



DATE: February 13, 2026

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Appropriations

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

RE: Vermont Council on the Arts FY27 Budget Request

Organizational Background

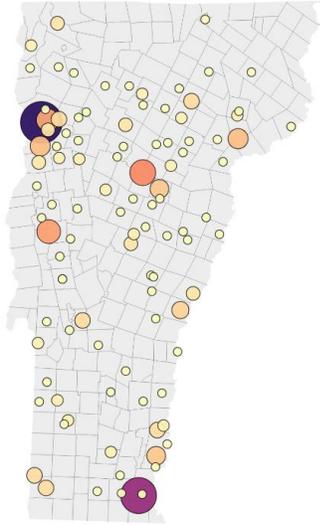
The Vermont Arts Council is the state's arts agency, and the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Arts. The Council envisions a Vermont where artists thrive and everyone has access to creativity in their lives, education, and communities. Engagement with the arts transforms individuals, connects us more deeply to each other, energizes the economy, and sustains the vibrant cultural landscape that makes Vermont a great place to live. Since 1965, the Council has been the state's primary provider of funding, advocacy, and information for the arts in Vermont.

I'm not breaking any news to say that we are in a challenging, unprecedented, and pivotal moment in our nation. The upheaval from the federal government is impacting so many sectors of life in Vermont, and the arts and culture sector are being directly targeted. From cuts to grants at federal cultural agencies, to changing priorities for federal grant making, to the dissolution of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and much more, Vermont's arts and culture sector is under tremendous pressure right now.

At the same time, the past year has shown us time and again, the power that the arts and humanities and libraries and museums have to heal, to connect, and to inspire. America's cultural sector is being uniquely targeted because of the tremendous power that our sector- the arts, humanities, libraries, and museums- has to affect positive change in our communities. The creative sector shows us new ways of looking at the world and helps us remember what being human is all about.

This moment requires courage and connection -our artists and cultural organizations are being courageous; they're continuing to live by their values and do their amazing work in the face of big odds. And they are creating the very connection we need in our communities to build a path forward for Vermont.

The Arts Council sees our role in the state as supporting the infrastructure that the cultural sector needs to thrive and meet the needs of our communities. We work primarily as grantmakers (investing private, state, and federal funding in the arts through a transparent process that supports artists, arts organizations, arts education, and community building), conveners (bringing people together to learn, connect, and advance the arts), advocates, and storytellers.



In FY25, the Arts Council awarded **\$1,444,302 in funding**. 255 total grants were awarded to **95 individuals and 139 organizations** 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.

Some of our key programs include:

- [Creation grants](#) that support outstanding Vermont artists to develop new work.
- [Artist Development grants](#) which foster individual artists' professional development.
- [Arts Operating](#) grants which provide critical operating support to build the capacity of arts nonprofits to affect change.
- [Arts Project](#) grants that fund nonprofit organizations, municipalities, and schools in their efforts to add vibrancy to Vermont communities through projects that provide equal and abundant access to the arts.
- [Animating Infrastructure](#) grants that support unique community projects that integrate public art into infrastructure improvements.
- Teaching artist residencies that engage students from [pre-K through high school](#) and in [Early Childhood Arts Partnership Grants](#) programs in arts-integrated learning.
- The [Creative Aging Initiative](#) which provides older Vermonters with meaningful arts learning experiences that provide rich opportunities for social engagement and community building.

Other highlights from the past fiscal year (FY25) may be found in our [Annual Report](#).

Driving Vermont's Creative Economy

Vermont's creative sector - the collective enterprises, organizations, and individuals whose products and services are rooted in artistic and creative content - is a significant driver of our state's economy. And the Council is committed to growing our creative economy to grow our overall economy on behalf of all Vermonters.

One of the Council's main initiatives is the [Vermont Creative Network](#), which was established by the Vermont Legislature in May 2016. The Creative Network is a broad

coalition of organizations, businesses, and individuals working to advance Vermont's creative sector. Investing in art, culture, and creativity as essential infrastructure 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 2023, the Vermont arts and culture sector was a more than \$1.2 billion industry. The industry represents 3% of Vermont's GSP and accounts for over 10,000 jobs.

But it's not just the direct economic numbers, we also know that patrons of live arts and culture events are directly supporting our local economies. 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. Nonlocal 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.

And it's not just dollars. Vermonters also know that the arts bring our communities together. In the 2024 [Vermont Poll](#), an annual statistically representative, statewide survey of Vermont residents, 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that opportunities to view and participate in arts and culture are an important part of thriving and healthy communities. 87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that arts and culture are an important part of K-12 education in Vermont. In thinking about what defines Vermont, 84% said arts and culture are very important or somewhat important to the identity of our state. [Learn more.](#)

State funding of the Creative Network bolsters local creative sector efforts in communities across Vermont and establishes Vermont as a thriving hub for creative industries. 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.

Business Development Training for Artists

Vermont artists are small businesses, and we hear the need for business development training again and again from the creative sector. For a second year in a row year, with funding from USDA Rural Development and the Vermont Arts Council, we offered free access to business training workshops specifically designed for artists through the

organization [Assets for Artists](#). These virtual workshops covered everything from how to file your taxes, how to incorporate your business, project management, websites, and digital marketing- all designed specifically for artists. And Vermont artists really took advantage of these trainings. 183 artists participated this year- the first year we had 76 artists participate and we thought that was good, but this is a 137% increase in participation! In total, these 183 Vermont artists received 916 hours of learning.

