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**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS ANNOUNCES
JEFFERSON COUNTY LIBRARY COOPERATIVE
TO RECEIVE A BIG READ GRANT**

November 13, 2007—Washington, DC—The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) today continued its drive toward making The Big Read the largest federal reading program in U.S. history. The NEA announced that the Jefferson County Cooperative is one of 127 libraries, municipalities, and arts, culture, higher education, and science organizations to receive a grant to host a Big Read celebration of one of 16 classic novels from January-June 2008. The NEA launched The Big Read nationally in 2007 in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. Jefferson County's book of choice for the 2008 Big Read is *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

“We are thrilled to participate in The Big Read with other libraries around the country, and we are particularly proud to be launching it with *To Kill A Mockingbird*,” said Pat Ryan, Director of the Jefferson County Library Cooperative. “As we saw just last week when Harper Lee received the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her great literary contribution to our country, the novel continues to have undeniable influence on our culture. This classic with close Alabama ties is a great choice to introduce and re-introduce to Jefferson County students and adults through The Big Read.”

The Libraries of Jefferson County are planning a host of activities to coincide with the Big Read in April 2008. In addition to resources and activities for teachers and students, the Libraries will host special interactive events and online capabilities to connect readers from around the county and beyond. A full events calendar will be available in January 2008.

The latest Big Read grantees represent 38 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The NEA inaugurated the Big Read as a pilot project with ten communities in 2006. By 2009, approximately 400 communities in the U.S. will have hosted a Big Read since the program's launch.

“In just two years, The Big Read has grown from ten communities to include nearly 200 towns and cities nationwide. Although each of these communities celebrates its Big Read program in its own way, one theme we consistently hear back is that The Big Read is not just bringing citizens back to the joy of reading, but also reinvigorating the very idea of community,” said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia. “I am delighted to announce the newest round of Big Read communities in this program, which is about so much more than reading.”

The organizations selected to participate in The Big Read for the first half of 2008 will receive grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$20,000 to promote and carry out community-based programs. Participating cities and towns also receive reader's guides and teacher's guides for each novel, audio guides that also can be used as radio programming, publicity materials, an online organizer's guide for running a successful Big Read program, and access to a comprehensive Big Read Web site. Each local program will include events, such as read-a-thons, book discussions, film screenings, and library and museum exhibits, aimed at avid and lapsed or reluctant readers alike.

“The Big Read is reaching across state and international borders,” said Dr. Anne-Imelda Radice, Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the NEA's lead federal partner for the Big Read. “As director of the IMLS, the federal agency that funds libraries and museums, I am pleased to support this initiative that is creating a new generation of readers. The sky is truly the limit with this partnership.”

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The Big Read brings together partners across the country to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment.

The next Big Read application deadline is February 12, 2008, for communities wishing to host a Big Read from September 2008-June 2009. For more information on The Big Read, including program FAQs, the complete list of Big Read novels, and application deadlines, please visit

www.neabigread.org.

A listing of all the Big Read grants awarded for programming in January-June 2008 is also available at www.neabigread.org.

*The **National Endowment for the Arts** is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts—both new and established—bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Arts Endowment is the nation’s largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases. For more information, please visit www.arts.gov.*

*The **Institute of Museum and Library Services** is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute’s mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development. For more information, please visit www.imls.gov.*

***Arts Midwest** connects people throughout the Midwest and the world to meaningful arts opportunities, sharing creativity, knowledge, and understanding across boundaries. Arts Midwest connects the arts to audiences throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest’s history spans more than 25 years. For more information, please visit www.artsmidwest.org.*