



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 over 500 not-for-profit member theatres across the country and the approximately 44 million audience members that the theatre community serves. **We urge you to support funding at \$167.5 million for the National Endowment for the Arts for FY20.**

The entire not-for-profit arts industry stimulates the economy, creates jobs, and attracts tourism dollars. The not-for-profit arts generate \$166.3 billion annually in economic activity, support 4.6 million jobs, and return \$27.5 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 and future generations 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:**

**Cleveland Public Theatre** in Ohio has received a \$10,000 ArtWorks grant from the NEA to support the development and premiere of *The Mask of Flight*. The play is inspired by the ways we cover and uncover ourselves. The ensemble will investigate the theme of masking through various examples of veiling – for instance, how we veil racism, how politically correct language can be a veil, how women cover for modesty and religious reasons vs. being forced to veil, how someone may veil their gender identity – and how these situations relate and intersect. *The Mask of Flight* will be a collage of short pieces springing from various works created for Cleveland Public Theatre’s annual community events including Station Hope, a celebration of Cleveland’s role in the Underground Railroad and an exploration of contemporary social justice issues. Annually, Cleveland Public Theatre engages over 800 children and families in public housing, teens from families defined as low-income, and formerly homeless men in recovery. These participants create original productions that are attended by 4,000 community members.

**Park Square Theatre** in Minnesota has received a \$10,000 Challenge America grant from the NEA to support the residency of Theatre Mu and their world premiere commission of *The Korean Drama Addict’s Guide to Losing Your Virginity* by May Lee-Yang and to support community outreach programming. Theatre Mu engaged the local audience with talk-back discussions after performances and other engagement activities related to contemporary Korean and Hmong culture. Pay As You Are and other discounted tickets were offered for the entire three week run in order to make the performances as accessible as possible.

**Perseverance Theatre** in Alaska has received a \$15,000 ArtWorks grant from the NEA for the world premiere of *Whale Song*, by Cathy Tagnak Rexford (Iñupiaq). The play explores the love of Iñupiaq people for the bowhead whale, examining myth, gender roles, and the balance of duty to oneself versus duty to others. Featuring a primarily Alaska Native cast, *Whale Song* is part of Perseverance Theatre’s 40th anniversary season. The theatre will offer Pay-As-You-Can previews and performances, student matinees, and a post-show discussion. Cathy Tagnak Rexford (Iñupiaq) is a member of The Playwright’s Circle, a group of 15 playwrights with the goal of developing diverse, new Alaskan plays and representing voices that were previously unheard. Perseverance Theatre serves over 17,000 artists, students, and audiences annually.



**Portland Stage Company** in Maine has received a \$15,000 ArtWorks grant from the NEA to support the world premiere of *Babette's Feast*, conceived and developed by Abbie Killeen, written by Rose Courtney, and adapted from the short story by Isak Dinesen. *Babette's Feast* tells the story of a refugee who transforms a closed religious community by sacrificing all she has in order to throw a lavish dinner party. The three-week run included 3 Pay-What-You-Can performances. Portland Stage also offered student matinees followed by talk back discussions; the theatre serves more than 7,000 students annually through its Student Matinee Program. Portland Stage Literacy and Education departments created *Babette's Feast Playnotes*— an extensive resource guide for students, teachers, and other audience members who wished to delve more deeply into the play. *Babette's Feast* was also a part of the Curtain Call Discussion Series, in which audience members had the opportunity to talk about the production with the performers. Throughout the run of the play, Portland Stage partnered with Wayside Food Program to run a food drive, with the goal of reaching 500 pounds of food.

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 \$167.5 million for FY20 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.

Despite the President's proposal to eliminate the agency, the subcommittee and Congress approved a \$2 million increase in FY19, which accounts for the NEA's current funding at \$155 million in the FY19 budget. We thank the subcommittee for its leadership in supporting the work of the NEA. Please stand firm against the President's second proposal to eliminate the NEA. We urge the subcommittee to fund the NEA at a level of \$167.5 million to preserve the important cultural programs reaching Americans across the country.

Thank you for considering this request.

*\*Revised May 13, 2019*