

Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville • ArtsBuild • ArtsMemphis • Ballet Tennessee • Belcourt Theatre • Bryan Symphony Orchestra • Chattanooga Ballet • Chattanooga Film Festival • Chattanooga Symphony & Opera • Chattanooga Theatre Centre • Clarence Brown Theatre Company • Concerts International • Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum • Dixon Gallery and Gardens • East Tennessee Symphony Orchestra • Frist Center for the Visual Arts • GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER • Humanities Tennessee • International Storytelling Center • Knoxville Museum of Art • Knoxville Symphony Orchestra • Knoxville Symphony Youth Orchestra • Memphis Chamber Music Society • Memphis Symphony Orchestra • Metro Nashville Arts Commission • Music City Youth Orchestra • Nashville Children's Theatre • Nashville Symphony • Oak Ridge Civic Music Association • OZ Arts Nashville • Stax Museum of American Soul Music • Tennesseans for the Arts • Tennessee Association of Museums • Tennessee Women's Theater Project • The Porch Writers' Collective

May 9, 2017

The Honorable Diane Black
Chairman
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Black:

We write to extend congratulations on your chairmanship of the Budget Committee and to thank you for the leadership which you bring to the Committee. We also write to **share critical information as you work with your colleagues to formulate an FY2018 budget resolution.**

We, the undersigned organizations **representing Tennessean museum, arts, and humanities nonprofit organizations and institutions**, appreciate your previous work throughout your service on the committee, including your commitment to American families and to future generations. As the new committee chairman, you have the opportunity to further build and chart a new course. We wish to work with you to provide key information about the substantial economic, educational, and direct community impact that investment and federal support for our cultural institutions provide.

Specifically, as you develop an FY2018 budget resolution with your colleagues, we write to urge the removal of previous, hold-over language detrimental to federal grant-making institutions and harmful to the key economic and community investments in Tennessee, Kentucky, and in all 50 states and the U.S. territories. As the cultural grant-making agencies serving our country, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) foster investment and spur job-related growth, expand educational opportunities, and provide for the preservation of our heritage.

For instance, **in the past year, the NEA has invested nearly \$1.3 million in Tennessee.** Statewide, **nearly \$800,000 of the Tennessee Arts Commission funding is sourced directly from the NEA.** Grants include:

- VSA Tennessee, where a \$10,000 grant leveraged additional private charitable gifts and other state and local public funding to help provide Tennesseans with disabilities opportunities to participate in and learn through the arts, with additional resources to help teachers with educational programming.
- The Cumberland County Playhouse has received multiple grants over the years ranging from \$10,000 - \$50,000 to support performing arts classes and training for youth, helping to leverage further local and private investment.

- The contributions of numerous Tennessee masters to the keeping of America’s cultural heritage have also been recognized through the NEA’s National Heritage Fellowships, the nation’s highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. Recipients, who each received a \$25,000 award, have included fiddler Clyde Davenport (Jamestown); bluegrass musicians Jesse McReynolds (Gallatin), Del McCoury (Hendersonville), Doyle Lawson (Bristol), and Mac Wiseman (Antioch); African American *a cappella* gospel singers The Fairfield Four and dobro master Jerry Douglas (Nashville).

Similarly, in the past year, **the NEH has invested nearly \$1.2 million in Tennessee.** NEH’s investments in museums, historic sites, research, and the preservation of historic artifacts have played a key role in developing local cultural heritage tourism economies, which attract 78% of all leisure travelers. For example:

- Each year, Humanities Tennessee (HT) hosts the Southern Festival of Books: A Celebration of the Written Word, one of the oldest literary festivals in the country. Annually welcoming approximately 250 of the nation's and region's most prominent authors - and more than 25,000 visitors - this free event is in part made possible by NEH grants.
- Across the state, HT has provided vital support for small institutions that provide important cultural services to rural communities like the Granville Museum in Jackson County. For more than a decade, HT has been a partner to the Granville Museum, providing organizational assessments, access to exhibit development assistance, and scholarships for professional development opportunities for museum staff -- all of which benefits the larger community directly by expanding cultural tourism infrastructure and helping community members shape and better understand their own shared history. In total, **HT’s programs reach an estimated 560,000 Tennesseans each year.**
- In another recent grant, NEH awarded \$128,000 to Middle Tennessee State University (2013-2015) to make nearly 200 years of significant American musical manuscripts and documents broadly available to the public by digitizing the collection. Through the grant, MTSU highlighted Tennessee’s role as an epicenter of American traditional music, built on an area of institutional strength, and provided rich resources to teachers, students, and the public.

