



Ben Folds, Artists Committee Member
Americans for the Arts
Testimony Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
February 6, 2020

Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of federal funding for the **National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at no less than \$170 million for FY 2021**, a \$7.75 million increase over FY 2020 funding.

Americans for the Arts is the leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education in America. We have more than 60 years of service and are dedicated to representing and serving the more than 4,500 local arts agencies in every state. Together we work to ensure that every American has access to the transformative power of the arts. I appreciate the opportunity to provide public comment on the budget request for the NEA.

While we have yet to receive the Trump administration's FY 2021 budget request, I was deeply troubled by the Administration's short-sightedness for the proposed FY 2018, FY 2019, and FY 2020 budgets calling for the elimination of the NEA. **I commend the bipartisan work from this committee**, and Congress, in rejecting those requests, and I know that I speak for the arts community in expressing our deep appreciation to Congress in appropriating **an additional \$7.25 million in funds for the NEA in FY 2020** over FY 2019—the largest increase the NEA has seen in the past six years and the highest level of funding the agency has had in the past decade.

Today, I want to highlight the vital impact this funding has on rural communities. In rural states, arts and cultural production contributed \$67.5 billion to the economies of states in which 30 percent or more of the population lives in rural areas and employed 628,500 workers. The value added to my home states of North Carolina and Tennessee, which have the largest rural arts economies, exceeded \$14 billion in each of those states. In South Carolina, Alabama, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Iowa, the value added exceeded \$4 billion in each state.¹

Additionally, the arts are a tourism draw for rural communities, as they attract visitors who come for the arts and spend money while in town. According to Arts & Economic Prosperity 5, audiences at arts events in rural communities (population <50,000) are more likely to come from outside the county than audiences in large urban areas (population >1 million)—35 percent of rural arts attendees are nonlocal versus 32 percent of urban arts attendees. Furthermore, nonlocal attendees at rural arts events not only spend more than their local counterparts (\$47.79 vs.

¹ National Endowment for the Arts, <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Brief2RuralStatesAccessWithMap.pdf>.

\$20.38), they also spend slightly more than nonlocal attendees at urban arts events (\$47.79 vs. \$47.06).²

Similarly, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in rural communities the number of innovative or design-integrated businesses—those that use design services or trademark and copyright-protected branding—rises proportionately in the presence of performing arts organizations. Specifically, the probability that a business will be a substantive innovator, rises from 60 percent in rural counties with no performing arts organization to 85 percent for rural counties that have four or more organizations. It is also important to note that:

- Rural counties that are home to performing arts organizations experienced population growth three times higher than rural counties that lack performing arts institutions.
- Rural counties that house performing arts organizations provide residents with higher incomes (up to \$6,000 higher) than are reported in rural counties that lack performing arts organizations.
- Two out of three rural businesses report that arts and entertainment are important for attracting and retaining workers.
- Rural counties that have design-driven businesses recovered more quickly from the recession, showing more growth in weekly earnings over a four-year period (2010 to 2014).³

I'd like to bring to the subcommittee's attention another issue that is very close to the work that I do with symphony orchestras across the country and that is engaging and expanding new audiences. Just last week, the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, released the full results from the nation's largest, most representative survey of adult participation in the arts called [*Survey of Public Participation in the Arts \(SPPA\)*](#).⁴ This study recorded the different ways that American adults (age 18 and older) engaged in the arts in 2017, where that engagement took place, and why adults participated in these activities. The survey report also tracked demographic characteristics of those who participated and respondents' perceptions of the availability of the arts in their communities.

Here are some of the key findings:

- **74 percent or 175 million adults** used electronic media to access artistic content,
- **57 percent or 138 million adults** read books, novels, poems, and plays that were not required for work or school.
- **54.3 percent or 128 million adults** attended artistic, creative, or cultural activities with live music performance being the most frequent activity.
- **53.7 percent or 128 million adults** created or performed their own art with singing as the most popular form of artistic expression.
- 17 percent or 41 million adults learned an art form informally or took arts classes.

² Americans for the Arts, <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/research-studies-publications/arts-economic-prosperity-5>.

³ National Endowment for the Arts, <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Rural%20Arts%2011-17.pdf>.

⁴ National Endowment for the Arts, <https://www.arts.gov/news/2020/national-endowment-arts-releases-latest-survey-public-participation-arts>

Other participation findings are:

- Among adults who participated in the performing arts—either as creators or performers—**62 percent did so to spend time with family and friends.** And those adults who created visual artworks reported doing so primarily because they **felt “creative or creatively inspired.”**
- More than half of adults who attended artistic, creative, or cultural activities did so **more than twice a year.**
- Among adults who sang, made music, danced, or acted, 63 percent did so **in the home**, while 40 percent did so **in a place of worship.**

In sum, the arts are part of the fabric of our lives and our communities. The arts engage our communities, expand audiences and educational opportunities, foster economic investment, spur job-related growth, are essential to rural communities, and provide for the preservation of our heritage.

Thank you for your consideration and support of at least \$170 million for the NEA in the FY 2021 budget, and, as always, we stand ready to assist and remain focused on getting the Endowments fully funded again in the coming months.