2026-8996 NEA Big Read

Application ID

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Application Type

NEA Big Read

Organization Information

TEATRO EXPERIMENTAL YERBABRUJA INC
17 2ND AVE
BAY SHORE, NY 11706-7904
Phone: 631-626-3603

Mission Statement

Teatro Experimental Yerbabruja is a multidisciplinary arts organization dedicated to advancing social change through theater, visual arts, and community-centered cultural programming. Rooted in immigrant, Afro-Caribbean, and Latinx experiences, we create inclusive artistic spaces that amplify underrepresented voices, foster civic dialogue, and strengthen community identity through creative expression.

Annual Operating Budget

$250,000-$499,999

Location Designation

Micropolitan

Applicant

Margarita Espada
Executive Artistic Director
17 2ND AVE
BAY SHORE, NY 11706-7904

Phone: 631-626-3603
Email: teatroyerbabruja@gmail.com

Publicity name

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

Teatro Yerbabruja

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.

Teatro Yerbabruja will deliver an island-wide program across Long Island featuring The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros. Through shared reading, facilitated book discussions, and arts-based events, the project will advance America250 by inviting community members to reflect on the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as lived realities. . Highlights include a public kick-off with a book giveaway and art exhibition, 15 books discussions, a art show, open mic, a radio conversation series, an Indigenous-led event at the Shinnecock Nation, and a family arts day at Long Island Game Farm.

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.

Teatro Experimental Yerbabruja (TEY) will lead an island-wide NEA Big Read initiative across Nassau and Suffolk Counties using The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros to spark dialogue about identity, migration, language, gender, and belonging while advancing the America250 theme and the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Programs will be bilingual (English/Spanish), and designed for mixed literacy levels, with hybrid/recorded options and broadcasts through JVC Broadcasting Radio to reach audiences with limited access to the arts.
TEY will engage diverse communities, including the Shinnecock Nation, Afro-Caribbean and Latinx communities, African American and students, families, seniors, multilingual participants.
The initiative begins with a public kick-off on September 19, 2026 at the Second Ave. Firehouse Gallery (Bay Shore) featuring civic proclamations, a free book giveaway, a public reading/discussion, and the opening of the community visual art exhibition " The House We Carry," which also serves as our America250 cultural heritage celebration. A presentation inspired by the book follows on September 22, 2026 at Suffolk County Community College's Center for Social Justice and Human Understanding. TEY and the Suffolk Cooperative Library System will coordinate at least 10 book discussions across partner libraries. Community creative responses include an Open Mic Reading (Jan. 29), a Writing Workshop (Jan. 31), an Indigenous-led "Matriarcas" reading and coffee conversation at the Shinnecock Nation (March 7), and a culminating family arts event, "Homes, Habitats & Belonging" at Long Island Game Farm (June 19–20, 2027) featuring reading, animal interaction, visual art stations, dialogue, and community celebration.

Prior grant recipient?

> Have you received a grant from Arts Midwest before?

Yes

Project Start Date

> When will the project begin?

09/19/2026

Project End Date

> When will the project end?

06/30/2027

Book Title

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

Book quantity

> Approximately how many books do you intend to order for your programming?

100

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

20

Proposed number of book discussions

> Must be at least 3

15

Proposed total number of events (including book discussions)

27

Anticipated adults served

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

29,000

Anticipated youths served

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

3000

Anticipated total participants

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

32000

Organization description narrative

> Tell us about your organization and the values that drive its work.

Teatro Experimental Yerbabruja (TEY) is a Long Island–based arts and cultural organization dedicated to building community, honoring cultural memory, and advancing social transformation through the arts. For more than 20 years, TEY has used theater, visual arts, and public engagement as powerful tools to uplift immigrant, Indigenous, and other historically marginalized voices, while creating inclusive spaces for dialogue, healing, and collective imagination. Rooted in culturally responsive practice, TEY activates public spaces and community institutions to ensure the arts remain accessible, relevant, and deeply connected to lived experience.
Over two decades, Teatro Yerbabruja has established a strong record of artistic excellence, audience engagement, and community trust across long Island. The organization has developed and sustained partnerships with libraries, school districts, colleges, Indigenous nations, media outlets, and grassroots organizations, allowing its programs to reach tens of thousands of residents annually. TEY's work is supported by federal, state, and local public funding, as well as foundations and individual donors.

One of TEY's most visible achievements is the production of the Long Island Puerto Rican Hispanic Parade, which the organization has led for the past 15 years. This annual civic and cultural celebration attracts approximately 50,000 attendees and serves as a vital platform for cultural pride, artistic expression, and community visibility for Puerto Rican and Hispanic residents across the region.

