



Building Together

A Collaborative Cultural Plan
for Southeast Vermont

Arts, Culture & Creative Economy

Acknowledgments

WORKING GROUP

Sue Fillion, Planning Director, Town of Brattleboro

Gretchen Havreluk, Economic Development Consultant, Town of Wilmington

Gary Fox, Development Director, Town of Rockingham

Matthew Bachler, Senior Planner, Windham Regional Commission

STEERING COMMITTEE

Abdullah Hafizi, Artist

Austin Rice, Independent Filmmaker

Dede Cumming, Green Writers Press

Emily Wagner, Creative Vermont Zone

Jenevieve Penk, Arthouse

Jenna Struble, Brattleboro Town Arts Committee

Kate Trzaskos, Downtown Brattleboro Alliance

Kate Ullman, Jamaica Selectboard

Lynn Barrett, Primetime Concepts, Inc.

Meg Staloff, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Robert McBride, Rockingham Arts & Museum Project (RAMP)

Susanna Gellert, Weston Theater

Zon Eastes, Music Director, State Representative (Windham District-1)

CONSULTANT

Cultural Planning Group

Martin Cohen

PLAN LAYOUT & DESIGN

Seth Thomas, Communications Coordinator, Town of Brattleboro

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Page 4: Introduction & Executive Summary

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Page 7: Existing Conditions

Page 9: Infrastructure & Coordination Needs

ENGAGEMENT

Page 11: Engagement

WHAT WE LEARNED

Page 12: For Individual Artists

Page 13: For Cultural Organizations & Institutions

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Page 14: Opportunity & Introduction

Page 15: How to Approach Goals & Strategies

Page 16: Goal 1: Enable artists and creative entrepreneurs to thrive and expand

Page 19: Goal 2: Support strengthening arts and culture nonprofit organizations in the region

Page 22: Goal 3: Advocate for establishing a creative community brand for Southeast Vermont

Page 24: Goal 4: Strengthening the creative sector in the region

FUNDING & IMPLEMENTATION

Page 26: A Regional Collaborative Approach

Page 26: Implementation Framework

Page 27: Long-Term Strategic Vision

Page 28: Funding Strategy & Resource Development

Page 29: Measuring Success & Sustainability

Page 29: Conclusion

PHOTO CREDITS

Page 30: Photo Credits



Introduction & Executive Summary

Southeast Vermont is home to a vibrant, complex arts and cultural landscape encompassing nonprofit cultural organizations, individual artists and creative enterprises. These organizations, individuals and businesses have significant opportunities at the same time they are faced with numerous economic, geographic and community challenges. This plan provides a framework for supporting and strengthening arts, culture, and creative economy in Southeastern Vermont through sustained regional collaboration. It was initiated by a coalition of three towns—Brattleboro, Wilmington, and Rockingham—and the Windham Regional Commission.

The planning process launched in October 2024 and development of the plan was informed through extensive interviews, focus groups, and community discussions across multiple towns including Brattleboro, Wilmington, Rockingham and surrounding areas. This engagement revealed both significant opportunities and persistent challenges facing the creative community.

Southeast Vermont demonstrates remarkable cultural vitality, ranking highly in national creative economy metrics and housing numerous cultural assets from established institutions to individual artists. Southeast Vermont benefits from a deep-rooted appreciation for the arts, with cultural organizations ranging from the historic Weston Theater to newer initiatives like the ArtLords collective. This cultural foundation contributes significantly to the local economy, with the creative sector representing one of Vermont's largest economic drivers.

However, individual artists consistently expressed various challenges. These include isolation from the broader creative community, economic challenges including affordable housing and workspace shortages, and the need for professional development opportunities and better marketing systems. The rural geography compounds these challenges through transportation and accessibility barriers.

Cultural organizations voiced strong interest in collaboration but cited limited capacity as a major implementation obstacle. Financial pressures persist from limited philanthropic support, reduced public funding, and the challenge of engaging a transient population of second homeowners and tourists. Organizations face ongoing impacts from COVID-19 and recent flooding, while experiencing significant generational leadership transitions.

A generational transition in leadership adds another layer of complexity as long-standing directors retire, compounded by the challenge of attracting a new generation of leadership. Organizations consistently highlighted the need for better coordination of events and programming, with many supporting the idea of a shared calendar system.

The research revealed critical infrastructure needs beyond physical spaces—specifically, the absence of coordinating mechanisms to connect cultural assets and initiatives. While resources exist through entities like the Vermont Arts Council, awareness and utilization varies significantly across the region.

The engagement process highlighted tension between serving local residents and attracting cultural tourists, along with perspectives from Native and immigrant communities emphasizing cultural preservation and exchange opportunities. Economic development emerged as a crucial framework, with stakeholders recognizing potential for stronger integration of creative economy into

broader development strategies, particularly around cultural corridors like Route 30.

Most significantly, widespread support exists for developing a stronger regional cultural identity and coordinated promotion strategy, creating clear opportunities for strategic partnerships that could benefit the entire creative community simultaneously.

This plan is collaborative in its design and intent. Successful implementation requires coordinated effort among municipal governments, cultural organizations, individual artists, economic development entities, and private supporters working toward shared objectives. The challenges identified—from artist isolation to organizational capacity constraints—



are regional in scope and demand regional solutions.

The plan establishes four primary goals: enabling artists and creative entrepreneurs to thrive; strengthening nonprofit cultural organizations; establishing a creative community brand; and strengthening the overall sector. Each goal includes specific strategies and tactical approaches designed to build systematically on existing strengths while addressing pressing community needs.

Given limited philanthropic and municipal resources, this framework is designed for long-term implementation with progress measured through incremental advancement rather than immediate achievement of all objectives. The plan emphasizes capacity building and collaboration as prerequisites for program expansion, recognizing that sustainable cultural development requires both immediate operational support and longer-term strategic commitment.

