ADDISON COUNTY
Economic Development Corporation
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2026 Addison County Job Seeker Survey

Prepared by The Addison County Economic Development Corporation

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Executive Summary

The Addison County Job Seeker Survey was conducted by the Addison County Economic Development Corporation (ACEDC) in partnership with the Vermont Department of Labor's Workforce Expansion Program (WEP). The initiative brings employers, educators, and community partners together to strengthen workforce participation, connect job seekers facing barriers with employment opportunities, and improve local career pathways. In Addison County, the program focuses particularly on youth ages 16–24, people with disabilities, and adults without a high school diploma.

Interpreting the Results

The survey gathered perspectives from 114 Addison County residents on their employment experiences, financial circumstances, job-search methods, workplace priorities, and barriers to workforce participation.

The survey reflects voluntary participation through community-based outreach, including Front Porch Forum, ACEDC social media, and outreach to community groups. Respondents were not a statistically representative sample of Addison County residents or job seekers, and some demographic groups had relatively few participants. The findings therefore should not be interpreted as estimates of how prevalent particular challenges are across the county or as evidence that any single factor causes a particular employment outcome.

Instead, the results provide a useful starting point for identifying concerns, informing employer and community conversations, and determining where additional investigation may be warranted. The results offer directional insights into the experiences and needs of participating residents and can help inform local workforce strategies, employer engagement, and future research. By combining these insights with employer input, existing workforce data, and ongoing community engagement, ACEDC and WEP can develop more responsive, locally informed strategies to strengthen economic participation and support a more accessible and resilient workforce in Addison County.

Key Findings

Financial security remains a concern, including among employed residents. Only 14% of respondents described themselves as living comfortably, while 43% said they were doing okay, 25% were just getting by, and 18% were finding it difficult to get by. Compensation, benefits, healthcare, housing, and other living expenses emerged as important concerns. Nearly half of respondents working part time reported that they were just getting by or finding it difficult to get by, suggesting that employment does not necessarily translate into financial stability.

Retention deserves as much attention as recruitment. More than two-thirds of employed respondents (68%) said they were somewhat or very likely to actively seek a job with another employer within the next

year. Respondents emphasized both economic benefits and workplace conditions: 88% rated a living wage and fair pay very important, 82% placed high importance on being respected and valued at work, and 80% prioritized good working conditions. Flexible scheduling also emerged as a significant concern, with 37% rating it very challenging and another 18% rating it moderately challenging. These findings point to opportunities for employers to strengthen retention through compensation, benefits, respectful workplace cultures, and more flexible scheduling where feasible.

Job seekers may face barriers to finding opportunities and navigating hiring requirements. Respondents commonly relied on national online platforms and personal connections to find employment, while relatively few reported using Vermont-specific job resources or employment agencies. Unemployed respondents identified a need for more job opportunities and easier ways to find them, alongside barriers such as education and licensing requirements, background checks, résumé gaps, and age-related discrimination. Improving job discovery, strengthening connections between job seekers and employers, and helping candidates navigate hiring processes may help address these challenges.

Workforce needs and effective supports vary across individuals and groups. Survey responses showed differences in reported unemployment, financial comfort, scheduling challenges, and benefit preferences across demographic and employment groups. For example, respondents who identified as having a disability reported a higher unemployment rate than those who did not, although the small subgroup sizes limit the conclusions that can be drawn. These patterns suggest that workforce initiatives should account for different barriers and circumstances rather than assume that a single intervention will meet everyone's needs.

Young adults may benefit from focused, relationship-based outreach and career engagement. Gen Z respondents were more likely than respondents in other generations to report finding their current or most recent job through word of mouth. ACEDC also initially faced challenges recruiting Gen-Z residents to participate in the survey but received additional responses after sharing it with an Addison County social group for residents in their 20s. Together, these experiences suggest that trusted personal networks and community partnerships may be useful channels for engaging young people. Because only 11 respondents identified as youth ages 16–24, additional direct input from young adults is needed to better understand their employment goals, barriers, and career interests.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, ACEDC recommends five complementary areas of action:

1. **Engage employers around job quality and employee retention.** Share findings with local employers and support efforts to review compensation, benefits, workplace culture, employee communication, and scheduling practices. Help employers identify practical ways to improve working conditions and offer flexibility where possible.

2. **Improve job discovery and connections between job seekers and employers.** Encourage employers to promote openings through multiple channels, improve the clarity of job postings, and communicate pay, benefits, qualifications, and scheduling expectations. Work with state and community partners to increase awareness and use of existing employment resources, and explore coordinated referrals that connect job seekers with employers and support services.
3. **Reduce barriers to hiring and career advancement.** Encourage employers to reconsider unnecessary degree and experience requirements, connect job seekers with résumé and interview assistance, and explore work-based learning opportunities. Partner with educators and training providers to align career development opportunities with local employer needs.
4. **Develop focused youth outreach and career engagement.** Build relationships with schools, educators, youth-serving organizations, and employers. Conduct listening sessions with young adults and explore opportunities for career exploration, employer visits, job shadowing, and internships. Use young people's perspectives to guide outreach and program design.
5. **Improve workforce data collection and ongoing evaluation.** Conduct focused follow-up research with populations whose experiences are not adequately captured, supplement survey responses with employer and service-provider perspectives, and establish indicators to monitor workforce participation, job placements, employer engagement, and retention over time.

Introduction

This report is a joint effort by the Addison County Economic Development Corporation (ACEDC) and the Vermont Department of Labor's Workforce Expansion Program (WEP). This two-year initiative brings employers, educators, and community partners together to fill jobs, connect job seekers facing barriers with opportunities, and improve local career pathways. In Addison County, it focuses on youth ages 16–24, people with disabilities, and adults without a high school diploma.

ACEDC gathered Addison County residents' perspectives by soliciting survey participation through Front Porch Forum posts and outreach to community groups and networks. This approach reached people with varied employment situations and workforce needs; the following limitations explain how voluntary, community-based outreach affects interpretation.

The report first explains how to interpret the findings and profiles respondents, then examines their financial circumstances and job-seeker experiences—from employment retention and desired work to job-search methods, barriers, benefits, and workplace practices. Tables and subgroup comparisons highlight patterns and differences, but subgroup findings are not statistically representative of Addison County or the State of Vermont.

Limitations and Understanding Survey Results

The survey results are best used as directional evidence to inform program design, outreach priorities, employer engagement, and future research, rather than as definitive measures of Addison County's labor market or workforce needs. It is important to acknowledge the following limitations of this survey before discussing results in detail.

Limitation #1: Reliance on Self-Reported Data

The survey relied on self-reported information, so responses reflect participants' own perceptions, recollections, and interpretations of their employment status, barriers, and needs. The results are useful for understanding the experiences and perspectives of respondents, including common barriers related to pay, benefits, housing, healthcare, flexible scheduling, and job-search resources.

Limitation #2: Fielding and Representation

The survey results should be interpreted as a summary of responses from people who chose to participate, not as a statistically representative sample of all Addison County residents or job seekers. Because the survey was distributed through Front Porch Forum and ACEDC social media channels, responses may overrepresent residents who use those platforms, follow ACEDC, or are already connected to local civic, workforce, or economic development networks. Additional outreach to Rural Adult Twenty Somethings (RATS) of Addison County helped increase youth and young adult participation,

but it also means responses from younger residents may reflect the perspectives of people connected to that community group rather than all young adults in the county.

The survey can identify themes, concerns, and priorities reported by respondents. However, survey results cannot estimate the true prevalence of issues across the full county population. Furthermore, the findings should not be used to make causal claims; for example, they cannot show that any single factor directly caused unemployment, job changes, or financial hardship.

Limitation #3: Demographic Representation

Some demographic groups had small numbers of respondents, so comparisons across towns, generations, racial or ethnic groups, gender identities, education levels, or employment-status categories may be unstable.

Demographics

This section provides an overview of survey respondents, including their municipality of residence, age, gender, educational attainment, and other relevant background characteristics. We also compare the demographic profile of the survey sample with those of Addison County and the State of Vermont using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2025 population estimates.[1] These comparisons help contextualize the findings by clarifying whom the survey results represent and how the sample differs from the county and state populations.

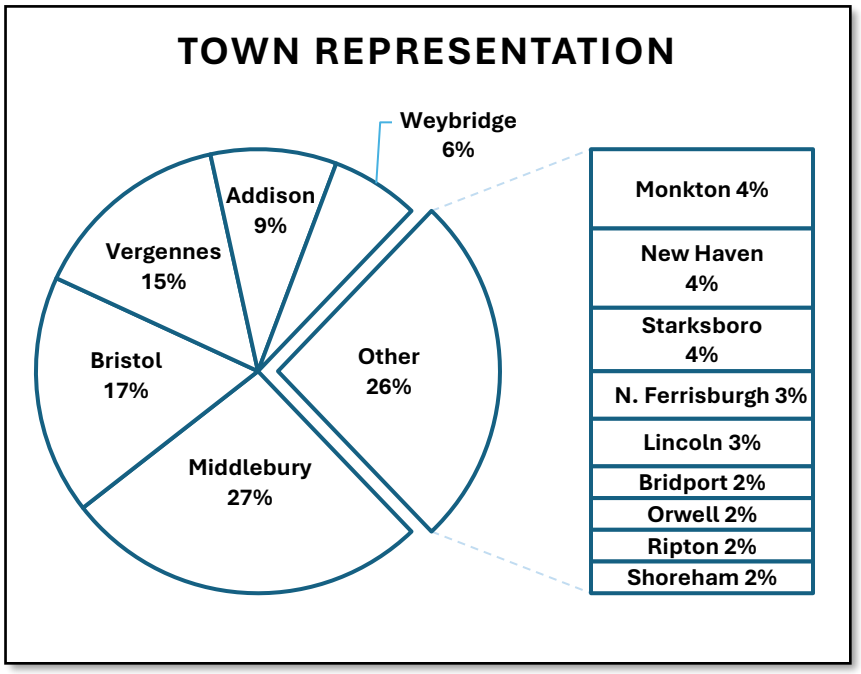


Figure 1 Respondents' Towns of Residence (n=114)

Municipalities

Respondents represented 19 municipalities in Addison County. The county's three largest municipalities—Middlebury, Bristol, and Vergennes—were the most well represented among survey participants. Figure 1 shows respondents' municipalities of residence.

[1] U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). QuickFacts: Vermont; Addison County, Vermont. Retrieved November 6, 2026, from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VT,addisoncountyvermont/PST040225

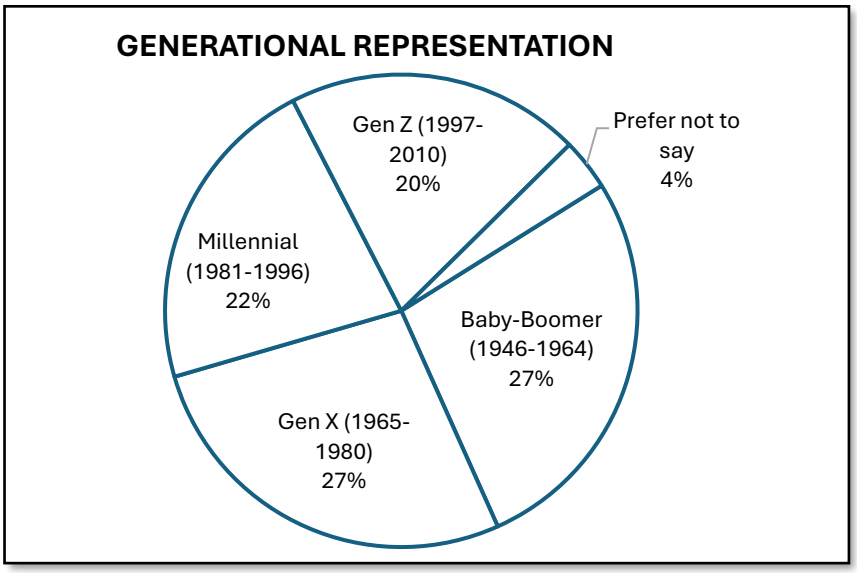


Figure 2 Respondents' Generations (n=114)

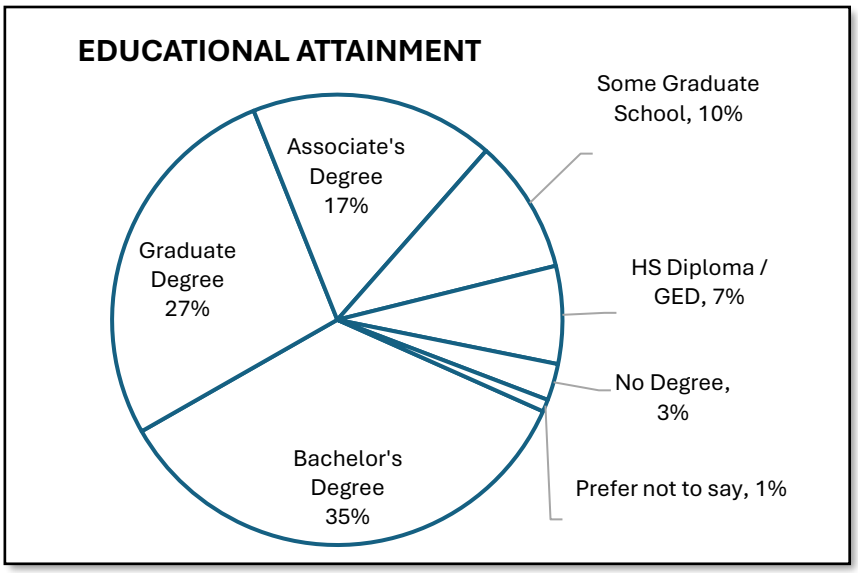


Figure 3 Respondents' Level of Education Attainment (n=114)

Generations

Survey responses reflect age diversity, with similar representation among individuals who identified as Baby Boomers (27%, n=31), members of Gen X (27%, n=31), Millennials (22%, n=25), and members of Gen Z (20%, n=23). Figure 2 displays the full results for generational representation in the sample.

Educational Attainment

Approximately 72% (n=82) of respondents had at least a bachelor's degree. This is a higher proportion than Addison County and the State as a whole, both of which have around 44% of residents possessing a similar level of education. Figure 3 provides a full breakdown of respondents' educational attainment.