In 2023, Teatro Yerbabruja reached a major organizational milestone by acquiring the Firehouse Gallery and Performance Space, a nationally registered historic building donated by the South Shore Restoration Group. This permanent home has strengthened TEY's sustainability and expanded its ability to host year-round exhibitions, performances, literary events, and community convenings, positioning the organization as a cultural anchor in Bay Shore

.

TEY has a proven history with the NEA Big Read. In 2021–2022, the organization was awarded a Big Read grant to celebrate American Sunrise by Joy Harjo. The program engaged more than 25 partner organizations and included readings, performances, educational programs, and civic conversations. TEY coordinated and hosted Joy Harjo's visit to Long Island, including presentations at Stony Brook University and a meaningful collaboration with the Shinnecock Nation. This initiative was recognized by Arts Midwest and featured on its website as a national best practice in NEA Big Read implementation and community engagement.

Together, these accomplishments demonstrate Teatro Yerbabruja's capacity to steward federal investment, convene diverse partners, and deliver impactful, inclusive literary programming that strengthens communities and elevates underrepresented voices.

Theme statement

> Provide a rationale for your chosen NEA Big Read book and your plans for using the theme (America250) in your programming.

Teatro Experimental Yerbabruja (TEY) selected The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros because it powerfully advances the NEA Big Read and Arts Midwest goals of using literature to foster inclusive dialogue, broaden participation in the arts, and elevate voices that reflect the full scope of American history. As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, this project positions immigrant and Indigenous Latinx communities—core to Long Island's cultural landscape—not at the margins of the national story, but at its center. Cisneros' work offers an accessible and resonant lens through which participants can examine the founding ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as lived realities rather than abstract principles.

The House on Mango Street speaks directly to TEY's community by portraying identity, migration, language, gender, and belonging through intimate, vignette-based storytelling. These short, poetic narratives affirm the dignity of everyday life while revealing how access to freedom and opportunity remains uneven. The book's structure makes it especially effective for intergenerational, multilingual, and mixed-literacy audiences.

As a community-based arts organization, TEY will use literature as a catalyst for public conversation and creative expression. Shared reading will be paired with facilitated discussions hosted in libraries, colleges, and community spaces, and expanded through radio broadcasts and livestreamed conversations to reach broader audiences. Participants will engage in arts-based programming designed to connect national ideals to personal and cultural experience, including spoken-word and poetry workshops that begin with the prompt "I deserve…," theater activities in which participants devise short scenes where characters argue with the Declaration—agreeing, disagreeing, or asking it to do better—and movement and dance workshops that explore life, liberty, and happiness through the body, examining where freedom feels present or restricted. Visual art workshops will invite participants to design a "house" using words, symbols, and color to represent safety, freedom, and belonging.

Through partnerships with public libraries, schools, colleges and , arts organizations, and community-based groups, TEY will ensure the project reaches youth and adults across Long Island. By centering creative participation, elevating local stories, and making space for critical reflection, this NEA Big Read initiative will use literature and the arts to celebrate 250 years of U.S. history as a living, evolving story shaped by the diverse communities who continue to define it.

Programming description

> 1. Describe your programming plans in detail, including types of activities and locations, and the involvement of local talent (e.g., writers, artists from other disciplines, teachers, field experts) and art works

> (e.g., companion books, films, visual art, etc.). Be sure that your plans meet the minimum project requirements. Be sure that your plans meet the minimum project requirements outlined in the guidelines. 2. Explain how your programs meet your goals and the goals of the NEA Big Read: to inspire meaningful conversations, celebrate local creativity, elevate a variety of voices and perspectives, and build stronger connections in each community. Explain how you plan to assess those goals to determine if they are met.

Teatro Experimental Yerbabruja will implement its NEA Big Read programming across Long Island's Nassau and Suffolk Counties, New York, aiming to engage a wide and diverse range of residents. This initiative will reach members of the Shinnecock Nation; Suffolk County's varied Latinx, African American, Caribbean, and white populations; students from all educational levels; families; seniors; and individuals who are multilingual or emerging readers.The initiative has a strong partner network, including the Suffolk Cooperative Library System (covering 55 libraries). Key collaborators include Suffolk County Community College's Center for Social Justice, La Fiesta Radio (93.3 FM / 1040 AM), the Shinnecock Nation, the Long Island Game Farm, and local artists.

The initiative launched with a high-visibility public kick-off and America250 celebration on September 19, 2026, at Teatro Yerbabruja's Second Avenue Firehouse Gallery in Bay Shore. The event will feature civic proclamations from New York State Senator Monica Martinez and Suffolk County Legislator Samuel Gonzalez, a free book giveaway, and the opening of a visual art exhibition, The House We Carry, curated by Ecuadorian artist Segundo Orellana. The event includes a public reading and guided discussion, connecting the book's themes (home, identity, neighborhood) with Long Island residents' real-life experiences. It aims to elevate the stories of immigrant, Indigenous, and communities of color to promote dialogue and understanding.