Success ultimately depends on continued engagement from the creative community, municipal leaders, and supporting organizations who recognize that investment in arts and culture strengthens the region's economic vitality and quality of life. Through patient, sustained collaboration, this plan can enhance Southeast Vermont region's position as a distinctive cultural destination while ensuring arts and culture remain accessible to residents as well as visitors.





Existing Conditions

Southeast Vermont's creative and cultural sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience while navigating significant challenges in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and other economic disruptions. This plan was initiated as creative communities across the country were seeking to understand and respond to the long-term impacts of the pandemic on arts and culture.

The pandemic fundamentally altered the landscape for cultural organizations and individual artists throughout the region. Many organizations experienced temporary closures, reduced programming capacity, and substantial revenue losses from cancelled events and decreased attendance. While federal and state relief funds provided crucial support during the acute phase of the crisis, these resources are no longer available, leaving organizations to adapt to new operational realities.

Cultural organizations have had to reimagine their programming models, often incorporating hybrid formats and outdoor venues to maintain community engagement while ensuring safety. The shift has required significant investments in technology and equipment, straining already limited budgets. Many organizations report that audience behaviors have changed, with some community members still hesitant to attend indoor events, affecting ticket sales and donor engagement.

The regional creative sector faces additional economic challenges beyond pandemic recovery. Recent flooding events have created infrastructure damage and business interruption costs that further strain organizational resources. The combination of climate-related disasters and pandemic impacts has created a complex web of recovery needs.

Housing affordability has emerged as a critical issue affecting both individual artists and cultural organizations' ability to attract and retain talent. The post-COVID real estate market has significantly increased housing costs, making it difficult for artists to maintain sustainable practices while living in the region. This challenge is particularly acute for emerging artists and those seeking to relocate to the area.

The cultural sector also faces uncertainty from shifting political environments at both state and federal levels. Changes in government priorities can significantly impact funding for arts and culture, from National Endowment for the Arts grants to state-level support programs. Organizations report increased difficulty in long-term planning when policy support for the arts remains uncertain. This political volatility affects not only direct funding streams but also broader policies around immigration, education, and community development that indirectly support cultural activities. The uncertainty creates additional challenges for organizations adding a layer of complexity to organizational and strategic planning, as cultural leaders consider multiple scenarios for funding and policy.

The cultural sector is experiencing significant generational transitions as long-standing leaders retire, a trend accelerated by pandemic-related stress and changing work-life priorities. Organizations face challenges in identifying and retaining new leadership given the economic pressures and demanding nature of nonprofit management in rural areas.

Similarly, individual artists frequently juggle multiple income streams to sustain their creative practices, a situation that has become more challenging as the broader economy continues to evolve. The need to balance multiple jobs while maintaining artistic practice creates additional stress on the creative community.

The region's philanthropic environment has also shifted in the post-pandemic period. While stakeholders report that there are several foundations and individual philanthropists who continue to strongly support arts and culture, there are



indications of long-term trends in changing donor priorities and giving patterns. Organizations report difficulty engaging a broader donor base, particularly second-home owners who may have reduced their regional presence during the pandemic or prioritize their primary residence for philanthropy.

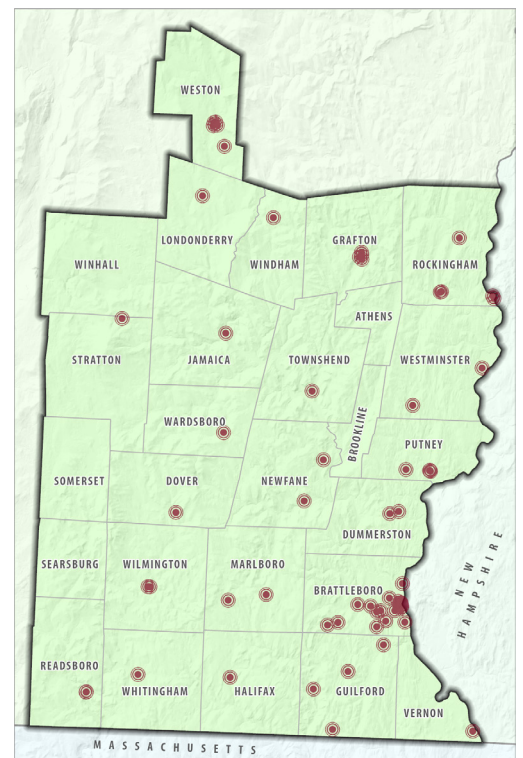
The challenge of building lasting relationships with the region's significant second-home owner population remains a persistent issue. These residents often have both financial capacity and cultural interests but may lack deep community connections that typically drive sustained philanthropic engagement.



