comment: In FY2020 budget (Act 72), VDOL was directed to design and begin implementing the Vermont Youth Employment Program (VYEP) by September 1, 2019. \$150,000 was added to the Departments base budget to help fund the initiative, focusing on costs that federal funds don't cover (e.g. wages and services for youth who are not federally funded, cohort supervision, group transportation, etc.). The aim of VYEP is to establish a comprehensive system of delivering employment services and support to any Vermonter ages 15-24. Current funding streams and programs are incorporated into the umbrella design of VYEP so that our youth customer and workforce partners will no longer have to navigate siloed programs and eligibility requirements. The metrics will be reporting each year will be:

- (1) the number of youth served;
- (2) the age and town of residence of youth at the time of enrollment;
- (3) the number and types of certificates or credentials granted to participants;
- (4) employment or post-secondary enrollment outcomes of participants in the second and fourth quarter of the year after enrollment; and
- (5) the total allocation of funding from federal, State, private, and philanthropic sources that is used to support the program.

Beginning in 2020, WIOA Youth, former Summer Youth Employment Program activities, the Vermont Internship Program, the forthcoming Pre-Apprenticeship Program, and other workforce preparation and experiences targeting youth and young adults will be aligned under the umbrella structure of VYEP. With WIOA Title I Youth remaining as the largest source of funding for basic and intensive career services, education and training, and work experiences for youth, a small amount of flexible state dollars will bridge funding of activities or participant wages that existing funding streams cannot cover.

All youth between the ages of 15-24 will be eligible to participate in structured opportunities to gain skills and experience real, paid work. VDOL staff will work with employers, training providers, and state and community partners to develop, oversee, and support employment projects that are customized to meet actual employer needs and, when possible, involve community service, improvement, or beautification.

Program Outline

Purpose: Through the Vermont Youth Employment Program (VYEP), the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) connects Vermont youth with local employers, providing skill development and work experience opportunities for youth, and workforce assistance for employers.

Goals:

1. To increase youth participation in Vermont's labor force by through education and occupational skill development and participant placements in real work experiences with Vermont employers.
2. Provide local employers with young workers, assisting them in providing meaningful work opportunities and developing pipelines to continued employment.

Strategies and Objectives:

- Support community-based, paid employment for service projects with project specific grants.
- Partner with state and local organizations who can add value or expertise to enhance the participant or employers experience and increase positive employment outcomes.
- Develop intentional outreach to participants and employers at the local levels, including career resource centers, schools, and community organizations
- Launch a social media/online campaign to expose and connect youth to local employment opportunities.

- Ensure that VDOL case managers have the technical, logistical, and programmatic assistance to support participants and employers throughout the work experience

2019 Pilot Examples: Under VYEP, VDOL supported a barn painting project in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture in an effort to beautify the barns of Vermont. The two projects included paid work for youth, skills development opportunities with VDOL and project partners, and a community-focused outcome to be proud of. In collaboration with VTYouthWorks, VDOL paid eligible youth to paint the UVM Morgan Horse Barn in Weybridge, VT. This youth cohort were given the opportunity to develop skills, receive industry certifications, get paid to work, and be part of something bigger than themselves.

Another collaboration took place in Cambridge, VT, involving partnerships with YouthBuild, the Vermont Youth Conservation Corp (VYCC), Agency of Agriculture, and the local high school and career and technical education center. The Cambridge Barn project brought together youth and young adults from multiple regions, Burlington and Lamoille county and allowed them to set aside the challenges they face on a daily basis and feel like they were a part of an important project and a team that was making a positive impact on one of Vermont's historic barns. It allowed them to feel a sense of pride in the work they completed on a daily basis, as well as a sense of pride in the growth they showed on a personal level.