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**Vermont Creative Network to Develop a Northeast Kingdom Creative Economy Action Plan**

Montpelier – The Vermont Creative Network, in conjunction with the Vermont Arts Council and an advisory committee comprising Northeast Kingdom (NEK) arts and community leaders, is developing a creative economy action plan for the three-county region. Supported by grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Vermont Community Foundation, the six-month project will result in a comprehensive plan to move the NEK creative sector forward and raise community awareness of the power and potential of the creative economy.

“We are grateful for this direct financial investment by the USDA and the Vermont Community Foundation,” said Vermont Arts Council Executive Director Karen Mittelman. “Their support will enable vital research and the development of a framework to create jobs by leveraging the region’s creative assets and entrepreneurial capacity.”

Organizers intend for the NEK project to serve as a model for Vermont that can be used to create individualized regional data and action steps for other areas of the state. They define the creative economy broadly to include organizations and individuals whose products and services are rooted in artistic and creative content, encompassing visual and performing arts as well as filmmaking, historical sites, writing and publishing, graphic design, and artisan food. This project aligns with the economic development priorities laid out by the NEK Collaborative organization, specifically supporting growth at the intersection of the creative, recreational, and food sectors.

Jody Fried, Catamount Arts executive director and chair of the Vermont Creative Network steering team added, “We know that the NEK has a wealth of cultural assets with significant untapped potential. Through this action plan, we will harness the energies of organizations and individuals throughout the NEK to benefit the economy and improve the quality of life for all NEK residents.”

The project will be implemented by a team including Melissa Levy, principal of Vermont-based Community Roots, LLC, a consulting firm specializing in rural economic and community development, Julia Dixon, an artist and creative economy consultant in the Berkshires, as well as Michael Kane, Stu Rosenfeld, and Stephen Michon, national experts on the creative economy. Members of the team have conducted similar studies for 16 urban and rural states or regions across the U.S., including the Creative Economy Strategic Plan for Orange and Windsor Counties in Vermont in 2015-2016.

According to Amy Cunningham, Vermont Arts Council deputy director and Vermont Creative Network manager, “This project will lift up the creative sector in the Northeast Kingdom, not only generating good ideas, but importantly building the capacity and momentum necessary to ensure that the good ideas get implemented. We are particularly excited to see the ways in which the work done in the Kingdom will inform and inspire the Creative Network throughout the state.”

### **About the Vermont Creative Network**

The Vermont Creative Network (VCN) is a broad collective of organizations, businesses, and individuals — all working to advance Vermont’s creative sector. Established by the Vermont Legislature in 2016 with support from the Vermont Community Foundation, this network of statewide creatives, economic and community development professionals, and nonprofit leaders has identified the need for comprehensive analysis of and action plan for the creative economy in Vermont. [www.vermontcreativenetwork.org](http://www.vermontcreativenetwork.org)

### **About the Vermont Arts Council**

The Vermont Arts Council envisions a state where everyone has access to the arts and creativity in their life, education, and community. Through its programs and services, the Council strives to increase public awareness of the positive role artists and arts organizations play in communities and to maximize opportunities for everyone to experience the arts. Since 1965, the Council has been the state's primary provider of funding, advocacy, and information for the arts in Vermont. [www.vermontartscouncil.org](http://www.vermontartscouncil.org).

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