CreateVT Action Plan
Progress Report

2022
Vermont is known as one of the most creative states in the nation. From Bennington to Barton, arts and culture nonprofits and creative businesses significantly bolster the local economy and are at the heart of Vermont's identity.

In 2021, the Vermont Creative Network (VCN) launched an ambitious statewide action plan and roadmap for the state's creative sector. Based on research to document the scope and economic impact of the creative sector, the CreateVT Action Plan incorporates the ideas of thousands of people and serves as a vision and roadmap for a Vermont that thrives through creativity, inclusivity and innovation. The plan was recognized as the 2022 Plan of the Year by Vermont Planners Association and by the Northern New England Chapter of the American Planners Association.

The CreateVT Action Plan is at once a portrait and celebration of Vermont's creative sector and a resource for achieving our vision, but perhaps most importantly it is a call to action for people, businesses, leaders, communities and champions to invest now, invest deeply and invest together in our creative future.

This report is an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the progress made in amplifying Vermont's creative sector since the launch of this plan in 2021. As our movement grows, we hope to learn more about what is already happening, engage new and different voices, connect people to needed resources, and inspire and support additional efforts.
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 enterprises and activities are tremendously diverse, ranging from symphony orchestras to artisan furniture factories, from major employers to small libraries, from individual artists to the venues, suppliers, retailers and service providers they connect with. A major statewide research study in 2019 on Vermont’s creative sector informed the action plan. Key findings of the study are:

- Vermont’s share of creative economy jobs (9.3% of all employment) is higher than the US average.
- The majority of those jobs are in design, specialty foods, and visual arts and crafts.
- Nearly 50% of Vermont’s creatives are self-employed or freelance (compared to 40% nationwide).
- The pace of growth in Vermont’s creative sector is lagging (8% growth from 2010 to 2018 vs. 14% nationally).

The seven creative segments in Vermont and the percentage of workers in the field. Source: Mt. Auburn Associations, 2019
## VISIONS FOR VERMONT'S CREATIVE SECTOR

The CreateVT Action Plan is a tapestry woven from thousands of individual ideas and visions, outlining a Vermont that we believe in and the Vermont that we will work toward. Since the plan was launched in 2021, we have made advances in building the network itself, and communities and creatives throughout the state have made great progress on their own work. Read on for a few selected examples of successes toward the CreateVT goals.

### Vision One

**Arts, culture, & creativity are essential Vermont infrastructure.**

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.

### Goal 1

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 public sector

**SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS:** Advocacy efforts of the VCN, as well as of many creatives and community leaders across the state, enabled the successful passage of historic legislation that is sure to empower Vermont's creative sector for years to come. In early June 2022, Governor Phil Scott signed S.11 into law with $9 million for Covid-19 economic recovery grants for creative non-profits and for-profit businesses. The investments in the bill will help creative enterprises build resiliency, bolster infrastructure, and prepare for the future.

### Goal 2

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

**SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS:** Begun in 2021, the creative aging initiative at the Vermont Arts Council seeks to address challenges that many older Vermonters face, such as isolation and limited access to meaningful arts learning experiences. The initiative is developing the capacity of Vermont's artists, arts organizations, agencies on aging, and service providers to support older adults and promote health, wellness, and social engagement through the arts. Key to this work is the development of a roster of trained teaching artists and a new grant program.

### Goal 3

State and local policies are designed to equitably support creative enterprises and infrastructure.

3.1 Organize statewide advocacy team and annual strategy

**SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS:** In 2021, the VCN launched its advocacy efforts with public information sessions, trainings and webinars, educating creatives across Vermont on municipal, state and federal opportunities and building on the work of the VCN Advocacy Working Group. Comprised of members from the VCN Steering Team, the VCN Advocacy Working Group effectively set and enacted strategies to ensure American Rescue Plan Act Covid relief funds were allocated for the creative economy. Meanwhile, VCN Zone Agents engaged leaders in every county to support this historic effort. The VCN Advocacy Working Group, along with our six Zone Agents across the state, are continuing their commitment to advance the goals of the CreateVT Action plan through strategic lobbying and public engagement in 2023.
Goal 4
Communities are infused with opportunities for creative economic development, expression, and engagement.

