

# NEW JERSEY 101.5

## Trump wants to cut arts funding — this is who would lose in New Jersey

By Sergio Bichao March 18, 2017



Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band play a benefit concert for the renovation of the Count Basie Theatre in 2008. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

President Donald Trump's proposal to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts wouldn't just hurt theaters and museums in New Jersey. It could also mean fewer dollars to the bars, coffee shops and restaurants around them, critics said this week.

In addition to the NEA, Trump's proposal also would wipe out the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The annual savings of \$740 million would be a fraction of the proposed \$4 trillion budget.

NEA spending in New Jersey — amounting to \$28.1 million since 1998, the earliest year for which data was available — is also a sliver of what the state and institutions here spend on the arts. Scroll down to the end of the story to see the full list.

And while the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, which funds hundreds of local artists and organizations, gets an annual NEA grant of about \$800,000, that is nowhere near the \$16 million that the council gets from its share of the hotel/motel occupancy fee.

But still, some fear the loss of government grants at a time when endowments and corporate donors are spending less on the arts in favor of other causes. They also say it's shortsighted — eliminating a government expense that pays tremendous dividends in job creation and economic development.

Timothy Shields, the managing director of the [McCarter Theater in Princeton](#), says it's no sure bet that private donors will write checks to make up the difference in lost NEA grants.

This year the theater got \$35,000 from the NEA to support its Lab, which awards commissions to playwrights and helps develop new plays. Since 1998, the NEA has awarded the theater more than \$680,000, which Shields says “doesn't amount to very much in the grand scheme of things.”

“On the other hand, it means so much to these groups who rely on the funding. They are more and more dependent on it and there is less of it to go around.”

NEA grants to New Jersey have gone to universities, museums, theaters and schools to fund exhibitions, performances, public concerts and to bring the arts to underserved populations.

Among recent recipients:

- The Matheny School in Peapack-Gladstone got \$10,000 to showcase art created by people with disabilities.
- WBGO, the only jazz station in North Jersey and New York City, got \$70,000 to help produce the weekly “Jazz Night in America” series featuring live performances and interviews with musicians.
- \$45,000 went to support the Montclair Jazz Festival, featuring international artists and aspiring musicians from the Montclair-based Jazz House Kids, an organization that provides music education to hundreds of students.
- Jewish Community Center on the Palisades got \$40,000 for the Thurnauer School of Music and its instruction of public school children in Englewood.
- Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn got \$40,000 to put on autism-friendly performances and drama classes for students with disabilities.
- Two River Theater Company in Red Bank got \$20,000 to help finance the production of a play by actress and playwright Regina Taylor.
- Arts Council of Princeton got \$30,000 to commission a public sculpture for the Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood of Princeton.

For the conservative Heritage Foundation, which has been advocating for the elimination of the NEA for decades, these are just examples of the “[politically correct art](#)” and “[welfare for the corporate elitists](#)” that underscore why they believe the NEA is wasteful spending.

Laura Petrovich-Cheney, a 49-year-old Asbury Park resident who left her elementary teaching job about five years ago to pursue a career as an artist, says preserving “our cultural identity and our creative voice” is a worthy government expense.

Petrovich-Cheney this year received an \$8,600 New Jersey State Council on the Arts fellowship, which has allowed her to exhibit her artwork — created from wood salvaged from Superstorm Sandy detritus — in Boston, Nebraska and Kentucky.

“I am bringing the story of Hurricane Sandy and identity of New Jersey and the Jersey Shore to other states. This is communicating the tragedy of Hurricane Sandy to other communities,” she said Friday.

“Art becomes part of this communication that we do as human beings and it enhances our humanity.”

It can also enhance the bottom line.

State budget documents estimate that the annual \$16 million in arts grants helped leverage \$375 million in local economic impact by creating 21,000 jobs and helping to fund 37,000 events that drew more than 6.5 million visitors, who in turn spent another \$125 million last year. The State Council on the Arts, which is part of the state Department of State headed by Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, also estimates that New Jersey is home to 20,100 arts-related businesses employing 75,454 people.

“Again, I don’t understand why they don’t give the Arts Council more money,” former Gov. Tom Kean says in a promotional video the council produced for its 50th anniversary. “Because it’s money you’re investing. You put dollars into the arts and it spreads, it grows. The arts, you get more back.”

Shields says the arts help urban communities like Red Bank, New Brunswick and Newark attract visitors, who help “fill the municipal coffers” by spending money on parking and dining at restaurants that pay property taxes.

“It’s an investment in the economy and it’s an investment in the culture.”

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