

Regional Advisory Board Meeting
Minutes - November 7, 2025

Attendees:

Mona Williams - Cota & Cota
Anne Beekman - WSESU
Guy Payne - SEON
Kris Hansen - TVMHS
Jen Stromsten - BDCC
Ginger Drisco - BFUHS
Kathryn Berta - Brattleboro North KOA
Emily Wilson - Rescue, Inc.
Heather Waryas - BFUHS
Leah Murdock - Brattleboro Savings and Loan
Kathy Larson - TV School Board
Anthony Girard - GPI Construction
Chris Norton - Windham County Sheriff
Jonathan Cavallo - TVMHS Principal
Bob Woodworth - BUHS Board - retired
Joe Grutta - BUHS
Rhonda Winegarner - BUHS/WRCC

Windham Regional Career Center Attendees:

Eduardo Melendez Rodriguez, Co-op Coordinator
Errold Nelson, Forestry & Natural Resources
Kristen Vicere, Special Education Coordinator
Rich Thompson, Manufacturing
Nicole Awwad, Career Foundations
Chris Hodsdon, Aviation
Linda Alvarez, Business, Vermont Teacher of the Year 2026
Orlando Alvarez, Criminal Justice
Lizi Rosenburg, Culinary
Jean Hodsdon, Health Careers
Rachel Fox, English
Jessy Cudworth, Registrar

The meeting was called to order at 12:02 p.m. The first with **Christy Betit**, BDCC Pipelines & Pathways and Chair of the RAB Board, leading the meeting.

1. **Welcome** -

- Announcement: The Windham Regional Career Center's Manufacturing program received a large donation of raw materials from GS Precision after they

purchased Ted Water Precision. Richard Thompson, WRCC Manufacturing Instructor, states this is worth thousands of dollars.

- Introductions were made by everyone.

2. **The Economic Landscape**

Presenter: Jen Stromsten, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

- Brief overview of regional economic trends and data - The link to the slides will be forthcoming. We are in the midst of the Silver Tsunami. Vermont is ahead of the curve. There is data information on the BDCC website and a link to Onet. This program has quality information for young people. It has great job descriptions that could be used for companies looking to change theirs. Two key takeaways 1) helping young people find purpose, 2) helping them find the pathway to that purpose and how to speak their language to make the connections.
17,500 people will be retiring this year and 5,000 will be graduating from High School.
Rhonda Winegarner, BUHS/WRCC, stated that we need to really familiarize ourselves with young people's buzz words because they don't understand the older language and verbiage of job postings. The younger work force is more concerned with work-life balance.
Make sure we know what the data is telling us about ourselves.
- Discussion: How do these trends affect our local school and employers?
There seems to be a disconnect between employers and employees. Employers are expecting a level of knowledge and social understanding that young employees don't seem to have learned either at school or in the home.

3. **Listening to Local Business Needs/Breakout Sessions - Building the Bridge**

- Small groups discussion:
 - 1) What are employers' biggest challenges in hiring young workers?
 - 2) What hard and soft skills are most needed?
 - 3) Where are the current gaps between education and readiness?
 - 4) How do we help students secure jobs in the community after graduation?
 - 5) Brainstorm collaborations and hands on learning opportunities that already exist or need to be created/actualized.

Chris's group - The biggest challenge that some employers face is getting applicants. Not just qualified applicants, but applicants. Communication follow-up by applicants isn't happening. Applicants are looking to tweak the job to meet the applicants work-life balance. Young workers do not have an understanding of the professional nuances Soft skills missing include email etiquette. There is a difference between the student that graduates from the Career Center and the High School. Hands-on training happens at the Career Center, collaboration, and some of those soft skills are embedded in the WRCC curriculum.

Nicole's group - Focused on the first 3 questions. There is a lack of skill when new employees are walking onto the job and there may be a correlation between that low enrollment in the WRCC Construction program. Skills like reading a tape measure and knowing how to run a saw are not necessarily the norm for new construction workers. Two soft skills that employers are needing are being on time and commitment to the job (longevity). GPI has a specific longevity program where they sit down with their employees to discuss their work and will pay them for meeting goals that are created from these meetings which can include being prompt and doing quality work.

Kat/Linda's group - Age can be a barrier to a certain career pathway. EMS you need to be a certain age to get your license and they need more experience behind the wheel. There seems to be a gap in time when students are ready to start or continue a career path and are then hindered because of age. This gap of time doesn't help keep students engaged. There was discussion around non-profits about how there is uncertainty and in this political economy people don't want to commit. Someone in the hospitality sector struggles getting seasonal help, the opposite time of the year to ski. It can be hard work and weekends, nights, etc.

Nancy's group - Employers have seen various forms of applications filled out in pencil or illegible or missing important information and not having all the skills necessary to look for a job. The Career Center prepares future employees with all the hands-on experience and learning about how they learn, understand how to ask relevant questions, gaining interview skills, getting a clear understanding of what you want in a job; weekends, holidays, etc. Rhonda W. mentioned that a soft skill that needs to be learned is learning how to rest in discomfort for a period of time. Asking if not me who, the sheriff's office seeks workers that can understand this and follow through with this thought process.

4. Wrap up & Next Steps - Further discussion:

Chris Hodsden stated that some students gain knowledge through a formal education system, but some of these soft skills are learned in a family unit. He feels that there is now a gap in this area. This hasn't been modeled or knowledge hasn't been taught by the family system.

Guy Paine, the notion of character, has to be a core piece of what we (the Board/WRCC) are doing. What is it? What does it mean? How do you know you have it? It means discipline. It is a critical skill. Following through on what you say you are going to do.

Linda Alvarez , where is education going to be in 2050? The students that are graduating now and how do we get them to want to stay in Vermont and work. University of Vermont is free tuition for students with income under \$100,000. We are getting there.

Jen Stromsten, BDCC, knowing what is here and the correct pathway. Not going through an entire program and realizing it was the wrong engineering path.

Ginger Drisco, Bellows Falls Union High School, learning how to present yourself, corporate retail and food service. Creating a learning experience that teaches those skills; like a “fake” retail program.

Kim Freeman Early Childhood Ed/WRCC, keep in mind trauma and the structure of the brain in terms of connections that aren't being made. Also, recent research has shown that adolescence has extended into an individual's mid 20s.

Nicole Awwad , Career Foundations WRCC, not enough jobs in the area for students, entry level, when she was in her teens she worked at a Mall. There aren't any large employers locally. Going to work and making a little money is a useful experience for youth.

Nancy Wiese, Director of WRCC, students here have the ability to practice adulting and a safe space for making mistakes to learn from.

Anthony Girard, GPI Construction, we need houses for people to live to then learn the skills to be in construction to then produce quality work.

Rhonda Winegarner , BUHS/WRCC, we need to tap into the big companies like McClure and Johnson Foundation for funding to offer more summer school boot camps like the Boys & Girls Club is offering, learning to write resumes, etc.

Christy Betit is working on all these things! 3 more meetings this coming year.

Next meeting date:

Jan. 23rd

March 12th

May 8th, 2026.

Featuring the Career Center programs and what they are doing. We hope to hear from students who have graduated and where they are and what they are doing.

Homework: Go to Onet and dig into that sector! www.onetonline.org

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.