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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Innovative Capacity-Building Program Announces Selection of 17 Arts Nonprofit Participants**

*Five-funder initiative commits to building the capacity of distinctive arts organizations  
through a new \$1.85 million three-year training and development program*

July 14, 2008, Minneapolis —ArtsLab, a collaborative of major foundations that support the arts, today announces the 17 Minnesota organizations selected for participation in its three-year training and development program. The 17 arts nonprofits were selected from a field of nearly 70 program applicants; a full list of program participants follows this release.

ArtsLab is a \$1.85 million venture of the Bush Foundation, the F. R. Bigelow Foundation, Mardag Foundation, The McKnight Foundation and The Saint Paul Foundation. Going beyond traditional capacity-building approaches to strengthen operational management, the ArtsLab program was holistically designed to also improve individual leadership capacity and to bolster the region's arts sector within a community context. ArtsLab seeks to:

- increase the leadership pool for tomorrow's arts sector;
- strengthen the presence of visionary small arts organizations in both urban and rural communities; and
- use the power of the arts to enhance community vitality and engagement.

“With increased capacity, these exceptional organizations will be better equipped to serve their own audiences and our entire community,” said Peter C. Hutchinson, Bush Foundation president. “By focusing on visionary leadership, as well as artistic excellence and community connections, ArtsLab will enable these institutions to nurture current and future cultural leaders.”

In addition to providing modest grants to support operations, ArtsLab will provide technical assistance and peer learning opportunities to cultivate leadership skills, strategic thinking, community impact and adaptability to change, as well as more traditional management tools and systems.

“Such promising, smaller organizations are worthy of both our attention and our investments,” explained Carleen Rhodes, president and CEO of The Saint Paul Foundation. “By allowing them to bring their missions fully to life, ArtsLab’s programs and professional team also empower them to have increased presence and engagement in their communities. In partnership with our committed colleagues, we are pleased to support these organizations as invaluable regional assets.”

To assist with the program’s curriculum and coaching design, training and development, ArtsLab has retained a diverse team of experts. Areas of expertise covered by the curriculum planning team include board development and governance, executive assessment and coaching, staff and volunteer skills-building, conflict management, organizational effectiveness, fundraising, evaluation and strategic planning, financial management, social change and community engagement, community development, marketing and communications and media relations.

Program participants were chosen because of their demonstrated ability to creatively explore their own artistic path, while also probing a deeper understanding of engagement with audiences and their civic community. Reflecting a depth of experience in arts administration and capacity-building in communities of all sizes, the selection panel included Barbara Davis, arts consultant (panel chair); Janet Brown, arts department chair, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota; John Davis, executive director, Cornucopia Art Center, Lanesboro; Cinda Holt, Business Development Specialist, Montana Arts Council; Herman Milligan, Jr., PhD, Wells Fargo & Company, Minneapolis; Linda Myer, arts consultant, Minneapolis; Rick Shiomi, artistic director, Mu Performing Arts, Minneapolis; Bonnie Steward, vice president of outreach & advancement, Northland College, Thief River Falls; Chris Widdess, managing director, Penumbra Theatre, St. Paul.

The 17 arts nonprofits selected by the panel cultivate new artistic aesthetics, reach a breadth of diverse audiences, serve both emerging and mid-career artists, challenge traditional organizational structures and meet a wide range of regional needs. Altogether, the organizations taking part in the unique three-year program represent cultural activity in four regions of Minnesota: Minneapolis/Saint Paul; Fargo/Moorhead; Bemidji; and Little Falls.

A full list of ArtsLab participants follows.

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## ArtsLab Participating Organizations

**Ancient Traders Gallery.** A Minneapolis showcase for American Indian fine art, Ancient Traders honors and strengthens relationships between contemporary American Indian artists and the living influence of preceding generations, between artists and audiences of all ethnic backgrounds, and between art and the soul of their neighborhood. Native artists throughout the Midwest and Southern Canada are exhibited in this nationally recognized gallery.

**Bedlam Theatre.** Blending professional and community art, Bedlam has engaged the community in boundary-pushing performing arts since 1993. As a radical theater collective, Bedlam challenges its audiences with cutting-edge productions, while challenging traditional notions of organizational structure. Bedlam's work and their space have created a "social hub" on Minneapolis's west bank and the broader metro region.

**Bemidji Community Art Center.** Since 1982, the Center has dedicated itself to encouraging the growth and development of and access to the visual arts in the Bemidji area. Housed in the historic Carnegie Library on Lake Bemidji, the Center provides gallery space for exhibitions, poetry, music and social events with a variety of partners. It brings to the region artists of national, regional and local prestige.

**Bemidji Symphony Orchestra.** This regional orchestra is dedicated to bringing classical music to new audiences and providing performance experience for auditioned regional musicians. The orchestra hired its first resident conductor in 2005, positioning itself for a new regional role. Dr. Beverly Evertt, conductor, has been lauded by the American Symphony Orchestra League as "among the most promising talent in our field."

