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Theatre Communications Group Announces Inaugural Recipients of Audience (R)Evolution Cohort Grants

Over \$1.184 Million Awarded to Support Audience Building Projects

New York, NY – Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for theatre, is pleased to announce the inaugural recipients of the Audience (R)Evolution Cohort Grants. Supported by Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF), Cohort Grants in the amount of \$25,000, \$75,000, and \$200,000, plus additional general operating support equivalent to 30% of each award, will empower teams of three or more not-for-profit organizations to design and implement audience-engagement and community-development strategies together. These grants are intended to have a seismic impact on the participating theatres, as well as the field at large, by supporting risk-taking, reflection, experimentation, and collective action toward implementing new strategies that will help theatres sustain and grow attendance demand. Over \$1.184 million will be awarded to nine Cohort Grant projects representing 32 partnering organizations. To date, the Audience (R)Evolution program has awarded over \$3 million to support research, national convenings, grant-making, and dissemination of program findings.

“The Audience (R)Evolution research, convenings, and grant-making we’ve conducted thus far have revealed theatres testing innovative audience-engagement and community-development strategies,” said Teresa Eyring, executive director of TCG. “These Cohort Grants provide some of the most daring and successful models the opportunity to scale through the transformative potential of collective action.”

Maurine Knighton, program director for the arts at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, remarked, “Audience engagement is an essential component of the cultural ecology that sustains the lives of artists. Theatres must have a sophisticated understanding of who and where its audiences are and how they want to engage. We are honored to support TCG’s efforts to extend the dynamism, excitement, and participation theatergoers have come to expect.”

“In a time when arts audiences are reported to be diminishing, a holistic approach to researching, supporting, disseminating, and scaling the best audience engagement practices is essential,” said Kevin Bitterman, associate director of artistic & international programs, TCG. “The second round of Audience (R)Evolution includes in-depth case studies, an online resource hub, and the recent publication of *Audience (R)Evolution: Dispatches from the Field*, a book of diverse essays written by 48 visionary theatre practitioners and cultural leaders.”

The inaugural Audience (R)Evolution Cohort Grant recipients are:

Youth Speaks, Campo Santo, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco, CA) will present the Life is Living Festival in DeFremery Park, West Oakland. With over 7,000 intergenerational participants, over 50 local artists, and more than 50 community organizations, this community-based arts festival celebrates the vibrant cultural history of Oakland. By increasing support for artists, cross-sector partnerships, art installations, and expanded live programming, the cohort will engage a broad sector of community groups in order to bring diverse audiences to performances and high-quality artistic experiences directly into underserved communities across the Bay Area.

People's Light (Malvern, PA), **Delaware Theatre Company** (Wilmington, DE), **McCarter Theatre Center** (Princeton, NJ), **Montgomery Theater** (Souderton, PA), **Theatre Horizon** (Norristown, PA), and **Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival** (Center Valley, PA) will work with consultants Dr. Roger Ideishi, Elizabeth Gardner Roan, and Robert Smythe to address accessibility and inclusivity needs across their shared region by offering 10 to 12 Relaxed Performances. These specially adjusted, sensory-friendly performances are designed to create a theatre experience for individuals with a wide range of sensory, learning, and communication differences, as well as their families and friends.

The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Webster Arts, and Springboard (St. Louis) will engage middle-school students and residents of North Webster Groves, one of the oldest African-American communities in Missouri, in a visual and performing arts project that will capture the history of, and give voice to, a key and vibrant part of the greater St. Louis community. The project "Connecting Community through the Arts" will bring together these two populations with commissioned artists to chronicle the living history of North Webster Groves and share that story with the entire community.

Huntington Theatre Company, Lyric Stage Company, and SpeakEasy Stage Company (Boston, MA) will collaborate on the expansion and further development of the "Huntington Community Membership Initiative" among all three organizations. The expansion of this initiative, which reduces economic impediments to theatre and builds audiences more reflective of Boston's diverse demographics, will broaden the program's reach to organizations affiliated with the recipient companies, and offer a wider range of opportunities for its members.

Ten Thousand Things Company (Minneapolis, MN), along with **Delaware Shakespeare Festival** (Wilmington, DE), and **The Old Globe** (San Diego, CA), will investigate various ways of working with artists to deepen non-traditional audiences' engagement with the plays and build stronger relationships with the dozens of communities for which each company performs. Using Ten Thousand Things' model of bringing professional theatre directly to audiences on the margins of society, the three theatres will hire artists to investigate, create, and test tactics to increase participation and engagement of non-traditional audiences through eight tours over the two-year period.

