

VDOL Recruitment Pilot Grant

Grant#2050REL06

Reporting Key Highlights: (10/1/20 - 12/31/20)

Reporting Due Date: 1/15/21

Narrative

Previous reporting detailed the influx of Vermonters as a result of COVID-19, the critical importance in moving to retain these newcomers, and BDCC's unique position to capitalize on the opportunity. As colder temperatures and increasing case counts have Vermonters new and established sheltering in place, several questions come to the forefront:

- How do we identify these newcomers?
- How can we safely facilitate the kind of meaningful social and professional connections that will spur them to stay even after a vaccine becomes widely available?
- In a world where we've made first contact with every new or would-be Vermonter, how do we combine smart pipeline management with the kinds of deep relationships that are the backbone of Vermont's small communities?

To begin tackling these challenges, BDCC contracted with a Burlington firm to redesign the SoVermont website (<https://sovermont.com/welcome-new-southern-vermonters/>) as well as plan and execute a targeted digital marketing campaign. This will dramatically increase the visibility of BDCC's existing services to new and prospective Vermonters. We predict this will spur signups to the newly-launched Southern Vermont Welcome Wagon Project (SoVT WWP), an initiative that has so far resulted in **3** newsletters to **46** volunteer hosts and **21** personal connections for new Vermonters.

BDCC has been increasing its investment in workforce development programs (see below) and strengthening its partnerships with ACCD on related programs (Stay to Stay and ThinkVermont Relocation). Made possible through investment by VDOL, BDCC's Recruitment Pilot has allowed for more comprehensive systems thinking around recruitment and retention. In early January BDCC shared an **Interim Findings and Recommendations** document. The goal was to communicate early lessons from this pilot, particularly as this could inform further development of our state-region partnership and inform establishment of similar initiatives across the state. The document is included with this report as this program development component is an important part of the Pilot.

Finally, BDCC's commitment to diversity and inclusivity drives program improvements and the growth of partnerships across the region and state. While the intake forms in both Stay to Stay and SoVT WWP have been updated to better serve diverse newcomers, the Talent Specialist has been developing relationships with local LGBTQ and BIPOC individuals and community/professional networks. BDCC continues to be a leader in the Diverse Workforce

efforts and is planning updates to the Bridge to Brattleboro program. BDCC is also in talks with representatives for Degrees of Freedom, a program to be held on the former Marlboro College campus that seeks to provide low-income, first-generation or students of color with the skills and resources to access competitive colleges and well-paid careers.

People Helped in this Quarter

- **37 new, returning, or prospective vermonters** received individualized guidance from BDCC staff (via Zoom and phone) on moving to or finding work in Vermont (Stay to Stay clients/referrals, TERR candidates, SoVT WWP Participants)
- **60 community connections** facilitated through SoVTYPs volunteer committees, event participations and SoVT WWP host signups
- **200 candidates** were directly connected to specific employment opportunities in Windham County through Internships as well as LinkedIn postings and recruitment

Programs and Services Updates

For a more detailed overview of the programs referenced below, please see the Q1 highlights in the previous progress report.

TERR - Targeted Expertise Recruitment and Retention

In the past quarter BDCC worked with four employers on the following high-level recruitment initiatives involving developing job descriptions, LinkedIn candidate searching and outreach, and in the case of Omega Optical, welcoming candidates considering the position which involves long distance relocation.

- NECCA ED
 - **29** Applicants through posting
 - **50** Candidates sourced for employer review
- Omega VP of Production (COO)
 - **138** Applicants through posting
 - **184** Candidates sourced for employer review
- Rich Earth Executive Director (Non profit)
 - **5** Applicants through posting
 - **130** Candidates sourced for employer review
- M&S Development Project Coordinator
 - Job description development
 - Preliminary search for candidates to assess hiring pool
- M&S Development Project Development Associate
 - Job description development
 - Preliminary search for candidates to assess hiring pool
- Commons Ad Sales Director
 - Job description development

- Job posting and promotion through LinkedIn

We also consulted with major employer the Brattleboro Retreat on planned layoffs in order to assist with the retention of regional talent, including medically trained personnel as well as very specialized psychiatric care professionals.

Stay to Stay

As COVID-19 continued to disrupt the moving plans for prospective Vermonters, BDCC's Talent Specialist provided regular, "on-the-ground" updates and guidance to **12** Stay to Stay clients and new referrals. The Talent Specialist has worked closely with State partners to provide support in the lead-up to a transition to a virtual Stay to Stay model:

- Provided feedback to improve intake and client pipeline management
- Led a discussion on administering the program for new regional partners
- Assisted with future planned promotional efforts by identifying success stories and forwarding contact information for those individuals

SoVT WWP: Southern Vermont Welcome Wagon Project

The Southern Vermont chapter of the Vermont Welcome Wagon Project was officially launched this quarter. It received promotion through BDCC's blog and newsletter as well as through presentations, newsletters, and word-of-mouth with organizations such as Brattleboro Area Human Resources Network (BAHRN), Brattleboro Sunrise Rotary, and others.

