



# Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing Transformational Tourism, Events, and Regional Marketing Grant Program

The Transformational Tourism, Events, and Regional Marketing (T-TERM) Grant Program launched in May 2024, as part of the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing's strategic implementation of a federal funds award under the American Rescue Plan Act, administered through the Economic Development Administration. The grants were intended to increase the ability of regional or statewide organizations to attract visitors to Vermont, demonstrate the potential of tourism to transform the economic vitality of local communities, and enhance the visitor experience of travelers to Vermont. T-TERM projects were funded to support long-term economic recovery and sustainability of travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation in Vermont in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on these sectors.

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## Program Design and Use of Funds

The Transformational Tourism, Events, and Regional Marketing (T-TERM) grant program was designed to fund projects that could have long-term, transformational impacts on increasing out-of-state visitation. Priority was given to projects that included specific details on how the project would reach new and diverse, and historically underrepresented, communities of visitors.

Specific types of projects eligible for T-TERM funding included:

- **Destination Tourism Events:** Expansion of existing events or development of new events that would generate out-of-state attendance, increase visitor spending, and generate community revenue.
- **High Impact Marketing Projects:** Marketing campaigns targeting an out-of-state audience, including strategic approaches to attract more overnight visitors as well as asset procurement and creative development of video and photography for tourism promotion and media use.
- **Destination Development Projects:** Innovative approaches or concepts to enhance tourism experiences and drive visitor engagement, including initiatives that promote destination stewardship and/or sustainable practices, diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion programming/training, and development of culturally relevant and/or targeted programming to support visitation for communities that have traditionally been underserved or under-resourced.

Applicants for the T-TERM grants were encouraged to ensure that their projects were long-term, transformative investments in their community including, when applicable, creating assets and collateral that could be used beyond the grant period. Priority consideration was given to projects that would increase overnight and new out-of-state visitation and that specifically outlined how they would target diverse communities of visitors. Applicants were also encouraged to collaborate with partners to leverage additional financial investments when possible.

The Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing received an overwhelming response to the Request for Proposal, with 49 applications totaling over \$6 million in funding requested. Originally \$1.25 million was allocated to the grant program, with a maximum grant amount of \$150,000 per grantees. After this response, the Department received approval from EDA to increase the amount of overall funding available for the program to \$1.4 million to allow awards for more projects to be approved for funding.



Through this highly competitive bid process, 15 proposals were awarded funds. Projects were selected with statewide coverage in mind, as well as representation across types of organizations and approaches. Grant activities began in the late summer or early fall of 2024. All activities needed to be able to be completed, and all funds utilized, by September 1, 2025.

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## **Types of Award Recipients**

Awarded grant recipients represent four types of nonprofit organizations:

- Arts and Culture Organizations **(4)**
- Chambers of Commerce **(3)**
- Downtown or Regional Organizations **(5)**
- Outdoor Recreation Organizations **(3)**

## **Grant Project Categories**

Awarded grant projects fell into five primary categories:

- Arts and Culture Event, with promotional marketing **(1)**
- Development of Creative Assets and Targeted Marketing Campaigns **(5)**
- Outdoor Recreation and Promotion **(3)**
- Festivals and promotional marketing **(2)**
- Destination Development **(4)**



## Project Summary

Grant projects were distributed across the state, creating transformational tourism opportunities within many different communities.

All project activities are now complete, and grantees have shared final reporting on their work. Below is a summary of each project and outcomes.

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### Recipients by Region

Summaries for all 15 grant recipients are described below.

#### Northwest

Projects in this region have a direct impact in Chittenden, Grand Isle, Franklin, and Lamoille counties.

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#### Leahy Center for Lake Champlain Inc

**Award Amount:** \$117,800

**Grant Overview:** The Leahy Center for Lake Champlain (The ECHO Center) on the Burlington Waterfront created an expanded and immersive 'Champ' experience to celebrate Lake Champlain's legendary lake monster and to attract new visitors to the museum and the region. Funds were used to create augmented reality assets that are part of an immersive experience for visitors, as well as a range of creative assets highlighting the new exhibit to be used for marketing efforts.

**Key Outcomes:** The grantee was highly successful in creating an educational and interactive exhibit that will drive interest in the Center and assets to support marketing efforts. The project included the creation of Champ Design Studio, an interactive exhibit which invites visitors to create and color their own unique Champ and then watch it swim around a shared digital aquarium. Also created was a historical Champ timeline with minigames, which explore the cultural history of the Lake Champlain Monster. This timeline and the games will also be posted on ECHO's



Champ webpage for public access. Photo and video assets were created and used within the exhibit, and for social media and promotion.

