

Bennington County Cultural Plan

Strengthening Creativity in
Southwest Vermont

May 2019



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This project was made possible by the Municipal Planning Grant Program administered by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development as well as a staff match provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission.

Foreword

The Towns of Bennington and Manchester extend a heartfelt thank you to the cultural plan steering committee and to community participants at public meetings and in surveys for their input on the *Bennington County Cultural Plan*. This plan would not exist without the commitment of the Bennington Area Arts Council, the Bennington Regional Planning Commission, and the Manchester Town Plan—which identified arts and cultural planning as a key strategy for local economic development. This has also been an exciting opportunity for the two towns to partner to strengthen our arts and cultural assets across Bennington County. Thank you to our consultant, Julia Dixon, for crafting a useful document for both town officials, arts and cultural institutions, and creative individuals. The *Bennington County Cultural Plan* articulates a vision for Bennington County's cultural future and establishes goals and strategies to make this vision our reality. We look forward to implementing the strategies and recommendations with the continued assistance of the steering committee.

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MANCHESTER MUSIC FESTIVAL, MANCHESTER. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY PETERS.

Introduction

Bennington County is a beautiful 678-square-mile region in Vermont's southwest corner bordering Massachusetts and New York State. The Green and Taconic Mountain ranges create scenic vistas along U.S. Route 7 and Vermont Routes 7A and 9, the county's primary highways. Rivers including the Battenkill and Walloomsac weave in between mountains and rolling hills are dotted with barns—the very essence of quintessential Vermont.

Bennington and Manchester are the largest towns in the county in terms of population and serve as dual county seats. Manchester and the towns surrounding it—Arlington, Sunderland, Sandgate, Winhall, Landgrove, Peru, Dorset, and Rupert—are considered the northshire while Bennington, Pownal, Stamford, Readsboro, Searsburg, Woodford, Shaftsbury, and Glastenbury are considered the southshire. North Bennington, Old Bennington, and Manchester Village are smaller villages within the two primary towns, but each are designated historic districts with their own distinct feel.

History is a huge component of Bennington County's identity. Aided by the Green Mountain Boys, the colonial militia won a critical battle in the region, now known as the Battle of Bennington, which became a turning point in the American Revolutionary War. The Bennington Battle Monument, one of the most iconic structures in Bennington County, pays homage to this event. Preserved covered bridges, reclaimed mills, and restored estates reflect the pride residents have in their community's history, and institutions such as libraries and historical societies are important local conduits for creativity and culture.

Like many communities in New England, the landscape has dictated the region's economic industries. Farming, fishing, and hunting have been trades since the land was first settled. Today, organic produce, maple syrup, milk, and cheese production are dominant agricultural industries in Bennington County. Water-powered mills produced everything from paper to cloth, and the nation's first marble quarry was established in Dorset in 1785. Now, mills are home to small creative businesses, among others, and farms are serving as community gathering spaces.

Outdoor recreation has drawn people to the area since the mid-



“Artists are culture-changers.”

1800s. Families flock to Bromley Mountain in Peru for its ski slopes and summer adventure parks, and nearby Stratton Mountain Resort boasts a golf course, multiple music stages, restaurants, and shops in addition to its 99 ski trails. Hiking trails can be found for all skill levels, from the Blue Summit Trail up Mount Equinox in Manchester, to the Adams Reservoir loop in Woodford State Park, and the Appalachian Trail merges with Vermont's Long Trail in Bennington County.

The county's rural geography also creates certain infrastructure challenges. Cellular service is not consistent and broadband—a resource on which many creative freelancers rely—is not available in some communities. The limited, aging, unaffordable housing stock creates challenges for business owners and cultural nonprofits across the region. Transportation also remains a key issue. Aside from the Green Mountain Express bus system, there is no reliable way for people to move about the county without a personal vehicle.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing residents is the bifurcation of the county. The northshire is very different from the southshire in its economy and character. The northshire is wealthier, more transient, and more educated than the southshire, although the southshire is younger, more populated, and has more jobs. Bennington contains the bulk of the county's community services including a regional hospital, while Manchester has an entrenched culture of philanthropy. However, both shires are facing a declining, aging population.

“... by developing cultural activities in the area we ... enhance the lives of all who live and visit here.”

Municipal leaders across the county are committed to economic development planning and investment in their communities, but they are also aware that it is crucial to align strategy at a regional and state level in order to have the impact necessary to reverse the downward population trend.

Last year, Bennington County joined forces with neighboring Windham County to produce the *2019 Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (CEDS) report in an effort to maximize resources and capacity. This cultural plan has been created in the same spirit. Like CEDS, it emphasizes collaboration as well as entrepreneurship, business support, connectivity, and community engagement.

Only, this plan focuses solely on the creative sector. Too often, economic development strategy lumps arts and culture into recreation and tourism, as these activities impact residents' and visitors' quality of life. It is indisputable that arts and culture are one of several pillars of the tourism economy. But the sector also impacts workforce development and job creation, product development, innovation, downtown revitalization, public health, environmental stewardship, and more.

The state of Vermont has recognized the power the creative

Overarching Issues

1 Divisions in geography (northshire/southshire), class (wealthy/poor), culture (elitist/populist), residential identity (flatlander/woodchuck), and politics (liberal/conservative) create or perpetuate many negative perceptions of the arts including:

- There is not enough to do or the area is not vibrant
- Artists don't contribute to the economy
- Bennington's cultural offerings aren't for residents

2 An aging and declining population puts a strain on the workforce, audience/customer base, and viability of certain creative ventures.

3 Lack of affordable, market-rate housing across the county creates additional workforce issues for nonprofit and for-profit creative companies alike.

4 Financial resources, professional development opportunities, and business training are either not available to or are not accessed by the creative community.

5 The economic development climate, which underappreciates the creative economy and its scope, needs, and multi-faceted impact, creates a stressful atmosphere for local artists and creative workers.

sector has to transform communities through economic and community development. A 2014 economic impact study commissioned by the Vermont Arts Council revealed that four specific arts businesses (artists, arts promoters and agents, museums and historic sites, and performing arts companies) generated over \$551 million in economic activity statewide and produced \$14.7 million in state and local taxes.

In 2016, the Vermont Arts Council formed the Vermont Creative Network, an alliance of statewide partners to advocate for and advance the creative economy. Shortly thereafter, the network commissioned a deeper sector analysis which determined that the creative economy is responsible for 37,132 jobs—or nine percent of Vermont's workforce.

The *Bennington County Cultural Plan* is a collaborative action plan that will strengthen Bennington County's creative community, but it is also a complement to the work these network leaders, including representatives of this region, are doing to educate Vermonters about arts and culture.

Arts and Culture In Bennington County

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Excerpt of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost

Bennington County's cultural history is surprisingly innovative. From its dramatic mountain views to quaint villages, the landscape served as a source of inspiration for painters, musicians, and poets throughout the twentieth century.

Acclaimed poet Robert Frost lived in Shaftsbury from 1920–1938, during which time he wrote "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and won three Pulitzer Prizes for poetry. Painter and illustrator Norman Rockwell relocated from Westchester County, New York, to Arlington in 1939—a move that is credited as stimulating his depiction of rural, small-town America, for which he is best known. Shirley Jackson, author of many critically and commercially successful horror stories which are considered foundational to the contemporary genre, lived in North Bennington from 1940 to 1965, where she did all of her writing.

Founded in 1932, Bennington College was the first institution of higher education in the United States to establish the fine arts

as equal disciplines within liberal arts education. It began as, and remains, a place where students and faculty were encouraged to push the boundaries of artmaking, solidifying the institution as a launch pad for modern art. Choreographer Martha Graham, who was developing a more expressive style of movement, co-founded the school's dance program in 1934. After Helen Frankenthaler graduated from Bennington College in 1949, she returned to New York City where she became a central figure in mid-century abstract painting. Recruited to the college faculty in 1946, Gunnar Schonbeck, a renowned innovator and musical savant, created and performed his own instruments throughout his 53-year tenure.

The school continues to attract curious, creative students to its fine and performing arts departments. Notable authors including Michael Pollan, Bret Easton Ellis, Jonathan Lethem, and Donna Tartt graduated from Bennington College in the '70s and '80s. Actors Peter Dinklage and Justin Theroux, theater producer Mandy Mishell Hackett, and arts advocate Sheila Lewandowski studied drama there in the 1990s. As the arts advance further into other fields, the school has remained responsive. Bennington College was one of the first to offer courses in electronic music, and an MFA in Public Action was added last year for artists who engage in social practice.

Bennington College students, faculty, and administrators comprise just one segment of Bennington County's creative community. In 2018, the National Center for Arts Research named Bennington County the seventh most arts vibrant small community in America. It has a density of artists, cultural organizations, creative businesses, and dollars that rival culturally-rich rural communities such as Summit Park, Utah—home to the Sundance Film Festival. Although it isn't known at this time how many jobs in Bennington County are situated within the creative economy, we do know that there are several key creative industries in the region.

Pottery was a critical manufacturing industry in the 1800s and, although it has scaled down dramatically over the past 200 years, it continues to play an important role in Bennington's creative economy. Founded in 1948 by the late David Gil, Bennington



FARM TO BALLET AT STUDIO HILL FARM, SHAFTSBURY. PHOTO BY CALLY MCDUGALL.

Select Organizations

Nonprofit Cultural Organizations

1761 Arts, Arlington

The American Museum of Fly Fishing, Manchester

Bennington Area Arts Council, Bennington

Bennington College, Bennington

Bennington County Choral Society, Bennington

Bennington Museum, Bennington

The Canfield Gallery at The Martha Canfield Library, Arlington

The Dorset Players, Inc., Dorset

Dorset Theatre Festival, Dorset

Hildene, Manchester

Manchester Music Festival, Manchester

Marble House Project, Dorset

Oldcastle Theatre Company, Bennington

The Park-McCullough House, North Bennington

Robert Frost Stone House Museum, Shaftsbury

Sage City Symphony, Shaftsbury

Southern Vermont Arts Center, Manchester

Vermont Arts Exchange, North Bennington

For-Profit Creative Businesses

3 Pears Gallery, Dorset

Bennington Potters, Bennington

Billsville House Concerts, Manchester

Catamount Access Television Corporation, Bennington

Catamount Glassware, Inc., Bennington

Chandler 4 Corners, Manchester

Earth Sky Time Community Farm, Manchester

Greater Northshire Access Television, Sunderland

GVH Studio Inc., Bennington

The Harwood Hill, Bennington

Helmholz Fine Art, Manchester

Jackie Sedlock Pottery, Pownal

JK Adams, Dorset

Mountain Media, Manchester

Norman Rockwell Studio & Inn, Arlington

Northshire Bookstore, Manchester

Readsboro Glassworks, Readsboro

Studio Hill Farm, Shaftsbury

Potters produces glazed dinnerware that is popular locally and nationally. The company, as well as the region's cultural history more broadly, can be described by its legacy. Many factory workers stay with the company for decades and most products, including the 70-year-old Original Mug, are Gil's designs.

JK Adams in Dorset has a similar legacy. The company opened in 1945 and has been producing and selling hand-crafted cutting boards, bowls, and other wood-based housewares for 50 years. As the largest employer in Dorset, JK Adams has 42 people working in production, design, shipping, and administration, with an average tenure of 20 years. Smaller furniture and wood product manufacturers that specialize in unique or custom pieces can be found throughout Bennington County.