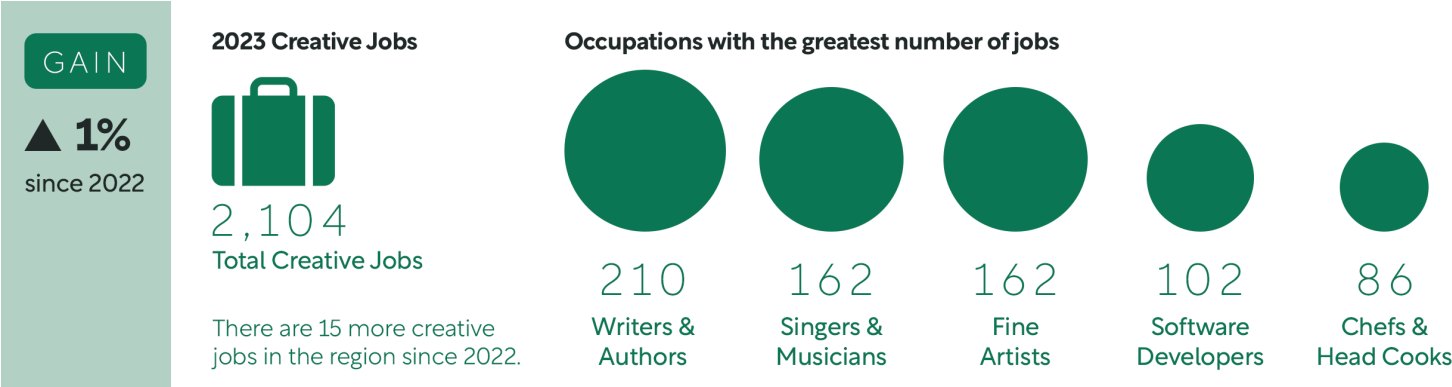
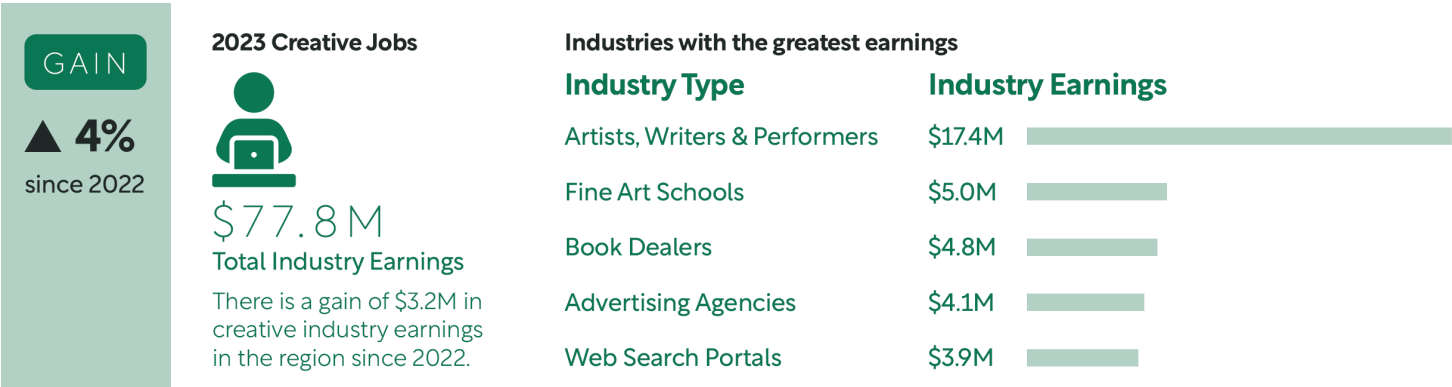
INFRASTRUCTURE & COORDINATION NEEDS

Despite these challenges, the region maintains significant cultural assets and demonstrates continued vitality. The creative sector remains one of Vermont's largest economic drivers, and the Windham region continues to rank highly in national creative economy metrics. The diversity of cultural organizations—from historic institutions like the Weston Theater to emerging collectives like the ArtLords—provides a strong foundation for recovery and growth. Across Southeast Vermont, there are nearly 100 nonprofit arts and culture organizations in the performing, visual and media arts; arts education and community access; and history and heritage. While the majority of organizations are clustered in and around Brattleboro, nearly every town in the region is home to one or more cultural nonprofit organizations. The following map of the region illustrates the geographic location of these clusters.

Earnings in creative industries in the region were nearly \$78M (in 2023) with over 2,100 creative jobs located in the region. This represents approximately 4% of the total population and greater than 10% of all jobs in the region¹.



¹ US. Census Bureau, Windham Regional Commission: Creative Vitality™ Suite is an industry standard data solution for measuring the for-profit and nonprofit arts, culture, and creative sectors provided by Western States Arts Federation.



INFRASTRUCTURE & COORDINATION NEEDS

The engagement process revealed that while numerous cultural assets exist throughout the region, there remains a lack of coordinating mechanisms to maximize their collective impact. Organizations continue to express strong interest in collaboration but cite limited capacity as a barrier to implementation.

The absence of dedicated regional coordination has become more apparent as organizations seek to rebuild and adapt their operations. The need for shared resources, coordinated programming, and unified marketing efforts has intensified as organizations work to rebuild audiences and sustainable revenue streams.

This existing conditions assessment informs the plan’s emphasis on both immediate operational support and longer-term strategic development, recognizing that sustainable recovery requires addressing both current challenges and building capacity for future resilience.

PARTICIPANTS

Erin Scaggs	Stone Church
Robin Johnson	Stone Church
Lissa Weinmann	118 Elliot
John Loggia	118 Elliot
Jenevieve Penk	ArtHouse
Mary Wright	Gallery Owner
Jane May Jones	Painter
Mary Angus	Glassblower
Ian Campbell	Musician
Kate Follet	Visual Artist/Painter
Jenny Crowell	Retreat Farm
Ashley Storrow	Main Street Arts
Sue Coakley	Putney Planning Commission
Amber Paris	Artist
Mckenzie Doss	Sandglass Theater
Charlie Hunter	Artist
Robert McBride	Rockingham Area Museum Project
Mark Piepkorn	Stage 33 Live
Susan Still	Main Street Arts
Amy Howllet	Saxtons River Village Trustee
Rick Cowan	Rockingham Selectboard, Chair
John Dunbar	Rockingham Selectboard
Leslie Goodman	State Legislator, Windham-3
Pat Fowler	Rockingham Historical Society
Nick Kekic	Glassblower
Chris Sherwin	Glassblower
Jared Williams	Field Center
Doug Cox	Violin Maker
Eugene Uman	Brattleboro Jazz Center
Catherine Stephen	YellowBarn
Jon Potter	Latchis Arts
Jamie Mohr	Epsilon Spires
Mollie Burke	Art in the Neighborhood
Kay Curtis	Harmony Collective
Rich Holschuh	Atowi Project
Emily Wagner	VT Creative Network
Adam Grinold	Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation
Kristin Sullivan	Retreat Farm
Danny Lichtenfeld	Brattleboro Museum & Art Center
Abdullah Elhan	Artist, Art Lords
Susanna Gellert	Weston Theater
Bob DuGrenier	Glass Artist
Sandy Wilbur	Artist
Tony Mazzochi	Kinhaven Music School
Brian Mooney	Marlboro Music Center

Engagement

OVERVIEW

The engagement for this plan took place between October 2024 and January 2025. The process gathered input from diverse stakeholder voices in the arts, culture and creative community through a series of interviews, discussion groups and gatherings in numerous locations in Southeast Vermont. Stakeholders shared their experiences in building a creative practice or as a leader of a cultural organization. Participants were asked to share the strengths of arts, culture and creative economy in Southeast Vermont, as well as the challenges. This input was synthesized and is outlined below in *What We Learned*, directly informing the development of goals, strategies and tactics.

