



### Steering Committee Meeting Notes

3:00 – 4:30 PM

August 26, 2020

**Present:** Michele Bailey, Michael Billingsley, Sally Blanchard-O'Brien, Carolyn Frisa, Carrie Cleveland, Eileen Corcoran, Ann Lawless, Tom McMurdo, Rachel Moore, Rachel Onuf, Ben Rose, Joseph Watson, guests Alejandra Dean & Evan Knight of COSTEP-MA

#### Updates

*Michele:* The Arts Council has been busy trying to keep their regular programs going and working with ACCD on CARES Act financial distributions. Currently there are no open grants available for organizations, and the Council is finishing up reviewing the applications that came in the late spring and early summer. Now that the Legislature has reconvened, the Council's executive director has been testifying on budgetary concerns.

*Sally:* The Vermont State Archives is open to the public again, by appointment only. Sally is leading a committee to coordinate statewide efforts for Archives Month in October. While they anticipate that event planning around the state will be difficult due to COVID, they hope that their efforts will bring more awareness to archives and get institutions planning and communicating more with each other.

*Carrie:* An additional COVID relief fund was launched this summer and is ending this month. Over 1,800 applicants applied, and 200 awards were given, and the second round of this funding is open now. This has been a different kind of approach for CERF+: their standing fund is typically handled with a case management approach, with continued communication and one-on-one contact. The emergency grant is a shift, as there is no one-on-one contact, the turnaround is much quicker, and they've had to deny funds to more people.

*Eileen:* The VHS museum has been open since July, and they've had 35% of admissions compared to last year. The majority of VHS programming will be virtual into next year, but there is some limited in-person programming for homeschoolers. The library is open by appointment only.

*Carolyn:* She is working very part time, back in her studio some, but still working mostly remotely on small projects. She's had only two site visits in 2020, which is a significant reduction. Her work for private clients has picked up, but work for institutional clients is at a standstill, and she anticipates this lull to continue for the foreseeable future.

*Ann:* She is working on Wheelock's town hazard mitigation plan, which includes sending a survey out with town tax bills. She has just joined the board of the Old Stone House Museum and is serving as chair of the collections committee.

*Ben:* A lot of COVID recovery is landing on state emergency management departments, without getting the answers they need from the Federal government, and the emergency management field is hoping that Congress will extend the December 31<sup>st</sup> deadline for spending relief money. Vermont has hired a high-level emergency management consultant that is helping the state submit requests to FEMA and other agencies to keep money flowing. Vermont's response is good, but the state is still preparing for what's to come.

*Rachel M.:* The Helen Day Art Center gallery has recently reopened to the public with no-fee ticketed reservations that are limited to four timeslots a day, six people per timeslot. Only eighteen people have come in person. The Center has also run outdoor camps this summer. They recently received a resiliency grant and will use the money to focus on disaster planning.

*Rachel O.:* She has finished a Vermont-specific disaster plan template, distilled from the more complex dPlan, and it is now linked on VACDaRN's website (see link below). Rachel also submitted a proposal to the Vermont Emergency Management Conference for a presentation related to VACDaRN's work, and the proposal was accepted. Lori Foley, the administrator for the Heritage Emergency National Task Force, will speak present on "The Power of Partnerships: Protecting Vermont's Cultural and Historic Resources." The conference will be held virtually from 1-5 September 29 and 30; Lori speaks at 2 p.m. on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The conference is FREE but you need to REGISTER. Program schedule and registration link here: <https://vem.vermont.gov/sites/demhs/files/Conference%20Flyer%202020.pdf>

*Joseph:* He returned to work in late June to work with collections in person, and now has been tasked with the reopening of the Middlebury College library. The library holds 630 seats and they're reducing that by half, as well as increasing signage about protocols, maximum occupancy in certain spaces, and other logistical concerns. Now that students are back and quarantining procedures are happening, the college campus is no longer open to the public. He is impressed with how the College has been handling testing and reopening to students.

*Michael:* His performing arts space is still closed. He is still working with emergency management concerns locally, and he has learned about a new research institute database and visualization tool that incorporates historical data about flood zones with frequently updated algorithms to estimate flood risk based on future weather. <https://firststreet.org/flood-factor/>

*Tom:* Department of Libraries has been keeping an eye on the state's budgetary concerns, and right now there is better than expected revenue. However, DOL continues to prepare for the future while maintaining their services. They have also been following the REALM studies (see link below) about how long COVID stays on the surfaces of library materials and have been providing guidance to their constituents about how best to handle returning materials.

