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## Taking a Look at the NEA's First Collective Impact Grants for Arts Education

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NEA Director of Arts Education Ayanna Hudson. Photo by Gregory Gilmer

Today we announce the **first round of the fiscal year 2015 grants**, including the first cohort of arts education collective impact grantees! Fewer grants, larger awards is the philosophy that is guiding the agency's investments in collective impact. Seven grants—from a mix of established and emerging collective impact initiatives—support projects that embrace cross-sector partnerships, data, planning, programming, and shared evaluation.

You may remember that we first announced the NEA's **new arts education strategic plan** back in April. This plan is grounded in collective impact, a framework for tackling and solving a complex problem by working with partners instead of working alone. (You can learn more about this framework by watching the NEA's archived **webinar series on collective impact** or visiting the Collective Impact Forum.) As I shared in the blog post I wrote at the time, a new collective impact grant category was added to our guidelines in order to leverage our investments for deeper impact. The new grant category also moved us closer to our vision: all students are engaged and empowered through an excellent arts education.

Of the seven grantees, four grants are for established collective impact initiatives: Austin Independent School District (\$80,000), Big Thought (\$100,000), Ingenuity Incorporated (\$100,000), and John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (\$100,000). Three grants also support communities with emerging efforts: Jones County Public Schools (\$50,000), Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (\$15,000), and Young Audiences of Houston (\$50,000). You can find more info about these grants on the **NEA website**, but let me capture why these projects give me goose bumps all over again and, in particular, the trends and innovation I see across these projects.

These projects are bold. The projects are innovative. These projects are changing the conversation on arts education by moving it from an isolated conversation about a specific program to a shared conversation about how to fundamentally

transform an entire school district or an entire community by ensuring *all students*—in small and big counties and cities across the country—have access to an arts education.

When we add up the numbers, together, these grantees are increasing access to arts education over time for more than 700,000 students.

The four established collective impact initiatives all have strategic plans that articulate how cross-sector community partners are working together to "move the needle" on arts education. The NEA is funding key strategies to advance their work. For example, in Dallas, NEA funding supporting Big Thought's efforts, via a collaborative coalition to create out-of-school time arts learning pathways for 30,000 students and create digital badges for each student. These digital resumes will document student accomplishments in the arts to use when applying for college, scholarships, and employment.

For the three emerging collective impact initiatives, strategic planning and research are the foundation to jump start their collective impact work. For Jones County Public Schools in rural Jones County, North Carolina, the NEA will support the creation of an A+ Schools district-wide plan for arts education, creating a creative culture across schools serving 1,260 students. Cross-sector partners will develop a creative vision, engage in strategic planning, and provide leadership development, professional development, coaching, and evaluation for district leaders and educators.

Overall all seven projects are collecting data that in turn help school district leaders, classroom educators, community arts partners, and community leaders understand what the data is telling them in order to design programming with a laser focus to address inequities. An example is the NEA's grant to Young Audiences of Houston, which supports the early stages of cross-sector implementation of a plan to improve arts education in Houston Independent School District for 207,000 students. The project completes a "State of the Arts" Mirror Report to map both arts-rich schools and schools that are not arts-rich, assigns schools a rating for the level of student access to the arts, moves schools up to the next rating level through professional development for principals, teachers, and parents, and provides direct delivery of arts programming for students in schools that are not arts-rich.

The NEA is thinking deeply about opportunities for current and future collective impact grantees beyond the grant award. We know from the eight states that participated in the **NEA's Education Leaders Institute Alumni Summit**, and I know firsthand as the Director of Arts for All for ten years, creating systems change is really hard work and often times can feel solitary.

So, the NEA is working with the **U.S. Department of Education** and the **Arts Education Partnership** to figure out joint needs of grantees across our two federal agencies. We will then create opportunities for grantees to come together to learn, to troubleshoot, and to support each other in moving their work forward. We also will look across the work of grantees to identify effective practices that can be shared far and wide across the country.

In spring 2015 the NEA will invite its first cohort of collective impact grantees to attend a convening on data, which is vital to the foundation of collective impact. Participants will learn about cutting-edge data systems and data infrastructure from inside and outside the field of arts education. Stay tuned for more information from the arts education team about this convening.

We are also still collecting collective impact stories about your community, both success and challenges, at **[collectiveimpact@arts.gov](mailto:collectiveimpact@arts.gov)** so please keep those stories coming!

While I have shared with you how we are moving forward our goal to leverage our investments for deeper impact through collective impact grants, there are many more updates on how the agency is moving forward the entire arts education strategic plan. So I invite you, if you haven't already, to sign up for the NEA's **arts education newsletter** to stay abreast of all things arts education at the NEA.

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