

March 17, 2025

Sen. Andrew Perchlik, Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Re: B.812 Vermont Humanities Council

FY26 Budget Impact: Vermont Humanities is requesting a 3% increase in our base budget amount from \$309,000 in FY25 to \$318,270 in FY26, in line with the Governor's recommendation.

Dear Sen. Perchlik and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for supporting public humanities engagement in every corner of our state through the annual appropriations process. Vermont Humanities is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress Center for the Book. Our non-profit organization turned 50 in 2024, and the legislature's support continues to empower us to meet our mission, to sustain and grow our work, and to prepare for the next fifty years. We greatly appreciate your commitment to keeping the humanities alive and thriving in communities around the state.

We recognize that we do our work in N'Dakinna, the traditional and unceded land of the Abenaki people who continue to live and work in Vermont today.

In 2024, Vermont Humanities contributed \$1,060,000 to the state-wide economy through grants to non-profits and support of local businesses. Coupled with the wages we pay to 12 staff members, 82% of all our expenses supported Vermont workers, organizations, and companies.

We have final numbers for our 2024 grantmaking and community support that demonstrate our strong growth over the last year. We awarded \$478,211 in grantmaking across all Vermont Humanities programs in community grants in 2024, made possible in part by the Governor's support and the Legislators' investment through the budget process.

In our regular 2024 grantmaking programs, we awarded \$221,565 to 50 **Project Grants** that funded diverse community initiatives with awards up to \$5,000. Additionally, we awarded \$31,231 for 41 **Rapid Response Grants** that support quick turn-around, small projects for humanities-focused community initiatives or unanticipated needs. In 2024, we also awarded our second year of **Partnership Grants**, a three-year commitment to eight organizations totaling \$65,000 per year for 2024-2026.

- 54 grant recipients received their first Vermont Humanities grant in 2024
- 151 grants were awarded out of a pool of 234 applications
- 65% of applicants were funded, demonstrating need for greater resources

Please click [here](#) for a full list of grant recipients. Below are just a few examples of 2024 grants:

- **Vets Town Hall:** Awarded \$7,500 annually to support statewide Veterans Town Halls that offer veterans a platform to share their experiences both in and out of the military, fostering understanding and acceptance amongst veterans and civilians.
- **Rutland Pride:** Awarded \$7,500 annually for this emerging organization's public programming supporting Rutland County's LGBTQ+ community.
- **Windham World Affairs Council:** Awarded \$7,500 annually to support their *America250: Examining America's Identity and Leadership in a Changing World* project which aims to provide opportunities to pause and learn from our nation's past, empower youth and marginalized groups whose rights are currently under attack, and build understanding and support across divides.
- **City of Montpelier Parks and Trees Department:** Awarded \$4,500 to create a series of interpretive trail signs along the accessible path in Hubbard Park to explore what happens along the trail, and bring the Abenaki language into the park.
- **Those Who Were Harmed Podcast:** Awarded \$5,000 to support a podcast that uses investigative journalism to uncover the history of eugenics in Vermont, humanize the victims through storytelling, and spark conversations that confront historical injustices.

Sponsorships: In 2024, we provided just over \$20,000 in further local and statewide sponsorship support to a variety of events and organizations including the Good Citizen Challenge (Seven Days), Catamount Arts Leavitt Amp Concert Series, Greater Burlington Multicultural Center Speakers Series, Green Mountain Book Festival, Non-Fiction Comic Book Festival, Pride Vermont Festivals in Montpelier and Burlington, the Queer Arts Festival in Plainfield, Richard Kemp Center – First African Landing Commemoration, the Vermont Library Conference, Vermont Association of the Education of Young Children Conference, the Vermont Association for Social Studies Conference, and the Park-McCullough Historic Governor's Mansion, among many others.

2024 Early Literacy Grants were made in two of our programs: the **Vermont Early Learning Initiative (VELI)**, which partners with libraries across the state to support their programmatic needs and interests and summer **Humanities Camps**, which provide high-quality, enriching educational activities for middle and high school students.

We increased the **VELI** cohort from 16 to 21 libraries in 2024, meaning libraries could reach more children, families, and caregivers in 21 Vermont communities. VELI libraries achieved the following: 1) engaged underserved populations in their communities through story hours and family-focused programming; 2) increased their offerings of curriculum-aligned take-home family kits; 3) provided consistent story hours and literacy resources to Afghan and other migrant and refugee families; 4) encouraged and facilitated partnerships between preschool educators and public librarians to develop collaborative programs; and 5) provided outreach to community child-care providers with books and other resources. Total participation: 735.

In addition, we awarded a total of \$31,500 in grants (\$1,500 per library) to support flexible funding for literacy projects. We held two in-person conferences with the 21 VELI librarians in 2024. In March, the focus of the conference was the Summer Reading Theme (adventure and exploration). In August, we delved into *Visual Literacy and Experiential Art*, presented by Vermont Humanities trainer Leanne Porter. Librarians learned why Visual Literacy is important for young children's literacy development, and how art can be a fully immersive experience in a library setting.