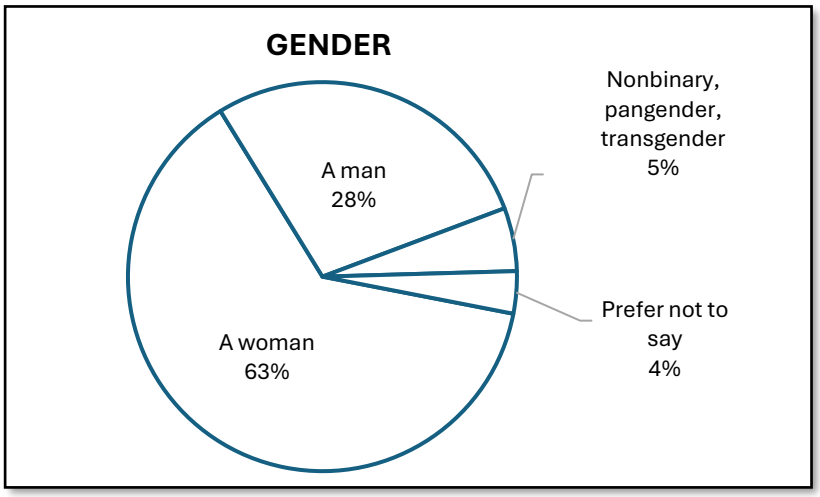


Figure 4 Respondents' Gender (n=114)

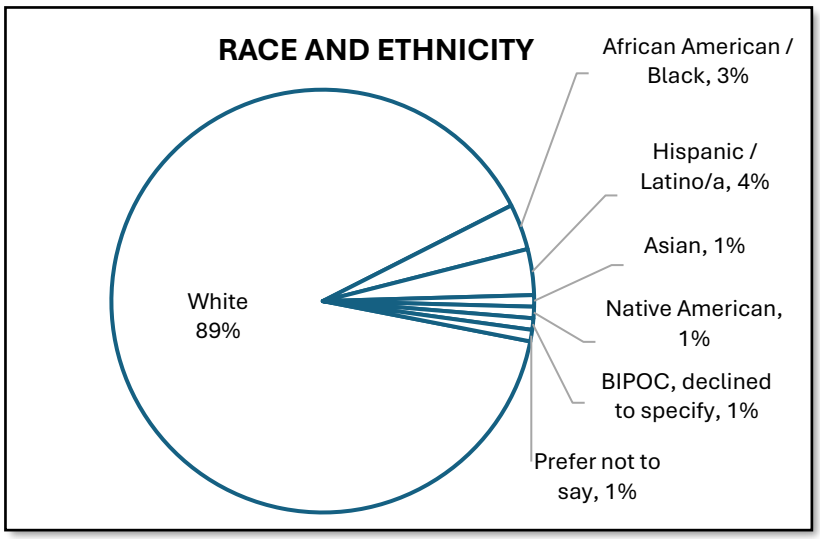


Figure 5 Respondents' Racial Identity (n=114)

Gender

As Figure 4 illustrates, more than half of survey respondents identified as women (63%, n=72). This proportion was higher than the share of women in the populations of Addison County (51%) and Vermont (51%).

Race and Ethnicity

Nearly 90% of respondents identified as white (n=102), which is generally similar to the demographic profiles of the county (92%) and state (92%). Figure 5 displays respondents' racial demographics in detail.

WEP Populations of Interest

In addition to the demographics described above, the Workforce Expansion Program identified several key populations of interest: individuals with disabilities, adults without a high school diploma, and youth ages 16–24. Nearly one-third of respondents (30%, n=34) belonged to one or more of these populations (see Table 1). Almost one in five survey respondents identified as having a disability (18%, n=20). Representation of youth (10%, n=11) and adults without a high school diploma (4%, n=5) was relatively low.

Table 1 WEP Populations of Interest

Do you belong to any of the following categories? (select all that apply)	Frequency* (n=114)
Adult without a High School Diploma (25+ years old);	4% (n=5)
Individual with a Disability;	18% (n=20)
Youth (16-24 years old);	10% (n=11)
None of the above;	68% (n=78)
Prefer not to say;	2% (n=2)

*Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

The analysis in the sections below highlights subgroup differences where applicable.

Respondents' Financial Situation

The following sections summarize respondents' answers to questions concerning their financial situation, covering topics including employment status, duration of employment or unemployment, anticipated employment changes, level of financial comfort, and economic challenges experienced.

Employment Status

Of the 114 survey respondents, 77 (67.5%) were employed, 21 (18.4%) were unemployed, 11 (9.6%) were retired, and 5 (4.4%) were engaged in other activities. To calculate the unemployment rate, retired respondents and those in the other-activities category were excluded from both the numerator and denominator. Among the remaining 98 respondents in the labor market (that is, classified as employed or unemployed), 21 were unemployed, resulting in an adjusted unemployment rate of 21.4%.

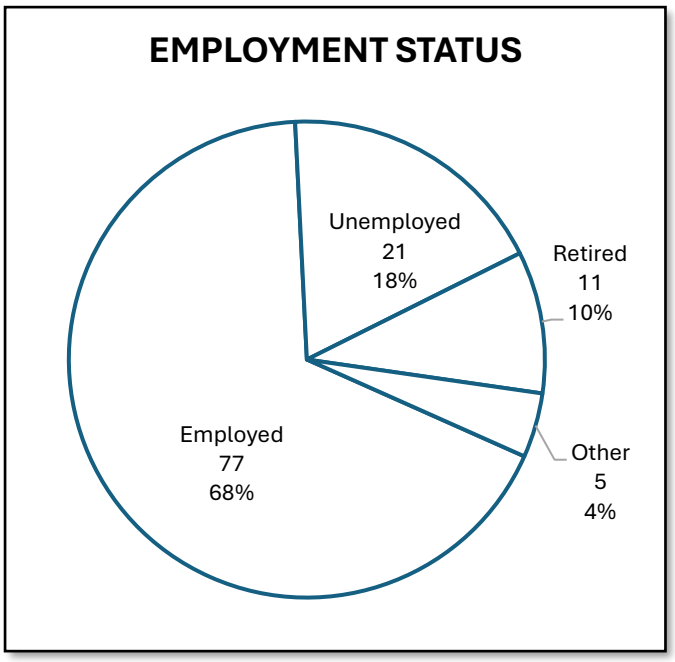


Figure 6 Employment Status (n=114)

There were several notable differences in unemployment rates among subgroups (see Table 2). The rate was 45% (n=9) among the 20 respondents who identified as having a disability, compared with 15% (n=12) among the 80 respondents without a disability. The unemployment rate was also higher among respondents without a four-year degree (24%, n=4) than among those with at least a bachelor's degree (14%, n=10).

Table 2 Unemployment Rates: Disability Status, Education Attainment Compared

	Respondents w/ Disability (n=20)	Respondents w/o Disability (n=80)	Four-year Degree or More (n=74)	No Four-Year Degree (n=17)
Unemployment Rate	45% (n=9)	15% (n=12)	14% (n=10)	24% (n=4)

The following subsections describe the nature and duration of employment and unemployment among the 98 respondents in the labor market.

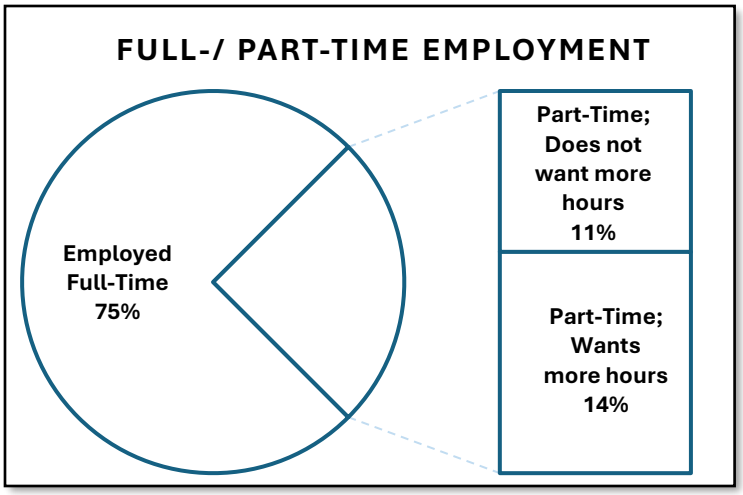


Figure 7 Full-/Part-Time Breakdown (n=76)

