CREATE VT
WITH US.

Creativity is essential to the cultural and economic vitality of Vermont. This plan is a portrait of our creative state. It’s a roadmap to equitable growth. And it’s a collective call to action.
We believe that the creative sector cannot thrive until we acknowledge and address racism, systemic injustice, and barriers to equity and accessibility.

We commit to recognizing past injustices, removing barriers, and sharing power with people of all races, genders, sexualities, religions, backgrounds, ages, and abilities.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Vermont is in the traditional un-surrendered territory of the Abenaki people, one of five Wabanaki nations, who have had a continuous presence here since time immemorial.

The Vermont Arts Council learned from Abenaki elders that in Abenaki, Waban is the white flickering light in the sky and Aki is the word for land. So the Wabanaki are the People of the Dawnland. We acknowledge their ancestors, their history, and their continuing creative presence today.

EQUITY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ACCOUNTABILITY AND AUTHENTICITY
We believe in leading with action-based intentionality and authenticity, holding each other accountable.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS
We believe that the creative sector cannot thrive until we address racism, systemic injustice, and barriers to equity and accessibility.

TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION
We believe that communication, coordination and collaboration are essential to scaling up and supporting the creative sector.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND INVESTMENT
We believe that creative individuals, organizations, and enterprises can thrive and can fuel a thriving state, if we invest in them and build capacity.

CREATIVITY, EXPLORATION, INNOVATION
We believe that we must venture beyond the known in order to expand and grow as a creative sector.

BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS
We believe that the creative sector’s ability to partner and build relationships is key to success.
This is a moment of astounding challenge and opportunity—a moment made for Vermont's creative sector.

The United Nations designated 2021 the International Year of the Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, affirming the value of the creative sector for fostering innovation and jobs, decreasing poverty, promoting racial and gender equity, and improving health and wellbeing. Vermont's creative sector is large, vibrant, and ready to lead in these areas.

Creative sector enterprises – publishers, galleries, theaters, museums, design firms, film studios, manufacturers, artisan cheese shops, and more – provide 9.3% of Vermont jobs. In 2019, arts and culture alone contributed $1.1 billion to the Vermont economy.

Like roads and bridges, creativity and innovation are essential infrastructure for Vermont's recovery and future.

A growing body of research demonstrates the power of the creative economy as a catalyst for growth and change, particularly in rural places, and particularly in times of crisis and recovery. Creativity is embedded in Vermont's character and communities, from the innovation of technology start-ups to the surge in artisan foods and the vitality of bustling community arts centers and libraries. Local arts and culture are in turn one of the biggest amenities drawing visitors and younger residents to Vermont.

What if we placed creativity, culture and innovation at the center of our path forward?
The CreateVT Action Plan envisions a Vermont that thrives through creativity, inclusivity, and innovation.

Realizing this vision requires a bold commitment of public and private resources, state and local policies, organized and grassroots action. Developed by the Vermont Creative Network over three years, the plan provides a roadmap for critical investment in Vermont artists, creative entrepreneurs, businesses and facilities at the state, local and individual levels.

The CreateVT plan commits to a creative sector that is diverse, accessible, and that reflects the creative expression of people of all races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, origins, religions, belief systems, ages, and abilities.

Now is the moment to empower and invest in Vermont’s creative sector, and in turn let creativity and innovation shape an equitable and prosperous Vermont. JOIN US.

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**the moment to THRIVE**

9.3% of all Vermont jobs are in the creative sector. For Vermont to thrive, creatives must thrive.

The U.S. creative industry lost 34% of jobs in early 2020, due to COVID-19. To recover, creative people and businesses need business support; studio and work space; and affordable living. Rebuilding jobs means reopening facilities and restarting creative and cultural events; that will take funding and investments.

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**the moment to GROW**

The creative economy is one of the world’s fastest growing sectors. For Vermont to grow, creative industries must grow.

Vermont’s creative sector contributes billions annually to our GDP, but our 8% growth rate is half the U.S. average. Growing creative industries will kickstart Vermont’s economy. Expansion of broadband and digital capacity is urgent, if we want to promote Vermont as a creative hub.

