

College & Career Event Planning Toolkit



Advance
Vermont



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About Advance Vermont

Advance Vermont is a statewide partnership of leaders from business, education, government, nonprofits and philanthropy with a unified goal to increase educational attainment in Vermont for the benefit of our citizens, communities and economy. Our mission is to advance the civic and economic vitality of Vermont by growing the number of Vermonters with degrees and credentials, increasing equity in educational attainment, and strengthening connections between education, training, and employment. www.advancevermont.org

About VSAC GEAR UP

Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) provides information and resources to support Vermont students in pursuing education and training after high school. VSAC's GEAR UP program is a federally funded program that serves middle school and high school students in their pursuit of careers, college, and training after high school. VSAC GEAR UP also provides schools and state partners with resources and support to improve college and career readiness for all Vermont students.

www.vsac.org/gear-up

Resources adapted from: [GEAR UP Oregon](#), [GEAR UP Washington](#), [The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation](#), [Federal Student Aid](#), and [Vermont Student Assistance Corporation](#). We're always looking for ways to make this toolkit better. With this in mind, please send your suggestions to: advancevermont@vsac.org.

Why Does College And Career Readiness Matter In Vermont?

The J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation's 2018 Pathways to Promising Careers reports that between 2018-2028, 100 percent of Vermont's high demand, high-wage jobs will require education and training beyond a high school diploma, and nearly 80% of these will require a "credential of value" (such as an apprenticeship, certificate, or degree). Yet only 50 percent of Vermonters currently have a postsecondary credential.

For the prosperity and equity of Vermont's citizens, the strength of its economy and the vitality of its communities, 70 percent of Vermont's workforce must have a postsecondary credential by 2025.

Why Hold A College Or Career Event In Your Community?

Communities and families have tremendous influence over the trajectories of local Vermonters. For communities to flourish, community members need enough education or training to earn a livable wage in a job they find meaningful, and to be productive and engaged in the local community.

Sometimes, community members are aware of the resources and opportunities available to them, but aren't sure of the first step in accessing those resources and opportunities. Sometimes they really aren't familiar with their options. College and career events provide access to resources and information, and also send the message to community members that the community supports them in pursuing their dreams and investing back in its own vital human resources.

How To Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to be brief, hands-on, and immediately useful in planning your college and career event. Some sections are specific to college and career events, and some sections are focused on general event planning. Use the sections that are relevant to you and complement your existing knowledge and skill set.



Resources Available to Download

All resources are available for download at <https://advancevermont.com/event-planning-toolkit/>

Planning

- Sample planning timeline
- Sample budget
- Tips for making nametags
- Tips for attendee, staff and presenter folders
- Tips on event timing
- Example packing list
- Example event evaluation

Presenters & Exhibitors

- Tips for inviting employers to participate
- Sample career workshop details
- Sample presenter communications
- Sample RFP
- STEM Fair invitation to participate template

Venue

- Questions to ask offsite venues
- Sample site plan
- Tips for event signage

Volunteers & Committee Members

- Day-of staff and volunteer roles
- Sample committee member recruitment email
- Sample volunteer emails
- Sample volunteer schedule
- Tips for choosing and utilizing committee members

Marketing & Attendees

- Attendee registration tips
- Sample attendee emails
- Sample marketing content

Example Events & Activities

- Freshman Frenzy overview
- Freshman Frenzy materials
- Zombie Apocalypse scholarship activity



Event Development

Critical Questions To Define Your College And Career Event

Start by asking yourself a few big questions below. Write your answers down, and refer to them as you plan the details of the event. Often, when planning something for our community, we are tempted to start with the details (where, when, etc.). We encourage you to answer the big questions first, as they will define the details:

What

What are you trying to achieve with this event?

If the event is a success, what specific outcomes will you see?

Who

Who do you want to come to this event? Middle School students? High School students? Adults? Parents? Moderate-income/first-generation students only, or a broader group? School counselors? Teachers? Administrators?

Are Vermont students facing systematic oppression based on identity factors such as race/ethnicity, country of origin, and ability included in your target audience?

When

When is the best time to reach your target audience?

Have you considered time of year, academic calendar – including school vacations and testing dates, sports schedules, when applications are due for different types of programs (e.g. Adult Technical Education programming, Vermont postsecondary applications, etc.)?

Where

Which location and venue type would be most convenient for your audience? A college? Middle/High School? Community center? Event space?

Does what you're trying to achieve match the venue?



Event Development

Vermont Career Resources

Local college and career events will be most successful when they target local needs. Consider the regional skills and trades needed in your area of Vermont and be sure employers and/or education/training providers in these areas are represented (if that fits the event you are hosting). Consult the following sources for up to date information on local labor market needs:

- [Vermont Department of Labor Economic and Labor Market Information](#)
- [McClure Foundation Pathways to Promising Careers Report](#)
- [Regional Technical Centers](#)
- [Regional Development Corporations](#)
- [Vermont Talent Pipeline Management \(Industry Collaboratives\)](#)

Groups to Consider Including in Your Event

- Representatives from local employers (see Resources Available to Download for tips for engaging employers)
- Local higher education institutions (or institutions/technical training programs from across the state or region)
 - » Include representatives who can speak about Dual Enrollment and Early College
 - » Include representatives who offer non-degree programs, including educational certificates, occupational licenses, registered apprenticeships, and adult technical education
 - » Include representatives from on-campus student groups focused on diversity, equity, and belonging (Black Student Unions, LGBTQ+ Affinity Groups, etc.)
- Representatives from schools including:
 - » High School Career and Technical Education Directors/ Adult Technical Education leaders, Co-op Coordinators
 - » High School Flexible Pathways Coordinators/ Work-based Learning Coordinators
 - » School Counselors
- Agency representatives including from:
 - » Vermont Department of Labor
 - » Vermont Agency of Education
 - » Vocational Rehab
 - » Vermont HITEC
 - » VSAC (Vermont State Grants, Scholarships, Loans, 529 Savings)
- Community-based organizations focused on supporting people of specific identities (local Black Lives Matter or NAACP chapters, LGBTQ+ support services, resettlement support organizations, etc.)



Fundraising

Consider the following potential funders as you look to secure resources to hold your event:

- Local and national foundations with a focus on College and Career Readiness
- Area employers
- In-kind donations (i.e. Venue space from a local employer and/or higher education institution)



Marketing

Consider the following for event marketing:

- Promotional language that can be shared with partners to help them market the event (see example in Resources Available to Download)
- Posters for schools, libraries, community centers, coffee shops, grocery stores, laundromats, etc. TIP – Check out Canva.com for a free resource to create event posters.
- Postcards to mail to students and families
- Lawn signs, banners
- Multiple emails to agency professionals, students, parents, school contacts

- Multiple emails from event planning committee members to their networks (provide them message to send)
- Posting in neighborhood groups/blogs (e.g. Front Porch Forum) and on social media
- Facebook event and ads
- Google search and display ads
- Regional radio advertising
- Regional newspaper digital or print advertising
- Local access TV



Event Ideas

Exploration Events

Below are ideas for events that help attendees explore career and college opportunities.

Career Panel

Audience: *Middle or High School*

Overview

Opportunity for attendees to learn about a variety of promising local careers directly from employers.

What to do

Invite local employers to come talk to attendees about career opportunities in their industry.

How to do it

This structure works well as a workshop or assembly. Invite 4-6 employers to be part of your panel. Ask each to prepare a short presentation (5 minutes max) that:

- Tells attendees what their organization does and what it's like to work for them
- Identifies options for training pathways that are easy (low barrier to entry to industry)
- Identifies critical jobs in this career pathway – and potential salaries
- Identifies education and training programs that will help attendees get hired or advance their career within this industry
- Identifies what skills hiring managers are looking for in all applicants
- Anything else they think is important to include that would inspire attendees to consider a career with them and/or in their industry

Assign a moderator to introduce each panelist and help transition between them. Leave time for attendees to ask questions at the end. See Resources Available to Download for sample questions that a moderator can ask to get things started.

Another option, especially if you have the time and space, is to make this more interactive. This can be done in one large space similar to the STEM Fair (outlined below), where local employers are given a table and asked to bring a hands-on activity related to their job that attendees can transition through at their leisure. Or, for more structure, have attendees choose the careers they want to hear about and rotate to different rooms for 30-60 minute workshops. Have presenters begin with the short presentation described above and then lead the group in a hands-on activity related to their career.

Tips

- Consider inviting presenters that represent promising careers as identified in the McClure Foundation Pathways to Promising Careers Report, Vermont Department of Labor Regional Labor Market Information and the Vermont Talent Pipeline critical industries
- Invite a diverse group of presenters from various backgrounds and identity groups so more attendees can see themselves in the presenters
- Consider inviting postsecondary representatives who can speak to degree and non-degree options for pursuing these careers
- If structuring as an assembly, ask presenters to share their presentations with you in advance so that you can compile into one powerpoint to make transitions smoother
- If structuring as an expo or workshops, be sure to confirm presenter set-up needs (e.g. Will they need access to power, tables, a projector/projector cables to show a powerpoint, outdoor space, etc.)

Overview

Hands-on opportunity for attendees to try out STEM Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) activities across a variety of careers. The goal is to engage and inspire attendees in building a STEM identity and considering careers in the STEM field.

What to do

Invite community businesses and organizations to come lead a hands-on STEM activity related to their work.

How to do it

The ideal location for this kind of event is a gymnasium or other large room with easy access to the outdoors (to allow for both indoor and outdoor exhibits). Set up tables for exhibitors to lead activities for students. Ideally activities should last approximately 15-20 minutes and be able to engage between 5-15 attendees at a time. We have found two hours to be an appropriate amount of time for attendees to spend at this event. If you are trying to serve a large group, consider offering a morning and afternoon session (and providing lunch for exhibitors in between sessions).

Tips

- Many exhibitors will require access to power. Make sure your space allows for this, plan to provide extension cords and power splitters if possible, and position exhibitors according to their power needs.
- Confirm how many attendees and exhibitors are able to engage at one time and make sure the numbers add up to match or slightly exceed your projected attendance (e.g. 10 exhibitors that can each engage 6 attendees at a time would be appropriate for attendance of 60 or less)
- Consider inviting businesses that might not traditionally be considered in the STEM field but involve STEM components – e.g. Ferry (or other) boat captains using angles and triangulation to find their position
- Invite a diverse group of STEM employees from various backgrounds and identity groups so more students can see themselves represented in STEM careers
- Be sure to include careers that can be obtained with a certificate or professional training program as well as options that require a four year or advanced degree.
- Rather than requiring attendees to visit a certain number of booths, consider letting them explore at their own leisure. Some may want to dive into an activity and focus on it for the entirety of the event. Others may want to check out several activities. Allowing them to choose makes the experience more meaningful and lets attendees pursue their own unique interests.

While the events below are primarily aimed at 12th graders to support them in their transition from high school to postsecondary education and training. To the extent that event planners involve the entire school or community, they can also help raise aspirations and plant the seed for younger grades, who may be starting to think about their futures. Many of the events below can also be adapted for adult learners.

Application Week

Audience: 12th graders | Timing: September

Overview

The American College Application Campaign (ACAC) is a national effort to increase the number of first-generation college students and students from low-income families pursuing a college degree or other postsecondary credential. The primary purpose of this effort is to help high school seniors navigate the complex college application and admissions process and ensure they apply to at least one postsecondary institution. The effort occurs during the school day, with a focus on students who might not otherwise apply to college or training programs.

What to do

Designate a day (or several days depending on your space availability and number of projected attendees) to assist students as they complete at least one college application.

How to do it

Visit the ACT's website for site coordinators to find detailed planning materials, including a planning timeline, templates, day-of-event, post-event, and student resources. Begin prepping students for the event the spring of their 11th grade year or the beginning of their 12th. Encourage them to begin researching schools and programs they would like to apply to. [Visit the ACT's website for site coordinators](#) to find detailed programming.

Hold the event in your school or organization's computer facilities or ask participants to bring laptops. Have attendees come to the event with:

- A plan for application fees or fee waivers (NOTE – It can be uncomfortable for students experiencing poverty to have to request a fee waiver, see tips below for ways to approach this)
- Final versions of admissions essays saved somewhere they can access
- All information needed to complete the application

Tips

- Consider meeting with each student individually prior to the event both to discuss where they might want to apply, and to bring up the opportunity for a fee waiver and see if they might qualify.
- Consider having all students create an account with both the Common App and the Coalition App. The Coalition App automatically grants fee waivers to students depending on their answers to a couple questions they answer while creating their profile, and will only accept colleges who prove that they provide substantial support (through financial aid, scholarships, or other means) to low-income or otherwise underrepresented students.
- Consider providing all students with a list of schools that don't require an application fee. This will be helpful regardless of income level, and especially for students who are reluctant to apply.
- Students shouldn't need to apply to a 4-year program to participate. Be sure to support students interested in applying to 2-year and non-degree programs (such as certificate, apprenticeship, license, or industry-recognized credential) as well.
- Review supplemental activities provided in site coordinator resources and determine which activities you want to use to make your event fun and exciting.
- If the goal of the event is to also support students who plan to go on for training instead of 2 or 4 year college, consider a simultaneous workshop/programming targeting local technical center offerings, apprenticeship opportunities, etc.