One participant shared that they “Attended a two session project management seminar that entirely changed the way I operate and upgraded my artist collective by leaps and bounds.” Another artist from Barre said, “I did the taxes for artists workshop with Akeem Davis, which was really helpful! It's wild how difficult it is to find simple explainers on self-employment taxes on the internet. I would definitely sign up for another financial education-type workshop.”

Emergency Response: VACDaRN

Another area of focus for the Council over the past few years has been emergency response and emergency preparedness, an issue that will only continue to be vital to Vermont’s creative sector and the future of our state. The Vermont Arts Council are co-leads of the [Vermont Arts and Culture Disaster and Resilience Network](#) (VACDaRN), along with the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, in the Secretary of State’s Office. VACDaRN is working to build the strength and resilience of Vermont’s vital cultural sector and offers trainings, support, and direct assistance.

Through the network, artists and cultural organizations work together to share expertise and resources, mobilize response for mutual assistance during emergencies, and engage collectively with first responders and government emergency management agencies. After both 2023 and 2024’s flooding, the VACDaRN steering team deployed assistance to artists and organizations, providing immediate expertise for conservation needs for impacted cultural heritage materials, supporting the FEMA process, and connecting the sector with Vermont’s emergency management response.

This year, with support from Waterwheel Foundation, the network is bringing together 11 organizations to develop their own disaster plans as part of a Resilient Organizations Cohort. Disaster planning is essential but never urgent. Until there is a disaster. So we are focused on supporting organizations to plan ahead for whatever is thrown at us.

Vermont Arts Council Funding Structure and FY27 Budget

The Vermont Arts Council is the only state arts agency in the country that operates as an independent nonprofit. We are a quasi-state agency, created in statute in 1965. The Council receives the majority of its revenue (80-90%) from two sources: the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the state of Vermont. The NEA requires that state

governments match the federal dollars allocated to state arts agencies, dollar for dollar. Our General Fund allocation, therefore, enables the Arts Council to secure substantial federal funds each year that are distributed to organizations, schools, and communities in all areas of the state.

While so much about federal funding has been uncertain, we have been in an incredibly fortunate position to retain our federal funding with no cuts. The National Endowment for the Arts continues to operate; we have received all of our FY26 money so far. The budget for the NEA was just recently passed, so we have been informed by the NEA that we should plan for continued level funding in FY27.

This is very different than many of our vital partners in cultural organizations across Vermont and the nation. And we recognize the limits to freedom of expression that artists across the nation are feeling. The Vermont Arts Council remains committed to using our public funding to invest in communities to support all Vermonters with increasing access to the arts, arts education, and community connection.

We have been advised by our partners at the NEA that our allocation will again be \$1,071,800. Securing 100% of these vital federal funds will result in increased funding going directly to Vermont's artists and arts organizations who are working to meet the needs of our communities and grow our economy. We are in the Governor's budget at \$1,033,155 this year and are requesting that the legislature fully match our federal award so that we can bring these funds to Vermont. That is a difference of \$38,645 between the Governor's recommended budget and our required state match for our federal award. In previous years we have received final notice of our award amount in April. If there are any changes in our federal award amount, it will remain vitally important that the state continues to support the arts through an appropriation to the Vermont Arts Council.

As I started with today, while the Arts Council's NEA funding has not been cut so far, the other cultural agencies who receive federal and state support have been significantly impacted over the past year: Vermont Humanities, the Vermont Historical Society, and the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. Last year, Vermont Humanities had \$630,000 in appropriated federal funding clawed back and they are anticipating no federal funding in this current fiscal year. Vermont Symphony Orchestra had a grant cancelled by the National Endowment for the Arts. And Vermont Historical Society, who has routinely received funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, is moving forward assuming that funding from that agency will no longer be available.

I know you all know and see every day the important role that our state's cultural agencies play- from economic impact to student success to community cohesion to the functioning of our local democracy. When we stop supporting this important slice of our civil society

with public funding, we diminish our prospects for the long-term future of Vermont. Because this year has been so hard, and because Vermont's artists and cultural organizations are in the cross hairs- our four cultural organizations are requesting an additional 10% in funding this year.

This 10% increase will nowhere near close the gap that these organizations are facing, nor is that the intent- instead, we hope that supporting this request will signify to Vermont communities that the state has their back, the state believes in the work that they do, and that the state values what our sector brings to communities statewide.

For the Arts Council, that 10% increase would more than cover the amount required for our federal match and allow us to increase grant making in our communities who have had their federal funds cancelled. I'm sure my partners at the other cultural organizations would be happy to talk with you about that in their testimony.

I'll end with the words of President John F. Kennedy, who, in 1962 said "I am certain that after the dust of centuries has passed over our cities, we, too, will be remembered not for victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit."

That is what Vermont's cultural organizations are building- our human spirit.

The Work Ahead

Our top priorities for FY27 are to help stabilize and sustain the creative sector through the challenges of our current moment and to build a vibrant, resilient creative economy for Vermont in the following ways:

- Support individual artists in developing the skills and financial strategies to put their creative businesses on firmer footing.
- Provide cultural organizations and creative businesses with the resources and expertise they need to build resilience.
- Revitalize downtowns and stimulate community recovery through the arts.

We continue to be committed to supporting an inclusive, diverse, accessible artistic landscape in Vermont. And we are committed to leading from our values and responding with flexibility to the ever-changing arts, state, and local landscapes in a way that benefits all Vermonters. Strengthening Vermont's creative economy is not only necessary for the good of humanity, but also for our economy. I know we all agree that Vermont, and all of us, need artists and arts opportunities that connect us with ourselves, with each other, and with our communities now more than ever.