



Date: February 4, 2025

To: Members of the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions

From: Susan Evans McClure, Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council

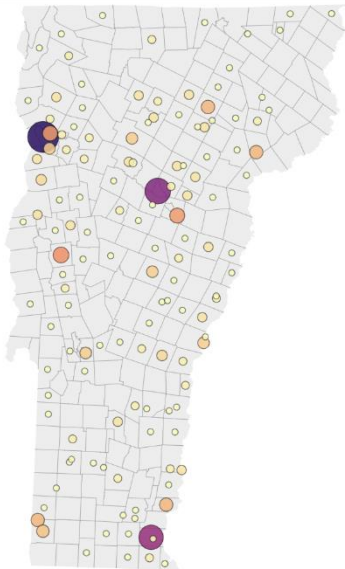
Re: Vermont Arts Council's Cultural Facilities Grants (Building Communities Grants)

Organizational Background

The Vermont Arts Council is the state's arts agency, and the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Arts. Our mission is to cultivate and advance the arts and creativity throughout Vermont. We are working to build a state where artists thrive, where creativity is at the heart of our communities, and where everyone has access to the arts in their lives and education.

The Arts Council works primarily as grant makers, conveners, advocates, and storytellers:

- *Grantmakers:* We invest private, state, and federal funding in the arts through a transparent process that supports artists, arts organizations, arts education, and community building
- *Conveners:* We bring people together to learn, connect, and advance the arts.
- *Advocates:* We raise awareness and work to increase local, state, and federal support for the arts and creativity in our lives and communities.
- *Storytellers:* We are the state's trusted source for information and resources that support and grow Vermont's creative sector. We tell the story of the rich complexity of the arts and creativity in Vermont.

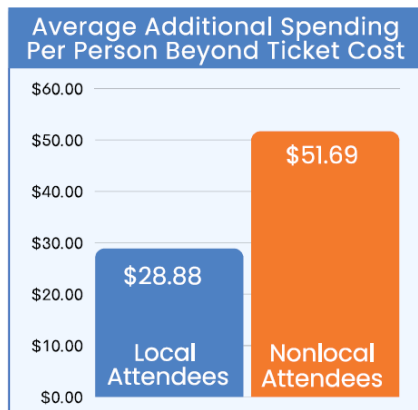


[In FY24](#), the Arts Council awarded \$3,247,415 in funding. Grants were awarded to 131 individuals and 235 organizations and businesses in all of Vermont's counties.

Grants directly support artists to create new work and deepen their practice, support communities to create public art connected with infrastructure projects, support educators to provide arts education to students in school settings, support arts organizations to add vibrancy to Vermont communities through projects that provide equal and abundant access to the arts, and much more. The Council also administers two grant programs on behalf of the state of Vermont- the Cultural Facilities grant program and the Art in State Buildings Program.

The Creative Economy Drives Vermont's Economy

We have all seen the power that the arts have in bringing our communities together, especially during times of crisis. Not only do the arts build our communities, but they are also a leading economic sector. Investing in art, culture, and creativity as essential infrastructure through the Cultural Facilities Grant Program means we will see a corresponding increase in statewide investment and resources for the creative economy – bolstering our towns, villages, and cities across the state. 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.



- According to the [U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis](#), in 2022, the Vermont arts and culture sector was a nearly \$1.2 billion industry, a 10% increase from 2021
- The industry represents 3% of Vermont's GSP and accounts for 10,574 jobs.
- According to the [Arts and Economic Prosperity 6](#) survey, there were 1.4 million attendees to nonprofit arts and culture events in 2022. 25% of those attendees were nonlocal, 75% were local. Non-local attendees spent, on average, \$51.69 per person on top of the cost of admission. Local attendees spent, on average, \$28.88 per person on top of the cost of admission.

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.

We know that strengthening Vermont's creative economy will strengthen Vermont's overall economy. And in order for those community and economic benefits to flourish, Vermont's cultural organizations need the physical infrastructure to make that happen, which is made possible through the Cultural Facilities grants program

Cultural Facilities Grants

Cultural Facilities Grants help Vermont nonprofit organizations and municipalities enhance, create, or expand the capacity of an existing building to provide cultural activities for the public. Applicants must own a facility that is at least 10 years old, and it must be physically located in Vermont. Cultural activities are defined broadly as activities that enhance artistic, creative, aesthetic, historic or scholarly appreciation by members of the public. This program is one of the seven Building Communities Grant Programs funded through the State of Vermont Capital Appropriations Budget. Support for the Cultural

Facilities Grant Program has been ongoing since it began in 1988; it was established in statute (Title 24 Chapter 137, § 5604).