Although the exhibit had only been open about a month at the close of the grant agreement, the ECHO Center had already seen positive signs in social media engagement and local and national media coverage that support the grant's goals. Upon opening, the exhibit was covered in six local media stories, and was featured in Scholastic Storyworks, which are story-based teaching tools distributed nationwide that reach approximately 600,000 students across the country. Social media engagement has also been successful, with a Champ Exhibit Reel Post resulting in 8.8K views, the Champ Exhibit Opening Announcement Social Media Post garnering 9.1K views, and the Champ Exhibit Sneak Peek receiving 12.7K views.

The ECHO Center anticipates that this new exhibit will continue to drive interest and out of state visitation, as well as new collaborations and projects. Local tourism partners, such as the Waterfront Diving Center, have already begun collaborating with the center to build related Champ-based tourism experiences (a Champ-themed dive map).

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## Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce

**Award Amount:** \$50,000

**Grant Overview:** The Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce (Hello Burlington) invested in the creative development of videography assets across two content pillars, Culinary Experiences and Outdoor Activities. These assets were utilized in a series of finished elements to be used in targeted advertising in the traditional markets of Montreal, Boston, and New York as well as to new direct flight markets. The assets will also be repurposed for other promotional activities in the future as well as being utilized by the State to increase overnight visitation.

**Key Outcomes:** The goals of this grant were achieved through the completion of four subject videos, highlighting the Community Sailing Center in Burlington, Ellison Estate Vineyard in Grand Isle, Santiago's Cuban Cuisine in Burlington, and Higher Ground in South Burlington. In addition to the subject videos, the grantee produced 15 second promotional edits for social media and a 30 second anthem video for paid advertising campaigns. The assets will also be repurposed for future applications and shared with the state for promotional efforts as well.

Although still in market at the close of the grant, the grantee saw positive early results from their video campaign using the developed assets. The video series garnered 780,989 views on YouTube and 832,769 views on



Meta platforms generating nearly 20,500 click throughs to the grantee's website. In particular, the grantee was able to use the assets to reach a new market in Charleston, South Carolina. Early results showed that state moving from #29 to #10 in Google analytics' rankings of the home states of visitors to their website.

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## Shelburne Museum

**Award Amount:** \$131,000

**Grant Overview:** Shelburne Museum planned to take 'Winter Lights' and transform it from an event serving primarily residents, to a true destination event to attract out-of-state visitors. To achieve this, Shelburne Museum implemented a robust, targeted marketing and public relations plan to attract visitors, and expanded the campus lighting and event programming to deepen the immersive experience of the event for participants.

**Key Outcomes:** As a result of investments made possible by the grant funding, attendance at Winter Lights in 2024 (the fourth year of the event) was the highest ever at 58,565, an increase of 18% over the prior year. Based on zip codes of ticket purchasers, 3,308 parties came from out of state, and the grantee can conservatively estimate that represents 8,425 visitors based on survey data showing the average party size to be 2.5 people. It is important to note that survey respondents reported that 33% of people in their parties were from out of state, which would boost this number even more, as many Vermont ticket purchasers were buying tickets for out-of-state visitors.

The grant enabled reach to out-of-state visitors by supporting robust digital marketing, public relations, and advertising in key drive-time markets. Earned media results were strong for Winter Lights with the event receiving 33 placements between the end of September and the end of December. Far-reaching USA Today and Yahoo included Winter Lights in things to do in Vermont. In the 90-day period from the end of October through the end of December 2024, the grantee saw an eye-popping reach on Facebook of 1.7 million, an increase of 50% over the same period in 2023. They served 579K impressions and reached 380K users who clicked 13K times to their web site.

The grant enabled Shelburne Museum to deliver an enhanced experience for guests with new features including the introduction of a lighted corridor linking the Museum to the village of Shelburne. Working with the Shelburne Business and Professional Association, they created a program branded 'Winter Lights X Shelburne.' Local shops, restaurants, and hotels were eager to participate, and a brochure was created with a map of



participating properties that was distributed to all businesses and at the admissions desk at the Museum. In all, 33 local businesses signed on to participate—17 retail shops, 10 restaurants, and 6 hotels. Each agreed to offer a special deal or discount for anyone who showed a Winter Lights ticket. The outreach to merchants together with the addition of lights along the Rte. 7 corridor created a sense of community around Winter Lights and many businesses got into the spirit with extra lights or lighting for the first time. The grantee will continue to actively foster this “holiday village” concept around Winter Lights as the local merchants clearly see the benefit and are eager to participate.