Individual interviews and small group discussions were conducted with stakeholders in the arts and creative community in several locations in Southeast Vermont for access and ease of participation.

The interviews and discussions were organized around a set of questions framing the inquiry, intended to understand the nature of the creative community and the ‘current state’ for cultural organizations and individuals with a creative practice.

Those questions include:

- › How would you describe arts, culture and creative economy in Southeast Vermont?
- › What are the strengths? What is distinct?
- › What is needed to strengthen arts and culture in the region? In what ways can this plan support your work (or organizations)?
- › Are there collaborations and partnerships that should be considered in this process?
- › What does success look like for this plan?

What We Learned

TOP LINE THEMES

There were both distinct themes that emerged through discussions with individuals and those with nonprofit cultural organization leaders as well as similar or common themes.

For Individual Artists

ISOLATION & LACK OF CONNECTION

- › Artists feel disconnected from each other and desire more opportunities for networking and collaboration.
- › There's a need for peer-to-peer mentoring and professional development.
- › Many artists hold multiple jobs to sustain their practice.
- › Artists seek critical feedback from their peers.
- › There is a strong interest in and need for professional practices training and professional education.



ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

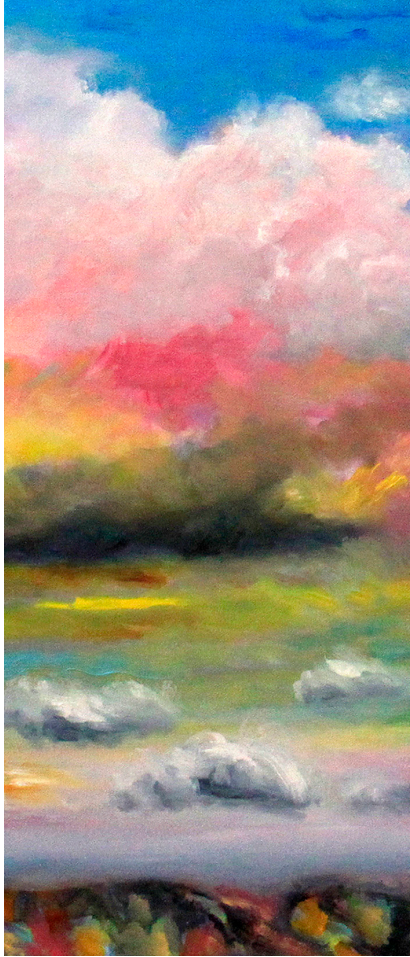
- › Affordable housing and studio/workspaces are major challenges, particularly in the post-COVID real estate market.
- › There is a need for better ways to market and sell work. There are few galleries in the region that are open to a broad range of artists working in the region.
- › There is a desire to find pathways for sustainable income from their creative practice.
- › The nature of the community is challenging, particularly in balancing pricing for local vs. tourist markets (a strong theme in performing arts and live audience-based programming).



INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

- › Lack of centralized resources or information hub
- › Need for better promotion and visibility of their work
- › Desire for shared spaces and collaborative opportunities
- › Transportation and accessibility challenges in rural areas





REGIONAL COORDINATION

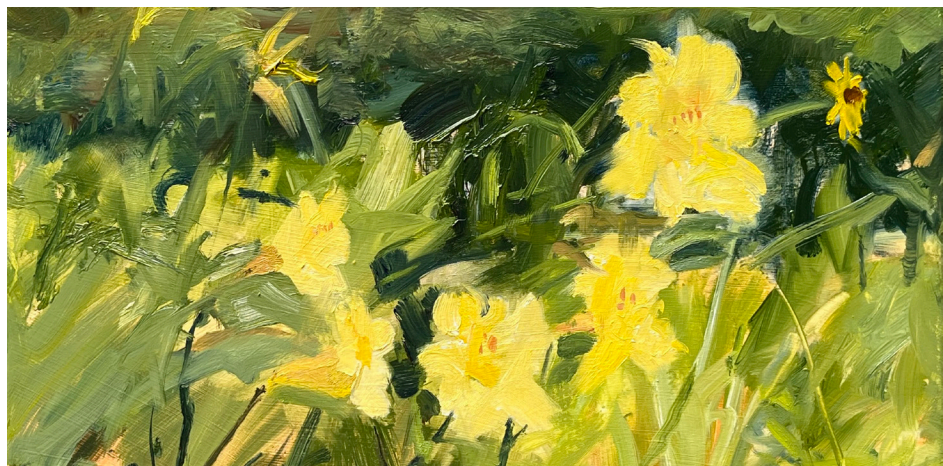
- › There is a strong desire for collaboration but lack of capacity in organizing and coordinating those collaborations. Organization leaders do communicate with the intention of gathering on a regular basis. They would benefit from an individual dedicated to organizing, managing and facilitating networking and collaboration.
- › There is a strong interest in a tool to coordinate programming, particularly in calendaring to avoid event overlaps and to lessen potential conflicts.
- › There is an interest in building a stronger regional cultural identity to recognize the critical mass of cultural offerings in the region as well as the number of artists who live and work in the region. Sentiments were expressed that this is an opportunity to brand the region as a primary attribute and not a secondary tourist opportunity.
- › There is a challenge of serving both local and tourist audiences – communicating with a tourist population as well as relationship-building with year-round residents.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

