The League of American Orchestras urges the Senate Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to approve Fiscal Year 2015 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at a level of $155 million. We ask Congress to continue supporting the important work of this agency, which increases public access to the arts, nurtures cultural diversity, promotes the creation of new artistic works, and cultivates a sense of cultural and historic pride, all while supporting millions of jobs in communities nationwide.

The League of American Orchestras leads, supports, and champions America’s orchestras and the vitality of the music they perform. Its diverse membership of approximately 800 orchestras runs the gamut from world-renowned symphonies to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles. Orchestras unite people through creativity and artistry, fuel local economies and civic vitality, and educate young people and adults. The League remains committed to helping orchestras engage with their communities, and the NEA plays an invaluable role through its direct grants, Federal/state partnerships, and research on trends in public participation and workforce development.

The award of a competitive NEA grant is widely considered an affirmation of national artistic significance. The ability to present nationally recognized programs is highly valued by communities large and small, and being an NEA grant recipient is critical in securing additional funding for a variety of programming and operations. In Fiscal Year 2013, the NEA’s Grants to Organizations included 100 direct grants to orchestras in the Art Works and Challenge America categories. In the current FY14 period, the following eleven highlighted awards total $200,000 in NEA grants, supporting orchestras that together employ more than 800 musicians and 360 full- and part-time staff.

**NEA Funding Increases Access for Underserved Communities**

Together with the organizations it supports, the NEA is dedicated to improving public access to the arts. With a Challenge America grant, the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra produced “Something Old, Something New,” a classical music concert featuring trombonist Joe Alessi.
The project was created to serve a low-income, rural community. In addition to the public performance, there was also a public dress rehearsal, a master class for a local high school, and free community outreach performances held in Gulfport and Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The public dress rehearsal attracts a full range of local citizens – from high school and college students to residents of retirement homes and local veterans. The Gulf Coast Symphony and its musicians accomplish all of this with the help of just three staff members and an active board.

Another Challenge America recipient serving many with a modest grant is the Bismarck-Mandan Symphony Orchestra (BMSO), the only full symphony orchestra in western and south central North Dakota. With two full-time and two part-time staff, roughly 75 musicians, and more than 40 volunteers, the BMSO will present a series of concerts and activities with guest violinist Michael Ludwig in Bismarck, the orchestra’s home base, and Mott, a rural community of 732 people. The orchestra and Mr. Ludwig will work with local partners in Mott to present a classroom program for student musicians at Mott-Regent Junior/Senior High School, a recital for residents of the Good Samaritan Society-Mott, which provides shelter and supportive services to older persons and others in need, and perform a free evening recital at Mott’s Playhouse Theater. These activities will benefit a community that would otherwise need to travel more than 100 miles to Bismarck in order to enjoy professional music performances.

Orchestras are finding ways to engage underserved communities that are nearby as well as those many miles away. The Seattle Symphony Orchestra (SSO), which employs 150 full-time staff including 84 musicians, will utilize its NEA Art Works grant to help support the New Music Works performance project, which employs music composition as a tool to increase public participation in the arts and creates skill development opportunities for youth. The project will feature compositions that bridge traditional and contemporary cultures. Among these works is a new piece co-created by northwest Native American youth and artists through the SSO’s Cultural Exchanges, which are hosted at tribal venues on a quarterly basis to foster closer relationships and collaborative work with the tribes.

**NEA Grants Help Orchestras Engage, Educate, and Equip America’s Youth**

The experience of live music can bring disparate communities and partners together, united in the purpose of educating and encouraging young people. The Greensboro Symphony’s OrKIDStra program, for example, partners with Guilford County Head Start to serve preschoolers throughout the Piedmont Triad. Tying together literacy skills with classical music, the symphony provides more than 600 Head Start children with free books related to a specific concert theme. Head Start educators work with the children, who later see the book brought to life in an interactive concert featuring the symphony’s Percussion Ensemble and a professional storyteller. Building upon the great success of last year’s program, the Greensboro Symphony, with its 13 full and part-time staff and more than 80 musicians, is expanding its OrKIDStra program this year to include several public performances at the Greensboro Science Center’s new Carolina SciQuarium facility in May 2014.
The Kansas City Symphony, with 80 full-time musicians, 31 full-time staff members, and as many as 200 part-time/seasonal employees, offers more than 170 performances and also education programs that connect with more than 40,000 children and teachers each year, many of whom are in rural and underserved areas. The Kansas City Symphony’s “Festival of Rhythm” program featured performances by percussionist Martin Grubinger playing John Corigliano’s percussion concerto *Conjurier*, and the Festival also included a free community concert of percussion works, a public lecture by Corigliano, and a master class and pre-concert discussions with Grubinger, all reaching more than 6,000 people. In addition, nearly 17,000 students and teachers from 20 communities in northwest Missouri and 21 communities in northeast Kansas learned about rhythm and percussion at 12 KinderKonzerts and Link Up performances.

