



**Written Testimony in Support of FY07 Appropriations for the
National Endowment for the Arts
Submitted by Robert L. Lynch, President and CEO of Americans for the Arts
House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior**

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Americans for the Arts is pleased to submit written testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior supporting FY07 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at a restored level of \$170 million. At the end of this statement we will also touch on a special one-time request for \$5 million for the NEA in the next Gulf Coast emergency package, separate from its regular FY07 funding.

The requested FY07 funding of \$170 million would:

- restore the NEA's ability to perform its core mission of supporting the creation, preservation, and presentation of the arts in America;
- strengthen the *Challenge America* program, which uses the arts to enhance America's communities through improved access to the arts for all Americans; and
- cover increased administrative and grant-making costs.

My statement focuses on the **core programs of the NEA**: *Access to Artistic Excellence*, *Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth*, and *Challenge America: Reaching Every Community*. I would like especially to explain how local arts agencies use these programs to serve their communities.

Local arts agencies are Americans for the Arts' key constituency, and advancing full and affordable access to the arts are at the heart of their mission. Local arts agencies meet community needs by using the arts to address social, educational, and economic development issues as well as by supporting "art for art's sake." They make grants, provide services to artists and arts organizations, and present arts programming to the public. Typically, local arts agencies lead community cultural planning – a community-inclusive process of assessing local cultural needs and mapping a plan of implementation. NEA leadership has played a pivotal role in creating and sustaining local arts agencies, which have grown in number from 500 in 1965, when the NEA was established, to 4,000 today. Three quarters of all existing local arts agencies are private non-profit organizations, of which many are designated official arts agencies for their communities and entrusted with granting government funds. The remaining quarter are government agencies.

Turning to the core programs of the NEA:

First, the *Access to Artistic Excellence* core program of the NEA helps local arts agencies build infrastructure, pool resources, and coordinate local partnerships and coalitions, with the aim of extending the reach of artists and arts organizations to new audiences. A few examples of recent FY06 grants include:

- The Arts Council in Stuart, FL, received a grant to support a needs assessment and cultural inventory as preliminary steps toward the development of a cultural plan, including a comprehensive catalogue of the county's cultural assets.
- In Broward County, FL, a grant from the NEA supports an e-marketing program, a regional shared calendar database, and electronic advertisements for cultural events and organizations in a multi-county area.
- South Dakotans for the Arts received a grant to support the Prairie Arts Management Institute, which provides intensive training for staff of small and mid-sized arts organizations from the "prairie states" of Middle America.

The second of the NEA's core programs is *Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth*. To cite the NEA's applications guidelines, this program "achieves its support of arts education through a focus on children, teachers, artists, arts organizations, and school leadership that will model best practices in arts education, disseminate those practices to the field, and build the case for quality arts education across the country. Critical to this strategy is the rigorous application of national, state, or local arts education standards."

Grants to local arts agencies from the *Learning in the Arts* core program typically support collaborations between teaching artists, local arts institutions, and providers of educational services to students in school and after-school. These grants play to the strengths of local arts agencies, which often maintain rosters of teaching artists and facilitate multi-party partnerships.

Recent examples include:

- The Fulton County Arts Council in Atlanta, GA, received a grant for after-school visual arts workshops and open studios for stained glass, clay, furniture making, glass blowing, and printmaking. The teenage participants are referred by the Fulton County Juvenile Court probation officer or a judge.
- In Lafayette, LA, the Acadiana Arts Council received a grant for an after-school and summer program featuring workshops in the visual and performing arts, emphasizing job-building skills. Participants work with artists on projects including public mural, web design, and theater production.

- In Tennessee, Allied Arts of Chattanooga is supporting local teaching artists who team with classroom teachers to develop and implement a curriculum that promotes reading and writing through dance, theater, and visual arts.

The third core program of the NEA is *Challenge America: Reaching Every Community*. To quote the NEA once again:

[T]his category offers \$10,000 grants, primarily to small and mid-sized organizations, for projects that extend the reach of the arts to underserved populations – those whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability. Projects that are supported in this category generally are smaller in scale and shorter in duration than those in the *Access to Artistic Excellence* or *Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth* categories.

