



Artists, Artisans, and Entrepreneurs:
Creative Economy of the East Central Vermont Region
Executive Summary



Acknowledgments

Artists, Artisans, and Entrepreneurs: Creative Economy of the East Central Vermont Region



Prepared for Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission and the East Central Vermont Economic Development District

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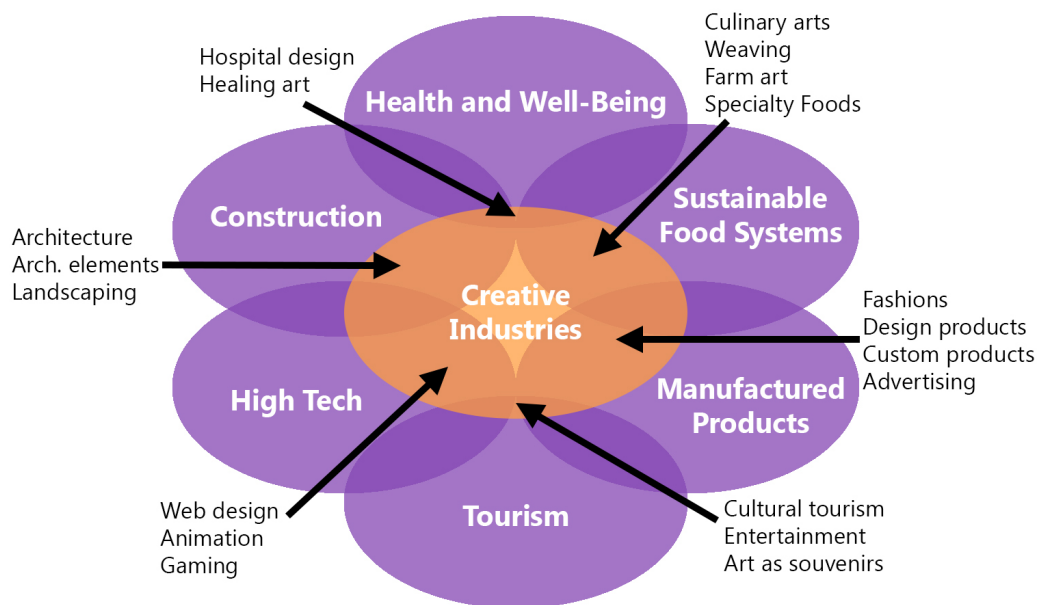
Introduction

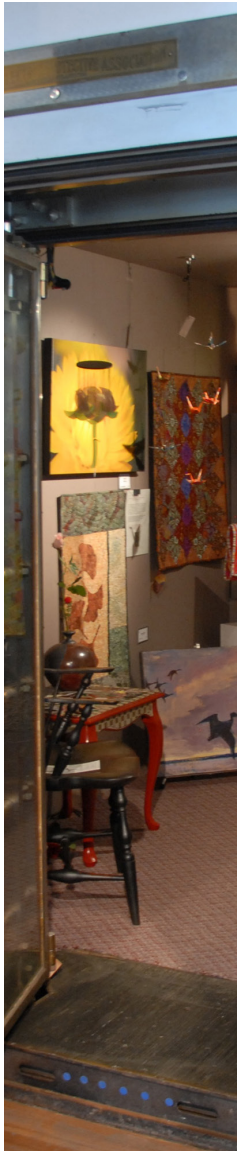
As the corporate mass production that invaded rural America in the latter half of the 20th century disappears, its earlier strengths in an artisanal production base is being re-discovered. The East Central Vermont Region is well ahead of the game, with an economy that has been quintessentially artisanal for a long time. The Region already depends heavily on its micro and small businesses. Many of these are innovative hybrids with diverse creative talents that can generate expanded markets. This hybrid industrial model is a large part of the state's and Region's brand.

This, among many other strengths, point to an expanding creative economy, the kind of economy in which Vermont and the Region already holds a decided edge. Creative businesses have already revitalized some parts of the Region, and a number of others stand on the cusp of real growth possibilities.

