



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 21, 2013

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**MetLife Foundation and Theatre Communications Group  
Announce Sixth Round Recipients of the A-ha! Program**

New York, NY – MetLife Foundation and Theatre Communications Group (TCG) announce the sixth round recipients of the **MetLife/TCG A-ha! Program: Think It, Do It**, which empowers TCG Member Theatres to take groundbreaking approaches to artistic, managerial, production and/or technological challenges and opportunities. Seven theatres were awarded grants totaling \$250,000 to either research and develop new ideas, or experiment and implement innovative concepts.

The **A-ha! Program** has two components: **Think It** grants (\$25,000), which give theatre professionals the time and space for research and development and **Do It** grants (\$50,000), which support the implementation and testing of new ideas. The projects supported by the **A-ha! Program** will not only impact the recipient theatres, but also serve as models for theatre and arts professionals across the country.

“Theatres are filled with creative and entrepreneurial minds that rarely have access to the risk capital needed to conceive and test out new ideas,” said Teresa Eyring, executive director of TCG. “This round of the **A-ha! Program** will empower innovative idea development and action in areas like student civic engagement, access to the arts in rural communities, and online platforms for artistry.”

“The recipients of the sixth round of the **A-ha! Program** exemplify MetLife Foundation’s commitment to building strong communities through the arts,” said Dennis White, president and CEO, MetLife Foundation. “We are proud to be part of this partnership with TCG and serve as a catalyst for the creativity and risk-taking that are essential to the growth of the not-for-profit theatre field.”

The 2013 **MetLife/TCG A-ha! Program** recipients are:

**THINK IT**

- **Bag&Baggage Productions (Hillsboro, OR)**

As the only professional performing arts organization within 60 miles of eight rural communities, Bag&Baggage Productions will determine how to connect their work to rural audiences in a more intentional way. Situated between urban/suburban Portland and the rural/agricultural west of Washington County, the organization will assess their nearby communities, examining issues such as the barriers to accessing performing arts services for residents of rural communities; population composition and effective marketing channels; and community interest in artistic programs both historically for the company and for future projects. This assessment will culminate in a series of performances within these local communities, and will include extensive feedback and conversation between the artists and the audiences they serve. It is the organization’s goal that through this process they will deepen their understanding of the specific issues surrounding rural communities, their access to live arts and how the company can intentionally connect their work to these audiences.

- **Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, MN)**

Through the use of interactive technologies, Children’s Theatre Company (CTC) will research, develop, and test radical new strategies for engaging artists and audiences in sustainable, collaborative community art-making. CTC seeks to explore using crowdsourcing models to create a community-wide dialogue that feeds the artistic process and results in startling new works of theatre. Through deep conversation with artists, young people who have participated in CTC activities and experts in the field of crowdsourcing technology and software development, CTC will research web platforms and other

technologies that support large-scale community conversation as well as ways to mitigate anticipated risks such as intellectual property and online safety for young people. This program will engage CTC in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship with their community; witness new energy, passion, and openness from their artists; and put surprising, wild, and brilliant new ideas onto their stages.

- **Golden Thread Productions (San Francisco, CA)**

To strengthen and deepen a 15-year history of collaboration and networking with Middle Eastern artists that has been strained in recent years due to the current political and economic climates, Golden Thread Productions will develop a network of artistic teams across the globe by co-creating one-minute performances in dialogue, captured on cell phones, and shared in a common virtual forum. Inspired by the usage of smartphones to capture, disseminate and editorialize on recent historic events in the Middle East, the company will utilize this technology to put theatre artists in the U.S. and various Middle Eastern countries in dialogue with each other. These performances will create forums for expression, dialogue and connection that are cost-effective, manageable opportunities for collaboration among otherwise disconnected artists and will support the creation of a thriving global network of artists that are vocal, active and creative towards building a sustainable, dynamic and responsive community.

- **National Black Theatre, Inc. (New York, NY)**

Building upon the online article series, “State of Black Theatre” on Howlround.com, National Black Theatre (NBT) will host a Think Tank in New York City for 20 leading theatre practitioners to create an action plan to address issues generated by the published articles. Through a series of online and in-person interactions, including a weekend-long summit at their facilities in Harlem, NBT will engage with the larger community of African American theatre artists. The goal of these interactions is to assess measurable ways to address issues surrounding institution building, playwright development, and financial stability as well as formulate initiatives that will generate change within Black institutions in America. This project will be heavily documented throughout the process and will allow NBT to build strong national partners, think strategically with others in the field, and reposition NBT as a national, leading voice.

