Introduction

Many arts and culture organizations increased their digital capacity and expanded online programming in response to the challenges of the pandemic. Engaging with audiences through digital media will be an ongoing need for Vermont’s arts and culture sector as we move forward. In response to this, the Vermont legislature approved $1.15 million in one-time funding to the Arts Council to help build the digital capacity of Vermont cultural organizations.

This report details the four components of the Digital Capacity Program:

- Organization Grants
- Collaborative Grants
- Technical Assistance
- Support for Artists

The pandemic forced us to look at creative ways to deliver our arts offerings to everyone during a time when our theater was forced to close for health safety, and we quickly realized that our ability to deliver live arts digitally, in addition to in-person, would be the future for the organization.

– Friends of the Vergennes Opera House

Organization Grants

Digital Capacity Organization Grants were intended to support Vermont’s arts and culture organizations by providing them with the skills, equipment, and expertise they needed to serve their audiences and community. Grant awards ranged from $5,000 to $30,000 depending on the scope of the project and the organization’s operating budget. Grant funds were used for a broad range of activities related to the creation, distribution, and marketing of digital content for public audiences, including website accessibility improvements, live streaming equipment upgrades, new online learning platforms, and more.

- # of Applications Received: 110
- Requested: $2,907,824
- Funded: 39 grants
- Amount: $974,200

Find the complete list of organization grantees at the end of the report starting on p.5.

Collaborative Grants

Two multi-year grants of $120,000 each were given to Catamount Arts in St. Johnsbury and Town Hall Theater in Middlebury to support collaborative efforts designed to increase the digital capacity of a cultural community in a particular region or focused on a particular content area or type of cultural organization.

At Catamount Arts, funds will be used to enhance the digital capacity of foundational, regional production services for more than 40 partners in the Northeast Kingdom, with the goal of
enhancing the digital capabilities of the creative assets in the towns and communities of Vermont’s most remote region. Upgrades are planned for regional box office/ticketing software and hardware; database and data management tools; digital marketing integration; and accessibility features, such as real-time, state-of-the-art closed captioning options for digital streaming and projection services.

At Town Hall Theater in Middlebury, funds were used to create the Addison Art Media Partnership (AAMP), specifically supporting a multi-camera, shared media hub at the theater for its network of resident companies, Middlebury Community Television, community partners, and audiences. Video and sound capabilities were installed at the theater for live-streaming, hybrid and recorded events and classes. An accessible website with county-wide arts calendar is also planned. Funds will also cover hiring a part-time technician and freelancers to run the digital media platform. With the shared technology and training, alongside the formation of AAMP, the goal is to create a stronger, more unified arts community in Addison County.

### Technical Assistance

The Digital Capacity Program also enabled the Council to partner with a number of organizations to offer an array of free technical assistance opportunities to support the development of digital programming, including digital accessibility, video creation, and legal assistance.

#### Digital Accessibility

In partnership with Inclusive Arts Vermont (https://www.inclusiveartsvermont.org/), nine webinars with more than 500 participants covered the following topics.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/2/2021</td>
<td>Disability Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/7/2021</td>
<td>Communication: The Power of Language and Disability Etiquette</td>
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<td>1/4/2022</td>
<td>Creating Verbal Description &amp; Alt Text</td>
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<td>2/1/2022</td>
<td>Beyond the Physical: Meeting Sensory Needs</td>
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<td>4/5/2022</td>
<td>Accessible Web Design</td>
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<td>Accessible Social Media</td>
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<td>Accessible Graphic Design</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/5/2022</td>
<td>Creating an Accessibility Plan</td>
<td>74</td>
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In December, Town Hall Theater completed its first-ever recording of a holiday concert thanks to the digital capacity grant. The “Kat & Brett Holiday Fête” is now available on YouTube at [https://youtu.be/nbRjcgMpgJk](https://youtu.be/nbRjcgMpgJk).
Webinar recordings are available on the Council's YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/user/vermontarts council) and, as of January 2023, have been viewed more than 500 times.

Video Creation

Media Factory (https://www.mediafactory.org/) offered three workshops related to video creation: Production Elements, Editing Essentials, and Going Live With What You Got. They also held two tech sessions and provided eight one-on-one consultations.

Legal Assistance

The Vermont Small Business Development Center (https://www.vtsbdc.org/) held sessions on legal considerations for online programming (presented by Vermont Law School), website analytics, social media marketing, and e-commerce.

All of our Technical Assistance videos are available for viewing on a dedicated page on our website (https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/programs/technical-assistance) as ongoing resource for organizations and artists to learn from. As of January 2023, the page has been visited 275 times. The videos have been viewed on our YouTube channel a total of 675 times. The top two most viewed videos are "Disability Awareness and Ableism" and "Creating Alt Text & Verbal Descriptions."

Support for Artists

The Arts Council solicited proposals from Vermont nonprofits that provide services and support to artists across the state and that are prepared to deliver training addressing the specific needs of artists in their networks. The following organizations received special grants to support the development of digital skills of individual artists across Vermont and to strengthen the capacity of statewide service organizations to provide digital support to the field:

**Big Heavy World**, Burlington, $10,800 to support providing 90 RØDE NT USB Mini microphones available to be borrowed by all Vermont musicians and the public via the state’s public libraries and their inter-library loan system

**Big Heavy World**, Burlington, $24,900 to create an on-demand music licensing platform so marketing firms and state agencies can easily license Vermont-made music for their content

**Burlington City Arts (BCA)**, $30,000 to support Highlight, Vermont's 2021 New Year's Eve celebration, produced by Signal Kitchen and BCA. The grant provided digital skills training and marketing support for participating artists. The festival brought Vermont’s leading artists, doers, and creators together through extensive virtual and in-person events. A total of 4,272 people attended the festival, 1,955 of whom attended virtually.
Clemmons Family Farm, Charlotte, $15,000 to support workshops on legal and artistic issues related to digital presentations for artists in their Vermont African-American/African Diaspora Artists Network

Vermont Abenaki Artists Association, Burlington, $15,000 to support digital skills training for team members and Abenaki teaching artists

Vermont Crafts Council, Montpelier, $5,000 to support Zoom training, small group coaching sessions, and individual mentoring sessions for craft artists

Vermont Dance Alliance, Burlington, $13,725 to support free dance and technology mini courses from November 2021 to March 2022 both virtually and in person. Courses covered production elements, camera movement, cinematography, editing, and more for dance video-making.

