



2024-2954 NEA Big Read

Application ID
2024-2954 NEA Big Read

Application Type
NEA Big Read

Organization Information
Gateway Regional Arts Center
101 East Main St
Mt. Sterling, KY 40353
Phone: 859-585-6018

Mission Statement
The mission of the Montgomery County Council for the Arts, Gateway Regional Arts Center, is to promote, enhance, and contribute to the educational, artistic, and cultural lives of those living in Central and Eastern Kentucky.

The Council will serve as a resource and a supportive agency for artists and organizations contributing to the cultural climate of our community.

Annual Operating Budget
\$250,000-\$499,999

Location Designation
Rural

Applicant

Publicity name

What should we call your organization when we conduct any future publicity?

Gateway Regional Arts Center

Project Summary

Please provide one to two sentences that summarize your project in plain, easy to understand language. This description will be displayed publicly when the grantees are announced.

"Our Towns, Our Gateway" is a community-created showcase of our contiguous rural Kentucky counties through the lens of Thornton Wilder's play "Our Town" with a multilingual staged production, book discussions, and a multidisciplinary arts exhibition. The program celebrates our area's diversity and cultural contributions, encouraging citizens to appreciate unique beauties in everyday life.

Short description

Please write a brief, one-paragraph, high-level description of your project. Cover the key highlights of your project and the minimum programming requirements as stated in the application guidelines.

The "Our Towns, Our Gateway" Project will celebrate the beauty in the commonplace and the extraordinary in the ordinary. By bringing together a coalition of Kentucky counties in the Gateway Area Development District, a collection of contingent small rural towns will read, perform, and re-contextualize Thornton Wilder's iconic play, Our Town. After a kickoff celebration, and through a partnership with each county's public library, sites will hold book discussions and writing workshops based on Our Town. A cohort of local actors from each community will perform in a production of the play with a community talkback. Citizens will document their town's beauty through a series of creative projects, resulting in photographic, musical, verbal, and artistic artifacts. This will culminate in a multimedia gallery exhibition and celebration, "Our Towns, Our Gateway," at the Gateway Regional Arts Center that celebrates the diversity and cultural contributions of this subregion and its people.

Prior grant recipient?

Have you received a grant from Arts Midwest before?

No

Project Start Date

When will the project begin?

09/07/2024

Project End Date

When will the project end?

04/20/2025

Theme and book description

Provide a rationale for your chosen NEA Big Read book and how you will use it with the theme of Where We Live.

Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" has garnered much acclaim, hailed by Edward Albee as the "greatest play ever written". Its unique ability to connect with readers and performers on a personal level, while also presenting a universal narrative that transcends location and time, is what drew us to this work. As a play, it is written to be shared - for this reason, we believe it is an excellent springboard for community conversations as it will be experienced and digested aloud as an act of literary and theatrical communion.

We have also selected this play because it resonates with our own rural communities in Eastern Kentucky. These communities, often overlooked and undervalued, have a unique charm and vitality that deserves attention. Our conversations will be centered around Our Town, with the aim of highlighting the beauty that can be found in simple, everyday interactions. By doing so, we hope to inspire a renewed sense of joy and connection in our towns, which have been struggling since the onset of the COVID pandemic.

In addition to fostering a sense of community, our project will also highlight the distinct identities of each of our five contiguous counties. We believe that every town has something to offer, and we want to showcase the wonderful cultural and social contributions that make our region special. Through a regional multidisciplinary arts exhibition and celebration, we hope to honor each community's qualities while also acknowledging the shared experiences that unite us as a small subregion of Kentucky.

In a time of great division, it is more important than ever to come together and build empathy and understanding among our neighbors. Our Town and this project will serve as a reminder that despite our differences, we all share common feelings and experiences, and that by working together, we can create a stronger and more vibrant community. We will also use the 2020 Wilder estate endorsed multilingual version of the play for our theatrical production.

Book Title

Thornton Wilder, Our Town

Requested Amount

What is the grant amount you're seeking? Please refer to the application guidelines for minimum/maximum limits. This field will automatically round to the nearest \$10 increment.

\$20,000

Proposed number of partner organizations

6

Proposed number of book discussions

Must be at least 3

10

Proposed total number of events (including book discussions)

20

Anticipated adults served

An estimate of individuals 18 and older to be served by the project.

700

Anticipated youths served

An estimate of individuals 17 and younger to be served by the project.

325

Anticipated total participants

This will auto-calculate based on your responses above and after you click the "Save" button.

1025

Organization description narrative

Briefly describe your organization's history and achievements.

