



June 16, 2014

Ms. Margaret S. Wurst
Henry Wurst Family Foundation
1331 Saline Street
North Kansas City, MO 64116

Dear Ms. Wurst:

The Foundation of the Metropolitan Community Colleges (MCC) requests a \$1,000 grant for MCC's 15th annual Storytelling Celebration, which will bring the art of storytelling to some 14,000 area children and their families via 230 performances at 65 metropolitan Kansas City venues.

About the Storytelling Celebration

The 2014 MCC Storytelling Celebration is a five-day event, from November 5th-8th, designed to inspire, entertain and educate area children and their families via the vanishing art of the compelling tale as told by skilled storytellers. The Celebration will feature 45 storytellers in 230 storytelling performances and related events at 65 venues throughout the Kansas City area. An estimated 14,000 people are expected to participate in this free, family friendly event led by storytellers – both professional and regional amateur tellers – who represent a wide range of cultures and performance styles. The Celebration will consist of several two- to three-hour performances by the four featured, internationally acclaimed storytellers, including a spooky and exciting night of ghost stories; scores of 45-minute to one-hour storytelling performances at schools, libraries and other community venues; plus several storytelling workshops. Approximately 80% of the participants will be children K-12 from schools in Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas as well as from the North Kansas City, Fort Osage and Kearney school districts. Roughly a third of participants will be from low-income, disadvantaged families for whom the Storytelling Celebration may be their only exposure to the arts during the year.

MCC has been sponsoring the Storytelling Celebration since 1999, which to date has advanced the power of the story as art among more than 270,000 area children and adults. The Foundation of the Metropolitan Community Colleges, a 501 (c)(3) organization established in 1975, is submitting this proposal on behalf of the MCC Storytelling Celebration.

Need

The Vanishing Art and Power of Storytelling

Well-told tales have the power to inspire and educate people as well as stimulate their imaginations. Unfortunately, the art of the spoken word through dramatic and engaging storytelling is not highly valued in today's technology-focused world. Yet the dynamic and intriguing stories narrated during our Celebration serve as mini life lessons about the triumph of the human spirit in the face of obstacles and adversity. For example, a past Celebration story about Satchel Paige of the Kansas City Monarchs and the discrimination he and other black baseball players had to overcome inspired many youngsters of all colors and cultures to persevere in their own life struggles. Sometimes the impact of a story is intensely personal. For example, at one recent Celebration performance, the storytelling artist told of her own sexual abuse and how wrong it is for anyone to abuse a child. After the event, one young participant told her teacher she was being abused. This was the first time the child had ever revealed her "secret."

Storytelling as a Teaching Tool

Storytelling can also be an invaluable teaching tool. Study after study demonstrates that the arts, including storytelling, enhance learning skills. This is important because students in some area public schools are failing to meet basic core literacy standards.

Unfortunately, too many students are graduating without the reading, math and thinking skills they need to succeed in work and in life. The Storytelling Celebration specifically focuses on the learning potential of storytelling, which is an active rather than passive mode of communication. By engaging audience members in the telling of a story, participants are much more likely to absorb the message of the narrative than when they are listening to a classroom lecture or sitting passively in front of a computer. And every single storytelling performance during the 2014 Celebration has an educational aspect designed to help children in the audience improve their core literacy skills, including reading, writing and listening.

Declining Funding

Metropolitan Community College has been committed to providing funds to supplement the Storytelling Celebration when outside funds were not sufficient to pay for the full cost of the event. However, since the economic downturn has spawned ongoing cuts in state funding and a decrease in enrollment, MCC can no longer provide the funding level it has afforded the Storytelling Celebration in the past. In order to avoid any cuts in programming, we are aggressively seeking funding from donors that understand the importance of engaging the public in the performance art of storytelling.

The budget for this year's Storytelling Celebration is \$64,800. Although we do not yet have formal commitments, we are anticipating \$34,500 from fundraising events and state and local foundations/organizations (including the Missouri Arts Council and ArtsKC Fund) that traditionally support our annual Storytelling Celebration. This leaves us with \$30,300 to raise from other local sources. (See attached budget for details.)

Key Objectives of the 2014 Storytelling Celebration

- **Expose More People to the Art of Storytelling**

The arts foster a vitality and liveliness in a community. MCC's Storytelling Celebration ignites and sustains this vitality via 230 dramatic storytelling performances over five days in November. Some 14,000 people, representing virtually every social, cultural, economic and racial/ethnic group in the metropolitan area, will attend one or more of these events, exposing them to the performance art of storytelling. This includes roughly a third of participants from low-income, disadvantaged backgrounds for whom the Storytelling Celebration may be their only exposure to the arts during the year.

