



VERMONT HUMANITIES

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February 1, 2024

Hon. Rep. Diane Lanpher, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Re: B.812 Vermont Humanities Council

FY25 Budget Impact: Vermont Humanities is requesting a 3% increase in our base budget amount from \$300,000 in FY24 to \$309,000 in FY25, in line with the Governor's recommendation.

Dear Rep. Lanpher and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for supporting public humanities engagement in every corner of our state through the annual appropriations process. Vermont Humanities turns 50 in 2024, and the legislature's support empowers us to meet our mission, to sustain and grow our work, and to prepare for the next fifty years. We greatly appreciate your commitment to keeping the humanities alive and thriving in communities around the state.

As we celebrate the past and build excitement about our future, we recognize the many people and partnerships that have stood with us through this journey thus far, and how our continued success is truly a community effort. We also recognize that we do our work in N'Dakinna, the traditional and unceded land of the Abenaki people who continue to live and work in Vermont today.

Since we last reported to the committee, we have final numbers for our 2023 grantmaking and community support that demonstrate our immense growth over the last year. We awarded \$415,000 in community grants in 2023 – an 80% increase over 2022, made possible in part by the Legislature's significantly increased investment for FY24. Adding to that, we distributed an additional \$400,000 in flood recovery grants after the devastating events of last June.

In our regular 2023 grantmaking programs, we awarded almost \$250,000 for 54 **Project Grants** that funded community initiatives with awards up to \$5,000. Additionally, we awarded over \$33,000 for 35 **Rapid Response Grants** that support quick turn-around, small projects for humanities-focused community initiatives or unanticipated needs. In 2023, we also awarded our first **Partnership Grants**, a three-year commitment to eight organizations totaling \$65,000 per year for 2024-2026.

- 40 of all grant recipients received their first Vermont Humanities grant in 2023.
- For Partnership Grants: 3 of the 8 grants were first-time grantees, although one had previously received emergency COVID funding.
- For Project Grants: 20 applicants were first-time grantees.
- For Rapid Response Grants: 17 applicants were first-time grantees.



Please click [here](#) for a full list of grant recipients. Below are just a few examples of 2023 grants:

- **Abenaki Circle of Courage:** Awarded \$10,000 annually to support the re-establishment of their annual Memorial Day weekend Abenaki Heritage Celebration.
- **Clemmons Family Farm:** Awarded \$10,000 annually to support their Windows to a Multicultural World Initiative which aims to develop curriculum modules that incorporate art and teach history focused on the multicultural diaspora of Black people.
- **Retreat Farm:** Awarded \$10,000 annually to support the farm's partnership with the Atowi Project to develop place-based programming centering on Abenaki history and the natural landscape.
- **Sundog Poetry Center: *Justice and Poetry For All*:** Awarded \$5,000 for an inclusive event that affirms the cultural and artistic contributions of Vermont's LGBTQ+ communities through poetry workshops, readings, and community dialogue.

2023 Floods Recovery Grants: Thrown back into crisis mode, as torrential rains damaged thousands of buildings around the state in July 2023, Vermont Humanities again stepped into leadership to assist with recovery efforts. We worked closely with the Vermont Arts and Culture Disaster and Resilience Network to give guidance and assistance to our impacted partners including providing significant funding for recovery through our own grant program and in concert with other funders including Vermont Community Foundation, Vermont Arts Council, Vermont Department of Libraries, and others.

Vermont Humanities allocated \$400,000 in flexible emergency support to over 40 flood-damaged institutions to help them build back stronger. We will continue collaborating with our partners in 2024 and beyond on additional resilience strategies. The full floods recovery grants list is not yet publicly available as we continue to finalize grant contracts.

2023 Sponsorships: We provided further local and statewide support in the amount of \$35,000 to a variety of events and organizations including the Vermont Library Association Conference, Bookstock Festival of Words, Non-Fiction Comic Book Festival, Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival, Pride Center of Vermont, Vermont International Film Festival, Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children, and the Greater Burlington Multicultural Center Speakers Series, among many others.

