

Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation

...Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy

Summary of Recommendations from all Sources

This combines and summarizes all the recommendations that surfaced during the year. Sources include VCCI surveys and forum discussions, Council meetings, invited guests, affiliates, and interviews.

General comments from the forums are summarized in a separate document.

COMMUNICATIONS AND NETWORKING

Networking

Establish a creative economy network similar to downtown network.

- Create a single voice on how culture will create jobs, impact community, etc.
- Promote cooperation among all the creative economy players.
- Weave small, isolated successes into one unit to increase visibility of cultural impact.
- Work to break down divide between culture and business. Encourage creative people to help business think outside the box. Develop more groups like Burlington's South End Arts Business Association.
- Work with media to build stronger understanding of life and culture. Develop more tools to reach everyone who doesn't "get it."
- Promote better communication among government agencies. There's money to revitalize historic districts, but then infrastructure changes (roads, power lines) try and destroy them. Downtown effort is undermined by roads, sewers, etc. that encourage sprawl and big box development.
- Develop models for creative partnerships that don't rely on exchange of cash.
- Engage philanthropy and private funders to collaborate and pool programs and funds.
- Create a resource guide for the creative economy. Include state agencies and organizations that offer grant programs and services for small organizations and businesses.

SUPPORT FOR ENTREPRENEURS AND BUSINESSES IN THE CE

Training and assistance

Establish an ombudsman position to help steer nonprofits. (For example, Act 250 was a big obstacle when museum tried moving a barn to its grounds.)

- Offer start-up advice. Provide somewhere to go to see if we're setting up a nonprofit correctly. (check with VANPO)
- Provide assistance in wading through barriers in rehabbing buildings and extra money to spend on meeting modern codes.
- Try to get state to have cultural organizations benefit from state services such as printing, publicity, insurance, etc.

Tilt current economic development incentives and technical assistance to support larger number of creative sector small and micro businesses. Make sure that this assistance is well promoted and available to people not just as a business is starting up, but throughout the critical time (three to six years after opening) when it is struggling to stay afloat and become established.

- Help small businesses learn about resources and how to use them. Remove intimidation factor. Keep in mind that Vt is not a small business state, it's a micro business state. Average size is six employees.
- Educate cultural community about business resources through newsletters, web sites, etc.
- Include CE resources as part of the VCCI pr campaign.
- Develop ways the current state and federal agencies offering small business assistance can better serve businesses related to the creative economy.
- Funnel resources to commerce of art.
- Emphasize support for local entrepreneurs—expanding pottery studios, etc.
- Set up training to learn how to establish a creative business, offer loans to build trade show booths, provide follow-up support and other incentives. Maybe a room of experience could be assembled to offer one on one business diagnostics. Much quicker success than learning through years of hard knocks.
- Develop mentoring program (Check Vt Business Roundtable Peer to Peer Program)
- Vermont should use innovation to develop new green power sources.
- Greater support for small established companies in the Wall-Goldfinger size. The state's effort in Island Pond doesn't help the other ten woodworking companies.

Encourage refugees to tap into their cultural heritage as a means to survive and thrive.

- Provide ongoing cultural and translation support.
- Develop “ethnic business sections” that facilitate business start ups and become a destination for tourists and residents alike.
- Support refugees' self-employment by working together in cooperative groups, such as in agriculture. These will require facilitation by micro biz experts and ongoing technical assistance.
- The State should establish an office for immigrants, refugees, and new Americans, designed to be a venue for accessing mainstream services.
- Track immigration patterns in Vermont to provide data that could greatly inform efforts to support and sustain immigrant/refugee business development. Currently there is no system for gathering the most needed information.
- Loosen green card requirements. Artists can't produce and sell work while trying to resettle.

Spaces

Establish (or modify) business incubators around the state that can fully serve innovative start-up businesses with the potential to grow the creative part of Vermont's economy.

- Include tax incentives, state investment, and the full collaboration of state and federal agencies related to economic development.
- Find a way to provide cheap huge, raw spaces for sculptors, artists, and theater set designers. Inform owners of large spaces looking to fill them with traditional manufacturing about creative needs.
- Develop incentives to bring empty manufacturing and warehouse space up to code for new uses.