There is a significant music production and DIY music scene in the region. At least four recording studios can be found in Bennington County: The Studio at Strawberry Fields Lane in Manchester, Old Mill Road Recording in Arlington, Earth Sky Time Farm in Manchester, and Bennington College. Local, emerging musicians and students rely on these resources as well as places to perform. The county has several 300–400 seat theaters but lacks a large, indoor concert venue. Perhaps in response to this, a music scene has emerged. Live music is offered regularly in restaurants, cafes, barns, churches, farms, homes, and other alternative spaces.

Individual visual artists and makers account for a large portion of Bennington County's creative community. Designers, printmakers, painters, sculptors, jewelers, quilters, photographers, and glass artists are scattered throughout the mountains in studios from Readsboro to Rupert. While some galleries have closed in recent years, others, like Helmholz Fine Art in Manchester and 3 Pears Gallery in Dorset, have opened within the past decade. Manchester's Tilting at Windmills Gallery and Fiddlehead at Four Corners in Bennington are both established galleries that sell work by national as well as regional artists. Many local makers sell at farmers markets, others sell directly through their websites, and some visual artists teach workshops out of the area in order to supplement their sales.

Cultural tourism is another important industry in southern Vermont, and Bennington County boasts several large organizations that attract eager visitors. Hildene, the Lincoln Family Home, is the largest cultural nonprofit in the county in terms of employees, annual revenue, and acreage. Located on a 412-acre, 14-building estate in Manchester, the historic home is open 360 days per year and sees 42,000 visitors annually.

With about 10 full-time staff members and 10 acres of property, Bennington Museum makes up for its small campus with a massive collection. Over 40,000 objects have been purchased or donated to the museum including paintings and artifacts of



ARTIST BARBARA ACKERMAN, BENNINGTON. PHOTO BY GREG NESBIT.

the farmer and folk artist Grandma Moses. The museum shows many of these objects in its galleries, but also mounts several temporary exhibitions annually. The institution, which saw over 22,000 visitors in 2018, is a member of ArtCountry, a marketing partnership between MASS MoCA, The Clark, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and Williams College Museum of Art—all in Berkshire County, Massachusetts.

The Southern Vermont Arts Center, located in Manchester, is a 100-acre campus that houses galleries, an auditorium, and a public sculpture park in addition to its own collection of several hundred objects and artworks. The arts center is also home to the Manchester Music Festival, a summer chamber music series.

World-class theatre is easy to find in Bennington County. The Dorset Theatre Festival is a summer stock theatre that has taken residence in the Dorset Playhouse since 1976. The company, which hires about 65 cast and crew members each summer in addition to its 6 full-time staff, focuses on producing new works and incubating works in process from June to August. Oldcastle

Theatre Company in downtown Bennington has a slightly longer season. The organization hosts close to 200 events from May through October annually and has produced nearly 300 shows in its Main Street theatre, which is undergoing extensive renovations and upgrades.

Many cultural nonprofits in Bennington County, however, are small—with less than \$1 million in revenue. Although their resources are limited, they are active, program-heavy organizations. The Marble House Project is a relatively new organization which hosts six 3-week artist residencies and one 2-week family-friendly residency in Dorset each summer. The program has served 275 artists since it began in 2014. The Vermont Arts Exchange, which is based in North Bennington, has been supplementing arts education and producing live music at various sites throughout Bennington County for 25 years. A more comprehensive list of nonprofit cultural organizations can be found on page 4.

2018–2019 Festivals and Special Events

May

- 9th Annual Booktopia, Manchester
- 33rd Annual Mayfest Arts and Crafts Festival, Bennington

June

- 32nd Annual Manchester Vermont Antique & Classic Car Show, Manchester

Summer

- Manchester StreetFest, Manchester
- 2nd Annual ART Manchester, Manchester
- 1st Annual 4 Freedoms Festival, countywide
- 41st Season Dorset Theatre Festival, Dorset
- 2nd Annual Taconic Music Annual Summer Festival, Manchester
- 25th Annual Vermont Sumer Festival Horse Shows, East Dorset
- 20th Annual North Bennington Outdoor Sculpture Show, North Bennington
- Concerts on the Green, Manchester
- 44th Season Manchester Music Festival, Manchester

July

- Circus Smirkus, Manchester
- 25th Annual Pownal Valley Fair, Pownal

August

- 40th Annual Southern Vermont Art and Craft Festival, Bennington
- 10th Annual Bennington Arts Weekend, Bennington
- 23rd Annual Norman's Attic, Arlington
- 54th Bennington Battle Day, Bennington
- 1st Annual Green Mountain Bluegrass & Roots Festival, Manchester

September

- 4th Annual Moonshine Music Festival, Manchester
- 23rd Annual Garlic Fest, Bennington
- 25th Annual Bennington Quiltfest, Bennington
- 37th Annual Peru Fair, Peru
- 30th Annual Manchester Fall Art and Craft Festival, Manchester

October

- 8th Annual Fallapalooza!, Bennington
- 26th Annual North Bennington Halloween Parade, North Bennington

Fall–Spring

- 90th Season Dorset Players, Dorset
- 15th Annual Vermont Ares Exchange Basement Music Series, Bennington

March

- "A Taste of the Shires" Restaurant Week, countywide



4TH ANNUAL MOONSHINE MUSIC FESTIVAL, MANCHESTER. PHOTO BY JAIDON LALOR.

“For a community of our size and area, we are fortunate to have the variety and dynamism that we do. It’s an important, and often overlooked, aspect to quality of life here.”

Planning Process

Cultural leaders and creative stakeholders in Bennington County have been working towards a cultural plan for several years. In 2007, the town of Manchester participated in the Creative Communities Program, a creative economy project planning series facilitated by the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD). One of the 19 proposed programs that emerged from this work was to “host a visioning session for the Manchester area,” which had a description similar to that of a cultural planning process. Ultimately, this program was not selected for development.

In 2012, the town of Bennington participated in a Community Visit Program, also facilitated by VCRD. Although the Community Visit Program helped identify a wide variety of needs, Bennington residents selected “make downtown Bennington a destination” jointly with “build a new Bennington town green” as one of four priority projects. The project was focused on marketing and tourism, but it included strategic growth of cultural assets and creative interventions as well. Following the release of the Community Visit report in June 2012, the Better Bennington Corporation, a downtown revitalization group, formed an arts committee to continue exploring ways to strengthen arts and culture. The group partnered with the Bennington County Regional Commission in 2013 to host three cultural summits—two of which focused on the creation of a cultural plan for the town of Bennington.

After several decades of inactivity, the Bennington Area Arts Council reemerged in the wake of this new cultural momentum. In 2016, the Better Bennington Corporation Arts Committee, which had since expanded to become the Cultural Bennington Planning Committee, absorbed the arts council and the reformed organization began advocating for the inclusion of arts and culture in the town plan.

The rise of regional planning between 2012 and 2016 allowed the vision for a cultural plan to expand to serve the county more broadly. The 2015 *Bennington County Regional Plan* recognized the importance of collaboration in arts-driven economic development and recommended the development of “a plan that highlights the region’s arts and cultural attractions, and identifies how those resources can enhance the area’s economy.”

“I love the cultural and creative opportunities that are here. I hope that Bennington County can turn that into a financial boon for the entire area!”



“STUDIO MATERIALS,” DRAWING BY TONY CONNER. PHOTO BY TONY CONNER.

Similarly, the 2016 *Northshire Economic Development Strategy* report acknowledged the creative economy as a vital industry in the region and called for collaboration, joint marketing, and asset mapping to support the sector. In 2017, the towns of Bennington and Manchester jointly applied for a Municipal Planning Grant through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development in order to formally develop a countywide cultural plan.

A cultural plan creates an informed strategy for launching, growing, or strengthening a region’s arts and cultural sector. Simply put, it allows arts and culture to have more of an impact. A cultural plan tends to call for artists, arts organizations, creative businesses, funders, and others to work together to leverage what they do for the benefit of:

Economic Development

When cultural organizations and creative businesses—including solopreneurs—expand, they impact the workforce and market value of goods and services. A cultural plan can support this kind of creative economic development by bolstering the creative economy.

Community Development

Arts and culture can play a pivotal role in improving the quality of life of all residents in a community. A cultural plan can help to forge partnerships between artists and human resource organizations, faith-based groups, and other community resources that contribute to community development by facilitating creative placemaking.

Innovation

Collaborations between artists and those in other industry sectors such as technology, manufacturing, environment and energy, health, and public safety are pivotal to the advancement of ideas, exploration of new processes, and sustainability of businesses. A cultural plan can encourage innovation by calling for increased arts integration.

Public Policy

Strategic informational and educational campaigns can improve funding and resource opportunities offered to creatives at the local, regional, and state levels. A cultural plan can integrate arts and culture into public policy with arts advocacy.

The Bennington County cultural plan leadership team defined the expectations and priorities of this particular process as follows:

- 1 Create a regional plan that reflects the assets and needs of each town, yet serves the county as a whole.
- 2 Ensure that the plan aligns with other regional economic development and cultural agendas.
- 3 Provide strategies that integrate arts and culture into different aspects of life in Bennington which will enable the cultural sector to have a positive and lasting impact on the community.
- 4 Provide strategies that strengthen and support the creative economy, emphasizing financial stability and organizational sustainability.
- 5 Deeply engage the community and present a plan that is reflective of community input.



CARVED GLASS SCULPTURE BY
K. WILLIAM LEQUIER, READSBORO
GLASSWORKS, READSBORO.
PHOTO BY G ROY PHOTOGRAPHY.

Methodology

The Bennington County cultural planning process was a 14-month-long period of intensive research and analysis employing Design Thinking. Design Thinking, or “human-centered design,” is a methodology rooted in creative practice that educators, planners, CEOs, inventors, and others use to develop practical solutions to problems. This model places emphasis on exploring and understanding customer or user needs as well as evaluating ideas.

The Design Thinking process is comprised of five steps:

EMPATHIZE: Understand the needs of the user by seeing, hearing, and involving them.

DEFINE: Summarize and group information in order to identify the problem.

IDEATE: Generate many ideas that might help to solve the problem.

PROTOTYPE: Flush out ideas to understand how possible solutions might function.

TEST: Explore the feasibility of the solution and solicit feedback for refinement.

The cultural planning process was divided into five phases based on the Design Thinking model:

Phase 1: Research and Review

April 16–July 1, 2018

Phase 1 involved a comprehensive analysis of Bennington County’s geography, cultural community, and economic development climate. Over 40 economic development reports, town plans, studies, and supporting documents were reviewed (see page 42 for a select list of literature). Tours of Arlington, North Bennington, and Shaftsbury were conducted, and grounding meetings were held in Bennington, Dorset, Manchester, Readsboro, and Rupert. Steering committee members contributed to an asset map that identified creative connections, resources, and activities in all 17 towns as well as the village of North Bennington.

Phase 2: Data Collection

July 2–October 31, 2018

Grounding meetings continued through Phase 2 and individual interviews were conducted over the phone and in person. A tour of Pownal as well as several Bennington College facilities were also conducted. Focus groups were held for four creative sector clusters: artists, artisans, and individual creatives; creative

businesses; cultural organizations; and festivals and special events. A complete list of interviewees can be found on page 43. In addition to this targeted data collection, a public survey was distributed online that assessed participation in and engagement with arts and culture in Bennington County. 540 individuals completed the 19-question survey. Data from all sources was compiled into a thorough SWOT analysis which identified the most critical strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges for Bennington County’s creative community.

