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NEA Withdraws \$10,000 Grant Funding for Kitsap Creative Youth Development Program

Funding was to be used for low-cost summer musical theater camp

Suquamish, WA. May 6, 2025. On Sunday, May 2, the leadership of Kids in Concert, a local youth creative development organization, was informed by email that KIC would no longer be receiving a \$10,000 grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts as part of its "Challenge America" grant program. The email stated that the purpose of the grant did not align with the President's new priorities for funding, stating, "The NEA will now prioritize projects that elevate the Nation's HBCUs and Hispanic Serving Institutions, celebrate the 250th anniversary of American independence, foster AI competency, empower houses of worship to serve communities, assist with disaster recovery, foster skilled trade jobs, make America healthy again, support the military and veterans, support Tribal communities, make the District of Columbia safe and beautiful, and support the economic development of Asian American communities."

KIC's award was announced in an NEA press release on January 14th of this year. It was one of 272 recipients of Challenge America grants nationwide and one of only eight from Washington State. It is the only organization in Kitsap County to have received NEA funding in the 2025 grant cycle. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, the Challenge America grant program "offer[s] support primarily to small organizations for a wide variety of arts projects that extend the reach of the arts underserved groups and communities that may have limited access to the arts relative to geography, ethnicity, economic status, and/or disability." In early 2025, the NEA announced that the Challenge America grant program would be dissolved for fiscal year 2026.

The purpose of the \$10,000 grant was to support KIC's annual musical theater summer camp- a youth-led, two-week camp that serves approximately 50 first through sixth grade students in north Kitsap County. 2025 marks the 10th year of KIC's musical theater camp. Musical theater camp is youth-led, with teenagers responsible for script writing, choreography, and adapting

musical numbers, and teaching and mentoring campers. Over two weeks, campers are assigned roles, learn lines, blocking, songs, and choreography, and put on a final performance for approximately 300 community members. KIC's program director, Kirsten Branson-Meyer states, "This revocation has a real impact. While we do charge a small tuition for camp, over 50% of our participants attend on full or partial scholarships. We now face a significant funding gap, and we will need to divert our limited staff time and resources toward emergency fundraising to ensure the program can run as planned. Like many small arts organizations, we operate on a very tight budget. Every dollar counts. This setback will not only strain our team but may limit our ability to offer the same quality or scope of programming." Additionally, Branson-Meyer warns of potential long-term impacts on access to arts programming: "The arts should be accessible to everyone—not just those who can afford them. When federal support for community-based arts is withdrawn, it disproportionately affects low-income families and young people who rely on scholarships to participate. This kind of loss shifts the burden of arts access to local fundraising and private donors, which widens the equity gap."

Kids in Concert (KIC) is a free after-school music and youth development program in Kitsap County, WA. Modeled after El Sistema, the internationally renowned youth orchestra movement from Venezuela, KIC was founded on the idea that every child should be able to access the benefits of music education with no barriers. Since its inception in 2010, KIC has grown into a robust program serving over 70 students aged 6-18 from diverse communities across north Kitsap County, including Suquamish, Indianola, Kingston, Poulsbo, and Bainbridge Island. Approximately 50% of KIC students identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). KIC enjoys a longstanding partnership with the Suquamish Tribe.

If you would like more information about this topic please contact KIC Executive Director, Christine Edwards, at christine@kidsinconcert.org.

For more information about Kids in Concert, or to make a donation, visit www.kidsinconcert.org.