Dear Friends,

Cultural organizations were among the first to close and will certainly be among the last to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, yet they are vital to the long-term success of Vermont communities.

Museums, libraries, theaters, galleries, and art centers provide support to individuals and families at critical moments in our lives. These organizations allow us to integrate and share our human experience. When a community gathers to celebrate or mourn, learn or connect, Vermont’s cultural organizations often provide the physical infrastructure, as well as the context and meaning.

Without the intentional cultivation of the arts and humanities in Vermont, we risk losing sight of where we’ve been, where we are now, and where we want to go.

This report lays out the work that we have done in partnership with the state of Vermont, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities to save Vermont’s cultural organizations from the most devastating impacts of the pandemic. It also notes where we have fallen short and illustrates the critical need for an ongoing, sustained investment in Vermont’s recovery.

Vermont’s artists and humanists are key voices in the ongoing discussion about how our communities can recover from Covid-19. We urge you to engage with the following stories and join us to ensure that the arts and humanities continue as vital hubs in our cities, towns, and villages.

Sincerely,

Karen Mittelman
Vermont Arts Council

Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup
Vermont Humanities

Without the intentional cultivation of the arts and humanities in Vermont, we risk losing sight of where we’ve been, where we are now, and where we want to go.”
CULTURE AND COVID

The Covid-19 pandemic has profoundly jeopardized the economic viability of Vermont’s cultural organizations, large and small. They were among the first to close to protect public health and the last to re-open.

197 APPLICANTS REPORTED $36M IN LOST REVENUE & 1.7M PEOPLE NOT REACHED AS A RESULT OF COVID-19.

CULTURAL RECOVERY IS VERMONT RECOVERY

In 2019, Vermont’s arts and culture sector added $1.1 billion in value to Vermont’s gross domestic product. The sector ranked a close third behind retail and construction. Vermont’s cultural organizations are critical to individual and community recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

These organizations:
- Support the social and emotional health of individuals and families
- Connect people more deeply to each other by building community
- Drive local economic activity
- Attract new residents and retain existing residents
- Bring visitors
- Sustain the vibrant cultural landscape that makes Vermont a great place to live

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Vermont Cultural Recovery Grant Program | 2021

To offset continued economic fallout from the pandemic, the Vermont Arts Council (VAC) and Vermont Humanities (VH) have awarded $1.2 million in recovery funding to 146 Vermont arts and humanities organizations through a collaborative grant program made possible by American Rescue Plan Act funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Vermont Cultural Recovery Grant Program is the second joint VAC-VH program providing rapid-response funding to arts and humanities organizations facing financial hardship as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, cultural organizations across the state used this funding to adapt their programs to the challenges presented by Covid, create new programs to meet evolving community needs, or to simply survive.

Arts and/or humanities organizations incorporated in the state of Vermont with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status were eligible to apply for the grants, which covered general operating or project expenses of $5,000 to $15,000 depending on the organization’s size.

Both councils are committed to equitable grantmaking. Special consideration was given to organizations serving and led by members of communities traditionally under-resourced in the arts and humanities.

Last year’s Cultural Relief Program distributed more than $780,000 to 123 cultural organizations, as detailed in the 2020 CARES Act Report to the Community.

There is no way we could have remained open or served all these kids without the recovery funding.”

— Hallie Flower, New England Youth Theatre

Pictured: Members of Sandglass Theater and the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program teach Vermonters about the refugee experience through an interactive game.
White River Junction had many vacant storefronts. "It was a town in progress," he says, "but fast-forward to today, you can see the positive economic impact the school has had, with 60 people who work for or study at the school year-round. Plus people come in from all over to eat, stay at a hotel, and do some shopping while they’re here."

CCS generates between $1.5 and $2 million in economic activity per year, but dollars don’t paint the full picture. When the pandemic hit and kids were out of school, CCS began offering hour-long cartooning classes online three times per week.

"It was amazing to see all these kids popping in from across the country—California, Alaska—craving that social interaction. And their parents just needing a break," remembers Lloyd.

CCS didn’t profit from the program, but Lloyd says it was well worth the time and effort: "For parents, the initial shutdown of the pandemic was brutal. We had something to offer that parents and kids really appreciated, really needed." Lloyd recalls. "Wouldn’t it be nice if we could assign a dollar amount to that?"

The Center for Cartoon Studies will use Cultural Recovery Grant funding to continue its scholarship program for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students.

We had something to offer that parents and kids really needed.

Keeping Communities Alive

CENTER FOR CARTOON STUDIES | WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VT

The organization is simultaneously empowering a growing network of Black artists in Vermont, preserving the 138-acre Clemons Farm, and curating opportunities for visitors to discover the history, culture, arts, and sciences of the African-American and African diaspora.

Vermont is often noted for a lack of racial diversity, a critique that ignores the over 36,000 Vermont residents who identify as non-white. CFF’s Vermont African-American/ African Diaspora Artists’ Network currently serves 220 musicians, singers, poets, spoken word artists, hip hop artists, DJs, dancers, hair braiders, painters, photographers, videographers, film editors, graphic designers, actors, historians, and scholars.

During a time of increased hate crimes and hostility toward members of the Black community, the need for programs that support them are in high demand. But the Black leaders running these programs are often over-extended as they manage the fallout from Covid-19 and increased racial tension this past year.