BDCC's Talent Specialist also provided support to Wilmington Works for their localized welcome efforts, which resulted in **8** attendees at their monthly New Vermonter Happy Hours. The Talent Specialist hopes to broaden these hyper-local partnerships as well as build channels to connect newcomers to resources based on the updated intake categories detailed below.

The Talent Specialist continues to explore the Vermont Welcome Wagon Project as the complement and natural extension to recruitment and retention efforts such as the Stay to Stay program. As word of the program spread, other organizations have expressed interest in learning about what it would take to set up their own chapters. The Talent Specialist has spoken with the Upper Valley Young Professionals, the Okemo Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce, and **19** Stay to Stay partners present in a statewide call.

- **16** new participant signups, **18** new host signups
- **21** connections made
- Intake improvements
 - Now includes preferred pronouns
 - Now allows participants to request additional connections/resources based on the following categories
 - LGBTQ+
 - BIPOC

- Families
 - Young Professionals
 - Established/Older Adults
- Community outreach
 - Brattleboro Area Human Resources Network
 - Brattleboro Sunrise Rotary
 - Wilmington Works
 - The Root Social Justice Center
 - Out in the Open

SoVTYPs: Southern Vermont Young Professionals

Under the leadership of its **11** volunteer Steering Committee members, SoVTYPs continues to develop meaningful social and professional opportunities for Southern Vermont's young professionals, both as a resource for newcomers and a reliable network for established Vermonters. In addition to regular activities, BDCC staff is conducting outreach to broaden regional and statewide YP collaborative possibilities and to enhance the organization's commitment to equity and inclusivity.

- Professional Development Grant Program
 - The **6**-member grant review subcommittee reviewed applications and awarded **3** grants
 - Alyssa Pelow of the Mill Marketplace, to go towards a Start Up Lab at Hannah Grimes Center in Keene, NH
 - Jon Saccoccio of JAS Architectural Workshop to go towards a Certificate in Historic Preservation from Boston Architectural College in Boston, MA
 - Kaitlin Haskins, LPN, to go towards an Associate's Degree in Nursing (ADN) from Vermont Technical College.
- With the help of **3** events subcommittee members, held **4** events that brought **31** attendees
- Met with a steering committee member from the Upper Valley Young Professionals to provide guidance on running YP organizations and the potential for collaborating on more statewide YP initiatives
- Met with the Vermont Professionals of Color network to discuss collaborations and encouraging BIPOC YP engagement in Southern Vermont

Paid Internship Program

The Talent Specialist provided continued support for current interns as their projects were extended or they were hired on at the conclusion of the formal internship. The Talent Specialist also conducted outreach to employers involved in providing technical assistance or administering COVID-19 relief funds to promote internships as a way to increase their capacity.

- Met with **4** colleges and universities to discuss new or ongoing initiatives
- Participated or presented in **4** career fairs or classes, engaging with **16** students

- Independently met or followed up with **12** students about internship opportunities
- Met with or conducted individualized outreach to **9** employers

Entrepreneurship + Recruitment = Jobs

BDCC has been developing both our suite of workforce programming, which includes recruitment and retention, as well as our small business services and financing. However, as the region's primary economic development organization one of our key roles is to attract and retain businesses to the region.

One of the core strategies to do this blends recruitment and entrepreneurship. Two initiatives launched this fall have an active component of seeking to attract current or potential entrepreneurs. One program, REGENER8, seeks to help the 30% or more of local businesses owned by older proprietors who want to retire but can't find a business buyer. We risk losing many local businesses and the jobs they provide due to failed succession planning. This USDA backed program is doing national advertising among business seekers outside the region and seeking to purchase a small business. The program is also doing local digital advertising targeting people who are residing here temporarily due to COVID (or perhaps stay undetermined), and who might wish to purchase a local business. Paired with our place-based recruitment through the Talent Specialist, we will be piloting this very special form of talent attraction this winter.

The other recruitment + entrepreneurship effort will stem from work that BDCC plans to take on, based on making a commitment to join the CORI (Center for Rural Innovation) Vermont cohort this fall. While several months off, we will be laying the groundwork for a tech-based business startup and growth initiative designed to create tech-based jobs to increase wages and opportunities here. Finding, attracting and retaining the entrepreneurs to make this happen involves intentional collaboration between our business and recruitment specialists.