

18 arts groups share \$400K in grants

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PROVIDENCE – To retain or restore jobs in the nonprofit arts world, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) today announced it has awarded \$391,500 in mostly federal stimulus funds to 18 arts organizations across the state.

The funding includes \$291,500 in federal stimulus dollars and \$100,000 from the Providence-based Rhode Island Foundation.

Without the Rhode Island Foundation contribution, only 12 arts organizations would have been able to receive funding, according to Randall Rosenbaum, executive director of RISCA. He thanked the foundation for its support of the arts and noted that the local organization recognizes “the need to stabilize a community in economic distress,” referring to the arts community in Rhode Island.

Fifty-two organizations submitted requests for a total of \$1,341,500. The 18 grants were, in most cases, made for either \$12,500 or \$25,000 each and will go to support mostly management positions. For the first time, RISCA utilized an online-only application process, which Rosenbaum said went so smoothly that the agency will continue to use this system for future grant awards, starting with the next round of general grants in October.

Of the \$770 billion in federal stimulus funds, the \$50 million for the arts nationwide amounts to .0065 percent of the total, Rosenbaum noted.

Asked how he responds to those who criticize federal funding for the arts, Rosenbaum quoted Harry Hopkins, a top aide to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s, who said: “Artists have to eat, too.”

“To that, I would add that artists have families and contribute to the economy as much as any other workers do,” Rosenbaum said.

The grants are intended to save specific jobs. In some cases, the jobs will be retained, but in other cases, Rosenbaum said some positions that have been eliminated will be reinstated thanks to the stimulus money. The amounts represent part of each position’s compensation package.

Awards of \$25,000 each to protect these positions went to:

- Blackstone River Theatre, Cumberland, executive director;
- Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum, Exeter, executive director;

- Newport Art Museum, education department staff member;
- Island Moving Company, Newport, booking manager and education director;
- Old Slater Mill, Pawtucket, curator and community guild staffer;
- Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre, general manager and sales manager;
- Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, manager of school, youth and family programs;
- Providence CITYARTS for Youth, arts program coordinator and teaching artist;
- WaterFire, Providence, members of the production team;
- Project New Urban Arts, Providence, studio manager;
- 2nd Story Theatre Company, Warren, box office manager;
- Gateways to Change, Warwick, art teacher;
- the Colonial Theatre, Westerly, 52 positions, including producing artistic director, general manager, artists and technicians.

Receiving awards of \$12,500 each to save these jobs were:

- Rhode Island International Film Festival, Providence, executive director, managing director and producing director;
- Redwood Library, Newport, assistant director and special collections librarian;
- VSA Arts of Rhode Island, Pawtucket, program coordinator;
- Courthouse Center for the Arts, West Kingston, education outreach coordinator.

Also, Fantasy Works Youth Theatre received \$14,825 to protect the director of education position.

Decisions on the grants were made by a three-member panel in recommendations to the state council board of directors, which made the final decision.

“Rhode Island’s art community is an important piece of the state’s economy and our quality of life,” Gov. Donald L. Carcieri, who will hold a news conference this morning to formally announce the awards at the headquarters of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra and Music School in East Providence, said in a statement.

“From teaching art to underprivileged youth to holding free Shakespeare productions in the park,” Carcieri said, “these funds will help save jobs in and allow our artistic community to flourish.”

U.S. Sens. Jack Reed, D-R.I., and Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., and U.S. Reps. Patrick J. Kennedy, D-R.I., and James R. Langevin, D-R.I., were also scheduled to speak at the news conference, along with Neil Steinberg, president and CEO of The Rhode Island Foundation.