



Vermont State Workforce Development Board
Career Pathways Committee - Meeting Minutes
May 3rd, 2022
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Committee Members in Attendance: Pat Elmer, Sophie Zdatny, Mary Anne Sheahan, Rick Bugbee, Melissa Norman, Veronica Newton, Kate Finley Woodruff, Meg Hammond, Rebecca Kapsalis, Brian Emerson

Guests in Attendance: Victoria Biondolillo, Abby Rhim

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo began the meeting at 12:02 pm by discussing today's agenda. This will include discussing the scope of the committee and narrowing down specific short and long term goals.

Kate Finley Woodruff introduced herself as a new participant. She is the Associate Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Vermont.

Victoria Biondolillo then began by pulling up her screen with a rough draft of the committee's roadmap including short- and long-term goals. She stressed that we currently don't have an all-encompassing map that displays how we would take someone from pre-school up to career. To start, she highlighted that we should establish our scope.

Rebecca Kapsalis noted that as a mom, her interest is educating young people on developing their own personal interests and how to take steps towards careers that link to those interests. She noted that with her own career, she has the privilege to provide those resources to her kids, however, others do not. These lack of resources in preparing kids with tools is a gap in our system towards identifying a career.

Mary Anne Sheahan agreed with Rebecca's point.

Brian Emerson noted that if kids attend tech centers, they will get exposed to local industries, however, most students do not attend said centers. With this lack of exposure, it is a hit or miss if they will build any local connections. He stressed that several members of our potential workforce are slipping through our fingers without those early connections. Secondly, he highlighted Perkins funding which serves to make connections with middle schoolers, however, not all schools utilize this funding. Without a statewide system tailored towards career development funding, we are losing those early connections with kids.

Mary Anne Sheahan added that when we are talking about youth, if we had tech center education for all, it would make it much easier for folks to learn about opportunities. However, how then do we get adults to be aware of these opportunities who have already graduated and have no career credentials and are past the age of a tech center.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed with this idea of focusing on adult aged workers. We can't just focus on the K-12 system. We do have federal funding that we can use to tap into marginalized groups including impoverished adults, folks with disabilities, etc., however, we just need to ensure we don't ignore these groups and only focus on kids.

Brian Emerson noted that there are 17 adult education centers that are supposed to work with the local industries to provide training to adult aged workers and fill positions immediately. Unfortunately, due to COVID, more than 80% of adult CTE education centers have been shut down. He asked the group how we should position ourselves to revitalize these facilities?

Victoria Biondolillo agreed. She noted that much of the infrastructure already does exist, we just need to utilize the system in a more unified way. There are many moving parts that aren't necessarily all going in the same direction.

Pat Elmer urged the group to focus on re-training folks who have previously been in the workforce but are no longer considered skilled. For example, mature workers in the field of digital literacy. We need to think about adults who can no longer do what they have been doing or groups who left the workforce for some reason and now want to re-enter the workforce but don't have the skills.

Kate Finley noted the 4-H programs and the early exposure that kids get with those sorts of programs. She added that there must be more ways to further push this exposure to tailor towards career development. Additionally, adding to Pat's point, she highlighted the importance of not only launching careers but re-launching careers. If someone has a new passion or would like to re-enter into a field, what credentials or tools do they need to get into that career?

Melissa Norman added that along with the skills aspect, we need to consider that many employers have experiential learning or actual positions within their businesses that can help folks pursue a career. If they can get a certification or on the job training, that is an asset. Many employees do not know about these opportunities. For example, at Casella, they have an accredited two-week CDL program. Many times, this feeds into an apprenticeship program to a job. We stressed that we must make sure that people understand what on the job training opportunities are available through employers that inevitably allows them to upskill.

Meg Hammond added that at Advanced Manufacturing Day, all the companies present discussed sign on bonuses, benefit packages and more. If these sorts of events and exposure continue, opportunities will build for prospective workers.

Rebecca Kapsalis added that UVMHC has similar pipelines with nursing, pharmacy, etc. However, could there be a place where on the job training or programs are listed as a resource for folks to go for a career change or upskill opportunities, like how we post jobs online. If it could be in a condensed place, folks could easily use it.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed and said that coordination like that could be within the State Workforce Board's realm to help with unification of the system.

