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## **Innovative New Arts Programs Awarded New Grant from Houston Arts Alliance**

**HOUSTON (February 19, 2016)** – A groundbreaking program that will teach Houston students how to design video games based on their own original stories, as well as a cost-saving, costume-sharing program for local theater companies, will take shape over the next two years thanks to a new grant from Houston Arts Alliance (HAA) that rewards innovation.

HAA has awarded the Jamail Innovation Grant—which provides funding to arts organizations for inventive ideas that expand artistic excellence and increase the organizations' reach—to two recipients: **Writers in the Schools**, for a video game-based creative writing education program, and **Main Street Theater**, for a centralized costume warehouse. The organizations each will receive \$50,000 over two years.

“This funding opportunity will provide recipients the opportunity to bring to life projects that might not otherwise have been realized,” said Richard Graber, Director of Grants, Programs + Services. “These organizations often have limited operating budgets and, therefore, limited freedom and flexibility. The Jamail Innovation Grant will help organizations think beyond those boundaries.”

Writers in the Schools, partnering with Houston-based Histrionix Learning Company as well as area schools, will incorporate gaming technology into their creative writing workshops by first training instructors in game design. Then students will use components from their own writing—such as character, setting, theme and plot—to design their own video games. They also will have the opportunity to publish their games online as part of a digital portfolio.

This program will be offered in local schools and community-based classrooms.

“The Jamail Innovation Grant from HAA validates our curiosity and advances us as leaders in the field of arts education,” said Robin Reagler, PhD, WITS executive director. “By pairing creative writing and game design, WITS introduces students and teachers to the pleasure and power of 21st century literacies. Students become creators versus consumers of digital media through the magic of their stories.”

Main Street Theater, alongside a number of local theaters, will create a one-stop costume storage facility for numerous theatre companies to share. Often, smaller theater companies borrow costumes from other groups and coordinating access can be challenging, said executive artistic director Rebecca Udden.

“Having everybody's stock in one storage facility will save time and money — the designers won't have to run from place to place, and everyone will have access to all the stock,” Udden said. “It seems like a small thing, but it will be huge to the folks producing theater all over Houston. The theater companies are very excited about collaborating on this costume shop, and we will work very hard to make this successful.”

Other companies partnering with Main Street Theater in this project include The Ensemble Theatre, Theater LaB Houston, Mildred's Umbrella Theater Company, Stark Naked Theatre Company, The Catastrophic Theatre and Classical Theatre Company. Additional theater companies also are likely to participate, Udden said.

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The Jamail Innovation Grant encourages arts organizations to do what they do best—problem solve. Funded projects are expected to address complex challenges creatively, departing from traditional practices while still aligning with the organization’s mission and vision.

“We thank Randall Jamail for his vision and commitment to encouraging Houston’s arts sector to stretch its artistic and organizational visions with this grant,” said HAA President + CEO Jonathon Glus. “We hope these grants set a new standard for grant-making in Houston.”

The goal is to increase the organization’s reach, impact and accessibility through strategic organization partnerships between arts organizations or with organizations outside the cultural sector.

To be eligible for the grant, organizations had to be current recipients of HAA’s General Operating Support, General Operating Support Expansion or Resident Incubator programs. Grantees had to be based in Houston, but partnering entities could be anywhere in the United States or abroad.

Grant panelists were Tracie Hall, deputy commissioner for arts and creative industries for the City of Chicago’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events; Elizabeth Love, senior program officer for environment, health, arts and culture for Houston Endowment; Thaddeus Squire, founder and managing director for CultureWorks Greater Philadelphia; and Neville Vakharia, assistant professor and research director for Drexel University’s Arts Administration Graduate Program.

For more information about HAA’s grant programs, visit [houstonartsalliance.com/grants](http://houstonartsalliance.com/grants).

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### **About Houston Arts Alliance**

Houston Arts Alliance (HAA) is a nonprofit, public-private initiative that invests in Houston’s arts and cultural sector, advances Houston’s reputation as an arts and culture destination, and works to elevate the quality of life for all Houstonians through arts and culture. As the city’s designated local arts agency, HAA provides programs and services for the arts and cultural sector and awards approximately 225 grants annually to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and individual artists. The Alliance is the custodian of the city’s art collection; takes permanent and temporary art to Houston’s public spaces; presents free Folklife + Traditional Arts programming; nurtures up-and-coming arts organizations through its capacity building programs; connects the business community with the arts; convenes the field as necessary, and provides the latest information and research on cultural policy, economic development and Houston’s folklife.

HAA’s primary partner is the City of Houston. Approximately 55% of HAA’s budget comes from Hotel Occupancy Tax and 30% from the City of Houston’s Percent for Art Program, which supports commissions of new civic art projects as well as conservation of existing artworks. The remaining 15% of HAA’s budget comes from private fundraising (grants/contributions/other revenue) for programs and special projects. HAA is committed to raising funds for only those projects and initiatives that the Arts Alliance is uniquely positioned to provide the community.

For more information, visit [houstonartsalliance.com](http://houstonartsalliance.com). For events in the region, visit [Artshound.com](http://Artshound.com).