



**Written Testimony in Support of FY 2011 Appropriations for
The National Endowment for the Arts**

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ND

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
“Arts Build Communities”

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Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Simpson, and distinguished subcommittee members, it is indeed an honor to have opportunity to speak to you on behalf of local arts agencies in rural communities. My name is Terri Aldrich. I am Executive Director of the Minot Area Council of the Arts in Minot North Dakota. I have served in that capacity for the past 10 years. My community of approximately 36,000 people is the geographic, economic, and cultural hub of northwest North Dakota, and is located near two Native American reservations, Fort Berthold and Fort Totten. We are the smallest community in the nation to be home to a symphony orchestra, an opera company, five dance studios, along with numerous art galleries and performing arts organizations.

The nonprofit arts in Minot support 188 full time equivalent jobs that produce \$8.6 million in economic impact while generating \$476,000 revenue to state government and \$363,000 to local government. The impact of the arts in our region takes on even greater significance in light of the vast distances between centers of population. Radiating from the hub of the northwest quadrant, you will travel at least 100 miles to reach any community with population exceeding 15,000 people. Members of our symphony orchestra routinely drive 70 miles to and from rehearsals and performances. Traveling those 70 miles they will encounter few other cars on the road and see road signs marking a turn to a couple little towns. Most communities surrounding Minot have populations ranging from 250–1,000 people.

The residents of our area are a strong, independent people who understand and value hard work. The heritage of those connected to the prairie, both native and immigrant, is “strong stock.” That strong, determined, and independent spirit survived 40 below temperatures and joined with neighbors to raise a barn or to bring in the harvest before the snow. It is that same spirit that allows arts organizations in our rural area to accomplish much more than our budgets should allow.

Because of my position I routinely hear comments about the “world-class” art and artists of our community that work within our arts organizations. I also hear comparisons to

similar performances, exhibits, and events in larger communities. We stack up pretty favorably! This is accomplished in the majority of arts organizations in our region without paid staff and with shockingly small budgets. Even our symphony orchestra operates with a part-time executive director. In my community, an arts organization with a budget of \$150,000 is considered large. Organizations with budgets under \$50,000 are unlikely to meet the necessary requirements to qualify for funding through a grant directly from the National Endowment for the Arts. Federal funds from the National Endowment for the Arts reach arts organizations in my community through our state arts agency. The state agency, the North Dakota Council on the Arts, provides funding in the form of grants to qualifying arts organizations. These funds (depending on the grant) may be used to cover operational expenses or to host a touring artist. They are a great boost for organizations operating with volunteer staff and limited resources. The organizations benefiting from these grants offer excellent programming—most with budgets of \$50,000 and less.

About 10 years ago my organization, the Minot Area Council of the Arts, was awarded an NEA grant in the amount of \$12,000. The grant was used to expand our arts education program to reach rural schools. \$12,000 may not seem like a large sum to most, but these funds allowed us to bring working artists to participating schools classrooms at reduced cost and to hire a part-time arts education coordinator. She and I were able build a program that has sustained the coordinator's position and expanded the number of students reached by our arts education program more than 200% in addition to providing a source of income for an increasing number of working artists on a contract basis. The \$12,000 from that grant was spent 10 years ago—but the impact of the program that it helped to build remains, bringing arts education that meets our state's fine arts standards to schools that cannot afford to hire a dedicated arts teacher.

The evidence of another facet of the broad impact of the arts to our region of North Dakota was brought clearly into focus for me while I served as president of our local Convention and Visitors Bureau. I was in Canada, at a petroleum conference, presenting the highlights of our community to conference attendees as they stopped by our booth. Company executives expressed interest in a community with a rich arts and cultural climate. They indicated to me that it was important to the health of their business in retaining and attracting a quality workforce. Our community is currently in a unique position of growth and the impact of the arts to our quality of life is a positive selling feature for economic development efforts.

The arts in small communities have a profound impact on tourism. Tourism is North Dakota's number two industry, second only to agriculture. Garrison, ND, with a population less than 1,500 people, is home to a Dickens Festival. I visited with their development director who told me that they are able to draw thousands of visitors to their community because of their vital and active arts council. Art, culture, history, and heritage have revitalized this community and made it a holiday destination for visitors who shop, eat in restaurants, buy gas, attend performances—in other words they positively impact the economy of this small town now and for the future. Another example that springs readily to mind is that of the Sibyl Center in Stanley, ND. A group of individuals joined together to renovate a historic old church building. The renovated

building has become an appealing arts and performance center in this community of about 1,200 people. After participating in standing-room-only event, many of us who had traveled 50 miles, stopped in the local “drug store” for a 1940s confection called a Whirl a Whip, and had dinner in the café. The arts drew those visitors to the event and local business reaped the benefit.

When I was invited to be a part of this panel and offered the opportunity to share our story with you, I asked my husband if he thought I should, and he responded “Terri, you have to.” So I am here because I am passionate about the arts, as a performer, as an administrator. I am here because I have observed and benefited from the positive impact of the arts to the quality of life and economy of the rural communities through arts organizations committed to participating in building vibrant, healthy communities by being good stewards of funds entrusted to them. To be here in our nation’s capital, to have opportunity to speak to you, is certainly an honor afforded an ordinary citizen because of our great nation, the grand experiment that allows individuals to be heard. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.