- › Financial challenges, especially post-COVID and flood impacts are still a prevailing theme in organizational stability. Relief funds are no longer available and there are challenges in adapting to evolving philanthropic resources and public resources in the region.
- › There is significant generational transition in leadership. Concern was expressed by leaders on identifying and retaining new leadership.
- › There is a need for better funding mechanisms, particularly expanding private philanthropy from second-home owners who have the financial capacity and inclination towards supporting arts and culture. There is a challenge with not being the 'primary' residence and building a sense of personal connection and ownership.
- › The cost of developing new infrastructure as well as the maintenance costs of existing, aging facilities is a concern.

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION/RELEVANCE

- › There is a desire to make arts more accessible to local residents and build a broader sense of ownership among residents. This is mirrored with the challenge of engaging second homeowners who have less of a connection.
- › There is an opportunity to integrate arts into broader community development efforts. This would benefit from dedicated leadership.



Goals and Strategies

OPPORTUNITY & INTRODUCTION

The Southeast Vermont Cultural Arts Plan is intended to provide a long-term approach towards enhancing, elevating and strengthening arts, culture and creative economy in the region. This is in response to the direct input from stakeholders across the region and reflects the distinct character of the arts, culture and creative sector. The plan will require a coalition of leaders from across the region to commit to a sustained approach and to identify and engage dedicated leadership to facilitate the initiatives outlined in the four goals. The role of this plan is primarily facilitative, providing tools and resources to the creative community while enabling greater self-sufficiency and building more diverse community support.

The engagement process revealed significant opportunities for strengthening arts, culture, and creative economy in Southeast Vermont. While challenges exist, the strong foundation of cultural assets, demonstrated community interest in collaboration, and recognition of the creative sector's economic importance create multiple pathways for strategic advancement.

The region's remarkable cultural vitality provides a solid foundation for growth. The challenge lies not in creating something new, but in better connecting and coordinating existing assets to maximize their collective impact.

The convergence of needs expressed by both individual artists and cultural organizations presents clear opportunities for strategic intervention. The widespread desire for networking, professional development, and coordination suggests that targeted investments in these areas could yield significant benefits across the entire creative community. The strong interest in collaborative programming and shared resources indicates readiness for regional initiatives that can serve multiple stakeholders simultaneously.

The recognition of arts and culture as a significant economic driver creates opportunities for stronger integration with broader economic development efforts. The concept of cultural corridors, combined with interest in cultural tourism and placemaking initiatives, provides frameworks for positioning the creative sector as central to regional economic strategy rather than a secondary consideration.

The expressed interest in developing a stronger regional cultural identity represents an opportunity to differentiate Southeast Vermont in the statewide competitive cultural landscape. Programs like "Made in Southeast Vermont" and "Play in Southeast Vermont" could create distinctive branding that serves both local community building and external marketing purposes, helping to address the challenge of balancing local accessibility with cultural tourism.

Perhaps most significantly, the consistent call for dedicated coordination and leadership points to an opportunity to establish sustainable mechanisms for ongoing plan implementation. The willingness of diverse stakeholders to participate in planning suggests potential for continued engagement in implementation, provided clear structures and dedicated resources are established.

These opportunities inform the following goals and strategies, which are designed to build systematically on the region's existing strengths while addressing the most pressing needs identified through community engagement.

The plan is organized into four overall goals that focus on: 1) artists and creative entrepreneurs; 2) arts and culture organizations; 3) enhancing the brand of the region as a creative hub; and 4) strengthening the sector. Each goal has strategies that comprise how each goal can be accomplished, plus action steps providing direction for more detailed implementation. These goals and strategies provide a framework for a coalition of leadership to provide the leadership and impetus for implementation. As with any long-term plan, circumstances will change during implementation. This plan can and should be adapted to meet new challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

HOW TO APPROACH THE GOALS & STRATEGIES

The following goals and strategies are designed for collaborative implementation rather than individual organizational execution. Each strategy represents an opportunity for multiple stakeholders to work together, sharing resources, expertise, and responsibility to achieve outcomes that no single entity could accomplish alone. Each strategy includes illustrations of tactics and approaches. These are not intended to be prescriptive, but to provide a framework or roadmap for collaborative implementation.



Goal 1

Enable artists and creative entrepreneurs to thrive and expand

Goal 1 focuses on the community of individual artists and creative practices and creative entrepreneurs in Southeast Vermont. The region is home to a broad range of artists and creative businesses. The following strategies and tactics respond to the input from stakeholders and outline the range of supports, services and resources intended to strengthen, enhance and expand the creative sector in the region.

1.1

Establish a series of networking opportunities for peer-to-peer critical feedback on their creative practices. Tactical approaches include:

- › Organize quarterly “creative critique” sessions hosted at rotating venues throughout the region.
- › Build on/expand existing online platforms such as Creative Ground for artists to share works-in-progress and receive feedback.
- › Establish discipline-specific peer groups that meet monthly (visual arts, performing arts, literary arts, etc.) or on a schedule that is practical and determined to be useful by each discipline.
- › Collaboratively organize an annual “Creative Exchange” conference to foster cross-disciplinary collaboration.
- › Develop a mentorship program pairing established and emerging artists.