“We need to slow down and accommodate these artists and culture bearers who are handling so much right now," says Lydia Clemmons, CFF’s president and executive director, referring to the negative health impacts of Covid-19 on Black artists who were already facing disparities and the daily stress of racism.

The organization is simultaneously empowering a growing network of Black artists in Vermont, preserving the 138-acre Clemons Farm, and curating opportunities for visitors to discover the history, culture, arts, and sciences of the African-American and African diaspora.

"We need to slow down and accommodate these artists."
**Uphill Climb: The Need Remains**

**NEW ENGLAND YOUTH THEATRE | BRATTLEBORO, VT**

Hollie Flower, director of the New England Youth Theatre (NEYT), has a plan if recovery funding for cultural organizations dries up: “We’ll pull back programming again and go bare bones,” she says. “That means another round of furloughs. And it means saying no to some percentage of the young people who want to be here.”

From Shakespeare to European clown tradition to holiday musicals with a live band, NEYT offers a delightfully diverse array of theatre opportunities for K-12 youth, both on stage and behind the scenes.

Young people are hungry for places of belonging, where they can be themselves and express themselves. Flower says that, for the nearly 1,000 youth who engage with NEYT in a normal year, the theatre is where they feel at home. And that the need is greater now than before the pandemic: “They’re carrying a lot of trauma. We are part of how the community is going to heal.”

When the theatre reopened with outdoor programming in the summer of 2020, the NEYT community literally came running. Flower got emotional thinking back on it: “I watched these two young women race toward each other that first day, stopping just short of a hug. It was the first time they’d seen another peer in months.”

While the theatre continues to operate at limited capacity, staff are working twice as hard to support the kids, keep folks safe, and do it all within a greatly reduced budget. “Kids and families want us back all the way, but the earned revenue isn’t there until we can pack the audience.”

**New England Youth Theatre will use Cultural Recovery Grant funding to bring back programming and provide more normalcy for the youth it serves.**

**Crisis-Fueled Innovation**

**LAKE CHAMPLAIN MARITIME MUSEUM | VERGENNES, VT**

When the pandemic hit, Susan McClure said that Lake Champlain Maritime Museum had no problem adapting: “We’re all creatives: naturally flexible and innovative. So we’re actually very adept at managing a crisis.” McClure is the museum’s director who oversaw an impressive number of Covid-friendly programs and adaptations over the last year, including a website-as-museum overhaul and a museum-site accessibility plan.

McClure says the hardest part of the pandemic has been recovering lost revenue. In a typical year, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum reaches nearly 10,000 people from across the world. Considered nonessential, the museum was quick to close its doors and slow to reopen them.

When the museum finally did welcome visitors again in May 2021, it did so under a new free admission model, which resulted in a 30% increase in museum visits. The jump demonstrates the demand for humanities programming and the financial barrier that made it inaccessible for much of the local population.

“Having stable, unrestricted support at the state and federal level allows us to focus on our impact,” she says. “When we have time to learn how to be a better museum, we actually become a better museum. And then more people show up.”

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum will use Cultural Recovery Grant funding to continue offering free admission.
Lessons Learned

1. Vermont’s cultural organizations are resilient and creative. These organizations have shown remarkable courage, often re-inventing their missions and business models overnight.

2. Hundreds of venues face an uncertain future. They need assistance to manage the high cost of Covid-safe supplies, re-boot programs, re-engage their audiences, and devise new financial models to survive.

3. The cultural sector is poised to help Vermont recover. These organizations drive the local economy, promote individual wellbeing, hold our history, and connect communities.

The Big Picture

Our advocacy and communications efforts over the past year were critical to securing the largest cultural funding allocation in the history of Vermont:

$5 million set aside for arts and cultural nonprofits in emergency economic relief, followed by an allocation of $1.15 million in state funds to specifically address the digital capacity needs of cultural non-profit organizations.

Despite an influx of funding, cultural organizations are still struggling:

• The future remains uncertain
• Federal and state grants didn’t meet the need
• Many are still operating at limited capacity
• Recovery is expensive

Cultural organizations are essential infrastructure.

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.

• Our communities won’t bounce back without our cultural organizations
• State and federal Covid-19 relief funding was critical to helping stabilize the sector
• Recovery is slow and the need for funding remains

Cultural recovery is Vermont recovery.

Federal and State Covid-19 Relief Grants for Vermont Cultural Organizations*

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<th>SOURCE</th>
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<td>Federal Shuttered Venue Operators Grants **</td>
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<tr>
<td>VT Economic Recovery Grants</td>
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</table>

*NEA Direct ARPA Fund Awards TBA spring 2022
**Federal Shuttered Venue Operators Grant to cultural nonprofits as of 12/06/21.

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**GRAND TOTAL** 549 $ 17,001,130

FACILITY ADAPTATION GRANTS to support Covid-safe buildings.

PROGRAM ADAPTATION GRANTS to support Covid-safe programming.

RECOVERY GRANTS to cover fixed monthly costs for organizations still operating at limited capacity.

Join Us

Theaters, community arts centers, galleries, museums, libraries, and hundreds of other cultural organizations are still struggling financially.

To ensure their sustainability for generations to come, we must invest in:

Cultural recovery is Vermont recovery.

Photo Credit: Hartford Memorial Middle School

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The Covid-19 Cultural Recovery Grant Program was seeded by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and funded through the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).