The League of American Orchestras urges the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to support Fiscal Year 2017 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at a level of $155 million. We are pleased that Congress showed strong bi-partisan support for the agency by approving a $2 million increase for its FY 2016 appropriation, and we ask for further support so the agency can help more communities fulfill the NEA’s mission to provide all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation.

The League of American Orchestras leads, supports, and champions America’s orchestras and the vitality of the music they perform. Its diverse membership of more than 2,000 organizations and individuals across North America runs the gamut from world-renowned symphonies to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles, from conservatories to libraries, from businesses serving orchestras to individuals who love symphonic music. Orchestras unite people through creativity and artistry, contribute to civic vitality, and educate young people and adults. The League is 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.

An NEA grant affirms an organization’s contributions to our nation’s artistic vitality. The capacity of orchestras to present nationally recognized programs is highly valued by communities of all sizes, in part because NEA grants awarded through the competitive process leverage additional funding from state, local, and private sources. In Fiscal Year 2015, the NEA’s Grants to Organizations included 102 direct grants to orchestras in the Art Works and Challenge America categories, and from the current fiscal year, the following ten awards, totaling $267,000 in support, offer a sampling of the high quality, unique opportunities communities are able to enjoy with NEA support.

**NEA funding broadens access for underserved communities**

In partnership with the organizations it supports, the NEA is dedicated to improving public access to the arts. The Challenge America grant category offers support 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 have been limited by geography, economics, or disability. Challenge America grantee Northwest Symphony Orchestra will present a concert and related educational programming with a focus on Northwestern classical composers and musicians. Koichiro Yamamoto, principal trombonist of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, will perform for the public, as well as participate in Symphony for Students, the orchestra’s program serving low-income students in South King County. Yamamoto will lead master classes for underserved youth, and orchestra musicians will visit ten schools to provide clinics and master classes to more than 200 students in the Highline School District. Youth participants will also receive free tickets to attend the public performance at the Highline Performing Arts Center, which will include music by Northwest composers Samuel Jones and Sumi Tonooka.

The Great Falls Symphony will use its Challenge America grant to produce performances, a public post-concert question-and-answer session, and various activities featuring pianist Sean Chen and one of the symphony’s resident string ensembles, the Cascade Quartet. In addition to the main performance, Chen and the Cascade Quartet will participate in concerts and lead master classes for rural high school students. Further broadening their reach, they will perform in a concert preview that will be aired on Montana’s public radio station as well as perform during an open rehearsal for local piano students and piano teachers. With just two full-time and two part-time staff, and three conductors, the orchestra and its musicians present a wealth of services to their community each year, from coaching sessions to education concerts in schools across Montana, as well as mainstage concerts. Great Falls Symphony also includes a youth orchestra and the Chinook Winds quintet, which performs throughout the country.

The NEA is committed to artistically rich youth development opportunities
Many of the NEA’s grants directly support programs involving the development of young artists and musicians, such as an Art Works grant to support the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras’ Intensive Community Program (ICP). This rigorous string instrument training program began in 1998 to serve inner-city youth by offering weekly music lessons, ensemble classes, instrument rentals, and performance opportunities to students who are exceptionally interested in music but are faced with financial and/or cultural barriers to participation. After a few years of intensive study, ICP students are prepared to pass the audition into the youth symphony’s entry-level orchestra. Historically, 98% of ICP students successfully audition into the highly competitive BYSO orchestras; once admitted, ICP students receive a tuition subsidy, weekly lessons, use of an instrument, and ongoing mentorship until they graduate high school. The BYSO, with a staff of 12 full-time and 24 part-time employees, prides itself on the ICP having provided this deep and focused experience to more than 150 students, with 100% of its graduates going on to college.

On the opposite coast, similarly rich and intensive youth development is offered by the Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles at Heart of Los Angeles (YOLA at HOLA). This after-school music program, in partnership with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, is inspired by the Venezuelan El Sistema movement and, with NEA support, provides free instruments, ensemble-based classical music instruction, and performance opportunities to underserved and at-risk
youth, ages 6-18, in central Los Angeles. YOLA at HOLA students participate in up to 15 hours each week of sectional, ensemble, and orchestra rehearsals, specialized music classes, community performances, academic tutoring and intervention, and wrap-around support. YOLA at HOLA is led by a knowledgeable and passionate corps of 19 music educators who teach and mentor HOLA’s students and contribute to an international conversation about high-intensity music education. Through HOLA’s and the LA Philharmonic’s partnership with the Longy School of Music of Bard College’s Master of Arts in Teaching program, the next generation of music educators also hone their skills in YOLA at HOLA’s classrooms.