The T-TERM grant allowed the introduction of 18 evenings of live programming during Winter Lights for the first time. According to a survey of Winter Lights ticketholders, 77% rated the performers a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is the highest rating. This addition to Winter Lights was popular and the grantee plans to continue live entertainment offerings going forward.

The grantee reports that Winter Lights brings large, multi-generational groups and more people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds than typically seen during the regular season, and anecdotally they know that many of the attendees are not their traditional museum visitors. The Winter Lights program broadens and diversifies visitation to the area, and with the learnings and improvements from the grant, they expect that only to increase.

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## Stowe Area Association

**Award amount:** \$50,000

**Grant Overview:** The Stowe Area Association (SAA) launched two high-impact marketing projects to promote Stowe as an inclusive, four-season destination. This project created new photography and video assets that reflect SAA’s commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility while highlighting Stowe’s diverse activities throughout the year. A four-season campaign strategy was developed and launched to reach additional out-of-state markets.

### **Key Outcomes:**

Stowe Area Association created six high-quality commercials, featuring different seasons and diverse casts that represent Stowe and the state of Vermont as a four-season destination. They were successful in representing different demographics in each commercial, from families to couples of all ages and backgrounds. SAA now has a well-established



arsenal of high-quality marketing assets that showcase diversity and represent multiple seasons that can be used to promote the Stowe area for years to come.

Funding from the grant made it possible to market to a much wider range of designated market areas. The success of the campaign can be attributed to many of those new markets appearing in the top performing cities month to month. The grantee hit their benchmarks in all three tracking metrics, exceeding the click-through rate (CTR) for both display and native ads while achieving over a 99% completion rate on Connected TV ads (via streaming services), which was 4% above their intended goal. The campaign targeted over 20 designated market areas, including 12 new cities outside of the drive market to target new and diverse communities. In addition to seeing successful conversions within a larger drive market radius from Philadelphia and Washington DC, they saw consistent success throughout the campaign in Denver, Atlanta, Chicago and Detroit, all of which are new markets for Stowe. After the success of this expanded marketing, SAA hopes to continue to message to these new markets and attract new and diverse out-of-state visitors.

## Northeast Kingdom

Projects in this region have a direct impact in Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans counties.

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### Catamount Film & Arts

**Award Amount:** \$150,000

**Grant Overview:** Catamount Arts launched a 12-month destination marketing initiative to promote LGBTQIA+ Arts Programming and Events in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom focused on attracting out-of-state visitors and promoting inclusivity within the community. The project included a diverse range of events, collaboration with local lodging establishments to enhance visitor experience, and targeted marketing to reach out-of-state visitors.

**Key Outcomes:** This project successfully reached the underrepresented LGBTQIA+ community. By hosting events like LGBTQIA+ film festivals, poetry readings, art exhibitions and live performances, inclusive spaces were created that welcomed diverse voices. Feedback from attendees indicated that many felt specifically drawn to these events because of their focus on representation and storytelling. The project prioritized geographic diversity by ensuring that programming reached different communities



across the vast/rural Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. This strategic approach helped to distribute tourism benefits more evenly and showcased various regional attractions.

The grantee saw positive overall event attendance, with a significant portion of participants coming from states neighboring Vermont and beyond. The grantee estimates that 23% of total event attendance was from out-of-state visitors. This indicated the effectiveness of targeted marketing strategies aimed at regional audiences which highlighted the importance of inclusivity and engagement, leading to increased participation from communities that had previously been less represented in local tourism. In addition, partnerships with local organizations that serve diverse populations helped amplify outreach efforts, ensuring messages resonated more broadly.

Collaborating with local businesses not only enhanced messaging and the visitor experience but also fostered an environment of inclusivity. Local establishments reported an increase in revenue from out-of-state visitors, reinforcing the idea that cultivating an inclusive, diverse community can both create a positive impact on the community and support the local economy.

