



February 7, 2025

RE: Introduction- House Commerce and Economic Development

The Associated Builders and Contractors is a national trade association for commercial construction with 67 chapters across the United States. The New Hampshire/Vermont chapter has 290 members and growing the chapters membership spans multiple states in New England. ABC members practice the “Merit Shop” philosophy which starts with growing people by offering opportunities for well-paid careers, and growth outcomes for workers that help employers win bids while operating safely and ethically for the betterment of their communities.

ABC NH/VT provides many services to its membership including workforce development, advocacy, business consulting and networking. The association also works beyond our membership with other groups in the community such as Vermont’s Career and Technical Centers, Vermont Adult Learning, Vermont Works for Women, National Association of Women in Construction, recovery organizations, state agencies and other groups dedicated to building Vermont.

ABC NH/VT is Vermont’s sponsor organization for the National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER). The program is a state recognized national education curriculum for construction. ABC NH/VT certifies education centers like the CTCs, prisons and other training outlets to perform the NCCER curriculum and testing. NCCER is also the basis of the ABC NH/VT apprenticeship programs.

Using the NCCER curriculum ABC NH/VT has now graduated three cohorts through our employer sponsored apprenticeship program. Currently we are developing a first-in-the-state construction pre apprenticeship program that will begin in June. The pre apprenticeship is set up to offer CTC graduates and others entering the trades a quick path to becoming proficient on the job site with hard skills like using tools and preparing them with soft skills such as communication and financial literacy.

In July of 2024 the association led by multiple members began planning for and designing a training center in Chittenden County. Through extremely generous cash, in kind and material donations a 10,000 square foot facility in Winooski has been acquired and the interior fit up has begun. A 501c3 nonprofit board of directors will oversee the facility, finances and its programs. By pairing the nonprofit model with the generosity of the industry driven by its workforce needs this facility will come online in March 2025. It’s also notable that fierce competitors have teamed up to bring this facility to reality. This is a testament to industries investment in our community and workforce.

The stated purpose of the facility and programming is to provide clear advancement routes to new contractors, act as a magnet to attract prospective career candidates and promote the value of a career in construction. The facility is part of a plan to bring back dignity to the trades and show Vermonters there are amazing careers opportunities with employers supporting quality outcomes for people entering the trades.

The apprentice model has been very successful and worked to curb some challenges faced in developing the workforce. After meeting many educators at CTC programs we've heard similar frustrations that if their graduates do not end up in a program like an apprenticeship or with an employer with a quality training program that retention can be a problem. The apprenticeship model allows for coaching and support in what can be an intimidating environment for new people. Often, if a new hire has a bad experience, it can sour them to the industry all together and we lose them forever. Support, mentorship and advancement are the best solutions to that attrition.

In addition to employer sponsored apprenticeships and pre apprenticeships, the facility will also be used to promote the industry to the public at large. There are full-time staff who are dedicated to promoting programs through traditional marketing and by visiting schools, organizations and recovery centers. By working with community members and organizations we have identified many sources of not only interested individuals but also financing opportunities such as Vermont Student Assistance Corporation forgivable loans to help with tuition for unsponsored class attendees.

We are now watching the physical work begin to start building the training facility. Even with major investments from the association and generous donations by members to the 501c3 its becoming clear how expensive a quality program is to build. In addition to the building, hiring full-time staff, and donations of materials there are needs for additional tools and equipment. Another challenge we have identified is the ability of companies to sponsor employees for training. Contractors of all sizes are challenged by ways to invest the funds they have available for training, safety and compensation of their staff. Close to 80% of Vermont's employers have 10 or less employees which means these are small and medium sized businesses and every dollar counts.

ABC NH/VT has two requests of the Vermont Legislature:

1. Create a Vermont corporate tax credit to help employers pay tuition for employees attending state recognized training programs. (Such as NCCER and other recognized Agency of Education credentials)
2. Create a grant program up to \$100,000 through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to assist organizations operating state recognized education programs purchase equipment or learning tools associated with the curriculum taught.

Regards

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