Rebecca Kapsalis added that she looked at Beta's website and saw how many engineering job openings they have. As an expanding company in our state, she asked how are we promoting those specific jobs and laying the groundwork for students to think about certain elements in order to potentially work for

one of Vermont's growing businesses in the future. Lastly, she added that back in the day, career days used to expose kids to jobs. She asked the group why do we not continue with these basics in order to educate young people what their options are? There are many things in education that we don't cover, for example, how to financially budget. She urged the group to review the basics so kids can grow into successful adults.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed with Rebecca. For a sustainable pipeline, we need to look at the person's entire life. Perhaps for best services, we may need to develop ways to expose students to different careers in middle school. If we can identify a recommendation of ways while taking the burden off of teachers, throughout their schooling years, we will be more prepared once those students graduate. With these touchpoints, we can avoid kids falling through the cracks due to lack of understanding their options. Additionally, we must think about how we bring adults into the system.

Brian Emerson noted that it is difficult to get a teacher to change their curriculum as they are already overworked. However, career and tech centers can be used as a resource to relieve the burden on teachers and schools in general. He then shared that he has seen successful exposure where schools and tech centers work together. There are a few models throughout the state, and they are currently showing success. These sort of touchpoints with kids must be implemented statewide.

Melissa Norman added that she used to be a part of a local WIB which hosted an event called the "Sophomore Summit". Through this event, they would host fairs targeted at 8th – 10th graders. The summits helped kids understand what opportunities are available throughout high school. This model occurred for about 5 years prior to the pandemic. As a state, we could have an idea like "summit education month" where each region of the state has an assigned date and employers can go and expose their businesses to kids.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed with these models. She noted that currently, it is unlikely that we will be able to add curriculum, however, if we do the heavy lift and offer opportunities, teachers will bring their kids.

Rebecca Kapsalis shared that she loved the idea of statewide summit.

Melissa Norman added that it is something that VDOL, the Governor and others could get behind. If you dedicate a month to career education, everyone could get involved and our state infrastructure could support these efforts.

Victoria Biondolillo suggested a proclamation, perhaps individualized for different aged kids. Every month, you can saturate kids with these opportunities. She then added that there are some pieces of curriculum requirements that we have lost along the way in schools. We need to long-term, think about harder life skills that kids should receive in schools.

Rebecca Kapsalis shared that UVMCC is using some funding to create a "day in the life" video library of their popular jobs. Down the road, she would like this to be for all UVMCC jobs so folks can quickly glance at what a career in a specific field would look like. If we could create this library at the state level, it would serve as an efficient resource to teach people what a specific job would look like.

Victoria Biondolillo noted that Tom Cheney with Advance Vermont could potentially house that library, as he is already doing some of this work.

Melissa Norman added that VSAC has some digital stories on their website as well.

Victoria Biondolillo noted that we need to ensure that our ideas and solutions align with our existing infrastructure. Everything needs to work in tandem. Alignment might be a secondary step we need to address.

Rick Bugbee noted that we need to understand both employer and employee needs and then identify training opportunities and supporting services to help meet demand. Especially with adults, we need to ensure that our resources are properly utilized within our infrastructure. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. We just need to make sure everyone is aware of what is available. He also added that outside of internships, we need to place value on mentoring and job shadowing to get first-hand exposure to ensure folks fully understand a position and want to invest their time and effort in any given industry. This will also benefit employers as they will save time.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed. With earlier exposure, it will save both employees and employers' time. She then noted that one concrete goal for the committee could be to select a month and host a summit throughout the state that involves employees and potential workers. For next steps, she told the group that she would develop a document with a better picture of what the current system looks like. At that next meeting, we can then identify short- and long-term goals. She then asked if there were any other questions that should be researched.

Mary Anne Sheahan noted outreach to individuals and our current limited access. She asked the group where should we be going to get in contact with folks who are looking for resources or information? She noted a real gap in our system with communicating resources with people looking for work.

Victoria Biondolillo asked the group if there are any other questions that she should be looking for in future research related to workforce pipeline.

Meg Hammond noted that we should identify the difference between K-12 and adult pathways.

Rick Bugbee added that within adult pathways, the pathway for an adult 25-year-old will be different than an adult 50-year-old. There is nuance in the adult category.

Victoria Biondolillo noted that we can create specific categories within the adult pathways.

Sophia Zdatny highlighted asking folks what skills they need to develop. We need to learn how to ask individuals what resources they might need and how to connect them to those courses, credentials, etc.

Victoria Biondolillo shared her excitement with the group. She stressed that she will try to distribute a research document prior to the next meeting with. We can then develop a plan with future goals. She also noted that we can further flush out the idea of a career development month with summits.

Meeting adjourned at 12:53 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Abby Rhim.

Abby Rhim, Executive Assistant
Vermont State Workforce Development Board