

Guide to the

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS



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Don Ball, Editor

Kelli Rogowski, Designer



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Information current as of January 2022.

FRONT COVER: The White Snake Projects production of the opera *I Am a Dreamer Who No Longer Dreams* by composer Jorge Sosa and librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs, supported by an NEA grant. Photo by Kathy Wittman

INTRODUCTION

This Guide to the National Endowment for the Arts provides an overview of the outstanding and important work the federal agency is doing to support the arts in communities across the country. You will find in the Guide links to various areas of the agency website, [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov), that will help you better navigate the site and find the material you are seeking.

The NEA's primary activities include grantmaking to nonprofit arts organizations, public arts agencies and organizations, and individual writers and translators. But it also is a national leader in the field and a convener on issues important to the arts community and people working at the intersections of arts and other fields such as health, community development, and education, among others. The Arts Endowment also disseminates important information, whether it is groundbreaking arts-based research or features on notable artists and arts organizations

in communities nationwide through our [blog](#), [podcasts](#), [American Artscape magazine](#), and [social media](#).

The Arts Endowment supports our nation by striving to make the arts accessible to all communities through grantmaking, partnerships, and research. Together, we will continue to bring meaningful arts experiences to all Americans, helping to ensure that everyone in the country has the opportunity to live artful lives.

▼ Young students prepare for their star turn in *Cinderella, Dance for Our Recuperation*, an NEA-supported healing arts project from Mauro Ballet in Puerto Rico. Photo courtesy of Mauro Ballet



ABOUT US

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), established in Congress in 1965, is an independent federal agency that is the largest funder of the arts and arts education in communities nationwide and a catalyst of public and private support for the arts. By advancing equitable opportunities for arts participation and practice, the NEA fosters and sustains an environment in which the arts benefit everyone in the United States. The NEA also conducts research on the value and impact of the arts in order to share that information with stakeholders and the public.

To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$5 billion in funding to strengthen the creative capacity

of our communities and provide all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation. The Arts Endowment has provided crucial support at pivotal moments in their history for arts organizations such as the American Ballet Theatre, American Film Institute, Appalshop, Deaf West Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, National Black Arts Festival, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Spoleto Festival USA, and the Sundance Film Festival. For more than five decades, the Arts Endowment has supported activities such as performances, exhibitions, healing arts projects, art education programs, arts and community development initiatives, festivals, and artist residencies throughout the country.



National Endowment for the Arts staff at the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities Annual Conference in 2019. NEA file photo



FUNDING

The National Endowment for the Arts awards matching grants on a one-to-one basis to nonprofit organizations. Forty percent of the agency's funds go to state and jurisdictional arts agencies and regional arts organizations in support of arts projects in thousands of communities across the country. This [video](#) provides a brief overview of our grants process.

All applications to the National Endowment for the Arts are reviewed on the basis of artistic excellence and merit. First, agency staff review applications for eligibility and completeness. Then, they are reviewed by independent, national panels of citizens from across the country. Panels make recommendations that are forwarded to the National Council on the Arts for review. The chair makes the final decision on all grant awards.

We're always looking for individuals with experience and/or expertise in one or more of the arts disciplines to serve as panelists, as well as laypeople with an interest in the arts. If you're interested in becoming an Arts Endowment panelist, fill out the [Volunteer to Be a Panelist form](#).

The National Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts' advisory body, comprises nationally and internationally renowned artists, distinguished scholars, and arts patrons appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The council reviews and makes recommendations on the applications. Those recommendations for funding are sent to the Arts Endowment chairman. The chair reviews those applications and makes the final decision on all grant awards.

The following information provides an overview of our funding categories and other activities. Deadlines for funding opportunities can be found in the back of this guide. For our application guidelines, please visit our website at [arts.gov/grants](https://www.arts.gov/grants).

Pittsburgh-based nonprofit City of Asylum presents the annual Jazz Poetry concert (featuring Oliver Lake and the OGJB Quartet in photo) with NEA support. Photo by Renee Rosenteel

City of Asylum
CITY of ASYLUM
City of Asylum



GRANTS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Grants for organizations support exemplary projects in artist communities, arts education, dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, local arts agencies, media arts, museums, music, musical theater, opera, presenting and multidisciplinary works, theater, and visual arts.

Nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations; units of state or local government; and federally recognized tribal communities or tribes may apply. Applicants may be arts organizations, local arts agencies, arts service organizations, local education agencies (school districts), and other organizations that can help advance the goals of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Generally, an organization is limited to one application per year. Financial assistance is not available for general operating or seasonal support; the creation of new organizations; the construction, purchase, or renovation of facilities; or directly for individual elementary or secondary schools—charter, private, or public.

To be eligible to apply, an applicant organization must also have a three-year history of arts programming.

GRANTS FOR ARTS PROJECTS

The arts are a powerful and important part of what unites us. The arts celebrate our differences while connecting us through a communal experience. For over 50 years, the National Endowment for the Arts has been healing, uniting, and lifting up communities with compassion and creativity.

[Grants for Arts Projects](#) is our principal grants program for organizations based in the United States. This category supports public engagement with, and access to, various forms of art across the nation, the creation of art, learning in the arts at all stages of life, and the integration of the arts into the fabric of community life. Applications from a variety of eligible organizations are encouraged, including those with small, medium, or large projects; and ranging from rural to urban communities. Projects may be small, medium, or large; existing or new; and may take place in any part of the nation's 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. jurisdictions.

The NEA is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and fostering mutual respect for the diverse beliefs and values of all individuals and groups. We encourage projects that use the arts to unite and heal, as well as those that address any of the following:

Elevate artists as integral and essential to a healthy and vibrant society.

- Celebrate the nation's creativity and/or cultural heritage.
- Enrich our humanity by broadening our understanding of ourselves as individuals and as a society.

■ Originate from or are in collaboration with the following constituencies encouraged by White House Executive Orders:

- Historically Black Colleges and Universities,
- Tribal Colleges and Universities, American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes,
- African American Serving Institutions,
- Hispanic Serving Institutions,
- Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities, and
- Organizations that support the independence and lifelong inclusion of people with disabilities.

In recognition of the United States of America's 250th anniversary in 2026, we also welcome arts projects that educate and engage communities in dialogue about the past, present, and future of our nation.

Matching/cost share grants of \$10,000 to \$100,000 will be awarded. Designated local arts agencies eligible to subgrant may request from \$10,000 to \$150,000 for matching/cost share subgrant programs.

[Deadlines](#)

[Contact for grant program](#)

CHALLENGE AMERICA

These grants offer support primarily to small organizations for projects in all disciplines that extend the reach of the arts to populations that are underserved—those whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability. Challenge America features an abbreviated application and enhanced technical assistance for all applicants.

This category is an entry point for organizations seeking Arts Endowment funding. First-time applicants to the Arts Endowment, as well as previous Arts Endowment applicants who have not been recently recommended for funding in many of our grant programs, are eligible to apply. See the [Challenge America guidelines](#) for eligibility requirements.

Matching/cost share grants of \$10,000 will be awarded.

[Deadline](#)

[Contact for grant program](#)



▲ Cowboy singer Gary Sprague introduces students to his horse Dusty during a visit to Aguila Elementary School in Aguila, Arizona, as part of the Cowboy Poetry Education Program at the Desert Caballeros Western Museum, supported by an NEA Challenge America grant. Photo courtesy of Desert Caballeros Western Museum

RESEARCH AWARDS

The National Endowment for the Arts invites applicants to engage with the agency's [five-year research agenda](#) through two funding opportunities for research projects:

- [Research Grants in the Arts](#) funds research studies that investigate the value and/or impact of the arts, either as individual components of the U.S. arts ecology or as they interact with each other and/or with other domains of American life. Matching/cost share grants of \$10,000 to \$100,000 will be awarded.

[Research Grants Deadline](#)

- [NEA Research Labs](#) funds transdisciplinary research teams grounded in the social and behavioral sciences, yielding empirical insights about the arts for the benefit of arts and non-arts sectors alike. Matching/cost share grants of \$100,000 to \$200,000 will be awarded.

[NEA Research Labs Deadline](#)

Contact for both research grant programs:
nearesearchgrants@arts.gov



OUR TOWN

Our Town is the National Endowment for the Arts' creative placemaking grant program. These grants support projects that integrate arts, culture, and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities by advancing local economic, physical, and/or social outcomes.

Successful Our Town projects ultimately lay the groundwork for systems changes that sustain the integration of arts, culture, and design into strategies for strengthening communities. You may apply to other NEA funding opportunities, including Grants for Arts Projects, in addition to Our Town. If you submit applications to other opportunities, each request must be for a distinctly different project, or a distinctly different phase of a project.