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**the moment to LEAD**

Racism, climate change, affordability, and automation need innovative solutions. For Vermont to lead, the creative sector must lead.

Vermont’s biggest challenges will take big ideas. Our educational system must nurture creative skills essential to the future and open a pipeline to creative careers—that will build our capacity and reputation for innovation and will attract investment and employers, visitors and residents.
Creativity is everywhere in Vermont: at maker spaces and museums, on stages and on street corners, in classrooms and kitchens. To grow and amplify the sector, we first need to understand it.

VERMONT’S creative sector

The collective enterprises, organizations, and individuals whose products and services are rooted in artistic and creative content

- 41K Vermont creative sector jobs
- 9.3% of all Vermont jobs

WHO ARE VERMONT’S CREATIVES?

Musicians, artists and writers are a critical component of Vermont's creative sector, but the sector overall contains a much larger set of occupations.

- A full 50% of Vermont's creative sector workers aren't in traditionally creative occupations—they are the custodians, accountants, line staff, and administrators who keep creative businesses and facilities afloat
- Another 26% are creative workers, like designers or media producers, but in other industries like education or retail
- Nearly 50% of Vermont’s creatives are self-employed or freelance (compared to 40% nationwide)
- 72% of creative sector survey respondents make $30,000 or less from creative work each year

WHAT ARE OUR CREATIVE INDUSTRIES?
Vermont’s seven major creative segments include everything from arts and culture to specialty foods and industrial design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEGMENT</th>
<th>JOB SHARE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Foods</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Arts &amp; Fine Crafts</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Arts</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film &amp; Media</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Arts</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Heritage</td>
<td>4%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

HOW IS OUR CREATIVE SECTOR DOING?
Vermont has more creative industry jobs than the U.S. overall. Unfortunately, growth is lagging.

- 7% of all Vermont jobs are in creative industries (U.S. average: 5.1%)
- Creative industry employment in Vermont is growing at 8% per year (U.S. average: 14%)
- Growth is highest in Addison/Rutland & Windsor/Orange regions

RESEARCH
In 2019, Mt. Auburn Associates completed Vermont’s first creative sector economic study, using economic analysis, focus groups and a statewide survey. Read the full report and explore the findings: vermontcreativenetwork.org.

VISION & PLAN
In 2020, the Vermont Creative Network and Community Workshop led a creative visioning and planning process to engage creative sector leaders and stakeholders, identify priorities, and create an equitable plan.

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE. 3 YEARS. 1 VISION.
we believe that
creativity is essential
to the cultural & economic vitality of Vermont

in our vision:
- arts, culture and creativity are essential Vermont infrastructure
- Vermont communities thrive through creative expression and enterprise
- creative enterprises succeed in a diverse, equitable, connected, and collaborative environment
Arts, culture and creativity are just as essential to Vermont’s future as roads, bridges and broadband. When we prioritize them as such, we will see a corresponding increase in statewide investment and resources, enabling policies, and education for the creative sector.

**GOALS & STRATEGIES**

**goal 1 | RESOURCES**
Creative enterprises have equitable access to robust public, private and community funding and resources.

1.1 Expand, develop and diversify accessible public and private funding streams to support the creative sector
1.2 Develop and promote policies and funding programs that ensure equitable access to resources
1.3 Collect, synthesize, and share statewide data on the creative sector and its return on investment

**goal 2 | EDUCATION**
Educational systems develop creative talent, skills, access to, and appreciation for arts and culture.

2.1 Foster accessible, creativity-infused education programming from early childhood through college and adult education
2.2 Encourage programs that expand creative sector mentorship, career development, certifications or credentials of value, and workforce training
2.3 Promote inclusive professional development and learning opportunities in all creative disciplines

**goal 3 | POLICY**
State and local policies are designed to equitably support creative enterprises and infrastructure.

3.1 Organize a statewide advocacy team and annual strategy
3.2 Build capacity for advocacy within the creative sector and Vermont Creative Network
3.3 Create a multi-audience communications campaign and toolkit to increase awareness of and support for the creative sector
Creativity is at the center of thriving, healthy, and equitable communities. When we foster local creative enterprises, infrastructure, leadership and collaborations, it pays off in community building, problem solving, vibrancy, livability, and economic benefits.

**SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE...**

**GOALS & STRATEGIES**

**goal 4 | LOCAL CREATIVITY**

Communities are infused with opportunities for creative economic development, expression and engagement.

4.1 Support the development and improvement of accessible venues, facilities, and work spaces for creative programs and enterprises

4.2 Promote creative activities through new and existing funding programs

4.3 Develop resources to build local capacity for creative initiatives

**goal 5 | LEADERSHIP**

Creatives are engaged in community building and leadership.

5.1 Create trainings and toolkits to support local and regional creative sector advocacy

5.2 Support and promote inclusive access to leadership development and opportunities for creative sector members

5.3 Support the development of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility strategies in Vermont's creative organizations

**goal 6 | COLLABORATIONS**

Cross-sector collaborations amplify creativity and local economies.

6.1 Cultivate partnerships and collaborations with other sectors such as transportation, tourism, recreation, and health

6.2 Establish reciprocal outreach partnerships with organizations that reach new audiences and diverse Vermonters

6.3 Promote cross-sector collaborations by sharing resources, successful models, and stories
A strong creative sector means thriving creative people, entrepreneurs, businesses, and organizations. We must dismantle inequitable systems, increase access to resources, and promote a diverse creative sector that includes underrepresented groups like people of color, indigenous people, LGBTQIA2S+, new Americans, migrant workers, and people with disabilities.

**SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE...**

**GOALS & STRATEGIES**

**goal 7 | SUPPORT**

Creative people and enterprises have abundant access to the resources they need to succeed.

7.1 Connect creative enterprises to business and technical support resources
7.2 Support statewide advocacy efforts for livability, affordability and accessibility
7.3 Provide COVID-19 recovery assistance and resources and support continuing creative sector disaster resilience

**goal 8 | NETWORKS**

Vibrant networks support creative people, industries, and communities of practice.

8.1 Define and promote VCN membership and participation to diverse creatives
8.2 Cultivate and support existing networks of support for people who identify with traditionally underrepresented groups
8.3 Expand and publicize creative networking events
8.4 Assess and strengthen accessible, user-friendly communication and networking channels for the creative sector

**goal 9 | PROMOTION**

Vermont is promoted as a hub for creative talent, experiences and communities.

9.1 Promote creative content and offerings that reflect the diversity of the state and elevate the culture and creativity of traditionally underrepresented groups
9.2 Develop solutions and partnerships to expand market reach of creative sector businesses, in-state and beyond
9.3 Integrate creative offerings into statewide marketing and incentives for tourists, investors, residents and businesses
Our implementation plan consists of three agendas to direct and prioritize actions: a statewide advocacy agenda to secure creative sector resources, a network agenda to connect and empower creatives, and a local agenda to guide regional and local action.

Implementation requires resources and investment, which calls for clear and coordinated statewide advocacy. While annual needs will change, four major priorities for collective advocacy have emerged.

### Advocacy Agenda

**Invest in Cultural Infrastructure**

Theaters, museums, libraries, parks, and community centers are essential for creative activity. Expanding programs like Cultural Facilities Grants and Historic Downtown Tax Credits can support upgrades, accessibility improvements, and new facilities.

**Promote Creative Local Economies**

From food festivals to public art, increasing creative local economic development projects is a win-win, growing local economies, vibrancy, and access to arts & culture. Supporting them takes dedicated funding programs like Better Places, and creative projects in other programs.

**Invest in Digital Capacity**

Digital skills and the ability to connect will be essential for creative enterprises in a post-pandemic world. Vermont must invest heavily in broadband expansion, technical assistance and digital capacity.

**Develop Entrepreneur & Business Skills**

Diverse creative enterprises need diverse professional skills: fundraising, finance, project management, equity practices and more. Additional funding could scale up and customize small business trainings and programs for the creative sector.
Making progress on this plan requires building the capacity for the Vermont Creative Network (VCN) to support a broader range of creatives and to forge coalitions of allied partners. These key actions will strengthen the VCN.

