



Steering Committee Meeting Notes

2:30 – 4:00 PM

May 28, 2020

Present: Amy Cunningham, Ann Lawless, Ben Rose, Carrie Cleveland, Eileen Corcoran, Jamie Duggan, Joseph Watson, Michael Billingsley, Michele Bailey, Rachel Onuf, Sally Blanchard-O'Brien, Tom McMurdo

Check-Ins and Updates:

Rachel: Continuing work on existing Historical Records Program projects and will be holding a virtual workshop with Carolyn Frisa about mold on July 2.

Michael: Was planning to open performing space next month, but it's hard to know if they can do in-person events at that time. Instead, they are considering being a streaming space for performing artists. Plainfield held a third community supper featuring bagged meals rather than sit-down service and served about 120 people.

Amy & Michele: Vermont Arts Council (VAC) COVID-19 response funding streams are closing and close to \$850,000 has been awarded. VAC feels good about what they've done but know it's not enough. They've also been gathering a resource compendium about safe reopening guidelines from other states and hosted a Q&A with the State Epidemiologist. VAC has organized a creative sector response team of about ten people to advocate to and advise the Governor's Economic Mitigation and Recovery Task Force, and VAC will be putting out advocacy alerts to help push efforts for recovery investment in the creative sector. Call to action: <https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/get-involved/advocacy/action-center>

Sally: The Vermont State Archives & Records Administration (VSARA) has been moving toward reopening, with more staff returning to onsite work and the probability of opening to researchers and other members of the public by appointment in the coming weeks.

Joseph: Spurred by a message sent out by Carolyn Frisa, he has been thinking about climate-controlled buildings on site at Middlebury College. Seasonal temperatures have increased but many buildings have

air conditioning turned off because staff is working remotely, and this could have a significant impact on collections, especially the library at the Bread Loaf campus.

Ann: Has been involved with the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative's COVID-19 support efforts and recently discussed VACDaRN at a meeting. Heat Squad members are preparing to once again go inside people's homes.

Eileen: The Vermont Historical Society is preparing to reopen the library by appointment on June 15 and the museum on July 1 with revised rules and improved signage in both places, as the buildings are shared with other state entities.

Tom: Department of Libraries is expecting the Governor to announce the reopening of libraries soon, so the Department is preparing. There are unique challenges as many of Vermont's libraries are small spaces. The Department is also distributing their \$56,000 portion of the IMLS CARES Act money, slated for practical reopening supplies such as hand sanitizer and plexiglass barriers, but also for expansion of Wi-Fi coverage at libraries. Before Covid-19, the State Library was only open by appointment, and they are thinking about when to resume those operations.

Jamie: Division for Historic Preservation is working toward a phased reopening, hopefully by July 1 for some sites. It is unlikely that all historic sites will be open this year, but this is an opportunity for the Division to do work on sites they may not have had an opportunity to do otherwise. They are also developing new procedures for maintenance and new signage to direct visitors through spaces in a safe way and are considering having visitors register in advance to limit the number of people at a site at any given time. They are also taking a hard look at their budget, which is almost completely supported by revenue from site entrance fees and gift shop sales, and the lack of this revenue from 2020 site closures will have a huge impact on the operating budget for next year.

Ben: He is interested in how arts and culture are plugging into response and recovery efforts. Vermont has good ideas for how to use the \$1.25 billion in CARES Act funding allocated to the state, and that money will not go very far. The White House announced that Covid-19 recovery money can be used as a match for FEMA dollars, which is good news for states, and Vermont is trying to identify as many FEMA-eligible expenses as possible. The State has contracted with a consultant to help at the Governor's level and Public Assistance (PA) level to ensure that Vermont submits good PA requests. An active hurricane season is forecasted for the 2020 season and we should consider how COVID-19 protocols might impact emergency response to natural disasters.

Carrie: Early in the pandemic, CERF+ restricted funds to medical assistance for artists only, but happily, there has not been a major need for this type of support. CERF+ is now reassessing criteria for eligibility and planning how to direct funds from this point forward.

Communications

The co-leads met with the new VAC communications staff for introductions and discussion of next steps for VACDaRN. VAC communications staff will set up VACDaRN's placeholder Facebook page to have a social media presence. For the time being, messages to the greater VACDaRN community will continue

to be sent by Rachel O., but VACDaRN will explore options for setting up a listserv for email message distribution.

It was mentioned that people are seeking comforting stories and have a desire for positive, creative news right now, and it's not a time for VACDaRN to be shy. This is the kind of communications that VACDaRN can push out and share on the Facebook page, and VAC has been sharing this kind of news in their regular newsletter and media outlets.

Next Steps – Future of VACDaRN

The Steering Committee decided that meeting every other month would suffice for maintaining engagement and forward direction for VACDaRN. Questions about the sustainability of the network and the role of the Steering Committee were addressed. Two stable institutions (VSARA and VAC) were intentionally chosen as co-leads to help ensure the stability of the network, whether or not additional funding is secured. The role of the Steering Committee is up to individual members: VACDaRN's co-leads intend their roles to be facilitators and enablers, not agenda-setters.

Next was a brainstorming session about potential VACDaRN actions:

- VAC has been talking with a photographer who has been taking front porch portraits of families during the Covid-19 crisis and using the money paid to donate to the food shelf. VSARA has also been working with two photographers doing similar projects and wants to expand their focus to include artists and their role in community documentation and healing through art. This initiative is something that can be bolstered by VACDaRN through the role of arts and culture in community recovery after crisis. We are going to be dealing with Covid-19 for a long time, and we need to think about how we engage with our communities and creative placemaking.
- Training artists, especially performing artists, on the technical side of engaging in virtual events, and partnering performing arts groups with cable tv stations to have high-quality, full bandwidth streaming of performances. This crisis has launched the golden age of training – more opportunities, more available in more ways, but we must be more aware than ever of the digital divide and realize that there may be people who cannot be reached in this way. However, there is hope that during Covid-19 recovery more money will be available for improving rural broadband.
- Collect data on the impact of arts and culture, have a dashboard on the website that shares this information, and bring that data to the lawmakers who can earmark money for the creative sector. This could be explored with return on investment calculators – taking the data for what we already track and show the value to communities and the economy. However, it can be difficult to quantify financial impact in this sector. VAC has been working on a case statement for the legislature that contains data they have collected about the value of this sector and the impact of COVID-19. See the Advocacy Alert issued 6.2.2020:
https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/uploads/Advocacy/Action%20Alert%20Creative%20Sector%20Relief%20Package_full%20details.pdf
- Showcase how artists help communities recover after a disaster on the VACDaRN website.
- Offer training and collect resources about cybersecurity – we're more reliant on the internet than ever and being prepared in cybersecurity is a must for continuity of operations and disaster

plans. Jessamyn West offered a session on this topic at the 2019 Vermont Library Association conference; Rachel O. will ask her if she would be willing to reprise the training for VACDaRN constituents.

- Continue to develop and refine content on website, adding press coverage of arts and culture as well as case studies and additional resources.