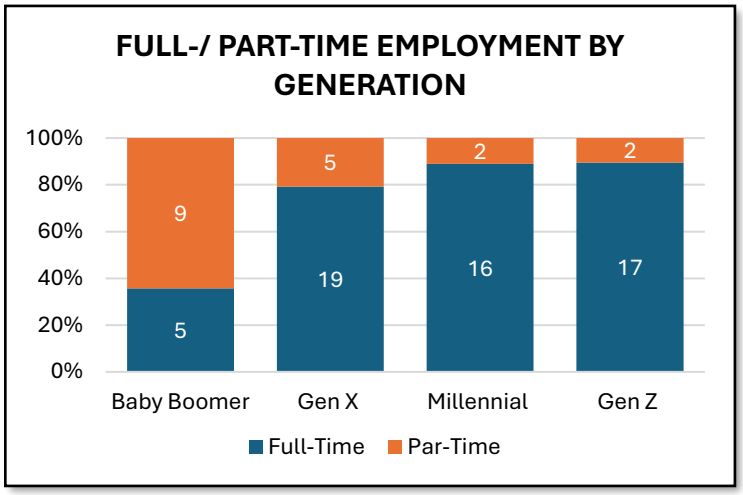


Figure 8 Full/Part-Time Break Down by Generation (n=76)

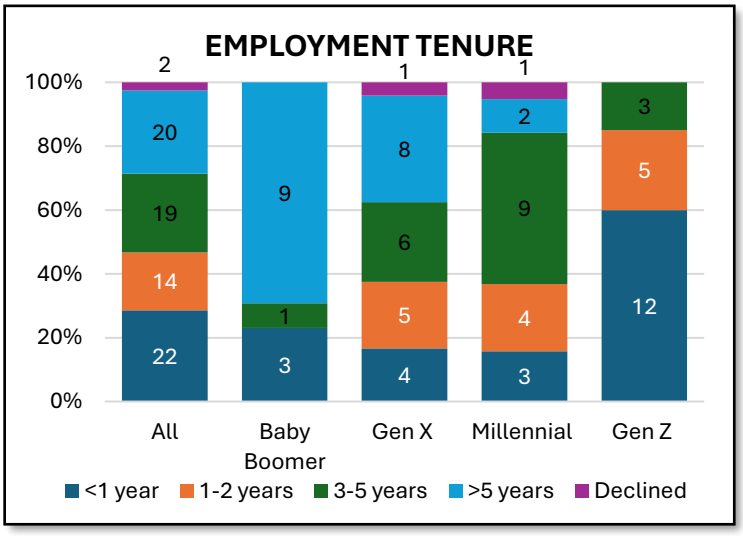


Figure 9 Duration of Employment: All, Generations Compared (n=77)

Employment Profile

The survey asked employed respondents to describe how much they work. Three quarters (n=57) reported holding a full-time position. Respondents working part time were also asked whether they wanted more hours. Among these respondents, a slightly larger share wanted to work more hours than did not (see Figure 7).

The proportions of respondents working full-time and part-time were similar across most subgroups, with a few exceptions. Baby Boomer respondents were less likely than members of any other generation to report full-time employment (see Figure 8). Additionally, part-time respondents without at least a four-year degree were more likely to want additional hours (31%, n=4) than part-time respondents with higher levels of education (6%, n=4).

Approximately half of employed respondents said they had been with their employer for at least three years (see Figure 9). Older respondents reported longer employment tenure, consistent with the Bureau of Labor Statistics' most recently published national data. More than three-quarters of Baby Boomer respondents had been with their current employer for at least three years, compared with 58% of Gen X and Millennial respondents and 15% of Gen Z respondents.

Employed respondents also described how soon they expect to change employers. More than two-thirds (68%, n=52) said it is somewhat or very likely that they will actively look for a new job with a different employer within the next year. By contrast, only 13% (n=10) of employed

respondents said looking for a new job within the year was very unlikely. There were no notable differences in expected employment transitions between subgroups. Table 3 displays aggregated responses below.

Table 3 Likelihood of Pursuing Different Employment

How likely is it that you will actively look for a new job (with another employer) in the next year?	Frequency* (n=77)
Very unlikely	13% (n=10)
Somewhat unlikely	19% (n=15)
Somewhat likely	29% (n=22)
Very likely	39% (n=30)

*Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Considerations for Retention and Growth

Employed respondents were asked what they believed would help them remain employed or advance in their careers. ACEDC identified eight themes across the 51 responses (see Table 4). Economic concerns were prominent: two of the three most frequently cited themes were better benefits and compensation and the cost of living in Addison County. Respondents also called for more employment opportunities—seven specifically noted a lack of job openings in Addison County—as well as more professional development and training options.

Table 4 Considerations for Retention and Career Growth

If you are working, what would make it easier for you to keep working and grow your career?	Frequency (n=51)
Benefits, compensation, healthcare	21
Opportunities (in general, local)	18
Cost of Living (childcare, housing, cost of living)	12
Professional Development (training, career pathways)	10
Ancillary support (transportation, eldercare, job boards)	7
Organizational Culture (workplace values, supervisor culture)	6
Schedule & hours (more hours or flexible schedule)	6
Age-related (succession planning, fewer opportunities for older workers)	2

*Response counts do not match the total frequency because respondents could select multiple options.

Unemployment Profile

The 21 unemployed respondents commonly described unemployment as recent and expected to change in the near term. Nearly half (48%, n=10) had been out of work for less than three months (see Table 5 for full results). All but two unemployed respondents (90%, n=19) said it was “very likely” that they would actively look for a job within the next year. There were no notable subgroup differences in the current or expected duration of unemployment.

Table 5 Duration of Unemployment

How long has it been since you last worked?	Frequency* (n=21)
Less than 3 months	48% (n=10)
3-6 months	10% (n=2)
6-12 months	14% (n=3)
More than a year	20% (n=4)
Not applicable / haven't worked before	5% (n=1)
Declined to answer	5% (n=1)

*Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Job-Seeker Obstacles

The survey asked unemployed respondents to describe what would help them find work. ACEDC identified five recurring themes across the 16 responses (Table 6). Nine respondents noted challenges related to their background, attributing difficulty finding employment to factors such as a lack of experience, criminal background, or gaps in their résumé. Eleven responses reflected a desire for more opportunities or the need for a centralized, comprehensive repository of job opportunities.

Table 6 Themes in Open Responses About Obstacles for the Unemployed

If you aren't working, what would make it easier for you to get a job?	Frequency* (n=16)
Background (education requirements, licenses, background checks, résumé gaps)	9
More opportunities and/or easier to identify opportunities	6
Age-related discrimination	4
Schedule considerations (part-time opportunities, flexible schedule)	3
Employer / Manager Responsiveness	2

*The sum of each row does not equal the total number of responses due to multiple themes present in individual answers.

Level of Financial Comfort

When asked to characterize their finances, most respondents described their economic situation as manageable. Overall, 43% (n=49) said they were doing OK, while 25% (n=29) said they were just getting by and 18% (n=20) said they were finding it difficult to get by. Only 14% (n=16) reported living comfortably, indicating that a relatively small share of respondents felt financially secure.

For comparison, in 2025 a report on economic well-being published by the Federal Reserve, 73% of respondents nationally reported that they were either "doing OK" or "living comfortably," a higher

proportion than the 57% observed in this survey.[2] Although the comparison is not statistically valid, the difference is notable and may suggest that Addison County respondents feel less financially secure than the national population.

Self-reported financial comfort increased with employment status and educational attainment (see Figure 10). A larger proportion of unemployed respondents said they were either "finding it difficult to get by" or "just getting by" than did respondents employed part time or full time. Similarly, a larger share of full-time respondents said they were "doing OK" or "living comfortably" than did their part-time peers. Respondents without at least a bachelor's degree were also more likely than their counterparts to report finding it difficult to get by.