1.2

Support professional development activities by individual artists designed to improve their career and business skills. Create pathways to connect artists with business mentors and professional services, knowledge, and access to resources. Tactical approaches include:

- › Develop a program with local/regional business professionals (financial, legal, marketing, etc.) to create an “office hours” program for artists and creative entrepreneurs to receive advice, coaching and/or mentoring.
- › Establish a relationship with VT SCORE to develop a business mentor program for individual artists and creative entrepreneurs.
- › Partner with organizations that host professional practices development programs to connect artists and creative entrepreneurs to workshops, seminars and resources on topics like pricing, marketing, and legal considerations for creative businesses.
- › Partner with local and regional economic and small business development programs to create an artist-focused resource guide on business development and funding opportunities. Compile existing resources from Vermont Arts Council, Americans for the Arts, Creative Ground and other organizations in a central database for ease of access.
- › Partner with Creative Ground to build upon and ‘localize’ information and resources for Southeast Vermont, that may include a centralized online database of grants, residencies, and exhibition/performance opportunities that builds upon existing resources.
- › Develop relationships with statewide and national funders, for example, local financial institutions and the Vermont Community Foundation, to increase awareness of regional artists.
- › Be intentional in providing multi-language access to key resources for immigrant artist communities, and/or partner with local agencies working with immigrant communities to increase awareness of resources.

1.3

Coordinate with existing economic and business development programs to establish a Creative Economy Task Force or Creative Economy Roundtable within regional economic development organizations.

- › Host joint workshops with local economic development entities that are curated and tailored on creative economy and creative entrepreneurs.
- › Seek partnerships with existing economic development and small business programs to integrate creative sector businesses into existing small business loan programs and other tools for business growth and development.
- › Establish seats for cultural representatives on local/regional economic development boards.
- › Develop targeted creative economy investment funds with economic development agencies, building and collaborating with existing programs and mechanisms.

1.4

Partner with municipalities and developers to create affordable housing/workspace solutions for artists.

- ▶ Research successful artist space (studio, live/work, housing) models such as Exner Blocks in Bellows Falls and Artspace projects and explore the potential for a partnership for such development in Southeast Vermont.
- ▶ Work with town planning departments and/or commissions to identify potential properties and related zoning issues to address for conversion to address creative space needs.
- ▶ Create a toolkit for property owners interested in developing artist spaces.





Goal 2

Support strengthening arts and culture nonprofit organizations in the region

2.1

Regional coordination efforts should prioritize and support a series of convenings on topics and issues relevant to strengthening the nonprofit cultural sector.

- › Support the existing network of arts nonprofit leaders in the region to assist with organizing and facilitating periodic roundtables. Develop programs for these roundtables focused on specific topics (e.g., fundraising, audience development, etc.).
- › Organize an annual regional cultural summit to support networking, advocacy, expanding the professional network, and building collaboration and camaraderie across the region.
- › Develop and facilitate a peer-to-peer problem-solving network, providing opportunities to establish informal mentoring networks particularly in support of new leaders in the region.

2.2

Develop a succession planning support program for cultural organizations facing leadership transitions.

- › Create a succession planning toolkit or aggregated online resource through drawing on the extensive templates, guides and resources in the nonprofit sector.
- › Identify a pool of experts in organizational transition and develop and facilitate a program providing one-on-one consulting for organizations anticipating leadership changes to support preparing for a transition and succession planning.

2.3

Build stronger connections with state and national funding sources.

- › Serve as a regional advocate for arts and culture with local, regional, state and national funders who support arts and culture to build awareness of the range of arts in the region and to facilitate potential opportunities for project and programmatic support.

2.4

Foster regular convenings between cultural organizations to coordinate programming and identify collaborative opportunities.

- › Expand on the convening function in 2.1 to include a regular schedule of programming coordination meetings to support season planning, exploring potential thematic concentrations and to address potential conflicts.
- › Seek resources to develop collaborative and thematic programming across the region.

2.5

Develop strategies and facilitate implementation to better engage second homeowners in cultural philanthropy.

- › Create a “cultural ambassador” program pairing local residents with second homeowners.
- › Coordinate a series of curated events during peak visitor seasons with the express goal of developing a cohort of second-home owner networks and support groups for arts and culture.
- › Research and develop a “Southeast Vermont Cultural Passport” program designed for short-term residents with special access and benefits.
- › Explore establishing a Second Home Cultural Fund with matching incentives in collaboration with local philanthropy that supports arts and culture.



2.6

Create a sliding scale ticket program that cultural organizations can opt into to increase local accessibility.

- › Develop a common framework for sliding scale pricing that organizations can customize.
- › Design clear communication materials explaining the program to audiences to encourage participation in a broad range of arts and culture programming.
- › For income-based programs, implement a simple verification system that maintains dignity for participants.
- › Collect and share data on program impact and participation.



2.7

Establish coordinated programs to engage youth and families in cultural activities.

- › Create a regional “Arts for Youth” pass program providing free or reduced-price access to participating organizations.
- › Develop coordinated after-school arts programming across the region
- › Establish a summer arts camp rotation among multiple cultural organizations
- › Create a youth arts council with representatives from each community
- › Develop family-friendly programming guides and resources in coordination with the activities outlined in section 3.3.





Goal 3

Advocate for establishing a creative community brand for Southeast Vermont

3.1

Support local and regional marketing channels aimed at increasing effective ways for community members to learn about arts and cultural offerings that interest them.

- › Establish a working group of marketing professionals and tourism development representatives to develop consistent branding guidelines for regional cultural marketing.
- › Develop and manage targeted social media campaigns for different audience segments in collaboration with local, regional and state networks (e.g., Visit Vermont, Downtown Brattleboro Alliance, etc.).
- › Develop cross-promotional materials for use at all cultural venues.

3.2

Explore establishing a “Made in Southeast Vermont” program to brand the magnitude of arts and crafts being created in the region.