Grants are limited to four specific uses: special events with guest artists; professionally developed public art projects such as murals or sculptures that are developed with community engagement; civic design activities; and projects that address cultural tourism or economic revitalization.

With a simpler application process and expedited review, these grants are especially valuable to arts organizations that lack the administrative staffing and expertise to compete with larger, better-funded organizations. *Challenge America* is a key component of the NEA's drive, which we praise, to ensure that direct federal support for the arts is spread broadly and fairly across the country. Our research shows that in FY05, 114 congressional districts received direct NEA grants solely through this program.

Recent examples of grants to local arts agencies include:

- In Aliceville, AL, the Rural Members Association received a grant to support the Freedom Creek Blues Festival, which showcases Alabama blues artists.
- In Idaho Falls, ID, the Arts Council received a grant to promote the Idaho Falls Cultural District, supporting the production of brochures, advertising, and banners for the district.
- The Iowa Trails Council received a grant to support the design and installation of public art on the Cedar View Pedestrian and Bicycle Trail Bridges in Jefferson County, IA.

Unfortunately, the administration's requested budget includes a cut of \$3.46 million from the *Challenge America* core program of the NEA. The funds would be shifted to the other core grant programs as well as to cover increased administrative costs. As noted at the beginning of my statement, we are requesting that the NEA receive an appropriation that can accommodate these needs without taking funds from an existing program that is effective, popular, and essential to accomplishing the NEA's goal of distributing federal funds fairly across the country.

Finally, I would like to address our special request for \$5 million in disaster recovery funds for the NEA as part of the next relief package of reprogrammed or supplemental appropriations.

As soon as Hurricane Katrina hit, the arts community stepped forward with open hearts and helping hands, in common with the rest of the nation. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, national arts organizations collected and disseminated information including damage reports, requests for help, and offers of aid. National organizations also solicited, coordinated and/or provided assistance. For example, by Monday, September 5, the board of directors of Americans for the Arts had approved the release of \$100,000 from our reserve funds. In 30 days, we disbursed the entire amount in emergency grants to local arts agencies and other arts organizations in the affected areas. Finally, national arts service organizations asked for federal relief funds to be provided to the NEA to address specific, unique needs, and that would not duplicate other federal programs.

The NEA has unmatched expertise among federal agencies with respect to the internal operations of arts organizations, their public services, and their relationships to the broader community. Therefore, several national arts organizations have developed a proposal for \$5 million in NEA funds that would provide technical assistance and planning for nonprofit arts organizations. In view of the immense shock that the storm delivered to a regional economy, arts organizations must come up with plans to withstand several years of reduced funding and smaller audiences. Many that have been forced to suspend operations must figure out how, when, and – unfortunately – even whether to reopen. Regrettably, these organizations as nonprofits are ineligible for Economic Injury Disaster Loans from the Small Business Association. Most similarly cannot qualify for help in any form from FEMA. Finally, other federal funds, especially the Community Development Block Grants, which normally can be used at the discretion of city governments to assist the arts, are now being directed almost solely to assistance for homeowners. We certainly do not begrudge the help to these individuals – they need it. My points are simply that first, almost no federal help is currently available for the nonprofit arts, and second, the arts need help because they are key to the recovery and rebuilding of devastated communities. Third and finally, as I indicated, private groups and individuals from around the nation stepped forth and helped at a moment's notice. I understand that the arts could not be at the top of the list for federal help when a million people were displaced and an entire infrastructure was destroyed. Six months later, however, it seems appropriate to begin investing in their recovery. To its credit, the NEA scraped together \$700,000 in FY06 funds to dispatch in discretionary grants. More funding, more broadly disbursed, is needed as quickly as possible. The future of the Gulf Coast is at stake.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Americans for the Arts is the leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in America. With offices in Washington, DC, and New York City, it has a record of more than 45 years of service. Americans for the Arts is dedicated to representing and serving local communities and creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts. Additional information is available at www.AmericansForTheArts.org.