Artists, Artisans, and Entrepreneurs: Creative Economy of the East Central Vermont Region makes it clear that the Creative Economy is a source of economic growth, jobs, and wealth. The Region exhibits an unusually high relative concentration in its creative

Convergence across sectors





The Gallery at the VAULT | Springfield

industries, especially for a rural region that lacks large-scale employers. Some are expected, such as food segments and design and fashion, but others are surprisingly high—namely literary arts and museums and heritage.

While some areas of Vermont are experiencing growth in younger age groups, building an educational system that encourages and rewards creativity, will benefit our existing families, but will also serve to attract young families who see this as an important way of engaging youth in learning.

Creative industries;

- Are a source of regional employment
- Contribute to the competitive advantage in other sectors
- Attract and retain businesses, tourists, and talent
- Are a source of inspiration and innovation
- Provide an opportunity for under-served people and places

Creative Economy Size and Importance

- Employment in the creative industries is about 8.9% of the total Region's employment.
- Employment growth in the Region's creative industries was 10.2% from 2010-2015 versus 8.2% for the U.S. and 7.6% for Vermont.

- The proportion of the workforce employed in creative industries in the Region is 86% above the similar national proportion.
- Awareness of the economic role and contribution of the Creative Economy in the Region based on the survey and discussions with business leaders and town officials.

From Creative Industries to Creative Economy

Most economic cluster analyses are based on numbers of people employed and, in some instances, self-employed by industries. But occupations can similarly be defined as creative based on the degree to which they require pure or applied artistic creativity. While creative industries employ people in creative occupations, they also employ people who do routine work. At the same time, other people work in creative occupations in industries that are not classified as creative. These include, writers in the financial or health care sector, graphic designers working for manufacturers of government, a chef at a resort, or a musician employed by a church.

The full scope of the Creative Economy is defined as the sum of these two measures: (1) people employed in creative industries and (2) those employed in creative occupations that are not in creative industries. Each implies a particular policy

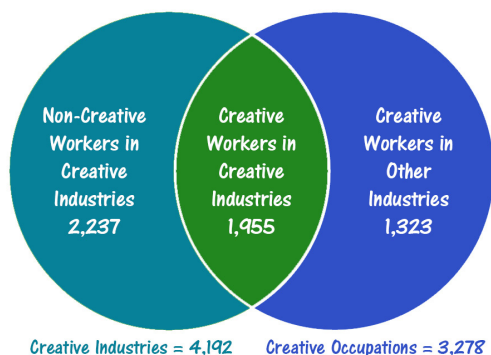
emphasis. Creative industries suggest strategies and needs for sustainability and future growth and prosperity while creative occupations suggest strategies and needs for education and workforce development.

The Region's creative economy, as defined by the combination of both employees of creative companies and employees of other companies who work in creative occupations, includes just over 5,500 jobs.

The creative enterprises are responsible for the employment of 4,204 people in 1,200 establishments with about two in five in creative occupations in those businesses. An additional 1,323 people are employed in creative occupations in sectors of the economy that don't fit the criteria established for "creative industries."

2015 Creative Economy of Region

Total Creative Economy = 5,515



Classifying the Creative Industries

Because the definition of a creative economy covers so many forms of creative expression with different strengths and needs, it's important to disaggregate it according to categories, or "segments," of creative industries that each represent distinct competencies and markets.

Thus, we have divided the creative industries into seven segments: visual arts and crafts, media and digital arts, design and fashion, performance arts, literary arts, museums and cultural heritage, and artisanal foods (See the full report for a more in-depth discussion of each.)

