



**Written Testimony in Support of FY 2014 Appropriations
For the National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by Sheila M. Smith, Executive Director, Minnesota Citizens for the Arts
House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
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Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, representing 1400 arts organizations and 38,000 artists and their audiences are pleased to submit written testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior supporting FY2014 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at the level of \$154.466 million. MCA is a member of Americans for the Arts.

Thank you to Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran and members for the opportunity to provide public comment on the budget request for the NEA, on behalf of arts and culture across the country. I would like to particularly thank Rep. Betty McCollum of St. Paul, who has been a life long advocate for and participant in the arts in her home state of Minnesota.

I flew half way across the country to be here today because I think it is so important to support the work of the National Endowment for the Arts, which has had a tremendous impact across the country and particularly in my home state.

I would like to talk about how the NEA serves as a catalyst to increase access to the arts for all Americans.

Several years ago the citizens of Minnesota took the rather extraordinary step of approving a ballot measure to add an amendment to our state constitution to create dedicated funding for the arts and the environment. By a wide popular vote Minnesotans voted to tax themselves to increase support for the arts because they agreed that the arts bring benefits to their quality of life and economy. We are now the only state in the country to have the arts as part of our constitution (although John Adams, when he wrote the Massachusetts state constitution, included the arts as one of the subject areas required to be provided as part of the state's educational system). There are many polls that suggest that Americans support arts funding, but in Minnesota we took it to the ballot box and received a very strong yes.

The arts hold a special place in the hearts of Minnesotans whether they live in the heart of the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, or in any town or rural area from Ada to Zumbrota. The passage of what is now called the "Legacy Amendment" has led to an extraordinary flowering of artistic activity that is bringing together people from all walks of life to share in creative activities and the bettering of their communities through arts.

The National Endowment for the Arts set the stage for this extraordinary action by investing in and encouraging the arts to flourish in every state through its highly effective grant programs. The NEA serves as a catalyst for additional state and local investments in the arts such as the bi-partisan Legacy Amendment by providing examples to the states of highly effective creative and cultural projects as well as organizations that promote access to and involvement in the arts for all citizens.

Economists are increasingly aware that when citizens gather together to create or perform the arts, they too are a catalyst for economic activity that brings people together to revitalize neighborhoods, energize businesses, and bring energy to our economy. Through the relatively small investments made by the NEA, Congress is making possible extraordinary things all across the country, including seeding new jobs in the creative economy. In Minnesota alone, the arts have over a billion dollar economic impact through the entrepreneurial work of artists starting small businesses, arts organizations producing and presenting the arts and the audiences who are drawn to and who participate in the wonderful work they create. We know through other studies that Minnesota's artists themselves are fully engaged in their communities, volunteering and voting at higher rates than other citizens, contributing their passions and their creativity to their neighborhoods and to their towns. Minnesota has 1400 nonprofit arts organizations who serve nearly 13 million attendees each year – more than twice the population of the state. This story is repeated in state after state where the NEA has had an impact.

As a child I was lucky to have parents who would take me on Sunday after church for "Culture Day" to all of the wonderful cultural organizations in our area – the Walker Arts Center, considered one of the premier modern art museums in the world, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which makes masterpieces from cultures across the globe available to all for free, and many other nonprofit arts organizations in St. Paul that opened my eyes to the beauty that was possible in the world and inspires me in my work even today. Even back then (and I'm not going to say how far back this was) these organizations were supported and helped along by the National Endowment for the Arts in their work to make the arts accessible to all Americans, regardless of where they live and what their resources, because the arts give us access to our cultural heritage and to ways of thinking that make us more engaged and better citizens. Because of the NEA's support these organizations are serving even more people now than they were then, and even reaching out to the rest of the world through new arts access points on the web.

I'd like to talk about two examples of how the NEA has been a catalyst for creativity and access to the arts across the country through a grants to arts organizations in Minnesota.

In the late 1990s the National Endowment for the Arts provided seed money for a program at the American Composer's Forum in St. Paul that, although it's based in Minnesota, has had a wide-ranging impact across the country on the music available to kids picking up their instruments for the first time to play in middle school bands. I know if you're a parent you may have had the privilege of attending middle school band concerts. It can be tough going, and not just because the instruments are making squawking noises as kids learn to

control the sounds, but particularly because the music itself can be so uninteresting and sometimes just bad.

