

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

### Strengths

The Vermont Arts Council currently enjoys many strengths:

1. It has a committed, long-serving staff, whose average tenure is over 10 years.
2. Its diverse, creative Board is selected from the membership, with the exception of one Governor's appointee who is selected from a list prepared by the Board.
3. The Council enjoys excellent relations with the Governor and his administration, and has for at least the last two decades.
4. The Council enjoys excellent, tri-partisan relations with the Legislature, and has seen its Legislative Arts Caucus membership swell to more than 45 people of all parties.
5. The Council enjoys excellent relations with its US Congressional Delegation who, collectively, is one of only a small handful in the country who scores A or A+ on its "Legislative Arts Report Card" presented annually by Americans for the Arts.
6. The Council is participating in the Cultural Data Project as of August 2011 which will significantly improve the quality of and access to information about Vermont's core "anchor" cultural institutions.
7. The Council has prepared itself for a greater emphasis on collaborations and communications (particularly e-communications and social networking) through its current work on five significant statewide collaborations:
  - a. A percent for art program for new construction or renovations in State buildings ["Art In State Buildings" **collaboration with the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS)**]
  - b. A cultural facilities capital enhancement program ["Cultural Facilities Program" **collaboration with BGS, the Division for Historic Preservation, and the Vermont Historical Society**]
  - c. A transportation enhancement project ["The Danville Project" **collaboration with the Agency of Transportation (Vtrans)**]
  - d. Cultural Heritage Tourism Promotion [**collaboration with the Vermont Dept. of Tourism and Marketing (VDTM)**]
  - e. Tropical Storm Irene Recovery ["Cultural and Heritage Recovery Team" **collaboration with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), Vtrans, and others**]
8. The Council has a skilled and adaptable automated Grants Administration system in place which has allowed it to adapt its programs to focus on community and educational grant programs.
9. The Council has a strong track record of timely and innovative initiatives to address constituent needs quickly and effectively:
  - a. "Breaking into Business Workshops" – an incredibly popular (in-demand) two-day workshop for artists and administrators done in conjunction with the Arts Extension Service.
  - b. "Cultural Routes"—a program that provides up to \$200 towards the cost of transportation for schoolchildren to attend cultural activities that they would otherwise be out of their reach. Priority goes to rural, underserved communities.
  - c. "Arts Partnership Grants"—operating funds given to core cultural institutions that provide important collaborative educational or social services in their own communities, in addition to their own presentations or exhibitions.

### Weaknesses

The Council has a unique role among state arts agencies. As a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization it enjoys considerable independence from state government. However this independence can be a two-edged sword:

1. The Council's advice on matters of policy that directly impact our programs and services is rarely sought. Council staff and trustees are rarely, if ever, appointed to oversight boards in the areas of education, business development, community planning, marketing, and tourism.
2. There is a persistent view that we should be very careful (to the point of limiting) our private fundraising efforts to avoid developing conflicts-of-interest with our own constituents.
3. As a quasi-State agency we have developed over time a calendar and arts directory presence on the web that does not fully address our constituents' needs. It was inexpensive to develop, but it's programmatically very expensive to run now because of the restrictions on what state-managed information systems can accommodate.
4. We have at least two staff positions that deal with functions that no other state arts agency staff in the country requires: payroll, billing, advocacy, fundraising, and reporting back to funders. This has led to a significant reduction in "staff bandwidth" to accommodate initiatives and collaborations as they arise.

### Opportunities

Opportunities constantly present themselves to the Council. Some grow organically in response to constituent needs; others are presented to us on a platter by collaborating agencies. The challenge is always keeping in mind the Council's Mission and Strategic Goals.

1. State of Vermont Collaborations
  - a. In response to Tropical Storm Irene, the Vt. Agency of Transportation has invited us to work with them to develop a marker commemorating the storm and its impact on communities throughout Vermont
  - b. The Forest and Parks Department of the Agency of Natural Resources has asked us to collaborate as it explores the feasibility of developing a property into Vermont's first-ever, year-round State Arts Park
2. Statewide Collaborations
  - a. Champlain College/Marlboro Graduate Program in Nonprofit Management have asked us to help expand their 10-week certificate program to include the arts
  - b. Champlain College Emergent Media Center has invited us to work with them on a project with an artist to create an artificial reality game about adapting to life in a much hotter planet.
3. Research/Technology
  - a. The Vermont Cultural Data Project will present us with information about our constituents that will vastly impact our programs and services over time.
  - b. The Council is developing a new website with much greater functionality where a statewide arts directory, arts calendar, and grant application systems are concerned.
  - c. Social Media is presenting many new opportunities to market and promote not just Council grants and activities, but constituent presentations and services as well.
4. Miscellany
  - a. The Council turns 50 in 2014. Don't forget!

### Threats

While the Council enjoys the relative safety provided by its independence as a 501(c)(3) in Vermont, there are at least four troubling items that threatens its continued existence:

1. The Economy. Vermont has a stronger economy than most other states, but there are still large numbers of unemployed or low wage earning citizens that are not in a position to participate in our programs and services and whose needs require vast increases to social services payments.
2. Political attacks on federal and state funding of “nonessential services.” At least the Arts are not alone as the focus of this stage of the Culture Wars as they were in the early 1990s.
3. Consumer attitudes: in part due to the economy and to the constant refrain heard in certain political and media circles that the arts are a luxury, many are beginning to believe that this is true.
4. The most imminent threat to the Council is, however, its dependency on only two funding sources: the National Endowment for the Arts and the State of Vermont.