MARKETING

Chambers and welcome centers

Develop standardized training so it's easier for everyone to promote their region.

- Be sure the state welcome centers represent *all* aspects of each region. (The staff at the center near Brattleboro sends visitors to the NEK to see "moose and bear.")
- Include pr, marketing, timelines, events planning, education about regional assets.
- Improve ways for local chambers to get wide spectrum of event information and distribute it soon enough to affect travel decisions (for residents and visitors).
- Publicize VDTM central events calendar.

Assure cultural organizations have the marketing support of local chambers, regional marketing organizations, downtown associations, and regional economic development groups.

- Encourage better communication between state and local levels.

Promotion and advertising

Provide more state level help getting inventions, art works, and creative products to market. Prohibitive for small biz to reach wider marketplace.

- Simplify ways and lower costs for entrepreneurs, artists, and artisans to get on the web for national and international marketing. Create a "Buy Vermont" web site portal to sell products even if people don't travel here.
- Use cultural ambassadors with all domestic and foreign trade missions.
- Protect Vt Brand. Stress quality, we can't compete quantitatively.
- Assist cultural organizations in developing mission-related products to market for increased revenue.
- Find a way to put the stone sculptors show on the road. It puts the Vermont name out there, helps build wider audience, and promotes sales for Vt artists.
- Offer a tax holiday for the arts like the state did on computers this year.
- Have state proclaim Arts and Crafts Day, with studio tours and sales tax exemption.
- Develop a Vermont Crafts Brand.

- Use the Cabot cheese idea and promote Creative Vermont in some way with every product shipped out of state.
- Help with public relations for Vermont's creative products.

VDTM should offer greater support for cultural heritage tourism.

- Improve the marketing of the VDTM web site as an in-state resource for cultural heritage tourism interests.
- Better promotion of Vermont's location at the center of the birth of our country. Great potential for international market wanting to visit and learn more about that story.
- Show people things they may not know about Vermont.
- Do more to take advantage of the Lake. Begin planning for major event marking the 450th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's arrival.
- More cross marketing for Vermont parks and historic attractions.

Develop "buy local" campaign.

- Spending extra money to buy local is a good investment since businesses continue to pay taxes, employ people, etc.
- See if state and local procurement and bidding process can be used to encourage buying local.

Don't let Vt brand efforts get in way of New England wide regional marketing.

Look at existing marketing efforts for opportunities to enhance our CE.

Cooperative efforts

The creative sector would benefit from more unified statewide promotion.

- Too much RMO duplication now. Reduce to 3 or 4 statewide.
- Look at bigger picture. Scenic by-ways, for example, can unite regions.
- Offer more joint marketing efforts (co-op ads, etc.) for efficiency.
- Promote clusters of arts organizations to pool their marketing. Efforts (Berkshire Cty, MA model)

Continue help for local businesses and communities to market their cultural heritage component.

- Establish local think tanks to support and promote area resources. These regional advisory panels could meet periodically with a consortium of state agencies to incorporate successes into a statewide marketing plan.
- Need someone to work with to facilitate cooperation of all our efforts. We stumble on lack of marketing funds. People find us by accident.
- Have VDTM offer incentive money for the private sector to partner with cultural groups in marketing efforts.

Improve efforts at adding "creative" and "innovative" to the Vermont brand.

- Create a clearinghouse to focus on the Vt Brand.
- Pursue a common core brand identity strategy.
- Take two core Vermont natural resources – granite and then wood. Sponsor symposiums for each. Invite the artists and the crafts people in-state and out that have occasion to shape these natural resources. Feature them among the industrial

designers – entice the architects, the designers, the builders and the developers to a Vermont vacation and convocation for each industry. Put interior and exterior design on notice – Show that in Vermont we have a passion for things that last *and* improve lives. Provide the context that ensures innovation is ignited - while honoring what is naturally found in Vermont – the granite sculptures and wood workers that shaped our culture for decades. Galvanize these two mainstays of our culture – as Cabot did for dairy – and you will advance all tiers of the Vermont economy under the banner of a Creative Economy while reinforcing our invaluable brand.