Phase 3: Information Synthesis

November 1, 2018–January 31, 2019

All 69 items contained within the SWOT analysis were grouped into categories which included programming, relationships, communications, perceptions, funding, environment, and infrastructure. This information was further analyzed through a series of ideation exercises including card sorting, brainstorming, and rapid prototyping conducted by the consultant as well as the steering committee which resulted in the identification of a community vision, goals, and strategies.

Phase 4: Drafting and Feedback

February 1–March 31, 2019

In Phase 4, specific recommendations began to emerge through comparative analysis of similar-sized communities across the United States as well as the continued processing of the SWOT analysis, interview notes, and focus group comments. These recommendations were vetted by the steering committee and the greater cultural community in several private meetings as well as public feedback meetings held in Bennington and Manchester. At both public meetings, attendees worked in small groups to complete resource assessment worksheets which served as the foundation for the implementation plan.

Phase 5: Refinement and Publication

April 1–May 31, 2019

The final phase of the cultural planning process was devoted to writing and designing the plan. A style sheet, graphics, and worksheets were created, and photography and resources were gathered. Lastly, a dissemination and adoption plan was created with the input of the steering committee as well as key cultural stakeholders.

Data

106 people directly participated in the cultural planning process through meetings, interviews, focus groups, and/or public feedback meetings, and the online public engagement survey received 540 unique, completed responses. Although the survey respondents were anonymous, it's safe to say that **over 600 individuals** engaged themselves in the cultural planning process. This is a testament to the passion that Bennington County residents feel towards arts and culture as well as their interest in seeing arts and culture in the region thrive.

Qualitative Data

The empathizing activities conducted in Phases 1 and 2 generated an immense amount of information. A SWOT analysis was created in order to group and assess objective comments (facts) and subjective comments (beliefs) about arts and culture in Bennington County as stated by interviewees themselves. The SWOT analysis evaluated internal and external factors upon Bennington County's artistic and cultural community as well as fixed and variable traits of the community.

Strengths

- 1 Enthusiastic arts community**
- 2** Bennington Museum/Bennington College are important assets (others cited)
- 3 Extensive cultural history**
- 4 Events are important**
- 5** Many long-standing annual events (history)
- 6** Robust summer & fall cultural season
- 7 Strong arts education**
- 8** Word-of-mouth is important
- 9** Local customers are loyal and devoted
- 10** Recording studios
- 11** Media freelancers (and other creative sub-communities) are already connected
- 12** Lots of longstanding employees*
- 13** Artists do wholesale*
- 14** Quality of life*
- 15** Impactful local media*

*Included in more than one category
Bold Comments repeated most often

Weaknesses

- 1** Lots of plans, slow movement
- 2** Lack of synergy/collaboration between arts orgs
- 3** No arts information pipeline
- 4** Artists work multiple jobs to make a living
- 5 Capacity limitations**
- 6** "Community access isn't what we do"
- 7** Anemic winter/spring cultural events
- 8** Many festivals have come and gone
- 9** Not much cross-industry awareness/connection
- 10** No vibrant nightlife
- 11** Lots of good music is under the radar
- 12** "A few people do everything"
- 13 Elitism; socioeconomic or generational art**
- 14** It takes a long time to build customers; constantly doing outreach
- 15** Lots of longstanding employees*
- 16 Collaborate more***
- 17** Youth not engaged*
- 18** "Change is bad"*

540 SURVEY RESPONDENTS
43 FEEDBACK MEETING ATTENDEES
60 INTERVIEWEES
49 MEETING LOCATIONS
34 DOCUMENTS/ARTICLES
17 REGIONAL REPORTS



GARLIC FEST, BENNINGTON.
PHOTO BY LORIANNA WEATHERS.



MILITARY GALLERY, BENNINGTON MUSEUM, BENNINGTON. PHOTO COURTESY BENNINGTON MUSEUM.

Opportunities

- 2 Close to big cities (ex: Albany, New York City, Boston)
- 3 **Relationships to neighboring communities** (ex: New York State; Berkshire County, MA; Windham County, VT; Rutland County, VT)
- 4 Natural beauty
- 5 Remote working
- 5 Colleges invested in downtown
- 6 Affordability
- 7 Colleges starting to address local workforce needs
- 8 **Hospitality and arts/culture**
- 9 **Farming/agriculture and arts/culture**
- 10 Private investment; philanthropy
- 11 Farmers market an important connection to customers
- 12 Film production demand
- 13 Front Porch Forum and other social media sites important
- 14 Need more new, exciting, experimental, radical art
- 15 New leadership at leading cultural institutions and some selectboards
- 16 Regional branding
- 17 The area can become a destination
- 18 Artists do wholesale*
- 19 Quality of life*
- 20 Impactful local media*
- 21 **Collaborate more***

Threats

- 1 **North/south divide**
- 2 Towns have differing identities
- 3 Population decline; aging population
- 4 "Vermont culture" doesn't include the arts
- 5 Arts/culture is not a part of economic development strategy/conversation
- 6 Flatlanders/woodchucks
- 7 Some things are hidden from view; visibility
- 8 Vermont's brand is so recognizable that the state has never invested in marketing
- 9 **Competition for audience, donors**
- 10 People don't buy art in town
- 11 Artists are too busy to take advantage of funding or professional development opportunities
- 12 Aggressive regulatory structure stifles creative business
- 13 Lack of affordable housing
- 14 Cost of living
- 15 No county infrastructure; inadequate systems
- 16 Vermonters aren't funding high-quality art
- 17 Defeatist attitude; no vision
- 18 No good fundraising culture in southshire
- 19 Community doesn't see artists as "working people"
- 20 Regional branding not for locals
- 21 Youth not engaged*
- 22 "Change is bad"*

Public Survey

540 individuals completed an online public survey intended to understand who is engaging in arts and culture in Bennington County and how. The survey was open for two weeks in summer 2018, launching on July 31 and remaining open through August 17. August 1 saw the highest number of collected responses (104), but responses were received each day the survey was live. A link and description of the survey was sent to the steering committee and redistributed through those networks. The survey was also posted on several social media pages. Additionally, a small quarter-page flyer was created and made available at the Vermont Arts Exchange Art Bus during the 40th Annual Southern Vermont Art and Craft Festival.

Highlights

- Overall **perception** of arts and culture in Bennington County is very high.
- Overall **engagement** with arts and culture in Bennington County is very high.
- Those who engage with arts and culture don't necessarily self-identify as **audience members**.
- The biggest barrier to participation in arts and culture in Bennington County is **time**.
- The biggest artistic or cultural demand in Bennington County is **music** (or performing arts more broadly).

Key Findings

Demographics

- Respondents were overwhelmingly residential Vermonters.
 - 90% Vermont, 86% Bennington County, 9% from bordering counties
 - 12% northshire—a low turnout compared to rest of county (33%)
 - 74% southshire—a high turnout compared to rest of county (67%)
 - Manchester and Bennington had low turnout compared to rest of county
 - North Bennington and Pownal had high turnout compared to rest of county
- Responses were evenly split between 3 age groups:
 - 30-49 years (31%)
 - 50-64 years (33%)
 - 65 years or older (30%)
- About 70% female and 30% male, 96% white
- Both personal and household income consistent at roughly 65% above, 11% at, and 24% below state medians.

90%

AGREE that investment in Bennington County's creative and cultural assets is important.

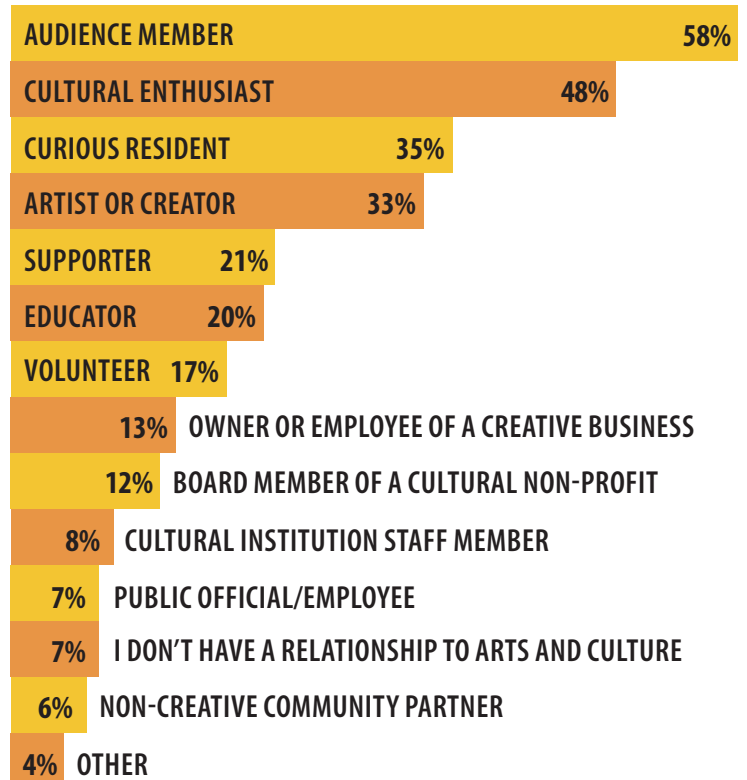
87%

INTERESTED in engaging with arts and culture in Bennington County.

86%

SUPPORT the idea of a Bennington County cultural plan.

ROLES



Engagement

90% of survey respondents reported visiting a cultural institution at least once in the past 12 months. However, only 58% of respondents identified themselves as audience members. This points to a disconnect between arts and culture and intended audience. Respondents may be unaware of their role as audience members or unaware of the definition and/or categorization of artistic and cultural activities, especially if these activities are integrated so seamlessly in the community.

While artists and creators comprise one third of all respondents, only 19% of respondents indicate they sold their art in the past 12 months. However, 54% of respondents reported purchasing art in the past 12 months. Those purchases could have been made outside of the region, or buyers are purchasing what they define as art from individuals who don't define themselves as artists.

Equally surprising is the percentage of respondents who have created art within the past 12 months. At 52%, this percentage is nearly 20 points higher than the number of respondents who self-identify as artists or creators. Respondents could be referring to art produced as the result of a creative class or workshop (40%). Respondents could also be amateur artists or hobbyists who are apprehensive to self-identify as an artists or creators.

ENGAGEMENT

ACTIVITY	% OF TOTAL
Been to a cultural institution	90%
Attended an event w/ cultural component	86%
Attended a creative or cultural event	85%
Purchased art	54%
Created art	52%
Donated to or sponsored	52%
Attended a creative class, workshop, or other educational program	40%
Exhibited, performed or displayed your art	28%
Sold your art	19%
Taught a creative class, workshop, or other educational program	19%
Curated, carried, and/or sold someone else's art	15%

Percentage of all respondents who selected the answer choices "1 or 2 times," "3-5 times," and "6 or more times"

"There is a lot to love about our area, including its unmatched natural beauty and artistic vibe."