Founded in 1991, the non-profit Montgomery County Council for the Arts is dedicated to promoting the arts and artists in Mt. Sterling and surrounding communities through programs and opportunities at its Gateway Regional Arts Center (GRAC). It is supported by state and federal funding from the Kentucky Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts as well as donations and grants.

We have grown from a simple storefront gallery in 1997 to a 15,000 sq. ft. regional multicultural center that regularly serves citizens in 22 rural Eastern Kentucky counties through outreach programming. Our three-floor cultural institution in Mt. Sterling provides a performance hall, three art galleries, a gift shop, classrooms, music rehearsal rooms, artists studio space, offices, a small performance cafe, dressing rooms, and a pottery studio.

GRAC's programming reaches 25,000 people each year.

GRAC programs have three main divisions:

- Academy: The Academy offers classes in every area of the arts, including dance, music, theater, and visual arts. Classes are taught by experienced and qualified instructors, and students of all levels are welcome.
- Events: The GRAC hosts a variety of cultural events throughout the year, including art galleries, musical performances, plays, children's events, and many others. These events are open to the public and provide an opportunity for people to experience the arts firsthand, some dipping their toes in the arts for the first time.
- Small Town America Institute for Rural Arts & Culture: The Institute provides support and guidance to artists and arts organizations in the region. It offers a variety of resources, including academic papers, practical how-to guides, and affordable project consultations and workshops for small-to-medium sized cultural institutions in rural areas.

GRAC is committed to making the arts accessible to everyone. It offers a variety of affordable programs and services. Our motto is "All the Arts for All the People."

Programming description

1. Describe your programming plans in detail, including types of activities, locations, and dates. Be sure that your plans meet the minimum project requirements outlined in the [guidelines](#).
2. Explain how your program will distribute copies of your chosen NEA Big Read book and optional companion title(s).
3. Describe your organization's efforts to further diversity, equity, inclusion, and access as it relates to

audiences for your proposed project.

KICK-OFF. (1) GRAC, June 7 2024, 5-8pm

At this regional celebration, we will host musical groups from each of the five participating counties, and two poets from the region who will perform pieces about our hometowns. Accessible visual art and writing activities will also be available for attendees, related to the question: What is unique about the Gateway Area? Speeches from project partners will give context in-between live performances describing the “Our Towns, Our Gateway” project and upcoming events. The Our Town book distribution will be ongoing throughout the evening event. Remaining unclaimed books will be distributed to county library partners as available/necessary for distribution. The event will be run by volunteers from GRAC and other partnering organizations.

BOOK DISCUSSIONS. (10) Jul/Aug/Sept 2024 (dates pending discussion leaders’ availability & space use)

Each library will host 2 book discussions, with a total of 10 region-wide. They will be held at corresponding county libraries.

- First discussion focus: People
- Second discussion focus: Industry & Culture, History

PRESENTATION. (1) October 10 2024 7pm at MSU

- Panel: “The Art of Kentucky’s Gateway Region: Reimagining the Future of Our Culture through the Lens of Thornton Wilder’s Our Town” will engage diverse panelists in a discussion on the future of cultural activity and preservation in our area.
- Screening of “Our Living and Our Dying: Our Town in the 21st Century” documentary film in partnership with Thornton Wilder Society

Panelists:

CIVIC: Kyle Risner, Mayor of West Liberty

CULTURAL: Valerie Scott, DuBois Community Center

LITERARY: Bobbi Conn, Published Author

HISTORICAL: Miles Hoskins, Montgomery County Historical Society

ARTISTIC: Octavia Fleck, Morehead State Theatre Dept.

ARTISTIC PROJECTS. (4) Jan-Apr 2025

- THEATRE: The Menifee Community Theatre Group will cast and perform a special multilingual version of Our Town, sanctioned by the Wilder estate and produced through Concord Theatrical Rights. The cast will consist of actors from all participating counties, and the play will showcase voices from the White, Black, and Hispanic communities that make up the majority of our towns’ evolving populations.
- STORYTELLING. Community members from different backgrounds will engage in “Story Exchange” - a

documentary role play, by listening to, and then performing, the story of their paired partner. This method of storytelling builds empathy across differences. Accommodations for participants with disabilities will be available for the workshop.

- VISUAL ARTS. A “Quilting the Gateway” workshop will be held with a folk arts instructor. Participants will create a quilt square that centers on the theme of WHERE WE LIVE.

- PHOTOGRAPHY: The GRAC Photography Club will host “The Gateway Through Photos,” a Saturday workshop with individuals from all participating counties who will spend the day photographing their community and will meet to share their best work at the end of the day.