Application Week

Audience: 12th graders | Timing: September

Attendees will gather at the designated time to submit their applications. Have volunteers who can greet students, help them log-on to the application site, guide students through the application process, help answer any questions, and hand out “I Applied” stickers.

Help ensure students register for the FSA ID after they submit their applications, and follow up after the event to make sure they submit any additional information required by the schools they applied to.

Ideas for involving younger students

- College wall bulletin boards
- “Ask Me!” Signs on offices and classroom doors
- Door decorating contests
- Encourage younger students to begin career, major, and college research. Use [My Next Move](#), ACT’s [ACT Profile](#), NRCCUA’s [MyOptions](#), College Board’s [Big Future](#), Education Trust’s [College Results Online](#), and other appropriate resources.
- Have younger students write a practice application essay following the prompts from the common application

FAFSA Completion

Audience: 12th graders and their parents/guardians | Timing: October

Overview

Filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, known as the FAFSA, is one of the most important steps students and their families can take to pay for college.

Completing the FAFSA is the only way to get federal, state, and institutional aid for college or training—including grants, scholarships, work study, and loans. After students complete the FAFSA they can also complete the [Vermont Grant](#) (Vermont’s income-based grant for postsecondary financial aid) right from the same page.

What to do

Designate a day (or several days depending on your space availability and number of projected attendees) to assist students and parents as they complete the FAFSA and Vermont Grant Application.

How to do it

Recruit a staff member or volunteer who is confident that they understand the application process. VSAC provides Fall Financial Aid trainings across the state each year where individuals can get training in how to complete the FAFSA. If you run into questions while completing, you may call Federal Student Aid or VSAC at (833) 802-8722 for support.

Tips

- Consider holding the event at a time when parents can attend
- Targeted to 12th graders, but 11th graders doing Early College in the coming year can also participate

Ideas for involving younger students:

Have younger students explore the [FAFSA Forecaster](#) and [Expected Family Contribution Calculator](#) to get an idea of what aid they might receive and estimate how much their family will be expected to contribute to college costs

You'll need a space with access to computers.

Attendees should be instructed to bring the following materials:

- Federal 1040EX, 1040A, or 1040 return with all schedules and W-2s for the year 2 years prior to when they're applying for aid (e.g. For the 2019-2020 school year attendees should bring their 2017 tax documents)
- Any documentation that lists taxed and untaxed income for the year 2 years prior to when they're applying for aid (same as above) including Social Security and/or disability benefits
- Monthly Reach Up Family Assistance and Food Stamps/Vermont 3 Squares documentation
- Current balance of checking and savings accounts
- Child support paid and/or received in the year 2 years prior to when they're applying for aid (same as above)
- Home value and debt (if applicable)
- Farm value and debt (if applicable)
- Business value and debt (if applicable)
- Investment value and debt (if applicable)
- Email address and password

They should also be instructed to go to www.studentaid.gov/fsaid to get their FSA ID before coming in.

The presenter should give an overview of the financial aid process and then give attendees time to complete the forms and get support with any questions that come up along the way.

Freshman Frenzy

Audience: 12th graders | Timing: Late May/Early June

Overview

Help prepare your 12th graders to succeed in their first semester at college with a game that walks them through building an ideal course schedule and trying to avoid the common pitfalls that students often make during their first year of school (including overlapping courses & unavailable courses!).

What to do

Schedule a workshop for students to play and debrief the game.

How to do it

Game instructions and downloadable playing cards are available in the Resources Available to Download folder. Assign a facilitator and break attendees into groups of approximately 5 (smaller groups will move through the activity more quickly, larger groups will take more time). Have students play through the game until each has completed their schedule, then debrief using the questions provided.

Talk about scheduling classes, choosing majors, time management, transfer paths and campus resources available to assist with these tasks.



Vermont College and Career Events

Vermont is fortunate to be home to a number of high-quality, large-scale college and career events. Consider supplementing your local events with attending one or more of the following:

New England Association for College Admission Counseling (NEACAC) College Fair – Largest college fair in the state for 9-12th graders. Organized by NEACAC and typically takes place in September alternating annually between UVM and Saint Michael’s College.

