



# Helping New Vermonters Thrive

## Southern Vermont

*Denis Tangney Jr.*

**The opportunity:** Southern Vermont's labor force has rebounded after experiencing a sharp decline over the last decade.<sup>1</sup> The Brattleboro area team is integrating New Vermonters, including new families, students, asylees, and refugees, into the community to take advantage of this upward trend and bolster the local workforce and economy. Team members aim to support a diverse and thriving region that benefits all residents.

## Purpose/Goal

The Southern Vermont Working Communities team created partnerships to welcome and support new Vermonters in the workforce in the Brattleboro region. The team trained workers, partnered with businesses, and tackled transportation and language barriers that can impact employment opportunities.

## Solutions

- **Employer practices promoting workforce retention:** The team worked with local employers to craft ways to improve retention of New Vermonters in the workplace. Employers adopted changes in practice that included onsite programs for workers with limited English proficiency, wage increases, and improved job quality and career mobility.
- **Workforce training:** Workers completed new skills training, earned new or refreshed existing workforce credentials, and completed courses that led to jobs.

*Joseph Sohm*

- **Transportation services for low-wage workers:** An employer survey identified public transportation gaps as a major barrier to filling open jobs. A pilot transit program extended bus routes and expanded service hours beyond 5 p.m., benefiting all Brattleboro residents—especially second- and third-shift workers.
- **New community-based organization:** The team built the relationships, capacity, and understanding needed to establish a community-based organization led by local New Vermonters. The group will advance support and education efforts for New Vermonters at the state level.

## Indicators of Success

- More than 400 New Vermonters have been welcomed to southern Vermont, resulting in fuller classrooms and workplaces.
- About 30 employers—representing at least 2,500 jobs—implemented new workplace practices to retain their workers.
- About 180 people have received help finding employment opportunities. This includes first jobs, next jobs, and upskilling.
- In 2024, New Vermonters earned an average wage of \$19.85.
- More than 165 refugees were placed in jobs at 52 different employers across every major industry in southern Vermont. More than 40 refugees completed workforce training, and another 15 are learning more skills through higher education.
- Regulations were changed to improve occupational relicensing and English language skills in the workplace, giving more workers access to the job market.
- Public transportation system changes have accommodated more work schedules at a variety of companies.



Christian Hinkle

## Impact Stories

- **Fully-staffed and growing:** Staffing challenges have limited growth at Against the Grain Gourmet, a Brattleboro-based producer of gluten-free foods, for years. But workforce training programs helped the company onboard 30 New Vermonters in 2024. With a full staff, the company has not only retained its customer base, but also increased production by 22%. Senior employees can now focus on developing innovative products that were previously out of reach.
- **Transportation for all:** When some New Vermonters first arrived in southern Vermont in 2022, local organizations improvised transportation solutions for students and workers due to unforeseen gaps in the public bus system. Working in close collaboration with Southeast Vermont Transit, multilingual tools were created and bus routes were tweaked- like adding stops at the Multicultural Center and SIT Graduate Institute- to better support a new ridership.
- **A catalyst for change:** After participating in employer training programs, C&S Wholesale Grocers—the largest wholesale grocery supply company in the US—hosted their human resources managers from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Florida at their Brattleboro office. They shared best practices to create a supportive and accepting workplace.

*“One in every 150 community members is a person who has been displaced. Devising solutions for neighbors rebuilding their lives is, more often than not, devising solutions for all Vermonters.”*

– Alex Beck, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

## Key Approaches

- **Building alliances:** Strong partnerships with service providers and businesses greatly helped team members identify the challenges faced by New Vermonters and implement effective changes. The team led coalitions to tackle transportation and employer support, with partner organizations meeting monthly to maintain momentum.
- **Data-driven action:** The Southern Vermont team committed to understanding the experiences of New Vermonters, using data collection, surveys, focus groups, interviews, and an outsourced legal services study to inform their strategies.
- **Collaborative policy and practice:** The team's work with policymakers led to the removal of workforce barriers faced by many New Vermonters. Successful outcomes included the elimination of residency requirements for state education funding, CDL licenses, and social services, as well as translator support during nursing assistant licensure exams.

*"Through improved collaboration with employers, service providers, and even public transportation agencies, I've seen first-hand how the workforce system has created meaningful opportunities that have helped new Vermonters build stable and fulfilling lives."*

– Amir Samar, employment specialist

## Partners

Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation, Bellows Falls Area Development Corporation, Bennington County Regional Commission, Community Asylum Seekers Project, School for International Training, Southeast Vermont Transit, Windham Regional Commission, Ethiopian Community Development Council, The Root Social Justice Center, Vermont Adult Learning.

## About the Working Communities Challenge

Since 2019, Vermont has invested in the Working Communities Challenge to catalyze the power of community-driven economic development across more than 60% of its towns. The Southern Vermont team received a financial award, technical assistance, and learning opportunities to advance their goals as part of the Working Communities Challenge, a partnership between the State of Vermont, philanthropy, communities, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

For more information, visit [bostonfed.org/workingplaces](https://bostonfed.org/workingplaces).

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Civilian Labor Force in Windham County, VT [VTWIND5LFN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/VTWIND5LFN>, April 7, 2025.