



## Steering Committee Meeting Notes

10-11:30 AM

April 22, 2021

**Present:** Katelynn Averyt, Michele Bailey, Sally Blanchard-O'Brien, Eileen Corcoran, Amy Cunningham, Carrie Cleveland, James Duggan, Carolyn Frisa, Tom McMurdo, Rachel Onuf, Ben Rose, Joseph Watson

### Updates

*Michele and Amy:* Vermont Arts Council has been busy with their usual grant administration. The CreateVT Action Plan – a strategic plan for the state’s creative sector – is being launched with a free event on May 3. This is a culmination of years of work and input, but also marks the beginning of more work with a roadmap of where the state wants to go. There will be a public comment period after the launch. There are also lots of funds for the creative sector through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). VAC will be getting more money than last time, and plan on running a similar relief granting program in collaboration with the Vermont Humanities Council.

*Tom:* The Department of Libraries got \$2.35 million from ARPA and are figuring out how to use it. It can’t be used for construction projects, so that’s not helpful for libraries in old buildings with troublesome infrastructure. One consideration is using the money for developing outdoor spaces for increased events and library usage during the pandemic. Building improvements could be covered by the Cultural Facilities Grants from VAC (current deadline is June 7), and if passed, the federal Build America’s Libraries Act would also cover them. As written now, it would include \$10-20 million for library infrastructure, but it may be rolled into a national infrastructure omnibus bill. During the pandemic, DOL has been able to extend wi-fi coverage for libraries, and libraries are keeping the routers on 24/7 for their communities. The good news is that broadband coverage will be expanding across the state in coming years, as the House already passed \$160 million for the expansion and the governor has recommended \$200 million. DOL is also talking local libraries through the processes of reopening and there are already a lot of plans for outdoor events. There’s also a bill in the Vermont Legislature to approve the funding of a library study to get a picture of what’s happening around the state. The

American Library Association was offering a disaster planning workshop for public libraries for a cost, but DOL reached out to Rachel and Sally at the Vermont Historical Records Program and they offered a two-level workshop for Vermont public libraries for free.

*Joseph:* Middlebury College had a remote January term but went on-site for spring. Summer will be a hybrid. Currently only ten people are allowed at a time in Special Collections, which is tough for hosting classes. The school has administered 34,000 COVID-19 tests since January and has very few active cases, with more positive tests among staff than students. Because of budgetary concerns, the acquisitions and supply budgets have been frozen, and databases have been cut, which makes it hard for professors to acquire periodicals for their classes.

*Carolyn:* She is finally able to start doing site visits and has four currently scheduled. She recently fielded some calls from Kentucky for the National Heritage Responders.

*Eileen:* Vermont Historical Society is waiting for July 4 before having any in-person events and they don't have many big plans for this summer, instead they're waiting to see how fall shapes up. They are already seeing more tourists in the museum. VHS recently held a roundtable on reopening with local historical societies and saw a range of approaches and comfort levels around reopening.

*Jamie:* The Division for Historic Preservation is gearing up for the coming season. They are continuing restricted hours and days but are planning on opening the state's three biggest sites – Bennington Battle Monument, Coolidge, and Mt. Independence – on Memorial Day. They are foregoing their normal July 4 events and instead will kick off events with the Plymouth Folk and Blues Festival in the fall. The division is also hoping to get relief money for outdoor recreational activities and is partnering with Forests, Parks, and Recreation on this.

*Sally & Rachel:* The Vermont Historical Records program has issued a survey to institutions with historical records collections. The survey serves as a way to advertise and promote the VHRP, to gather information about the state of collections and institutional needs to care for them, and will be compared to data from a similar survey, Connecting to Collections, that was conducted in 2008. The Vermont Historical Records Advisory Board is trying to decide what to focus on programmatically with the next NHPRC grant that Rachel is working on. They're really excited about civics education, but since there are other entities around the state engaged in this, funding may not be needed. Another focus for the funding can be to bring intensive disaster preparedness training (HEART) from Washington, DC to Vermont. Rachel has been talking with the Old Stone House Museum about conducting a series of disaster preparedness workshops, and she's trying to encourage local organizations to apply for ARPA funding through the National Endowment for the Humanities. Rachel is meeting with State Historic Preservation Officer Laura Trieschmann about future cultural mapping initiatives where cultural sites and assets could be mapped alongside flood maps to ensure targeted assistance and outreach.

