



February 13, 2023

TO: Members of the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

FROM: Amy Cunningham, Interim Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council

RE: The Vermont Creative Network and the Creative Futures Grant Program

I am thrilled to have this opportunity to join you on February 15th to talk about the intersection of arts, culture, and creativity with commerce and economic development. Vermont's creative sector owes a debt of gratitude for this Committee's deep understanding of the importance of a vibrant cultural landscape for a thriving Vermont.

Vermont Arts Council

The Vermont Arts Council (VAC) has been the state's primary provider of arts funding, advocacy, and information since 1965. We believe that engagement with arts transforms individual lives, connects people more deeply to each other, energizes the economy, and sustains the vibrant cultural landscape that makes Vermont a great place to visit and live. Supported by private and public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the State of Vermont, a total of \$2,923,181 in Arts Council funding was awarded in FY2022. Grants were awarded to 121 individual artists, 217 organizations in every county, and 121 towns across Vermont.

Vermont Creative Network

In addition to our core work mentioned above, the VAC has led the development and growth of the [Vermont Creative Network](#) (VCN), which was established by the Vermont Legislature in May 2016. The VCN is a broad collective working to advance Vermont's creative sector. Vermont's creative sector includes museums and theaters, visual artists and actors, writers, and musicians. It also includes architects and graphic designers, librarians and literary agents, museum curators and media producers, to name a few. Here are a few data points to illustrate the importance of this sector:

- Arts and culture added **\$1.1B in value to Vermont's GDP in 2019**, ranking a close third behind retail and construction.
- **9.3% of all Vermont jobs** are in the creative sector —a greater share than the US average. However, growth in the sector (8%) is half the US average.

- The World Economic Forum predicts the **top three future job skills** will be creative: complex problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.

The [CreateVT Action Plan](#), launched in 2021, is a strategic roadmap to investment in our state's vital creative sector, based on several years of research and input from thousands of Vermonters. Advancing the CreateVT Action Plan contributes directly to key indicators of economic growth in [Vermont's Strategic Plan](#): cultural events have a demonstrated impact on revenue from tourism, drawing visitors and increasing revenue generated at hotels, bars, restaurants and shops. Creative sector businesses and activities also engage the younger demographic that is vital to expanding Vermont's workforce and convincing young people to build their lives and careers here.

VCN activities at the local level are anchored by grassroots leadership teams in six “creative zones” that represent regions of Vermont. Local zone leaders promote the creative sector in their communities, facilitate meetings and networking opportunities for creatives, and build relationships with allies in other sectors. A [Steering Team](#) provides statewide vision.

Creative Futures

The Covid-19 pandemic profoundly jeopardized the viability of Vermont’s creatives and cultural organizations, large and small. The VAC asserted itself as a vital resource by assisting the cultural community in navigating the intense (and continuing) disruptions of the pandemic. VAC has successfully administered unprecedented amounts of relief to Vermont artists and cultural organizations. Thanks to collaborations with Vermont Humanities, the Vermont Community Foundation, the Agency of Commerce & Community Development, and the generosity of individual donors, we have—to date—overseen delivery of \$8.9 million in urgently-needed aid to artists and cultural organizations since the pandemic hit in March 2020. See our [Covid-19 relief page](#) for complete details.

The most recent and substantial relief effort by far was made possible by the Vermont Legislature and the strong support of this Committee last session: the allocation of \$9 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to the Vermont Arts Council (a part of [Act 183](#)) for grants to creative sector entities that have sustained economic harm due to the pandemic.

Program overview: The aim of the Creative Futures program is to provide aid to creative sector organizations and businesses that continue to struggle financially due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This program is open to all Vermont-based **creative economy nonprofits and for-profit businesses** that can demonstrate economic harm caused by or exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Unincorporated arts, humanities, or cultural groups without official nonprofit status may apply using a fiscal agent provided they are otherwise eligible.

Funding amounts are based on 2019 (pre-pandemic) operating revenue. These funds are for any regular operating expenses, including but not limited to payroll and benefits, utilities, rent, and insurance.

Applications are evaluated using the following criteria:

- Severity of Covid-19 pandemic harm
- Community and cultural impact
- Economic impact
- Special Consideration for under-resourced groups

See more detailed information here: <https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/grants/creative-futures-grant-program>.

Process overview: Round 1 of the program opened in mid-September and closed on November 1, 2022. We received 147 applications requesting a total of \$6,290,000. In December, we awarded **49 Creative Futures awards totaling \$3,692,500.**

We provided a number of avenues for outreach and support to potential applicants. We've hosted multiple grantseeker workshops via zoom, had a dedicated email address for inquiries, and provided applicants with an online calendar system to easily book one-on-one meetings with a grant manager. In addition, we contracted with the Vermont Professionals of Color Network for focused outreach and technical assistance for BIPOC applicants.

The first review was an internal screening of each application, completed by grant managers. We checked for accuracy and completeness of the award request and financial documentation and assessed an initial "severity of pandemic harm" score.