2023 Early Literacy Grants were made in two of our programs: the **Vermont Early Learning Initiative (VELI)**, which partners with libraries across the state to support their programmatic needs and interests and summer **Humanities Camps**, which provide high-quality, enriching educational activities for middle and high school students. We provide more detail on two of those programs below:

We increased the number of **VELI** libraries from 11 to 16, providing them with books, hands-on materials, and training in early and preschool literacy, preschool mathematics, social-emotional development, and visual literacy. In addition, we awarded a total of \$24,000 in grants (\$1,500 per library) to support flexible funding for literacy projects. The libraries currently taking part in the program are in Barre, Bellows Falls, Bennington, Bradford, Brattleboro, Cavendish/Proctorsville, Colchester, Craftsbury, Enosburg Falls, Hyde Park, Lyndonville, Orwell, Poultney, Randolph, Swanton, and Westford. We are already seeing how this program can encourage other initiatives, including Humanities Camps and enhanced connections with area schools. We also held our first in-person conference with the VELI librarians in August and we continue to be impressed with the dedication of public librarians in meeting the evolving needs of their communities through their responsiveness, adaptability, and commitment to providing equitable access to information, programming, and other resources.

In summer of 2023, nine communities hosted **Humanities Camps**, ranging from a theater camp at Bradford Public Library, to an Art and Mindfulness in Nature Camp in Orwell, to a Fake News in a Very Real World Camp for Brattleboro middle schoolers. We awarded \$65,500 in grants to support camps such as the Old Stone House Museum in Brownington, who hosted a Time Traveler's Day Camp; Get Thee to the Funnery Shakespeare Camps in Chelsea and Craftsbury; Camp Outright in Starksboro for LGBTQ youth; Swanton Library's History Camp; and a new camp for youth who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) held in Addison County by the Education Justice Coalition. These camps offered a diverse range of educational and humanities-based activities for students, enriching the local cultural and educational landscape. Humanities Camps served over 350 students with engaging humanities experiences, free books, and summer meals.

- The Chelsea Funnery's two-week Shakespeare camp which worked on "Much Ado About Nothing" this season, a play that engages with interesting and controversial questions around gender and class. Read more about the camp [here](#) in this Valley News feature article documenting the importance of the camp in a deeply rural community.
- The overnight BIPOC camp served 18 youths from around the state. One of only two overnight camps in our program, the camp was offered to families on a sliding scale and most youth attended for free with financial aid provided by Vermont Humanities and others. One participant said this about the impact of the camp, "...it was a great experience and it's a great space to connect with people who are similar to you and face the same struggles."

Vermont Reads 2023: *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* by Malinda Lo started on July 1st and is off to a great start. The novel tells the story of teenager Lily Hu who is fully immersed in the life and culture of San Francisco's Chinatown, home to Chinese immigrant families like hers. As she comes of age in the 1950s, her passion for rockets and space exploration is matched by her curiosity about the Telegraph Club. Lily, and her friend, Kath, begin to sneak out to the club, which hosts performances by Tommy Andrews, a woman who dresses and performs in a traditionally masculine style. Kath and Lily's interest in each other continues to grow despite the danger faced by two girls falling in love in 1954.

To date, over 42 communities are hosting projects around the book's themes which include self-acceptance, familial and cultural ties, connections through music, US/China relations, LGBTQIA+ and Feminist history, McCarthyism and xenophobia, and the Asian American experience, among others.

Statewide programming includes a series of in-person and hybrid public events as well as an author visit coming in April. In a new expansion this year, we are offering Vermont Reads hosts free facilitated discussions about the book. Central to our work with schools and libraries will be a partnership with Outright Vermont, our state's largest LGBTQIA+ youth organization. Outright is working intensively with eight schools across Vermont to develop programming by queer youth specific to their schools and their lives. Similarly, Outright will create in-depth public programs with 10 libraries, again in collaboration with queer youth, across the state.

In partnership with the Museum of Chinese in America, we are bringing a traveling exhibit, "Responses: Asian American Voices Resisting Tides of Racism" to the Manchester Community Library that will allow Vermont schools and communities to learn more about the Chinese experience in the US. School groups can apply for mini grants to cover transportation costs to the library.

Throughout the pandemic and this past summer's floods, we remained steadfast in our mission - using the humanities, we connect with people across Vermont to create just, vibrant, and resilient

communities and to inspire a lifelong love of learning - no matter what challenges arise. Together, we can continue this essential work into the future.

The Vermont Legislature has understood the importance of the humanities for many years, and we value your continued partnership. Thank you. Through the humanities, we can achieve a better understanding of the past, a stronger analysis of the present, and a more hopeful vision for the future.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Kaufman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Kaufman" clearly distinguishable.

Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup
Executive Director