- **Visual arts and crafts** include artists who create and produce much of the artistic and cultural content and also provides other sectors with competitive advantages.
- **Film and media** includes firms that produce, distribute, and support film, radio, television, music, and computer and video games.
- **Design and fashion** encompass the commercial applications of the arts to the design and production of places and spaces, design-oriented products, and communications designed to influence markets.
- **Museums and cultural heritage** consists of public and private museums, historical sites, and cultural

institutions that attract and serve tourists and provide distinguishing features for communities.

- **Literary arts** include sectors related to the art, re-production, and distribution of the written word, the writers, publishers, book stores, libraries.
- **Performance arts** includes all those sectors related to music, dance, and theatrical performances, artists who are performers, businesses that transport and/or stage productions, and publicity and ticketing systems.
- **Artisanal foods** comprise those farms that supplement food production with some form of creative expression, eating establishments that create culinary experiences, and specialty food production.

Taken together, these sectors make a coherent whole that covers enough common ground to justify special attention and particular interventions that meet their common needs. Although many of these companies have multiple competencies and fit more than one segment, to avoid duplication, each company is defined by its dominant characteristic.

The size alone of the creative economy in the Region has a large and direct impact on the economy—about 1,200 establishments responsible for more than 5,000 jobs engaged in the production, distribution, and marketing of aesthetically or emotionally oriented products or services. This alone would be sufficient reason to invest further. However, the impacts of the creative economy on many other sectors must be considered as well. Sectors such as:

- Tourism
- Agriculture
- Information technology
- Manufacturing
- Health care
- Innovation
- Talent attraction

The potential of the Creative Economy far exceeds the conventional view of the industry as an artist at a booth at a festival, a musician at a pub, or a lone wolf app designer sitting in a coffee shop on a device.

We've long recognized the importance of the creative economy in our region. With this report and action plan, we hope to inspire others, including state officials, to recognize the importance of and to provide the much needed support for the Region's and the overall State's creative economy.

Goals and Action Strategies

Goal 1: AN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP TEAM TO OVERSEE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

1. Create a Leadership Team/Group

Implementing the Plan requires a leadership group to guide the implementation process, secure funding for the various components of the Plan, coordinate the work of the staff/people who will be taking responsibility for specific projects, communicate with the public and key stakeholders about the Creative Economy and the implementation process, and develop partnerships with organizations that currently operate within the creative and economic development landscape in the Region and State.

The team could begin with the organizations that form the East Central Vermont Economic Development District (the Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission, the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, the Springfield Regional Development Corporation, and the Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission). It should also include representatives from the Creative Economy and Vermont Arts Council's Creative Network. The Vermont Arts Council expects to use this Plan as a guide for other regional efforts and could occasionally be spokespeople for the Region's projects.

2. Develop Staff Capacity

Staff and administrative support from existing organizations can provide some of the capacity to help implement the projects, programs and initiatives contained in this report. If this arrangement challenges the existing organizations, then additional staff should be considered. In essence, the successful implementation of this plan depends on effective and coordinated staff capacity. Coordination is a key issue because some of the projects and programs that are being recommended are regional in nature and will need the close communication and cooperation of whatever staff is working on them.

3. Seek Funding

Some funding will have to be secured through a combination of sources for the staff, administrative operations, communications, and for supporting the appropriate projects and programs. Some of the funding could be in-kind contributions of administrative and program support by participating organizations, but some will have to come from other sources.

The U.S. Economic Development Administration, which funded a portion of this project, is one source to pursue as well as foundations and Vermont state agencies. Legislative champions could be critically important to securing state funds. Some creative economy organizations also have generated income

Goal 1 continued next page

from fees for services, technical support, workshops, etc. This income generally supplements other larger sources of funding and is not a substitute. The Center for the Creative Economy, for example, in the Piedmont Region of North Carolina charges for some of its services and programs.

4. Support and Focus on Near-term Priorities

The leadership team should lend support for the following tasks and projects to get the implementation process started as the foundation of the Creative Economy project.