Communities of all sizes in all 50 states, DC, and U.S. jurisdictions have been funded through the program, and many interesting partnerships between arts organizations and government, private, and other nonprofit organizations have occurred.

Matching/cost share grants of \$25,000 to \$150,000 will be awarded.

[Deadline](#)

Contact for Our Town: OT@arts.gov



With support from an NEA Our Town grant, the Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA) developed a creative placemaking initiative to revitalize the Little Mekong neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota. Photo courtesy of AEDA

LITERATURE FELLOWSHIPS

Through National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowships awarded to published [creative writers](#) and [translators](#), the agency advances its goals of creating art that meets the highest standards of excellence and engaging the public with diverse and excellent art. Literature Fellowships in creative writing enable recipients to set aside time for writing. These non-matching grants are for \$25,000. This program operates on a two-year cycle with fellowships in prose available one year and fellowships in poetry available the next.

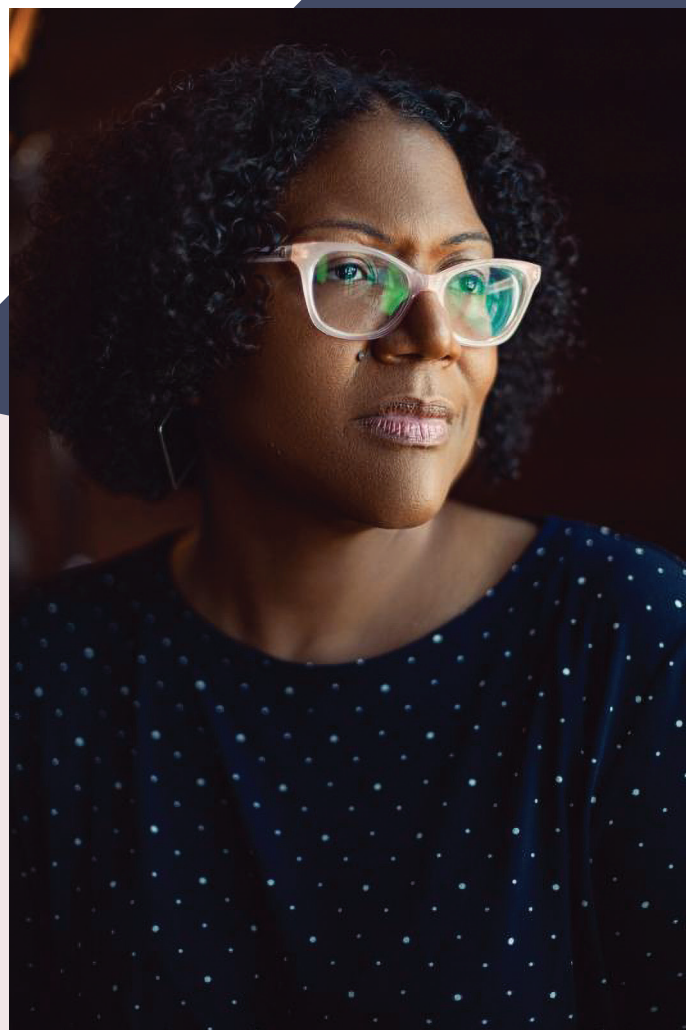
Literature Fellowship applications for creative writing are evaluated through a process of anonymous manuscript review under the sole criteria of artistic excellence and merit. Panelists do not know the identities of the writers, their publishing histories, academic achievements, or previous awards.

Literature Fellowships also are given for translation projects, enabling recipients to translate works of prose, poetry, or drama from other languages into English. The art of literary translation has made available to the American public some of the most important writing in the world. Non-matching grants are awarded in amounts of up to \$25,000.

The Literature Fellowships are the only competitive, non-nominated awards that the National Endowment for the Arts gives to individual artists.

