



To: House Committees on Appropriations, Commerce & Economic Development, and Education
Senate Committees on Appropriations, Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs,
and Education

From: Tom Cheney, Executive Director, Advance Vermont

Re: Report on Activities Conducted by Advance Vermont (2023, Act 78, Sec. B. 1101(c)(6))

Date: December 15, 2023

Introduction

There is strong consensus in Vermont that workforce development is one of the biggest issues facing the state. The Vermont Department of Labor and the McClure Foundation predict that between 2020 and 2030, there will be nearly 82,000 openings for Vermont’s “most promising” jobs. Nearly all of these jobs require post-high school education and training, and 72 percent require a postsecondary credential. Occupations such as nursing, construction, accounting, and teaching are especially critical needs.

Recent historic investments by the state in postsecondary programs, new financial aid, loan forgiveness for critical occupations, and worker retention programs have sought to help the state address its urgent workforce development needs. However, the falling postsecondary aspiration and continuation rates threaten to forestall some of the potential gains those programs could help create.

To help grow a skilled workforce and strong economy, in 2019, the legislature codified the goal that 70 percent of working age Vermonters will hold a credential of value by the year 2025. As of 2021 (the most recent available data), the postsecondary attainment rate in the state sits at 59 percent, up 13 points since 2011 but still 11 points short of the state’s goal.

Since 2017, Advance Vermont has worked in partnership with stakeholders across the education and workforce systems to support workforce development by increasing educational attainment. It aims to ensure that every Vermonter, regardless of any barriers they may face, sees and is able to pursue a career and education pathway that helps them meet their goals.

Act 78 of 2023, Sec. B. 1101(c)(6) appropriated \$350,000 to Advance Vermont (through the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation) to work, in coordination with State partners, to support the State’s postsecondary attainment goal as detailed in Act 183 of 2022, Sec. 39.

The text requires a report to the relevant committees of the General Assembly outlining Advance Vermont’s progress to date on the activities outlined in Act 183 Sec. 39. Funds appropriated by the State, raised from philanthropic organizations, and from a contract with HireAbility Vermont have been used to support the work detailed below.

This report is broken into the three main themes of the work prescribed to Advance Vermont: awareness, collaboration, and data. We welcome the opportunity to speak with individual members or committees to go into greater depth about our activities to date.

Awareness

Advance Vermont is charged by Act 183 to help increase the “public awareness of the value of postsecondary education and training” and to promote an understanding of the “public good and value” in achieving the state’s attainment goal. The text specifies that strategies include the deployment of “web-based resources” and through outreach to “career and education counselors, employment and training counselors, jobseekers and their families, and other stakeholders.”

MyFutureVT

Created and maintained by Advance Vermont, [MyFutureVT.org](https://www.myfuturevt.org) is the state’s free online hub for education and career exploration for youth and adults. Now almost 2.5 years old, the site has quickly become a go-to resource for career and education seekers and the “navigators” who support them along the way (such as counselors, teachers, mentors, employers, and family members).

This year, Advance Vermont has continued to grow the reach, accessibility, and content of MyFutureVT. As of December 14, 2023, the site has seen approximately 73,000 users, a 82 percent increase in the last 12 months.

The site is one of the few career and education resources in the state available in the top 8 spoken languages in the state, is written at an 8th grade reading level, and is mobile-ready. In fact, about one-third of users access the site from a mobile device.

Since Advance Vermont’s 2023 legislative report, the site has seen continued functionality improvements and the addition of new content, including:

- ▶ The publishing of new blog posts to raise awareness of Vermont’s most promising jobs, early college, the concept of “stackable credentials,” careers in the forest economy, and LGBTQ+ resources, with more in the pipeline.
- ▶ The incorporation of Vermont State University programs into the database education and training opportunities, with many more programs added or updated from the state’s other public and private institutions, and career and technical education centers.
- ▶ The creation of an industry-specific landing page with information about career and education opportunities in the climate workforce.
- ▶ Refreshed a webpage that aggregates information on the new financial aid opportunities funded by the State.
- ▶ Modifications to the homepage to connect users with key content.
- ▶ Improvements to search and filter functionality to the career and education program databases.
- ▶ Soon to be incorporated changes to education program pages to include information on prerequisites and program audiences/eligibility.
- ▶ The production of a video, in partnership with Serve Learn Earn, profiling a nontraditional career and education pathway.

This fall, Advance Vermont commenced a comprehensive evaluation of MyFutureVT through a user survey, user interviews, and a deep examination of site analytics. The project will be completed by

third-party vendors in early 2024 and its key findings will be shared with the legislature and relevant state agencies. In the coming year, Advance Vermont will implement improvements to the functionality, navigation, and content on the site as identified by the evaluation.

Additionally, Advance Vermont expects to work with employer partners to create additional industry-specific content to showcase critical need career sectors, expand its content to elevate non-traditional pathways, and to deepen the site's support for those facing unique barriers to pursuing education and training such as boys, first generation postsecondary students, people of color, New Americans, and those living with a disability.

Outreach

Similar to last year, Advance Vermont focused its outreach efforts to grow understanding of the various career and education and pathways and to increase the use of MyFutureVT in two main ways.

