VERMONT ACADEMY OF SCIENCE & ENGINEERING℠

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VASE Annual Report for 2025-26 (FY2026).

The Vermont Academy of Science and Engineering (VASE) had a very good year acting on its established initiatives such as its small equipment (SEQ) and hands-on science and technology (HOST) grant programs. New this year is a VASE collaborative with several Vermont Technological Companies to promote career shadowing opportunities for rural high school students (grades 9-12). Herein is a report of VASE events since the last annual report that was filed in 2024-25.

VASE is grateful for the support it received in FY26 from the Vermont Technology Council ($20,000), as well as the $3,500 it received from institutional donations. Modest membership dues ($75.00) implemented for the first time in July 2025 totaled $5100.00. I'm pleased to report that 100% of the Board supplemented their annual dues with donations that, when combined with donations from the general membership, totaled $14,000 in FY26.

The VASE Development Committee led a successful fundraising campaign this year. The committee secured up to $20K from each of three sponsors from within and outside the Academy plus an additional $7500.00 from individual donors. In addition, the committee received funding from the Waterwheel Foundation (~$3,000) and submitted a successful grant application to the Mergens Foundation in the amount of $5000 to help support VASE's mission in FY'27. Taken together, support from the VTC, the VASE membership, and the Development Committee's fundraising campaign and grantsmanship efforts raised more than $93,000.00, positioning VASE in good financial standing at the close of FY26.

The Academy's call for SEQ and HOST grants in the Fall of 2025 was once again met with higher demand than VASE funds could support. Altogether $21,787.00 in VASE funds ($7,651.00 SEQ and $14,136.00 HOST) were awarded to help propel K-12 STEM education throughout Vermont. The SEQ and HOST grant distributions met only one-third of the demand however, with total requests exceeding $21,000 and $42,000, respectively. Looking ahead, VASE will remain focused on fundraising efforts to support more SEQ and HOST grant disbursements in the future (perhaps at a higher funding level) and to secure continued salary support for VASE's Administrative Assistant whose duties are essential to VASE operations.

VASE recently launched a new collaborative that will provide high school students and their teachers from rural counties in VT with transportation costs so they can participate in career orientation days at several biotech companies in Chittenden County. To date, VASE has received applications from Hardwood Union HS (Duxbury, VT), the Hannaford Career Center (Middlebury, VT), Champlain Valley Union HS (Hinesburg, VT), and Bellows Free Academy (Fairfax, VT) requesting transportation for a cohort of up to 40 students per school to attend a career day at Agilent Technologies, Beta Technologies, GlobalFoundries, and/or OnLogic. Career orientation will involve exposing students to the production, design, and marketing operations of a corporate STEM environment, and meeting one-on-one with corporate personnel about future internship opportunities (ie. interested students may return to shadow company employees and gain a greater understanding of the work skills required for

a career in biotech). This initiative will also allow VASE to increase its impact on STEM education in Vermont while expanding its reach to rural area high schools.

VASE continues to have a presence at the Vermont STEM Fair held at Norwich University on Saturday March 14, 2026. VASE recognized three students at the fair with special awards – first place and $200.00 was awarded to Clay Nicholson, a senior at Champlain Valley Union High School for his project *Design and Evaluation of an FPGA Based Interconnect for More Energy Efficient Data Center Operation*; second place and $150.00 went to Elijah Renner, a senior at Thetford Academy for his work *Pathformer: Large Language Models for Automated Billing Code Assignment in Multi-Institutional Pathology Reports*; and honorable mention ($100.00) was awarded to Vinnie Douglas (7th grade) of the Fred Tuttle Middle School for his project, *The Photosynthesis Kill Switch: UV-B-Induced Photoinhibition of ATP Production*. For the first time, VASE also provided $2000.00 to the VT STEM Fair to support travel costs and registration fees for each of two VT students to attend the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) competition in Phoenix, AZ. Not surprisingly, both Clay and Elijah were the Vermont representatives at this year's ISEF competition, and both were ISEF awardees, securing $23,000.00 and $600.00 in scholarship funds, respectively. Clay will attend MIT this fall to study electrical engineering, and Elijah will begin his undergraduate career in the fall at Stanford.