[Deadline for Creative Writing Fellowships](#)

[Deadline for Translation Fellowships:](#)



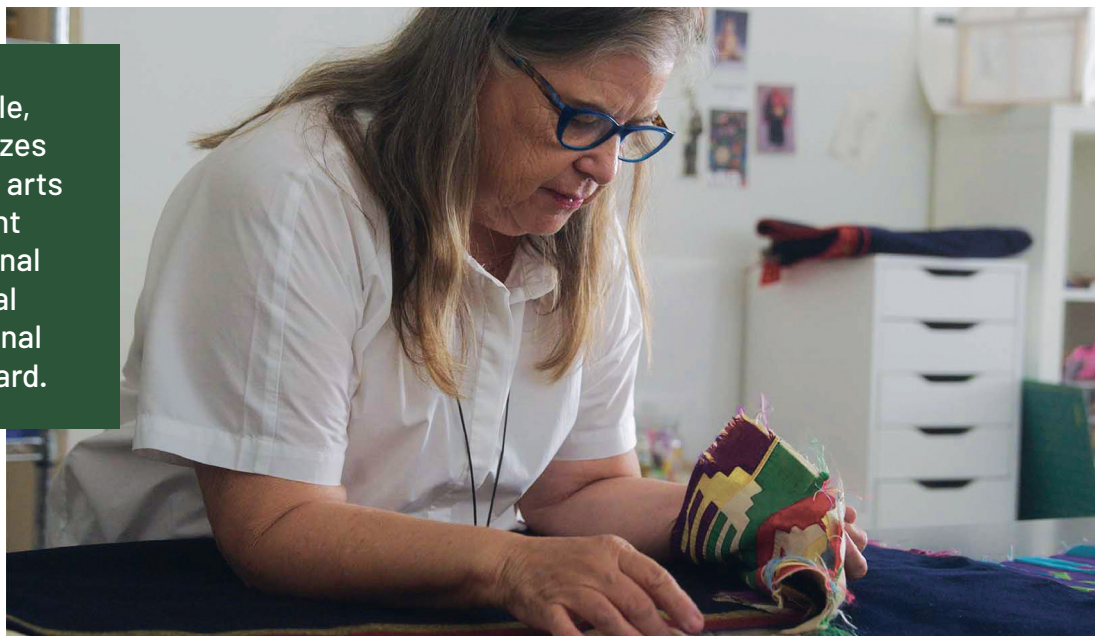
If you have questions about either grant program, please contact the Literary Arts staff at 202-682-5034 or LitFellowships@arts.gov.

▲ 2011 NEA Literature Fellow Honorée Fanonne Jeffers.
Photo by Sydney A. Foster

LIFETIME HONORS

On behalf of the American people, the federal government recognizes outstanding achievement in the arts through the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters; National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowships; and National Medal of Arts, a presidential award.

► 2021 NEA National Heritage Fellow Anita Fields (Osage/Muscogee) looks at some of her traditional ribbon work in a still from the tribute film *The Culture of America*, available for free viewing on the [NEA YouTube channel](#). Photo courtesy of Hypothetical Films



NATIONAL MEDAL OF ARTS

The National Medal of Arts is the highest award given to artists and arts patrons by the federal government. It is awarded by the president of the United States to individuals or groups who are deserving of special recognition by reason of their outstanding contributions to the excellence, growth, support, and availability of the arts in the United States. Annually, a number of nominations are submitted from citizens across the country for consideration by the National Council on the Arts, which in turn submits its recommendations to the White House.

NEA JAZZ MASTERS FELLOWSHIPS

The National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Fellowships are the highest honors that our government bestows upon jazz musicians. These fellowships are given in recognition of those individuals who have made significant contributions to the art of jazz. Non-matching fellowships of \$25,000 each are awarded annually on the basis of nominations from the public.

The National Endowment for the Arts honors a wide range of styles in the jazz field. In addition, the A.B. Spellman Jazz Masters Award for Jazz Advocacy is given to an individual who has made a major contribution to the appreciation, knowledge, and advancement of jazz, such as a writer, patron, or presenter.

NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIPS

As part of the Arts Endowment's efforts to honor and preserve our nation's diverse cultural heritage, National Heritage Fellowships are given to recognize the recipients' artistic excellence and accomplishments, and support their continuing contributions to America's folk and traditional arts. Non-matching fellowships of \$25,000 each are awarded annually on the basis of nominations from the public. In addition, the Bess Lomax Hawes National Heritage Award is presented to an individual who has made a major contribution to the excellence, vitality, and public appreciation of the folk and traditional arts through teaching, collecting, advocacy, or preservation work.

PARTNERSHIPS



A young girl at the Delta Cultural Center in Arkansas decorates an apron as part of *Apron Strings: Ties to the Past*, an exhibit made possible through ExhibitsUSA. ExhibitsUSA is a touring exhibition program managed by the Mid-America Arts Alliance. Photo courtesy of Mid-America Arts Alliance

STATE & REGIONAL

In partnership with the state and jurisdictional arts agencies and regional arts organizations, the National Endowment for the Arts provides federal support for projects that benefit local communities.