4.2 Promote creative enterprises and programs through new and existing funding programs

SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS: Online programming presents challenges for cultural organizations, from purchasing new equipment for digital content, paying for streaming platforms, enhancing websites and social media, to hiring new staff. Digital programming also presents new opportunities as more audiences can be reached, including those with disabilities and transportation challenges. A total of $1.15 million in one-time funding from the legislature enabled the Arts Council to launch a new program with grants and technical assistance to help build the digital capacity of and expand online programming by Vermont cultural organizations and artists.

Goal 5
Creatives are engaged in community building and leadership.

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

SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS: Creative sector leaders from across the state presented at both the Downtown & Historic Preservation Conference in June 2022 and the Vermont Council on Rural Development Leadership Summit in August 2022 addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by community arts organizations in Vermont. Speaking on key issues, such as housing, workforce development, and Covid resilience, these individuals and organizations illuminated for conference attendees the myriad of ways arts organizations are solving problems facing Vermonters.

Goal 6
Cross-sector collaborations amplify creativity and local economies.

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

SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS: The VCN’s Addison/Rutland Zone Agent collaborates regularly with nearly a dozen other sector leaders to bolster local economies at the roundtable convened by the Addison County Economic Development Corporation. Representing the creative economy, the VCN highlights how the creative sector is essential to healthy rural economic development. Included in the roundtable are public entities ranging from town and regional planning groups, public transportation organizations, and chambers of commerce, as well as nonprofits focusing on access to local food, such as Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN) and poverty reduction groups including the Central Valley Economic Development Authority.
Creative enterprises succeed in a diverse, equitable, connected, & collaborative environment.

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.

Goal 7
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

SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS: The 3CVT Zone, led by the Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission, has launched a professional development workshop series for creative entrepreneurs, funded by a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The overall goal is to provide opportunities for networking, business development, and marketing resources to help members of the region’s creative sector recover from the pandemic. Free toolkits were also created to assist creatives and small business owners where they are in their development to build their practices or small businesses and a thriving creative economy.

Goal 8
Vibrant networks support creative people, industries, and community of practice.

8.3 Expand and publicize statewide, regional, and informal creative sector networking events

SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS: The VCN Zones have activated new regional networking events for creatives. The first was hosted by the Southern Vermont Zone in April 2022. The “Creatives Town Meeting” had over 40 individuals from across Bennington and Windham Counties, and was generously hosted by The Hatch in Brattleboro. Mixers and events to support communities of practice for creatives across the state are planned for 2023. Find out more on our VCN event page at https://www.vermontarts council.org/vermont-creative-network/vcn-connect/events.

Goal 9
Vermont is promoted as a hub for creative talent, experiences, and communities.

9.2 Develop solutions and partnerships to expand market reach of creative sector businesses, in-state and beyond

SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS: In 2022, the New England Foundation for the Arts launched Creative Ground 2.0, a centralized network of artists, creatives, culture bearers, arts and culture organizations and creative businesses. The VCN is an official partner of Creative Ground, empowering the creative community with knowledge, connection, and resources by harvesting their stories, relationships, and data.
The role of arts, humanities, and culture in building community resilience and recovery has never been clearer. At the same time, Vermont faces persistent challenges. We need to harness the potential of the creative sector now—to draw visitors and new residents, to bolster vibrant local economies, and to forge a healthy, sustainable future for our state. In 2023, we will continue to build partnerships with community and economic development entities to ensure integration of the creative sector in municipal and regional work; will advocate in the legislature to ensure policy and funding support for the creative economy; and will expand opportunities for creative sector networking.

How to Get Involved

Implementing this plan is a long-term effort that requires the coordination and creativity of many different stakeholders. There are thousands of people with great ideas, hundreds of organizations with inspiring missions, communities with a variety of priorities and capacities, and with this plan, we have a clear call to work together in pursuit of a shared vision. Below are some small but powerful ways to get involved on the local or statewide level.

01 **SIGN UP** for VCN news and events and join social media groups. Check out our event calendar here: [https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/vermont-creative-network/vcn-connect/events](https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/vermont-creative-network/vcn-connect/events)

02 **JOIN YOUR ZONE** by connecting with a VCN Zone Agent or signing up for your zone’s communications channels. Find your local Zone Agent here: [https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/vermont-creative-network/vcn-about/creative-zones](https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/vermont-creative-network/vcn-about/creative-zones)

03 **SHARE YOUR SUCCESS** and projects with us! Contact VCN Manager Johanna de Graffenreid at johanna@vermontcreativenetwork.org for ways we can elevate your hard work and promote the impact of the creative economy in Vermont.