

League of American Orchestras

Simon Woods, President and CEO
League of American Orchestras
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Written Testimony in Support of FY2027 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts

The League of American Orchestras urges the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to support no less than \$213 million for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in fiscal year 2027. The nonprofit arts sector is deeply grateful for consistent bipartisan support from House and Senate Appropriators as well as the full Congress for our nation's cultural agencies. Federal investment has enabled the NEA to provide national leadership, rigorous research, and transformative grants that sustain public engagement with the arts in communities in every state and Congressional district. With robust support, more Americans of all ages can experience excellent artistry, creative opportunity, and unique connectedness the arts provide.

For more than fifty years, the National Endowment for the Arts has played an invaluable role. Its grant awards and indispensable research spur important actions by arts organizations, practitioners, and other federal agencies, as well as the public. The NEA awards 60% of its grantmaking budget directly to arts organizations and 40% to state and regional arts agencies, in a time-trusted demonstration of efficient and effective partnership. The long-running Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, produced in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau since 1982, as well as the National Arts Statistics and Evidence-based Reporting Center both offer key insights that benefit the entire arts sector. These periodic measurements offer critical insights into popular formats and settings of arts engagement, which inform arts organizations and policymakers about how to improve the access and delivery of art to many more Americans.

Every orchestra—in all fifty states and several territories—is a vital part of its local community. A grant from the National Endowment for the Arts confers a significant reputational endorsement that assists orchestras of all sizes in leveraging additional funding to present concerts and unique experiences to Americans from all walks of life. A rigorous panel review process ensures each funded project meets a high standard of artistic merit and community impact, making an NEA award a highly sought designation.

Celebrating American Musical Heritage and Identity

Orchestras supported through the NEA's Grants for Arts Projects (GAP) program are making the celebration of America's musical heritage a cornerstone of their programming in 2026. The

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Pops presented concerts last month that included the multimedia orchestral work *American Mosaic*. This celebration of the people, places, and spirit of the United States featured cinematography from all fifty states and live narration of powerful quotes from throughout American history along with American-themed orchestral music composed by Peter Boyer. This spring, the **Young People's Symphony Orchestra's** NEA-supported festival highlights 250 years of American musical innovation, featuring both chamber music and full orchestral works by all-American composers, including Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, William Grant Still, Leonard Bernstein, and more. Students play an active role in curating and interpreting the festival, researching composers, writing program materials, and addressing audiences from the stage. The **Adrian Symphony Orchestra's** month-long celebration of America and its musical heritage includes a public concert showcasing works by George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, John Philip Sousa, Charles Ives, and Howard Hanson. The orchestra will also perform "Semper Supra," the official anthem of the U.S. Space Force, honoring Adrian, Michigan's connection to telescope innovation. As the nation celebrates its founding ideals and journey to the present, these are three of the many orchestras playing their part in sharing our cultural stories.

Youth Education and Access

GAP awards from the NEA are supporting orchestras in bringing professional musical experiences to young people, particularly in underserved communities. The **Oregon Symphony** will perform two Young People's Concerts in Salem, serving thousands of students from dozens of Oregon schools, most of which are rural or in areas with very limited access to the arts. Prior to the concerts, students will participate in a semester-long curriculum developed by the Oregon Symphony integrating music, culture, and history through classroom guides, multimedia resources, and educator webinars. Virginia's **Fairfax Symphony Orchestra** is engaging third- to sixth-grade students from primarily Title I schools as part of Carnegie Hall's Link Up program in curriculum-aligned classroom activities exploring Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*, and Dvorák's *New World Symphony*, culminating in a participatory concert with symphony musicians. The **Elgin Youth Symphony Orchestra** is visiting area schools in Illinois, providing interactive presentations with full symphonic performances by the youth orchestra. These performances will draw students' attention to the ways various elements of the orchestra combine to affect audience's emotions and experience in different ways. The orchestra will also join students at each school for side-by-side rehearsals and clinics. These programs do more than introduce children to musical instruments—they cultivate critical thinking, encourage a lifelong relationship with the arts, and in some cases open doors to careers. Whether learning directly from professional musicians or performing alongside peers who train in a dedicated ensemble, these students receive a level of access to music that literally meets them where they are.

