The League of American Orchestras urges the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to support $167.5 million in Fiscal Year 2020 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Bipartisan support in Congress for the ongoing work of the NEA has been especially appreciated in the past several years, and we are grateful for the Subcommittee’s leadership. Increased support in FY20 will enable the agency to provide more direct grants, which will boost meaningful arts participation for more Americans.

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 includes world-renowned orchestras, community groups, summer festivals, student and youth ensembles, businesses serving orchestras, and individuals who love symphonic music. As orchestras navigate the myriad changes coursing through American society, they are continually honing the ways the orchestral experience serves communities. NEA support via Art Works and Challenge America grants helps to expand the capacity of orchestras to present concerts and programs to communities of all sizes, and each NEA direct grant dollar leverages more than $9 of additional non-federal or private investment. The following ten orchestral projects from FY19 total $155,000 in direct federal support and offer a sampling of the remarkable orchestral partnerships serving the public in responsive ways.

**National Endowment for the Arts funding increases public access to the arts**

The NEA is committed to helping small- and mid-sized organizations extend the reach of the arts to populations whose arts opportunities are limited by geography, economics, or disability. The Kansas City Symphony, employing 80 full-time musicians and 35 full-time staff, offers a series of free chamber music concerts featuring symphony musicians performing a wide range of music, from baroque to contemporary, that is not readily available elsewhere in the community. Curated by the musicians, these weekday, early evening, casual programs are designed to remove barriers of formality, access, and financial ability, and they draw more than 1,200 people to every performance. Nearly one-third of audience members has the opportunity to experience a new musical form and enjoy the cultural richness of their own community for the first time, thanks in part to an NEA Art Works grant, which leads to broad financial support for the symphony from foundations, businesses, and individuals throughout the community.

The Adrian Symphony Orchestra’s Challenge America grant will support a week of activities specifically designed for youth and the rural Lenawee County community in
Michigan. The symphony, with a small but dedicated staff of four, will present *Carmina Burana*, featuring local choirs and soloists Allison Prost and Jonathan Lasch, as well a new work, *Broad Band of Light*, by American composer Conni Ellisor with soloist Stephen Seifert on the mountain dulcimer. The project and ancillary activities would not otherwise be possible without additional support, and the NEA grant and its multiplying effect mean that local teachers will be able to receive a pre-concert guide with information about the orchestra, music director, composers, guest artist, and the mountain dulcimer, and the orchestra will able to present a Young People’s Concert for children in kindergarten through second grade, offering unique opportunities to connect with the soloists and composer.

The Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale (BSO&C), which employs 90 staff and musicians, received a Challenge America grant to support performances and community engagement in honor of Black History Month and the 60th anniversary of the founding of Motown Records. In addition to performing at the Alberta Bair Theater, guest artists Sydney Morton and Jarran Muse visited the St. Charles Indian Mission on the rural Crow Indian Reservation; the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch (a therapeutic and residential treatment center for children with emotional and behavioral challenges); Riverside Middle and Senior High Schools, which are Title I schools in Billings; and the Montana State Women’s Prison to work with the women’s prison choir. The program included discussions about racism and discrimination, being a friend to people who may be different from you, music performances that included Motown hits such as *What’s Going On*, and discussion of the history of Motown music. The BSO&C is committed to bringing musical experiences to underserved communities, and this program in particular was designed to facilitate the Billings community engaging with and learning from artists of color.

**National Endowment for the Arts advances equity, diversity, and inclusion**

In addition to increasing public access to the arts, support from the National Endowment for the Arts provides opportunities to recognize and celebrate the diverse backgrounds that comprise communities throughout the country. The Quad City Symphony Orchestra (QCSO) received a Challenge America grant for a performance and related engagement activity by the Kaia String Quartet. The quartet will perform at the Boys and Girls Club of the Mississippi Valley Teen Center in Moline, Illinois as part of a QCSO series focused on work by Latino composers, and it will also visit Bicentennial Elementary and the bilingual Lincoln-Irving Elementary that serves Floreciente Neighborhood students. The symphony, which is supported by a staff of 12 people, is also partnering with the Greater Quad Cities Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to promote the event to the broader Latino community and provide discounted tickets through their member businesses. A portion of the ticket price will benefit the Club, and donations will be requested at the event for Club’s cello programs.

With 7 full-time staff and 7 part-time project-based staff employees, the Princeton Symphony Orchestra will use an Art Works grant to support a free community event featuring Mexican-American author Sandra Cisneros, composer Derek Bermel, and mezzo-soprano Paulina Villarreal. Cisneros will discuss her experiences growing up amidst two cultures and how those experiences informed her award-winning novel, *The House on Mango Street*. Cisneros’ discussion will be augmented by a performance of excerpts from Bermel's *Mango*
Suite, which was inspired by the book. The planning process has enabled the Princeton Symphony to partner with organizations such as the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Princeton Community Housing Group, and Corner House Youth Leadership programs, as well as the Princeton and Trenton Public Schools. The symphony has taken such an interest due to the recent significant increase of Latino family immigration to the Princeton and surrounding Mercer County area. Princeton Symphony hopes the performance of Mango Suite will be an opportunity to address the experiences of immigrant families and work toward creating a more diverse and welcoming environment for all. At the event, audience members will have an opportunity to talk with Cisneros one-on-one, and on the day prior Bermel will visit local schools with significant immigrant populations to lead students in songwriting workshops exploring these same issues of identity and assimilation.

