



Testimony to Senate Government Operations
Amy Cunningham, Deputy Director, Vermont Arts Council
VACDaRN and Flood Recovery for the Arts and Cultural Sector

Thank you for this opportunity to talk about VACDaRN and flood response and recovery efforts for the creative sector.

VACDaRN is the Vermont Arts and Culture Disaster and Resilience Network. Established in 2019, VACDaRN is a partnership of the Vermont Arts Council and the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration. The goals of this network are to:

- Enable artists, arts, and heritage organizations to share expertise and resources
- Mobilize response for mutual assistance during emergencies
- Engage collectively with first responders and government emergency management agencies

The steering team includes representation from key statewide resource groups and critical expertise in specialized cultural recovery areas. The members are:

- Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (co-leads): Rachel Onuf and Megan Johnson-Saylor
- Vermont Arts Council (co-leads): Amy Cunningham and Michele Bailey
- Vermont Emergency Management: Ben Rose and Taiga Christie
- Vermont State Historic Preservation Office: Laura Trieschmann and Jamie Duggan
- Vermont Department of Libraries: Tom McMurdo
- Vermont Humanities Council: Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup
- Vermont Historical Society: Eileen Corcoran
- Paper Conservation, National Heritage Responder: Carolyn Frisa,
- Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+): Carrie Cleveland
- Middlebury College Libraries: Joseph Watson
- Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative: Katelynn Averyt
- University of Vermont, School of the Arts and Waking Windows: Paddy Reagan

After the historic flooding of 2023, the [VACDaRN steering team](#) activated to deploy assistance to artists and cultural organizations. VACDaRN operates as a “network of networks,” which was a significant asset during flood recovery. In the aftermath of the flooding, our work included:

- Activating the VACDaRN steering team, using our collective networks to catalog damage and needs around the state (through 1:1 outreach and a survey form)

- [Deploying National Heritage Responder conservators](#) to sites with damaged collection for salvage and stabilization work (and have secured \$25K to cover some of the treatment costs)
- Serve as the de facto “Historical and Cultural Restoration Task Force” which is a required committee for the State’s long term recovery planning efforts
- Outreach to help flood impacted individuals and organizations in the sector to know what kind of state and federal resources were available to help (including a webinar for cultural orgs with FEMA and VEM reps)
- In coordination with the Smithsonian’s Cultural Rescue Initiative, we offered [workshops about saving family treasures](#) after the floods
- VACDaRN representatives served as arts and culture advisors to the Vermont Community Foundation flood grants team.
- Coordination of funding needs among partners to avoid duplication of effort:
 - Vermont Humanities secured private and NEH funding to distribute \$400,000 in support to flood-damaged cultural organizations
 - VAC stood up an artist relief grant program, granting out \$67,756
 - Donations to VACDaRN for collections treatment

As we look towards long-term recovery, the VACDaRN team is focused on:

- Continued support/strengthening of the VACDaRN network, including improved contacts lists and asset mapping.
- Coordinating a statewide VACDaRN convening in the fall with hands-on training and reflection and case studies from the 2023 floods.
- Trainings for the field on climate resilience. The Culture for Climate Action Series, presented in partnership with UMass Amherst Arts Extension service, begins this week with over 20 of Vermont’s cultural organizations enrolled.
- Continued emphasis on preparedness—trainings and support to create emergency plans and continuity of operations plans. Rachel Onuf, co-lead at VSARA has expertise and is providing this assistance to many collecting organizations statewide.
- We are also interested in the ways that our cultural infrastructure can be an asset in preparing for future emergencies—for example, how might we involve the town library and the performing arts space in local emergency management planning to enable them to provide support during a disaster?
- Adjusting existing grant programs to encourage projects in flood impacted towns and facilities improvements that are flood resilient.
- Advocating and funding for arts and culture initiatives that promote collective healing and recovery in communities around the state.

Our many cultural assets—from painters and performers to theaters and historic sites—are vital in making Vermont a place where people want to visit, live, and stay. The arts also serve as a helpful tool for rebuilding community fabric and processing collective grief after traumatic events. VACDaRN is committed to helping these cultural assets weather the next storm so that they can continue to serve their communities.