

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 25, 2019

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Metro Arts Groups Receive Accessibility Grants

Nine Twin Cities arts organizations have been awarded ADA Access Improvement Grants by VSA Minnesota. The nonprofits will use their grants, totaling \$82,635, to make their arts programs more accessible to people with disabilities. Since 2010, 149 projects by 76 different organizations have now been funded, totaling \$1,705,635.

VSA Minnesota has administered the ADA Access Improvement Grant program since 2010 for the [Metropolitan Regional Arts Council](#) (MRAC). Funds come from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature with money from the vote of the people of Minnesota on November 4, 2008. The purpose is to enable nonprofit arts organizations in the seven-county Twin Cities area to improve their programs, projects, equipment, or facilities in ways that have the potential for significant or long-term impact in involving more people with disabilities as participants or patrons in arts programs.

Funded projects are (* = short-term impact guidelines with smaller grants):

[Art Works Eagan](#), Eagan **15,000**
Art Works will install automatic door openers for six to eight strategically targeted doors in its facility in Eagan. The project is necessary to make its gallery and event spaces easily accessible for clients, volunteers and community members with mobility challenges.

[Cedar Cultural Center](#), Minneapolis **15,000**
With the support of a web accessibility service, The Cedar Cultural Center will audit, assess, test and update its website to become more accessible to people who utilize screen readers. As part of this project, Cedar staff will undergo training on web accessibility standards to ensure that they are equipped to understand and maintain accessibility as the site and standards are updated.

[Drama Interaction](#), Chaska **1,407**
Drama Interaction proposes the purchase of sound equipment to better serve participants in classes and audiences.

[In the Heart of the Beast Puppet & Mask Theatre](#), Minneapolis **9,000**
In the Heart of the Beast seeks funding to increase the accessibility of its largest annual event, the MayDay parade, ceremony and festival, which over 60,000 people attended last year. It wishes to hire an Accessibility Coordinator to help the theater establish long-term relationships with communities of people with special needs, redesign its studio space layout for community workshops, and increase accessibility offerings the day of the event.

* **Jewish Community Center of Greater St. Paul**, St. Paul **7,500**
To increase the number of people with hearing loss attending JCC cultural arts events through the installation of a frequency modulation assistive listening devices in its Center for Performing Arts.

Lakeshore Players Theatre, White Bear Lake **4,667**
Lakeshore Players Theatre will buy open captioning equipment to continue to become more accessible to all individuals.

* **Leonardo's Basement**, Minneapolis **5,345**
Leonardo's Basement seeks to procure hardware that will support individuals with cognitive disabilities and physical impairments. This will include an automatic door operator, adjustable height workbenches and noise reducing headphones. Support from VSA Minnesota will help make arts learning workshops accessible to all 14,000 students served annually.

Pillsbury House Theatre, Minneapolis **15,000**
The goal of this project is to transform a neglected room on the second floor into a Sensory Room for young people in programs who have learning difficulties, developmental disabilities or sensory impairments. This room would have a myriad of interactive elements that would encourage young people to engage and explore the environment which will have a positive effect on their ability to react and interact with the larger world around them.

Playwrights' Center, Minneapolis **9,716**
This project is designed to deepen the Playwrights' Center's outreach by improving the accessibility of its services and resources for people with disabilities, who are underrepresented among its fellowships, mentorships, membership and educational programming.

GRANT REVIEW PANELISTS:

A total of 15 applications were scored by a panel of persons active in arts and disability communities; VSA Minnesota's board approved the panel's recommendations.

Panelists included:

Nicholas Ambroz, Brainerd, VSA Minnesota Board

Kit Bix, Minnetonka, freelance theatre reviewer

Sam Jasmine, Plymouth, VSA Minnesota Board, KFAI "Disability & Progress" director

Cindy Tarshish, Minnetonka, ADA Minnesota (St. Paul)

John Work, Stillwater, TicketWorks

Michael Foster, Minneapolis, and Mark Hiemenz, St. Louis Park, were unable to attend.

The next grant application deadline is May 1, 2019. \$82,635 will be available to award.

Founded in 1986, VSA Minnesota is a statewide, nonprofit organization whose mission is to create a community where people with disabilities can learn through, participate in and access the arts. It is an affiliate of VSA, a program of The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC.