



EMPLOYER CLIMATE SURVEY
(Conducted: July 2015)

WRITTEN RESPONSES

**Bennington Employer Survey
Written Responses
July 2015**

Q: 6 - How many years has your company or organization been in Bennington?

40+	7
99	13
100	12
58	5
1884	5
36 (under various names)	17
30?	Less than 1
2	3
52	too long
36	2
7	13
10	
4	
98	
73	
47	
29+	
35	
65	
26	
5	
84	
4	
30+ years providing transportation	
8	
131	
21	
10	
50+	
11	
118	
8	
9	
28	
8	
16	
50	
38	
26	
44	
8	
15	
1.5	
67	

Bennington Employer Survey
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Q: 9 - What do you like best about operating a business or organization in Bennington?

Natural beauty, convenient to transportation

- Access to leaders
- People
- small enough to know where to find resources
- Access to freight
- Community Support
- Have mostly found the town to be very flexible, accessible, and easy to work with.
- The people are some of the most friendly I have ever me.
- Personal contact and local support network
- potential here and the beauty
- Great employees
- The rural setting
- the people
- simplicity
- the people
- contributing positively the community I live in
- quality of life, small town feel, good New England culture
- The partnerships and relationships with other business partners
- Distance, easy drive from MA & NY
- Close to home and the autonomy
- The Community,
- The people in the town office
- The support of the BCIC, the town and the state
- We are close to 3 different states.
- The location is perfect for our business
- Employees enjoy high quality of life, good tactical support from the Town
- The people
- Close to home
- Poor
- Business owners are friendly and proactive
- Beauty of landscape; location: proximity to NYC, Albany metropolis; good fortune in characteristics of my inheritance longevity and name mean closely tied to Bennington
- Local business supported by local people
- It is close to my house. It also is better populated than outlying towns.
- Low overhead
- Location proximity to larger geographic areas, nostalgic look of downtown, historic significance, cleanliness of streets, flowers, lighting, free parking business to business support.
- The monument
- Feeling of being part of a town trying to find their way through a tough economic time with many good people in government, business and not-for-profits
- Access to local, regional, state and federal government.

Bennington Employer Survey
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Q: 10 - What do you like least about operating a business or organization in Bennington?

- “Insider/Native’ vs. “Outsider/Transient” dynamic
- Too small and group think. No mayor or single decision maker
- Lack of identity
- Limited labor pool
- Work Force
- Finding appropriate office space
- No cell service. With so many visitors to Southern Vermont, this is our biggest complaint
- Still figuring that one out
- Declining economy, population and self-image
- Lack of skilled workforce
- Great employees
- Lack of social infrastructure (Restaurants, etc.)
- Negative attitude of residents about Bennington
- High taxes, including water and sewer
- Knowing that people’s expectations for my business and town in general are not reality-based, and trying to manage those expectations.
- Hard to find qualified employees, a large focus on tourism over local business development, lack of good commercial rental space, cost of new flood insurance map that hurts town development, need increase patrol of downtown to address lingerers
- Negative perception in the community that Bennington is dying and there is nothing to do.
- The inability to become a progressive town, like Brattleboro
- Dwindling accounts and customers
- Lack of skilled white collar labor force
- The economy
- Consideration for the needs of the specific business and the willingness to make variations.
- Location relative to major markets
- The lack of communication
- The lack of an abundance of direct labor
- Labor market is difficult. Town leadership is too reactive about economic development, not proactive enough.
- Lack of a well-educated, financially secure audience
- Remote and lack of professional and skilled employees
- Cronyism, Nepotism, Favoritism, Untruthful members of leadership, and too few people hold onto too much power to the detriment of everyone else.
- Not much support or promotion from the town
- Number of key people working Bennington events designed to be public draws and small numbers of people attending local cultural events – can create negative spiral – disheartening – discouraging-
- Lack of help from town and local organizations
- The economy is slow. Bennington is also starting to feel less safe. I live by the hospital. In the past week, my neighbor’s car was broken into while sitting in our common driveway. Another neighbor around the corner had their house broken into while they were sleeping.
- Complete lack of cooperative business and community resources
- The difficulty of running a business in Bennington. When trying to make improvements or changes, being met with a “you can’t do that” response/attitude as opposed to “how can we work together to make that happen?” MAJOR lack of communication – example – finding out about this survey right before it was due-small business owners, often with no staff need to have easy access to information, in a timely fashion that will allow them to respond/react in a time frame that is reasonable. Many business owners do not have “down time” during the work day to respond to email/paperwork and need to schedule it into times their business is closed to the public.
- You
- Limited respect for the services I provide and many who doubt that the town is capable of returning to being a successful place to live and do business.
- There is virtually no labor pool

**Bennington Employer Survey
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Q: 17 - How can the Town of Bennington help you grow your business or organization?

- Increased diversity, stronger overall atmosphere
- Increase vibrancy and improve elementary schools
- Continue support press/legislature
- Provide financial incentives for job growth
- Reduce Taxes & Utilities
- Create an environment that attracts Young Professionals (18-30 age range)
- Tour busses
- Clean up the drug problems and the less than desirables that seem to be roaming our streets
- Create interest to help retain young professionals
- Increasing communication regarding programs and opportunities to enhance business
- Need more restaurants and cafes for our students and faculty
- Additional signage and bus shelters
- Support the downtown and other initiatives that make the town function beyond the bare minimums.
- It can streamline, by centralizing, economic development efforts. The BBC should be subsumed by the Town Economic Development office and efforts coordinated with reasonable accountability. Invest in infrastructure that facilitates a more pleasant experience downtown, and between downtown and Northside: bike racks, a reasonable bike/walking path on Benmont to safely get from here to there: clearly market
- Create a focused jobs plans that hold SOMEONE accountable. Jobs are the foundation of an economy.
- Explore ways the town can promote growth through financial incentives.
- Support the legalizational of recreational marijuana.
- The revolving loans are a big help, as is the support of the BBC.
- Attract more employers to town
- Make the resources that Bennington has to offer more transparent and visible to the business community.
- Develop a plan to make Bennington a destination.
- Attract and retain workforce in the area.
- Get people here and off the bypass. Have things to draw people here.
- By continue helping with energy savings
- Continue to support creative economy projects, workforce development
- Promote Bennington in the Cap. District, Berkshires etc.
- I don't know
- I'm sure the Harringtons and Keanes of the world are doing backflips with the answer to 15, so does it really matter what I answer here?
- Promote town wide events
- By supporting a coordinated program of marketing Bennington as a destination. The question "Why Bennington?" -- why visit? why relocate? -- is at the heart of what is needed. You and this survey are working on this. Thank you (even though I find surveys awkward and unsatisfying). Real (and so effective) branding requires both attractive promise and reliable delivery. That last – reliable delivery—depends upon the “selling power” of guest (aka customer) experiences (aka services) – is what we, the individual businesses and organizations, provide day in and day out. How do we improve this and make this really remarkable – as a Group – as a Community? This - a piece of “community organizing” – is something that the Town can best support by a form of Servant Leadership. An increase in the “infrastructure” of support for such a Community Entity is how the Town can help me grow Bennington Potters. Bennington Potters – by playing as if there was such a Community Entity – has helped call that Entity into being. This is an instance of “Being the change you want to see.” I would be pleased to speak with anyone about this set of ideas.
- Support events and share information
- Provide open and informative communication of open bid and relevant projects in the area, as well as opportunities for diversification. Provide intelligent and targeted marketing for local business
- The infrastructure, manpower, and technology is in place to organize the local business and resources Bennington has to offer to market & grow Bennington as a whole. If we work together we will all do better. As an example: If we continue to create 15 different committees with the same goal in mind but not communication between committees or involving the local business owners (who are

Bennington Employer Survey
Written Responses
July 2015

the backbone of the community) we will continue to run in circles. The silo mentality doesn't serve anyone well. We all need to work together, cross market, have centralized information sources etc-

- Outside Bennington but within Vermont
- Encourage development and use of design services.
- Work on a local and state level to improve the labor pool. It is overwhelmingly the anchor preventing greater growth for us.

**Bennington Employer Survey
Written Responses
July 2015**

Q: 29 - What is the most important action the Town can take to retain and attract businesses?

- Most of the problems are really the state, not the town
- Improve elementary schools and improve downtown vibrancy
- Market the town identity/branding...why come to Bennington needs to be answered
- Tax incentives, higher trained available workforce
- Reduce Crime & Improve work force & reduce utility costs
- Make it a place for young professionals, Develop/build mid-level housing. (120K-160K homes and condos)
- Hire a designated PR person for all aspects Tourism and business relocation.
- Improve quality of life here with more restaurants and retail services
- Develop a strong workforce
- Communicate and get to know who the business leaders are in the community – all of them
- Need a more vital downtown
- Tax incentives
- Improve elementary and secondary education
- Improve employee pool
- Actively seek out larger employers (manufacturing etc), and invest in the infrastructure/education requirements to make them more likely to stay.
- Having a sole focus on creating and maintain jobs and reduce property taxes. This will create a growth economy which in turn helps almost all existing businesses.
- Show they are committed by investing in growth opportunities. Actively recruit.
- Retain and add more area events
- Continue available grant funding and support.
- Retain: help current businesses with marketing & publicity, get BBC to do more marketing and publicity on their behalf
- Create a reason for people to come. Create a single vision that will make Benn a destination.
- I think get people to come here instead of bypassing us for Manchester and other towns
- Needs to make bring more business to the downtown area
- Focus more resources proactively on filling social infrastructure gaps: orchestrate deals to get pubs, cafes and other walkable retail businesses in place
- A more activist govt. is needed
- Business incentive programs
- Remove all current leadership except 1 or 2 and replace them with people who understand business.
- Promotional efforts to drive revenue
- Continue to increase the perceived vitality of the downtown.
- Be available and friendly
- Allow business to come in that can benefit the town. We don't need another dollar store. We don't need massage practices that encourage, imply, or allow prostitution. It makes it difficult for the licensed therapists that are working clinically and professionally.
- Make it, and market it, as a destination – pedestrian and family friendly..
- Communication, Branding/marketing Bennington not only to people from out of the area, but to Benningtonians as well! There are SO many people in our area who think nothing of running to the mall, Albany, Saratoga, Pittsfield etc- because they have NO idea that there are businesses right in town that can meet their need- or they are under the impression that the things in town are boutique and too expensive. Small business owners spend an inordinate amount of time fighting this impression- we will continue to do so, but the town
- Should be leading the charge.
- Resign
- Cooperate with and participate with businesses trying to grow and develop
- Labor pool needs to exist

Bennington Employer Survey
Written Responses
July 2015

Q: 30 - In your experience, what are the top reasons a business would choose to start in or relocate to Bennington?

- Quaint
- Difficult to answer beyond servicing the local population. We need to better attract “out of towners”
- Better quality of life, good support from the state level
- Not so much Bennington but the state of Vermont is not business friendly and until that changes I cannot think of one reason why someone would want to move to Bennington or the state of Vermont
- Bennington’s island like status. The next closest opportunities are Manchester, Wilmington, Williamstown, and Troy. No one likes MA or NY...so location is awesome. Vermont Begins here.
- In general, the goodness of the people. Except for the internet armchair finger pointing trolls
- Quality of life. With crime and drug activity – this is changing
- Slower pace, great environment
- For the “Vermont “ location – relaxed lifestyle
- It is a delightful place to live and work
- Quality of life. Simplicity and cost of opening.
- The attraction of being in Vermont
- Seat of county with good through traffic, and better through traffic potential. Because the owner already lives here. Name recognition and interest generated because of Bennington College. Low cost via foreclosure purchase.
- Currently, only quality of lie. In the future, if we can create jobs, develop the local economy, have an educated and skilled work force and reduce property taxes.
- Quality of life
- Cheap rent, location to MA & NY.
- That hometown atmosphere
- Available real estate, slow turn around, ground floor opportunity, to help with the turn around
- Location. Great infrastructure. Close to Albany and NY. Close to an international airport.
- Efforts of the BCIC with support from the Town and State
- Business owner enjoys living in Bennington or had a positive experience visiting Bennington
- Location
- Customer in the region
- Proximity to NY, MA
- Vitality of downtown; excellence of public education; accessibility, reasonableness and perceived fairness of Town rules and regs.
- The people
- I think Bennington attracts businesses that are minimum wage or just above.
- Lifestyle/wanting a “small town feel” while having close proximity to larger markets.
- Beauty
- Quality of life

Bennington Employer Survey
Written Responses
July 2015

Q: 33 - If you chose “reduce taxes by cutting services already offered”, what municipal service(s) or area(s) would you cut/reduce?