- Do not leave definitions of Vermont up to individual perceptions before an experience or their memories after. You are wasting a powerful opportunity to make an indelible impression.
- There could be great creativity to adopt Cultural and Innovative brand lines by turning Vermont into an active VERB.
- Consider other attributes of the Vermont Brand that VCCI thinks would be desirable (but are not showing up in the current study) and pass that back to the Marketing and Promotion Team. As an example Alex would like to see Vermont be seen as “accessible”, both physical and program.

Signage

Allow temporary signs to promote specific activities or events.

Improve info and directional signs. State not doing well at maintaining existing signs, plus we need more and more specific signs out there so it’s less confusing to find places.

Implement “brown sign” program for cultural destinations.

EDUCATION

Creative partnerships

Link K-12 with available higher ed and business resources as well as local cultural institutions. Find ways to overcome barriers for partnerships.

- These groups could do even more to supplement education opportunities. Programs (both in and away from school) need to be valued and supported.
- Encourage mentors, independent studies, and apprenticeships as alternatives to traditional classroom studies. Real world eye-opener for students.
- Creative industries can be added to tech training centers. For instance, train students in restoration arts and let them work on projects in our downtowns.
- Develop ways to get more artists teaching in schools.
- Develop “mad scientist” clubs for kids who are drawn to innovation. (Carol Lakoff, SE)
- Connect with corporations that support community involvement. They pay employees to be in schools and bring students to see how businesses operate.
- Provide high speed connections in all schools to promote resource sharing.

Strengthen partnerships between cultural organizations and local libraries.

- Speak with the Freeman Foundation and research possibilities for federal funding from the Institute of Library and Museum Services.
- Dedicate \$500,000 of the \$1 billion (.5%) we spend on public schools in Vt. to bringing ties with community libraries.

Use culture to instill pride in kids about their area and encourage them staying.

- Find ways to get kids out in community.
- Let kids express their vision for community and what they see as its assets. (Holyoke, MA model)
- Examine place based curriculum as a way to promote learning from local resources. (Fairbanks Museum, Vt Leadership Center two examples)
- Need to look at whole community. How do we engage kids and intergeneration with the arts?
- Support classroom initiatives like the Life on the Water project in the NEK that involved 400 students in Franco-American history.

Develop funding for high schools and training centers to bring young creative people up through local companies.

Consider establishing a Center for Creative Thinking—a retreat (maybe a Solzhenitsyn Center at Shelburne Farms) where people come together to dream big ideas.

Art high schools

Vt should form at least one arts high school.

- Look into Career Academy program. Morrisville is now an approved academy in the arts.
- Should be residential based, open to all students, fine and performing arts, options for high school classes to do week-long residencies, summer programs, options for high school arts teachers to be guest instructors, options to bring in guest artists, writers, performers, etc, and a serious Arts professional development program for teachers.

Advocacy

Advocate for full implementation of existing Vermont education standards related to arts and culture.

- Provide incentives for public schools to include learning through culture in K-12 classrooms, especially tied to Vermont heritage.
- Promote a sense of place and community pride in our students.
- Current overemphasis on testing is working against excellent portfolio development.

Culture has big sales/education job to do. Schools too fast to cut arts out when facing budget pressure. Need tectonic shift, shouldn't be just crisis response to cuts.

Essential to get across importance of creativity in developing work force.

Showcase ways to bring student art into communities. Art shows at Town Hall, chorus at Town meetings, etc.

Work to replace No Child Left Behind. This puts too much focus on testing and pushes other evaluation methods out.

Monitor whether schools are stifling creativity in favor of security.

Find equitable way to provide arts in schools statewide. Even in same district some feeder schools have music, others don't, so some students aren't eligible to be in HS band unless they have private lessons.

Encourage sharing resources between schools.

Work on more teacher training. Art not required for teaching license in Vt.

Provide better funding of special ed at local level.

Encourage parents to bring kids to live events, museums, public art etc.

Other

New VAC arts education program is having positive effect on developing integrated curriculum

Develop statewide list of art teachers, music teachers, etc. Establish list serve for them to communicate. (VAAE has one already)

See why it's more common for arts to be integrated in the younger grades than in high school.

Look at ways to increase creative use of video in high school.

Put effort into training school community about fundraising for cultural activities.

Persuade the staff of Vermont's higher education institutions to do more of their "service" in state and more of their research on Vermont topics.

