



PEG ACCESS TELEVISION IN VERMONT

- Vermont has **25** independent, non-profit Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) Access Centers; more per-capita than any other state.
- Each Access Center is a welcoming space for producing video, borrowing equipment, taking classes, and meeting.
- These 25 Access Centers operate **81** commercial-free channels: **67** in Standard Definition and **14** in High Definition.
- The predominant Cable Operator is **Comcast**, which contracts with 22 of these Access Centers. Other Cable Operators are:
 - **Charter Communications, d/b/a Spectrum** (contracts with 2 Centers)
 - **VTel** (contracts with 6 Centers that also contract with Comcast)
 - **Burlington Telecom** (contracts with 3 Centers that also contract with Comcast)
 - **Southern Vermont Cable** (contracts with 1 Centers that also contracts with Comcast)
 - **Waitsfield Communications** (contracts with 1 Centers)
- Every year these 25 Access Centers produce a combined total of almost **16,000** local, original programs. These programs total **18,000** hours per year, or **49** hours per day!
- Access Center employ nearly **200** people, aided by hundreds of community volunteers.
- In fiscal year 2017, over **\$8 million** in fees were collected by Vermont's cable operators and passed on to the Access Centers. The commercial dollar equivalent of community services our Access Centers provided that year were nearly **\$74 million**, or 8.5 times the amount of their funding.
- 24 Access Centers provide web streaming of their programming, either live or on-demand.

(over)

ACCESS FUNDING DECLINE

In the first quarter of 2018, Access Centers on Comcast cable systems saw a significant decline in revenue over both the previous quarter and the same quarter in 2017. This decline was due to Comcast taking advantage of new non-mandatory Generally Accepted Accounting Principles in the way it treats bundled services.

We estimate that this decline represented a nearly \$117,000 shortfall in statewide revenue for that quarter. In addition, the gradual migration of consumers from cable to newer “over-the-top” services has led to even more decline in Access Center revenue over the last few years. In all, over half a million dollars in revenue was lost in 2018 due to accounting changes and shifting technology.

THE LEGAL & REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

Vermont's Access Centers, represented by the Vermont Access Network (VAN), are currently party to legal action against the State by Comcast. We're waiting for the Federal District Court of Vermont to rule on whether the VT Public Utility Commission over-reached its authority in requiring Comcast to place their PEG Access programming schedules on its Interactive Program Guide (IPG), among a number of other conditions. Several surveys conducted over the past 10 years by the VT Public Service Department and a number of Access Centers have shown that the ability to see what programs are being shown at what time via the IPG is the number one improvement that would increase viewership. Access Centers are hoping that this condition will be supported by the court, as well as other conditions related to High Definition channels, line extensions, and upgrading previously-required remote origination sites.

There are two rule-making processes being put forward by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 2019 that could have disastrous implications for centers all over the country, including Vermont. The first seeks to allow cable companies to charge traditionally in-kind contributions against Access funding. Then second would reclassify some cable services so that they would no longer be considered to be using public rights-of-way, a key component of how we're funded. Both actions would greatly decrease local control over public resources and dramatically reduce Access Center funding...possibly to the point where many centers are forced to close.

**Documents related to these issues and much more information
about PEG Access in Vermont can be found at:**

www.vermontaccess.net