



Steering Committee Meeting Notes

12-1:30 PM

September 8, 2021

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

Institutional Updates

Michele and Amy: The deadline for the next round of Cultural Recovery Grants is coming up soon and the Vermont Arts Council has more money to give this time, in combination with the Vermont Humanities Council. The grants can go to any arts organization for operating costs or to any humanities-related project that has been impacted by the pandemic. Libraries are not included in the general operational funding because there is other money available for them through the IMLS. The Creative Network launched their plan over the summer and advocacy is a big piece of the strategy; for the first time, the Vermont Arts Council has partnered with lobbyists. VAC will be coordinating Digital Capacity Grants, available to all cultural organizations. There is \$1.15M from the general fund available for this opportunity. Projects might include website updates, e-commerce, or recording equipment for streaming events. A survey will go out soon to assess needs and the grant program will open next year.

Carrie: CERF+ is finishing their fourth cycle of COVID relief funding and there has been a downturn in applicants; 1800 artists applied for the first cycle of funding whereas only 900 applied for this cycle. There is still a need out there but there may be less interest because of COVID fatigue. Carrie participated in a pilot analysis of crisis mitigation training for cohorts of regional arts organizations that aims to get the arts and emergency management sectors together. The training consisted of five sessions and will inform a model that can be used going forward.

Tom: The State Librarian has left the Department of Libraries to be the Director of the National Library Service at the Library of Congress. Tom is acting State Librarian. The Department has been advising public libraries to go to town officials if they need new wastewater systems or other building or system

improvements because ARPA funds can be used. This should be true for other cultural heritage institutions as well.

Katelynn: The Kellogg-Hubbard Library is open again and they are rethinking mask protocols and numbers of patrons in the building.

Joseph: Middlebury College Special Collections is having a record number of classes coming in. The incoming Middlebury freshman class is the largest ever, and all students are on campus. Special Collections is down one staff member.

Ben: Is a new grandfather! COVID has subsided to a “dull roar” for Vermont Emergency Management. Most of the state’s costs (vaccines, emergency shelters, etc.) will be covered by FEMA, and VEM is waiting on the Health Department for future vaccine booster rollout. Vermont received \$12M in hazard mitigation funding (Vermont is the 49th most populated state but came in 35th for funding). Vermont is in a good position having a mandate and state funding for a hazard mitigation program. VEM is focusing on flood issues and tackling them before FEMA can get to it. VEM is noticing that people tend to stay in flood-prone areas because there’s nowhere else for them to really go; Vermont has a housing crunch and this has been coming up in the Vermont Climate Council discussions.

Ann: Ann is serving on the Vermont Climate Council’s Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee, and they are having a public input meeting on September 15. She is also still serving on the Old Stone House Museum Board and with the Northeast Kingdom Heat Squad to get people signed up for weatherization. Her town finalized their multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation with other towns, working through their regional planning commission.

Eileen: The Vermont Historical Society Museum has had record attendance this summer and is also hosting bus tours through October. The League of Local Historical Societies annual meeting will be held in-person in late October. The VHS has noticed loss of energy in local historical societies, not dissimilar to other arts and cultural institutions in the pandemic era.

Rachel and Sally: Rachel reached out to southern Vermont cultural institutions after the flooding in July and though not many responded, there were no reports of damage. Ben noted that he would love to be looped in on any reports from the field in future. She has been giving several disaster preparedness workshops, one at the Old Stone House Museum and a series of four later this year for the Association for Rural and Small Libraries. She will also be doing a session on disaster supply caches next week for the Alliance for Response network and will be presenting with Bolton Assistant Town Clerk Carol Devlin at the Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference next week, presenting a case study and giving information about VACDaRN. She has also recently helped a library dealing with a significant mold outbreak. Sally has been on several site visits around the state over the summer and is finishing up a report on a survey the Vermont Historical Records Program undertook this spring on the state of historical records and repositories in Vermont. This survey builds off the work done with the Connecting to Collections survey conducted in 2008.

Working Group Updates

Training Working Group: The group is trying to determine when to offer the artists' training again, possibly early November into the winter. The first training had several people registered but no one showed up. A survey went out to registrants and the preference was in the afternoon, two sessions a week apart. The group is torn on whether to offer the training again as is or if it needs to be retooled. There is some thought that currently there is a lot of "disaster fatigue" so that even with the training's focus on resilience, it might be too much for people to handle right now. The group is open to suggestions about how to proceed.

Disaster Supply Bin Working Group: The group has been discussing what the contents of the bins should be and where they should be cached.

Action step

Rachel proposed that steering committee members who are comfortable doing so might share cell phone numbers; she will then create a "group text" so we can easily communicate with the group or with individual members in the event of an emergency, assuming power and wifi are operational. Once steering committee members who were not present at the meeting have a chance to opt in or out, Rachel will create the group and send out a message.

Next meeting

Agreed to meet in the first half of November. Possible agenda: meeting with Craig Nutt of CERF+, who has been advocating for changing FEMA guidelines for some time.