Commission *Vt Life* to create a curriculum and teaching materials for a Vermont history course.

FUNDING

Provide funding for collaborative joint projects statewide.

- Increase funding for the existing cultural facilities program beyond the \$50,000 annual cap
- Continue to have transportation enhancement funds used to improve community buildings
- Create a new partnership among statewide cultural and business organizations to support economic development efforts in our communities.

Vt Arts Council

- Expand cap on VAC grants. More support will have spin off.
- Continue VAC municipal partnership grants. (In Montpelier its helped create an arts fund that has funded 59 projects, from major festivals to public sculptures.)
- Continue and expand VAC small grants. (Its matching \$750 grant provided big return. Free music in the square.)

Historic Preservation

- Provide more grant money for preservation efforts.
 - More historic preservation money for affordable housing and/or senior housing.
 - Look at ways to offset the tremendous burden cultural organizations take on when they use historic buildings. Sudden repairs can run \$100,000 plus and there is rarely any surplus or endowment to cover it.
 - Support preservation projects that deal with Vermont's everyday folk, their way of life, and its contributions to Vermont.
- Strengthen the connection between the Vt Historical Society and local historical societies.
 - Restore funding for the VHS small grant program to fund local projects.
 - Secure state funding for the Vt History Project which involves students in local history.

New projects

- Support emerging outdoor summer theater project about Vermont.
- Support a new indoor facility like Heritage New Hampshire. It's an educational tourist attraction and school resource.
- Assess need for and fund new cultural facilities.

State should support the Vt Crafts Council in a much stronger financial way.

Come up with way to better leverage public and private investments

- See if state can work with banks (especially local) to back loans and financing for artists.
- Offer more low cost funding options through VEDA and Small Business Administration. Don't make small business seek venture capital.
- Institute a matching grant program for small biz and cultural groups (similar to the Fund for Tourism and Marketing initiative that failed in '03).
- Try to inspire the private foundation sources to support the CE.

Make greater state level investment in cultural institutions. We are incubators of creative economy. It's penny wise but pound foolish.

- Find way to provide every day operating money, not just to fund innovative projects.
- Continue supporting cultural institutions to strengthen downtowns. They are anchors.

Continue successful downtown program. Funding for projects is too low, but the strength is getting people to organize locally, define and carry out their goals.

Reestablish Vt Association of Farmer's Markets. Good outlet for local art, crafts, music.

- Offer smaller grants for Farmers Markets, etc. to bring in local performers.

Assure Vt customers pay sales tax on catalog and web purchases. Lack of revenue to state means less funding for the arts.

Small grants are appreciated, but would like to streamline process so nonprofits could have more flexibility with the funds.

Funnel Secretary of State filing fees back into creative economy initiatives.

Hold tax free holiday for art purchases.

Public investments that help the CE

Tourist information centers add to visibility.

State capital budget

Housing and Conservation Trust Fund (however, hard to get money for restoration).

Federal clean water initiatives have made rivers an attraction to build other efforts on.

Byways grant program provides seed money for larger projects.

Federal brown fields funds also tapped.

National Trust for Historic Preservation offers modest seed grants that are catalyst.

Document \$10 return for every \$1 invested.

USDA Rural Development—Funds for distance learning, access improvements, better parking etc.

Community Development Block Grants

Agency of Transportation—Danville project, enhancement funds

Historic Preservation grants

Vermont Arts Council

REAP designation for NEK help them get priority funding from USDA. Need help to make sure authorization of program and its funding don't lapse.

National Park infusion in Woodstock area. New jobs, partnering with the arts.

Emory Hebard State Office Building in Newport combined the Dept. of Buildings and General Services, the Dept. of Historic Preservation, and the state curator working with local organizations to create a permanent exhibit about the Abenaki.

State funding for the Holland Historical Society provided office, exhibit, and storage space in replicated horse sheds.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Add the creative economy “snowball effect” as a criteria for deciding the best way to use abandoned or underutilized buildings owned by the state. Be sure to consider the building's historic use in that decision.

- Review an inventory of current state assets to determine a priority list and educate economic development screeners as to the potential impact of these properties. This may include charettes, community workshops, town meetings, etc.

Create a tool kit for revitalizing a community through creative industries and initiatives.

