

Annual Report / Local Content & Service, 2016

What I See



As we enter our 50th year, I'm reminded of the lofty purpose that first launched public television, of the deep roots that keep it grounded, and of the expanding aspirations that keep us looking to the future.

In 1966, amid a mounting space race, anti-war protests and race riots, the Carnegie Commission issued a report to the American people. A political cross-section, the 15 member Commission saw an educational and cultural opportunity to support democracy and the common good for the American public through the power and potential of visual media. The Commission wrote:

Public Television programming can deepen a sense of community in local life. It should show us our community as it really is. It should be a forum for debate and controversy. It should bring into the home meetings, now generally untelevised, where major public decisions are hammered out, and occasions where people of the community express their hopes, their protests, their enthusiasms, and their will. It should provide a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard.

Have things changed? In an age when each tweet, post or blog seems to be a sort of personal public media, is there any voice that remains “unheard?” Participation in new media platforms is abundant, but it may be harder than ever to be heard. Limited in space and time, and buried by volume, social media as a public media tool often leaves us without context, common ground, or a thoughtful discussion. In social media, your conversation is only as good your feed. The essential character missing in your feed and most of today's media: Trust and bridge-building discovery.

By virtue of its mission to include diverse points of view and to serve the community, public television offers an experience that fosters understanding. We bring balance to the volume of competing perspectives and bridge gaps in our understanding. We aren't motivated to sensationalize or divide communities for commercial or political purposes. Our efforts to be non-partisan and non-commercial also help Vermont PBS get the real story told – just as the Carnegie Commission envisioned five decades ago in a time of political controversy and social division.

We cultivate diverse points of view, and foster shared community values. Values like education, economic opportunity, health, the environment, and equality. In 2017 alone we are building a robust offering of videos, discussions and school curricula around diversity, the Lake Champlain watershed, our history, the arts, political milestones, early childhood education, local agriculture and local food, and equal economic and social opportunity. A commitment to diversity and community values make public television a good fit for Vermont.

Public television was established 50 years ago this September, based on the work of the Carnegie Commission. Signing the Public Broadcasting Act into law, President Lyndon Johnson said, "While we work every day to produce new goods and to create new wealth, we want most of all to enrich man's spirit. That is the purpose of this act."

The vision to enrich each and every one of our viewers for the sake of our communities and our democracy continues at Vermont PBS. And it is through the continuing participation of engaged and loyal viewers and members that we are building a shared vision of what public media can be.

Following is an overview of how we've engaged and connected with Vermonters throughout the year just past, and how we'll carry that momentum forward into the years to come.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Holly Groschner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Holly Groschner
President & CEO
Vermont PBS

Community Activities Benefitting Vermonters.

Perhaps it's a sign of success that so many of our community-focused activities continue, and grow, from year to year – connecting communities, building bridges to understanding, engaging Vermonters in civil discussion, and empowering our children with a love of learning.

This ability to build community and engender a sense of discovery – and to serve as Vermont's visual storyteller – is key to a vibrant future for Vermont PBS, and for Vermonters. Recent and ongoing endeavors helping us build on that legacy include:

- An expanding partnership with **Vermont Headstart**, to bolster its' mission of expanded early educational opportunities for Vermont's children. Thanks to a generous grant from XXXXX, we're working with the parents of preschoolers in less-advantaged areas, teaching them to use PBS children's educational programming as an effective learning tool, leading to greater success in school.
- As an expansion of that commitment, we've recently launched a 24/7 **Vermont PBS Kids** broadcast channel and web stream. Now Vermont kids, wherever they are, can watch educational PBS Kids programming with their parents, at times convenient for families. Research released last year by the U.S. Department of Education found kids learn best from video stories and games when they engage with adults in the learning process. The Vermont PBS Kids channel and web stream adds to an already rich store of kids learning resources through pbskids.org.
- Along with expanding access to quality PBS Kids content for Vermont kids, we're also expanding access to Vermont content for kids across the country. Over the past year, with support from **Shelburne Museum** and **National Life Group's "Life Changer of the Year"** program, we've been integrating Vermont PBS-produced content with the robust – and free – online resource for teachers and students, **PBS Learning Media**. The online venue hosts hundreds of thousands of educational resources – videos, lesson plans and more – used by teachers and homeschoolers across the country to supplement their curriculum. Those educational assets are now bolstered by informative segments from **Emerging Science, Poets & Their Craft, Outdoor Journal** and other Vermont PBS productions.
- For the 21st year, our **Vermont PBS Kids Writers Contest** inspired school children in kindergarten through third grade to write and illustrate their own original stories. The statewide contest promotes reading skills and creativity through hands-on, active learning. Winners from each grade were featured reading their stories on-air and online. They were also recognized at an awards ceremony at the Vermont PBS studio and received an invitation to read their stories aloud to family and friends at Storytime Parties held at locations across the state.
- Finding ways to engage with older students, 2017 has us heading toward our fourth straight year of broadcasting and webcasting the Vermont finals of the national **Poetry Out Loud** competition, in partnership with the Vermont Arts Council. Each year, approximately 5000 Vermont high school students participate in this statewide contest, inspired to learn and recite great works of poetry. The contest concludes as 10 finalists go head-to-head at the Vermont PBS studios, with the winner going on to the national competition. Great works of art delivered with passion... and a spotlight on some talented young Vermonters.

- The past year saw us unveil a second season of **InnoVaTe**, our online series that puts a spotlight on Vermont’s creative business community. The series has garnered praise and web followers, and is helping raise the profile of some leading-edge Vermont creators.
- 2016 produced a robust election year – both locally and nationally – that brought with it a heightened need for trustworthy information and civil discourse. Many Vermonters turned to their statewide public television station to find it, as Vermont PBS broadcast and webcast 10 debates and political forums that helped Vermonters decipher the facts and make informed decisions in both state and national elections. **PBS NewsHour, Washington Week, Frontline, PBS Presidential Debates** and national convention coverage kept Vermonters informed about election developments on the national stage.
- Bolstering special election coverage was our array of regularly scheduled local public affairs programs. **Vermont This Week, Ask the Governor, Report From Montpelier** and **Report From Washington** keep regular tabs on the state’s political news and give Vermonters a chance to speak directly with our elected officials in both Montpelier and Washington, D.C. Through programs like these, Vermonters can take advantage of opportunities for civic engagement that residents of many states never enjoy.
- For the second year in a row, our series **Discover Jazz on Vermont PBS** brought all the vibrancy and artistry of Burlington’s Discover Jazz Festival to the TV screen for all Vermonters to enjoy, as we recorded and broadcast eight live performances from the 2016 festival. From big names to up and coming artists, we were able to offer these stellar performances to a host of folks unable to attend the live events.

Community activities keep us connected.

Highlights of some of our community events in 2016.

- **Made Here:** Launched in the Fall of 2016, *Made Here* is our new initiative to give local films a home, and local filmmakers a voice, on Vermont’s public television station. We’re committed to bringing local storytelling to our airwaves, and to communities across the state. Our goal is simple – to find the best local stories of any length or subject and make them accessible to an eager regional audience. The *Made Here* series has already premiered films and programs from over 70 area filmmakers, with more amazing films coming in the door daily. These local stories have been embraced by viewers and have given local filmmakers a renewed sense of partnership with Vermont PBS.
- This year’s *PBS Arts Fall Festival* kicked off with a **Great Performances** special that looked behind the scenes at the making of the smash Broadway hit, *Hamilton*. Tapping into the play’s immense popularity, Vermont PBS brought a sneak peek of this program to Vermonters all over the state. Over a three-week period in October, we hosted six free screenings and discussions – in Norwich, Manchester, Rutland, Montpelier, Burlington and Derby Line – for thrilled audiences comprised of all ages.
Total attendance: 439 Hamilton devotees.

