



Written Statement of  
Theatre Communications Group  
Submitted March 12, 2008 to  
The House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee  
On the Importance of Increased 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 467 not-for-profit member theatres across the country and the 30.5 million audience members that the theatre community serves. **We urge you to support an increased appropriation of \$176 million for the National Endowment for the Arts.**

Indeed, the entire not-for-profit arts industry stimulates the economy, creates jobs and attracts tourism dollars. The not-for-profit arts generate \$166.2 billion annually in economic activity, support 5.7 million jobs and return \$12.6 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 of 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 examples of NEA funding impact:**

***From the NEA's Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth Program:***

**Seattle Repertory Theatre** in Seattle, WA received \$75,000 to partner with The Seattle Children's Theatre, The Seattle Shakespeare Company and Book-It Repertory Theatre in support of Bringing Theater Into the Classroom, BTiC. Presented as a five-day intensive summer workshop, BTiC creates an engaging and fun learning community, as Classroom Teachers and Teaching Artists work together to integrate drama into all curriculum areas. During the following school year, BTiC faculty members visit each participant's classroom to provide an additional week of support and consultation. BTiC also welcomes a growing and enthusiastic alumni contingent to each summer workshop.

***From the NEA's Access to Artistic Excellence Program:***

**Double Edge Theatre Productions, Inc.** in Ashfield, MA received \$10,000 to support Stacy Klein and the Double Edge Ensemble to co-create *The Disappearance* with Mexican-Jewish author Ilan Stavans, with a premiere in October 2008 at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. The performance, based on Stavans' short story about the Belgian actor Maarten Soetendrop, addresses anti-Semitism, collective guilt, and identity. *The Disappearance* is a milestone in the theatre's 25-year history, a unique exchange between writer and ensemble, and incorporates puppetry, film, and an original score by the legendary Latin jazz composer Paquito D'Rivera.

**Arizona Theatre Company** in Tuscan, AZ received \$25,000 to present Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning literary masterpiece – *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This powerful drama adapted for the stage by Christopher Sergel will kick off *America Plays! Celebrating Great American Stories* – ATC's multi-year programming initiative bringing classic American works to Arizona stages. Designed to

emphasize the diversity of the American experience and remind us of the strength that often accompanies challenging times, the project includes expanded education programming and strengthens community partnerships, reaching an audience of 30,000 in one year, including students from under-served rural communities throughout Arizona.

**Contemporary American Theater Festival** in Shepherdstown, WV, received \$15,000 to present a newly developed production of *Stick Fly* by African American playwright, Lydia Diamond. In a play about class, family and race relations, audiences will identify with the difficulty of keeping the family unit together while dealing with the pressures of diversity today. Contemporary American Theater Festival's target population is primarily from the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia, the Washington, DC/Baltimore area, with patrons attending from 32 different states. Educational outreach opportunities include an Under the Tent Humanities lecture series with the playwright and a guest lecturer, as well as talk-backs following performances.

**The Seattle Children's Theatre** in Seattle, WA received \$30,000 to fund the world-premiere production of the adaptation of Richard Scarry's book, *What Do People Do All Day?* adapted by Kevin Kling with music and lyrics by Kling and Michael Koerner. With a nod to vaudeville, the Pickle Family Circus/Cirque de Soleil, and the slapstick comedy of Charlie Chaplin, Seattle Children's Theatre's production will use puppetry, original costumes, lively music and non-linear elements to bring Richard Scarry's polite, observant, anthropomorphic characters to life on the stage. The world of Busytown is complete with jobs, vehicles, and places to go. The characters' adventures and problems will unfold on the stage to the delight of audiences young and old.

***From the NEA's Shakespeare for a New Generation Program:***

**Kentucky Shakespeare Festival** in Louisville, KY received \$25,000 to tour a production of *Julius Caesar* that will explore our human ability to make a choice and act upon it, and the more difficult task of confronting the consequences. The production will tour at twenty middle and high schools throughout Kentucky and Indiana, reaching an estimated 7,000 students and 350 teachers. Education activities explore the ideas of affirmation, communication and cooperation in the students' daily lives, while helping them to discover not only how conflicts arise, but how to resolve them. Using text from *Julius Caesar*, students will act out a conflict and discuss how the outcome might have been different if the characters were able to communicate or cooperate.



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These are only a few examples of the kinds of extraordinary programs supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. Indeed, the Endowment's Theater Program is able to fund only half of the applications it receives, so the other 50% of the theatres are turned away because there aren't sufficient funds. Theatre Communications Group urges you to support increased funding for FY09 for the NEA, so that more not-for-profit professional arts organizations can continue to educate and entertain audiences, train the next generation of artists, and generate local revenue nationwide.

The American public favors spending federal tax dollars in support of the arts. Today, federal arts funding enjoys solid bipartisan support in the House and Senate. The NEA is funded at \$144.7 million in the current fiscal year (FY08); it has never recovered from a 40% budget cut in FY96 and its programs are still under-funded. It has had small incremental increases in the past seven years and a more substantial increase for FY08. A total appropriation of \$176 million for FY09 would represent an increase of \$31.3 million, restoring the agency to its 1992 level of \$176 million, which was then equal to 69 cents per capita. In 2008, sixteen years later, the federal government spends only 51 cents per capita. If adjusted for inflation, this per capita spending cut would be even deeper.

Thank you for considering this request.

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