PERCEPTION

STATEMENT	% OF TOTAL AGREE
Investment in Bennington County's creative and cultural assets is important.	90%
I am interested in engaging with arts and culture in Bennington County.	87%
I support the idea of a Bennington County cultural plan.	86%
Partnerships are an important part of Bennington County's creative community.	78%
I am able/I feel welcome to participate in most or all cultural and creative activities in Bennington County.	76%
Bennington County is known for its creative community and/or artistic and cultural opportunities.	60%
Bennington County provides a wide variety of cultural and creative activities.	59%

Total agreement is percentage of all respondents who selected the answer choices "strongly agree" and "agree"

Perception

There is overwhelming agreement that investment in Bennington County's creative and cultural assets is important.

Respondents from the northshire and southshire feel similarly about most of these statements. However, more respondents from southshire disagree that Bennington County has a wide variety of creative activities (21%) than the northshire (11%).

NEEDS

ACTIVITY	# OF MENTIONS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Music	102	34%
Youth	43	14%
Events—other	39	13%
Dance	37	12%
Education	32	11%
Galleries	31	10%
Diversity	30	10%
Food	29	10%
Free/low cost/affordable	24	8%
Public art	22	7%
Film	21	7%
Communication	19	6%
Festivals/fairs	17	6%
Sports	14	4%
Theater	13	4%
Nightlife	12	4%

Percentage of respondents refers to the number of respondents who answered this question (304)

Needs

Music is the activity that most respondents feel is missing from Bennington County. While it is not more or less likely that Bennington residents want more music, it is more likely that survey respondents from Bennington want more music. Residents from North Bennington and Shaftsbury are also more likely to want more music based on the percentage each town is represented in total survey respondents as well as the county population.

Of the 102 comments referencing music in response to the question, *What creative, artistic, or cultural activities do you think are missing from Bennington County?*, 24% had something to do with venue. 50% of those venue comments came from residents of Bennington, 21% came from residents of North Bennington, and 17% came from residents of Pownal.

Performing arts is the art form that respondents feel is most missing from the region. 58% of respondents mentioned missing five specific types of performing arts: music, dance, film, theatre, and comedy.

Northshire vs Southshire

Respondents from the northshire and southshire have several things in common. They feel that arts and culture have the biggest impact on education and quality of life. They also feel that arts and culture don't have a great impact on retail.

Respondents from the northshire and southshire also differ strongly. Only 38% of respondents from the southshire feel that arts and culture are important to civic engagement, while 80% of respondents from the northshire feel that way.

When listing favorite creative businesses, organizations, and events in Bennington County, 83% of respondents from the southshire mentioned only things that are based in the southshire. None listed northshire culture only. Northshire-based respondents, however, were more mixed. 35% of northshire residents cited things in both shires, 43% cited north-only culture, and 23% cited south-only culture. It can be inferred that, in terms of movement, while a fair amount of Bennington residents routinely partake in culture located in their own communities, northshire residents move around more.

BARRIERS

BARRIER	# OF MENTIONS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Time/timing	115	37%
Cost	81	26%
Marketing	64	20%
Transportation/travel	44	14%
Programming	27	9%
Accessibility/inclusion	21	7%
Infrastructure	14	4%
Personal	11	4%
Malaise	10	3%
Vibrancy	10	3%

Percentage of respondents refers to the number of respondents who answered this question (313)

Barriers

Barriers to participation are grouped into ten categories. Over one third of all respondents report that issues regarding time (limited personal time or the conflicting timing of scheduled activities with their own schedules or other organizations' activities) is the biggest barrier to participation.

Findings

Data accumulated through conversations, interviews, focus groups, and the public survey all point to a set of conditions that are holding the cultural community back. Bennington County abounds with cultural activity but, based on these needs, the region lacks connectivity within the cultural sector as well as outside of it. There are few systems in place that link creatives to each other or provide access to customers, patrons, resources, services and other support mechanisms in the community.

Arts and culture in Bennington County are **UNDervalUED**:

- lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the economic impact of the arts by locals
- not enough awareness or appreciation for the region's cultural vibrancy and quality by visitors
- lack of arts integration with local government despite opportunities to do so

Arts and culture in Bennington County are **UNDERRESOURCED**:

- not enough investment in the arts
- lack of access to or awareness of available funds
- lack of professional development opportunities for creative workers and business owners
- poor cultural infrastructure (studios, rehearsal and performance space, affordable artist housing, transportation, and communications)
- strained nonprofits
- isolated artists

Arts and culture in Bennington County are **UNDERUTILIZED**:

- perception that the arts are only for tourists
- poor awareness of events and activities for locals
- not enough visibility of youth culture or arts education
- lack of cross-industry collaboration with the arts
- need for more exciting and innovative programming
- poor leveraging of the creative economy



PRIDE AND PREJUDICE BY KATE HAMILL. 2018 DORSET THEATRE FESTIVAL, DORSET. PHOTO BY JOEY MORO.

The Plan

The *Bennington County Cultural Plan* presents a 5-year roadmap for strengthening the region's arts and cultural sector. Developed with numerous public and private partners, the plan aims to create infrastructure that connects creatives to each other as well as the greater community. The following pages outline a set of goals, strategies, and tactics that, when implemented, will lead to a healthier, vibrant, more creative Bennington.

ONE VISION

A vision is the foundation for any cultural plan. Because this plan serves all of Bennington County, it was important for the vision to be defined by community members themselves. The eight vision statements below, which describe ways to strengthen Bennington County's cultural community, are summaries of comments made during interviews and focus groups or written in survey answers. These statements were clustered even further to inform the plan's goals, strategies, and tactics.

- Celebrate Bennington County's rich culture and incredible creative community.
- Brand Bennington County as an arts destination, promoting its cultural assets to a larger regional audience.
- Improve the accessibility of arts and culture to all local residents.
- Provide better access to information, particularly online, about creative events and organizations.
- Coordinate and support artists, businesses, and nonprofits in the creative economy.
- Facilitate better municipal engagement with arts and culture, including public art.
- Encourage local youth participation in arts and culture.
- Connect the Northshire and Southshire through arts and culture while embracing each community's differences.

"We have a lot of talent in our community worth leveraging to enrich the lives of residents and visitors."

FOUR GOALS

A goal is an outcome. Think of it as the result of the work, or a measurement of success—what you want to see happen at the end of the day. These four goals should not change as the plan is being implemented. Even when each goal is achieved, efforts should be made to maintain the goals' outcomes. For example, the creative economy should remain strong, and relationships should be nurtured and sustained.

CREATIVE VIBRANCY

Build on the county's legacy as a launchpad for groundbreaking art while maintaining the region's traditional cultural "brand" to promote the region as a cultural destination.

SECTOR BUILDING

Leverage Bennington County's cultural and community resources to support creatives and strengthen the creative economy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Establish proactive outreach and experiential programs/tools to bridge perceived and real community divides.

CRITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Engage cultural, community, and industry leaders throughout the region to develop collaborative models, identify opportunities to share audiences/dollars, and increase organizational capacity.

SIX STRATEGIES

A strategy defines what approach to take in order to achieve a goal. It is not in itself an implementable action. Instead, it is an organizational bucket which creates focus. The six strategies below provide essential objectives that create alignment, which is particularly important for plans that have multiple organizers and facilitators. They are specific enough to address each goal, yet broad enough to encompass different kinds of projects and initiatives.

1. Establish a toolkit for local creative producers

This strategy supports the region's creative economy by establishing or aligning resources for creative producers which provides more opportunity for those who make and/or sell.

2. Establish a toolkit for local creative consumers

This strategy involves the development of physical and digital portals to creative businesses and products, enhancing visibility both for creative producers as well as local consumers who want to participate in—and pay for—arts and culture.

3. Create an internal cultural advocacy message

This strategy is a communication plan that includes the creation of assets and activities that illustrate the size, scope, and impact of the creative community in order to educate others about arts and culture.

4. Create an external cultural tourism message

This strategy emphasizes collaboration and communication between cultural organizations, creative producers, and various businesses and agencies that promote activities in the region—diversifying outreach methods and increasing visitors.

5. Develop innovative art-making, programming, and engagement activities

This strategy integrates arts and culture into other sectors in order to create an environment that stimulates innovation, encourages civic participation, and improves access to the arts.

6. Create a mechanism for shared leadership within the arts and cultural sector

This strategy distributes responsibility among all producers and supporters of arts and culture in Bennington County—providing long-term stability to the sector through collaboration and capacity-building.

TWENTY-TWO TACTICS

A tactic is the “how” of your strategy; a tool that leads to the development of specific programs and policies. While every community is different, there are some tools that, when customized or modified, are proven to be effective across the board. These are called best practices. The tactics presented in this plan were selected based on best practices in the field as well as ideas that came directly from community input. Some have been proposed in the past, but lacked prioritization or resource allocation. Each tactic is reinforced with specific recommendations and suggestions—the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when*—which came from research, interviews, and steering committee discussions. These additional details should further enable the plan’s implementation.

STRATEGY 1:

- Network and connect creatives across media, industry, and geography
- Expand existing financial and business training programs
- Create a creative career pipeline program for youth
- Create a communication tool that provides artists and creative entrepreneurs with access to information

STRATEGY 2:

- Create a communication tool that provides residents with access to up-to-date information about cultural activities
- Coordinate a curated indoor holiday market
- Coordinate countywide open studios

STRATEGY 3:

- Develop call-to-action assets that can be easily/widely shared and used
- Establish and organize a countywide creative advocacy day
- Commission and/or participate in economic impact studies that quantify creative activity

STRATEGY 4:

- Strengthen relationships with local and regional tourism and hospitality businesses and organizations
- Find opportunities to collaboratively promote cultural activities
- Improve signage and wayfinding for arts and cultural assets
- Develop a culture and heritage trail

STRATEGY 5:

- Encourage pop-up events and activities in underutilized spaces
- Establish public art commissions or committees to better integrate public art in municipal policy-making, planning, and funding
- Cultivate creative partnerships in community development projects
- Create new residency opportunities, particularly for local artists in non-creative industries

STRATEGY 6:

- Extend the work of the steering committee to ensure plan outcomes and assist partners in facilitation
- Formally adopt the cultural plan into town governments or town plans throughout Bennington County
- Convene working groups to better fund, schedule, and promote activities of Bennington County’s cultural and historical institutions
- Create and maintain an online asset map

Implementation

The *Bennington County Cultural Plan* is a reflection of the community's needs, wants, and capabilities—thus, the implementation should be a reflection of the community's collective actions. It was written for anyone who is interested in contributing to the achievement of the community's cultural goals including town officials, cultural directors and staffers, community leaders, business owners, investors and funders, developers, artists, educators, and citizens of the region. This section is constructed and organized to serve as a tool that can support new or established projects that align with this plan. The tactics and recommendations are best practices, but implementation of each tactic will be unique, leveraging Bennington County's specific assets and resources

How To Use This Cultural Plan

Take action!

- Take the lead on a tactic and develop or adjust a project to better incorporate or strengthen arts and culture.
- Save or print the tactic page (pages 20–41) that best correlates to your project and use that page as a planning guide.
- Print and fill out the planning worksheet (page 45). This will help you understand the feasibility of your project and build a roadmap for success.
- Think county-wide, specifically when identifying possible partners and funders. Who can you work with in other towns or industries whose goals align with yours?
- Establish a set of evaluation metrics to measure the effectiveness of your project as it relates to this cultural plan.
- Use anything in these pages as support/validation as you educate, advocate, communicate, and seek to acquire:
 - grant funding
 - crowdfunding
 - sponsorships
 - partners and collaborators
 - participants
 - encouragement and goodwill

Participate!