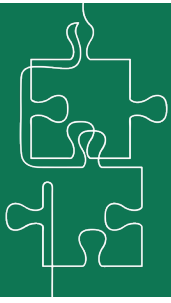
- › Create distinctive branding, logo, and certification criteria in collaboration with a cohort of individual artists, creative businesses and entrepreneurs.
- › Collaborate with retail districts, business alliances and business development centers in creating opportunities for product placement and promotion.
- › Establish an annual “Made in Southeast Vermont” showcase event either as a ‘stand-alone’ or in conjunction with existing regional events and programming.
- › Explore developing an online marketplace for participating artists that aggregates existing web-based sales networks.

3.3

Explore establishing a parallel program of “Play in Southeast Vermont” to brand the depth and breadth of performing and visual arts, heritage and cultural offerings in the region.

- › Create seasonal “Play in Southeast Vermont” guides featuring events and activities in collaboration with tourism promotion organizations.
- › Develop themed itineraries (music weekends, gallery tours, etc.) in collaboration with existing events marketing programs and building upon established marketing outlets.
- › Establish a regional cultural pass with discounts to multiple venues.
- › Collaborate with visitor information centers to establish a “cultural concierge” service.





Goal 4

Strengthening the creative sector in the region

4.1

Establish a dedicated coordinator position to focus on plan implementation and serve as the regional facilitator for furthering arts, culture and creative economy.

- › Secure funding through a coalition of the Vermont Creative Network, towns, organizations, and private philanthropy to support a leadership position.
- › Develop a clear job description with measurable outcomes and responsibilities tailored to the available resources.
- › Seek to house the position within a neutral organization to provide support and infrastructure.

4.2

Work with towns to incorporate cultural considerations into municipal plans.

- › Create a cultural planning toolkit for towns in the region.
- › Offer workshops on cultural planning for town officials.
- › Develop model language for town plans that can be customized.
- › Facilitate public engagement sessions focused on cultural elements of town planning.
- › Create case studies of successful cultural integration in town plans.



4.3

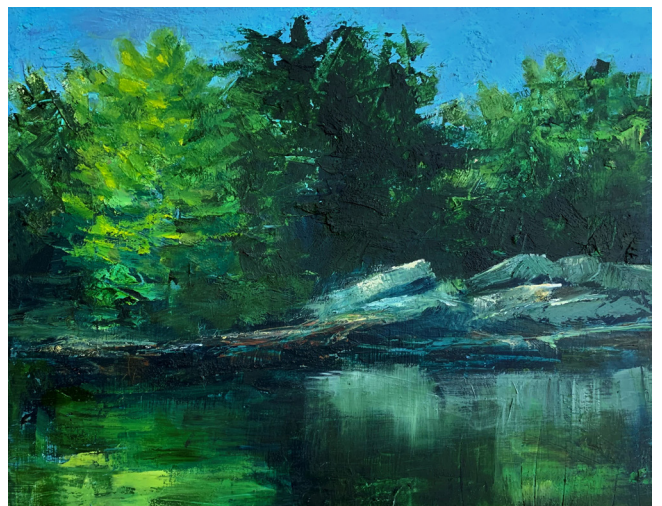
Explore supporting expansion and strengthening of existing local and regional cultural corridor and/or event programming

- › Support development and expansion of designated cultural corridors across Southeast Vermont.
- › Partner with other activities and festivals such as the Putney Craft Tour, Rock River Artists Open Studio Tour, Brattleboro Gallery Walk, Yellow Barn and Marlboro Music Festival.

4.4

Support creative placemaking initiatives in downtown areas.

- › Create a collaborative task force of town and village representatives to coordinate and promote a range of pop-up cultural activities in vacant or underutilized spaces across the region.
- › Explore creating a regional creative placemaking grant program for community-led initiatives.





Funding & Implementation

A REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The success of the Southeast Vermont Arts, Culture and Creative Economy Plan depends fundamentally on sustained collaboration among diverse stakeholders across the region. This plan cannot be implemented by any single organization, municipality, or sector acting alone. Rather, it requires a coordinated effort that brings together municipal governments, cultural organizations, individual artists, economic development entities, and private supporters in a shared commitment to strengthening the region's creative economy.

The collaborative approach is not merely strategic—it is essential. The challenges identified through community engagement, from artist isolation to organizational capacity constraints, are regional in scope and require regional solutions. Individual towns or organizations attempting to address these issues in isolation would duplicate efforts and ultimately compete for limited resources. Only through regional coordination can Southeast Vermont maximize its collective cultural assets and create the critical mass needed to establish a distinctive creative identity.

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Successful implementation will require establishing clear governance structures and sustainable funding mechanisms from the outset. The plan calls for a dedicated coordinator position that would

serve as the regional facilitator, but this role must be supported by a coalition of stakeholders who share ownership of the plan's objectives.

The implementation approach should be phased, beginning with initiatives that build trust and demonstrate early wins while laying groundwork for more complex collaborative efforts. Stakeholder feedback suggests that priority should be given to establishing a shared events calendar system, organizing initial networking opportunities for artists, and creating the regional cultural summit as foundational activities that can generate momentum and engagement across the creative community.

Central to implementation is the recognition that capacity building must precede program expansion. Before launching new initiatives, the region must invest in creating the infrastructure for collaboration—both the human infrastructure of relationships and trust, and the organizational infrastructure of shared systems and resources.



LONG-TERM STRATEGIC VISION

Given the limited philanthropic and municipal resources available in the region, this plan is designed as a long-term strategic framework. The timeline for full implementation should be viewed with progress measured through incremental advancement toward stated goals rather than immediate achievement of all objectives.

This long-term perspective is realistic given the scale of challenges identified—from affordable housing to leadership succession to regional coordination—which require sustained effort and evolving strategies. It also reflects the nature of cultural development, which builds gradually through accumulated investments in relationships, infrastructure, and community capacity.

The plan's longevity also serves as a strength, providing stability and continuity that can outlast changes in individual leadership or short-term economic fluctuations. By establishing a framework that can adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining core objectives, the plan creates a sustainable foundation for cultural development.