- **Enhance Learning Among Children**

The 2014 Celebration, with its emphasis on using the art of storytelling to help children K-12 develop their core literacy skills, will prepare students to meet current and future academic requirements. The Celebration study guide gives educators a series of optional activities that address core Communication Arts standards in Missouri schools as they relate to storytelling. These age-appropriate activities, which can be used both before and after the performances, are designed to help children develop and improve core literacy skills. A 2010 study by the Missouri Alliance for Arts Education determined that higher levels of student participation in fine arts (including storytelling) resulted in higher Math scores, higher standardized test scores in Communication Arts and higher graduation rates.

Helping children build critical academic and life skills via the Storytelling Celebration is a long-term investment in the economic and social health of the Kansas City community.

- **Foster Peace and Understanding Among Diverse Populations**

The Kansas City area has historically been a community divided, not just by the Missouri River, but also by the ethnic, socio-economic and even religious differences common in metropolitan areas. The Storytelling Celebration is designed to break down these social and cultural barriers by educating audiences – via dramatic, inspiring storytelling – about the unique attributes and strengths of various cultural groups in the community. The intent is to generate more tolerance and acceptance.

About the Featured Storytellers and Storytelling Events

Featured National/International Storytellers

Below are the four featured storytellers scheduled for the 2014 Celebration.

- Antonio Rocha, internationally renowned storyteller and mime who can transform ancient myths into exciting tales that mesmerize audiences.
- Lyn Ford, an African American who specializes in African-American and Appalachian folk tales.
- Carrie Sue Ayvar, a bilingual storyteller
- Anthony Clark, the singing storyteller

All Celebration storytellers are selected by the Artistic Director based on their storytelling skills and narrative focus as well as their suitability for specific audiences and program venues. The featured storytellers are members of the National Storytelling Network; most of the regional storytellers are members of the River and Prairie Storyweavers Guild.

The Artistic Director is Joyce Slater, professional storyteller, linguist and actor, who has managed the artistic portion of the Storytelling Celebration since 2000. She is the former director of the River & Prairie Storyweavers Guild and has served as a National Storytelling Network board member.

Sample Storytelling Events

Keynote Event

- Ghosts in the Night Sky – Featured storytellers entertain children with a night of scary stories at the Plaza branch of the KCMO Public Library.

More than 200 Storytelling Sessions in Schools, Libraries and Other Community Sites

Although we are still in the planning stages, storytelling sessions will be similar to those outlined below, which have been presented at past Celebrations or are on the drawing board for the 2014 Celebration.

- Bully Billy Goat stories show children the harm of bullying and ways to avoid both bullying and being bullied.
- Tales about Jack, the poor boy who, through hard work and cleverness, eventually secured money and respect.
- The story of Satchel Paige of the Kansas City Monarchs and the discrimination he and other black baseball players faced.
- Tales of Earth, Sea and Sky features designed to stimulate an interest in science, geology and astronomy.
- Let Me Fly includes legends related to the Underground Railroad.
- Numerous bilingual (English/Spanish) performances in KCMO and KCKS neighborhoods with large Hispanic/Latino populations.

Storytelling Events Designed for Special Needs Populations

These include a storytelling concert to entertain and engage mentally and physically challenged youth at the Maple Valley State School on the MCC-Maple Woods campus. We also have scheduled a special storytelling performance for members of MCC's College Experience for Adults with Developmental Disabilities program, which provides educational experiences beyond traditional schooling that allow developmentally challenged adults to continue to grow socially and intellectually.

Additionally, we hope to have one or more signed storytelling performances at the Kansas State School for the Deaf in Olathe, as we did in 2013. The impact of that event by signing storyteller Peter Cook was incredible. At the end of the performance, Devin, a young deaf child, came up to Peter and excitedly tugged at him and made grunting noises. Devin's teachers and mother were overwhelmed with emotion and began to cry. Devin had not made a sound in more than three years, yet he was so moved by the storytelling performance of Mr. Cook that he found his voice, which for this deaf child consisted of grunts.


Project Evaluation

All hosting Celebration storytelling venues are required to distribute and collect two evaluation surveys: one for general audience members and a second for educators. The general audience survey, which identifies each participant's demographics, storytelling venue, and level of satisfaction with the session/event, enables planners to better determine the storytellers and kinds of stories that audiences most enjoy – key factors in planning future Celebrations. The educator survey is designed to assess the educational value of various storytelling events, including how the Celebration stories and study guide support the teaching of Communications Arts and other Missouri core school standards.

Past evaluation surveys from both audience members and educators have been extremely positive.

I appreciate your time and consideration of this request. Should you have any additional questions about this proposal or our Storytelling Celebration, please contact Heather Kelly-Perez, the project director for this event. You may reach Ms. Kelly-Perez by phone (816/604-3007) or email (heather.kelly-perez@mccckc.edu).

Sincerely


Mark James
Chancellor