Programming continues with a college-based public reading on September 22, 2026, at Suffolk County Community College's Center for Social Justice. Additional bilingual book discussions will take place across Nassau and Suffolk Counties through partner libraries, including Westbury Library on September 24 (in collaboration with poet Adriana Devers), Brentwood and Hauppauge Libraries on October 21, and Central Islip Library on November 5, with additional sessions scheduled through the library network. These discussions will be facilitated to support mixed literacy levels, ensuring meaningful engagement for both emerging and experienced readers while reinforcing libraries' roles as trusted community hubs.

In January 2027, Teatro Yerbabruja will activate the Firehouse Gallery as a creative literary hub. A community open mic and public reading on January 29, led by Afro-Jamaican poet Ne'qual, will invite participants to share readings, reflections, and original work inspired by the book. A writing workshop on January 31, led by the Writing Away program under poet Terry Moss, will guide participants in crafting new work centered on belonging, community, and civic ideals. These programs position participants as creators as well as readers, transforming literature into artistic expression and community storytelling. To broaden access, TEY will produce a four-part live radio and online conversation series on February 4, 11, 18, and 25, 2027, via La Fiesta Radio and JVC Broadcasting platforms. Featuring immigrant youth,

educators, and new Americans from the Brentwood and Patchogue school districts, these broadcasts will pair readings with guided conversations about the book's relevance to contemporary life on Long Island. The radio format expands access for audiences unable to attend in person and connects households across the region through a shared literary experience.

In March, TEY will present Matriarcas on March 7, 2027, at the Shinnecock Nation—an Indigenous-led reading and coffee conversation curated by Bianca Collins of Matriarchal Coffee. Centering Indigenous perspectives on land, sovereignty, home, and women's leadership, this program deepens cross-cultural understanding and ensures America250 reflection includes Indigenous worldviews.The initiative concludes with Homes, Habitats & Belonging, a family-centered, place-based event at the Long Island Game Farm on June 19–20, 2027. Through artmaking, reflection, movement, and a dance performance by TEY's ensemble—including Shinnecock Nation dancer Sunshine Grumbs—participants will explore themes of home, freedom, and care within a shared public setting.

Across all sites and formats, TEY anticipates reaching approximately 32,000 individuals, including 2,000 in-person participants and 30,000 through radio and online platforms. Evaluation methods will include attendance tracking, book distribution totals, broadcast metrics, bilingual participant surveys, facilitator reflections, partner feedback, and documentation of creative outputs, ensuring the project meets NEA Big Read goals of fostering meaningful dialogue, celebrating creativity, elevating diverse voices, and strengthening community connection.

Project partnerships narrative

> 1. Describe your partnerships with libraries (as applicable) and community organizations. Indicate if these are new partnerships or describe your history of working with these partners. 2. Explain the role each partner will play in your program.

Teatro Experimental Yerbabruja (TEY) will deliver this NEA Big Read through a strong network of library, civic, education, media, Indigenous, and cultural partners across Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Many of these relationships are long-standing collaborations built through years of co-presented public programs, school-based residencies, and community arts initiatives; others are expanded partnerships developed specifically to scale an island-wide Big Read and ensure broad geographic and demographic reach.

Libraries are the primary public humanities partners. The Suffolk Cooperative Library System (SCLS) will serve as our central library hub, coordinating participation across its network of 55 Suffolk County libraries and supporting scheduling, outreach, and program promotion. Confirmed Suffolk County library partners—Brentwood Library, Central Islip Library, Hauppauge Library, Bay Shore Library, and Middle Country Library—will host NEA Big Read book discussions and community conversations, provide accessible public space, promote events to patrons, and support local book distribution and registration.

In Nassau County, Westbury Library extends the project's reach across the Island and will host a featured program in collaboration with poet Adriana Devers as part of the Latinx Writers Fair, combining reading and book discussion.

Higher education and school partners expand intergenerational participation and youth leadership. Suffolk County Community College's Center for Social Justice and Human Understanding will host a reading and discussion and support outreach to students, educators, and community members. Brentwood Union Free School District and Patchogue-Medford School District will help recruit and prepare immigrant youth and educators for readings and dialogue, strengthening school-to-library participation pathways and elevating student voice.