- Stay informed by reading the cultural plan and sign up for newsletters, social media groups, and other platforms that contain cultural news and listings.
- Attend cultural events, meetings, networking opportunities, classes, and workshops.
- Use call-to-action assets including logos, taglines, and hashtags.
- Volunteer to:
 - host an intern or apprentice
 - speak about this cultural plan to classes, selectboards, or community groups
 - teach artists about business, finance, marketing, or other topics
 - support an organization, project, or special event
 - serve on a public art commission or committee



RUBY AMANFU AT BILLSVILLE HOUSE CONCERT, MANCHESTER. PHOTO BY NANCY NUTILE-MCMENEMY.

Implementation Snapshot

✓		<6 MONTHS	6–12 MONTHS	12–24 MONTHS	24–36 MONTHS	LEAD (SUGGESTED)
Strategy 1: Establish a toolkit for local creative producers						
	Network and connect creatives across media, industry, and geography					BAAC/BCoC
	Expand existing financial and business training programs					
	Create a creative career pipeline program for youth					
	Create a communication tool for artists and creative entrepreneurs					BAAC/VAE
Strategy 2: Establish a toolkit for local creative consumers						
	Create a communication tool for resident consumers					BB/BCoC/MM/MJ
	Coordinate a curated indoor holiday market					gallery/farmers market
	Coordinate countywide open studios					BAAC
Strategy 3: Create an internal cultural advocacy message						
	Develop call-to-action assets					SC
	Establish and organize a countywide creative advocacy day					SC
	Commission and/or participate in economic impact studies					BM/BCRC/DTF
Strategy 4: Create an external cultural tourism message						
	Strengthen relationships with local/regional hospitality businesses					culturals
	Find opportunities to collaboratively promote cultural activities					culturals
	Improve signage and wayfinding for arts and cultural assets					towns
	Develop a culture and heritage trail					towns
Strategy 5: Develop innovative art-making, programming, and engagement activities						
	Encourage pop-up events and activities in underutilized spaces					
	Establish public art commissions or committees					towns
	Cultivate creative partnerships in community development projects					
	Create new residency opportunities					
Strategy 6: Create a mechanism for shared leadership within the arts and cultural sector						
	Extend the work of the steering committee					SC
	Formally adopt the cultural plan into town governments/town plans					SC/towns
	Convene cultural/historical nonprofit working groups					culturals
	Create and maintain an online asset map					SC

Key **BAAC:** Bennington Area Arts Council
BB: Bennington Banner
BCoC: Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
BCRC: Bennington County Regional Commission
BM: Bennington Museum

DTF: Dorset Theatre Festival
MJ: Manchester Journal
MM: Mountain Media
SC: Steering Committee
VAE: Vermont Arts Exchange

Tactics and Recommendations

STRATEGY: *Establish a Toolkit for Local Creative Producers*

Network and connect creatives across media, industry, and geography

Networking is fundamental for industry clustering. Meeting peers in the creative sector is the first step towards building connectivity and social infrastructure. While some Bennington County creative producers reported that connections exist within fields (media freelancing, theater, music, and pottery for example), networks remain siloed. A broader networking series can provide an important atmosphere where artists and creative workers can explore the cultural landscape and diversify their professional and creative relationships.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Messaging should feel informal: “meet people,” “hang out,” “tell stories”
- Events should take place quarterly or seasonally
- Hold at venues across the county, preferably casual settings
- Offer food and beverages
- Provide facilitated yet fun networking activities that encourage conversation
- Pair the networking with community events such as film screenings, openings, festivals, or professional development workshops

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- Bennington Area Arts Council
- Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce

PARTNERS:

- THE MILL
- Vermont Arts Exchange
- host venues (culturals, creative businesses, farms, cafés)

FUNDING:

- admission/cover charge
- sponsorship

TIMELINE: 4 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Creative Mingle

Rockingham County Arts Council
Rockingham County, NC (90,949)

Although the Rockingham County Arts Council has a membership base, these quarterly networking events are free and open to the public. Over 50 creatives attended the inaugural event in January 2018. Creative Mingle gatherings are held at different venues throughout Rockingham County and involve refreshments, sharing, and—often times—participation in community events. The February 2019 Creative Mingle, held at the Mayodan Arts Center in Mayodan, North Carolina, supported a countywide food drive. Attendees were invited to create art on food collection boxes in order to inspire more food donations.

www.rcarts.org

STRATEGY: *Establish a Toolkit for Local Creative Producers*

Expand existing financial and business training programs

Professional and business development programs build capacity and encourage the growth of independent creative ventures and small businesses. The Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce Lunch & Learn program, Vermont Small Business Development Center's advisor services, and The Lightning Jar's Start Up 802 classes are incredibly valuable but might not feel welcoming to creatives. These business owners need access to traditional business services as well as programs of their own. For example, Assets for Artists, a matched savings and financial training program, is available to communities across New England where funding has been identified.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand Assets for Artists to Bennington County
- Provide skill-building workshops designed specifically for creative entrepreneurs and arts administrators
- Workshop topics should reflect the needs of the creative community although fundraising, grant writing, marketing, bookkeeping, and legal information can be helpful to a wide variety of creative workers
- Encourage creatives to participate in current professional and business development programs through inclusion in messaging and outreach

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

PARTNERS:

- Bennington Area Arts Council
- Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
- Bennington College
- The Lightning Jar
- Southwest Vermont Career Development Center
- Vermont Arts Council
- Vermont Small Business Development Center

FUNDING:

- USDA Rural Development
- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development: ThinkVermont Innovation Grant Program
- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Vermont Community Development Program
- tuition/workshop fees

TIMELINE: 24 months

INSPIRATION

Artist Workshop Series

Wesserunsett Arts Council
Somerset County, ME (50,626)

The Wesserunsett Arts Council's free quarterly workshop series provides training, tools, and resources for artists in central Maine. 2019 series topics include Instagram as a marketing tool, asset and emergency preparedness, creative entrepreneurship in rural Maine, and an information session about the Maine Arts Commission's grants and application process. Workshops are held in different venues throughout Somerset County and are offered in January, March, June, and November.

www.wesarts.org/artist-workshops

STRATEGY: *Establish a Toolkit for Local Creative Producers*

Create a creative career pipeline program for youth

Bennington County's public and private schools have excellent art programs. Burr and Burton Academy in Manchester has a robust creative arts department and Mount Anthony Union High School in Bennington is renowned for its drama club. Still, students lack understanding of or interest in establishing a creative career in the region, and creative businesses struggle to find qualified local employees. The region will benefit from a coordinated strategy of attracting high school graduates to jobs in local creative industries as well as educating younger students about creative careers, including fine arts entrepreneurship.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide high school internships at creative businesses and organizations
- Cultivate high school apprenticeships with local artists in their home/work studios
- Create opportunities for creative job shadowing, particularly for middle schoolers
- Offer educational tools such as handouts and classroom presentations
- Include creative professionals in special workforce events such as the Community College of Vermont's Emerging Leaders Program

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

PARTNERS:

- Bennington County school districts
- Community College of Vermont
- Bennington College
- THE MILL

FUNDING:

- Vermont Community Foundation
- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Vermont Training Program
- Vermont Department of Labor: Vermont Registered Apprenticeship Program

TIMELINE: 24 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Pop Start Art Apprenticeships

Coleman Center for the Arts
Sumter County, AL (12,687)

The Pop Start Art Apprenticeship Program provides high school students with hands-on experience in creative practice, creative problem solving, and arts entrepreneurship. Apprentices are paid a \$250 honorarium to assist local artists and craftspeople with creative work. At least 24 instruction hours must be completed by each student as well as three professional practice workshops on subjects such as accounting and professional writing. Mentors include Selma-born writer Salaam Green, Livingston-based painter Shelia Hull, York-based textile artist Lillie Mack, and Emelle-based quilter Willie Poe.

<https://colemanarts.org/2018/08/psaa>

STRATEGY: *Establish a Toolkit for Local Creative Producers*

Create a communication tool that provides artists and creative entrepreneurs with access to information

Communication infrastructure is especially important in Bennington County—a rural, geographically isolated region. The lack of an information pipeline for creatives can put resources out of reach, straining their ability to make a living or focus on their practice. It is crucial that members of the cultural community have access to one comprehensive digital portal to various types of practical information. More than a directory, a real time or routinely updated communication tool can help creative producers and workers at all career levels build sustainability and resiliency.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Content could include news, jobs, calls for art/auditions/collaborators, internships, classifieds, space rentals, application deadlines, and workshops
- Choose an administered (website, e-newsletter) or non-administered (social media page, bulletin board) platform
- Ensure links, dates, and other information is up-to-date
- Provide a local press kit template and outreach contact list

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- Bennington Area Arts Council
- Vermont Arts Exchange

PARTNERS:

- all (for content)

FUNDING:

- ads
- sponsorship

TIMELINE: 9 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

SLV Artists Resource

San Luis Valley, CO (47,950)

SLV Artists Resource is a public Facebook group administered by an independent artist, although many recent posts are published by the executive directors of the Creede Arts Council and the San Luis Valley Museum Association, both of which are located in south central Colorado. The group has over 450 members who post information about calls for art, classes, vendor opportunities, special events, and more.

www.facebook.com/groups/145763055581033

STRATEGY: *Establish a Toolkit for Local Creative Consumers*

Create a communication tool that provides residents with access to up-to-date information about cultural activities

According to the public engagement survey, most respondents hear about cultural activities in Bennington County through word-of-mouth. While social media is an important communication tool in the region, many residents don't hear about activities in time; one in five respondents say the biggest barrier to their participation in arts and culture is a lack of awareness or information. Many organizations have their own communication tools, but these don't necessarily reach new, local audiences. Bennington residents will benefit from a single point of entry to the county's cultural community, whether that be a comprehensive calendar, newsletter, app, or website/landing page.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Populate with content using a submission form (templated press releases with hard deadlines may also work for a calendar or newsletter)
- Educate creative producers on this process in order to cultivate a sustainable, proactive culture of information-sharing
- Provide creative producers with a link to the new tool and encourage them to include it in their communications
- Develop a promotional strategy to encourage residents to use the new tool

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- Bennington Banner/Manchester Journal
- Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
- Mountain Media

PARTNERS:

- all (for content)

FUNDING:

- Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing
- sponsorship

TIMELINE: 9 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Arts + Culture in Waldo County

Belfast Area Creative Coalition
Waldo County, ME (39,832)

The Belfast Area Creative Coalition's website is a go-to place for all things arts and culture in Waldo County, Maine. The easy-to-navigate site includes a comprehensive directory, which is free for inclusion, called "Our Creative Community" with listings organized in the following categories: creative services, educational, fine arts, fine crafts, happenings, public spaces & organizations, local food, performers, and retail spaces. Businesses and special events can be filtered through tags, and listings feature professional photography and descriptions. The site also boasts a robust events calendar. Events are only listed based on submissions, which are free.