The New Haven Symphony Orchestra (NHSO), which employs 9 full-time staff and 229 part-time employees, is utilizing its Art Works grant to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Marian Anderson’s April 9, 1939, concert at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The program will take place at Lyman Center for the Performing Arts at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven and will feature celebrated artists Kristen Renee Young and Harolyn Blackwell and include orchestral works like Old and Lost Rivers by Tobias Picker; an arrangement of traditional spirituals by Joel Martin; Lincoln Portrait, Down a Country Lane, and John Henry by Aaron Copland; Hip-Hop Essay #1 by Daniel Bernard Romain; and Joseph Schwantner’s New Morning for the World. Accompanying visual images will be curated by Peabody Award-winning broadcaster, producer, and director Elliott Forrest. Students from local public schools will also have the opportunity to perform side-by-side with orchestra musicians, and members of the NHSO’s Harmony Fellowship for Underrepresented Musicians will perform as well. New Haven’s Mayor, the honorable Toni Harp; the Reverend Jerry Streets; and SCSU faculty will serve on a pre-concert panel that will discuss the music and the historical context of the program.

National Endowment for the Arts supports youth engagement
Lifelong engagement with the arts begins early, and the NEA has been a strong supporter of arts education and projects that foster youth engagement with art. The San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra’s Artist Development Program is designed to enhance the artistic growth of its student participants and increase their comprehension of and skill in orchestral music. An Art Works grant will serve 100% of the youth orchestra musicians – a total of 116 students from the Greater Bay Area region, from Sacramento to Santa Cruz. The program includes intensive weekly coaching by musicians of the San Francisco Symphony and collaboration with internationally renowned guest artists such as composer John Adams. The project arranges for the youth orchestra to perform free of charge in community settings, for senior groups, for a holiday concert for young children, and for the biannual Bay Area Youth Orchestra Festival, which convenes half a dozen regional youth ensembles with a culminating concert that benefits homeless and undeserved youth. In addition to this performance-based activity, the program also provides paid apprenticeships to prepare interested youth orchestra members for careers as music librarians, personnel managers, and arts administrators. Apprentices work closely with San Francisco Symphony staff up to 20 hours per week to receive on-the-job training and learn skills not available through arts administration curricula.
The El Paso Symphony also received an Art Works grant for its youth orchestra, which will facilitate the first of an annual learning and performing festival in El Paso, the Southwest Youth Orchestra Festival, for underserved youth in the Southwest U.S. and Northern Mexico region. The week-long youth orchestra festival will allow youth ensembles to come together as one voice to learn, study, and perform music. The festival will provide students the opportunity to learn from music instructors and conductors other than their own in an intense musical “boot-camp” setting. Auditions will place participants into groups with the goal of creating ensembles of varying cultures, ethnicity, and heritage. Groups will perform separately and in a joint group orchestra in three to four different venues.

The National Endowment for the Arts supports contemporary works and living composers

Many orchestras are devoted to expanding their contemporary repertoire to offer a broad selection of musical styles to their communities. The NEA is helping several orchestras support the work of contemporary composers. The Utah Symphony & Opera (USUO), with 52 full-time and 15 part-time staff, embraces the work of living composers as a way of enhancing both musicians’ and the public’s understanding of and enthusiasm for classical music. An Art Works grant will support a performance project highlighting works by Pierre Boulez, Vivian Fung, Zhou Tian, Joan Tower, and Andrew Norman. Chinese-American composer Zhou Tian, a 2018 GRAMMY nominee, has been commissioned for a piece to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Transcontinental Railroad. Andrew Norman, Musical America’s 2017 Composer of the Year, is USUO’s first Composer-in-Association in 2018-19. Two of Mr. Norman’s works, Suspend and Play, will be performed by Utah Symphony during this season. Both Zhou and Norman will spend time working with students, providing valuable insight into the creative process, and inspiring members of the community to engage more deeply with music.

Another Art Works recipient is the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO), which, with its more 34 full-time staff, 13 part-time staff, and 21 musicians, inaugurated Tapestry19, a festival celebrating life stories through music. Programming included premiere performances of new works such as a collaboration (Let the Crows Come) by Minneapolis-based Bharatanatyam dancer and choreographer Ashwini Ramaswamy and composer, DJ, and author Jace Clayton; A Requiem for Zula by composer and interdisciplinary artist PaviElle French in a tribute to her mother, who grew up in St. Paul's historically African-American Rondo neighborhood; a new work by composer and clarinetist Kinan Azmeh which expanded on his previous work Do Not Repeat After Me, about the collective memories of growing up in Syria in the 1980s; and a new work, Say Home, by Beecher, inspired by the poetry of Chris Santiago, the son of Filipino immigrants. For his piece, Beecher conducted interviews with 47 community members and made 26 visits to 13 elementary schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul where he integrated brief student audio responses into a brand-new work that was given its world premiere at each of the school visits.

Thank you for this opportunity to illustrate the tremendous value of NEA support for the communities that orchestras serve in every corner of our country. We applaud the NEA’s national leadership in promoting public engagement with high-quality artistry, and we urge you to increase our nation’s creative potential and access to the arts by approving $167.5 million for the National Endowment for the Arts in FY 2020.