



February 4, 2019

TO: House Committee on Corrections and Institutions
FROM: Karen S. Mittelman
RE: Vermont Arts Council budget for FY2020

I look forward to meeting with the Committee on February 6 to discuss two programs administered by the Vermont Arts Council: Cultural Facilities grants and Art in State Buildings.

Established by the state legislature in 1988, these two programs together represent a vital investment in the future of Vermont's cultural infrastructure. They meet the state's goals to preserve and maintain Vermont's vibrant cultural resources, and to ensure that those resources are widely accessible and enjoyed by all, particularly our most vulnerable residents.

In preparation for our discussion, I am pleased to submit the following materials:

- The Arts Council's FY2020 budget request
- A list of our FY2019 grants
- Data on the Cultural Facilities Grant program, FY 2014-FY2018
- A list of completed Art in State Buildings projects
- Images of the three most recent Art in State Buildings projects (one completed, two in progress)

Background on the Cultural Facilities Grant program

Cultural Facilities grants help Vermont nonprofit organizations and municipalities enhance, create, or expand the capacity of an existing building to provide cultural activities for the public.

Since 2001, Cultural Facilities grants totaling \$2.9 million have enabled 213 theaters, museums, town halls and community arts centers across Vermont to make critical improvements to their buildings (ranging from upgrades to lighting, sound, and heating systems to installing elevators or wheelchair ramps.) Many of these improvements are required for ADA compliance or address critical safety issues in Vermont's historic structures – for example, upgrades to electrical wiring, sprinkler systems, emergency exits and fire escapes. The program also helps communities to re-use or protect existing infrastructure, by bringing existing municipal buildings up to code, increasing energy efficiency, or ensuring accessibility for disabled patrons.

Over the past 5 years, 70% of the funding from this program supported cultural facilities in Vermont's most rural communities, protecting libraries, theaters, museums, and town halls that serve our most economically disadvantaged residents.

Cultural Facilities grantees are required to provide a 1:1 match, and in most cases, the investment of public funds enables grantees to leverage private support.

The majority of funds distributed through this program also support jobs for local community contractors and vendors. From 2014 to 2017, for every dollar awarded through a Cultural Facilities grant, more than two dollars were invested locally, supporting electricians, contractors, and suppliers of technical equipment required for infrastructure improvements.

Key challenges

The main challenge facing us in the next 10 years is Vermont's aging cultural infrastructure. Demand for Cultural Facilities grants already far outstrips the program's resources. We consistently receive many more worthy applications than can be supported with available funds.

Over the past 5 years the Council received 125 applications for Cultural Facilities grants, requesting a total of \$1,914,876. We were able to make 80 grants totaling \$1,039,826 (meeting only 64% of the expressed need). Given Vermont's aging building stock, we anticipate even greater demand in the coming decade as historic facilities deteriorate and the costs of compliance with safety and accessibility standards rise. There is an ongoing, urgent need to invest in Vermont's cultural facilities in order to address critical safety issues and code violations, and to ensure compliance with ADA requirements.

Background on the Art in State Buildings program

Vermont's Art in State Buildings program has been enriching public spaces through art since the program began in 1988. Works of art have been commissioned in 33 buildings across Vermont, drawing on the creative talents of more than 60 artists. The program is administered by the Vermont Arts Council in partnership with the Department of Buildings and General Services.

In addition to enhancing Vermont's landscape, Art in State Buildings projects offer outstanding Vermont artists the opportunity to create large-scale, often challenging works of public art that will be viewed by thousands of Vermonters and visitors. These works of art transform the built environment and create vibrant public spaces that distinguish Vermont towns and communities.

Key challenges

The AISB program is now in its 30th year. While the criteria for the commissioned works of art call for durability of materials and minimal maintenance, the reality is that over the next decade, some of the public artwork will require conservation and maintenance. Program funding has never taken into account this need for long-term maintenance.

In our 10-year capital budget narrative, we recommend that the AISB Legislative Advisory Committee take up the issue of a long-term maintenance and conservation strategy for Vermont's public art collection. The Arts Council is prepared to collaborate with the state curator's office in the coming fiscal year to assess the maintenance and conservation needs of the existing public art collection.