belfastcreativecoalition.org

STRATEGY: *Establish a Toolkit for Local Creative Consumers*

Coordinate a curated indoor holiday market

A curated indoor holiday market creates a visible, physical sales portal to local artists' goods without competing with farmers markets, the Mayfest Arts and Crafts Festival in Bennington, or the Southern Vermont Art and Craft Festival in Manchester. A holiday market extends the cultural season to a time of year when activities are slowing down, and encourages a different kind of sale—the sale of gifts, not personal possessions—which may also extend a local artisan's customer base to include more residents.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Schedule between Thanksgiving and Christmas
- Keep it small—limit number of total vendors to about 50
- Choose participating artists and artisans based on diversity and quality
- Prominently feature vendors and their products in promotional materials
- Offer music and other activities as benefits of the shopping experience

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- gallery
- farmers market

PARTNERS:

- Bennington Area Arts Council
- Sage Street Mill

FUNDING:

- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Vermont Community Development Program
- booth fees
- sponsorship

TIMELINE: 18 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Hudson Valley Hullabaloo

Wishbone Letterpress
Kingston, NY (23,169)

Hullabaloo was founded by a pair of creative entrepreneurs in 2012. They describe the event as “a design-focused, hip-and-happening, family-friendly event whose mission is to introduce local artists, craftspeople, and designers to a community experiencing a renaissance as a center for the arts.” 74 vendors, selling everything from jewelry to gin, participated in 2018. Booth fees were \$200 for a single space and \$400 for a double space. Hullabaloo publishes a specific set of vendor criteria on their website in order to encourage the right makers to apply.

hvhullabaloo.com

STRATEGY: *Establish a Toolkit for Local Creative Consumers*

Coordinate countywide open studios

When artists open their work spaces and studios to the public, they become a fixed presence in the community. The conversations and demonstrations they offer can demystify the creative process and add value to their products. Every year, the Vermont Crafts Council coordinates statewide open studio tours Memorial Day weekend and early October. Of the 179 participants in the May 2018 Vermont Open Studio, only six were located in Bennington County. An annual countywide open studios event will give more artists exposure to new customers and allow them to deepen relationships with their neighbors.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restrict participants to those with studios in Bennington County only
- Conduct extensive promotion prior to and during the artist application/registration period
- Develop a detailed fundraising and marketing plan
- Distribute physical signage to all participants and ensure they can be used in subsequent years

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- Bennington Area Arts Council

PARTNERS:

- Bennington Banner/Manchester Journal
- Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
- GVH Studio, Inc.
- The Harwood Hill
- Manchester Business Association

FUNDING:

- Vermont Arts Council: Arts Impact
- participation fees
- sponsorship

TIMELINE: 18 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Gorge Artists Open Studios Tour

Gorge Artists Inc.

Hood River County, OR (23,232)

The Gorge Artists Open Studios Tour is an annual self-guided tour of participating artist studios in Oregon's Hood River region. 48 artists working in a variety of media participated in 2019. Artists are required to apply annually and, once accepted, pay a reduced participation fee of \$225, which requires a minimum of 8 hours of volunteer committee work, or the full participation fee of \$395. Logos, graphics, press releases, artist bios and links, and an interactive Google map with artist descriptions and driving directions can be found on the website. A 44-page printed guidebook is also available year-round.

www.gorgeartists.org

STRATEGY: *Create an Internal Cultural Advocacy Message*

Develop call-to-action assets that can be easily/widely shared and used

Digital assets including logos, graphics, hashtags, and taglines as well as physical assets such as mailers, bags, stickers, and buttons allow residents to self-identify as members of the creative community. When deployed widely, these assets make creatives visible, instill a sense of pride in creatives and residents, and promote the creative community. Asset usage should be prevalent and unfettered. For example, a logo should be able to be incorporated into a magazine advertisement promoting the next exhibit at the Bennington Museum as well as a flyer for a free concert at a local church.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make all assets accessible to the public
- Encourage the adoption and usage of assets through events, examples, and an identity kit
- Design assets to be flexible, to speak to different audiences (politicians during campaign seasons, parents during workshop enrollment periods, residents of specific towns, etc)
- Track asset production and distribution (physical) or usage (digital)

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- steering committee

PARTNERS:

- Bennington Area Arts Council
- Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
- GVH Studio, Inc.
- Vermont Arts Exchange

FUNDING:

TIMELINE: 3 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

North Fork Valley Creative Coalition

North Fork Valley, CO (2,767)

The three towns of North Fork Valley, Colorado (Paonia, Hotchkiss, and Crawford) employ a number of assets to identify and unify the region's creative community including the hashtag #paoniacreatives which has been used over a thousand times on Instagram, a tagline ("Small Towns, Big Personality"), a consistent font, and a logo that has slightly different variations to represent the North Fork Valley Creative Coalition and the Paonia Creative District.

northforkcreative.org

STRATEGY: *Create an Internal Cultural Advocacy Message*

Establish and organize a countywide creative advocacy day

Everyone knows that Small Business Saturday is the Saturday after Thanksgiving and Ben & Jerry's Free Cone Day is a Tuesday in April. A recognition day allows people to rally behind a cause and saturate the market with a specific message. Creatives and residents in Bennington County will benefit from a pre-assigned, special day devoted to the awareness of and participation in arts and culture.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- If appropriate, align with Americans for the Arts' Arts Advocacy Day in March
- Coordinate one large, unifying educational or advocacy event similar to the Southern Vermont Creative Meeting: Crash to Creativity held in August 2018
- Invite all business, civic, and community leaders to participate
- Release a call for special programming; capture through submission form
- Promote partner events through consumer communication tool
- Leverage the day to fundraise for arts programming

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- steering committee

PARTNERS:

- Bennington College
- Community College of Vermont
- Vermont Arts Council
- Vermont Arts Exchange

FUNDING:

- admission
- sponsorship

TIMELINE: 12 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Arts, Culture & Creativity Month

Nevada County Arts Council
Nevada County, CA (99,814)

As officials designated April to be Arts, Culture & Creativity Month in California, the Nevada County Arts Council jumped on board, because "being active members of Americans for the Arts and Californians for the Arts helps [them] connect to the 'big picture'—both statewide and nationally." The organization circulated the statewide advocacy logo as well as a Ways to Engage Guide produced by Californians for the Arts, and collected and promoted special community events through its online calendar. It also hosted two free arts advocacy trainings in March and unveiled findings of a Nevada County economic impact study at a special launch event on April 18, 2019.

www.nevadacountyarts.org/advocating-for-the-arts

STRATEGY: *Create an Internal Cultural Advocacy Message*

Commission and/or participate in economic impact studies that quantify creative activity

Advocacy initiatives often lean heavily on metrics and numbers. Qualitative evidence such as images and anecdotes might be less persuasive to residents that don't have a relationship to arts and culture or elected officials who rely on data in order to make decisions. State and national statistics are excellent places to start, although the more information you have about the size and impact of your own creative activities, the more leverage your message can have locally. For example, after conducting its own economic impact evaluation, Bennington Museum included its findings—that the museum generates \$4 million in new economic activity every year—in its end-of-year fundraising appeal letter.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Produce a countywide economic impact study
- Use tools and data that are already available, including:
 - Americans for the Arts' [Arts + Social Impact Explorer](#) and fact sheets
 - Americans for the Arts' [Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 calculator](#)
 - U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and National Endowment for the Arts' [Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account](#)
 - Vermont Creative Network's [Vermont Creative Sector Economy Study](#)
 - Americans for the Arts' [Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 Vermont report](#)
 - New England Foundation for the Arts' [Jobs in New England's Creative Economy and Why They Matter: Vermont](#)

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- Bennington County Regional Commission
- Bennington Museum
- Dorset Theatre Festival

PARTNERS:

- Americans for the Arts
- Vermont Arts Council
- Williams College Center for Creative Community Development
- towns

FUNDING:

- Vermont Department of Labor

TIMELINE: 30 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Creative Minnesota 2017

Minnesota Citizens for the Arts
Morrison County, MN (33,064)

As part of a larger statewide effort, cultural leaders in Morrison County, Minnesota participated in an economic impact study in 2017 that quantified creative activity in the region. "Arts organizations and artists realized that in order to be taken seriously, they needed to have some hard numbers to prove their worth to the public," explained Mary Warner, Executive Director of the Morrison County Historical Society. The report analyzed creative organizations and individuals, revealing that the 395 artists of Morrison County have a \$1.5 million annual economic impact, and arts and culture's overall economic impact in the region is nearly \$5 million.

bit.ly/MorrisonCounty

STRATEGY: *Create an External Cultural Tourism Message*

Strengthen relationships with local and regional tourism and hospitality businesses/organizations

Cultural institutions, restaurants, inns, and outdoor resorts are very different businesses with one thing in common: they are all important components of the region's tourism economy. The cultural community as a whole needs to strengthen its relationship with other industries, specifically hospitality and outdoor recreation, and share each other's messages—leading to one robust, enhanced experience for visitors. It could also have a closer relationship with nearby tourism bureaus including those in Massachusetts and New York State.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop an annual cross-industry event such as a business breakfast or trade show similar to EXPO!sion
- Produce seasonal press releases for regional hospitality and recreation industries
- Coordinate venue tours or performance previews for hospitality and recreation leaders
- Host informal cross-industry networking events for industry staff
- Create vacation packages for statewide promotion on vermontvacation.com

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- cultural

PARTNERS:

- Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
- Four Chimneys Inn
- The Harwood Hill
- Kimpton Taconic Hotel
- Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing

FUNDING:

- staff time

TIMELINE: 6–12 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Breakfast with the Arts

Arts & Business Council of Miami
Miami, FL (463,347)

Arts and culture is a billion dollar business in Miami-Dade, and city officials have capitalized on the success of this industry by building what they call “pARTnerships” between arts and culture and other businesses. Their local arts advocacy group which is, in fact, an arts and business council, has established a “Breakfast with the Arts” series that connects arts groups with technology, finance, and hospitality companies. The springtime Breakfast with the Arts & Hospitality event has been taking place for 15 years.

www.artsbizmiami.org/breakfastwiththearts

STRATEGY: *Create an External Cultural Tourism Message*

Find opportunities to collaboratively promote cultural activities

All purveyors of arts and culture need to look for every opportunity to work together to promote the region's cultural offerings. Collaboration in Bennington County is key; for visitors to consider the area a destination, they must be made aware of the cultural density and variety that exists. A reframing of promotional thinking—"come to US" not "come to ME"—can lead Bennington County's creative offerings to collectively draw tourists in lieu of a large cultural anchor.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create joint press releases and outreach to regional/national media with a collective cultural tourism pitch
- Host a summer season kickoff press conference
- Pool marketing resources to invest in collaborative print and digital advertisements
- Develop a co-ticketing program or align activities around programmatic themes as THE MILL accomplished with the 4 Freedoms Festival
- Develop countywide cultural itineraries for specific weekends and weekdays
- When possible, participate in state-sponsored trade shows and special events

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- culturals

PARTNERS:

- Bennington Banner/Manchester Journal
- Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
- Mountain Media
- Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing
- Vermont Public Radio

FUNDING:

- staff time

TIMELINE: 18 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Colorado Creative Corridor Field Guide

Carbondale, Salida, Crested Butte, Paonia, and Ridgway, CO (16,713)