WRITING WORKSHOPS. (5) Oct/Nov 2024 (dates/times pending)

Each county library will host 1 creative writing workshop, with a total of 5 region-wide. These will be hosted by seasoned workshop leader and local author/educator Liz Prather. The prompt will be to “write a three minute play set in your town,” and plays will be read aloud at the end of each workshop.

COMMUNITY VOICES EVENT. (1) Apr 10, 2025 at GRAC

The program culminates in a multidisciplinary event where writing, music, photography, visual art, and theatre produced during the project activities will be shared. Despite our division by counties, our rural communities are relatively close geographically and our collective population is quite small - we have more in common as a subregion than what divides us by county lines. Through a multitude of diverse voices in artmaking, we will come together as a larger community to see the beauty in the commonplace that makes our region an extraordinary place to call home.

Accessibility narrative

Please describe how you will make your proposed activities accessible to people with disabilities.

We strive to create an environment where everyone in our community has the opportunity to engage with the arts. In all programs and procedures, we firmly adhere to a robust Cultural Equity Statement.

Some important accessibility measures include:

- ASL interpretation and accommodations as requested
- Offering programs free of charge
- Ensuring that staff, board members, and volunteers are educated on equitable practices
- Providing audio description services
- Ensuring ADA accessible facilities

Project partnerships narrative

1. Describe your partnerships with libraries (as applicable) and community organizations.
2. Explain the role each partner will play in your program, the activities each partner will undertake with your organization, and whether these partnerships are confirmed or pending.
3. Explain how your partnerships will allow you to reach your intended audience(s) and engage individuals of diverse backgrounds and ability levels.

We will be partnering with each county's public library system in the five-county Gateway Area Development District (GADD), including:

- Montgomery County Public Library (Mt. Sterling & Camargo Branches)
- Bath County Memorial Library (Owingsville & Sharpsburg Branches)
- Menifee County Public Library (Frenchburg Branch)
- Rowan County Public Library (Morehead Branch)
- Morgan County Public Library (West Liberty Branch)

The main points of contact for each partnering library will be the library's executive directors. Each library will provide an in-kind space rental in their facility for all related program activities and act as the Big Read hub in their county. Additionally, these public libraries will serve as the liaison between GRAC and discussion leaders and creative workshop facilitators in terms of scheduling and logistics in each participating county. The libraries will collectively leverage \$2,500 in matching funds for the program, with each library contributing \$500.

In addition to the 5 county public libraries, each participating county in the Gateway Area Development District has put forth a second organization that will offer varied supports:

- R.L. Brown Foundation (Bath County/Confirmed): The Brown Foundation has confirmed \$6,000 in matching funds for the program. They will also serve as a fiduciary co-leader of the program on distributing funds as a means of accountability.
- Menifee Community Theatre Group (Menifee County/Confirmed): MCTG has confirmed \$500 in matching funds, and will also provide turnkey services for the theatrical direction, casting, and producing of our multi-community production of *Our Town*.
- Gateway Regional Arts Center (Montgomery County/Confirmed): GRAC is the managing organization for this program and will oversee the completion of all program activities and deliverables. Jordan Campbell, project manager, will coordinate with other partners and county libraries to facilitate the program over the course of the period of performance, conduct evaluation and participant counts, and will submit grant reports on behalf of the project. GRAC will also provide in-kind use of its space for both the Kick-Off Event, the Story Exchange, and the final culminating exhibition & celebration. GRAC is leveraging \$7,000 in matching funds for the program.
- DuBois Community Center (Montgomery County/Confirmed): DuBois is the primary Black & Hispanic

cultural center in the Gateway area. They serve the minority communities in each town and village, and will help to promote opportunities through Black & Hispanic churches and social groups in the region. They are providing \$250 in matching funds.

- Gateway Community Action (Morgan County/Confirmed): GCA is providing outreach and promotion for the program to rural communities in each county. GCA is providing \$600 in matching funds.

- Morehead State University (Rowan County/Confirmed): MSU is the flagship higher education institution in the Gateway Region with the main campus and two satellite campuses falling within our participating counties. With a strong existing relationship between MSU and GRAC, the university will provide access to folk music groups, an English professor expert on Thornton Wilder, and institutional support with volunteers and participants in Rowan County. MSU will leverage \$4,000 in matching funds.