Conclusion

Building a strong digital foundation for Vermont's arts and culture sector is essential to Vermont's recovery from the impact of Covid-19. State investment in the creative sector through this program is providing important resources for arts and cultural organizations to innovate, adapt to the challenges brought on by the pandemic, to improve accessibility, and reach out to broader populations. Vermont's creative sector continues to serve local communities and engage public audiences through digital formats while developing additional strategies for long-term resilience and preparedness.

List of Digital Capacity Organization Grants

Art on Main, Bristol, $7,500 to support building a new website

Bennington Museum, Bennington, $25,000 to support website redesign for accessibility

Brattleboro Words Trail, Brattleboro, $25,000 to support creating digital content

CATV, Inc., White River Junction, $5,000 to support website redesign for accessibility

CCTV, Burlington, $29,000 to support installing neighborhood-based video system and launch a demonstration video captioning project

Central Vermont Community Radio Corporation, Plainfield, $15,000 to support expanding hybrid broadcasting sytems and equipment

Clemmons Family Farm, Charlotte, $25,000 to support integrating an e-commerce platform on the website, procure a nonprofit management platform, upgrade artist network database, and procure equipment for livestreaming

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro, $18,000 to support expanding digital programming
Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium, St. Johnsbury, $22,000 to support website redesign for accessibility

Friends of the Vergennes Opera House, Vergennes, $14,000 to support purchasing equipment for livestreaming

Generator, Burlington, $12,000 to support creation and expansion of digital offerings

Heritage Winooski Mill Museum, Winooski, $20,000 to support purchase of digital storytelling system

The Vermont Abenaki Artists Association (VAAA) is a Native American arts organization that serves the public by connecting them to Abenaki educators, artists from the visual and performing arts as well as literary genres. The VAAA received grants to support the organization and to extend digital skills training to artists in its network.

Inclusive Arts Vermont, St. Albans, $28,000 to support hiring a part-time digital content manager

JAG Productions, White River Junction, $7,400 to support website redesign for accessibility

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum at Basin Harbor, Vergennes, $22,000 to support expanding online learning experiences, building staff capacity, and improving accessibility for virtual audiences

Lost Nation Theater, Montpelier, $22,000 to support purchasing equipment, website updates for accessibility, digital marketing strategies, ASL interpretation and audio description services, and upgrading internet service

Media Hour Ltd, East Arlington, $12,000 to support purchasing equipment and expanding digital workshops

Middlebury Community Music Center, Middlebury, $20,000 to support expanding digital programming and offering livestreamed performances

Montpelier Community Gospel Choir, Montpelier, $20,000 to support increasing digital capacity and expanding online programming

North Branch Nature Center, Montpelier, $25,000 to support enhancing the digital and hybrid visitor experience

Out in the Open, Brattleboro, $29,000 to support creating a Rural LGBTQ Audio Fellowship

Outright Vermont, Burlington, $25,000 to support creating an online learning platform

Pride Center of VT, Burlington, $22,000 to support existing digital capacity
Rokeby Museum, Ferrisburgh, $11,500 to support upgrading Wi-Fi access, purchase equipment for livestreaming, and hire a videographer

Rural ARTS Collaborative, Greensboro, $25,000 to support the Digital Archive Project with staff positions, web accessibility consultants, and equipment purchases

SafeArt, Chelsea, $5,000 to support updating and purchasing new computers

Stage 33 Live, Bellows Falls, $7,800 to support creating a permanent high-quality livestreaming infrastructure

Stone Valley Arts, Poultney, $15,000 to support increasing digital capacity

Theatre Adventure, Brattleboro, $15,000 to support purchasing equipment for hybrid programming, retaining ASL interpreter, and supplementing the technical director position

Vermont Abenaki Artists Association, South Burlington, $15,000 to support technical assistance with social media marketing, website updates, and video production

Vermont College of Fine Arts, Montpelier, $18,000 to support developing an accessible micro-site for the Center for Arts and Social Justice

Vermont Folklife Center, Middlebury, $25,000 to support website redesign for accessibility and marketing digital content

Vermont Historical Society, Barre, $22,000 to support creating short videos that highlight the Vermont Historical Society’s collection

Vermont Jazz Center, Brattleboro, $22,000 to support website redesign for accessibility, livestreaming concerts, and securing intellectual property rights

Vermont Symphony Orchestra, Burlington, $25,000 to support recording concerts, enhancing website and digital ticketing, and improve social media presence and educational content

Very Merry Theatre, Burlington, $25,000 to support creating a digital classroom

Weston Playhouse Theatre Company, Weston, $22,000 to support purchasing equipment, training staff, and hiring commercial digital production companies to create marketing and promotional assets

Windham World Affairs, Brattleboro, $6,000 to support expanding digital audience and online accessibility

Young Writers Project, Burlington, $25,000 to support website redesign for accessibility
For More Information

For more information, contact Amy Cunningham
acunningham@vermontartscouncil.org

About the Vermont Arts Council
The Vermont Arts Council envisions a Vermont where all people have access to the arts and 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. Learn more at www.vermontartscouncil.org

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