



January 31, 2017

Requested: \$425,000

Governor's Recommendation: \$271,000 (Level)

When a young Vermonter is home alone, or parents and caregivers can't find the transportation or means to offer a child preschool, or a rural Vermonter does not have the means to attend a concert, a museum, or theater, Vermont PBS provides a connection to an inspiring world. Vermont PBS, Vermont's only statewide visual communications network, is the most cost-efficient educational service funded by state government. For an appropriation of \$0.41 per person we deliver national quality programming to Vermonters of all incomes and locations, especially focusing our services on two important constituencies that are priorities for state services: children from age 2+, and seniors on limited income.

Vermont PBS is the only communications service in Vermont that is based on educational programming (as opposed to news). State funding ensures universal access for all Vermonters - especially low-income and underserved populations. One third of the programming is devoted to commercial free children's educational programming - now available 24 x 7 for family viewing. Every year, our efforts prepare thousands of Vermont preschoolers for success in education, and reach tens of thousands of Vermonters over the age of 65 on a limited or reduced income.

Education and cultural enrichment are part of the purpose for which public television was created fifty years ago by an act of Congress: to strengthen our democracy through an educated electorate. This year alone we will engage the public in conversations about water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin, finding solutions to the opioid epidemic, shortages and opportunities in our work force, the Vermont agricultural system and local food availability, discrimination, outreach to veterans, and their families, Vermont's history of progressive politics, emerging technology and innovation, building community in times of political divide, as well as inspiring the public through regional film and arts. Again in 2017-2018, we will also continue our work to provide educational programming to thousands of teachers in public schools, to convene public forums at libraries,

colleges, and public schools in every county in the state attended by thousands of Vermonters, and to host families and children at our television station and in Head Start schools.

We focus our media reach on Vermont – its innovators, communities, creativity, and quality of life -- illuminating Vermont values and a wealth of optimism. This effort builds on the reputation of Vermont as a place with a commitment to community and quality. Our programming sends a message of engagement and hope that serves to inspire Vermonters and engenders pride in our communities.

Why did we ask for an increase? Because video programming is expensive and we have much work yet to do to meet the needs of underserved Vermonters. We need to extend our outreach to veterans and their families in an engaging and supportive way that is possible through educational programming. There are cultural issues that require communication to help high school students' transition to 21st century work programs. And, we want to extend our work with Head Start to ensure that we are teaching preschoolers, and their parents, especially in new American families, with national certificated curriculum-based programming.

We were operating on a tight budget when the abrupt decrease in our state appropriation (by 50% in 2015) impacted our ability to perform. The state appropriation drop by over \$250,000 also triggered a drop in federal match of \$35,000. With an average annual contribution from Vermonters of \$75, we believe that the cost of acquiring contributions from an additional 4,000 viewers is approximately \$150,000 and could not be reversed over a period of 12 months. While we are diligent in our efforts to grow our private support for this important work, replacing the appropriation with private donations is a challenge that can't be met in this timeframe. We are especially concerned that a reduction of state support at this time will have an added negative impact: it may be used as indication of support for defunding public media at the federal level.

We leverage the State support very effectively to reach new audiences, acquire powerful national content, invest in local programs about uniquely Vermont issues and expand our educational outreach. We partner with those whom the Legislature has funded: especially nonprofits in the arts and public schools. We leverage the State's investment in public television by sharing the broadcast

platform with all Vermonters. This service is provided free over the air and therefore not dependent upon the purchase of expensive cable and satellite services, which are beyond the means of the lowest income households in Vermont.

Our educational activities are made possible through the support of the State. We are proud to be in a state that understands the importance of public media. We thank you – as do the hundreds of thousands of viewers across the region – for the State of Vermont’s continuing support.

Very truly yours,

Holly Groschner  
President and CEO, Vermont PBS

### **Program Description**

On the air, online and in the community, Vermont PBS (formerly VPT), now in its 50th year, works to educate, inform, entertain and inspire Vermonters. Vermont PBS works as a cost effective and powerful anti-poverty program, to

- Expand civil discourse that fosters democracy, community participation and understanding of one another
- Prepare children to succeed in school
- Create a vision of community that is uniquely Vermont's
- Encourage lifelong learning at no cost to viewers
- Expand Vermonters' appreciation for government affairs, science, history, the arts, and nature

Without level-funded support this year from the State of Vermont, Vermont PBS cannot bridge the gap to a sustainable financial model for the delivery of quality broadcast programming. We share the best of Vermont with the world, and make a difference in the lives of Vermonters - especially those without financial means or access to other forms of educational and cultural programming. Vermont PBS

is the only public media where you can see Vermonters share their stories -- we take you there statewide.