Media and outreach partners broaden access for communities with limited access to the arts. La Fiesta Radio (93.3 FM / 1040 AM) and JVC Broadcasting will produce and broadcast the four-part live reading and conversation series and amplify the initiative through radio, digital platforms, and community promotion. Additional outreach partners—Noticias, Great Bay Shore News, and the We Are Long Island network—will promote key events to diverse audiences, including Spanish-speaking communities and regional networks, increasing participation across Nassau and Suffolk.
Indigenous and place-based partners ensure cultural inclusion and innovative programming. The Shinnecock Nation will host "Matriarcas," an Indigenous-led reading and coffee conversation curated by Bianca Collins (Shinnecock Nation member and owner of Matriarchal Coffee), centering Indigenous perspectives on land, home, sovereignty, and women's leadership. Long Island Game Farm will host the culminating family arts event, providing a site for place-based literacy and arts learning.
Local artists and cultural workers will lead creative engagement and original work. Visual artist and curator Segundo Orellana will curate TEY's exhibition "La Casa Que Llevamos / The House We Carry," supporting local artist participation. Afro-Jamaican poet Ne'qual will lead the community open mic and public reading, while poet-educator Terry Moss (Writing Away) will lead the writing workshop. Adriana Devers will contribute a featured reading and facilitated discussion at Westbury Library.
TEY will serve as the lead organizer and producer, coordinating partners, contracting teaching artists, ensuring bilingual and accessible program design, managing marketing and documentation, and implementing evaluation across all sites to ensure alignment with NEA Big Read goals.

Describe the community your program impacts

> Please describe the community you plan to reach with your programming with details about the underserved group(s) you intend to reach.

Our programming is designed to engage the diverse communities that form the fabric of our organization and the wider area, deeply rooted in our mission as a Latinx organization. We will use The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros as a central text to celebrate her literary contribution as a

Latina woman in the United States and introduce her work to new audiences. This selection provides an ideal platform to foster dialogue on themes vital to the America250 observance—identity, migration, language, gender, and belonging—in the context of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Community Engagement and Outreach:

We will actively engage a broad spectrum of the community, including:
Immigrant and new American communities
Indigenous people of Long Island (such as the Shinnecock Nation)
African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Haitian communities
White communities
Senior center participants
New immigrant students and literary teachers (via Spanish-language broadcasting)
Neurodiverse populations (with experienced, accommodating support)

Programming Methods for Diverse Engagement:
Beyond traditional library readings, our diverse programming ensures wide participation:
Art and Literature Integration: An art exhibition, poetry writing workshop, and open mic session curated by local artists from the target communities.
"Café con Matriarcas": A dedicated discussion with the Shinnecock Nation to highlight and understand Native American voices.
Media Outreach: Broadcasting public readings and discussions to a Spanish-speaking audience to reach individuals who might not otherwise participate, while also elevating young voices.
Oral History Preservation: Programs with senior center participants to capture and give voice to often-forgotten oral histories.
Accessibility: All programs are bilingual, and our facilities are ADA compliant.

Methods for Invitation and Promotion:
We will employ a multi-faceted approach to invite participants:
Direct Promotion: Targeted outreach with partner organizations, including libraries and elected officials.
Local Distribution: Flyers distributed to local businesses and chambers of commerce.
Online Marketing: Targeted campaigns on Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to reach our specific audience and geographic area.
Radio Promotion: Utilizing JVC Broadcasting across three stations in both English and Spanish.
Press Releases: Distribution to local newspapers.

Budget

Expense Description	Paid by Grant	Paid by Applicant	Paid by 3rd Party	In-kind	Total Match
Program Director	$8,000.00	$0.00	$5,000.00	$0.00	$5,000.00
coordinator	$3,000.00	$2,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$2,000.00
Brentwood Librarian	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00	$0.00	$1,000.00
Hauppauge Librarian	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00	$0.00	$1,000.00
Middle Country Librarian	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00	$0.00	$1,000.00
Central Islip Librarian	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00	$0.00	$1,000.00
Westbury Librarian	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00	$1,000.00
Suffolk County Library System	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$5,000.00	$5,000.00
Books 100 books	$1,300.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
local artists and performers	$3,000.00	$1,000.00	$0.00	$2,000.00	$3,000.00
2 Native American Artists	$1,000.00	$500.00	$0.00	$0.00	$500.00
3 outside Facilitators	$1,500.00	$0.00	$0.00	$500.00	$500.00
Facility space Firehouse	$1,000.00	$3,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$3,000.00
Facility space Shinnecok Center	$500.00	$500.00	$0.00	$0.00	$500.00
Art material	$0.00	$1,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00
Promotion and Marketing	$700.00	$500.00	$0.00	$3,000.00	$3,500.00
Insurance	$0.00	$1,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00
Administration overhead	$0.00	$500.00	$0.00	$0.00	$500.00
Radio Advertising	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$5,000.00	$5,000.00
Game Farm Facilities	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$2,000.00	$2,000.00

4 Radio Programs productions	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$6,000.00	$6,000.00
Local newspapers ad	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00	$1,000.00
Total Project Expenses:	**$20,000.00**	**$10,000.00**	**$9,000.00**	**$25,500.00**	**$44,500.00**

Use this space to offer more detail about your budget

Suffolk County Cooperative system will provide additional libraries no included in this budget as we are still waiting for confirmation.

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