Despite challenges Catamount Arts encountered with decreasing Canadian visitation and stakeholder participation hesitancy due to federal policy changes in 2025, the project was successful in creating a vibrant, welcoming environment that not only elevated the Northeast Kingdom's appeal as a destination but also strengthened community ties and supported economic growth.

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## Newport City Renaissance Corporation

**Award Amount:** \$ 94,568.04

**Grant Overview:** The Newport City Renaissance Corporation launched a destination development initiative, the Newport Peddlers Project, to draw visitors from across New England and Quebec to Newport and Lake Memphremagog. The project aimed to create a unique, destination shopping experience utilizing transportable, custom 'peddler carts' to showcase local businesses around the downtown area, taking advantage of the scenic beauty of the nearby lake. A targeted marketing campaign supported the launch.

**Key Outcomes:** This project was designed to increase Newport's identity as a beautiful location for outside visitors, and their capacity to welcome those visitors with unique experience. The grantee built 13



“Memphremagog Pushcarts” using volunteer labor, and they have become a regular fixture on Main Street during public events. In support of these pushcarts, the grantee extended outside free Wi-Fi along the three-block main street. The effort to revitalize the Tasting Center (a local venue on Main Street that has struggled to attract visitors) using the Pushcarts was successful, and the grantee’s board of directors is making active plans to build on that success.

The project originally intended to strengthen visitation from Canada but had to pivot in the face of the strained relationship between the USA and Canada the emerged early in the grant. Despite this challenge, the grantee was able to pivot successfully to marketing to the lower New England area and saw a modest uptick in visitors from outside the state. They also created a suite of professionally produced videos to promote Newport that will be used immediately and for years to come. Further, they carried out a modest campaign that increased visibility in expressing their community’s respect and appreciation for our Canadian neighbors.

The loss of our Canadian visitors this year has had a significant negative impact on Main Street businesses, but the grantee intends to build on what they have learned moving forward, using the created videos to reach out to markets outside of Vermont with a focus on diverse communities.

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## Discover St. Johnsbury

**Award Amount:** \$65,000

**Grant Overview:** Discover St. Johnsbury (St. Johnsbury Works!) launched a promotional campaign to establish the region as an easy to reach and enjoyable destination for all kinds of visitation, with particular attention paid to promoting the walkable downtown, world-class performing arts series, and arts and culture experiences. A publicity and social media outreach campaign developed messaging, pitched to traditional media outlets and worked with social media content creators to cultivate media exposure and social media buzz around St. Johnsbury as an easy place to get to for a day or overnight trip.

**Key Outcomes:** The project marketing campaign was very successful, specifically the exposure that was garnered through several social media influencer visits, which is something the grantee will be able to build upon in the future to establish St. Johnsbury as a destination for the out-of-state visitors.

Significant improvements were noted in social media engagement and web traffic from target regions, corresponding to the New England metro



area in I-91 and I-93 drive markets, plus New York. Google Analytics reporting (for the project period corresponding with the marketing partner's active work) showed significant increases compared to the same period last year. Overall, web visitation was up 60% for all users in 2025 compared to 2024, with the highest active user regions being Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, New Hampshire, Virginia, and Connecticut. Additionally, Facebook followers increased by over 700, with the largest increases corresponding to the period of most active outreach, in spring 2025.

In addition to the image and video libraries produced through the project, which have already been utilized for social media marketing, website updates, and ad designs, the standout success was the influencer engagement. Social media influencer visits surpassed expectations with seven influencer visits during the project period and several additional interested parties in conversation for additional visits. This will have longstanding positive benefits as influencer relationships continue into the future.

## Central

Projects in this region have a direct impact in Addison, Washington, and Orange counties.

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### Mad Valley Sports

**Award Amount:** \$52,970

**Grant Overview:** Mad Valley Sports expanded their signature event, the Mad Marathon, to be inclusive of a wider audience, with a goal to increase overnight stays by runners and their families. The marathon was expanded to include a Kids Fun Run, a Mad Mile for teenagers, and a new category for adaptive athletes to participate in the Mad Half, 10K and 5K events. Videos promoting “the place before the race” and the stories of hearing-impaired guided runners and athletes on hand cycles were created to be used as part of a targeted promotional campaign.

**Key Outcomes:** With the grant supported marketing plan and campaigns, registration increased by over 42%. Runners joined the Mad Marathon events from 38 states and 4 countries which included Sweden, Belgium, the Virgin Islands and Canada. Significantly, many of these runners had never previously visited Vermont. These runners brought an average of 3 people with them to enjoy a weekend in the Mad River Valley which significantly increased revenue to the Valley and Vermont.