The [Partnership Agreements](#) for the state arts agencies provide funds to address arts and culture priorities identified at the state level. The regional arts organizations, each representing a geographic grouping of states, assist the National Endowment for the Arts in distributing funds and programs nationally through touring and other activities that are responsive to the needs of the region.

GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The National Endowment for the Arts works with other federal agencies, as well as with state and local governments, on projects that provide opportunities for thousands of Americans to experience quality arts programming throughout the country. These partnerships include initiatives with such agencies as the Department of Education, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and National Institutes of Health.

INITIATIVES



The National Endowment for the Arts partners with state arts agencies, regional arts organizations, government entities, and for-profit and nonprofit organizations on national initiatives that provide opportunities for Americans to experience quality arts programming throughout the country.

ARTS AND ARTIFACTS INDEMNITY PROGRAM

This program was created by the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Act of 1975 (20 U.S.C. 971) to minimize the costs of insuring [international exhibitions](#) and was amended in 2007 to include [domestic exhibitions](#). The program is administered by the National Endowment for the Arts for the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, which comprises agency heads throughout the government.

ARTS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

Beginning in 2011, the National Endowment for the Arts has convened a Federal Interagency Task Force on the Arts and Human Development to

encourage more and better research on how the arts can help people reach their full potential at all stages of life. Task force members represent multiple units across federal government, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education.

To date, the Task Force has met quarterly to share ideas and information about research gaps and opportunities for understanding the arts' role in improving health and educational outcomes throughout the lifespan. Task Force members also have collaborated on public webinars, research reports, and convenings about the arts and human development. For more information, go to [arts.gov/task-force](https://www.arts.gov/task-force).

ARTS EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

The Arts Education Partnership (AEP), a center within the Education Commission of the States (ECS), is a national network of organizations dedicated to advancing the arts in education through research, policy, and practice. AEP's annual conference brings together leaders from around the country to foster collaboration and action that helps secure the role of arts education in the curriculum. Established in 1995, AEP is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education in cooperation with ECS and comprises more than 100 education, arts, business, cultural, government, and philanthropic organizations. For more information, please go to aep-arts.org.

BLUE STAR MUSEUMS

Blue Star Museums is a collaboration among the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families, the U.S. Department of Defense, and participating museums as a way to thank our military personnel and their families for their service and sacrifice. The program provides free admission for active-duty military personnel and their families during the summer to participating museums nationwide. For more information, go to arts.gov/bluestarmuseums.

CITIZENS' INSTITUTE ON RURAL DESIGN

Design can be a powerful tool for rural communities to build upon existing assets and improve the way a community looks, its quality of life, and its economic viability. Established in 1991, the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design (CIRD) is a National Endowment for the Arts leadership initiative in partnership with the Housing Assistance Council. CIRD offers funding and technical assistance to small towns and rural communities to host community design workshops. In addition, the program offers rural community leaders the option to participate in a rural design learning cohort to dive more deeply into design principles and engage with their peers. With the support of design professionals from the fields of community planning, architecture, landscape architecture, and creative placemaking, CIRD brings together local leaders from nonprofits, community organizations, and government to develop actionable solutions to pressing rural design challenges. For more information on CIRD, visit rural-design.org.

CREATIVE FORCES

Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs that seeks to improve the health, well-being, and quality of life for military and veteran populations exposed to trauma, as well as their families and caregivers.

The program places creative arts therapies at the core of patient-centered care at clinical sites throughout the country, including telehealth services, and increases access to community arts activities to promote health, well-being and quality of life for military service members, veterans, and their families and caregivers. Creative Forces is managed in partnership with Americans for the Arts, the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, and Mid-America Arts Alliance.

Creative Forces' capacity-building efforts include the development of toolkits, training materials, and other resources to support best practices in serving the target populations. In addition, Creative Forces is investing in research on the impacts and benefits—physical, social, and emotional—of these innovative treatment methods. Visit Creative Forces' National Resource Center to learn more and to read all research associated with Creative Forces: creativeforcesnrc.arts.gov.