Affordable and Accessible Community Performances

The removal of barriers to participation in the arts has long been a priority of the NEA, not only for students as noted above, but also for adults whose opportunity to experience live performing arts is limited due to geographic, financial, or other constraints. **The Jackson Symphony** has

been using grant support to bring free patriotic concerts to several rural Tennessee counties whose residents might otherwise lack access to live orchestral music. These performances ensure that high-quality, live orchestral experiences are a shared community resource that connects and inspires all, regardless of geography or income. The **Carolina Philharmonic** is presenting a family-focused event involving the performance of Herbert Stothart's Academy Award-winning score synchronized to *The Wizard of Oz*, with discounted tickets offered to students and active-duty service members and their families. The **Minneapolis Pops Orchestra** has a NEA-supported Pops Chamber Music Series that brings small ensembles into senior care facilities, where performances encourage participation through singing, movement, and conversation. Additionally, its grant also supports the full orchestra's summer Lake Harriet Pops Concert series, where all performances are free, open to the public, and presented in a public park in Minneapolis. These efforts each reflect the field-wide belief that the civic and human value of live music is best realized when it is available to all.

Commissioning and Premiering New Works

Numerous orchestras and other arts organizations support the creation of new American music with the assistance of NEA awards. Just last month, the **Houston Symphony** presented the world premiere of a new timpani concerto by composer Andy Akiho, commissioned specifically for its principal timpanist. And in the next few months, the symphony presents composer John Adams conducting his own music and a program featuring a new work commissioned by violinist Joshua Bell by five different American composers, all part of a concert series of American composers supported by a GAP grant. The 92-yr old **Long Beach Symphony** will present the West Coast premiere of a co-commissioned five-movement cello concerto entitled *Faces of America at 250* featuring Zuill Bailey with five different composers inspired by the text and spirit of the Declaration of Independence. Also working with multiple composers is the **Jacksonville Symphony**, which presents the world premiere of its commission, *The Flying Ace*. A synchronized multimedia performance will unite the classic silent film with contemporary orchestral works, scored by six American composers. The premiere week will also include activities such as composition workshops and open rehearsals for area students in Florida. Investing in living composers allows orchestras to exercise their creative muscle while contributing to the ever-growing American musical canon. And while repertoire will often speak to broad contemporary American themes, the presentation of a commissioned work is also a sign of deeper connection to an orchestra's community, which participates as an integral partner in the collective experience of new music.

Continued Federal Investment is Needed

The intricate nature of arts funding in our country requires a measure of stability that the NEA has long provided. Despite the limited number of direct and indirect grants the agency is able to award, there is no doubt the NEA occupies a highly influential position when it comes to grantmaking, research, and national leadership. As the largest public funder of the arts and a leader in arts participation, the NEA reaches communities nationwide and its awards are proven to generate additional support from private philanthropy and businesses. This support has helped

orchestras and other nonprofit arts grantees to provide essential employment for arts workers as they fulfill their core purpose of educating and serving their communities.

American orchestras are making a meaningful difference with the music they share, whether they are welcoming audiences to a concert hall or performing in schools, outdoor venues, or community centers. The programs mentioned in this testimony represent a fraction of what orchestras can do with federal investment in the arts. Congressional support for an FY2027 appropriation of no less than \$213 million for the National Endowment for the Arts will allow more communities throughout our nation to experience the life-changing and affirming benefits of the arts. Thank you for this opportunity to highlight the importance of continued federal support for the National Endowment for the Arts.

*The **League of American Orchestras** champions the vitality of music and the orchestral experience, supports the orchestra community, and leads change boldly. The only national organization dedicated to orchestras and their communities, the League supports the field through advocacy, research, convenings, leadership development, artistic programs, and grants. Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League includes nearly 25,000 musicians, conductors, orchestra staff, board members, volunteers, and business partners working within our membership of 2,000 world-renowned orchestras, community groups, summer festivals, student and youth ensembles, conservatories and libraries, businesses serving orchestras, and individuals who love symphonic music.*