Mad Valley Sports was able to introduce new events, including Mad Half Marathon, 5K, 10K, and a kids fun run. The new 5K and 10K races increased family participation, including younger runners. The kid's run was very successful and inspired new runners down the road.

The grantee was also able to purchase three hand cycles, two on road bikes and one off-road bike, which are all now in use with adaptive athletes. These cycles will return to the Mad River Valley for all future Mad Marathons.

The Mad Marathon enjoyed extensive exposure with new Marathon Guide and Runzy advertising. MarathonGuide.com is the largest English-speaking marathon website in the world and Runzy.com is a global running online calendar that attracts more than 200,000 visitors per month. Advertising with these outlets was a key element in increasing participation in the event. The grantee also saw success with increased social media marketing, and marketing partnerships with Sugarbush and Vermont Adaptive. After seeing the incredible impact the use of these outlets and partners had on event participation, Mad Valley Sports plans utilize these partnerships and tactics in future years to continue to grow awareness of the Mad Marathon.

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## Montpelier Downtown Community Association

**Award Amount:** \$150,000

**Grant Overview:** The Montpelier Downtown Community Association (Montpelier Alive) Bridge Illumination Project is a destination development initiative that aimed to transform Montpelier's historic downtown, attracting visitors to the capital city from near and far. The project illuminated six key historic bridges that serve as gateways into and through Montpelier and established a new identity for the capital city as "The City of Bridges," through a paid marketing campaign.

**Key Outcomes:** Montpelier Alive was successful in illuminating six bridges downtown with permanent artistic lighting. The grant allowed a greater impact by addressing the entire cityscape at once, leading to a stronger effect and drawing more attention to Montpelier.

This project brought Montpelier into view for many out-of-state visitors. Montpelier and the City of Bridges project has achieved broad exposure to the New England region and beyond through advertising campaigns and social/digital media marketing strategies. As this project is intended to be a long-term endeavor, the grantee will continue to track visitation to understand the impact on out of state visitation. However, they have



begun to gain traction online as viewership has increased and tourist comments are clearly positive. Montpelier Alive will continue to host free events centered on the bridge illumination, such as walking tours and festivals, to engage audiences of all types, bringing people together from Vermont and beyond.

In addition to the bridge lighting, Montpelier Alive worked with a marketing company to help brand Montpelier as the City of Bridges and implemented a marketing strategy to attract attention to the project and the city as a whole. They obtained baseline data that will help them continue to evaluate the success of this project as an economic driver. Through anecdotes and testimonials, they have learned that the community has benefited immensely from the project, and that the project has attracted interest from beyond the Central Vermont region. They will continue to leverage this transformational project to bring out of state visitors to the capital city.

## South

Projects in this region have a direct impact in Rutland, Bennington, Windham and Windsor counties.

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### Come Alive Outside

**Award Amount:** \$79,000

**Grant Overview:** Come Alive Outside, Inc. aimed to elevate the Winterfest experience in Rutland into a major multi-day destination event to increase out-of-state attendance, improve visitor satisfaction, promote inclusivity, and boost the visitor economy of Rutland County. Some of the event enhancements included transforming the local snow carving event into the US Nationals Snow Sculpting State of Vermont qualifier and adding a Chili Cook-Off, expanding the Winterfest Drag Show, and adding a 'Rail Jam' freestyle snowboarding competition and a snowmobiling expo.

**Key Outcomes:** Winterfest reached an estimated 7,500 attendees in 2025, representing a 2,500-person increase from the prior year. Digital, social, and broadcast marketing delivered 1.95M impressions and high engagement, successfully raising awareness of Winterfest as a destination event. The campaign achieved measurable growth in out-of-state visitation. Marketing was initially concentrated in Boston, later expanding to a 100-mile radius around Rutland (including Saratoga and Albany) to capture regional markets. 30% of Winterfest attendees came from out of state, and were primarily from Massachusetts, New York and



New Jersey. These out-of-state visitors reported an average spend of \$1,025, generating more than \$350,000 in additional taxable spending during Winterfest week.

Along with attendance, Come Alive Outside was able to improve many other aspects of Winterfest with support of the grant program. Accessibility was strengthened through multilingual wayfinding signage and creation of more accessible events for individuals with mobility and sensory needs. Professional branding, a redesigned website, and new media assets elevated Winterfest's profile, aligning with the goal of enhancing the visitor experience. Partnerships with local businesses, designers, transportation providers, and influencers demonstrated strong collaboration, strengthening community capacity.