Grants range from \$1,000-\$30,000 and require a 1:1 match of non-state funds. Examples of projects eligible for funding include:

- improvements to wiring, heating, lighting, and plumbing
- accessibility features (ex: elevators, assistive listening systems, ramps, bathrooms)
- stage improvements such as curtains, lighting, sound, and rigging
- permanent display panels or exhibit cases affixed to the building
- fixed equipment
- improvements to environmental controls, storage, or lighting for collections care
- hazard mitigation efforts (ex: flood gates, sump pumps, rain gutters, sprinklers)
- energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, heat pumps, renewable energy systems, LED lighting

Over the past 3 years, we have seen a 65% increase in the amount of grant funds requested through the program, and a 40% increase in the number of applications. In addition, there has been a significant increase in requests to fund flood and climate change mitigation projects for cultural facilities.

	# Applications	# Grants	\$ Request	\$ Awarded	% Funded
FY2023	20	15	\$369,612	\$299,222	~81%
FY2024	25	19	\$442,759	\$313,845	~71%
FY2025	28	17	\$611,566	\$302,023	~49%

This is truly critical funding, and Cultural Facilities grants are some of the very few funds in Vermont, public or private, that fund capital projects at cultural organizations and municipalities.

Since the Arts Council took over administration of the program began in 2001, grants totaling \$4.6 million have enabled over 370 arts and cultural institutions across Vermont to make essential improvements to their buildings. And because these are capital projects, it means that these grants are facilitating the employment of Vermont businesses.

From 2014-2025, 75% of the money spent on these projects stayed in Vermont and went directly to Vermont businesses. The out-of-state spending that occurred was mainly to highly specialized contractors or supplies. These state investments are largely staying in Vermont and supporting local small businesses. We are all part of building the economy of Vermont, and the arts and culture are a crucial part of that economic ecosystem.

Cultural Facilities Project Spending 2014-2025 (grant funds + non-state match funds):



Data source: grantee final reports from 2014-2025

Cultural Facilities Grants, Emergency Preparedness, and Climate Change Mitigation

Many of the improvements funded by Cultural Facilities grants are required for ADA compliance or address critical safety issues in Vermont's historic structures. We are also seeing requests for projects that address emergency preparedness and an increase in energy efficiency projects and climate change mitigation work. These modest state investments are having long-term economic impacts on our local communities.

In FY20, the Capital City Grange Hall in Berlin received a Cultural Facilities grant to install sump pumps in the basement and make other drainage upgrades. After 2023's historic flooding, they let us know that these improvements kept the basement dry: "I just wanted to share good news from the Capital City, Grange Hall that we didn't have any flood damage and we can thank the Vermont Arts Council Cultural Facilities Grants for that outcome. We used to experience water coming into the basement during big storm events. Thankfully due to the sump pump and drainage that we installed that no longer happens. Amid all of the challenging news, I thought you might like to know of this little success story." reported Friends of the Capital City Grange Hall board member Nancy Turner in the summer of 2023.

This is a story of a small government investment upfront having a substantial long-term payment. The Friends of the Capital City Grange received a \$26,000 grant. And as we have seen, the cost of flood damage could easily exceed that amount, by many multiples. **In FY25, 8 of the 17 projects funded are for projects related to energy efficiency or climate change mitigation.**

FY2026 Budget

In the FY24 and FY25 budgets, Cultural Facilities Grants were funded at \$300,000 each year as part of the Capital Budget. The Governor has included Cultural Facilities Grants at \$250,000 in the proposed FY26 Capital Bill. We understand the many stresses on Vermont's fiscal landscape, and request that the Committee level funds this valuable grant program at \$300,000 in FY26. This funding is critical to Vermont's cultural institutions, to our local economies, and to our communities. It is modest state funding that has a significant impact and a dynamic return.

Grantees FY2024 & FY2025

Addison County



Corner School Resource Center, Granville | FY2024

\$4,751 to support the installation of storm windows and insulating shades



Friends of the Vergennes Opera House, Vergennes | FY2024

\$30,000 to support the installation of an accessible three-level lift



Starksboro Public Library, Starksboro | FY2024

\$30,000 to support the installation of a vertical lift in Starksboro Town Hall

Bennington County



Bennington Museum, Bennington | FY2025

\$20,000 to support HVAC updates in the historic church gallery



Dorset Players, Dorset | FY2025

\$17,779 to support the replacement of auditorium speakers and related sound equipment

Grantees FY2024 & FY2025

Bennington County (continued)



Oldcastle Productions, Bennington | FY2025

\$24,000 to support the installation of audio, visual, and lighting equipment



Park-McCullough Association, North Bennington | FY2025

\$13,854 to support the installation of fire-stopping between the basement and first floor and four de-humidification units