**NETWORK AGENDA**

**GROW & DIVERSIFY the network**
Many Vermont creatives don’t yet engage with the VCN, or even identify with the sector. We must create space for those left out and make the case to join in.

- Create a VCN brand and messaging campaign
- Define VCN membership and expand participation
- Create and support existing networks for underrepresented groups

**CONNECT & ENGAGE creatives & partners**
When creatives connect, opportunities happen. Statewide, local, and cross-sector events and networking opportunities are top priorities.

- Organize statewide events for VCN members
- Develop regular zone networking events and communication channels
- Connect with cross-sector partners in food, recreation, tourism and allied sectors

**SUPPORT & EMPOWER the network**
Creative people and businesses need resources and assistance to grow and market their work. VCN must help gather, broadcast and customize resources.

- Develop and share resources for COVID-19 recovery
- Scope, design, and build an online resource hub
- Offer network trainings in advocacy and diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility

**MEASURE & SHARE creative sector impacts**
Successful advocacy hinges on demonstrating the creative sector’s impact. Collecting and sharing data, stories, and impacts is a top priority.

- Develop a creative sector monitoring/reporting plan
- Form an advocacy team to create an annual advocacy agenda and plan
- Develop toolkits and events to expand members’ advocacy skills

**LOCAL AGENDA**

**BUILD & JOIN TEAMS for local action**
Some areas have strong creative networks, committees, or councils already. All areas should facilitate ways to work together.

- Get involved with a VCN Zone
- Develop a local or regional creative sector plan

**STRENGTHEN PLANS and policies**
Local plans and policies are powerful tools to support (or inhibit) creative sector growth.

- Review town and regional plans for creative language
- Develop a local or regional creative sector plan

**IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY of spaces & programs**
Make sure flexible, varied, creative community spaces and programs are accessible for all.

- Upgrade cultural, community and arts facilities for accessibility and flexibility
- Develop affordable offerings for diverse local audiences

**CREATE! anywhere & everywhere**
Creativity should be everywhere in communities. Publicize what’s happening and start creating more.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan was produced with input, resources and support from thousands of people and dozens of organizations. We’re grateful to everyone who played a role in creating it and who will carry it forward.

VCN STEERING TEAM

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David Schütz, Vermont Buildings & General Services
Morgan Webster, Common Good Vermont

* Zone Agents

The VCN is a broad collective of organizations, businesses, and individuals working to advance Vermont’s creative sector. The Vermont Arts Council provides backbone support.

Amy Cunningham,
Network Coordinator
vermontcreativenetwork.org

VERMONT CREATIVE NETWORK

VERMONT ARTS COUNCIL
vermontartscouncil.org
Since 1965, the Vermont Arts Council has been the state’s primary provider of funding, advocacy, and information for the arts in Vermont.

SUPPORTERS

We are grateful to the following funders and organizations for their generous support of CreateVT.

major grants
Jane’s Trust
The Windham Foundation

additional support
Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development
National Life Group Foundation
Ruth and Peter Metz Family Foundation

CONSULTANTS

Planning & engagement lead
Community Workshop
communityworkshopllc.com
Rebecca Sanborn Stone, David Hohenschau, Emily Adams

Planning & facilitation support
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CREATIVE SECTOR RESEARCH

The majority of research and data presented in this plan derive from Vermont’s first comprehensive study of the creative sector, “Assessing Vermont’s Creative Economy.”

A team led by Mt. Auburn Associates completed this analysis in 2019 using national economic and employment data, a statewide survey of independent creative sector members, and a series of statewide focus groups. The full research summary is available at vermontcreativenetwork.org.

Mt. Auburn Associates
mtauburnassociates.com
Beth Siegel, Alyssa Rosen, Emily Doglio

With support from
Stuart Rosenfeld
Melissa Levy (Community Roots LLC)

REFERENCES


ARTWORK

Juniper Creative Arts
Jennifer Herrera Condry, Will Kasso Condry, and Alexa Herrera Condry created the original vision artwork illustrating this plan.

junipercreative.bigcartel.com