1. Schedule a leadership team meeting to develop a set of operational procedures and protocols that make it easy to communicate, and make decisions. Funding for the implementation should be a high priority.
2. Publish an Executive Summary. The final summary should be formatted and designed as a multi-color, visually compelling, accessible report. The “Captivate” report of the greater Albany region could be a model.
3. Develop a ‘go-to’ web site to be a focal point for people wanting information about or to become engaged in projects.
4. Refine the database of individuals, enterprises, organizations and resources that was initiated in the planning process. This database would be a valuable source of information concerning the Region’s stakeholders and major drivers of the Creative Economy. The database would make it possible to communicate with the creative community, and it would provide opportunities for people to connect to each other for commercial purposes.
5. Plan a Creative Economy Summit. The Summit will provide an opportunity for the leadership team to present the plan, thank stakeholders for their participation, bring them up to speed on recent actions over, and invite their ideas for and participation in projects.
6. Follow up on the Early-stage Projects that were undertaken or jump-started during the planning process. Some of these are moving forward and some require further work. They include:
 - a. The Vermont Film Archives project
 - b. The effort to build an institutional relationship between this Creative Economy and key creative, entrepreneurial and innovation centers and departments at Dartmouth College (e.g. the Arts and Innovation District, Hood Museum, Digital Arts and Leadership Lab, and Dartmouth Entrepreneurial Network). A meeting was held in the spring 2016 to initiate a relationship that promises to significantly benefit the Region’s creative community.
 - c. Move ahead on Maker Space. A meeting on makerspaces was held in early June with Doug Webster, the state’s lead resource for makerspaces,¹² and several downtown development staff in the Region.

Goal 1 continued next page

- d. Schedule a meeting with the area's Chambers of Commerce and creative communities. A meeting with several of the Region's Chambers of Commerce will better acquaint them with this project and identify business opportunities between the creative community and Chambers' members.

Goal 2: IMPROVED GROWTH AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF CREATIVE INDIVIDUAL AND ENTERPRISES

Interviews, focus group meetings, and survey results clearly showed that creative individuals and enterprises are interested in increasing their income and revenue, finding the right business model, expanding their markets, growing their business, and making them sustainable. But, they need help and resources in order to realize their vision.

1. Form an East Central Vermont Creative Enterprise as a Virtual Center

The Center would be organized by the Region's economic development organizations, GMEDC, SRDC, TRORC, and SWCRPC plus the SBDC, SCORE offices, Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center, and UVM Extension. Consideration could also be given to including the Dartmouth Entrepreneurial Network (DEN).¹³ We suggest that a few creative economy-related businesses and organizations in the Region be members of the Group as well, organizations and businesses that bring connections to a rich network of creative individuals and enterprise across the Region. They would be able to market and promote the Center to their networks and help identify business needs. Examples are Yellow House Media which has an electronic network of 4,000 individuals and enterprises; Collective—The Art of Craft, a cooperative of fine crafts and artwork; North by Hand, an artisan coop in Orange County; and the VAULT, a high-end art gallery of artwork from the greater Springfield area.

Services and Programs: The Center would provide a full complement of business, finance and economic programs and services to creative individuals and enterprises in the Region. Based on what was learned from speaking to people in the creative community in the Region, there are a number of possible services and programs the Center could offer.

- Business-related seminars and information sessions on topics such as:
 - Choosing the Right Business Model for a Creative Enterprise.
 - How to Take Your Business to the Next Level
 - Using Social Media to Generate More Customers and Business
 - Effective Branding and Marketing Campaigns for Creative Enterprises
 - The Nuts and Bolts of Starting a Creative Enterprise