- The entire state of VT needs to reorganize public education
- Get rid of the union as the costs for labor are extremely high. Reduce the regulatory costs for the work performed by the state.
- Find alternate methods of fundraising. And ask for volunteers. Mandatory volunteering for internet trolls..
- Stop arresting drug dealers and arrest the users including the professionals who make the dealers risks worth while
- Subsidized housing, financial support of BBC
- “temporarily increase tax to generate investment and grand-list growth
- The obvious budget of the Maintenance Dept. I do not recommend doing less maintenance but rather requiring greater efficiency
- I am not sure what should be cut. I stay very busy between my business, school, and my family. I am sure I should be spending more time paying attention to where the money is going. I can say my taxes are high. I think sometimes money gets wasted on things like building half a bridge on Benmont Ave instead of closing it and getting it done quicker
- BBC
- For #32 above want to see “Bring in more business and increase tax rolls” as an option-taxes spread out over many as opposed to the struggling few would be a much better scenario.

**Bennington Employer Survey
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Q 35: - Thinking about your business or organizational needs, in what areas could the Town improve its information sharing?

- Much more info about amenities, etc., readily available
 - Non-sports youth achievement, develop functional event calendar
 - Meetings open to the residents on a quarterly basis
 - Push information out-blast lists for Select board minutes, news. Etc.
 - Emails, phone calls when there is a water shut off or flushing
 - Again...centralized PR position would cover this.
 - Only intermittent communication from Town. Businesses are also a resource of information for the town. Should be actively talking with businesses.
 - Email newsletters and informational updates
 - A weekly/monthly e-mail with information-the local paper is not a good resource anymore.
 - Apparently, you've got an email list. Who knew? Any organization funded primarily through town tax dollars to do public works should be declared an instrumentality of the state (town in this instance), and subject to open meeting laws...meaning warned agendas etc that will keep all of us abreast of issues at hand.
 - Tell us what you're doing and share current economic development projects.
 - CAT-TV is underutilized and of inconsistent quality.
 - Town meeting agendas need to be more descriptive. An agenda item that merely says, "Dimitri Garder" (July 27, 2015) for example is of no help and doesn't help me determine if I should attend that meeting.
 - Create a centralize location to get information from all town or development organizations
 - We are located right near main st and yet we are one of the last places to hear about going on.
 - When it concerns tax incentives
 - Better quantitative evaluation of what's working and what isn't in economic development. Most action being taken by working groups is based on anecdotal information at best..
 - It's especially funny to hear John Shanahan tell the local newspaper that he promoted Midnight Madness on the BBC Facebook page when the BBC Facebook page hadn't been updated in 6 Weeks previous to Midnight Madness. A real laugh riot, huh? Did anyone on the Select Board hold John's feet to the fire over that one? Over course not because one of the members of the Select Board -- Michael Keane -- sits on the executive board of the BBC. Incestuousness is Bennington's middle name. Won't even get into my thoughts on folks like Michael Harrington's hold on power here, or Stu's
 - Invest in consolidation and publicizing access to "information sharing" – people are very busy and the people who are doing the most to improve Bennington are the busiest
 - Thinking about business outside of just the downtown
 - Provide full and open disclosure of all municipal business
 - Very difficult for me to respond to this without coming off as snarky, but SERIOUSLY??? There is honestly nowhere to go but up. Keeping regular updates on Town webpage and FB page, a hard copy directory of how to access information (web page addresses/FB page titles/relevant phone numbers to town resources etc-given to every business, a regularly scheduled method of correspondence- ex: a 3pm email every day bcc'd to EVERY business- let US decide if the information is relevant to our business activities- there are things that happen at local, regional, state and national levels that impact us- would love to see someone responsible for gathering that information and delivering it to us- even if it does not directly impact our business- maybe we can then pass on the information or cross pollinate with other businesses around the information/opportunity - (recent examples- economic dev. meeting held in Manchester, the Fresh Track Road Pitch Event held @ Bennington College, this survey...)many businesses had NO idea they were happening OR a once a week newsletter on a specific web page same place/same day each week that we know to go looking for, +/OR postcards hand delivered to each business by a volunteer or a dept. of corrections participant or the high school interact club just to list a few ways to have free delivery. I could stay on this subject a lot longer, but due to just finding out about this survey & the short turn around- I will move on- feel free to contact me about other ideas- there are MANY!
 - Emails/facebook posts about goings on.
 - Don't rely on the chamber. Reach out to businesses directly.
- Q: 39 If not, what is the main reason why you have not provided your feedback to the Town?