Kingdom Career Connect – Career exploration event with hands-on workshops for 8th graders in the Northeast Kingdom. Organized by VSAC and typically takes place in October at Northern Vermont University-Lyndon.

Women Can Do – One-day career immersion experience for 9-12th grade girls from across Vermont, featuring dozens of hands-on workshops and action stations highlighting careers in the skilled trades and STEM fields. Organized by Vermont Works for Women and typically takes place in October at Vermont Technical College.

Sophomore Summits – Career awareness, exploration, and planning event for 10th graders. Organized and take place regionally around the state in the fall and spring (depending on location).

College & Career Pathways – College and career planning events for 10th and 11th graders, parents, and adult learners with workshops on planning and paying for college and career training. Organized by VSAC and take place in late winter/early spring in four locations around the state.

Spring College Fairs – Regional college fairs. Organized and take place regionally around the state in early April.

Vermont Technical College Try a Major Day – Event for 10th and 11th graders that gives students a chance to experience, first-hand, the programs offered at Vermont Technical College (VTC). Students participate and interact with VTC faculty and current students in a major that they would like to “try out” for the day. Organized by VTC and typically takes place in May at their Randolph campus.

Transition & Career Planning Conference – Professional development conference for educators and professionals with workshops on supporting college and career readiness for students and clients. Organized by VSAC and typically takes place in May.

Additionally, VSAC offers the following resources:

Financial Aid Forms Night – VSAC provides these evening workshops to support students and parents through filling out the FAFSA & Vermont Grant forms. Visit the VSAC website for a list of these events in the fall each year.

Financial Aid & Managing College Costs Workshops – VSAC provides these evening workshops to 10th and 11th grade students and parents to share information about how families pay for college costs and the different types of financial aid available. Visit the VSAC website for a list of these events in the spring each year.

FAFSA Fridays – VSAC offers free, in-person appointments at our Winooski office from October – February to provide one-on-one assistance with filling out the FAFSA. Call our FAFSA helpline at 1-888-943-7301 to make an appointment.



Wrap Around Curriculum for High School Students

College and career events are most effective when paired with opportunities both before and after the event to explore interests, career options and the requisite education. In addition to reinforcing learning outcomes with job shadows, internships, work-based learning opportunities, and college visits, consider wrap around curriculum that can be done before or after the event to prepare students and continue the conversation.

Consider the following resources for curriculum and activities to accompany your event:

[Next Gen Personal Finance](#) – High-quality, easy to use curriculum and activities for financial literacy, paying for college, and career planning

[Junior Achievement](#) – Programs for elementary, middle and high school students that support career awareness, exploration, and preparation

[Mapping Your Future](#) – Resources for exploring careers, developing a career plan, preparing and paying for college

[My Career Project](#) – Free Myers Briggs assessment tool with career suggestions by personality type and resources for exploring related training and college options

[College Board's Big Future](#) – Resource for exploring colleges, majors and careers

[My Majors](#) – Personal assessment tool with recommendations for majors, colleges and careers based on student's academic achievements, interests and personality

[FAFSA Forecaster](#) – Planning tool for students in 9–11th grade to get an idea of what aid they might receive

[Expected Family Contribution Calculator](#) – Tool to estimate how much the student's family will be expected to contribute to college costs

[Scholarships & Grants for Vocational Students](#) – Resources for students interested in a certificate program or vocational degree

VSAC Resources

[Adult Student Resources](#) – Curated resources, videos, online tools, and helpful website for adult students in planning for their futures

[Paying for College Guide](#) – Guide to the types of financial aid available, the applications you need to complete, and tools to keep you on schedule and in control of the process

[College Admissions Toolkit](#) – Guide to finding colleges that fit, making the most of campus visits, and staying on track through the application process

[Grants](#) – Resource for understanding and applying for federal, college & Vermont state grants, including Advancement (formerly “non-degree”) grants

[Scholarships](#) – Resources for how to find scholarships, including tips for success and information on avoiding scams

[Federal Loans](#) – Clear descriptions of the types of federal loans available to families

[Unsure About College](#) – Support and resources for students who are unsure about college

[Exploring Career Options](#) – Support and resources for students to consider career options

[High School Student Resources](#) – Curated resources, videos, online tools, and helpful websites for high school students in planning for their futures



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August 2019