

Vermont Humanities Program Narrative for State of Vermont FY 2022

Mission Statement

Vermont Humanities seeks to engage all Vermonters in the world of ideas, foster a culture of thoughtfulness, and inspire a lifelong love of reading and learning.

Note: Our fiscal year is the calendar year, and so our 2021 budget relates to the State's 2022 budget.

The Covid-19 pandemic upended and disrupted everything that we planned for 2020. While we still have little idea when the pandemic will ease, we can look back with great pride on the success we had in pivoting our work and meeting the challenges that this past year presented, and we look forward with enthusiasm to 2021-2022.

As the pandemic took hold in the spring, Vermont Humanities set three goals for 2020 and beyond:

1. Provide committed, collaborative leadership for the cultural sector as we all work to weather this pandemic.
2. Meet our mission to provide public humanities and literacy programming in new ways that do not rely on traditional gathering spaces.
3. Keep our talented, professional team employed doing good work to the greatest extent possible.

These three goals may be even more relevant now, as the long-lasting impact of the pandemic continues to drive our daily work plans.

Covid-19 Pandemic Relief

We have taken a leadership role in pandemic relief, providing support for cultural organizations across Vermont. Working in close partnership with the Vermont Arts Council, we distributed \$781,000 in Federal CARES Act relief grants to 122 cultural organizations, located in all 14 Vermont counties.

We also worked with a coalition of cultural leaders to advocate for additional relief, gratefully securing \$5 million in Vermont CARES Act funding for cultural organizations with support from the legislature and Governor Scott. This funding is helping to ease the tremendous hardship experienced by these organizations and by the over 40,000 Vermonters who make their living in cultural and creative sector jobs. We are thankful for this committee's and the full legislature's steadfast support of the cultural and creative sector.

Public Humanities and Literacy Programs

Vermont Humanities recently won one of four 2020 Schwartz Prizes for outstanding public humanities programming in the U.S. for Vermont Reads 2019: *March: Book One*, based on the graphic novel by Rep. John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell. The award is given by the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the National Humanities Alliance at their annual conference, which was held online in November. This is the first time that Vermont Humanities has been awarded this prestigious prize.

Since March 2020, Vermont Humanities has pivoted to public digital programming with great success, hosting dozens of online events while planning for a future that continues to be uncertain. These events have enriched the lives of thousands of Vermonters and have supported libraries, schools, hospitals, and other key community organizations. While we miss the sense of connection that comes with hosting in-person events in Vermont towns and cities, the benefits of virtual programming include on-demand access and full participation by people who cannot drive or otherwise attend in-person events.

- Nine libraries across Vermont hosted a total of 27 in-person **First Wednesdays public humanities lectures** from January to March 2020. After we paused our in-person public programming in March, we hosted 19 First Wednesdays talks online through August. These presentations included Pulitzer Prize winner David Blight talking about his biography of

Frederick Douglass and acclaimed poet Richard Blanco discussing the themes of his new collection, *How to Love a Country*. In October we began our new 2020-2021 First Wednesdays season online, with nine lectures hosted by libraries on Zoom on the first Wednesday of every month, plus an additional lecture streaming on our social media channels the same evening. Over 2200 Vermonters participated in these lectures via Zoom in October, November, and December of 2020. The season will continue online through May 2021.