**Bennington Employer Survey
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- Way to busy
- Never been asked
- Didn't feel like my feedback was relevant
- I don't know what the answers are to the problems the town faces when dealing with businesses. I just know there are problems
- I have not been in the position to do so
- Yes
- Too busy. Shy. Hesitant to offend. Not at all sure of return on investment.
- Doesn't seem invited
- Yes
- This is a loaded question- happy to discuss further in person.

**Bennington Employer Survey
Written Responses
July 2015**

Q: 49 Anything else you would like to tell us?

- I strongly believe we need to figure who and what Benn is, and brand that image “Gateway to Vermont” Southeast Kingdom” something that identifies Benn to the outside
- Your job is not easy but it is important for the economic development department to stay within the duties of utilities used by the public and to insure that the town tax money is being spent in a way that impacts all, no special interest groups. If you would like to talk to me more about this please do not hesitate to contact me.
- Develop the Putnam (Greenberg) property into Souter Vermont Conference and Entertainment Center – It would spawn restaurants downtown, maybe more hotels, and clean up that block.
- HIRE A PR PERSON. FULL TIME. AND GET SME TOURBUSSES IN HERE. ALSO...FIND THE DAMN LANDLORDS WHO LEAVE SPACES EMPTY. IF TE ARE GOING TO BE EMPTY THE PUT LEGITIMATE BUSINESSES INTHERE RENT FREE AND LET THEM FIX THE PLACES UP. AND LAST BUT NT LEAST...GET RID OF HAPPY ENDINGS MASSAGE PARLOUR ON MAIN ST.
- We are in a downward spiral and something big needs to be done to change that momentum. The town will not have the resources, but if private ideas and funding come up, the town should help those efforts and not impede. I think we should be flexible in allowing businesses to come even if it means variances to zoning or design.
- It must be difficult work to satisfy all the diversified folks in Bennington
- Keep up the great work☺
- Businesses are in Bennington because somebody wanted to be here. We can’t attract more by following the ideas of people who don’t want to be here.
- The town needs to realize that Main street is not going to come back as it once was, they have devoted time and money for years with no results and have ignored Northside Drive, the only time there is any improvement there is when the developer is required to do so.
- I think a mayoral system would better represent the needs of the town.
- We would like to know how the Town feels it helps businesses.
- We would like to see more collaboration among downtown merchants. It should be all us working together, not back biting and competing. The Greater Good....
- My ratings if the town are based on my personal experience not from a business stand point. I really believe that if Bennington supported the legalization of marijuana or having a dispensary here in town you would see an increase in businesses and money for the town to use on appropriate things
- Just wish to apologize for filling out this form late
- The Town scores a 10 on tactical support for our business. I think better coordination among planning groups and a more proactive approach to addressing know economic problems could improve.
- Town manager system does not work
- I’ll share any of those thoughts face to face. I won’t hold my breath waiting for anyone from the town to give me that opportunity. I mean, that would be a “half-baked” idea, right?
- I realize that I don’t know enough about what you do offer to be truly useful as an evaluative data resource. Thank you for this experience which has shown a clear light on that fact. I will take action on this.
- Encourage and listen to your business owners!
- Questions #41=#48 are too broad to answer with the allowed options-there is a huge difference in departments, resources, access etc- a “town employee” could be the road crew, town manager, town office employees etc- If given a break out by department and a comment box, I would be happy to answer/rate each of these areas. Also, in the future- while I am thrilled to have this opportunity to give feedback- a long response time, providing a larger reply box (paragraph shape as opposed to single line) and alternate options, such as a paper survey for those who prefer/don’t have computer access need to be provided.
- Though the new chief has made significant improvements under Chief Doucette, I feel that there still remains a frighteningly complacent attitude on the part of a select few officers (certainly not all officers). I have had several occasions where agents of the BPD simply refused to perform their duties. In closing, I kept this realistically critical, but please know that I am extremely happy with the Town management.