

Vermont Arts Council Strategic Plan 2018-2020

Framework adopted by board of trustees in September 2017
Updated September 2018



Choreographer Toby McNutt performs as part of the "Art of Inclusion" workshop in Middlebury. Photo by Rachel Stearns.

Introduction

The strategic vision and goals set forth here were developed during a period of tremendous change at the Vermont Arts Council. Following the departure of an executive director who led the organization for twenty years, the organization welcomed a new director in October 2017. Council board and staff, during this time, concluded an intensive, multiyear process of strategic visioning, consultation with the field, and planning for the future.

We are grateful to the thousands of Vermonters who participated in surveys, attended community meetings, and shared their thoughts and insights. The voices of artists, cultural leaders, legislators, community planners, parents, school teachers, and administrators are all reflected in this document. We hope we have been true to their dreams for the future of the arts and culture in Vermont.

One key outcome of that planning process was the establishment of the Vermont Creative Network. As we look to the future of our communities, it is clear that the creative sector is vital to Vermont's economic health and prosperity. Vermont's nonprofit arts and culture sector is a \$123 million industry that supports thousands of jobs and generates millions of dollars in revenue to local and state government. In recognition of the importance of this sector, the Council formed the Network in 2016 with support from the state legislature and the Vermont Community Foundation. This innovative statewide collective brings together the individuals, businesses, and organizations whose work centers on creativity to promote investment in creative enterprises across our state.

Vermont is a place of both remarkable cultural riches and daunting challenges for people building a life around the arts. With this strategic plan, the Arts Council is committed to advancing Vermont's creative economy, and supporting the organizations and individual artists whose work builds and sustains vibrant, creative communities.

Gail Nunziata
Board Chair

Karen S. Mittelman
Executive Director

Methodology

2015 marked fifty years of public and private funding for the arts in Vermont. As the Council began planning for its second fifty years, the staff gathered information from thought leaders, grant program recipients, arts educators, members of the creative sector, and others. Listening opportunities included statewide and regional arts education forums, community forums in the run-up to the establishment of the Vermont Creative Network, quarterly conversations with the Council's Arts Partners, various summits and convenings, and occasional issue-specific surveys. All told, thousands of Vermont voices were heard. The Council aims to act on the thoughtful feedback provided.

The Council adopted the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) model, which has been embraced as a significant planning tool for the state of Vermont. RBA is a data-driven, decision-making process that helps communities and organizations take action to solve problems. At its simplest, RBA asks three questions: 1) How much are we doing? 2) How well are we doing it? and 3) Is anyone better off?

To guide the strategic planning process, the Council hired arts consultant Stephen Procter in 2016. Our work with Stephen explored the Council's place in Vermont's arts ecosystem, and the potential for the Council to serve a leadership role in the field. That process produced a framework of core values and core capacities outlined in this document, which were adopted by the board of trustees.

The board has been actively engaged throughout the process. A standing committee participated with staff in listening sessions and the formulation of the plan framework. The full board reviewed and adopted the core values and capacities, as well as the overall strategic plan framework that is presented here.



The Carving Studio and Sculpture Center in West Rutland received a Cultural Facilities Grant for roof repairs.

The Plan

values

Five values anchor all Council planning and work:



creativity - Art and culture open avenues to imagination and innovation

equity - Removing barriers invites access and participation

collaboration - Sharing values and resources creates robust, inclusive outcomes

integrity - Vision, responsiveness, and transparency invite trust

reflection - Ongoing planning and evaluation improve effectiveness

Students participate in arts activities as part of the Bennington County Head Start Arts Integration Program. Photo by Betsy Kane.

Vision statement: Everyone in Vermont has access to the arts and creativity in their lives, education, and communities.

mission

The Council's mission has remained essentially unchanged since it was adopted in the mid-1960s. The board reviewed the statement during this planning process and remains committed to its initial spirit. While the Council was designated by the Vermont legislature as the state's arts agency to serve artists, arts organizations, and arts education, the Council currently works to create an environment in which individuals, organizations, and communities can flourish.

To cultivate and advance the arts and creativity throughout Vermont.

core capacities

Many individuals and organizations bring skills, voice, and passion to their work in the arts as producers, creators, presenters, and educators. A key goal in the Council's strategic planning process was to identify those things that the Arts Council does best – the things we are uniquely qualified to accomplish, given our statewide position and vision.



