



Northwest Colorado Council of Governments Grow Your Own Part 2



Cultivating Local Talent for a Thriving Workforce

INTRODUCTION TO THE GROW YOUR OWN WORKFORCE SERIES:

In an era marked by dynamic economic shifts and evolving job markets, the concept of "Growing Your Own Workforce" has emerged as a transformative approach to building thriving communities. This series of articles aims to explore this innovative concept from various perspectives, highlighting examples of regional organizations that have successfully implemented the "Grow Your Own" philosophy to strengthen their workforce from both community and organizational standpoints. Herewith our findings:



PART 2: Growing Our Own: Vail Valley Partnership Cultivates Local Talent for a Thriving Workforce



Chris Romer, CEO of the Vail Valley Partnership, named "Chamber of the Year" by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives in 2016 & 2020, recently shared with NWCCOG the evolution of Grow Your Own efforts that emerged from conversations with local businesses about their

workforce challenges. The VVP has been successful with CareerWise and VVWorks in recent years.

According to Romer, "As we came out of the Great Recession we started to see the local workforce problem was really exacerbated beginning in 2016-2017, the VVP, in collaboration with organizations and community members, identified the need for an intentional plan to attract and retain a talented workforce as well as a program that would equip businesses with leadership skills and resources. Thus, the 'Grow Your Own Workforce' philosophy was borne." From there, VVP began to deliberately develop a comprehensive array of programs to nurture local talent, provide them with the necessary skills and employment opportunities, provide management and leadership programs, and build an extensive resource compendium – each focused on supporting, attracting, and retaining talent within the Eagle County region.

"Like most of the communities in our area, our businesses were plagued by the challenge of finding the right people for the right job, then once they were in place, finding the formula that allowed the businesses to retain that talent," Chris Romer CEO, VVP.

Recognizing the increasing outward migration of younger individuals who had grown up in the area, VVP saw the importance of equipping local youth with the skills needed for sustainable careers. Romer

explains, "We needed to be strategic about our local youth – how to equip them with the skills they needed to find jobs – so they could stay in a community where they already had a network of family and friends where they had roots." Thus, the concept of "growing their own workforce" emerged as a strategic imperative.

Building the necessary resources for these programs was a deliberate and thoughtful process. Actively listening to the needs and insights of others, working collaboratively with partners such as SBDC, Workforce Centers, and chamber groups, and being willing to adapt and refine programs quickly, are essential steps for success. Romer stressed to "fail fast. If it doesn't work, ditch it, refine it, drop it - move on." For Romer these



approaches were intentional. The results? Starting in 2014-15, VVP focused on training and brought in [CareerWise](#), a youth apprentice program. Through extensive consultations with HR organizations, large employers, board members, and county officials, VVP identified tangible needs and worked diligently to secure partnerships and instructors that would best serve their mountain communities. The VVP also launched the [VVWorks](#) program, a 501(c)(3) organization, which enabled VVP to access additional grants and collaborate with statewide partners such as the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT). This commitment to excellence is evident in the extensive catalog of knowledge offered through their training programs.

The CareerWise program provides apprenticeship opportunities for local high school students. In 2022 alone, CareerWise offered 50 job openings, successfully placing 32 apprentices from local high schools with local businesses – 22 apprentices from Eagle Valley Highschool, 9 from Battle Mountain, and 1 from Red Canyon. Examples of participating businesses are Alpine Bank, Vail Health, Shaffer Hyde Construction, Gallegos Corp., and many others. The positive response from the community has been overwhelming, with numerous young adults growing their skills within their own locality. As Romer states, "People are so excited, and it's really been a grassroots effort."

To measure the success of their programs, VVP takes a multi-pronged approach, focusing on training, retention, relationship-building, and community connections. By helping individuals forge personal connections and fostering a sense of belonging, VVP ensures that participants are invested in the community's growth and success. While the programs are currently performing well, VVP remains committed to continuous improvement, actively seeking and incorporating community feedback to refine their initiatives.



Despite the success, VVP acknowledges the challenges faced in mountain communities. The transient nature of these communities, coupled with staffing shortages and the time constraints of business owners, can make implementation difficult. However, VVP firmly believes that investing in the local workforce is crucial to mitigating high turnover rates and creating sustainable economic growth. While it sometimes might be tempting to hire from out of the area, Romer emphasizes, "hiring from outside is not always the best answer. For middle to upper management to execs the failure rate for out of towners is much higher than employing locally – we'll keep the high turnover rate

going unless we continuously INVEST in our local workforce."

Drawing from their experiences, VVP offers valuable tips for other communities looking to embark on similar programs. They emphasize the importance of intentionality, building a foundation, and securing program advocates and champions within the business leadership. Romer went on to further clarify, "It's a figurative foundation - like a building - to a successful program. Early champions include but are not limited to Gary Woodworth at Gallegos Corp, David Hyde & Tiffany Ingoldsby at Shaffer Hyde Construction, Mike Brown and Julie Herr at Alpine Bank, and many others. They were early adopters, program champions, and risk-takers who were with us from day one to build the program." Additionally, VVP offers custom training for businesses, further demonstrating their commitment to meeting the unique needs of the community.

Vail Valley Partnership's comprehensive approach to growing their own workforce stands as a testament to their dedication and the power of community-driven initiatives. By investing in local talent, providing training and employment pathways, and forging strong partnerships, VVP has created a vibrant ecosystem where the workforce and the community thrive hand in hand.

in each story. However, any errors or inaccuracies that may be found within the series are solely my responsibility .



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Photos in the story courtesy of VVP website

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