In 1997 the NEA funded a program at the American Composer's Forum called "BandQuest" – a program that commissions simple but creative music for middle school bands. It was – and is – a desperate need for this important age group. Prominent living American composers – at least four of whom have won Pulitzer Prizes – are paired with middle school bands around the country to enrich their educational experience with new, challenging and interesting music. Imagine – Pulitzer Prize winning composers in residence in a middle school – writing great music that is inspired by the students themselves – their lives, their interests, and their town. The program's multiple goals include creating new high quality music that will keep the kids interested in learning, creating music that can be shared with other schools across the country, and providing musical experiences for kids that will inspire them to become life-long learners in the arts. The new music created by the modest NEA grant then became available to teachers and students all across the country to play with their own kids.

Minnesota composer Stephen Paulus, who lives on Summit Avenue in St Paul just down the road from Congresswoman McCollum and who was one of the founders of the American Composers Forum, was one of the earliest participants in the program creating a piece for BandQuest called *Mosaic*.

Another participant in BandQuest, Michael Colgrass, a Pulitzer Prize winning composer, created a piece called *Old Churches*, which took Gregorian chants and bells as its inspiration and has since become one of the most popular musical scores for kids in middle schools to play across the country. In fact, since his work with the project he's been inspired to go on to write six more pieces for middle school kids, so yet again with this project the NEA grant has acted as a catalyst to leverage additional investments and creativity in American schools.

The National Endowment for the Arts, by continuing its rather modest investment in this program for the past several years, has increased exponentially the challenging and interesting music available to middle school students everywhere who are just learning to play their instruments. In addition, the NEA grant was a catalyst to additional private investment totaling three times the size of the grant, and the series continues to this day as one of the leading sources of great music for kids by living composers.

Over 500,000 kids in every state, including Idaho, Virginia and Oklahoma have benefitted from the ripple effect of the NEA's investment, creating a lasting impact and inspiring kids across the country to think of music as relevant to their own lives.

As one participating student said, "I have a deep respect for (the composer). I play bassoon, and without this song my life would not be complete. Thank you." That – from a 12 year old.

Another program funded by the NEA in St Paul has also served as a catalyst for growing entrepreneurship and small businesses in the arts across the country. Springboard for the Arts is an economic development agency run by and for artists, based in St. Paul.

Springboard creates programs that help artists make both a living and a life and programs that help communities tap into the resources artists can provide. Their programs include business skills and entrepreneurship training for artists and programs that pair artists with small businesses to develop creative ways of attracting people and dollars.

Springboard creates these innovative programs from their home in Minnesota, and in recent years support from the NEA has helped them create models and toolkits so that these training programs can be shared with communities all across the country. The NEA has again been a catalyst, helping to scale up Springboard's work to a national level and allowing communities of all sizes (and particularly rural communities) to get access to the programs and services that help artists contribute more to the economy and to their communities.

For example, because of the NEA's support, Springboard has been able to provide training in entrepreneurship for artists in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where artists are leading the way in the redevelopment of a business district devastated by the historic 2008 flood.

Because many artists are small business entrepreneurs, they make good things happen at the local level. The creation of art has real economic spillover effects — sales revenue, advertising revenue, and jobs. Improving income for individual artists through training and other opportunities allows them to better join the economic mainstream. As new markets develop around the arts, businesses benefit, too. And because artists and art projects make places more attractive to shoppers, entrepreneurs and homebuyers, the larger community benefits.

The National Endowment for the Arts has an important role as a catalyst in promoting opportunities for Americans to participate in the arts, spurring employment for artists and for encouraging economic activity made possible by the arts. For this reason I would like to conclude by reiterating our request that the Subcommittee fund the National Endowment for the Arts at the President's request of \$154.466 million.

We are concerned that the nonprofit arts and the small businesses they often work with will be negatively impacted by cuts just as they are starting to get back on their feet after the recession. The dollars provided by the National Endowment for the Arts draw other private and public investments that make our local economies thrive. Please support the NEA's request.