## **Goals/Objectives/Performance Measures**

### Goal 1: Expand Educational Programs and Services to Vermonters

#### Objective:

- Develop preschool educational programs and partner with Head Start and YMCA to deliver to families, especially those with financial limitations, to ensure quality pre-school preparation.
- Create family based programming
- Make educational programming available on an improved schedule, accessible to more families.
- Provide family-based low cost educational opportunities for Vermont families
- Continue Poetry Out Loud and Young Writers Project (working with Vermont Arts Council)

#### RBA Measurement: Number of Children and Families Reached

##### How many:

- 10,000 pre-school viewers
- 150 specially trained parents and day care providers to assist pre-school learners
- 250 families attending low cost educational events
- Pilot project of new children's program scheduled for Fall 2017
- 60,000 additional hours of children's STEM-certified programming during new family-friendly hours
- Friday night children's movies every other week

How well and whom: Professional preschool educators work one on one in a training for parents and daycare providers. The program for Head Start families will be replicable (subject to funding) with follow-through and post-program feedback. Training programs will be taped and available to parents state-wide. This program improves preschoolers scholastic readiness by an average score of 30%.

Program cost: \$50,000.

### Goal 2: Funds for Aging Towers/ Broadcast Equipment/Interconnectivity

#### Objective:

- Establish maintenance funds for inspection of mountain top transmission infrastructure that is more than 25 years old and at risk of failing.
- Repair/ inspect the power and fiber supply to transmission sites, and perform transmission antenna replacement/retuning mandated by the Federal Communications Commission.
- Perform these expensive and un-budgeted network activities that ensure safety and reliability of the state communications network (mountaintop sites) and retains union positions.

#### RBA Measures:

How many: This tower and fiber infrastructure is the backbone of the Vermont PBS broadcast, serving 400,000 viewers weekly, and is a key location for other radio-based communications systems such as national security providers, cell phone companies, emergency responders and paging companies.

How well and whom: This work would be performed to industry standards and ensures the reliability of the broadcast network. Mandated antenna modifications and repair costs equal the salaries of as many as 4 union jobs.

Project Cost: \$120,000

### Goal 3: Expand Vermonters' Access to State-Supported Cultural Activities

#### Objective:

Provide access and support to Vermont's arts organizations through production, broadcast and online facilities. Use Vermont PBS resources to promote Vermont, and its arts community, with viewers across Vermont and beyond. Examples include broadcast of Vermont Symphony Orchestra concerts, filming and broadcast of Vermont Arts Council initiatives, live broadcast of original Vermont

theater and musical performances, broadcast public affairs initiatives, and production of other events in collaboration with nonprofits across the state. This is under-funded ongoing work, expanding the effectiveness of government expenditures for cultural and public affairs information and education.

RBA Measurement:

How many:

- Double the minutes of local programming per year.
- Triple the number of Vermont content producers with access to Vermont PBS airwaves.

How well and whom: Leverages State spending on the arts to benefit over 400,000 viewers every week with shared access to quality programming at the local level. This program particularly serves seniors on fixed incomes, those who can't afford or reach the arts, and the housebound. Vermont PBS will survey partner organizations and Vermonters to measure program relevance and awareness.

Program cost: \$95,000

### **Key Budget Issues FY 2018**

The key budget issue facing Vermont PBS is the impact of last year's reduced state and federal funding appropriations. We were operating on a tight budget when the abrupt decrease in our state appropriation (by 50% in 2015) impacted our ability to perform. The state appropriation drop by over \$250,000 also triggered a drop in federal match of \$35,000. With an average annual contribution from Vermonters of \$75, we believe that the cost of acquiring contributions from an additional 4,000 viewers is approximately \$150,000 and could not be reversed over a period of 12 months. While we are diligent in our efforts to grow our private support for this important work, replacing the appropriation with private donations is a challenge that can't be met in this timeframe. We are especially concerned that a reduction of state support at this time will have an added

negative impact: it may be used as indication of support for defunding public media at the federal level.

Vermont PBS is urgently seeking a new business model to sustain and improve service to Vermonters, built on voluntary contributions from Vermonters. To change our economic dependence on public funds we have begun changes in programming and operations. Sustainable funding to bridge this time of change is critical. We are deeply impacted by the state economy, fluctuations in the stock market, and deferred and increased costs of maintaining broadcast transmission infrastructure in order to maintain a reliable service statewide.

### **Vermont PBS FY17 Budgeted Revenue**