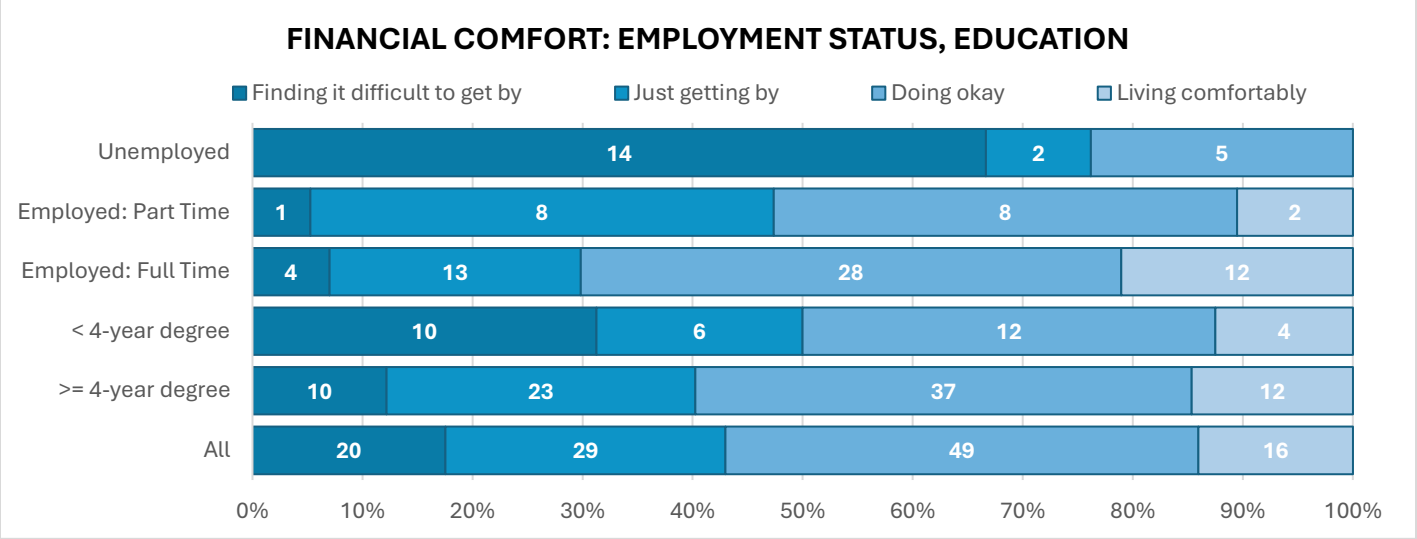


Figure 10 Respondents' Perceptions of Financial Comfort: Overall, by Employment Status, and by Education

There also were several notable differences between generations of respondents (see *Figure 11*). Millennial and Baby Boomer respondents were more likely than Gen X and Gen Z to report finding it difficult to get by. Gen Z respondents reported living comfortably more than other generations.

[2] Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. (2025). Report on the economic well-being of U.S. households in 2024: Overall financial well-being. https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/2025-economic-well-being-of-us-households-in-2024-overall-financial-well-being.htm

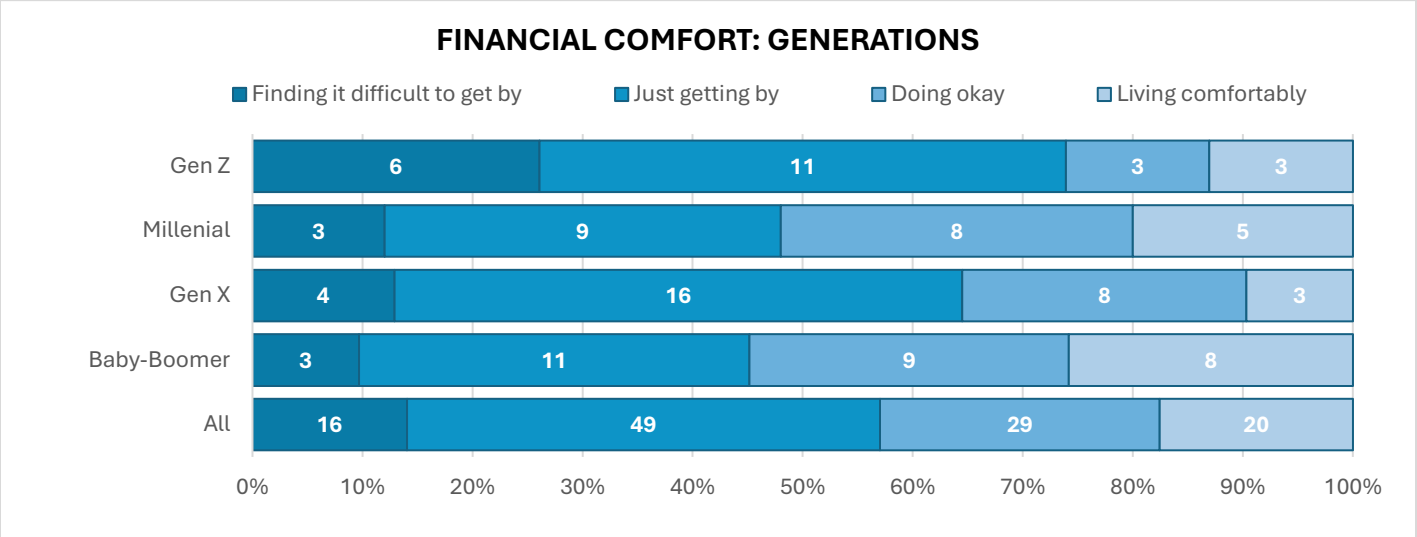


Figure 11 Respondents' Perceptions of Financial Comfort: Overall and by Generation

Respondents' Economic Challenges

Across the full sample, flexible schedule needs emerged as the most common challenge, with 37% of respondents (n=42) rating it very challenging and another 18% (n=20) rating it moderately challenging. Healthcare and housing also stood out as broader challenges: 18% (n=20) rated healthcare very challenging and 25% (n=28) rated it moderately challenging, while 13% (n=15) rated housing very challenging and 23% (n=26) rated it moderately challenging. By contrast, internet, transportation, and childcare were most often not challenges or did not apply to respondents. Internet access was least likely to be a challenge, with 76% (n=87) saying it was not a challenge, followed by transportation at 64% (n=73). Childcare had the highest "prefer not to answer/does not apply" response, at 58% (n=66), suggesting that it was not relevant for many respondents, though those who did experience childcare challenges tended to describe them as at least moderately challenging.

Table 7 Respondents' Rating of Various Challenges Related to Workforce Participation

	Childcare	Transportation	Internet	Housing	Healthcare	Education	Legal Support	Flexible Schedule	Losing Benefits
Very Challenging	4% (n=5)	5% (n=6)	2% (n=2)	13% (n=15)	18% (n=20)	11% (n=12)	11% (n=12)	37% (n=42)	16% (n=18)
Moderately Challenging	3% (n=3)	4% (n=5)	3% (n=3)	23% (n=26)	25% (n=28)	10% (n=11)	10% (n=11)	18% (n=20)	9% (n=10)
Slightly Challenging	4% (n=4)	17% (n=19)	14% (n=16)	16% (n=18)	17% (n=19)	25% (n=29)	11% (n=12)	21% (n=24)	6% (n=7)

Not a Challenge	32% (n=36)	64% (n=73)	76% (n=87)	41% (n=47)	37% (n=42)	36% (n=41)	30% (n=34)	14% (n=16)	31% (n=35)
Prefer not to answer/does not apply	58% (n=66)	10% (n=11)	5% (n=6)	7% (n=8)	4% (n=5)	18% (n=21)	39% (n=45)	11% (n=12)	39% (n=44)

*Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Perspectives on schedule flexibility varied by generation and disability status. Millennials (48%, n=12) and Baby Boomers (39%, n=12) were more likely than Gen X and Gen Z respondents to rate flexible scheduling as very challenging. Additionally, nearly half of respondents who identified as having a disability (45%, n=9) rated flexible schedules as very challenging, compared with 37% (n=33) of respondents without a disability.