- Vermont lovers of British programming also share their passion each spring at our annual **Britcom Tea & Screening** events. It's a great opportunity for like-minded folks to feel a sense of community around something they love – and to give us their input regarding upcoming programming choices on *their* public television station.
2016 attendance: 328 loyal public television supporters.
- Our statewide **Community Cinema** series brings important films to communities across Vermont for free screenings and discussions of societal issues. Films from **Independent Lens, P.O.V., local filmmakers** and other sources give Vermonters a chance to connect on issues that are important to them and to feel engaged in their community.
See below for a list of Community Cinema highlights from 2016.
- As always, kids are core to our mission. Our ongoing **Vermont PBS Kids Film Series** brings PBS Kids programs to community libraries and other venues across the state, throughout the year. These events create fun, educational outings for Vermont families in many rural areas with limited social opportunities for children. Featured programs are tied to STEM, literacy, and social and emotional behavior – all explored through the prism of fun, entertaining characters from award-winning PBS Kids programs.
- Of particular note is our **Vermont PBS Kids Film Series in St. Johnsbury**, in partnership with Catamount Arts and Head Start. The monthly event draws large crowds from across Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.
Attendance in 2016 totaled 649 children.

Based on successes elsewhere, in October we launched an additional **Vermont PBS Kids Film Series** partnership with the Manchester Community Library in Manchester.

- Each October, Vermont PBS engages with a host of young Vermonters and their parents at our annual **Spooky Saturday Halloween Party**. The kids have a ball – many come dressed as their favorite PBS Kids character – and their parents seem to appreciate having a fun-filled, safe environment for celebrating Halloween. As we like to say, "It's not TOO spooky."
2016 attendance: 307 kids & their families; 17 volunteers, including 14 high school students.
- Another statewide outreach endeavor in 2016 revolved around our broadcast and free screenings and discussions of Ken Burns' latest film, *Jackie Robinson*. In addition to 11 community engagement events around the state, we profiled Sadie Chamberlain, an 8th grade student at Burke Middle School in Burke, Vt.. Sadie came in first out of 17,000 middle school students from across the country in Scholastic's/Major League Baseball's *Breaking Barriers National Essay Contest*. Our profile of Sadie received broadcast and webcast exposure.
Attendance at "Jackie Robinson" events totaled 2,068.
- For the first time, Vermont PBS partnered with the Vermont International Film Festival (VTIFF) to bring POV's *Seven Songs for a Long Life* to the annual festival in Burlington, with discussion led by POV's Executive Director Justine Nagan and film producer Lori Cheatle. As part of our presence at the festival, we also hosted a special, informative session for local filmmakers, *Ask a Film Producer*. Nagan and Cheatle provided sound advice, and a useful sounding board, for a large number of inquisitive filmmakers.
Attendance at the two events totaled 171.

Community Cinema highlights from 2016:

Topic: Criminal Justice

Attendance: 9 Events, 233 attendees in 8 Vermont communities

Topic: Diversity

Attendance: 65 events, 3,802 attendees in 19 Vermont communities.

Topic: Race

Attendance: 35 events, 2,940 attendees in 13 Vermont communities.

In total, 2016 saw us host over 135 community events, covering all 14 Vermont counties, and forming new partnerships with more than 50 different organizations. In all, these events allowed us to connect directly with roughly 8,000 engaged Vermonters!

Some important facts:

- Vermont PBS kids programming is available to nearly all Vermont preschool children for free, over the air and online – no cable access, transportation, or teachers required – and it’s been shown that preschool children who utilize PBS programs are better prepared for school by 30% in reading comprehension and math readiness skills.
- Vermont teachers, homeschoolers and students have free access to more than 100,000 curriculum-aligned digital resources through PBS LearningMedia.
- Tens of thousands of older Vermonters, many of whom can’t afford to participate in – or can’t physically reach – the arts by any other means, depend on Vermont PBS for information, education and entertainment. Last season alone, PBS offered nearly 600 hours of free arts and cultural programming – and initiatives such as *Hamilton’s America* brought the arts into communities across the state.
- Vermont PBS programming and community outreach helps provide a venue for civic discourse, and the basis for a civil society. Our live call-in programs provide Vermonters with direct access to legislators and decision makers, supporting the values inherent in a civil, informed electorate.
- For 14 consecutive years, PBS has been rated as the most trusted institution among nationally known organizations. Vermonters turn to Vermont PBS for quality, unbiased news, information and entertainment that they can’t find anywhere else.

We are Vermont’s visual storyteller – here to inspire, inform and connect Vermonters as only a visual public medium can.

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