Thanks to an NEA Challenge America grant, the Fort Smith Symphony Orchestra, which employs four full-time staff and 93 per-service professional musicians, was able to offer for free, an interactive educational program called EARQUAKE!™. In partnership with both public and private schools, this award-winning, live concert series reached 3,500 sixth-graders in a five county region in western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma, engaging them in a total symphony experience designed to encourage music appreciation and future participation in the arts. EARQUAKE!™ concerts featured exciting music by the full orchestra, complete with video projection, audience participation, and performances by violist Tazonio Anderson. Nearly one fourth of the Fort Smith students live in poverty, and participating rural Arkansas and Oklahoma schools have acute economic disadvantages with limited arts education budgets.

The San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra will use its Art Works grant from the NEA to support the Artistic Development Program. The program complements the youth orchestra’s core activity of weekly rehearsals and concert performances by providing students with coaching, mentorship, and specialized training in chamber music. Students will receive free tickets to San Francisco Symphony performances and participate in master classes with guest artists such as composer John Adams, violinist Joshua Bell, and pianist Garrick Ohlsson. Participants will also rehearse at least twice a year with San Francisco Symphony Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas. The San Francisco Symphony currently employs 107 full-time orchestra members and 123 full-time staff.

NEA Funding Encourages New Works and Local Artistry
NEA grants to orchestras help support the creative work of American composers and musicians. Whether the music is newly composed, inspired by classics, or blends music from different genres, the artistry supported by the NEA is as diverse as the communities that surround their grantees. The Utah Symphony | Utah Opera, whose 56 full-time and 20 part-time employees and 85 full time musicians help bring music to 450,000 residents in Utah and the Intermountain region, received an Art Works grant to support the premiere performance of a percussion concerto by Andrew Norman. Mr. Norman chose the percussion as the solo medium due to its physicality, which he feels compellingly demonstrates the theatrical aspect of live orchestral performance. The world premiere performance of his concerto will feature guest artist Colin Currie in Abravanel Hall, Salt Lake City.
The Portland Symphony Orchestra, led by 82 musicians along with 12 full-time and 5 part-time staff, received an Art Works grant to support audience engagement with both traditional and contemporary compositions in celebration of the orchestra’s 90th anniversary season. The orchestra will perform all nine of Beethoven’s symphonies over the next three concert seasons, with the upcoming season’s February concert to feature Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3 and a Beethoven-inspired commissioned piece by a young American composer. A national, competitive application process will be held to help launch and promote the career of the selected young American composer, who will also participate in a “mini-residency” which will involve participating in community events such as education symposiums, master classes in local schools, and Q&A events for concert audiences.

Also supporting the work of living composers is the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, which will use its Art Works funding to support a residency, commission, and premiere of a new work by American composer Christopher Theofinidis. In addition to working with orchestra musicians prior to the premiere, Mr. Theofinidis will also work with underserved students in central Arkansas and take part in pre-concert lectures. The orchestra, which employs eleven full-time musicians, eighty part-time musicians, and twelve full-time staff members, serves over 120,000 Arkansans a year with live music and is proud to premiere the work of Mr. Theofinidis.

The Chicago Sinfonietta, with its 62 musicians, a staff of 4 full-time and 7 part-time employees, and 30-member board, will use its Art Works grant to present unique programming that blends musical and cultural genres. The Cross-Cultural Genre Fusion concert, with related educational activities, is a multicultural exploration of the intersection between symphonic and electronic music and will feature a Bhangra DJ together with two guest conductors—one Brazilian and one African American. Each conductor will conduct one half of the concert and will focus on their individual cultural heritage. Educational activities will include pre-concert discussions and school visits.

Thank you for this opportunity to convey the tremendous value of NEA support for orchestras and communities across the nation. These are but a sampling of the innovative compositions, thoughtful programming for underserved regions and populations, and lifelong learning opportunities orchestras provide in service to adults and children from all walks of life. The Endowment’s unique ability to provide a national forum to promote excellence and engagement through high standards for artistic products and the highest expectation of accessibility remains one of the strongest arguments for a federal role in support of the arts. We urge you to support creativity and access to the arts by approving $155 million in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts.