



Written Statement of
Theatre Communications Group
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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)

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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 494 not-for-profit member theatres across the country and the 34 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 FY14.**

Indeed, 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 \$9.59 billion in federal income taxes. 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 many more dollars in matching funds for each federal dollar awarded, and is clearly an investment in the economic health of America. In an uncertain 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, will be vital to supporting the economic health of our nation.

Our country's not-for-profit 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. Our 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. 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 impact:

In order to create a lasting impact on the field and promote burgeoning playwrights, the **Alliance Theatre** based in Atlanta, GA received a \$40,000 Art Works grant to support the world premiere production of *Bike America* by Mike Lew, the winning play of their National Graduate Playwriting competition. Recounting the story of an unlikely athlete's journey by bicycle from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, this winning script captures the restlessness of a millennial generation that will go to any lengths to find a place that is always just out of reach. The National Graduate Playwriting Competition is a one-of-a-kind national competition that transitions student playwrights to the world of professional theatre, and has resulted in high profile partnerships for the Alliance Theatre with institutions and associations such as Fox Theatricals, the Kennedy Center, the Lark Theatre and the National New Play Network. In addition to programs that launch the careers of emerging writers, the Alliance annually reaches over 200,000 audience members and positively impacts over 70,000 students through their performances and in-school education programs.

With a \$10,000 Art Works grant from the NEA, **Cleveland Public Theatre (CPT)** will produce *Earth Plays*, the second work in The Elements cycle. The Elements is a series of four plays—each focused on a distinctive aspect of sustainability—and a fifth “bridge play” that integrates the work. The first play, *Water Ways*, was a multi-media work about the fragility of our great resource—water, through a collaboration between CPT and Oberlin College and Conservatory. For *Earth Plays*, nine creator/directors, twenty actors, three designers and an extensive production team have devised twelve short plays that illuminate our ever-changing relationship with the environment. These provocative works, which range from comedic to tragic-surreal to very real, immerse audiences in a theatrical experience that propels them out of their seats and moves them through the theatre space. Through 11 performances, *Earth Plays* reached an audience of 1,500. The other two plays in the cycle, *Air Waves and Fire*, are scheduled for the 2013-14 season.

An Art Works grant of \$35,000 from the NEA has allowed **Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT)**, one of this country's most prominent creators of new theatrical work for young audiences, to engage artistic organizations and audiences far beyond the Pacific Northwest with a production of *The Edge of Peace* by Suzan Zeder. This poignant story speaks to the impact of military service on family members, and is the culmination of a dramatic trilogy which explores the role of the deaf within American society. *The Edge of Peace* is a collaboration among artists from throughout the U.S. The initial workshop took place at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and was further developed and first produced at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin. SCT's Artistic Director, Linda Hartzell, included several MFA candidates from UT in public and school show performances which will reach approximately 1,350 patrons in Austin and another 7,425 children, teachers and parents in Seattle.



With a \$15,000 Art Works grant from the NEA, **Idaho Shakespeare Festival** was able to grow their Access Program and open the door for over 30,000 people ages 5 to 100 to enjoy the professional theatre arts, many of whom would not be able to attend otherwise. The program includes a tour with over 100 performances that includes an engaging new script with full set, costumes and sound to elementary students across the state of Idaho. 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 the broader audience, the Access Program has significantly broadened the demographic makeup and interest of those able to experience performances.

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 50% of the applications it receives, so 50% of the theatres are turned away because there aren't sufficient funds. Theatre Communications Group urges you to support a funding level of \$155 million for FY14 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 its economic vitality. It is supported by a remarkable combination of government, business, foundation and individual donors. It is 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 was funded at \$146 million in the FY13 budget which was reduced due to Sequestration; however, it has never recovered from a 40% budget cut in FY96 and its programs are still under-funded. 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.