



Written Statement of
Theatre Communications Group
Submitted May 24, 2017
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations | United States House of Representatives
The Importance of Federal Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

Laurie Baskin
Director of Research, Policy & Collective Action
Theatre Communications Group
520 Eighth Avenue, 24th Floor
New York, NY 10018
(212) 609-5900 ext. 228, lbaskin@tcg.org, www.tcg.org

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee, Theatre Communications Group—the national service organization for the American theatre—is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of our 521 not-for-profit member theatres across the country and the nearly 30 million audience members that the theatre community serves. **We urge you to support funding at \$155 million for the National Endowment for the Arts for FY18.**

The entire not-for-profit arts industry stimulates the economy, creates jobs, and attracts tourism dollars. The not-for-profit arts generate \$135.2 billion annually in economic activity, support 4.13 million jobs, and return \$22.3 billion in government revenue. Art museums, exhibits, and festivals combine with performances of theatre, dance, opera, and music to draw tourists and their consumer dollars to communities nationwide. Federal funding for the arts creates a significant return, generating nine dollars in matching funds for each federal dollar awarded, and is clearly an investment in the economic health of America. In an economy where corporate donations and foundation grants to the arts are diminished and increased ticket prices would undermine efforts to broaden and diversify audiences, these federal funds simply cannot be replaced. Maintaining the strength of the not-for-profit sector, along with the commercial sector, is vital to supporting the economic health of our nation.

Our country's not-for-profit theatres present new works and serve as catalysts for economic growth in their local communities. These theatres also nurture and provide artistic homes for the development of the current generation of acclaimed writers, actors, directors, and designers working in regional theatre, on Broadway, and in the film and television industries. Our theatres develop innovative educational activities and outreach programs, providing millions of young people, including "at-risk" youth, with important skills for the future by expanding their creativity and developing problem-solving, reasoning, and communication abilities—preparing today's students to become tomorrow's citizens. At the same time, theatres have become increasingly responsive to their communities, serving as healing forces in difficult times and producing work that reflects and celebrates the strength of our nation's diversity.

Here are some recent examples of NEA grants and their community impact:

The NEA has awarded a \$15,000 grant to **Touchstone Theatre** in Bethlehem, PA to support its Young Playwrights' Lab, bringing an eight-week playwriting residency to students in 3rd–12th grade. Through this grant, Touchstone partnered with 10 public schools in Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton to offer an afterschool residency, reaching approximately 150 students. Twice a week for eight weeks during 90-minute sessions, two professional teaching artists guide students through theatre, journaling exercises, and workshops. Students learn to create dialogue, refine plot, and enhance their editing ability. The supportive workshop environment helps students improve communication and literacy skills, build self-esteem, and develop creative voices. At the end of the Lab, a handful of student-written plays are selected and professionally produced in the annual Young Playwrights' Festival. All Young Playwrights' Lab student participants receive complimentary tickets to attend the Young Playwrights' Festival.

The **Coterie Theatre** in Kansas City, MO received a \$10,000 Art Works grant to support the development and production of *Imaginary Friends* by Laurie Brooks. The theatre commissioned Brooks to write a play for teens and families that is adapted from a short story by her brother, award-winning fantasy author Terry Brooks. The story centers on a young teen with a serious illness who must face a demon alone. In the play, playwright Brooks will further develop these themes and add a new work of fantasy to the canon of dramatic literature aimed at teens and pre-teens. *Imaginary Friends* will open on January 26, 2018 for 28 performances and is expected to reach over 5,800 students and educators as well as families and individuals. The Coterie has an established, diverse audience drawn from all demographic areas in a city that sits on the state line between Missouri and Kansas, with 50% of its audiences drawn from each side. As the theatre is centrally located, the play will reach urban, suburban, and rural communities alike. Approximately 200 in-school residencies will occur to prepare students for the play's topics. Interactive forums after each performance will further explore the play's themes

With a \$10,000 Art Works grant from the NEA, **Idaho Shakespeare Festival** was able to grow its Access Program and open the door to enjoy the professional theatre arts for over 30,000 people ages 5 to 100, many of whom would otherwise not have been able to attend. The program includes a tour—with over 100 performances for elementary students across the state of Idaho—that features an engaging new script, full set, costumes, and sound. Additionally, the program creates access for students of all ages, the deaf and hard-of-hearing, elderly on fixed income, at-risk youth, refugees, wounded veterans (as well as their families), and volunteer service providers to attend the Festival's mainstage season. By integrating those with special needs into its audience, Idaho Shakespeare Festival's Access Program has significantly broadened the demographic makeup and interest of those able to experience performances.



Perseverance Theatre, which produces theatre by and for the people of Alaska, received a \$10,000 Art Works grant from the NEA for the world premiere of *They Don't Talk Back*, by Frank Katasse of the Alaskan Tlingit tribe, directed by Randy Reinholz of the Choctaw tribe. The NEA's funding helps local communities across Alaska connect with their past and with one another. The play explores issues of family, coming of age, and honoring one's culture in the face of change as a young Tlingit man from Juneau returns to his family's village. Contemporary characters are paired with traditional Tlingit music and storytelling. The themes of the play are lifelong love, the impact of military service on veterans and their families, and the challenges of keeping family ties strong in the modern world. *They Don't Talk Back* will have 19 performances in Juneau and will have 9 more in Anchorage, reaching approximately 5,000 audience members across Alaska. Outreach activities will include four pay-what-you-can performances; a performance in honor of Alaska Legislative Appreciation Night; and discounted tickets for seniors, students, and military personnel.

These are only a few examples of the kinds of extraordinary programs supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. Indeed, the Endowment's Theatre Program is able to fund only 60% of the applications it receives, so 40% of applying theatres are turned away—in part because available funds are insufficient. Theatre Communications Group urges you to support a funding level of \$155 million for FY18 for the NEA; to maintain citizen access to the cultural, educational, and economic benefits of the arts; and to advance creativity and innovation in communities across the United States.

The arts infrastructure of the United States is critical to the nation's well-being and economic vitality. It is supported by a remarkable combination of government, business, foundation, and individual donors and represents a striking example of federal/state/private partnership. Federal support for the arts provides a measure of stability for arts programs nationwide and is critical at a time when other sources of funding are diminished. Further, the American public favors spending federal tax dollars in support of the arts.

The NEA is currently funded at \$150 million in the FY17 budget, and despite the President's proposal for a mid-year cut, the subcommittee and Congress approved a \$2 million increase. We thank the subcommittee for its leadership in supporting the work of the NEA. Please stand firm against the President's proposal to eliminate the NEA. We urge the subcommittee to fund the NEA at a level of \$155 million to preserve the important cultural programs reaching Americans across the country.

Thank you for considering this request.