VASE's Governance Committee re-visited the Academy's Charter and ByLaws this year, which hadn't been reviewed since 2015. The Academy continues to operate in accordance with the Charter and ByLaws, with one exception pertaining to the constituency of the Board (which should include the President and the President-Elect in an election year) and terms of service on the Board. The Board will adjust to accommodate these ByLaws moving forward. Otherwise, the proposed amendments to the Charter/Bylaws served to improve clarity, remove language no longer relevant to organizational operations, or provide updates to allow meetings of the Board to take place virtually on Zoom. All amendments were deliberated, voted upon, and ultimately accepted by a quorum of the VASE Board of Directors.

VASE also prepared a formal letter to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the governing body that sets federal regulations for research and federal financial assistance. The letter was written in response to proposed changes to Federal Grant Funding processes (OMB-2026-0034) which speak to 1) shifting final authority for peer review decisions from career scientists and program officers to senior political appointees, 2) requiring that each approved award "demonstrably advance the President's policy priorities," 3) allowing funding agencies to terminate active grants at any time and for any reason, 4) prohibiting federally funded collaborations with researchers in certain designated countries, 5) requiring pre-approval for attendance at scientific conferences, and 6) prohibiting the use of federal funds for journal publication costs. VASE's response to these alarming restrictions was spear-headed and written by the VASE Board of Advisors and subsequently circulated to the VASE membership. The letter is included as an addendum to this report.

The VASE Board of Directors, comprised of nine members, continues to meet once monthly via Zoom. In FY26, there was some movement on the Board, with two members rotating off the Board (former VASE President, Jeff Finkelstein and Member-at-Large, Rory Waterman) in exchange for two new additions to the Board (Jeff Marshall from UVM, and Noah Graham from Middlebury College). The Board includes the President, Treasurer, and an Outreach Coordinator, and six Members-at-Large (one chairs

the Development Committee and another the Governance Committee). The work of VASE's Administrative Assistant, the only paid position in the organization, is essential and includes the duties of a would-be Secretary.

VASE continues to host two in-person meetings for the general membership; the annual fall meeting and dinner at Middlebury College was held on November 5, 2025, with Hyun (Michel) Koo, DDS, Department of Bioengineering and Co-Director of the Center for Innovation & Precision Dentistry at UPenn's School of Dentistry as keynote speaker. At this meeting, Bill Poirier (UVM), Beverley Wemple (UVM), Jason Stumpf (UVM), Charles Irwin (UVM), and Roland and Lisa Groenveld (OnLogic) were inducted into the Academy and recognized for their lifelong contributions to STEM education and innovation in Vermont. The recipient of VASE's 2026 Outstanding Science Teacher of the Year, Ms. JoAnn Harvey of the Georgia Elementary School was also recognized with a plaque and a cash prize for her significant contributions to middle school STEM education. VASE hosted its spring meeting on May 6, 2026 at OnLogic in South Burlington, VT where our newest inductees (alongside VASE members Richard Page and Christopher Francklyn) delivered "flash talk" presentations in their areas of expertise. The fall and spring meetings were well attended by our science and engineering professionals, and they both brokered compelling discussions and fruitful liaisons.

In closing, VASE looks forward to another successful year ahead. With the continuing support of the VTC, membership dues and donations, active grantsmanship, and a funding campaign centered on building relationships with potential new sponsors, we expect VASE will continue to expand its impact throughout the state of Vermont. Attached please find VASE's budget for the current year and its projected budget for 2026-27 (FY'27).

Respectfully Submitted,

Grace Spatafora, PhD
President, Vermont Academy of Science and Engineering