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## Okemo Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce

**Award Amount:** \$ 77,935.75

**Grant Overview:** The Okemo Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce (OVRCC) launched a marketing campaign with multichannel messaging incorporating social media, influencer storytelling and digital marketing to both increase overnight stays and out of state visitors, as well as reach new and diverse markets. The influencer and social media aspect were used to coordinate virtual and real familiarization tours of the region and promote regional events to illuminate the Okemo Valley brand. Regional photography assets were also generated as a foundation to marketing efforts.

**Key Outcomes:** Through this project, OVRCC was able to develop six distinct, well-defined campaign identities, which created marketing assets for future use. Each campaign—including the Holiday Express and the Tasty Treat Trail—now have established branding, content libraries, and performance benchmarks.

The grantee leveraged influencer partnerships to reach new and diverse markets beyond its traditional sphere, targeting populations in New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Marketing efforts successfully drove 61,000 people to the OVRCC website, and the project reached 842,462 people across Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, email, and YouTube channels. Campaign content generated 2.1 million total impressions throughout the grant period, indicating brand visibility across target audiences in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York markets. The influencer partnerships and earned media placements successfully expanded OVRCC's reach beyond its existing follower base. Collaborations with Visit New England and Yankee Magazine, combined



with influencer content from Connecticut-based creators, effectively penetrated target markets in ways organic reach alone could not have achieved.

The project generated a comprehensive library of professional photography, videography, and graphic assets that will serve OVRCC's marketing needs well beyond the grant period, a key challenge identified at the project's outset.

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## Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce

**Award Amount:** \$85,000

**Grant Overview:** Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce implemented a high impact marketing campaign to promote the unique attractions of the Shires region, especially its cultural diversity, to increase brand recognition with out-of-state visitors with a focus on BIPOC and other diverse communities. This project included the development of new photography and video assets, as well as a comprehensive marketing campaign and quantitative data collection.

**Key Outcomes:** Extensive photography sessions and video production took place throughout the campaign to create new assets that are evergreen and scalable for future tourism promotion. New graphic designs were developed and utilized across digital and social platforms to highlight the region's scenic beauty, vibrant towns, culinary moments, and inclusive experiences. The grantee was focused on inclusive storytelling, and BIPOC individuals were featured prominently in photo and video shoots, not as background but as central subjects. A pre-campaign focus group helped shape the tone, avoiding tokenism and centering cultural authenticity.

The marketing campaign successfully expanded awareness of The Shires across regional and out-of-state markets. Through over 1,000,000 digital impressions (via Facebook, Instagram, and Hearst Media placements), the campaign reached first-time visitors and key urban markets within 120 miles of Bennington. A custom StoryStudio article was also deployed on WCVB.com, increasing visibility among BIPOC travelers, foodies, and outdoor enthusiasts. The campaign was crafted to be culturally relevant, emotionally resonant, and inclusive of BIPOC and underrepresented voices. Through its "Reconnect in The Shires" theme, it successfully conveyed belonging, discovery, and warmth. While long-term impact data is still forthcoming, the groundwork for lasting influence has clearly been established.



To support marketing efforts with quantitative data, the grantee purchased and implemented Placer.ai software, which allows for real-time tracking of visitor trends. This tool will be used to observe initial trends and long-term performance. Full analysis and reporting will occur after the completion of a year-over-year comparison between Summer/Fall 2024 and Summer/Fall 2025, which will be shared with the Department of Tourism and Marketing and other partners.

## Statewide

The following projects have statewide impact.

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### Kelly S. Brush Foundation

**Award Amount:** \$62,750

**Grant Overview:** The Kelly Brush Foundation developed a multifaceted campaign to showcase adaptive-accessible mountain biking opportunities in Vermont to engage and inspire individuals with disabilities to enjoy the freedom of recreating in an inclusive space. This unique campaign positions Vermont to draw visitors who may have never realized all the state has to offer, as well as encouraging additional adaptive recreation development in Vermont.

**Key Outcomes:** This grant supported the creation of “The Best Day Ever,” a film about creating adaptive trails and opportunities for individuals with disabilities to access trails that they could not before. The film has been submitted to major film festivals throughout the country and is a truly inspirational piece of storytelling.