The rural libraries will allow us to reach people who are geographically marginalized but can get to their local branch. Our partnership with DuBois and Gateway Community Action will involve many Black and Hispanic participants who might otherwise not know about the programs. They will also assist with translations and distributing copies of "Nuestra Ciudad," the Spanish translation of Our Town, to Spanish-speaking community members. At GRAC, we engage heavily with a wide range of ages, the LGBTQ population, and people with disabilities. As an ADA-compliant and Certified Safe Space, we hope to draw these folks in as well.

Describe the community your program impacts

Please describe the community you plan to reach with your programming.

For the purposes of this grant, we are defining our community as the Gateway area. This is a state-designated development district (the smallest in KY) and serves the people of five small, rural counties in KY. With a rich cultural heritage of Bluegrass music, pulled cream candy, and mountain clogging, this area's cultural contributions are only matched by its natural beauty, sitting at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Sadly, due to economic challenges and the COVID19 pandemic, the area's people are experiencing the brunt of a depressing disconnect that persists today. This disconnect is especially felt by our ethnic minority communities (8.8% nonwhite) who already have few welcoming, diverse social outlets and our marginalized (seniors, veterans, people with disabilities) whose challenges are exacerbated by geographic distance (100% of our region's population is considered "rural"). This program will serve as connective tissue - through the power of literacy, creativity, cultural exchange, and art-making - to assist in bringing creative opportunities to those who lack social connectivity.

An average of 23% of our collective population - nearly one in four citizens - is below the poverty line. In some extremely rural pockets of the Gateway area, this number jumps to 52% living in poverty. Our area has serious economic challenges-Menifee is one of the most economically disadvantaged counties in the US. Because activities are free, the program will open access to those who are otherwise unable to pay.

Our theatre programming often reaches youth, and we feel this play can bring youth into the conversation about past and future versions of our towns. We hope it will instill a sense of excitement about the possibility of the future, as "brain drain" is a common challenge due to the lack of recognition of the area's strengths. We aspire to empower youth to see what their communities CAN be, and use this experience to help them be the change they wish to see.

Underserved audience

Please indicate the underserved audience you hope to reach.

- ☒ Black
- ☒ Indigenous
- ☒ POC
- ☒ Disability
- ☒ Seniors
- ☒ LGBTQIA
- ☒ Rural
- ☒ Veterans
- ☐ None of the above

Underserved narrative

Please provide any details about the underserved audience(s) served through this project.

In addition to serving rural pockets of our contiguous counties as mentioned above, our patron surveys indicate that GRAC is a safe space for our small BIPOC and LGBTQ populations. We feel that this program will continue that coalition-building for minoritized groups. We will also uplift the voices of our growing Hispanic community, which will be assisted by providing copies of Our Town in Spanish and having translators available.

Through the participation of our the full community - especially our seniors and veterans - it is our dream that people with disabilities (about 33% of the local population) see themselves as vital parts of the local culture. We will collaborate with nursing homes and the American Legion to ensure these populations are aware of our events.

Overall, we hope this project impacts all walks of life. We want to dispel the myth that rural Kentucky is not a diverse place, and through a range of activities and creative modalities, this will be felt by our citizens.

Relevant biographies

Provide brief biographies of artists, staff, and/or personnel leading or involved in your project.

JORDAN CAMPBELL (Project Manager) is an award-winning actor, educator, and an emerging leader in

the global arts & culture sector. With a career that spans the fields of theatre, education, and policy, Jordan leverages his background in acting for a wide array of creative initiatives and partners. Originally from Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, he is proud to be returning home to lead the Gateway Regional Arts Center. Jordan has performed for audiences around the world, including shows on U.S. & international Broadway tours, at Carnegie Hall, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the Grand Ole Opry. He has also worked in film, TV, and on national commercials. He is a Helen Hayes Award nominee and has been awarded multiple Artist Fellowship grants. He most recently served as the Director of Research & Knowledge at Creative Generation, a DC-based global consultancy that works at the intersection of the arts, youth, and social justice. Jordan also worked on Arts & Cultural issues at the White House during the Obama Administration. As an author, Jordan has written on topics ranging from mentorship models to musical theatre history. Jordan holds an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a BFA in Musical Theatre & BA in Political Science from Western Kentucky University.

LIZ PRATHER (Workshop Leader) is a writing teacher at the School for Creative and Performing Arts, a gifted arts program at Lafayette High School in Lexington, Kentucky. A classroom teacher with 21 years of experience teaching writing at both the secondary and post-secondary level, Liz is also a professional freelance writer and holds a MFA from the University of Texas-Austin. Liz is the author of Project-Based Writing: Teaching Writers to Manage Time and Clarify Purpose, and Story Matters: Teaching Teens to Use the Tools of Narrative to Argue and Inform.

