



March 15, 2021

To the Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Vermont Arts Council, to express our strong support for the proposed allocation of \$5 million for the *Better Places* program. We are proud to be one of several private funding partners for this innovative, place-based economic development initiative.

As Vermont's state arts agency, the Arts Council leverages state, federal, and private dollars to invest in artists and the creative process, arts education in K-12 classrooms, and cultural organizations that engage audiences across the New England region. The Council also serves as the backbone organization for the Vermont Creative Network, a collective of individuals, businesses and organizations focused on amplifying the state's creative economy and creative assets, established by the legislature in 2016.

Even before the impact of COVID19, it was clear that strategic investment in the creative sector is vital to Vermont's economic future. Research completed by the Vermont Arts Council in 2018 demonstrates that our state's share of creative economy jobs (9.3% of all employment) is higher than the average across the United States. A report issued by the National Governor's Association cites Vermont among its case studies of the power of the creative economy to catalyze economic growth in smaller, rural communities.

Nationwide, arts and culture have been among the industries hardest hit by the pandemic. In Vermont, according to a Brookings Institution report, our creative sector lost 8,090 jobs and sales of \$216 million in just four months from April to July of 2020. Beyond the immediate impact on artists and cultural nonprofits, the pandemic has had ripple effects that are felt in the hospitality, food, and tourism sectors. When a museum or theater closes, there are economic repercussions throughout an entire town—at the restaurants, shops, hotels, and bars where those arts patrons spend their dollars. Event-related spending by arts and culture audiences in Vermont totaled \$44 million in 2016.

As Vermont communities recover from the pandemic, the Arts Council's goal is to help revitalize our shared public spaces and support art that brings new energy to downtowns, villages and regions. Over the past several months, the Vermont Creative Network convened hundreds of stakeholders invested in the cultural and economic vitality of our state to map out a strategic plan for a resilient and creative future for Vermont.

The *Better Places* initiative is in perfect alignment with 3 of the priority areas identified in this plan:

- Communities are infused with creative expression and opportunity.
- Creatives are engaged in community building and leadership.
- Cross-sector collaborations amplify regional economic growth.

Arts and culture have always been key to creating economic opportunity and community vibrancy in Vermont. They are essential now to bringing us back together and helping to restore and re-energize our communities. That is why we are proud partners and enthusiastically support the *Better Places* program.

Thank you for your consideration of this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ka Mittelman", is displayed on a light green rectangular background.

Karen S. Mittelman
Executive Director