We recruited a team of 44 reviewers from around the country for this program. They included individual creatives from a variety of disciplines, staff from other statewide organizations and agencies, staff from community development and economic development agencies in the state (Regional Planning Commissions, Designated Downtown groups for example), and staff from 12 other arts councils around the country.

Round 2 opened in early January and Round 3 will open in early May. We will continue outreach, especially focusing on small business owners, BIPOC- led and owned entities, and those in Franklin, Grand Isle, Essex, and Rutland counties. We anticipate that many of the 98 applicants not funded in round 1 will be funded in future rounds.

Round 1 Applicants and Recommended Awardees by Entity Type

| Entity Type | Applicants | Recommended Awardees |
|-------------|------------|----------------------|
| For profit | 65 | 16 |
| Nonprofit | 82 | 33 |

Round 1 Applicants and Recommended Awardees by County

| County | Applicants | Recommended Awardees |
|------------|------------|----------------------|
| Addison | 10 | 3 |
| Bennington | 12 | 4 |
| Caledonia | 7 | 3 |
| Chittenden | 36 | 11 |
| Essex | 1 | 0 |
| Franklin | 3 | 1 |
| Grand Isle | 2 | 0 |
| Lamoille | 7 | 3 |
| Orange | 5 | 2 |
| Orleans | 4 | 3 |
| Rutland | 3 | 2 |
| Washington | 19 | 5 |
| Windham | 23 | 9 |
| Windsor | 15 | 3 |

Round 1 Creative Futures Awards

| Applicant | City | Recommended Award |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Bennington Museum | Bennington | \$95,000 |
| Brattleboro Museum & Art Center | Brattleboro | \$65,000 |
| Brattleboro Music Center | Brattleboro | \$75,000 |
| Burlington City Arts Foundation, Inc | Burlington | \$200,000 |
| C.X. Silver Gallery LLC | Brattleboro | \$7,500 |
| Carving Studio and Sculpture Center | West Rutland | \$45,000 |

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| Catamount Film and Arts Center | Saint Johnsbury | \$162,500 |
| Center for Arts and Learning | Montpelier | \$35,000 |
| Central Vermont Community Radio Corporation | Plainfield | \$25,000 |
| Chandler Center for the Arts, Inc. | Randolph | \$75,000 |
| Circus Barn, Inc. dba Circus Smirkus | Greensboro | \$200,000 |
| Clemmons Family Farm | Charlotte | \$45,000 |
| Corey Hendrickson SP | Middlebury | \$15,000 |
| Dorset Theatre Festival, Inc. | Dorset | \$112,500 |
| Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium | St. Johnsbury | \$137,500 |
| Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, Ltd | Burlington | \$200,000 |
| Haskell Free Library and Opera House | Derby Line | \$35,000 |
| Inclusive Arts Vermont | Saint Albans | \$25,000 |
| Jeffrey Gale | Strafford | \$5,000 |
| Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival | Winooski | \$35,000 |
| Lake Champlain Maritime Museum at Basin Harbor | Vergennes | \$137,500 |
| Lines Vermont Studio | South Burlington | \$15,000 |
| Lyric Theatre Company, Inc. | South Burlington | \$95,000 |

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| Main Street Arts | Saxtons River | \$35,000 |
| NLB UNITED LLC, dba Fusion 802 | South Burlington | \$25,000 |
| Northern Stage Company | White River Junction | \$200,000 |
| Now is the Time Productions, Inc. | Montpelier | \$25,000 |
| Oldcastle Productions, Inc. | Bennington | \$45,000 |
| Raq-On Dance, LLC | Springfield | \$7,500 |
| River Gallery School of Art | Brattleboro | \$45,000 |
| Rural ARTS Collaborative | Greensboro | \$35,000 |
| Shelburne Museum, Inc. | Shelburne | \$200,000 |
| Southern Vermont Arts Center | Manchester | \$55,000 |
| Tara Lynn Scheidet | Sutton | \$5,000 |
| The Hatch, Inc. dba HatchSpace | Brattleboro | \$15,000 |
| The Paramount Theatre | Rutland | \$162,500 |
| The Stone Church dba FSO LLC | Brattleboro | \$35,000 |
| The Studio Store, Inc. | Johnson | \$15,000 |
| Theatre Adventure, Inc. | West Brattleboro | \$15,000 |
| Una Lee dba And Also Too | Johnson | \$5,000 |

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|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Valerie Hird | Burlington | \$5,000 |
| Vermont Comedy Club | Burlington | \$112,500 |
| Vermont Evaporator Company | Montpelier | \$15,000 |
| Vermont Folklife Center | Middlebury | \$85,000 |
| Vermont Jazz Center (VJC) | Brattleboro | \$45,000 |
| Vermont Studio Center, Inc. | Johnson | \$200,000 |
| Vermont Symphony Orchestra Inc. | Burlington | \$187,500 |
| von Trapp Farmstead LLC | Waitsfield | \$75,000 |
| Weston Theater Company | Weston | \$200,000 |