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- A Creative Business Mentoring Program that pairs a seasoned creative business person with others considering starting or expanding a business.
- Bi-monthly Entrepreneurial Meet-ups (e.g., Berkshire County, Massachusetts) where creative individuals and entrepreneurs meet and learn about other creative individuals and enterprises in the Region.
- A Financing Assistance program to help individuals and small enterprises navigate their way through the sources of capital that are available in the state and in the Region.
- A Start-up Lab, modeled on the Lab at the Hannah Grimes Center in the Keene, New Hampshire, which is a one-stop resource for small businesses and entrepreneurs. The Lab offers a multi-week instructional program on the essential ingredients required for starting a business, which would be tailored to creative enterprises.
- Local business markets and customers. The Center could be a focal point for connecting the business community to the products and services of the Region's creative enterprises. Local businesses and institutions, for example, are potential markets for local and regional creative products, such as purchasing art to display in public spaces and in offices. Dartmouth-Hitchcock has a paid arts program coordinator who purchases and displays the work of local and regional artists and sculptors. In Randolph, Gifford Hospital, a local insurance company and the Chamber have purchased local artwork for display.

2. Secure Support for Creative Food Products, Processing, Branding, and Marketing

Working with UVM Extension and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, find assistance for farmers that have the potential to add value to what they grow or raise by processing, packaging, branding, and/or serving in creative ways. This would be in part an educational process, in part technical, and in part marketing. By identifying networks of businesses able to work together, small growers may be able to achieve greater scale and lower costs. This strategy may involve establishing a food hub or incubator to help develop and test new products to help entrepreneurs and existing businesses develop and market the new products or recipes.

Vermont already has a number of successful food hubs in other regions such as Mad River and UVM already has a national program to certify food hub managers that may be able to provide assistance.

3. Provide Assistance for Creative Individuals and Enterprises for Developing and Strengthening E-commerce, Business-related Social Media, On-line Advertising, and Others Application of the Internet

Web-based commerce and communications is moving so quickly, it is difficult for small and relatively isolated small businesses to keep up and take advantage of the new opportunities. This is affecting all

Goal 2 continued next page

sectors of the creative economy but particularly artists, makers, publishers, and writers. This strategy (a) establishes a focal point or network of regional or state-based providers that understand the nature of creative businesses and can assist them and (b) work towards improving and expanding access to high-speed Internet connectivity, expressed as a problem by some surveyed or interviewed.

CraftNet, an alliance of community colleges, with support from the Appalachian Regional Commission, established an on-line program to help artists and craftspeople learn how to use e-commerce.

4. Support Marketing Networks Among Small Manufacturers/Makers

Very small enterprises lack the resources and capacity to attend trade shows and industry marketplaces but could do more by sharing booths and entrance fees, and other expenses. Marketing networks have been used effectively around the world to achieve economies of scale but it requires an individual to organize and broker the networks, which could be done by a guild or collective or an independent network broker with costs shared by the members. In many states, the Manufacturing Extension Service has assumed the brokering role (VMEC, in Vermont).

USNet, a U.S. Department of Commerce-supported five-year program, partnered with 15 state manufacturing extension centers to help small companies form networks for market and product development, sharing resources, and learning.

Goal 3: EXPANDED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR INSPIRING AND DEVELOPING CREATIVE TALENT

The Region has the educational capacity to develop the talent it needs to compete in a innovation-based, creativity-driven economy but has not reached its potential. Programs for creative careers are scattered across the state in higher education but are not well connected to the Region's schools.

1. Encourage Schools in the Region to Expand Programs that Target Creative Occupations

Most of the programs in the Region for the arts and design are found at the secondary, not postsecondary level. Postsecondary education institutions include the arts broadly as part of their humanities or cultural programs, but few students are enrolled in occupational career programs aimed at applied arts that prepare students to work in a more technically oriented enterprises, such as graphic or industrial design and film and media production.

2. Increase Access to and Information about Career Paths and Opportunities in Creative Fields in Community Colleges and in Career and Technical Education

Information about careers in many of the creative occupations is scarce, either because the occupations

Goal 3 continued next page

are new and/or do not have standardized titles or documented skill sets or because they are heavily oriented toward freelancing and microenterprises and not included in official projected employment figures. By ensuring that career counselors and placement offices, workforce investment centers, and employment offices understand and know about emerging opportunities in creative occupations and work, they can help students make more informed choices.