## **DO IT**

- **Center Theatre Group (Los Angeles, CA)**

A key challenge facing Center Theatre Group (CTG) as well as regional theatres across the country is how to ensure the art of theatre remains vital and relevant amidst rapid changes in technology and cultural consumption. To attempt to address this issue, CTG will pilot a series of workshops and events at their under-utilized costume shop and warehouse located in East LA. This location, known as “The Shop”, will provide opportunities for residents from all walks of life to express their creativity, build community, and connect the craft of making theatre to daily life. Through an action group representative of the East LA community, CTG will design and evaluate the workshop programming, identify potential partners, and actively market to community leaders and residents. CTG's re-envisioning of The Shop will be an important contribution to the field-wide dialogue about the changing role of theatre by testing an inventive model of community programming that utilizes an existing organizational resource, explores what it means to be a good neighbor, and leverages the need for creativity and theatre-related skills in daily life.

- **The Playwrights' Center (Minneapolis, MN)**

As The Playwright's Center (PWC) seeks to evolve to meet the needs of living playwrights and their work, they have found the need to develop a pioneering and comprehensive set of web-based and mobile tools for playwrights to help artists at all levels access the resources they need to further their careers and enrich the field. To do this, PWC will reinvent its website with an eye toward usability; create a new membership section that features free resources as well as premium content for submission opportunities; and develop a pioneering mobile application that will enable playwrights to track their submissions and build an online profile that can be viewed by literary managers, artistic directors, and others who can help move their work from the page to the stage. The website upgrade and corresponding mobile application will increase the number of PWC members and deepen their level of engagement with PWC, making it easier for members to balance their time with their writing careers and take full advantage of all the available playwriting and production opportunities.

- **Young Playwrights' Theater (Washington, D.C.)**

In Detroit and Washington, D.C., young people frequently grow up presented with an image of their hometowns as centers of extreme poverty, high crime and violence, and with little recognition of their rich cultural histories. To counter this perception, Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT) will engage youth in these cities through a project called "My Art Is So Loud: The 524 Project". YPT will connect a classroom of D.C. students with a classroom of Detroit students using 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, such as online chats, photo sharing and live video conferencing, as they participate in a series of in-depth artistic workshops. Students will create art that embodies their neighborhoods in a variety of forms, and their work will be performed live in both cities and shared online, igniting national conversations about each city's past, present and future. The 524 Project will engage underrepresented youth who feel divorced from their city's artistic legacy and empower these students to use the arts as tools to spark and shape national conversations.

For more information about the program and previous recipients, visit:

[http://www.tcg.org/grants/aha/aha\\_recipients.cfm](http://www.tcg.org/grants/aha/aha_recipients.cfm). To read reports from the sixth round of recipients, visit: <http://www.tcgcircle.org/category/metlifetcg-a-ha-think-it/>.

The grant applications were reviewed by an independent national panel of theatre professionals comprised of **Mark Clements**, artistic director, Milwaukee Repertory Theater; **Rachel Grossman**, ring leader, dog & pony dc; **Charles Varin**, managing director, Denver Center Theatre Company; **Amanda Thietje White**, managing director, Mixed Blood Theatre; and **Stephanie Ybarra**, artistic associate, The Public Theater.

**MetLife Foundation** was established in 1976 to continue MetLife's long tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. We are committed to building a secure future for individuals and communities worldwide. Since it was established, MetLife Foundation has provided more than \$550 million in grants and \$100 million in program-related investments to nonprofit organizations. For more information, visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

For over 50 years, **Theatre Communications Group** (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre, has existed to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional not-for-profit American theatre. TCG's constituency has grown from a handful of groundbreaking theatres to nearly 700 member theatres and affiliate organizations and more than 12,000 individuals nationwide. TCG offers its members networking and knowledge-building opportunities through conferences, events, research and communications; awards grants, approximately \$2 million per year, to theatre companies and individual artists; advocates on the federal level; and serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute, connecting its constituents to the global theatre community. TCG is North America's largest independent publisher of dramatic literature, with 12 Pulitzer Prizes for Best Play on the TCG booklist. It also publishes the award-winning AMERICAN THEATRE magazine and ARTSEARCH®, the essential source for a career in the arts. In all of its endeavors, TCG seeks to increase the organizational efficiency of its member theatres, cultivate and celebrate the artistic talent and achievements of the field and promote a larger public understanding of, and appreciation for, the theatre. [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org).

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