



VERMONT HUMANITIES

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February 17, 2026

Sen. Andrew Perchlik, Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Re: B.812 Vermont Humanities Council

Dear Sen. Perchlik and Members of the Committee:

FY27 Budget Impact: Vermont Humanities is grateful for the Governor's recommendation of a 3% increase in our base budget amount from \$318,270 in FY26 to \$327,818 in FY27.

That said, in addition to the 3% base budget increase recommended in the Governor's budget proposal, the four cultural organizations request an additional 10% each to demonstrate the legislature's support for organizations affiliated with federal agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services which are facing unprecedented attacks from the current federal administration.

Vermont Humanities requests that the Appropriations Committee fund Vermont Humanities at a total of \$360,600.

Thank you for supporting public humanities engagement in every corner of our state through the annual appropriations process. Vermont Humanities is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Library of Congress Center for the Book. As you may know, we received notice from the NEH in April 2025 that all awarded grants were canceled in their entirety due to the "change in priorities" at the White House. At that time, NEH funds made up 42% of Vermont Humanities' annual budget.

With a FY25 loss of over \$630,000 in lawfully appropriated federal funding and an even greater amount of projected federal funding loss in the current year, the legislature's support is critical to empowering us to meet our mission, to sustain and grow our work, and to maintain our commitment to Vermonters. We greatly appreciate your dedication to keeping the humanities alive and thriving in communities around the state.

We have worked hard to mitigate federal losses through emergency fundraising campaigns, prudent fiscal management (including a reduction in staffing), and a successful annual fund campaign in the fourth quarter. Vermonters stood up for us, and we saw a significant increase in individual donors in FY25 compared to FY24, from 495 donors to 636 Donors. Our final bottom line for the year was still unfortunately \$200,000 less than our original budget but we used only \$30,000 in reserve funds to meet our obligations for the year.

With this robust community support, we were able to hold firm on delivering mission-critical programs like Community Grantmaking, Vermont Reads, the Fall Festival, the Speakers Bureau, Humanities Camps, and all our early literacy programming. That said, for the first time in our 51-year



history, our board passed the FY26 budget which includes NO federal funding from the NEH. As a result, the State of Vermont's contribution is significantly more important than in prior years.

In 2025, Vermont Humanities contributed \$919,000 to the state-wide economy through grants to non-profits and support of local businesses. Coupled with the wages we paid to 13 staff members, 84% of all our expenses supported Vermont cultural workers, non-profit organizations, and local businesses.

Since we submitted our annual report to the Governor in October, we have final numbers for our 2025 grantmaking that demonstrate our resilience and commitment to our partners over the last year. We awarded \$434,625 in grantmaking across all Vermont Humanities programs in community grants in 2025, made possible in part by the Governor's support and the Legislators' investment through the budget process.

In our regular 2025 grantmaking programs, we awarded \$224,660 to 53 **Project Grants** that funded diverse community initiatives with awards up to \$5,000. Additionally, we awarded \$28,000 for 35 **Rapid Response Grants** that support quick turn-around, small projects for humanities-focused community initiatives or unanticipated needs. In 2025, we also awarded our final year of **Partnership Grants**, a three-year commitment to eight organizations totaling \$65,000 per year for 2024-2026.

- 44 grant recipients received their first Vermont Humanities grant in 2025
- 137 grants were awarded out of a pool of 229 applications

But only 60% of applicants were funded, demonstrating the need for greater resources especially in this moment when federal support for initiatives like these is lacking.

Please click [here](#) for a full list of grant recipients. Below are just a few examples of 2025 grants:

- **Clemmons Family Farm:** Awarded \$10,000 annually to support their Windows to a Multicultural World initiative which aims to develop curriculum modules which incorporate art and teach history focused on the multicultural diaspora of Black people.
- **The Bridge at Ezili's Respite—Healing through Nature: The Land-Based Edition of Harm Reduction Heroes:** Awarded \$5,000 to support a curriculum tailored for use in nature-based contexts that empowers participants to reduce harms associated with substance use or other behavioral health challenges.
- **The Civic Standard—Hardwick State 2026: A Town-Wide Free University:** Awarded \$5,000 to support a town-wide, weekend-long, pop-up, free university where anyone can teach and everyone can learn through humanities-rich, community-led classes, workshops, and performances.
- **Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning, Inc.—Leading Together: Strengthening Youth Voice in Vermont's Democracy:** Awarded \$5,000 to engage youth and adults in dialogue, research, and storytelling to elevate youth voice, build civic leadership, and reimagine decision-making, strengthening civic health and intergenerational democracy in Vermont.
- **Vermont Racial Justice Alliance—Commemoration of Vermont First African Landing Day:** Awarded \$1,000 to help highlight the resilience and contributions of African Americans since 1619, acknowledge the impact that slavery has had on the United States and educate the public about the arrival of Africans to the US.

Sponsorships: In 2025, we also provided just over \$10,000 in local and statewide sponsorship support to a variety of events and organizations including the Good Citizen Challenge (*Seven Days*), Catamount Arts Leavitt Amp Concert Series, Non-Fiction Comic Book Festival, the Flynn Center's Snap Storytelling Festival, the Vermont Library Conference, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children Conference, the Vermont History Day Teacher's Prize, the Vermont Association for Social Studies Conference, and the Vermont Council on Rural Development–Leadership Summit, among others. Although our original budget called for \$20,000 in sponsorship support, we did have to make many cuts due to the lost NEH funding, and this is one of the areas that unfortunately needed to be trimmed back. With limited funds, we chose to focus sponsorships mostly on programs that provided professional development for our stakeholders.

2025 Early Literacy Grants were made in two of our programs: the **Vermont Early Learning Initiative (VELI)**, which partners with libraries across the state to support their programmatic needs and interests and summer **Humanities Camps**, which provide high-quality, enriching educational activities for middle and high school students.

We maintained the **VELI** cohort of 21 libraries in 2025, and they achieved the following: 1) reached underserved families through story hours and community-based literacy events; 2) expanded the use of curriculum-based take-home kits for families; 3) encouraged children to use their imagination with a variety of hands-on materials that highlight early literacy skills; 4) encouraged and facilitated partnerships between preschool educators and public librarians; and 5) provided consistent outreach to community child-care providers with books and other resources. Total participation: 840.

In addition, we awarded a total of \$31,500 in non-competitive grants (\$1,500 each) to early educators and librarians. We met with the 21 **VELI** librarians in-person twice in 2025: in late March and early September. In March, the focus of the conference was on how to teach children the value of collaboration, participation, and teamwork through team-building activities. Educator Scott Noyes of Empowering Programs led the librarians in several hands-on activities that could be done with children and adults alike. Scott also offered research-based information on brain development, a topic the librarians very much enjoyed learning more about. In August, we invited Four Winds Institute to present an experiential program on nature-based play with young children and families. The presenters set up learning stations outside for librarians to experience; activities included exploring force and motion, making collections of nature-based objects, and using tools to explore insects found in the environment. Each station featured picture books tied to that activity.

In summer of 2025, 16 communities hosted **Humanities Camps** with themes ranging from "Wilderness Survival" to "Shakespeare and Team Building," from "Local Mysteries" to "Problem Solving." We awarded \$69,700 in grants to support camps such as Camp Outright in Starksboro for LGBTQ+ and allied youth and the Swanton Library's Marvelous Magical Creatures camp. These camps offered a diverse range of educational and humanities-based activities for students, fostering meaningful interactions and learning experiences. Humanities Camps served a total of over 3,000 participants including students and audiences at performances and events.

Humanities Camp hosts at the Education Justice Coalition of Vermont shared some campers' responses to the question: What is a special memory you have from camp? OR What did you enjoy most about camp?

- When a bunch of us were just sitting and yapping outside of the bathroom or in the village or in the tent."
- "I enjoyed that we were so free to do whatever we wanted and speak to whoever whenever. It felt almost like a big family."
- "Literally EVERYTHING!!! it was so fun and wonderful, and I had an amazing time!!!"
- "I remember baking with a lot of other campers and singing with them and dancing."

For many students, these camps mark a turning point: it may be the first time they feel confident, curious, and acknowledged. Others may find a sense of purpose and belonging that transforms how they view themselves as learners and members of a community. The director of the Richford Jr.-Sr. High School camp reported, "This made for an exciting week of discoveries and honing of artistic skills, as well as camaraderie and collaboration."

Vermont Reads 2025: *The Light Pirate* by Lily Brooks-Dalton has continued the surge in popularity of our statewide, one-book reading program. To date, 109 different Vermont Reads hosts have led *The Light Pirate* programs in 91 different communities, making Brooks-Dalton's novel about climate change and resilience the second-most popular Vermont Reads book ever, based on the number of community projects.

The top three books in the program's 23-year history are from the last four years:

- *Gather* by Kenneth M. Cadow (2024): 138 projects
- *The Light Pirate* (2025): 109 projects
- *The Most Costly Journey* (2022): 106 projects
- *Bread and Roses, Too* by Katherine Paterson (2018): 85 projects
- *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio (2014): 85 projects

Danielle Zimmerman from the Smokey House Center in Danby, VT wrote, "Vermont Reads created a powerful shared experience for our community." Smokey House Center advances ecologically sound farming and forestry and provides work and learning that includes local youth. Copies of *The Light Pirate* were distributed to staff, including summer apprentices, and the Center hosted a three-day nature writing workshop in October led by author Kai Thomas.

"Reading the same book together opened up meaningful conversations among staff and students, encouraging everyone to reflect deeply, listen generously, and engage with one another's perspectives," said Zimmerman.

Due to the overwhelming popularity of the novel, our full stock of books has been claimed. However, many projects are still taking place across Vermont and will do so until the close of the program year on June 30, 2026.

A representative from Brooks-Dalton's publisher, Hachette Book Group, wrote, "Thank you for getting *The Light Pirate* out into your community. The work that you all do is special and we are so honored to have a book in your program."

Vermont Reads project hosts can book one free discussion of *The Light Pirate* led by trained facilitators, and up to two free Speakers Bureau talks. For the third year, Vermont Reads hosts will be able to extend their programming with grants of up to \$500, which can be used for honoraria for

guest speakers, screening costs for films related to the book's themes, facilities charges and equipment rental costs for special events, and transportation costs to events and/or exhibits.

Vermont Reads 2025 will conclude with a special visit to Vermont by Brooks-Dalton, who grew up in Windham County. Taking time out of her busy promotion schedule for her new novel, *Ruins*, she will be a featured speaker at Teen Lit Mob, the state's only literary festival led by and for high school students, in Woodstock on Friday, April 10. The following day, Brooks-Dalton will give a free public talk, which will also be livestreamed, at the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington on Saturday, April 11 at 2 pm. Phoenix Books will offer her books for sale, and she will sign copies after her talk. We welcome legislators to take a break from the end of session challenges and attend this event.

To reiterate, Vermont Humanities requests that the Appropriations Committee fund Vermont Humanities at a total of \$360,600 to recognize the positive impact that the cultural sector has in communities across Vermont during these difficult days.

We are deeply grateful that the Administration and the Vermont Legislature have long understood the importance of the humanities, and we value your steadfast partnership. Together, we can continue this essential work into the future.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Kaufman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Kaufman" clearly distinguishable.

Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup
Executive Director