**Center for Hmong Arts and Talent.** CHAT resides at the heart of the Hmong community of St. Paul, with a mission to nurture and develop Hmong artists to enhance the community. CHAT gives voice to the Hmong community through programs for children, teens and elders. Programs span spoken word, theater, radio, visual arts and an annual festival celebrating and bridging cultures. Their newest program sums up their work: "Old Stories in a New Light."

**Edge Center for the Arts.** With a population of 469, Bigfork is indeed located at the "edge of the wilderness" in northern Minnesota. It is now home to a \$2.1 million arts and community center owned by the school district and managed by the Edge Center. Dedicated to "enhancing the edge of the wilderness by providing a welcoming and well-managed space where shared art experiences build community," the Center has become a regional hub for fine arts, community arts, community education and myriad community gatherings.

**Forecast Public Art.** Forecast strengthens and advances the field of public art locally, nationally and internationally. *Public Art Review* is the world's only journal critically exploring contemporary public art. Created in 1989, the *Review* currently reaches 10,000 readers in all 50 states and 20 foreign countries. Forecast also awards 8-10 competitive grants each year to emerging Minnesota artists, and provides consultative support to public art initiatives.

**The Great River Arts Association.** In 1992, the Great River Arts Association was established. In 2001, it realized its dream of establishing an arts center to serve Minnesota's heartland in collaboration with a series of public and private partnerships. Today, the Association offers the region a breadth of artistic opportunities through its galleries, a retail outlet for local artist's work, youth programming, concert series and a home for public access television.

**Lake Agassiz Arts Council.** A partnership of 59 arts organizations, arts-related businesses and individual artists since 1970, The Council serves and advocates for the arts throughout the region surrounding Fargo-Moorhead. The Council provides a strong voice for the arts, including an arts-focused newsletter,

the *Arts Forum*, as well as CulturePulse, an arts events website. The Council has received a Fargo-Moorhead Convention and Visitors Bureau award for its work in support of community development.

**Mask and Rose Women’s Theatre Collective.** Mask and Rose produces plays that express the human condition in the female voice, bringing live theater to new and underserved audiences of Bemidji and the surrounding communities of northern Minnesota. The group’s artistic purpose is to provide creative vision and voice of women and youth through music, poetry, original theater and visual arts. Central to the Collective’s product development process is a nurturing and educative journey.

**Mizna.** Mizna is devoted to promoting Arab American culture, providing a forum for its expression through literature and art. Since its incorporation in 1998, Mizna has published the only journal of Arab American literature in the United States, and it presents the only Arab American film festival in the Upper Midwest. Mizna also works with local artists to develop their work, and hosts national and international Arab artists for broader community.

**Nordic Culture Club.** The organization’s vision is to present innovative and life-changing fine and cultural arts that help create identity and connection, with a mission to preserve, perpetuate and celebrate Nordic cultures. Though founded to connect Scandinavian-Americans with their cultural roots through the arts, the organization also seeks to connect diverse peoples and cultures through their programming, including serving as a role model to the Celtic Arts Festival, the Pangea Intercultural Arts and the Mujeres Unidas Latina group.

**One Voice Mixed Chorus.** Now in its 20th year, One Voice is the nation’s largest gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) and straight allies community chorus. Its mission is to “build community and create social change by raising our voices in song.” The group seeks, through creative musical entertainment, to enhance the quality and understanding of GLBT culture. One Voice is known for its musical excellence, diverse repertoire, innovative collaborations, humor and strong commitment to community outreach.

**Red Eye Collaboration.** Red Eye has been “celebrating the messy process of discovery” since 1983, holding true to the belief that art lies in pushing at the boundaries; and that the artist’s role is to contest the barriers found internally, in the audience and in the world around us. Red Eye supplies audiences and artists with opportunities to get up close and personal with the thrills and challenges involved in developing new work. Red Eye focuses strategically on building the next generation of artists, audiences and supporters of the arts.

**Springboard for the Arts.** Springboard connects artists with the skills, contacts, information and services they need to make a living and a life as the artist. The organization’s purpose is to build the reciprocal relationship between artists and community, so that artists are active, engaged and valued for the contributions they make to a vital community. Springboard has expanded its services to reach a multistate region with its “Work of Art” workshops.

**Theatre B.** Theatre B produces cutting-edge, contemporary productions that explore human issues and themes that emerge uniquely through character and story. The theater seeks to diversify the cultural offerings of the Fargo-Moorhead regional community and explore social issues that lead to a greater understanding of the human condition, for creative artists and audiences alike.

**TU Dance.** TU Dance was founded on the extraordinary artistry of Uri Sands and Toni Pierce-Sands, veterans of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. With a foundation of experience and technical excellence in numerous dance traditions, the company has forged a distinctive hybrid aesthetic for exciting new directions in dance. Seeking to reach diverse audiences and to expand audience for dance, the group has developed a strong school residency program, and launched a touring program, in addition to local performance.