## **COSTEP-MA Discussion with Co-Chairs Alejandra Dean & Evan Knight**

COSTEP is a network to connect emergency management personnel and first responders with collecting and cultural heritage institutions. After hurricanes Rita and Katrina, NEDCC came up with the COSTEP framework to coordinate statewide efforts for emergency planning and two states joined the pilot, Massachusetts and New Mexico. MA kept it going after the pilot, creating by-laws and governance documents in the 2000s (though the organization is not formally chartered and is completely volunteer run). In the early days, COSTEP-MA was driven by big institutions as anchors, but over time, that changed. Momentum in the organization went down, and it was at this point that COSTEP-MA looked to grant initiatives to keep going. These grants led to big, long-term projects, including the Finding Common Ground curriculum.

Alejandra and Evan came on board as co-chairs of COSTEP-MA in 2018, at a time of transition. At that point, executive committee meetings were being held monthly or bimonthly, with the same discussions coming up but no real actions taken. The organization also traditionally held two in-person meetings a year for subscribers, but these had stagnated. As Alejandra and Evan joined, they realized that they needed to limit the scope of the group to tackle specific, goal-driven projects. Not being formally chartered gives the organization flexibility and allows for the possibility of change of focus in the future. They started with easy, low-hanging fruit projects when they started, such as revamping the website to ensure that people knew there was immediate help available when a disaster happened. They continue to focus their projects and programming on three discrete, achievable goals that they set each year. These goals provide an opportunity for the COSTEP-MA leaders to get involved in which projects they're interested in, and working groups organically come about.

Evan and Alejandra had a lot of tips to share:

- Remember that cultural heritage institutions are typically not a priority for emergency management; they're viewed more as a recovery effort, not response. It's about making them understand that once a piece of culture is gone, it's lost forever. It's ideal to build relationships with someone on the emergency management side who has a connection to cultural heritage. It's also useful to attend an emergency management conference for networking opportunities.
- Educating organizations on best practices is often more effective and efficient than trying to do the best practices for the organizations. You should give the organizations the tools that allow them to do it for themselves. Some of the top best practices to drive home are developing relationships with local emergency management and prioritizing collections.
- Promote the existence of 24/7 access to specialists via the National Heritage Responders (Carolyn and MJ Davis in Vermont). Connect with a meteorologist, as they have experience with flooding and are versed in climate resilience.
- Once the network is operational, the challenge is to keep sustaining its efforts. Continue to breathe life into work you've done before. In the past, COSTEP-MA created guides and now the organization continues to point to them, so the information is communicated, and the work is not lost. *There is a great deal of value in passing on trusted information.*
- While also sustaining your efforts, it's also about finding where the emergency management and cultural heritage fields align and planning programming around those joint areas. Some recent projects/goals that COSTEP-MA have undertaken include:
  - Tabletop exercise to get people to test their disaster plans (happening virtually in September, see link below)

- Have 1-2 in-person events (these became virtual in 2020, one covered hurricane preparedness)
- Develop a climate resilience guide (this was switched to a COVID-19 guide instead)
- Held a resilience symposium with two panels of speakers
- Strengthened communications workflows and policies
- In the future, they feel there could be a public component to COSTEP-MA, to educate the public about resilience and cultivate citizen advocates.
- Remember that there is organizational turnover all the time, so efforts need to be repeated to continually reach new staff members. The importance of local relationships cannot be overstated, with both emergency management and the community at large.
- Be accessible in your communications, particularly being aware of the acronyms that you're using.

### **COSTEP-MA Discussion with Co-Chairs Alejandra Dean & Evan Knight**

Everyone was excited about the idea of working groups. It was decided to think about what VACDaRN's priorities should be and to set specific goals at our next meeting. COSTEP-MA offered to promote our efforts on their blog or to connect us to their distribution list to expand our reach and to celebrate our successes.

#### **Links shared during meeting:**

Vermont-specific disaster plan template: <https://vacdarn.org/cultural-heritage-institutions/readiness-for-cultural-heritage-institutions/>

Latest REALM data:

<https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/realm/test3-report.pdf>

Upcoming COSTEP-MA workshop: <https://mblc.state.ma.us/costepma/index.php/2020/06/26/free-disaster-planning-response-workshop-for-ma-cultural-institutions-registration-open/>