First, staff met regularly with organizations from education, business, government, nonprofit, and philanthropy to connect around best practices, share resources and brainstorm content; collaborate on growing the reach and use of MyFutureVT; and to seek ways to work together in promoting the message that there is a training to career pathway for everyone. Additionally, Advance Vermont published an email newsletter aimed at updating these partners and the community at large on both organization initiatives and state and national postsecondary attainment improvement efforts.

Through this work, MyFutureVT has been incorporated into the work of direct service providers, including but not limited to the Vermont Department of Labor, HireAbility Vermont, Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, the Vermont State Colleges, Vermont Adult Learning, Vermont Afterschool, Careers CLiC, Mentor Vermont, and school counselors and work-based learning coordinators across the state.

Second, Advance Vermont conducted trainings and exhibited at events that provided career and education seekers, families, and navigators the tools they need to explore career and education opportunities and use MyFutureVT. Recent navigator trainings include those for CVOEO's New American Community Ambassadors, each HireAbility office across the state and for staff working as part of its Vermont Career Advancement Project, attendees at the Vermont School Counselor's Association Conference, and Vermont Department of Labor staff.

Advance Vermont provided trainings for students and families at Vermont Student Assistance Corporation's Career and College Pathways event, to a virtual event for students and families at Champlain Valley Union High School and surrounding schools, and with a cohort of New American students led by the U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

Advance Vermont brought its message to the Northshire Career Expo, the Vermont Career & Technical Education Summer Conference, the Vermont After School Conference, the Youth Environmental Summit, and Vermont Works for Women's "Women Can Do" Conference.

These outreach efforts have proven successful and we expect to grow their reach and impact in the coming year.

Collaboration

Act 183 directs Advance Vermont to work with stakeholders to “seek to align the delivery of high-quality education and training opportunities with career advancement” and support progress toward the attainment goal.

Advance Vermont forged a partnership with Energy Action Network’s Climate Workforce Network Action Team to publish and promote resources on MyFutureVT and in print geared toward supporting the growth of the state’s climate workforce. Staff partnered with Vermont Afterschool to support the development of its pilot career and education exploration curriculum in afterschool and summer programs, and assisted VSAC with the creation and promotion to schools of a full-sized poster about finding a path after high school. Advance Vermont began a collaboration with the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund to raise awareness about careers in the forest economy and food systems. Advance Vermont continued its work with HireAbility’s VCAP governance team and has participated in the reestablishment of the Training and Credentialing Committee of the State Workforce Development Board.

Act 183 Sec. 39 subsection (1) subdivisions (4)-(6), direct Advance Vermont and the State to coordinate regarding how credential transparency and MyFutureVT are aligned with the State’s work, including but not limited to VDOL’s new customer relationship management system. Unexpected events caused delays to VDOL’s CRM project which has limited Advance Vermont’s ability to contribute to that work. Collaboration on this project is expected to move forward over the course of the next calendar year.

Data

The use of data is core to the charges in Act 183 Sec. 39 that relate to growing awareness. Advance Vermont maintains a data dashboard of indicators of postsecondary attainment and is the leader in bringing credential transparency to the state.

Data Dashboard

Advance Vermont publishes an [online data dashboard](#) highlighting 26 indicators of postsecondary attainment, in coordination with relevant state agencies. The dashboard is regularly used and referenced by stakeholders.

Credential Transparency

Advance Vermont leads the Vermont Credential Transparency Project, which is an effort to catalogue and publish all postsecondary credentials (apprenticeships, certificates, certifications, degrees, licensures) in Vermont. This dataset helps make access to postsecondary credential information more equitable through publication on MyFutureVT, can be used to inform systems-level workforce development program and policy innovation, and is a resource to employers seeking to recruit and/or train employees.

Advance Vermont has currently published information on 431 credential bearing programs to MyFutureVT. This includes data from all public institutions, two-thirds of the state’s private colleges, and nearly all of the state’s CTE centers. Work with the remainder of the state’s private

colleges and CTE centers is ongoing and Advance Vermont expects to publish as many as 400 more programs by early 2024.

Conclusion

While good progress has been made to increase postsecondary attainment in recent years, and Advance Vermont is proud to have been a part of it, underlying indicators demonstrate that building upon that progress will prove difficult.

According to a new study from VSAC, the aspirations of high school seniors has fallen dramatically since prior to the pandemic, as has the share of parents or guardians who encourage their student to enroll in education after high school. The Agency of Education reports that in 2022, only 48% of students enrolled in college following their senior year. (Note: Comprehensive data on other types of credentials is not available, and college data is used as a proxy for all forms of education).

Digging deeper into the data reveals huge equity gaps. Those who are first in their family to attend postsecondary education, boys, and people of color aspire, continue, and complete at much lower levels than other subpopulations. As an example, only 26 percent of first-generation males in the high school class of 2012 completed college within 6 years.

According to polling reported by the New York Times this fall, nationally the public's trust in postsecondary education has fallen dramatically in recent years. A decade ago, 74 percent of young adults said college was "very important." Now, that number is only 41 percent.

Vermont needs to lay a better foundation for career and education seekers to both help create a pipeline of workers for in-demand jobs, but also to grow postsecondary aspirations to drive current and future workers to education and training programs that prepare them for those jobs. This work must happen expeditiously in communities across the state with youth and families but must also reach adults seeking opportunities to advance in their careers.

Thanks in no small part due to the support of the legislature, Advance Vermont is prepared to continue to do its part.