



Jody Fried

Executive Director

September 9, 2020

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TO: Members of the Senate Economic Development Committee

SUBJECT: Letter of Support for the Vermont Arts Council's CRF Funding Request

Dear Members,

I am writing today in support of the Vermont Arts Council's \$6M funding request to address the Vermont Creative Sector's two most urgent needs at this point in the pandemic: (1) to prevent the permanent closure of Vermont's core cultural institutions and (2) to provide COVID-19-related technical support. My insight is informed by several professional positions I hold within the creative sector, including Chair of the Vermont Creative Network, President of the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative, and Executive Director of Catamount Arts.

The impact of COVID-19 on the Creative Sector, both here in Vermont and across the country, has been catastrophic. Vermont has been hit particularly hard. Rural arts & cultural organizations and creative businesses tend to be hand-to-mouth, lacking the large endowments that support our urban counterparts. In the Northeast Kingdom, the Creative Sector is a key component of our long-term economic development plan, so the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative has identified preserving Cultural and Civic Infrastructure as one of five key priorities in our June 2020 COVID-19 Recovery Plan (see attached). The plan specifically calls for providing 12-18 months of bridge overhead funding for arts and cultural institutions that remain unable to open.

Since March 15th, the Catamount Arts Center has remained closed to the public due to COVID-19 public health-related issues including air quality and ventilation. An HVAC assessment of our building will cost more than \$4,000, and we anticipate the subsequent recommendations will be very expensive. This is just one example of the prohibitive expenses faced by facilities like ours as we identify and complete physical adaptations required to keep our patrons and communities safe going forward.

Catamount Arts and our Creative Sector peers who own and maintain physical infrastructure, whose facilities are the heartbeat of our respective communities and essential to the vibrancy of their village downtowns, are facing an existential threat as the pandemic drags on. While we can control our ongoing programming and incremental operational expenses, we have almost no way to lower our fixed costs or those associated with adapting our physical infrastructures. There are few funding options to help pay for facility overhead or the required COVID-19-related physical alterations.

The Creative Sector is critical for the future health and prosperity of our rural state, and it is imperative that we ensure it remains viable.

Thank you for your consideration and support of the Vermont Arts Council's proposal.

Cheers, Jody

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jody Fried", written in a cursive style.

Jody Fried, Executive Director

Attachment: NEK-Recovery-Plan.pdf