The grantee also created three high quality video advertisements to use in advertising Vermont as an exciting and inclusive destination for mountain bikers of all abilities. Promotion of the videos through website targeting, and on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram is ongoing in New England and New York and beyond.

The major success of this project is in increasing awareness to every one of the possibilities for people with disabilities, and in demonstrating that Vermont is a pioneer in adaptive mountain bike trail design and adaptation. This awareness will attract new visitors to Vermont, particularly the underserved population of individuals with disabilities



## Vermont Cheese Council

**Award Amount:** \$ 84,496.93

**Grant Overview:** The Vermont Cheese Council successfully evolved the Vermont Cheesemakers Festival into “Vermont Cheese Week” to attract visitors during a typical lull in out-of-state tourism after Labor Day and before ‘leaf-peeper’ season. This project looked to encourage statewide visitation and attract younger and more diverse out of state visitors through an advertising and social media campaign targeting these markets. New photography assets were also created to support marketing efforts.

**Key Outcomes:** Of the data available from Vermont Cheese Week in 2024, 51% of attendees were out-of-state visitors with one event welcoming visitors from seventeen different states and Canada. Paid social media advertising resulted in a reach of 396,332 to people from out-of-state. Radio advertising for Vermont Cheese Week 2024 and 2025 focused on the New York, Boston and Philadelphia metropolitan areas, and was effective at increasing traffic to the Vermont Cheese Week webpage 20% from 2024 to 2025. Anecdotally, the grantee personally met and spent time with multiple couples who came from NYC, Philadelphia, and Florida after hearing radio advertising or seeing social media advertising. The 2025 event took place after the close of the grant, but early signs indicate that the expanded marketing had a positive impact on attendance.

Marketing targeted younger and diverse communities by working with influencers from outside Vermont to target foodie, younger and diverse tourist audiences. All three influencers the grantee worked with are part of a younger demographic and based in the greater New England/Northeast area. Their visits and storytelling highlighted a broad spectrum of Vermont geographically, focusing on Central Vermont, Addison County and Franklin County cheesemakers.

The photography taken as part of this project was a big success, both for Cheese Week promotion and for Council members and cheesemakers. In addition to use in promotion of Cheese Week, one of the makers (Fat Sheep Farm) was already able to use their beautiful portrait with products for a story in the Boston Globe. The assets created will help cheese, farms, the working landscape, and good food to be used as levers to keep growing the Vermont brand and bring in more out-of-state visitors for years to come.



## Vermont Mountain Bike Association

**Award Amount:** \$150,000

**Grant Overview:** The Vermont Mountain Bike Association created a new destination-focused resource to encourage multi-day tourism for people interested in mountain biking. The digital and print-on-demand guide was launched with an aggressive media push and featured communities in all regions of Vermont that have mountain biking trails and facilities nearby that are welcoming to all abilities.

**Key Outcomes:** The Visitor's Guide to Mountain Biking in Vermont, a destination-focused resource to encourage multi-day tourism for people interested in mountain biking, is a rich resource that will have lasting benefit to Vermont. The guide features a diverse array of regions of Vermont that have mountain biking trails and facilities nearby that are welcoming to all abilities. Targeting out-of-state recreationalists, the guide simplifies the process of planning trips for individuals who wish to participate in mountain biking in Vermont.

Working with VMBA Chapters and colleagues throughout the state, the team created itineraries in Stowe, Woodstock, Manchester, the Mad River Valley, Waterbury, Killington, East Burke, Burlington, and Central Vermont. The completed itineraries capture the wide array of recreation, dining, lodging, and cultural opportunities in each of these regions. The digital-first approach provides an "always on" marketing campaign that can be shared by partner organizations and VMBA well into the future, and the content prioritizes a diversity of partners and experiences, supporting economic development and long-term tourism impact.

The grantee secured ambassador placements with six diverse and well connected influencers to promote the new guide. These influencers have a total combined audience of 354,800 Instagram followers, and 604,600 YouTube followers. Media visits were also conducted by Singletracks Magazine, Misspent Summers, and freelancer Alex Tzelnick who documented Vermont's communities and riding for forthcoming coverage.

The Visitor's Guide to Mountain Biking in Vermont will have enduring value as an updateable website and as PDF resources that can be shared with partners. Future coverage by media, influencers, and other industry partners will continue to drive traffic and visitors to Vermont.