The NEA supports celebrating the arts and our natural resources

The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra (SLSO), employer of 93 musicians and 61 full-time staff, won an “Imagine Your Parks” grant in this year’s joint celebration of the NEA’s 50th anniversary and the centennial of the National Park Service. SLSO paired French composer Olivier Messiaen’s “Des canyons aux etoiles... (From the canyons to the stars...)” with visual imagery by photographer Deborah O’Grady. Programming explored the relationship between art and nature, incorporating images of the National Parks that inspired the composer for the original 1971 commission to celebrate the bicentennial of the United States. O’Grady literally followed in Messiaen’s footsteps to capture the breathtaking images from Cedar Breaks, Zion, and Bryce Canyon, among other locations. The cross-disciplinary concerts were presented in St. Louis, and then in Berkeley and Los Angeles as part of the SLSO’s four-city California tour.

The Boulder Philharmonic, which employs 73 musicians and a staff of eight people, is using its “Imagine Your Parks” grant to commission and premiere a new orchestral work by composer Stephen Lias, which will accompany projected images that showcase Rocky Mountain National Park. Concerts will take place in Boulder, Colorado, as well as at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. next spring as part of the SHIFT Festival of American Orchestras. Ancillary events in both Colorado and D.C. will include interpretive musical hikes and public talks featuring the composer that examine the national parks legacy through a musical lens. For the inaugural SHIFT Festival, the Boulder Philharmonic is one of four orchestras, with each participant presenting education events, symposia, and community events in venues around Washington, D.C., along with full-orchestra performances in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall.

NEA funding supports bringing world-class artistry to communities

With the help of an Art Works grant, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra – comprising 38 full-time and 6 part-time staff members, and 26 full-time musicians – will present contemporary works by an international array of composers such as George Crumb, Bryce Dessner and Nico Muhly (U.S.), Georges Enesco (Romania), Sir Michael Tippett (U.K.), Erkki-sven Tuur (Estonia), and Alberto Ginastera, Mauricio Sotelo and Manuel De Falla (Spain). The orchestra’s three-week performance project will feature guest artists Finnish violinist Pekka Kuusisto, Moldovan violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Spanish mezzo-soprano Nerea Berraondo, and Spanish Flamenco dancer Rubén Olmo, and the project will be highlighted by the world premiere of Mauricio Sotelo’s Red Inner Light Sculpture, a new work for solo violin, strings,
and Flamenco dancer. Several pre-concert educational lectures will be offered as well, to provide audiences with additional context for and deeper engagement with the programming.

The **Louisville Orchestra**, with a staff of approximately 21 employees and 55 full time musicians, will use its *Art Works* support to bring exceptional guest artists for a three-week Festival of American Music created, curated, and conducted by music director, Teddy Abrams. The Festival will feature the orchestra alongside artists from across the country, encompassing a variety of musical genres including jazz, contemporary, popular music, and local music of the Kentuckiana region. The Festival will include concert previews before each show addressing the role of American orchestras and composers in the 21st century, as well as several community engagement events with schools and local businesses. The final week of the festival will include a world premiere of a piano concerto by Chase Morrin, featuring the composer as soloist.

Showcasing the world-class musicianship of their home state, the **Eugene Symphony** will utilize its *Art Works* grant to present a series of new composition, performance, and mentorship opportunities for Oregon composers. In celebration of its 50th anniversary, the Eugene Symphony – which employs seven full-time and four part-time staff, and 83 part-time musicians – will present the world premiere of a new piano concerto by Oregon composer Robert Kyr featuring Eugene-based pianist Alexandre Dossin. Kyr is also planning an integrated composition project for high school and graduate students, which will culminate in the creation of an orchestral theme and variations based on “Ode to Joy” from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. The premiere of the jointly composed work will take place on a regular subscription program and for students at a youth concert in November 2016.

Celebrating both local and international talent, the **Dallas Symphony Orchestra** received *Art Works* support for world premieres of works by two celebrated American composers, Jeremy Gill and Christopher Rouse. Gill’s composition is written for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra’s principal oboe Erin Hannigan, while Rouse’s composition is a co-commission led by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and shared with the Aspen Music Festival and the Nashville Symphony. Educational activities include participation by the composers in workshops, master classes, and school programs. Both works will be conducted by Jaap van Zweden, music director of the orchestra, which employs 65 full-time and 20 part-time staff, and 91 musicians.

Thank you for this opportunity to convey the tremendous value of NEA support for the communities served by orchestras throughout our country. Orchestras provide countless innovative collaborations, thoughtful programming for underserved communities, and lifelong learning opportunities in service to adults and children from all walks of life. As orchestras continually strive to bring the power and benefits of music to more people, we applaud the NEA’s national leadership in promoting excellence and engagement with high quality artistry. Advancing the highest expectations for accessibility and artistry are among the strongest arguments for a federal role in support of the arts, therefore we urge you to increase creativity and access to the arts by approving $155 million in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts in FY 2017.