Sarah-Lee Terrat was commissioned to create a mural as part of the Art in State Buildings program.

The staff and board identified the following core capacities:

advocate - The Council advocates for arts and culture in Vermont nationally, regionally, and within the state

convene/connect - The Council convenes diverse voices and connects resources to strengthen the cultural community and amplify its impact

promote - The Council promotes Vermont's cultural and creative riches as intrinsic to Vermont's identity

Conditions, Indicators, and Performance Measures

"Conditions," in the Result-Based Accountability model, describe the results we are trying to achieve.

Condition 1. All of Vermont's cultural stakeholders contribute significantly to the state's economy and identity.



Choreographer, Middlebury College Chair of Dance, and Creation Grant recipient Christal Brown. Photo courtesy of the artist.

The arts are one element of Vermont's creative economy, which in turn, is a key component of the state's essential character. Vermont's creative sector includes performing arts, visual arts and fine crafts, literary arts, design, film and media, and artisan foods, as well as culture and heritage. The Council embraces and promotes the ways in which arts, culture, creativity, and innovation contribute to Vermont's economy and identity.

indicators

1. The federal and state government increase and broaden investments in the state's creative sector
2. The state of Vermont increases investment for public art
3. People in Vermont advocate for the presence of arts, culture, creativity, and innovation as key to the state's economy and well-being
4. People are aware that the creative sector is a strong component of the economy, attracting tourists, businesses, and new residents
5. People in Vermont celebrate the arts, creativity, culture, and innovation

performance measures

1. The federal and state government increase and broaden investments in the state's creative sector. The Council will:
 - a. advocate for increasing appropriations from the National Endowment for the Arts
 - b. advocate for increasing appropriations from the Vermont state legislature by identifying key needs and opportunities for the state's creative sector
 - c. advocate for increased investment for maintenance and development of cultural facilities
2. The state of Vermont increases investment for public art. The Council will:
 - a. research public art programs nationwide
 - b. promote awareness of Vermont's current public art assets
 - c. develop and propose a comprehensive Vermont public art program
3. People in Vermont advocate for the presence of arts, culture, creativity, and innovation as key to the state's economy and well-being. The Council will:
 - a. communicate current national and state funding priorities and actions
 - b. encourage public participation in advocacy activities
 - c. promote citizen awareness and use of online advocacy tools



"Mural Dependency of Thought and Experience," photo collage by Creation Grant recipient Michelle Saffran.

4. People are aware that the creative sector is a strong component of the economy, attracting tourists, businesses, and new residents. The Council will:
 - a. invest in marketing and promotion collaborations that enhance the position of arts, culture, creativity, and innovation as central to Vermont's identity
 - b. invest in research to document and raise public awareness of the economic impact of Vermont's vibrant creative sector
5. People in Vermont celebrate the arts, creativity, culture, and innovation. The Council will:
 - a. invest in marketing and promotion collaborations that enhance the position of arts, culture, creativity, and innovation as central to Vermont's identity
 - b. promote and provide recognition for Vermont artists, arts organizations, and cultural institutions
 - c. celebrate Vermont's artists and cultural treasures

Condition 2. Vermont schools engage students in and through arts, cultural, and creative activities to prepare them for success in school, work, and life.



Students participate in a West African dance class with teaching artists from Jeh Kulu Dance and Drum Theatre.

The Council supports schools by investing in arts-in-education activities and partnerships, especially those that contribute to positive school environments, engage reluctant learners, expand student skills, deepen community connections, and/or address issues of equity.

Note: The staff recently revised the Indicators for this condition, as a result of three intensive work sessions with a Results-Based Accountability consultant. The new Indicators appear at the bottom of the next page. At the time of this writing, we are in the process of reviewing the performance measures and will revise them to align with new Indicator language.

indicators

1. Vermont students have access to arts instruction as a part of a well-rounded education
2. Vermonters use national and local research to shape education policy and ensure arts programs in schools are fully funded
3. Students graduate with the creative problem-solving skills necessary to contribute to the creative economy or to any workplace
4. Schools build relationships with community organizations and teaching artists that have expertise in providing extended learning opportunities, residencies, or personalized learning opportunities

performance measures

1. Vermont students have access to arts instruction as a part of a well-rounded education. The Council will:
 - a. track the number of schools providing arts learning opportunities with certified teachers
 - b. prioritize investments in schools serving historically marginalized students
 - c. invest in strategies that engage all students, promote student retention, and contribute to a positive school environment
 - d. document, recognize, and promote strategies and initiatives that support equity
2. Vermonters use national and local research to shape education policy and ensure arts programs in schools are fully funded. The Council will:
 - a. convene partners to develop research-based advocacy agendas and identify key indicators to track
 - b. develop, promote, and distribute advocacy tools and research
 - c. track key indicators such as:
 - i. number of arts options available for students
 - ii. number of dance and theater instructors
 - iii. planning time available for arts teachers
3. Students graduate with the skills necessary to contribute to the creative economy or to any workplace with creative problem solving skills. The Council will:
 - a. invest in arts experiences and partnerships that expand opportunities for PreK-12 students to learn or demonstrate learning through the arts in arts and/or non-arts classrooms
 - b. invest in arts experiences and partnerships that expand opportunities for students to master transferrable skills such as creative problem solving
 - c. contribute to improved school climates by investing in arts experiences and partnerships that reinforce social connections and/or have positive effects on teacher practice and satisfaction
 - d. invest in partnerships and arts experiences that promote community and parental participation
 - e. document, recognize, and promote successful investments in arts-integrated learning



A fourth-grade student participates in an Artists in Schools residency at Jamaica Village School. Photo by Laura Hazard.

4. Schools build relationships with community organizations and teaching artists that have expertise in providing extended learning opportunities, residencies, or personalized learning opportunities. The Council will:
 - a. maintain a roster of teaching artists that demonstrate skills and experience in schools
 - b. track number of school residencies by members of teaching artist roster
 - c. invest in partnerships and trainings to prepare teaching artists for work in schools
 - d. promote the work of successful school/community organization partnerships
 - e. track the number of extended learning opportunity grants distributed to arts organizations

new indicators (adopted by staff in August 2018):



A young student learns about Taiko drumming during an Artists in Schools residency.

1. All students have access to rich arts and arts-integrated instruction in their schools
2. Underserved students have expanded opportunities to study in and through the arts, especially in early childhood
3. Students strengthen academic, social, emotional, and transferrable skills across the curriculum through the arts
4. Students and teachers contribute positively to their school climates and to their communities through the arts

Condition 3. Organizations and artists serving people in Vermont build vibrant, creative communities.

Creativity and the arts are vital to solving key community issues. The Council honors the work that local cultural organizations and individual artists do to have long-term impact on health, safety, community connectedness, and lifelong learning.

In working to ensure that arts organizations and artists are supported, the Council helps to build and sustain Vermont's cultural infrastructure.



Artist Mary Lacy created a mural as part of an Animating Infrastructure Grant project.

indicators

1. Creativity is embraced in decision-making at the local and state levels
2. Artists and organizations provide full-spectrum (lifelong) programming
3. Cross-pollination of arts and non-arts organizations with artists and innovators creates an infrastructure to support creatives
4. Communities celebrate their cultural assets

performance measures

1. Creativity is embraced in decision-making at the local and state levels. The Arts Council will:
 - a. work to ensure that arts organizations and artists are represented in town and village planning
 - b. support communities to expand the role of arts in community infrastructure projects
2. Artists and organizations provide full-spectrum (lifelong) programming. The Arts Council will:
 - a. identify ways to support emerging organizations
 - b. support individual organizations in developing capacity and strategy-based decision-making
3. Cross-pollination of arts and non-arts organizations with artists and innovators creates an infrastructure to support creatives. The Council will:
 - a. foster strong ties between entities that share a common desire to improve and sustain the quality of life in Vermont communities
 - b. promote the economic impact of the creative sector
4. Communities celebrate their cultural assets. The Arts Council will:
 - a. conduct research to define and document the value of Vermont cultural assets
 - b. support organizations and artists in communicating their impact to funders and constituents

Condition 4. The Arts Council’s ongoing structural and financial sustainability is assured and strengthened.

As advocate, convener, connector, and promoter, the Vermont Arts Council works to consistently secure the organization’s responsive structure and vital sustainability.

indicators

1. The Council listens as it continually creates, implements, monitors, and evaluates a vital strategic plan
2. The Council’s board identifies and obtains additional annual operating revenue
3. The Council’s ongoing work aligns with its values, outcome statement, and mission
4. The Council invests in its board and staff in order that each may advocate, convene and connect, and promote for the betterment of the state of Vermont



The town of Waterbury commissioned a sculpture by Phillip Godenschwager made possible, in part, by a Vermont Arts Council Animating Infrastructure Grant. Photo courtesy Revitalizing Waterbury.

Performance measures

1. The Council listens as it creates, implements, and continually evaluates and monitors a vital strategic plan. The Council will:
 - a. make decisions about budgets, programs, and services based upon the priorities expressed in the strategic plan
 - b. track progress and report on contributions toward strategic plan indicators and conditions
2. The Council's board identifies and obtains additional annual operating revenue. The Council will:
 - a. train the board to maximize development potential and opportunities
 - b. invest in appropriate training for staff
3. The Council's ongoing work aligns with its values, outcome statement, and mission. The Council will:
 - a. review the values, outcome statement, and mission annually and report to the field
 - b. conduct annual board and staff evaluations and planning retreats to monitor progress
4. The Council invests in its board and staff in order that each may advocate, convene and connect, and promote for the betterment of the state of Vermont. The Council will:
 - a. conduct annual performance reviews of the board, executive director, and all staff
 - b. construct an annual budget that balances program and service, staff, and administration costs
 - c. invest in suitable board and staff training, with particular focus on Results-Based Accountability when appropriate



The St. Johnsbury History and Heritage Center received a Cultural Facilities Grant to support renovations for the safe storage and preservation of historic artifacts. Photo courtesy the Center.

Appendix

program priorities

adopted by the Arts Council staff and board in March and July 2018

The Vermont Arts Council is committed to building a Vermont where art, culture, and creativity are at the heart of our communities. Engagement with the arts transforms individual lives, connects people more deeply to each other, energizes the economy and sustains the vibrant cultural landscape that makes Vermont a great place to live.

Three priorities will guide the Council's grant-making and programs in the coming year:

expanding arts opportunities

We believe that everyone in Vermont should have access to art and creativity in their lives, education, and communities. To remove barriers to participation in arts and cultural activities, the Council will:



Participant in the Burlington City Arts internship program.

1. increase investment in arts education for at-risk students, especially during the critical early childhood years
2. prioritize grantmaking in Vermont's most economically challenged communities
3. support outstanding artists and arts experiences in at-risk communities. (These might include, for example, individuals with limited access to the arts due to age, ability, income, race, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, or religion.)
4. provide technical assistance for arts organizations to identify and remove barriers to access to cultural facilities and events
5. advance awareness for teachers and arts professionals of the barriers that limit participation in the arts

cultivating creative placemaking

Creative placemaking celebrates downtowns, villages, or regions through the arts, animating public spaces and bringing new energy and inspiration to local businesses and neighborhoods. Creative placemaking projects join diverse groups together to re-envision community places through the arts and foster community identity and belonging.

To revitalize communities across Vermont through creative placemaking, the Council will:

- invest in public art projects that position art and culture at the center of community development
- support teaching artist residencies that engage students in creative placemaking activities
- promote cross-sector partnerships that join the arts to community development and planning (for example, around public health, safety, housing or environmental issues)



Teaching artist Gowri Savor's lantern-making residency at Essex high School culminated with a community parade.

energizing Vermont's creative economy

Recent research by the Arts Council, the New England Foundation for the Arts, and Americans for the Arts demonstrates the economic power of the arts and the broader creative sector. Vermont's vibrant creative enterprises attract tourist dollars, revitalize downtowns, and provide jobs across our state.

To advance and promote awareness of Vermont's creative sector, the Council will:

- provide ongoing financial and organizational support for the Vermont Creative Network
- invest in research to define and document the economic impact of Vermont's creative enterprises
- promote public awareness of the economic importance of the creative economy



Langdon Street in Montpelier has been enlivened through the addition of public art and a pocket park. Photo by Ward Joyce.