- We offered our annual **Fall Conference, “Democracy 20/20”** online between August and November, releasing recorded talks every Wednesday evening to our website and social media channels. These 13 presentations reached over 4425 viewers. The most popular video was a panel of Abenaki leaders, *Democracy, Social Change, and Representation in N’dakinna*, moderated by Vera Longtoe Sheehan. All conference sessions, with curricular extension resources, remain online for use by educators or the general public at www.vermonthumanities.org/democracy. The 2021 conference will focus our attention on climate change and the humanities.
- We hosted 58 free public **Speakers Bureau** talks in conjunction with libraries, schools, museums, and other community centers in 49 different towns in 2020. These talks were attended by 2263 people. We also sponsored 66 **Reading and Discussion** events hosted by organizations in 15 Vermont towns in 2020, helping to engage 722 people in lifelong learning, reading, libraries, and their local community. Many of the discussions and talks were presented online due to the pandemic and attracted attendees from across the state.
- Our newly created **Words in the Woods** program, a partnership with Vermont State Parks and the Vermont Arts Council, brings Vermont poets into state parks to share their craft with a small group of attendees. This program is designed to engage a fresh, diverse audience by meeting them in the outdoors, where we can celebrate Vermont literature’s historic and ongoing connection with the natural world. We plan to capture the interest of Vermonters who spend more time outdoors than in libraries, and young families who may not yet be aware of our programming. Although Vermont State Parks canceled all programming this season due to the pandemic, we did record one-on-one videos with three Vermont poets, and promoted the videos on our website and social media channels: Geof Hewitt (recorded at Elmore State Park), James Crews (recorded at Jamaica State Park), and Judith Chalmer (recorded at New Discovery State Park). The videos can be viewed at www.vermonthumanities.org/words-in-the-woods. A new season is being planned for Summer 2021 and will, with luck, good planning, and widespread vaccination, hopefully take place live in the parks.
- **Vermont Reads 2020**, our statewide one-book reading program, features *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, a powerful novel about a young girl engaging with the contemporary civil rights movement. The Vermont Reads 2020 program began with a racism and reading training session for librarians, teachers, and community members wishing to facilitate community conversations about racism, bias, and equity around the themes of *The Hate U Give*. The session led by Latinx scholar Dr. Laura Jiménez of Boston University on February 8 in Montpelier was attended by 29 participants from community organizations. But just a month after our training with Dr. Jiménez, the Covid-19 pandemic upended and disrupted everything that we had planned for Vermont Reads in 2020. Because of the twin pandemics of Covid-19 and systemic racism, we have extended Vermont Reads 2020: *The Hate U Give* programming to June 2021, the end of the current academic year. We have seen an influx of applications from communities working to switch their programming from in-person to virtual. We have scheduled or completed 67 programs around *The Hate U Give* to date. The Vermont State Library is partnering with us to offer Vermont Reads: *The Hate U Give* to Vermont state employees this spring.
- We gave **26 grants totaling \$69,400** in 2020 to our non-profit partners, including Get Thee to the Funnery - The Quality of Mercy, which aims to address the rise of hate speech in America through the lens of Shakespeare. This project also received support from the French Embassy’s *Night of Ideas Festival*. Over the summer our grants committee reviewed and updated our grant procedures and policies using a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. In 2021, we will double our grants budget to move more money to local communities, offering **Project Grants** (similar to those we have given in the past; awarded twice yearly with grants of \$1,000 to \$5,000), **Rapid Response Grants** (for immediate needs up to \$1,000) and **Partnership Grants** (for three-year initiatives at \$5,000/year.)