3. Integrate Business and Entrepreneurial Skills into Creative Programs of Study

Programs in the arts or design in both secondary and postsecondary education rarely include the entrepreneurial skills students will need to work independently or in small enterprises. Those who do acquire business skills generally depend on the interests and experiences of their individual teachers who work it into the curriculum. Students in music, design, media—programs for creative occupations likely to result in freelancing, self-employment or entrepreneurship—need similar skills. Creative enterprises have unique features with respect to markets, business relationships, scale of operations, and risks that do not lend themselves to generic business courses. Some are offered to artists as non-credit workshops, but the school, with support from the state, could develop courses that address needs of creative enterprises.¹⁴

Western North Carolina integrates a Real Enterprise entrepreneurship program into its school-based arts and crafts and offers short business programs to existing artists, and Montana's State Arts Council offers Artrepreneurship in schools and as adult education.

4. Expand Workplace Learning and Apprenticeships in Creative Fields

A number of businesses and individual artists already offer apprenticeships, such as Simon Pearce. But these are for the most part, neither officially recognized nor credentialed. Apprenticeship opportunities could be expanded, formalized, and integrated into creative occupation career and technical education and community college programs. Because this would most likely be easier to develop in creative fields where employers are already accustomed to working with apprentices than in other sectors of the economy. To ensure credit, the idea would have to be pursued in cooperation with the Vermont Department of Education. As interest in the U.S. grows in the apprenticeship programs that are common across Europe, the Region could become a demonstration site for the creative economy.

5. Integrate the Arts and Design into Other Existing Educational Programs

A wide range of employers value creative skills in the workforce because they inspire creativity and innovation. Multidisciplinary courses that integrate creative with the sciences and humanities meet that goal and could also fulfill some STEM requirements. The combination of arts and sciences is already accepted at most major universities and is working its way down to the lower levels of education and,

Goal 3 continued next page

with support from the public schools, this Region could become a leader in that effort.

Now a common practice at major universities,¹⁵ interdisciplinary education is making its way into lower levels of education. For example, students at South Carolina's Beaufort Middle School are learning about cell structure from an artist who draws for scientific journals.

Goal 4: COMMUNITIES THAT DEVELOP, RESTORE, AND PROMOTE THEIR CREATIVE ASSETS

The Vermont Council on Rural Development initiated a Creative Communities Program but it has not yet had an impact on all communities. All should have the opportunity to further benefit from their heritage, creative businesses, and cultural strengths. Such a transformation is sometimes called Creative Placemaking.

1. Draw on State Resources to Conduct Creative Economy Assessments and Develop Community Based Plans for the Least Prosperous Towns and Villages

While much of the creative economy is concentrated in a relatively small number of towns and villages, many others places may have much more talent and creativity than they realize. Led perhaps by UVM's Center for Rural Development, faculty and graduate students in architecture, landscape design, and/or regional planning from nearby universities, UVM Extension, or community non-profits, teams would assess and catalogue the particular creative economy strengths on which a town or village has to build and recommend steps to build on them. These assessments and plans would involve a broad range of citizens. To develop and implement promising plans, the Region would have to help communities apply for and secure resources.

2. Develop Partnerships between Towns with Weak Economies and Towns with Strong, Vibrant Creative Economies

While the Region's larger towns, particularly those along popular tourist routes, have received both attention and investment, other towns have had to struggle to generate wealth, retain jobs, keep their young people, and benefit from the state brand. By forming a "sister town" relationship, the communities can learn from one another, provide advice and markets for each other, and possibly collaborate on economic activities. This idea could be tested by identifying and pairing two sets of interested towns or villages and assessing the impacts and value to each.

