Creatives at the Table:

Getting Involved in Local and State Government

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Image: Vermont Creative Network

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What We'll Learn Today

- Ways you can get involved in local and state government
- What people who work in government are really like (your neighbors!)
- Why creative sector voices matter in "non-creative" spaces

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Image: Vermont Creative Network

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Elected Local Offices

- Your town/city is led by a ***non-partisan*** selectboard or council
- There are other elected, non-partisan roles:
  - Library Trustees
  - Cemetery Trustees
  - Justices of the Peace
  - And more… check your town's website

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Running for Office



Image: Vermont Creative Network

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- Local elections are usually on Town Meeting Day (1st Tuesday in March)
- You'll need a petition to get on the ballot signed by residents, usually due in January
- Ask your town clerk to explain the process and how to get signatures

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Appointed Committees

- Not all local govt. roles are elected!
- Selectboards appoint people to a variety of committees
- Committees are hungry for service; look for vacancies or just apply
- Check your town website to see what interests you and learn about applying

Some example town committees

- Recreation Committee
- Energy Committee
- Arts & Culture Committee
- Trails Committee
- Development Review Board

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Image: Weston Theatre Company

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Why Creative Voices Matter

- Artists, designers, makers, storytellers - we see the world in unique ways
- Problem solving requires creative thinking, unique connections
- Creative approaches make civic engagement more accessible

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Image: The Current

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When Creative Voices are at the Table…

- Energy committees fund efficiency improvements for cultural buildings
- Towns engage creatively with community to plan public space
- School boards keeps the arts in the curriculum

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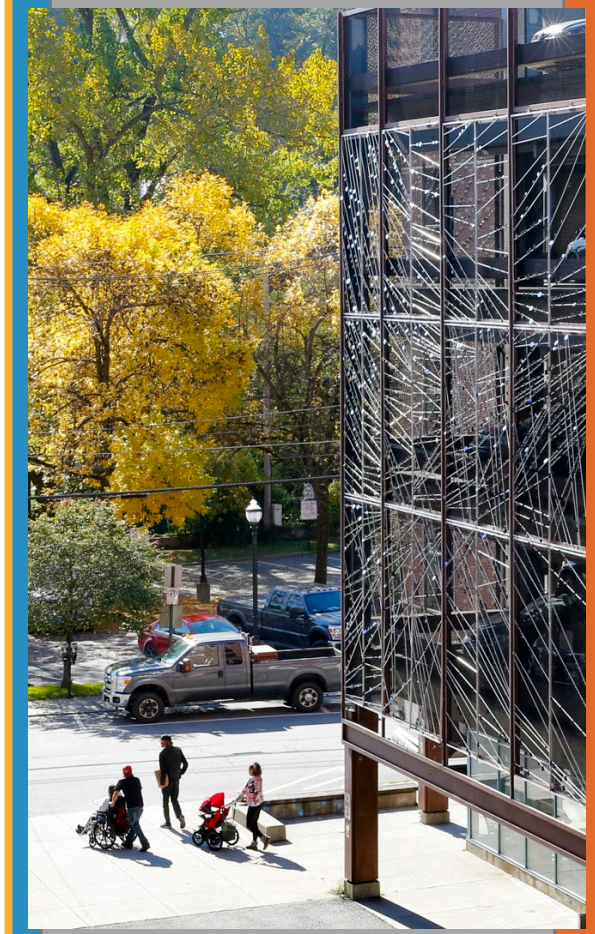

Image: Evie Lovett for Downtown Brattleboro Alliance

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Town Plans

- 8-year plans that describe a town's intentions and guide budgets, land regulations, and community development
- Most VT towns/cities have a town plan - 240 out of 252
- Must go through public hearings – make sure the creative sector is part of your town plan!

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Image: Justin Miel for Circus Barn

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School Boards

- Elected on town meeting day; must be a legal voter in the school district
- Need creative, big-picture thinking
- Set the direction for education in the district
- Learn all about getting involved at the Vermont School Board Association website: vtsba.org

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State Elections



Image: Vermont Arts Council

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- House, Senate, and Governor elected every 2 years – 2026 is an election year!
- These elections are partisan, as in declare your party.
- Primaries in August, elections in November
- There are many creatives in the Legislature, some here today!

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Skills Needed for State Races



Image: HatchSpace

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- Communications: get the word out
- Fundraising: gather financial/material support
- Campaigning: organize toward the goal
- These are skills many creatives use every day!

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National Elections



Image: Brattleboro Music Center

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- 1 U.S. House member (2-year terms)
- 2 U.S. Senators (6-year terms)
- Reach for the stars!

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State Boards and Commissions

- Appointed by the Governor, anyone may apply
- Address a wide variety of topics: justice, conservation, education, culture, even artificial intelligence
- See all opportunities and apply at the Governor's website:

governor.vermont.gov/boards-commissions

Some example boards and commissions

- Vermont Arts Council Board
- Criminal Justice Council
- Travel and Recreation Council
- Board of Libraries
- Human Services Board
- Council for Equitable Youth Justice

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Training Programs

- Prepare to run for office with supportive programs:
  - Leadership Education and Development Vermont (LEAD-VT) Training
  - Trainings from associations like VTSBA
  - Snelling Center's Vermont Leadership Institute

LEAD-VT Training:

- Virtual
- Non-partisan
- For those interested in running OR supporting candidates
- **Learn more:**

vermontconservationvoters.com/lead25/

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Supporting Matters as Much as Running



Image: Spruce Peak Arts

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- You don’t have to run for office or apply for committee or board service to make an impact
- Candidates and public servants need your support:
  - Donate to or volunteer for campaigns
  - Show up for campaign events
  - Spread the word about people and initiatives you support

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Pro Tip: Op-Eds

- Elected official or not, share your opinion and expertise in local media
- Different publishers have different guidelines
- Some Vermont media accepting op-eds/letters to the editor:
  - VTDigger
  - Seven Days
  - Probably your local paper

Vermont State Employees' Association keeps a **list of local papers accepting letters to the editor**, with links to guidelines.

Find yours here:

https://qrco.app/4NIQ

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Image: Vermont Arts Council

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What Did We Learn?

- Many ways to serve, many topics to address
- People in govt. come from all walks of life
- Creatives bring essential skills to the table
- There's support to help you get started:
  - Your town clerk
  - Training programs
  - Associations

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