The Colorado Creative Corridor is a partnership between ten organizations in five small towns in western Colorado. Each town has a state designated cultural district, which this collaborative marketing initiative is linking via a 331-mile driving route. To supplement a brochure and map, the collective has created a 5-day itinerary of the corridor which includes insider tips, food and lodging, and a stop at the Carbondale Wild West Rodeo. Cultural activity suggestions range from theater and live music to gallery tours and art classes.

www.colorado.com/fieldguide/colorado-creative-corridor

STRATEGY: *Create an External Cultural Tourism Message*

Improve signage and wayfinding for arts and cultural assets

A persistent challenge for Bennington County's cultural community is physical visibility. Creative businesses in towns such as Pownal and institutions including Bennington College, Hildene, and the Southern Vermont Arts Center are not located on commonly traveled routes, and most road signs that are installed are inadequate. This puts a burden on these communities and organizations which may threaten their success. Towns can take a lead in promoting cultural tourism by pointing visitors and residents to their concealed cultural gems.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand the Bennington informational sign system
- Ensure all towns utilize the same signage design or aesthetic
- Focus on vehicular directional signs, more than pedestrian signs

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- towns

PARTNERS:

- Bennington County Regional Commission
- Grow Bennington
- Manchester Business Association

FUNDING:

- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Downtown Transportation Fund
- National Life Group Foundation: Main Street Grant Program
- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Vermont Community Development Program

TIMELINE: 30 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage Plan

Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce
Tompkins County, NY (104,802)

The Tompkins County Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage Plan, which was funded entirely by hotel room occupancy tax, includes the design and installation of county gateway signs, community gateway signs, and community way finding signs. The signage plan also funds interpretive kiosks and signs for at least eight themes including arts and culture. The plan is "envisaged to help 'build the brand' for the county by directing visitors to and informing them about the county's attractions and unique places."

www.tompkinschamber.org/whats-new/wayfinding

STRATEGY: *Create an External Cultural Tourism Message*

Develop a culture and heritage trail

These types of trails are common regional tourism initiatives because they draw attention to specific features of a region's history, food and beverage production, or culture. They are relatively simple to execute and don't require much oversight or maintenance. Supported in part by the wayfinding signage tactic described on page 32, a culture and heritage trail will encourage the movement of tourists and patrons throughout Bennington County.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus on cultural organizations and heritage sites, with the possibility of developing several smaller industry-specific trails for pottery, literature, and public art
- Create a brochure, map, and promotional video similar to The Shires of Vermont Byway materials
- Organize special events along the trail

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- towns

PARTNERS:

- steering committee

FUNDING:

- National Endowment for the Arts: Our Town
- Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing
- sponsorship

TIMELINE: 24 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Cultural Trails

Cultural Economic Development Task Force
Mason County, MI (29,073)

In 2010, a community task force was assembled to facilitate the development of a Ludington/Mason County cultural economic development plan. The group created five cultural trails which feature agriculture, barn quilts, lumber, music, and sculpture, and a sixth is in development. The sculpture trail in particular serves multiple purposes: it is, at once, a public art project, local artist showcase, and a wayfinding initiative. Each self-guided trail can be followed via a downloadable brochure or an "interactive tour": an app which contains Google maps, audio descriptions, and stories about trail stops.

masoncountyculture.com

STRATEGY: *Develop Innovative Art-Making, Programming, and Engagement Activities*

Encourage pop-up events and activities in underutilized spaces

Cultural organizations have fantastic resources which, in Bennington County, often include historic buildings and lots of land. In these cases, the community is required to go to those locations in order to engage with the culture offered. Community engagement works best when artists and others bring creativity to people on their own terms. Pop-up activities are excellent community engagement tools—they can also spur community revitalization and economic development. These kinds of creative interventions can be surprising, interactive, brief, voluntary, and/or informative.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a goal first, whether that's to revitalize a vacant property or engage a group of people
- Focus programming on engaging underserved residents such as youth or low-income
- Programming should include temporary or permanent public art projects
- Free or low-cost to participate
- Spaces should be easily accessible to the community: storefronts, parking lots, sidewalks, billboards, town squares, parks, libraries, schools, etc.

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

PARTNERS:

- Arlington Area Renewal Project
- Bennington College
- Better Bennington Corporation
- Manchester Business Association
- Discover Pownal
- Vermont Arts Exchange
- cultural
- towns

FUNDING:

- National Endowment for the Arts: Challenge America
- New England Foundation for the Arts: Public Art Learning Fund
- Vermont Arts Council: Animating Infrastructure, Arts Impact
- Vermont Community Foundation: Vermont Arts Endowment Fund

TIMELINE: 18 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Pop Up Museum: White Mountains

Historical Society of Cheshire County
Cheshire County, NH (75,960)

Pop Up Museum was created by the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History in California as an engagement tool for anyone in any community. These are spontaneous, temporary, thematic exhibits—usually lasting only a few hours on one day—at formal or informal spaces, from libraries to laundromats. The “museum” is filled with the objects and stories of anyone who chooses to come and participate. The Historical Society of Cheshire County’s Pop Up Museum featured artwork, writing samples, hiking tools and equipment, photographs, and business items for a llama trekking company.

popupmuseum.org

STRATEGY: *Develop Innovative Art-Making, Programming, and Engagement Activities*

Establish public art commissions or committees to better integrate public art in municipal policy-making, planning, and funding

Public art is a form of creative placemaking—it can tell stories, shape communities, and redefine experience. Municipalities that form public art commissions or committees make it easier, administratively and ideologically, for these projects to happen. Most municipal public art groups are staffed by appointed or volunteer resident artists and creative professionals who understand their community as well as the art-making process. They serve as important advocates for the inclusion of arts and culture in town plans and projects.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Form these groups even if funding for public art projects has not yet been identified
- Create an inventory of spaces that would make ideal locations for public art
- Share information and ideas with other town public art groups
- Establish lines of communication across municipal departments including planning, parks, and community and economic development

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- towns

PARTNERS:

- Bennington County Regional Commission
- Bennington Murals
- Manchester Riverwalk
- Northern Bennington Outdoor Sculpture Show
- Vermont Arts Exchange

FUNDING:

- Percent for Art/other tax revenue
- Vermont Arts Council: Animating Infrastructure

TIMELINE: 18 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Town Arts Committee

Town of Brattleboro
Brattleboro, VT (12,046)

The Town of Brattleboro in neighboring Windham County, Vermont believes that “the integration of the arts within the fabric of town government enhances the vitality of the town and the quality of life for its citizens.” Among the resources the town’s seven-member arts committee has created since its founding in 2008 are a public art policy and application, an arts compendium, and a five page arts and culture section in the 2018 town plan.

www.brattleboro.org

STRATEGY: *Develop Innovative Art-Making, Programming, and Engagement Activities*
Cultivate creative partnerships in community development projects

Artists have a unique ability to make communities stronger and more whole. They are increasingly teaming up with transportation, safety, housing, food, and healthcare practitioners—adding a critical level of empathy, connection, and clarity to these projects. Given the need for more interaction between Bennington County’s residents and creatives, it seems fruitful to not simply provide better access to the arts and cultural sector, but integrate arts and culture into other sectors to generate lasting community impacts.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus on partnerships with human service organizations
- Continue exploring the connection between the arts and farming

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

PARTNERS:

- Alliance for Community Transformations
- Bennington College
- Greater Bennington Interfaith Community Services
- Shires Housing
- Turning Point Center
- towns

FUNDING:

- Artplace America
- Ford Foundation: Creativity and Free Expression
- Vermont Arts Council: Arts Partnership Program

TIMELINE: 18 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Housing2Home

New City Arts
Charlottesville, VA (48,019)

Housing2Home is a collaborative program between The Haven, a homeless shelter, and New City Arts, both located in Charlottesville, Virginia. As The Haven finds housing for formerly homeless residents, New City Arts works with the clients to commission artists who help to furnish and decorate these spaces, which are transformed into homes that reflect the clients’ personality, experiences, and taste. Artists involved in the program range from visual artists to craftsman and furniture makers. The program has shown to increase housing stability as well as connection to community.

newcityarts.org/vocation/housing2home

STRATEGY: *Develop Innovative Art-Making, Programming, and Engagement Activities*

Create new residency opportunities, particularly for local artists in non-creative industries

Artist residency programs are more formal and structured than pop-up activities (see page 34), yet share the same goals. They allow artists working in various mediums to engage with populations on a deeper level by making art or creating a participatory art experience based on their emersion within that population. Residencies have occurred in nursing homes, factories, laboratories, airports, state and federal parks, stores, and hospitals. For example, Berkshire Medical Center in nearby Pittsfield, Massachusetts works with the Medical Musician Initiative to integrate medically trained musicians into its intensive care unit.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand the Medical Musician Initiative to Bennington County
- Engage organizations in various industries to identify possible collaborations
- Host an artist residency development workshop
- Create residencies for local artists only, at least initially
- Ensure residencies open the process to the public through workshops or presentations

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

PARTNERS:

- Bennington College
- Marble House Project
- Southern Vermont Medical Center

FUNDING:

- Alliance of Artists Communities (fiscal sponsorship)
- Artplace America
- National Endowment for the Arts: Challenge America
- Vermont Arts Council: Artists in Schools, Artist Development grants

TIMELINE: 36 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Creative Communities of Care

Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
Hollidaysburg, PA (5,767)

Creative Communities of Care is a partnership between the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The program places artists-in-residence at six veterans' homes across the commonwealth. At the Hollidaysburg Veterans Home, artist Terry Johnson worked with clients for 20 days to create mosaics with the help of TimeSlips, a methodology to access memories through storytelling. TimeSlips organizes 62 Creative Communities of Care programs in six states.

bit.ly/PACreativeCommunitiesofCare

STRATEGY: *Create a Mechanism for Shared Leadership Within the Arts and Cultural Sector*

Extend the work of the steering committee to ensure plan outcomes and assist partners in facilitation

Due to the lack of county government in Vermont, Bennington County will not necessarily be well-served by a single plan administrator to oversee or facilitate of all recommended tactics in this plan, nor does it make sense at this time. The absence of a mature regional organization focused on supporting arts, culture, and/or the creative economy in Bennington County as well as a sustainable funding source for such an organization reinforces the need for a collaborative approach to implementation.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Determine a meeting frequency that best serves the initiative
- Meet consistently; designate alternates for every organization and business represented
- Create a public portal to the group via a website or email account in order to receive and respond to requests for support, connections, and press
- Create a database that captures all new or recurring projects that align with this plan
- Employ public evaluation methods such as surveys or interviews
- Create concise annual reports or host an annual meeting where community members can discuss their projects and/or updates
- Reevaluate this cultural plan in five years

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- steering committee

PARTNERS:

- towns

FUNDING:

- internships
- staff time

TIMELINE: 2 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Project ABC: Art, Beauty, Culture

Park City Summit County Arts Council
Summit County, UT (40,307)

In 2018, leaders at the Park City Summit County Arts Council completed a year-long cultural planning process. The resulting plan, known as Project ABC, has been digitized and made available online. The website also contains a list of project partners and supporters, resource directory, contact form, and "Implementation Dashboard" which visually tracks the momentum of the plan's seven collective priorities. 28 community leaders signed a commitment statement, which can be found on the website, and a Facebook page was established to collect success stories. Additionally, project leaders hosted an Art Summit in April 2019 to discuss the initiative's impact as well as future projects.