WILLIE CARVER (Workshop Leader) has spent his entire life dedicated to teaching the literary arts. He gained a Bachelors in French and English at Morehead State University, where he focused his studies on advocacy for students, particularly first generation, Appalachian, and minoritized students. He began his work in Eastern Kentucky, later studying and teaching in France. He gained a Rank 1 in French Linguistics at the University of Georgia, where he also taught and was elected student representative. Most recently, he gained a double-endorsed MAT in French and English, dedicating over a decade to teaching in Kentucky high schools and universities, where he created LGBTQ-inclusive spaces and advocated for travel abroad and dual credit opportunities. In 2022, Willie was given the honor of being named the 2022 Kentucky Teacher of the Year and Ambassador to the Kentucky Department of Education, where he created a platform of inclusion and advocacy for LGBTQ, BIPOC, and Appalachian students. He has been published in multiple magazines and newspapers (Courier Journal, Kentucky Teacher, Education Week, Herald Leader, EdPost) and featured on multiple news platforms (NBC, PBS, NPR, Advocate, ABC, CNN).

TYLER WELLS (Theatre Director) is a seasoned theatre artist, with more than 25 shows under his belt as director and 30 more as an actor. Tyler is the founder of the Menifee Community Theatre Group, bringing the arts to some of Kentucky's most marginalized communities. He graduated from the University of Kentucky with degrees in theatre and business.

SINCLAIRE MARIE (Arts Class Facilitator & Gallery Exhibition Curator) is a visual artist focusing on

ceramics and charcoal. Originally from Northern Arizona, she has moved and now creates her artwork in Eastern Kentucky. Sinclair is a recent graduate of Morehead State University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art. During her undergraduate career, she was selected the Outstanding Freshman, Sophomore, and Senior in Art & Design. Sinclair worked in a Undergraduate Research Fellowship with the Golding-Yang Gallery as a gallery assistant.

Budget

Expense Description	Paid by Grant	Paid by Applicant	Paid by 3rd Party	In-kind	Total Match
Kickoff Event - Local Band Stipend (\$500 each)	\$0.00	\$2,500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,500.00
Kickoff Event - Local Poet Stipend (\$150 each)	\$0.00	\$300.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$300.00
Books - Bulk Order (English & Spanish)	\$4,916.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Book Discussions - Leader Stipend (10x \$100)	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$500.00
Creative Writing Workshop - Instructor Stipend (5x \$100)	\$250.00	\$250.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$250.00
Panel Event - Speaker Stipend (5x \$150)	\$0.00	\$750.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$750.00
GRAC Project Manager - Staff Salary	\$2,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00

Accessibility - Spanish Language Interpreter - Stipend for all events	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$3,000.00
Accessibility - ASL Interpreter - Stipend for all events	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,200.00	\$1,200.00	\$2,400.00
Community Voices Event - Curator Stipend	\$1,500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Community Voices Event - Fabrication & Installation costs	\$2,000.00	\$0.00	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$500.00
Arts Classes - Instructor Stipends	\$0.00	\$1,050.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$2,050.00
Theatre Production - Theatrical Rights for producing Multilingual Our Town	\$950.00	\$490.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$490.00
Theatre Production - Costumes & Props Budget	\$804.00	\$1,000.00	\$500.00	\$1,000.00	\$2,500.00
Theatre Production - Director/Facilit ator Stipend	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Theatre Production - Local Actor Stipend (14x \$250)	\$3,500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00



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Program					
Advertising Budget	\$2,580.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,000.00
Arts Classes - Materials & Supplies	\$0.00	\$1,500.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$2,500.00
Volunteer Hours Worked	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,954.00	\$3,954.00
Total Project Expenses:	\$20,000.00	\$10,340.00	\$4,700.00	\$9,654.00	\$24,694.00

Use this space to offer more detail about your budget

Supporting Documentation

Supporting documentation

Upload relevant information. Click Browse Files to get started.

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[letter_head_-_GRAC_Big_Read_Grant.pdf](#)

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Total Files: 4

Certify

I certify on behalf of my organization that the information provided in this application is true to the best of my knowledge. Furthermore, I certify that:

- My organization is eligible to receive federal funds and not delinquent in the repayment of Federal debt.
- My organization is a unit/division of government, a Federally-recognized tribal government, an institution of higher education, or a 501c3 nonprofit.
- My proposed activity space(s) are accessible to people with disabilities.
- My project budget does not include match from another federal source.
- My organization does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.); on the basis of age, in accordance with the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq.); on the basis of sex, in any education program or activity, in accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.).

☒ I certify