FUNDING STRATEGY & RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The plan acknowledges the reality of limited local resources while identifying multiple potential funding streams that, when combined, can support implementation. These include:

Municipal Investment: Recognizing that arts and culture represent economic drivers, the three initiating towns—Brattleboro, Wilmington, and Rockingham—along with other regional municipalities, should view cultural development as a component of broader economic development strategies. Municipal support may include direct funding, in-kind services, or policy changes that facilitate cultural initiatives. The current fiscal challenges faced by towns across the region will impact any early investment. The aim is for longer-term strategies to be built in by the municipalities to elevate arts, culture and creative sector development.

State and Federal Resources: Vermont's commitment to creative economy development, combined with federal programs supporting rural arts and culture, provides opportunities for leveraging local investments with outside funding. The plan's regional approach and comprehensive framework position it well for competitive grant applications.

Economic Development Integration: By positioning cultural initiatives within broader economic development strategies, the plan can access funding streams typically reserved for business development, tourism promotion, and workforce development.

Earned Revenue and Social Enterprise: Some plan initiatives, particularly those related to cultural tourism and artist professional development, may generate revenue that can support ongoing operations.



MEASURING SUCCESS & SUSTAINABILITY

The plan's success should be measured not only through specific program outcomes but through broader indicators of regional cultural vitality and economic impact. Key metrics include increased collaboration among cultural organizations, expanded professional opportunities for artists, enhanced regional cultural identity, and measurable economic benefits from creative sector development.

Long-term sustainability requires building the plan into the institutional fabric of the region rather than treating it as a separate initiative. This means integrating cultural considerations into municipal planning processes, establishing cultural representation on economic development boards, and creating systems that become self-reinforcing over time.

CONCLUSION

The Southeast Vermont Arts, Culture and Creative Economy Plan represents an ambitious but achievable vision for strengthening one of Vermont's most culturally rich regions. Its success depends on recognizing that cultural development is inherently collaborative and long-term, requiring sustained commitment from diverse stakeholders working toward shared objectives.

While the challenges are significant—limited resources, geographic barriers, and capacity constraints—the foundation is strong. The region possesses remarkable cultural assets, demonstrated community interest in collaboration, and recognition of the creative sector's economic importance. By building systematically on these strengths through a coordinated regional approach, Southeast Vermont can enhance its position as a distinctive cultural destination while ensuring that arts and culture remain accessible and relevant to local communities.

The plan provides a roadmap, but success ultimately depends on the continued engagement and commitment of the creative community, municipal leaders, and supporting organizations that recognize that investment in arts and culture is investment in the region's economic vitality and quality of life. Through patient, sustained effort and genuine collaboration, the vision outlined in this plan can become reality, creating lasting benefits for current residents while attracting new talent and investment to the region.



Photo Credits

- Cover:** Mural designed by Mark Ragonese and produced by fathers taking part in the Greater Falls Community Justice Center’s Parenting with Respect program and their children, along with muralists Negina Azimi and Marwa Safa Azimi. Photo by Seth Thomas.
- Page 4:** Muralist Hells Gibson. Photo by Seth Thomas.
- Page 5:** Robert DuGrenier & Miss Vermont. Photo by Lynn Barrett.
- Page 6:** [Above] Robert Burch demonstrating during Putney Craft Tour. Photo by Lynn Barrett; [Below] Photo by Robert Smith.
- Page 7:** Photo by Rob Aft.
- Page 8:** [Above] Arabella at the Wilmington Fairy Stroll, Floral Butterfly installation by Wilmington Works; [Middle] Robert DuGrenier. Photo by Lynn Barrett; [Below] Painter Marcie Maynard. Photo by Lynn Barrett, Putney Craft Tour.
- Page 9:** Photo of Mucuy Bolles, Putney Craft Tour.
- Page 12:** Three photos courtesy Putney Craft Tour. [Above] Photo of Josh Letourneau; [Middle] Pura Vida Essentials, LLC; [Below] Brandis Glassworks. Photo by Lynn Barrett.
- Page 13:** [Above] Work by Judy Hawkins, Putney Craft Tour; [Below] Work by Mucuy Bolles.
- Page 14:** [Clockwise from left] Caitlin Burch, Putney Craft Tour; Photo by Robert Smith; Yellow Flowers by Deborah Lazar.
- Page 16:** Muralist Hells Gibson. Photo by Seth Thomas.
- Page 18:** [Clockwise from upper left] Photo by Robert Smith; Works by Jeanette Staley; Researcher Julia Borden prepares a hand-woven wool kashmiri shawl for a photoshoot; Work by Green Mountain Spinnery.
- Page 20:** Artist Kristen Williams holding an original work.
- Page 21:** Page 21: [Above] Photo of Colors in Nature Scavenger Hunt at Arthouse Summer Art & Sustainability Camp; [Middle] Nancy Calicchio’s study, Putney Craft Tour; [Below] Robert Burch teaching Emma Barnard how to blow glass.
- Page 22:** Artist Mwanga William with original works. Photo by Seth Thomas.
- Page 23:** Mural designed by Ezra Veitch and painted by Cliff Clear and Bonnie Lee Turner. Photo by Seth Thomas.
- Page 24:** Photo of Elise and Payne Junker.
- Page 25:** Three photos courtesy Putney Craft Tour. [Clockwise from left] Photo provided of Anya Bredbeck; Works by Caitlin Burch; Work by Laurie Alberts.
- Page 26:** Photo provided by Green Mountain Spinnery.
- Page 27:** Photo by Robert Smith.
- Page 28:** [Above] Photo by Robert Smith; [Below] Works by Julia Brandis, Putney Craft Tour.
- Page 29:** [Above] Musician collective Lakou Mizik performed during the 2025 Bandwagon Summer Series. Photo by Robert Smith; [Below] Parish Hill Creamery, Putney Craft Tour.
- Back Cover:** Work by Marcie Maynard.