Goal 5: THE STATE OF VERMONT TAKES A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN TREATING THE CREATIVE ECONOMY AS A KEY ECONOMIC ASSET

Although this report focuses on the Region's Creative Economy, there is no doubt that the Region's ability

Goal 5 continued next page

to grow and strengthen its Creative Economy will be affected by how the state positions and supports the Creative Economy. Previous efforts in the state to raise the profile and the economic importance of the Creative Economy have met with mixed results. Just recently, the Vermont Arts Council initiated its Creative Network project, and this holds real promise for bringing the Creative Economy into sharper focus. But even here, the state (governor and legislature) needs to take a stronger role.

See box on page 106 for examples of other states that have positioned and supported their creative economies.

Goal 6: AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN THAT INCREASES THE CREATIVE ECONOMY'S VISIBILITY

If the Region wants to publicize and leverage its creative assets, it will have to find a way to distinguish itself both as a place to grow creative businesses, and as a destination for tourists hoping to take advantage of the Region's creative assets. The Region's public and private sector leadership will have to decide how to package its strengths to get the most from its overall creativity. Several things can be done in this regard.

1. Develop a Distinctive Regional Creative Identity and Communications Strategy

A formal strategy is needed that better reflects both the importance and particular strengths of the Creative Economy in the Region that can be used in marketing the Region. All parts of the Region need a cogent and compelling story that can impress new immigrants, investors, and tourists. Create a communication strategy for telling the creative economy "story" in the Region. Since the Valley News' monthly publication Enterprise has made an explicit commitment to covering creative individuals, enterprises, and the Creative Economy, it would be appropriate to work with the editor on the communication plan.

2. Create a Regional Web Portal and On-line Platform for the Region's Creative Economy

The ECVEDD has a website which houses the Creative Economy project, and it is a go-to source for information, contacts and materials. It will also include this final report and the Executive Summary that is proposed elsewhere in this document. Consideration should be given to modifying that site, or developing a new site, that is more of a marketing and promotional site similar to the sites of other regional Creative Economy projects and initiatives – e.g. the Capital Region's Alliance for the Creative Economy, the Creative Alliance of Milwaukee, and the Center for the Creative Economy in the Winston-Salem area of North Carolina.

3. Create a Series of Well-designed Maps to Illustrate Key Assets of the Region's Creative Economy

These maps are intended to make it easier for visitors and residents to find the Region's creative assets

Goal 6 continued next page

and sharpen the image and identity of the Region. Vermont's Farm-to Plate map is a good example of such a concept. It helps residents and visitors alike navigate their ways to the farm and table destinations, and tells a compelling story.

The Virginia Heritage Trail map, the Mississippi Blues Trail map, the Literary Trail maps, and the Ohio Murals Corridor map are all good examples. Something similar could be done in the Region, perhaps in partnership with the Connecticut River Byway program or Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing.

Goal 7: STRENGTHENED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Although the Region already is home to many professional and business associations that facilitate networking, the vast majority of working artists and creative professionals who responded to the survey and with whom we met indicated that more opportunities for person-to-person networking opportunities are high on their list of needs. They sometimes feel isolated in their work and expressed interest in further opportunities to network across disciplines, communities, and regions. Examples of town- or village-based networking events occur at places like the Artisan Park in Windsor, Chandler in Randolph, Thayer Academy in Bradford, and Common Gallery in South Royalton. Other examples are Tip Top Pottery's "Cork and Canvas," a combination of social networking and painting, and the weekly networking functions at the Great Hall in Springfield. Networking of this nature has become a high priority among creative regions across the country.

The Springfield Massachusetts Fine Arts Museum hosts a monthly networking event called Cocktails and Culture. The Denver Art Museum sponsors "Mixed Taste," a series of and short presentations, conversations, and connections on completely unrelated topics but creative topics. SPARK! is a networking event that has been in existence in the Berkshires for several years. As they arrive at the location, which changes each month, guests are asked to write a project or opportunity on their name cards they would like to talk about, which mixes social and business goals.

CREATIVE ECONOMY /

The enterprises, organizations and individuals whose products and services are rooted in artistic and creative content