Another difference emerged between employed and unemployed respondents regarding the level of challenge associated with accessing legal support. A larger proportion (47%, n=11) of those unemployed rated access to legal support as at least slightly challenging than employed respondents (21%, n=16).

Job-Seeker Experiences Finding Employment

The survey asked all respondents to share insights, perspectives, and experiences pursuing employment, including the work schedules they consider, how they find job opportunities, and the importance of various benefits employers can offer.

Type of Work Sought

The survey asked respondents who were actively looking for, or considering looking for, a new job in the coming months (n=100) about their scheduling needs (see Table 8). Nearly two-thirds (61%, n=61) expected to seek full-time employment, while 35% (n=35) said they would need a part-time role. Another 16% (n=16) needed to set their own schedule. The school calendar was less prominent: 8% (n=8) needed to work during school hours, and 3% (n=3) needed to work outside school hours.

Table 8 Schedule Sought When Searching for a Job

If you are planning to look for a job, what type of schedule would you need?	Frequency* (n=100)
Full-time	61% (n=61)
Part-time	35% (n=35)
Need to make my own schedule	16% (n=16)
During school hours	8% (n=8)
Outside school hours	3% (n=3)
Other	4% (n=4)

*Response counts do not match the total frequency because respondents could select multiple schedule options.

How to Find Opportunities

All respondents described how they found their current or most recent position. Approximately 40% (n=45) reported using an online platform; most of these respondents (n=41) used a platform with national reach, such as Indeed or Craigslist. Only four respondents used Vermont JobLink. Use of other Vermont-specific employment resources was similarly low: only three respondents reported finding employment through the Department of Labor, HireAbility, or another employment agency. Word of mouth was also common, with 30% (n=34) saying they used personal connections or referrals. Full results appear in Table 9.

Table 9 Method of Finding Current/Most Recent Job (n=114)

How did you find your most recent (or current) job?	Frequency* (n=114)
Online (Indeed, Craigslist, etc.)	36% (n=41)
Word of Mouth (friend, family, guidance counselor, etc)	30% (n=34)
Newspaper ad	8% (n=9)
Started Business	5% (n=6)
Other	5% (n=6)
Online (Vermont Job Link)	4% (n=4)
Employment Agency (Department of Labor, HireAbility, etc.)	3% (n=3)
Radio ad	0
Job Fair	0
N/A	10% (n=11)

*Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Gen Z respondents were more likely than members of any other generation to report finding their current or most recent position through word of mouth (39%, n=9). Reported use of word of mouth decreased with age: Millennials had the second-highest share (32%, n=8), followed by Gen X respondents (23%, n=7) and Baby Boomers (19%, n=6).

Employer Benefits

When evaluating a job prospect, respondents placed the greatest importance on core economic supports, especially pay, insurance, paid time off, and flexible schedule options. Pay stood out most strongly, with 69% (n=78) of respondents saying it was very important, followed by insurance at 57% (n=65), paid time off at 46% (n=52), and flexible schedule options at 42% (n=47). By contrast, family or parental leave and support related to wages and state benefits appeared to be lower priorities or less broadly applicable: 30% (n=34) said family or parental leave was not important, and 27% (n=31) said support related to wages and state benefits was not important, with relatively high shares also selecting "prefer not to answer/does not apply" for these two areas. Full results are displayed in Figure 12 below.

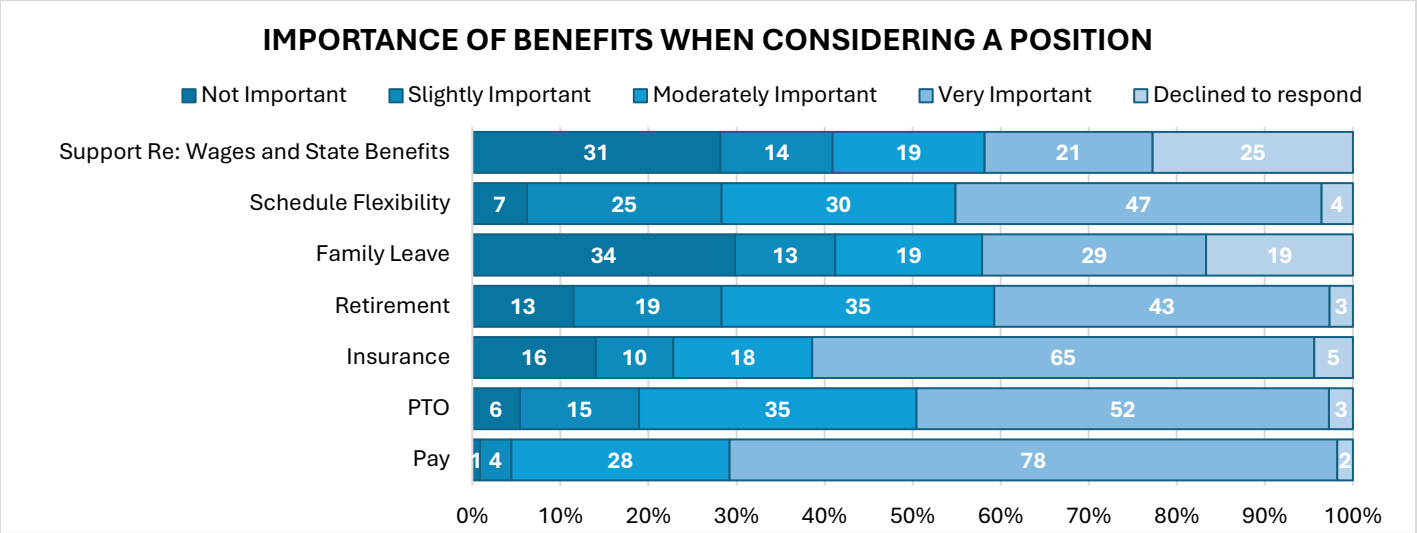


Figure 12 Rating the Importance of Benefits When Considering a Job Opportunity

Several subgroup differences emerged in how respondents rated employer benefits. Pay was broadly important, but Gen X, Millennial, and Gen Z respondents were more likely than Boomers to rate compensation as very important. Insurance also showed a generational pattern: larger shares of Millennial respondents (72%, n=18) and Gen X respondents (71%, n=22) rated insurance as very important, compared with Boomer respondents (39%, n=12) and Gen Z respondents (43%, n=10). One in four Baby-Boomers said insurance was not important, while respondents from other generations were much less likely to say the same. PTO showed smaller subgroup differences, though respondents with disabilities were somewhat less likely to rate PTO as very important (30%, n=6) than respondents without disabilities (49%, n=46), as were youth ages 16–24.

Millennial respondents stood out across several other benefits. More than two-thirds of Millennials rated retirement savings programs as very important (68%, n=12), compared with roughly one-quarter of respondents from other generations. Millennials were also more likely to rate family or parental leave as very important (48%, n=12), compared with 16% to 22% among other generations, and more likely to rate flexible schedule options as very important (68%, n=17), compared with Gen X (45%, n=14), Baby Boomers (39%, n=12), and Gen Z (9%, n=2). Support related to wages and state benefits showed one notable generational difference: 44% of Millennials (n=11) rated it very important, compared with roughly one in ten respondents from other generations.