Robert Frost Stone House Museum, Shaftsbury | FY2024

\$18,750 to support the installation of electricity and plumbing to the historic barn

Caledonia County



Catamount Arts, St. Johnsbury | FY2025

\$17,549 to support the installation of a sculpture pedestal and modular mural hanging system on the exterior of the Northern Forest Center-owned building in St. Johnsbury



Northeast Kingdom Arts Council, Hardwick | FY2025

\$14,625 to support the purchase and installation of a lift to make the stage accessible at the Hardwick Town House

Grantees FY2024 & FY2025

Caledonia County (continued)



St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, St. Johnsbury | FY2025

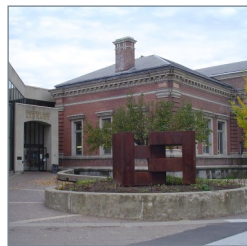
\$21,404 to support rebuilding the chancel from four levels to one to improve use as a stage

Chittenden County



Birds of Vermont Museum, Huntington | FY2025

\$23,750 to support the installation of heat pumps



Friends of the Fletcher Free Library, Burlington | FY2024

\$10,759 to support fixed audio/visual equipment to improve arts experiences at the library



Shelburne Craft School, Shelburne | FY2025

\$10,098 to support increased electrical services for safety and for the future installation of heat pumps

Franklin County



Maquam Bay of Missisquoi, Swanton | FY2025

\$28,500 to support energy-efficient improvements with a new furnace, ventilation, insulation, air sealing, LED lighting, heat

Grantees FY2024 & FY2025

Franklin County (continued)



Town of Franklin, Franklin | FY2024

\$27,000 to support the replacement of an ADA-accessible lift and heating system in the Haston Library

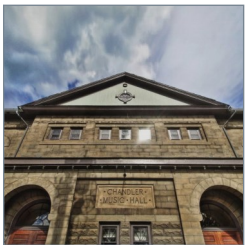
Grand Isle County



Island Arts, North Hero | FY2025

\$14,155 to support the installation of roof insulation

Orange County



Chandler Center for the Arts, Randolph | FY2024

\$19,196 to support an overhaul of the audio amplification environment



Thetford Academy, Thetford Center | FY2024

\$18,000 to support an upgrade to the digital projection, sound, and lighting in the theater



West Fairlee Community Club, Fairlee | FY2024

\$4,371 to support the installation of an ADA-compliant restroom

Grantees FY2024 & FY2025

Orleans County



Greensboro Historical Society, Greensboro | FY2024

\$1,665 to support the installation of light-protecting window shades

Rutland County



Chaffee Art Center, Rutland | FY2025

\$20,800 to support the installation of heat pumps



Friends of the Brandon Town Hall, Brandon | FY2024

\$17,675 to support replacing the over 100-year-old wooden floor in the main hall



Paramount Theater, Rutland | FY2024

\$30,000 to support the expansion of the stage counterweight system and installation of a new main curtain

Washington County



Barre Opera House, Barre | FY2025

\$28,500 to support the installation of exterior lights on the building

Grantees FY2024 & FY2025

Washington County (continued)



Center for Arts and Learning, Montpelier | FY2024

\$25,000 to support the replacement of the old flat rubber membrane roof on the Convent/West Side of the building



The Four Corners Schoolhouse Association, East Montpelier | FY2024

\$30,000 to support mitigating mold issues that require insulation, HVAC, and a dehumidifier in the facility



The Robinson Sawmill, Calais | FY2024

\$15,000 to support the rebuild of the penstock intake



Town of Plainfield, Plainfield | FY2024

\$8,480 to support audio reinforcement, an assisted listening system, and a large-format video projection with secured storage

Windham County



Main Street Arts, Saxtons River | FY2025

\$7,809 to support the installation of heat pumps on the first floor

Grantees FY2024 & FY2025

Windham County (continued)



New England Youth Theatre, Brattleboro | FY2024

\$13,223 to support re-decking the flooring in the main theater space



Next Stage Arts Project, Putney | FY2024

\$3,562 to support the installation of temperature-regulating curtains on the theater windows



Westminster West Public Library, Westminster West | FY2025

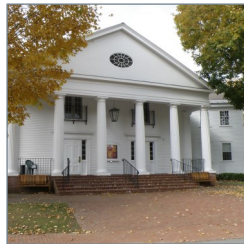
\$15,200 to support energy efficiency improvements

Windsor County



Okemo Valley TV, Ludlow | FY2025

\$24,000 to support the expansion to become a multimedia center in the Ludlow Community Center complex



Weston Theater Company, Weston | FY2024

\$6,413 to support the replacement of curtains and other theater soft-goods