DISASTER RECOVERY

Through support of state and local arts agencies and local arts organizations, the National Endowment for the Arts has been involved in helping communities recover from disasters. The Arts Endowment has provided financial support, technical assistance, and national leadership following man-made disasters such as the Oklahoma City bombing and 9/11 and natural disasters such as the 2005 hurricanes that devastated the Gulf Coast states. In the fall of 2018, the agency again offered emergency funding and support to areas damaged by powerful hurricanes in Texas, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. In addition, Arts Endowment staff have deployed multiple times to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands through the Interior Department and FEMA to work with state and local agencies on damage to cultural and historical resources and to help advance

the recovery of arts and culture sectors. This has included capacity-building for nonprofit arts organizations so they are better prepared for future calamities.

MAYORS' INSTITUTE ON CITY DESIGN

Since 1986, the Mayors' Institute on City Design (MICD) has helped transform communities through design by preparing mayors to be the chief urban designers of their cities. A partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts and U.S. Conference of Mayors, MICD brings mayors and design experts together for in-person and virtual sessions to present and discuss case studies of critical urban design challenges brought by the participating mayors. More than 1,200 mayors have participated in MICD since the program began, having a significant impact on how American cities look and feel. For more information on MICD, go to micd.org.

MUSICAL THEATER SONGWRITING CHALLENGE

The Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge is a competition for high school students who have a passion for writing songs that could be part of a musical theater production. Launched in 2016 as a pilot program in three cities, the program expanded to a national competition in 2017, offering six finalists mentorships with professional songwriters and the opportunity to have an original song performed by Broadway musicians and vocalists. In 2020, the pandemic forced all mentoring sessions to be virtual; however, the program was able to include 12 finalists. For more information, visit arts.gov/songwriting.

NEA BIG READ

An initiative in partnership with Arts Midwest, the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read broadens our understanding of our world, our communities, and ourselves through the joy of sharing a good book. Showcasing a diverse range of themes, voices, and perspectives, the NEA Big Read aims to inspire conversation and discovery. The main feature of the initiative is a grants program, managed by Arts Midwest, which annually supports selected nonprofit organizations around the country to host dynamic community-wide reading programs, each designed around a single Big Read selection. For more information, visit arts.gov/neabigread.

POETRY OUT LOUD

Presented in partnership with the Poetry Foundation and the state arts agencies, Poetry Out Loud is a national arts education program that encourages the study of great poetry by offering free educational materials and a dynamic recitation competition for high school students across the country. The program starts at the classroom/school level or at the local level with an area organization. Winners then may advance to a regional and/or state competition, and ultimately to the national finals. In total, Poetry Out Loud annually awards more than \$100,000 to state- and national-level winners. For more information on how to participate in the official program, visit poetryoutloud.org.

SAVE AMERICA'S TREASURES

Established in 1999, the Save America's Treasures program helps preserve nationally significant historic properties and collections that will convey our nation's rich heritage to future generations of Americans. The program is a partnership between the National Park Service and the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Institute of Museum and Library Services. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservationfund/save-americas-treasures-grants.htm.

SHAKESPEARE IN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Shakespeare in American Communities provides professional Shakespeare performances and educational programs to high school and middle school students and youth in juvenile justice facilities. The program is administered by Arts Midwest. More than 125 theater companies have taken part since the program's inception in 2003. For more information, go to artsmidwest.org/programs/shakespeare.

SOUND HEALTH NETWORK

The Sound Health Network (SNH) is a partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts with the University of California, San Francisco in collaboration with the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Renée Fleming, the center's artistic advisor. The SHN was established to promote research and public awareness about the impact of music on health and wellness. For more information, go to arts.gov/initiatives/sound-health-network.

PUBLICATIONS

In order to better communicate to the public the exemplary work the National Endowment for the Arts supports and provides, the Office of Public Affairs works with other agency offices to create [publications](#), free to the public, that highlight successful projects and programs. The NEA also produces a magazine, [American Artscape](#), that highlights artists, arts organizations, and issues in the arts community.

Additionally, the [Office of Research and Analysis](#) issues [periodic research reports and briefs](#) on significant topics affecting artists and arts organizations. The office also produces an [Arts Data Profile Series](#) that presents collections of statistics, graphics, and summary results from data-mining about the arts.

TECH AS ART

Supporting Artists Who Use Technology
as a Creative Medium



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▲ Megan Massie, Ebony Jordan, and A.J. Baldwin portray Alice Paul, Ida B. Wells, and Angelina Weld Grimké in a pivotal moment where the inequality in the women's suffrage movement comes to a head in the NEA-supported StageOne Family Theatre production of Diana Grisanti's play *Lawbreakers!* Photo courtesy of StageOne Family Theatre

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400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20506
202.682.5400