www.projectabcsc.com

STRATEGY: *Create a Mechanism for Shared Leadership Within the Arts and Cultural Sector*

Formally adopt the cultural plan into town governments or town plans throughout Bennington County

It is important that cultural plans are formally adopted by each municipality within the plan’s scope. This reinforces the commitment that communities have made to arts and culture, and underscores the value of arts and culture to civic life. Goals of branding the region, bridging geographical divides, fostering connections, and supporting arts-driven economic development are more likely to be achieved if each town in Bennington County adopts the plan. Comprehensive municipal adoption will also align cultural policy throughout the region and can help communities secure grant funding.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Draft a sample policy statement to accompany the plan before adoption
- Send copies to planning boards and other pertinent commissions
- Create a presentation template so that messaging remains consistent
- Produce a video, poster, radio ad, or other marketing piece to spread awareness about the plan

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- steering committee
- towns

PARTNERS:

- Bennington County Regional Commission

FUNDING:

- staff time

TIMELINE: 12 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

From Plan to Policy: Creating a Structure to Integrate Arts

Arts Alive!
Monadnock Region, NH (131,400)

Arts Alive!, a resource organization for New Hampshire’s southern cultural corridor, is partnering with community members to develop a formal, actionable arts policy for Keene, the region’s largest city. Using economic impact data it has generated as well as other community models, the group is crafting policy to be included in the city’s master plan. Arts Alive! will use this policy as a template and work with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission “to distribute to other towns in the Monadnock region so that all of the town master plans that include the arts will now have a means to implement their creative community visions.”

monadnockartsalive.org/city-of-keene-arts-policy

STRATEGY: *Create a Mechanism for Shared Leadership Within the Arts and Cultural Sector*

Convene working groups to better fund, schedule, and promote activities of Bennington County's cultural and historical institutions

Cultural organizations in Bennington County have limited funding and staff, and those staffers have limited time. Collaboration is key, yet many are apprehensive or unsure of the path forward. Between the county's small population and the narrow window organizations have to attract visitors, some feel like they should be competing for audience members and donors, not sharing them. But if department staff assembled simply to talk, ideas for collaboration may begin to percolate. This is a way to build organizational capacity through networking and connection.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Organize separate annual or biannual meetings of organizations' education, marketing, development, and programming department staff
- Have participants name their working group
- Share best practices, news, ideas, and plans
- Hold at venues across the county, preferably casual settings
- Offer food and beverages

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- cultural

PARTNERS:

- steering committee

FUNDING:

- staff time

TIMELINE: 6 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Berkshire County Development Alliance

Berkshire County, MA (126,313)

According to the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires, 984 nonprofit organizations can be found in Berkshire County, Massachusetts—the majority of which have budgets under \$250,000. These nonprofits “compete for funding and other resources in a geographically and demographically tri-furcated county with no regional government.” The Berkshire County Development Alliance was formed to mitigate some of these challenges by creating an informal network where members share information and engage in meaningful dialogue about advancement issues. About 120 nonprofit development professionals who represent a wide range of organizations, from museums to schools, meet four to six times a year.

www.facebook.com/groups/BCDevelopmentAlliance

STRATEGY: *Create a Mechanism for Shared Leadership Within the Arts and Cultural Sector*

Create and maintain an online asset map

Asset mapping is an important tool used to identify and inventory resources in a community. A map of Bennington County’s cultural and community assets was created during Phase 1 of the planning process. This map, which was created in spreadsheet form, catalogued active connections (meetups, organizers, arts committees, media, websites, and brands), resources (organizations, schools, classes, suppliers, recording studios, internships, residencies, and funding), and activities (cultural institutions, venues, businesses, exhibitions spaces, makerspaces, and events) in all 17 towns as well as select neighboring communities.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote the map as a planning tool for creative producers, not the general public
- Choose a location where the asset map will be stored
- Should be reviewed and updated quarterly
- Use by steering committee to identify partnerships and track projects as well as the cultural plan’s impact over time
- Use in advocacy

SUGGESTIONS

LEAD:

- steering committee

PARTNERS:

- Bennington County Regional Commission

FUNDING:

- internships
- staff time

TIMELINE: 4 months

NOTES

INSPIRATION

Cultural Asset Map

Nevada County Arts Council
Nevada County, CA (99,814)

Nevada County’s cultural asset map is a publicly accessible digital resource. The map contains ten categories of cultural and recreational assets (for example, “Galleries, Studios, Museums”) with corresponding visual icons, and three supplemental categories including parking. Each map icon is clickable, revealing the asset’s address, website, and description. A submission form link can be found above the map which can be used to add or correct any data point. The map was created thanks to seed funding provided by the Nevada County Economic Resource Council.

www.nevadacountyarts.org/cultural-asset-map

Literature

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Interviewees

The cultural planning team would like to thank those individuals who, in many cases, gave hours of their time to contribute to this cultural plan through in-person interviews, phone interviews, and focus groups. Special thanks to those who opened up their homes and workplaces to the consultant for tours.

Mary Angus, Readsboro Glassworks
Amy Anselmo, The Left Bank
Ben Arrindell, THE MILL
Jim Baker, JW Consulting, LLC
Shannon Barsotti, Discover Pownal
Paige Bartels, Bennington College
Florence Belnap, Mack Molding
Jon Blatchford, J.K. Adams
Seth Bongartz, Hildene
Bill Botzow, Vermont State Representative/artist
Marnie Briggs, Marble House Project
Juliette Britton, J.J. Hapgood General Store and Eatery
Henry Chandler, Chandler 4 Corners
Joe Chirchirillo, artist
Zirwat Chowdhury, Town of Bennington
Bill Colvin, Bennington County Regional Commission
Tony Conner, artist
Kate Connor, Merck Forest and Farmland Center
John Conte, Temblor Creative Group
Pamela Corkey, The Harwood Hill
Anne Corso, Southern Vermont Arts Center
Amy Cunningham, Vermont Arts Council
Jane Davies, Jane Davies Studios
Eric Despard, Southern Vermont College
Nikki Dexter, Town of Manchester
Clint Dickens, Norman Rockwell Studio & Inn
Margaret Donovan, Temblor Creative Group
Danielle Epstein, Marble House Project
David Evans, Southern Vermont College
Jamie Franklin, Bennington Museum
Rob Gaiotti, Town of Dorset
Philip Gilpin, Jr., ITVFest
Emily Gold, papercakescissors
Doug Hacker, Billsville
Marlene Hall, Town of Shaftsbury
Peggy Hanson, The Martha Canfield Library
Matt Harrington, Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
Christine Hubbard, Merck Forest and Farmland Center

Dina Janis, Dorset Theatre Festival
Alexina Jones, Bennington Area Arts Council
Alain Karyo, Catamount Glassware
Don Keelan, The Keelan Company
Andrew Koss, The Studio at Strawberry Fields Lane
Dave LaChance, Bennington Banner
Jon Larson, Riley Rink
Beq Lendvay, Bennington Area Arts Council
Christopher Macksey, The Park-McCullough House
Michelle Marrocco, Bennington County Regional Commission
Elisabeth Marx, Vermont Community Foundation
Megan Mayhew Bergman, Bennington College
Pauline Moore, Town of Manchester
John O'Keefe, Town of Manchester
Sarah Perrin, 1st Annual Food Truck Festival
Matthew Perry, Vermont Arts Exchange
Eric Peterson, Oldcastle Theater
Rhonda Ratray, The Left Bank
David Rees, Bennington College
Ken Reig, Eight Oh Two Marketing
Nicole Riley, Sage Street Mill
Tim Scoggins, Town of Shaftsbury
Jackie Sedlock, Jackie Sedlock Pottery
Joshua Sherman, THE MILL
Phyllis Skidmore, The Martha Canfield Library
Chris Smith, artist
Jonah Spivak, Spectrum Design
Shelly Stiles, Town of Shaftsbury
Anne Thompson, Bennington College
Fran Tobia, Peru Fair Committee
Don Trachte, Arlington Area Renewal Project Arts Committee
Jill Turpin, Green Mountain Bluegrass & Roots Festival
Greg Van Houten, GVH Studio, Inc.
Ryan VanDenBoom, THE MILL
Meredith Whatley, Mountain Media
Kate Whitehall, K. Whitehall Design
Jenny Wren, Wrenhouse
Suzy Yucht, Hoisington Realty

Resources

National

Alliance of Artists Communities
www.artistcommunities.org

Americans for the Arts
www.americansforthearts.org

Art of the Rural
artoftherural.org

Artplace America
www.artplaceamerica.org

Assets for Artists
www.assetsforartists.org

The Awesome Foundation
www.awesomefoundation.org

CreativeGround
www.creativeground.org

Ford Foundation
www.fordfoundation.org

National Endowment for the Arts
www.arts.gov

New England Foundation for the Arts
www.nefa.org

Springboard for the Arts
springboardforthearts.org

USDA Rural Development
www.rd.usda.gov

State

Guild of Vermont Furniture Makers
www.vermontfurnituremakers.com

National Life Group Foundation
www.nationallife.com/OurStory-OurFoundation

Vermont Agency of Commerce and
Community Development
accd.vermont.gov

Vermont Arts Council
www.vermontartscouncil.org

Vermont Businesses for Social
Responsibility
vbssr.org

Vermont Business Roundtable
vtroundtable.org

Vermont Community Foundation
www.vermontcf.org

Vermont Community Loan Fund
www.investinvermont.org

Vermont Convention Bureau
vermontmeetings.org

Vermont Council on Rural Development
www.vtrural.org

Vermont Crafts Council
www.vermontcrafts.com

Vermont Creative Network
vermontcreativenetwork.org

Vermont Department of Labor
labor.vermont.gov

Vermont Department of Tourism and
Marketing
accd.vermont.gov/tourism

Vermont Economic Development
Authority
www.veda.org

Vermont Glass Guild
www.vermontglassguild.com

Vermont Humanities Council
www.vermonthumanities.org

Vermont Small Business
Development Center
www.vtsbdc.org

Vermont Watercolor Society
www.vermontwatercolorsociety.com

Local

Bennington Area Arts Council
www.benningtonareaartscouncil.org

Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce
www.bennington.com

Bennington College
www.bennington.edu

Bennington County Regional Commission
www.bccvt.org

Bennington Downtown Alliance
www.betterbennington.org

Community College of Vermont
ccv.edu/location/ccv-bennington

Discover Pownal
pownalbusinessnetwork.com

The Fund for North Bennington
northbennington.org

Grow Bennington
www.betterbennington.org/growbennington

The Lightning Jar
www.lightningjarvt.com

Manchester Business Association
www.manchestervermont.com

Manchester Riverwalk
www.manchesterriverwalk.org

Quiet Valley Quilters Guild
www.benningtonquiltfest.com

Shires Young Professionals
www.shiresyp.com

Southwest Vermont Career
Development Center
www.svcdc.org

Project Planning Worksheet

Project:

Cultural Plan Strategy:

Cultural Plan Tactic

IMPACT Why is this project important to the cultural plan strategy and tactic identified?	NEEDS What do you need to make the project work?	STEPS How is this going to happen?	RESPONSIBILITIES Who will accomplish each step?				DEADLINES When will each step be completed?
			Team Member 1	Team Member 2	Team Member 3	Team Member 4	
INITIATION							
PLANNING							
EXECUTION							