- Build on the National Trust Main Street model and Vermont's downtown program while introducing new ideas viewed through a creative economy lens.

Establish a creative economy resource team (CERT) to visit, spur new ideas, and provide technical assistance to communities and cultural organizations at all stages of development.

- Use state and private funding to seed pilot projects that will integrate cultural infrastructure and economic development.

Assure a way to sustain the sole public buildings in many of our small communities.

These “rural essentials” are often the only place more than 25 people can gather under one roof.

Include cultural aspects into all state/town/local planning.

- Train the regional planners and get them excited about the potential of this sector. The planners, in turn, provide technical assistance to towns writing plans and will pass their enthusiasm down the line. This will be much more effective than simply adding another box to check off on their “things to consider” list.

Dept. of Tourism needs to refocus efforts to make Vermont a more livable place.

Help communities focus on innovative ways to use our waterways.

Clear up grey areas about taxes and nonprofits. Generally nonprofits are exempt, but confusion about property taxes can cause animosity, especially in smaller communities. Hurts critical healthy relationships with neighbors.

Place more state emphasis on village and city centers instead of big box and strip mall culture.

State needs to do more with sustainable agriculture. Culture has a lot to do with agriculture. Make a better effort at making Vt a sustainable state.

Be sure historic preservation is well done. Needs to result in something people want to see.

Find a way to support, inspire, and help individual leaders who can spark the revitalization of a community. We have talent, but need guidance and leadership.

Need more resources, administrative help to pull cooperative effort together. Agencies could loosen up requirements to ask for funding or provide help through the administrative bottlenecks.

Encourage ways to incorporate murals, mosaics, and sculptures into public buildings, bridges etc. They can reflect communities and bring art to the community.

Set up incentives to encourage government (state, federal, municipal), and business to undertake creative problem solving.

Request the Governor and Legislature to acknowledge the value of Vermont’s cultural life by requiring each state agency to accomplish its mandated objectives through culture. (Scotland model)

Support the connection to arts therapy for serving aging, incarcerated, and people with disabilities. Pays off in savings for health care, institutional costs, etc.

Similar for investment in creative schools—keeping youth engaged means social and dollar savings.

Vermont communities could do “Green Maps” similar to Burlington.
Strengthen the role of Vermont colleges and universities as people magnets.
Look at transportation funds to develop infrastructure support for the creative economy.
Assuring telecommunications access is critical to CE development.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

Immigration

Help lift INS restrictions for international artists trying to tour here.
Open up borders for Canadian artisans to sell here and vice versa.

Regulation

Streamline permitting process. Currently it’s difficult to introduce new business or cultural development.
Current permit process keeps inappropriate development in check.
Need rosy business climate. Most cultural activities are supported by private funds so need to change state’s anti-business attitude.
Be careful. Bigger isn’t always better. Promote small and creative business, not big box and fast food.
Difficult to get good building codes passed to allow residences in downtown preservation efforts.
#NAFTA has made it very hard to compete with the Canadians, and China may well make Vt wood manufacturing extinct.

Insurance

Need lower liability insurance. Furniture maker can’t make chairs because liability is too expensive.
Building insurance on the rise since 9/11.
All forms of insurance are high.
Reduce cost of health care for small business owners.
#Like to see a reduction in workers’ comp rate.
Find a way to keep an affordable health plan for our aging work force.

Taxes

Very high state taxes are big hurdle.
NH tax department more biz friendly. For example, paying rooms and meals tax on time gets 3% discount there, here one day late gets penalties.

Follow-up on Rep. Sanders proposal a few years ago to exempting artists from paying state income tax (as in Ireland). You could stipulate that an amount equal to taxes would need to be invested in the artist's business (employees, rent, or other local expenditures) [Whether this was Sanders proposal needs to be verified.]

Other

Dance needs help. Nurture a dance company long enough to establish it as a state dance company.

Encourage inns and others to put up artists to let them capture the surroundings and create art shows (Basin Harbor model).

Improve high speed computer access. Entire state needs broadband and wireless technology.

Bulk ordering of materials would be very helpful.

Keep rail viable.

Help identify feasibility and location for a larger site for events and conferences in Vermont.

Establish a high speed train (from Montpelier to NYC)