Additional Employer Benefits

Respondents placed especially high importance on employer practices that signal fair treatment, respect, and supportive working conditions. A living wage and fair pay were rated very important by 88% of respondents (n=100), followed by being respected and valued at work (82%, n=93) and good working conditions (80%, n=91). Having a voice at work was also a strong priority, with 64% (n=73) rating it very

important. By comparison, onboarding and training opportunities that support career advancement were less likely to be rated very important, although both remained meaningful to many respondents: 44% (n=50) rated onboarding very important, and 48% (n=55) rated training opportunities very important. Onboarding had the largest share rating it only slightly important (18%, n=20), while training opportunities had the largest share rating it not important (4%, n=5).

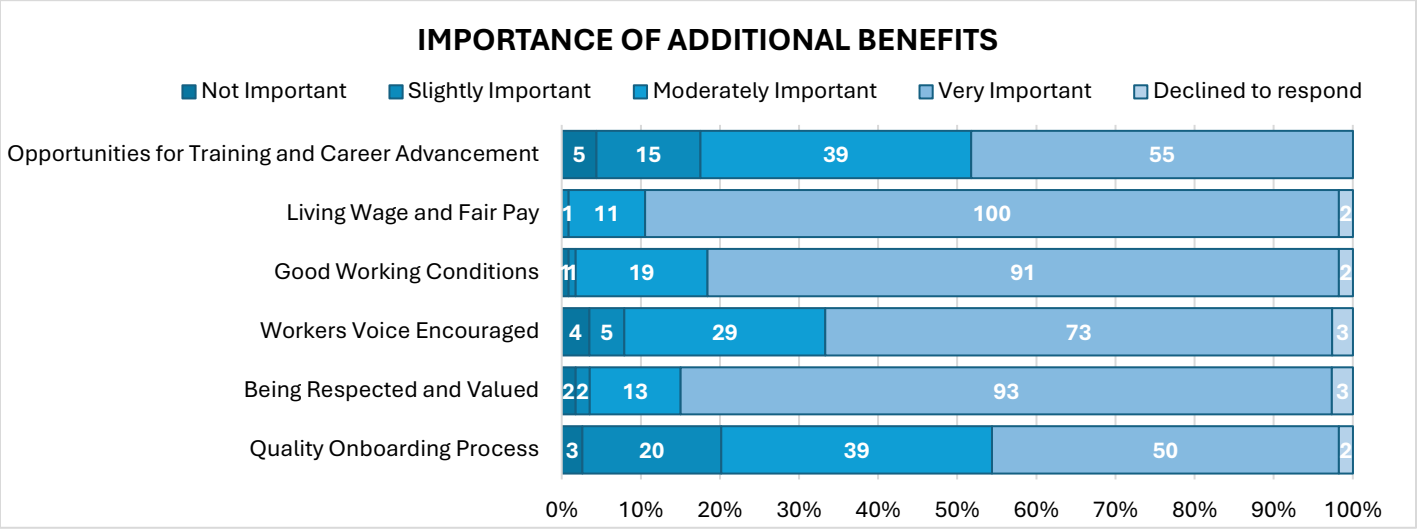


Figure 13 Rating the Importance of Additional Benefits

Most of the priorities in this table were broadly shared across respondent groups, though opinions about training opportunities showed a clear generational difference. Roughly one-quarter of Boomer respondents rated training opportunities to support career advancement as very important, compared with more than half of respondents from other generations. Furthermore, all five respondents who rated training opportunities as not important identified as Boomers.

Findings and Recommendations

The Addison County Job Seeker Survey highlights several interconnected factors that influence workforce participation, employment retention, and career advancement. Because the survey reflects the experiences of volunteers rather than a statistically representative sample, its findings should be interpreted as directional evidence to guide further investigation and program development.

By combining these insights with employer input, community partnerships, and additional workforce data, ACEDC and WEP can develop practical, locally informed strategies to strengthen economic participation and support a more accessible and resilient workforce in Addison County.

Findings

ACEDC identified the following key findings and recommendations from its analysis:

Finding 1: Financial security is a major concern, even among people who are working.

Only 14% of respondents reported living comfortably, while 43% said they were doing okay, 25% were just getting by, and 18% were finding it difficult to get by. Respondents identified housing, healthcare, and other living expenses as significant challenges. Furthermore, compensation, benefits, healthcare, and the cost of living were among the most frequently cited concerns affecting workers.

Employment alone does not necessarily translate into financial stability. While financial comfort was higher among employed respondents than unemployed ones, nearly one-quarter of full-time-employed respondents (22%) and half of part-time-employed respondents (47%) said they were finding it difficult to get by or are just getting by.

Finding 2: Worker retention deserves as much attention as recruitment, with compensation, workplace culture and scheduling influencing both.

Employers may not be able to rely solely on recruitment to address workforce shortages as more than two-thirds of employed respondents (68%) said they were somewhat or very likely to actively seek a job with another employer within the next year.

When considering employment options, traditional employment benefits matter, but workers also place high value on respect. In terms of traditional benefits, a living wage and fair pay were rated very important by 88% of respondents, health insurance by 57% of respondents, and paid time off by 46%. Respect and feeling valued at work were also rated very important by 82% of respondents, good working conditions by 80%, and having a voice at work by 64%. Employer engagement should address both compensation and workplace practices. Smaller employers that cannot compete with larger organizations on every benefit may still have opportunities to improve communication, employee voice, respect, and working conditions.

Flexible scheduling was another important consideration for respondents. More than a third of respondents (37%) rated flexible scheduling as very challenging, and another 18% rated it moderately challenging. Among people considering a job change, 35% anticipated needing part-time work and 16% needed to set their own schedules. Scheduling was also especially important to individuals with disabilities, nearly half of whom cited flexible scheduling as a challenge to employment, as well as to Millennials. Employers may be missing qualified workers when positions have rigid schedules or limited options for adjusting hours. Flexibility may be particularly important for workers managing disabilities, caregiving, other responsibilities, or changing employment needs.

Finding 3: Job seekers may need better access to opportunities and more support navigating hiring requirements.

Both the visibility of available jobs and the accessibility of hiring processes may be barriers for the Addison County workforce. Eleven responses from unemployed participants identified a need for more employment opportunities or an easier way to find them, with six specifically identifying opportunities or access to them as a challenge in the open-response coding. Furthermore, utilization of centralized job-posting resources was low among respondents, with only four respondents reported finding their current or most recent job through Vermont JobLink, and three cited the Department of Labor, HireAbility, or another employment agency.

Improving job discovery alone may not be enough if candidates also need help addressing hiring requirements or connecting with responsive employers. Nine responses identified background-related barriers, including education requirements, licensing, background checks, and résumé gaps. Respondents also raised age-related discrimination, scheduling needs, and employer responsiveness.

Finding 4: Workforce needs and effective support may differ across the population.

Survey responses suggest that workforce needs differ across populations. Respondents identifying as having a disability reported a 45% unemployment rate, compared with 15% among respondents without a disability. Unemployed respondents were more likely than employed respondents to identify access to legal support as at least a challenge. Educational attainment was associated with differences in reported unemployment and financial comfort. Generational differences appeared in benefit preferences, including insurance, retirement savings, and family leave among others; additionally, Gen Z respondents were more likely than respondents in other generations to report finding their current or most recent job through word of mouth.

Considering the multitude of experiences, a single workforce intervention is unlikely to meet everyone's needs. Programs should be designed with specific populations and barriers in mind, while avoiding assumptions that every member of a group shares the same experience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings described above, ACEDC offers the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Engage employers around job quality and employee retention strategies.