The NEA and NEH also have exemplary partnerships with the states, with 40 percent of program funds distributed through state arts agencies and humanities councils. **Every congressional district, all 50 states, and every U.S. Territory benefit from this investment.**

Moreover, museums employ nearly half a million workers and directly contribute at least \$21 billion to the U.S. economy and billions more through indirect spending by their visitors. Museums also invest \$2 billion annually in educational programming, with the typical museum devoting three-quarters of its education budget to K-12 students. **In the past three years, \$1.5 million has been granted to Tennessee museums through the IMLS Office of Museum Services grants,** including:

- The Discovery Center at Murfree Spring to expand its STEAM Bus program’s outreach visits to 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students at two underserved, rural elementary schools;
- The Children’s Museum of Oak Ridge—in partnership with the East Tennessee Children’s Hospital, Oak Ridge Associated Universities, and the University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension—to develop a “Kids in Action” exhibit that educates about nutrition, biology, exercise, and science; and
- Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage to improve its visitor experience and enhance learning about the 7th U.S. President.

We urge you to recognize the valuable contributions of cultural institutions to every community across the nation, and **the role that federal agencies such as IMLS, NEH and NEA play in invigorating communities and promoting lifelong learning.** These are indeed core federal responsibilities.

Thank you for your consideration of our input. Should you need additional data, please count on us and do not hesitate to contact any of our organizations who call Tennessee home. Again, thank you for considering our request. We look forward to seeing you the next time you are back in Tennessee.

Sincerely,

Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville
ArtsBuild
ArtsMemphis
Ballet Tennessee
Belcourt Theatre
Bryan Symphony Orchestra
Chattanooga Ballet
Chattanooga Film Festival
Chattanooga Symphony & Opera
Chattanooga Theatre Centre
Clarence Brown Theatre Company
Concerts International
Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum
Dixon Gallery and Gardens
East Tennessee Symphony Orchestra
Frist Center for the Visual Arts
GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER
Humanities Tennessee
International Storytelling Center
Knoxville Museum of Art
Knoxville Symphony Orchestra
Knoxville Symphony Youth Orchestra
Memphis Chamber Music Society
Memphis Symphony Orchestra
Metro Nashville Arts Commission
Music City Youth Orchestra
Nashville Children's Theatre
Nashville Symphony
Oak Ridge Civic Music Association
OZ Arts Nashville
Stax Museum of American Soul Music
Tennesseans for the Arts
Tennessee Association of Museums
Tennessee Women's Theater Project
The Porch Writers' Collective

cc: The Honorable John Yarmuth, Ranking Member

Previous Budget Resolution Report Language

- Past budget reports state, “Federal subsidies for the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting can no longer be justified. The activities and content funded by these agencies go beyond the core mission of the federal government. These agencies can raise funds from private-sector patrons, which will also free them from any risk of political interference.” [House Report 114-470, page 119]

We disagree. These statements confuse the role of the public and private sectors. Private funding will not sustain the arts nationally at current levels if public funding goes away, as the federal investment uniquely supports national initiatives, partnerships with the states, and leverages other forms of support. Moreover, a non-federal funding model will leave too many communities behind. Philanthropic giving as a whole in the United States is [geographically disproportional](#), with rural areas receiving only 5.5% of foundation grant dollars. Public funding for the arts plays an essential role in making sure *all* American communities may benefit. Federal funding from the NEA reaches every Congressional district, and grants are focused on increasing access to the arts for underserved audiences and communities across the nation. Moreover, the NEA and NEH provide vital funds to preserve artistic works and museum collections and make historical artifacts available to the public through programs, exhibits, and digitization.

Nonprofit arts organizations already raise funds—at least one-third of their budgets—from private-sector patrons. Federal dollars allocated by Congress are directed toward making the arts available to the broadest possible audience and lowering barriers such as price and location that can limit participation. Suggesting that private giving can make up for losses in public support is particularly unrealistic in the current context of tax reform proposals that could weaken charitable giving by placing floors, caps, and other limitations on the charitable tax deduction, and at a time when some in Congress are vocal about expecting philanthropy to fill the gap for reduced social services funding across the board.

We object to the notion that there is a "risk" of "political interference"; by contrast, recommendations on funding are made by panels of private-sector peers and experts, a highly-regarded system that the Budget Committee may consider to be exemplary.

- Past budget reports state, “The Institute of Museum and Library Services is an independent agency that makes grants to museums and libraries. This is not a core federal responsibility. This function can be funded at the state and local level and augmented significantly by charitable contributions from private-sector businesses, organizations, and individuals in civil society.” [House Report 114-470, page 119]

We disagree. IMLS provides key funding for education, collections stewardship, digitization, and public programming. Further, it should be noted that each time a federal grant is awarded, additional local and private funds are also leveraged. Two-thirds of IMLS grantees report that their Museums for America grant had positioned the museum to receive additional private funding.