In summer of 2024, seventeen communities hosted **Humanities Camps**, ranging from a myths and legends camp at Charleston Elementary School, to a cooking camp at Lanpher Memorial Library, to a wilderness-based camp focusing on Indigenous wisdom at the Barra School in East Corinth. We awarded \$74,000 in grants to support camps such as the Old Stone House Museum in Brownington; Camp Outright in Starksboro for LGBTQ youth; Swanton Library's History Camp; and the Education Justice Coalition's social justice camp led by and for BIPOC youth. These camps offered a diverse range of educational and humanities-based activities for students, enriching the local cultural and educational landscape. Humanities Camps served a total of almost 3,000 participants including students and audiences at performances and events.

Here are highlights from camp directors:

- "Our group of campers had a wide range of interests and abilities but worked joyfully together in any of the levels or topics of projects that fit them best. For example, some would read while others listened, some would plan while others built, some would brainstorm while others wrote. They all increased their knowledge of Ancient Greece, the skills of literacy, and understanding of themselves." (West Rutland School)
- "In our rural communities, this opportunity for teens to get together and meet new people from outside of their friend groups and express themselves creatively is important to personal development and priceless to the community. I could not be more pleased and impressed by the respect, kindness, and patience exhibited by these kids to one another." (Bradford Public Library)

Vermont Reads 2024: *Gather* by Kenneth Cadow, tells the story of Ian, a resourceful teenager from rural Vermont. He is not supposed to have a dog, but his adopted pup Gather soon becomes a good friend. Although he has not yet finished high school, Ian works hard to take care of his mother, who is trying to overcome her addiction to opioids. In between classes and other responsibilities, Ian helps his family make ends meet by fixing things for neighbors and working at a sawmill off the books. Sadly, he needed to quit the school's basketball team to support his family.

Ian wants his family to remain on the land where they have lived for generations. But after a tragedy, he and Gather leave Vermont. Living on the run, Ian draws on his well-honed survival skills to care for himself and his dog. At the same time, a community of folks come together to try to provide a way home for Ian and Gather. The *Gather* program year began on July 1, 2024, and is already the most successful book in the 23-year history of the program.

Kenneth M. Cadow is an educator and writer who lives in Pompanoosuc, Vermont. *Gather* is his first young adult novel, and this book was selected as one of five finalists for the prestigious National Book Award in young people's literature, which was chosen from nearly 350 publisher submissions. Cadow is currently co-principal of Oxbow High School in Bradford, and he drew upon his 20 years of working with middle and high school students in rural Vermont to write this debut novel.

"Anyone who has endured what it's like to witness someone they love recover from addiction, struggled to afford necessities, or relied on public programs like school lunches will find themselves nodding in agreement as they absorb the words from each page," said Gabby Fernandez in *Vox*. "Having grown up in a low-income household, I couldn't help but think of how much I would've appreciated this novel when I was in high school." The National Book Foundation judges wrote, "*Gather* is a dog, but *Gather* is about gathering resources, people, and love. Kenneth M. Cadow tells a story about finding value in what—and who—might be easily overlooked."

To support Vermont Reads 2024, we are coordinating a minimum of 15 visits to Vermont communities with the author. Vermont Reads project hosts will also be able to book free discussions of *Gather* led by trained facilitators, and we have added several talks to our Speakers Bureau catalog that are related to the themes in the novel. These talks will be free to Vermont Reads 2024 hosts. New this year, Vermont Reads hosts will be able to extend their programming with grants of up to \$500, which can be used for honoraria for guest speakers, screening costs for films related to the book's themes, facilities charges and equipment rental costs for special events, and transportation costs to events and/or exhibits. Grants may also fund deep "community conversations" about class in selected Vermont locations, led by Will Eberle, director of Recovery Vermont and Mission Driver Consulting. In addition, *Gather* book group discussions in Correctional Facilities will be supported and led by Writers for Recovery.

While we knew *Gather* would be popular, it has blown through all previous records and our complete stock of books in just the first six months of the program year. As of today's report, we have distributed over 6,000 copies of the book to 124 program hosts in 91 communities and ordered an additional 3,500 copies of the book.

Community partners include schools, libraries, senior groups, social services organizations, bookstores, and other businesses and nonprofits. Vermont Reads participants include both children and youth (including older elementary, middle, high school, and college students) and adults (including confident readers, incarcerated men and women, and adult education students through our partnership with Mercy Connections). Many new schools and community organizations are participating in the program this year including:

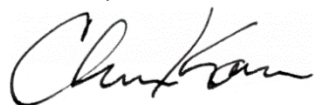
- Central Vermont Career Center (Barre): Using the young adult voice of the main character, they will facilitate targeted conversations to help students express their own experiences and needs. Career/Tech Centers have rarely participated in this program in prior years.
- Jenna's Promise (Johnson): In partnership with the Johnson Public Library, they will distribute free copies of the book and host a community conversation about housing insecurity, food insecurity, addiction, and other issues with free childcare available and refreshments served.
- Dorset Players: Staged readings of the book that will involve members of the Dorset Players, as well as students from area schools.
- The J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation: Sharing the book with their board of directors and staff, the Foundation is prompting discussions about the intersection of the arts and humanities with career and technical education organizations about the needs of non-traditional learners like Ian.

We are so delighted to have struck such a chord working with Ken's amazing book.

We are deeply grateful that the Administration and the Vermont Legislature have long understood the importance of the humanities, and we value your steadfast partnership. Thank you. Together, we can continue this essential work into the future.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Kaufman".

Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup
Executive Director