Workforce development efforts should consider job quality and the relationship between wages, benefits, and the cost of living—not just the number of jobs filled. Emphasizing job quality will be critical to address the concerns for financial distress (see Finding 1 above) and employee retention (see Finding 2 above) reflected in the survey responses. While compensation is an important factor in job quality, it is essential for employers to continue offering no- and low-cost benefits, such as schedule flexibility.

Suggested Actions

- Share survey findings with employers participating in the WEP, ACEDC's business, municipal, and community organization members, and the public through appropriate channels.
- Develop an employer-facing resource on living wages that is specific to Addison County.
- Encourage employers to review compensation and benefits packages, including healthcare, paid time off, and retirement options.
- Help employers identify lower-cost ways to improve employee voice, recognition, communication, and working conditions.
- Work with employers to identify positions that could accommodate flexible start times, adjusted shifts, part-time schedules, or alternative scheduling arrangements.
- Identify opportunities for employers to expand part-time positions or provide additional hours to workers who want them.
- Develop examples of scheduling practices that have worked for local employers.

Recommendation 2: Improve job discovery and connections between job seekers and employers within Addison County.

Respondents most commonly reported using national online platforms and personal connections to find employment. Reported employment challenges differed notably between respondents who relied on these methods, suggesting that job-search approaches may reflect differences in job seekers' needs, experiences, and perceptions.

Those who used a national platform to find their current or most recent job were less likely (26%) than their counterparts (42%) to rate finding a job with schedule flexibility as very challenging. Differences in scheduling considerations were also reflected in respondents' open-text answers. Of the 18 open responses concerning challenges finding employment from individuals who reported using a national platform, seven referenced a need for looking outside of the area to find hybrid or remote positions or jobs that offered scheduling flexibility. Conversely, among those who relied on word-of-mouth, no open

text responses described scheduling concerns; instead, the most common themes included concern for cost-of-living, housing, and healthcare coverage.

Taken together, these findings suggest that national online platforms may be particularly useful to job seekers looking for opportunities that meet specific scheduling needs or offer remote or hybrid work, including positions outside Addison County. While the survey cannot establish why individuals chose particular job-search methods, the differences in reported challenges suggest that job seekers' needs and priorities may influence how they search for work.

There is an opportunity to complement national platforms by strengthening local job discovery and connections between job seekers and Addison County employers. This could include making local openings easier to find in a centralized, accessible format; working with employers to clearly communicate scheduling flexibility and remote or hybrid options; and creating more opportunities for job seekers and employers to connect directly. These efforts could help residents identify local opportunities that align with their needs while helping employers reach a broader pool of potential candidates. There is an opportunity to accomplish this by evaluating, tuning, and promoting Vermont-specific resources, such as HireAbility and Vermont JobLink, which relatively few reported using.

Suggested Actions:

- Encourage employers to promote openings via multiple outreach methods, pairing national platforms with local resources.
- Help employers improve job postings by clearly identifying pay ranges, benefits, scheduling requirements and/or flexibility, qualifications, and advancement opportunities; consider developing a job posting exemplar or template that employers—particularly employers without dedicated Human Resources personnel—can leverage when posting opportunities.
- Encourage employers to respond promptly to applicants and communicate clearly about hiring decisions.
- Explore a coordinated referral process through which community partners can connect job seekers with appropriate employers and support services.
- Coordinate with the Department of Labor, HireAbility, educational institutions, and community organizations to improve awareness of existing employment resources.
- Continue partnerships with service providers to better understand how transportation, childcare, healthcare, and other supports affect people's ability to work.

Recommendation 3: Reduce barriers to hiring and career advancement.

Related to the previous recommendation, there is an opportunity to strengthen how employers and community members address the barriers Addison County resident experience in both establishing employment and advancing their careers. Unemployed respondents identified education requirements, licensing, background checks, résumé gaps, and age discrimination as obstacles. Employed

respondents also expressed interest in professional development and career pathways. Where possible, employers, ACEDC, WEP, and relevant State and community organizations may consider the suggested actions below to remove or reframe employment pre-requisites, bolster inclusive hiring practices, and support the utilization of career development resources and pathways.

Suggested Actions

- Encourage employers to identify positions where skills, experience, or demonstrated competencies could substitute for unnecessary degree requirements.
- Connect job seekers with résumé assistance, interview preparation, licensing guidance, and relevant employment services.
- Explore work-based learning opportunities, including internships, apprenticeships, work experiences, and employer-led training.
- Partner with educators and training providers to align training opportunities with actual local employer needs.
- Investigate whether existing programs can better support people with employment gaps or criminal records, where applicable and consistent with job requirements.
- Work with employers to identify where the job description and requirements for open roles can be adjusted to align with job-seekers at either end of their careers: Gen Z and Baby-Boomer residents of Addison County.
- Coordinate actions taken related to this recommendation with Recommendation 2 concerning strengthening connections between employers and job-seekers.

Recommendation 4: Develop focused youth outreach and career engagement.

Workforce participation among young adults will be critical to future strength of the economy in Addison County. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national unemployment rate among 16- to 24-year-olds was approximately 10% in the summer of 2026.[3] There was a similar unemployment rate among Gen Z survey respondents (9.5%), though there is no publicly available data tracking Vermont's youth unemployment. The importance of youth employment is also evident in the statewide trend of fewer young adults entering the workforce than there are retirees. In fact, the Vermont Futures Project estimates that 14,800 workers are projected to retire annually through 2029, compared to roughly 2,100 high school graduates and 4,500 college graduates estimated to stay in Vermont and enter the Vermont workforce per year.[4]

[3] Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. (n.d.). Unemployment Rate – 16-24 Yrs (LNS14024887). FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LNS14024887

[4] Vermont Futures Project. (n.d.). People-based community economic development. https://vtfuturesproject.org/people/

Though youth-specific findings are preliminary given the limitations outlined in the introduction, both survey responses and ACEDC's experience administering the survey highlight the potential value of focused, relationship-driven outreach for youth-focused workforce initiatives. ACEDC initially struggled to secure participation from younger residents but received additional responses after sharing the survey with an Addison County social group for young adults. This experience illustrates the importance of identifying effective outreach channels and building relationships with young adults and the organizations they trust. Survey responses offer a complementary insight: Gen Z respondents were more likely than respondents in other generations to report finding their current or most recent job through word of mouth. While this finding should be interpreted cautiously given the small number of youth respondents, it suggests that trusted personal networks may play an important role in connecting young adults with employment opportunities.

Suggested Actions

- Conduct focus groups or listening sessions with young people ages 16–24 to understand their employment goals, barriers, and perceptions of local career opportunities.
- Partner with schools, youth organizations, and employers to identify effective outreach channels.
- Explore youth-oriented career events, employer visits, job-shadowing, internships, and other opportunities to build relationships with local employers.
- Ask young people what would make employment in Addison County more attractive, including their views on pay, scheduling, transportation, training, and advancement.
- Use findings to develop an outreach and engagement strategy based on youth perspectives rather than assumptions about their needs.

Recommendation 5: Improve workforce data collection and ongoing evaluation.

The survey provides directional insights, but the small sample sizes for some populations and the voluntary recruitment approach limit the conclusions ACEDC can draw about the broader county workforce.

Suggested Actions

- Conduct focused follow-up research with youth, people with disabilities, adults without a high school diploma, and other groups whose experiences are not adequately captured.
- Supplement job-seeker perspectives with employer interviews, workforce data, and input from education and service providers.
- Establish a consistent set of indicators to monitor workforce participation, employer engagement, job placements, and retention.
- Repeat selected survey questions periodically to track potential changes.
- Document sample sizes and limitations when reporting subgroup results, and avoid treating survey percentages as countywide prevalence estimates.