- This year we facilitated **Veterans Book Groups** for female veterans at the Lakeside Veterans Affairs Clinic in Burlington and the VA Medical Center in White River Junction, and a group for veterans and Gold Star family members at Northern Vermont University at Lyndon. The groups began later than usual due to the pandemic and the need to transition to online meetings, but all are currently active and meeting regularly. Two additional groups— at the Veterans Place in Northfield and at the VA Medical Center for combat veterans—postponed meeting until 2021 due to the pandemic. Seventeen discussion sessions were held in 2020 with 37 veterans participating.
- One hundred and eleven health care professionals at three hospitals took part in **Literature and Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Health Care** in 2020. This national reading and discussion program helps health care professionals raise their communication and interpersonal skills while increasing job satisfaction, cultural awareness, and empathy for patients. Sessions scheduled in April and May of 2020 were cancelled due to the pandemic. However, participants have shared their eagerness to resume sessions as soon as Covid-19 restrictions allow.
- Internet-based and streaming resources became more important than ever in 2020, as noted above in our reports about our First Wednesdays and Fall Conference programs. In addition, we produced three new **Before Your Time podcast** episodes in 2020; all episodes of this joint project with the Vermont Historical Society were streamed or downloaded about 7200 times during the year. We also launched a second podcast in 2020, **The Portable Humanist**, releasing 16 episodes that were streamed or downloaded about 2300 times. We will continue to produce new episodes of both podcasts throughout 2021. As of this writing, we have 2762 followers on Twitter, 3645 on Facebook, and 1455 on Instagram. We have 275 subscribers to our YouTube channel. We send weekly emails to about 9000 subscribers, and we also send printed newsletters twice a year to about 7500 addresses, along with a printed First Wednesdays program guide. Our website, www.vermonthumanities.org, was visited by about 56,000 users in 2020.
- We began the first quarter of 2020 by scheduling 16 **Early Childhood Literacy** programs; 11 trainings were held before the governor's stay-at-home order in late March. We did not stop working, however: over the summer and fall we evaluated our programs and examined our processes for both quality and efficiency. We also negotiated the return of the Vermont Center for the Book to Vermont Humanities after operating as separate organizations for over 30 years. Both organizations firmly believe that our literacy programs will be better managed and better serve the community under one roof. This will eliminate operational and development inefficiencies, confusion in the field, and the unnecessary duplication of services that have grown over time. This new structure will allow us to better meet our mission while assuring that the best practices of both organizations inform curricula and program delivery. We are restarting Early Literacy Programs online now and hope to return to in-person events by the summer of 2021 if safety guidelines allow.
- Even though the pandemic arrived just before our **Humanities Camps** application deadline, we were deeply moved by the directors who remained committed to holding camps in 2020. Ten camps took place in 2020, albeit with significant modifications. While some camps happened online, many camps continued to meet in person in socially distanced, safe ways. We also adjusted our planned curriculum for the year, emphasizing historic and documentary photography, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement as represented in our Vermont Reads 2020 book, *The Hate U Give*. Camps often provide students with their first positive interaction with reading, school, and sometimes learning itself. These interactions were particularly important in this disrupted year. Not only do the camps strengthen reading and self-expression, they also dramatically change students' attitudes and self-identification as learners. The camps were free for families as always, providing a crucial source of summer activity (and summer meals) during a trying year. Camps are being planned for summer 2021, with themes including the Olympic Games, indigenous cultures, and climate change.

**Vermont Humanities Council
Approved FY2021 Budget**

Income

4000	Contributed Income		
	4100	Contributions/Support	
		<i>Unrestricted Annual Fund</i>	\$ 200,000
		<i>Restricted Contributions</i>	\$ 250,000
	4200	Government Grants	
		<i>Federal Funding</i>	\$ 700,000
		<i>State Funding</i>	\$ 227,959
	5100	Program - Earned Revenue	\$ 40,000
	5800	Other Revenue - Endowment	\$ 50,000
	TOTAL REVENUE		\$ 1,467,959

Expenses

7000	Expenses		
	7100	Payroll	
		<i>Salaries and Taxes</i>	\$ 707,100
		<i>Benefits and Insurance</i>	\$ 163,927
		<i>Other staff expenses</i>	\$ 31,225
	7200	Facilities	\$ 18,300
	7400	Direct Program Expenses	
		<i>Honoraria and Salaries</i>	\$ 175,200
		<i>Books</i>	\$ 83,450
		<i>Grants and Awards</i>	\$ 141,500
		<i>Other Direct Program</i>	\$ 83,100
	7500	Communications/Development	\$ 81,550
	7800	General & Administration	\$ 82,607
	TOTAL EXPENSES		\$ 1,567,959
		Net income	\$ (100,000)
		Reserve Fund Commitment	\$ 100,000*

*We have committed \$100,000 from our reserve funds in 2021 to increase grants to local community groups and to continue our 2020 Covid-19 relief practice of allowing all community organizations to present Vermont Humanities programs either on-line or safely in-person on a sliding scale rather than with a fixed fee.