



Act 183, Sec. 39 Report

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 (2022, Act 183, Sec. 39)

Date: December 15, 2022

Introduction

Increasingly, post-high school education and training is necessary for Vermonters to secure jobs that meet their individual and family needs, and workforce demands. These jobs are the building blocks of fulfilling, healthy lives that support a strong economy and vibrant communities. Yet, thousands of well-paying jobs in Vermont are going unfilled, often due to a lack of a skilled workforce.

Recognizing the urgent need for action, Act 80 of 2019 codified the goal that 70 percent of working age Vermonters will hold a credential of value by the year 2025. Today, postsecondary attainment in the state sits at 52.6 percent. At its current pace, Vermont will not reach its goal until the year 2040.

Since 2017, Advance Vermont has worked in partnership with stakeholders across the education and workforce systems to increase educational attainment to benefit Vermont's residents, communities, and economy. Its mission is to advance civic and economic vitality by growing the number of Vermonters with postsecondary credentials, increasing equity in educational attainment, and strengthening connections between education, training, and employment.

Act 183 of 2022, Sec. 39 appropriated \$150,000 to Advance Vermont (through the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation) to work, in coordination with State partners, to support the State's postsecondary attainment goal.

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 Sec. 39. Funds appropriated by the State and philanthropic organizations have been used in tandem 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 have attempted to make this report clear and concise and welcome the opportunity to speak with individual members or committees to go into greater depth about our activities to date.

Awareness

Act 183 charges Advance Vermont 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

[MyFutureVT.org](https://myfuturevt.org), Advance Vermont’s free online hub for education and career resources, continues to grow its reach, accessibility, and content. The site is designed to reach career and education seekers (youth and adults) and those who help them along the way (such as counselors, teachers, mentors, employers, and family members), with a particular focus on making it accessible to populations historically underserved by the postsecondary educational system.

As of December 14, 2022, the site has seen approximately 40,000 unique users since its launch in May 2021, and over 14,000 since the enactment of Act 183. Additionally, the site has experienced a 240% increase to date in new users since the enactment of Act 183, compared to the same time period the prior year (June 8 to December 14). The number of users who organically found MyFutureVT via search engine (i.e., not the result of paid advertising) increased 107% for the same time period, and directly (i.e., typed MyFutureVT.org into the address bar) increased approximately 20% — indicating a much higher general awareness of this resource compared to the prior year. Finally, referral traffic increased 97%, showing that our partners are both finding value in, and sharing, the website with their audiences.

MyFutureVT is being 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 Afterschool, Careers CLiC, Mentor Vermont, and school counselors across the state. Since the enactment of Act 183, the site:

- ▶ Added sitewide translation into Swahili, Arabic, Somali, Nepali, Spanish, French, and Vietnamese
- ▶ Unveiled a new tool to compare education and training programs, similar to how a shopper would compare products on e-commerce sites
- ▶ Significantly expanded its database of Vermont-specific career information (it will contain information for the top 500 careers in Vermont by calendar year’s end)
- ▶ Added a majority of the programs that lead to credentials of value offered at the state’s regional career and technical education centers to its education and training program database
- ▶ Launched a blog feature to allow for the creation of dynamic content and the promotion of new information, new programs, and success stories
- ▶ Produced and promoted the first of several anticipated video profiles highlighting nontraditional career and education pathways
- ▶ Refreshed and promoted a highly visited webpage that aggregates information on the new financial aid opportunities funded by the State

Outreach

Advance Vermont focused its outreach efforts to grow understanding of the various education and training pathways and to increase the use of MyFutureVT in two ways.

First, staff meets regularly with organizations from education, business, government, nonprofit, and philanthropy to connect around best practices and share resources; collaborate on growing the reach and use of MyFutureVT; and to seek ways to work together in promoting a postsecondary education-going culture and the message that there is a training to career pathway for everyone. Additionally, Advance Vermont publishes 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.

Second, Advance Vermont conducts trainings that provide navigators the tools they need to support students and job seekers, often including a tutorial on MyFutureVT. Recent trainings include those for all HireAbility staff as well as its Vermont Career Advancement Project governance team, the Community College of Vermont's Introduction to College and Careers instructors and partners, and to a virtual event for students and families at Champlain Valley Union High School. This fall Advance Vermont brought its message to the Vermont Superintendents Association and Vermont School Board Association Conference, the Vermont After School Conference, the Vermont School Counselor's Association Conference, Chittenden County's Adult Education Council, Senator Leahy's Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, and Vermont Works for Women's "Women Can Do" Conference.

Collaboration

In alignment with its mission, the legislation 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.

Key examples of this work since July include participation in HireAbility's VCAP governance team and collaboration with the McClure Foundation and VDOL to grow awareness of the state's most promising jobs through the inclusion and promotion of that information on MyFutureVT. Additionally, Advance Vermont has been invited to join VDOL's customer relationship management system implementation team and has supported the development of the State Workforce Development Board's strategic plan. Advance Vermont regularly meets or is in touch with state agencies, including the Agency of Education, VDOL, and the SWDB.

Finally, Advance Vermont is conducting a strategic planning process of its own that is engaging stakeholders, including various State agencies, to help build a roadmap of how we can best work in concert to increase statewide attainment of Vermonters in the coming 3 years. The plan will be complete in early 2023.

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 bringing Vermont in line with new national best practices by leading credential transparency efforts in the state.

Data Dashboard

Since 2020, Advance Vermont has published and maintained a data dashboard which highlights 26 indicators of postsecondary attainment, explaining in detail the importance of each metric. The dashboard is among the top three visited pages on Advance Vermont's website and its data is regularly used and referenced by stakeholders. The dashboard is consistently tracked and updated as new data becomes available. Since enactment of Act 183, over half of the indicators on the data dashboard have been updated or are currently in the process of being updated.

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 be a resource to employers seeking to recruit and/or train employees.

To date, information on over 350 credential bearing programs has been published to MyFutureVT from each of the state colleges, the University of Vermont, 75 percent of career and technical education centers, and nearly half of the state's private colleges. Half of the credentials published on the site are non-degree credentials. This important project is making steady progress – we are working with new and existing provider partners to publish hundreds of credentials in the coming months, including Vermont State University once its program offerings are finalized.

Conclusion

As Act 183 states, postsecondary attainment is a public good. Higher levels of education among Vermont's population not only support thriving individuals and families but helps develop a skilled workforce that powers its economy and provides the backbone to its communities. In recent years, the legislature has reaffirmed its commitment to increasing attainment in the state, including through passage of Act 183, but much work remains.

While the state is a leader in high school graduation, Vermont is tied with Maine for the lowest postsecondary educational attainment level in New England and is in the middle of the pack nationwide. In Vermont, we see disparities in attainment that must be addressed between rural and urban areas, low- and high-income earners, and among populations historically underserved by the postsecondary education system, including people of color and people with disabilities.

To meet our state economic, education, and workforce goals, it will take the continued collaboration of public and private entities. To that end, in the second half of the fiscal year, Advance Vermont pledges to build off the progress it has made to date to increase public awareness of the value of postsecondary education and the many career and education pathways in Vermont, collaborate with key systems players across the state, and work to support State agencies in Advance Vermont's areas of expertise.