*Ben:* His work at Vermont Emergency Management has been focused on the big picture and big numbers for COVID-19 relief. He has been impressed with the Federal response and Vermont is doing well compared to other states. Vermont has received \$214 million from FEMA just for vaccines and PPE, and Vermont will come out of this stronger.

*Ann Lawless [could not attend but sent update]:* She is enjoying so much working with Rachel and other terrific people (conservators Walter Newman and Rick Kerschner and very committed staff and local

folks) on the Old Stone House Museum Board & Collections Committee. Working on the forms to accompany the newly adopted Collections Management Policy and planning a Disaster Planning session starting in August that will be opened up to local historical societies to build networking. The Wheelock Selectboard has a big project underway with a municipal planning grant to plan how to make their town hall ADA compliant. The consultant team provides a strong public outreach component and architectural planning. The U.S. Dept. of Justice established a time frame that needs to be followed to get this done. She is also serving on the VT Climate Council Rural Resilience & Adaptation subcommittee and her work continues to promote HEAT Squad home energy audits in the Northeast Kingdom.

### **Working Group Updates**

*Education & Training:* Carrie will be offering a free workshop on May 26 and 27 (4-5:30 PM) for disaster preparedness for artists: Career Protection for Artists: Preparing for an Emergency During an Emergency. CERF+ has done a lot of these trainings in the past and Carrie will be adapting it for VACDaRN. It will include information about risk assessment, documentation, disaster planning, and insurance and will have an interactive component where participants can share their own experiences during COVID-19. This training falls under our established goal of targeting individual artists who tend to get lost in the conversations about emergency preparedness. It's primarily for Vermonters but open to any artists and promotion is underway.

*COVID Documentation & Artistic Response:* This group has paused work for now as the VHRP digital repository has expanded to include other citizen-led documentation projects. But COVID-19 documentation hasn't been forgotten and they want to include other artists documenting the crisis as the group becomes aware of them.

*Communications:* At the last steering committee meeting we left it that the listserv would be placed on Google Groups. However, in the interim, we became aware of an opportunity through the American Institute for Conservation, which is setting up online interactive community spaces for the Alliance for Response networks (VACDaRN is one). This provides a listserv experience but is more interactive with discussion posts and provides a space for storing documents. One of the top ten priorities from the VACDaRN launch was to have a way for VACDaRN members to learn from each other and share their resources, and this online community would be a way for members to share more sensitive documents like disaster plans with each other; these documents would not be appropriate to share publicly on the VACDaRN website. So far, all steering committee members have been invited to join and we want to get some initial content up in the space before we launch to everyone. If this platform turns out to be too much for us to sustain, then we can simplify later, but this also provides a space for VACDaRN to interact with other AFR networks, which could be very beneficial. **At our next meeting, we will discuss this platform more and what we can do with it.**

*Disaster Supplies:* This working group will be launched soon!

## **New Ideas**

*Vermont Arts Council initiatives:* Amy is serving on the FEMA-Based Solutions group in Vermont related to hospitality and tourism. Two national air quality experts are working with them on ensuring healthy buildings, and they will be hosting a webinar for the Agency of Commerce and Community Development on air quality in older buildings – of which there are many in Vermont’s hospitality, tourism, and arts sectors. VACDaRN will be listed as one of the sponsors. The Department of Tourism and Marketing, Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, and the VAC have been working on a joint promotional effort to encourage outdoor performances this year, and VACDaRN will also be listed as a sponsor. Last week was the National Arts Advocacy summit and Craig Nutt from CERF+ spoke about proposals for changes in FEMA and other agencies for improving support of creative workers. Amy spoke with Craig about the need to get congressional champions to move this forward. **This advocacy role is something that VACDaRN should consider and we will talk about it more at our next meeting.**

*Insurance/Assessment Working Group:* The VAC had the idea of working with insurance companies to be able to offer an insurance premium reduction to artists who attend future VACDaRN trainings. This led to the idea of setting up artist insurance pools, like the PACIF program through the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (<https://www.vlct.org/rms/about-pacif-and-verb>). VAC investigated group rates for artists for health insurance about 10-15 years ago but found the rates were still high, but it is something that could be investigated for other types of insurance. This relates to something Jamie has noticed in his work – that smaller institutions tend to not have a correctly assessed value of their assets. In many cases, individuals and organizations are not aware of what their insurance policies cover. These ideas will be turned into a new working group.