Imagination Stage, DC Arts and Humanities Education Collaborative, Sitar Arts Center, and Spanish Education Development (SED) Center (Washington, DC) will explore parent engagement through the arts in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, DC, a socioeconomically diverse and largely Latino community. As Imagination Stage prepares to open a space in this neighborhood in 2018, this project will help the cohort better understand the neighborhood's unique cultural dynamics, forge valuable partnerships, and address the specific barriers parents are facing in this community regarding their engagement and participation in the arts.

The Public Theater (New York, NY), **Dallas Theater Center** (Dallas, TX), and **Seattle Repertory Theatre** (Seattle, WA) will work to create a scalable, replicable model of The Public's program Public Works in other major U.S. cities. Using theatre to create deep, sustained relationships between arts organizations and the communities they serve, Public Works creates ambitious works of participatory theatre through long-term partnerships with community organizations.

Artists Repertory Theatre, Disjecta Contemporary Arts Center, and Hand2Mouth Theatre (Portland, OR) will draw upon their collective audience-development knowledge and programming to increase participation from Portland's thriving Maker community, as well as those who purchase their products. This project will work from the assumption that Maker-affiliated groups exhibit practices and values that align with the live theatre and arts experience.

The Talking Band (New York, NY), **Antioch College** (Yellow Springs, OH), **Telluride Theater**

(Telluride, CO), and **Virginia Tech University** (Blacksburg, VA) will develop the “Marcellus Shale Project for Civically-Engaged Theater” (The Marcellus Shale Project), which uses theatre as a rallying point for conversation among artists, activists, and communities affected by environmental issues around the country. This program is designed to draw affected communities deeper into the experience of making theatre, and into local and national conversation about the environmental issues that concern them.

The Audience (R)Evolution Cohort Grants selection panel included **David Ira Goldstein**, artistic director, Arizona Theatre Company; **Marcia Pendleton**, founder, Walk Tall Girl Productions; **Jesus Reyes**, program manager, community partnerships, Center Theatre Group; **Devon Smith**, founder, Measure; **Robert Sweibel**, director of marketing & audience development, Roundabout Theatre Company; and **Laura Zabel**, executive director, Springboard for the Arts.

Audience (R)Evolution is a multiyear program designed by TCG and funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to study, promote, and support successful audience-engagement and community-development strategies for the U.S. not-for-profit theatre field. This initiative, now in its second round of activity, encompasses four phases: research and assessment; convenings; grantmaking; and widespread dissemination of lessons learned and effective audience-engagement models. To learn more about the program, please visit http://www.tcg.org/grants/aud_rev/index.cfm.

Based on TCG’s work with AMS Planning & Research findings, the Audience (R)Evolution program has launched a Research & Resources Hub with [Case Studies](#) on effective audience-engagement and community-development strategies. In addition, the Research & Resources Hub includes a comprehensive literature review, recent field-wide research, essays, articles from Audience (R)Evolution grantees, and archived videos from past Audience (R)Evolution Convenings to facilitate the program’s commitment to widespread dissemination of innovative and impactful audience-engagement and community-development practice. Some of these findings have also been included in *Audience (R)Evolution: Dispatches from the Field*, a book of diverse essays from the field on audience engagement, edited by Caridad Svitch.

Doris Duke Charitable Foundation’s mission is to improve the quality of people’s lives through grants supporting the performing arts, environmental conservation, medical research and child well-being, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke’s properties. The Arts Program of DDCF focuses its support on contemporary dance, jazz and theatre artists, and the organizations that nurture, present and produce them. For more information, please visit ddcf.org.

For over 50 years, **Theatre Communications Group** (TCG), the national organization for U.S. theatre, has existed to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional not-for-profit theatre. TCG’s constituency has grown from a handful of groundbreaking theatres to nearly 700 member theatres and affiliate organizations and more than 12,000 individuals nationwide. TCG offers its members networking and knowledge-building opportunities through conferences, events, research and communications; awards grants, approximately \$2 million per year, to theatre companies and individual artists; advocates on the federal level; and serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute, connecting its constituents to the global theatre community. TCG is North America’s largest independent publisher of dramatic literature, with 14 Pulitzer Prizes for Best Play on the TCG booklist. It also publishes the award-winning *American Theatre* magazine and ARTSEARCH®, the essential source for a career in the arts. In all of its endeavors, TCG seeks to increase the organizational efficiency of its member theatres, cultivate and celebrate the artistic talent and achievements of the field and promote a larger public understanding of, and appreciation for, the theatre. www.tcg.org.

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