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For Immediate Release

**Arts Midwest President and CEO David Fraher to step down in 2019,
following a 35-year tenure at the institution**

*FRAHER ESTABLISHED MAJOR U.S. ARTS AND CULTURE ORGANIZATION
FOCUSED ON CREATIVE VITALITY OF MIDWEST*

October 30, 2018/Minneapolis, Minnesota—Arts Midwest’s Board of Directors and its President and CEO, David Fraher, jointly announced today that as part of an extensively-planned leadership transition, Fraher will step down from his position in the late-summer of 2019, after serving more than 35 years in that role. In that span of time with strong support from and in collaboration with the board, staff, and partner state arts agencies, Fraher has guided Minneapolis-based Arts Midwest to its current position as a major force in the U.S. arts and culture landscape with **programs annually enriching the lives of close to one million individuals** in communities across the Midwest, the nation, and the world.

Arts Midwest Board Chair Peter Capell said, “David Fraher is a renowned and respected visionary in our field, and his passion for the creative well-being of all people from communities big and small is inspiring. He conveys a great generosity of spirit and curiosity about people and culture, and I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to work with him and learn from him at Arts Midwest. David’s departure from Arts Midwest brings to a conclusion a triumphant tenure in which he nurtured the development of many arts organizations, arts administrators, and artists throughout the country. He imparted an attitude of collaboration, friendliness, excellent business sense, and cultural openness that has bolstered the best qualities of Midwestern culture while bringing art and ideas from across the globe to millions of people in our region. This is a moment of celebration for David and his achievements, all of which are deeply woven into the fabric of who we are and what we do.”

Fraher first came to the Midwest as Executive Director of the Affiliated State Arts Agencies of the Upper Midwest (a predecessor organization to Arts Midwest) in 1983, after having spent seven years in the mountain West region, where he worked in leadership roles with the Wyoming Arts Council and at the Western States Arts Federation. He credits his time in that region with forging a deep understanding of the less accessible, more sparsely populated areas of our country, while also deepening his commitment to ensuring that smaller, more geographically isolated communities have robust opportunities to celebrate, explore, and enjoy the fullest range of creative and artistic experiences. It was during his years in the West that Fraher also learned that imagination, collaboration, and sheer will power

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could often overcome the challenges of limited resources and public skepticism about the importance of the arts in everyday life. However, he was also struck by the positive attitude of those with whom he worked.

“I grew up in this business in a place and time where no one ever said, ‘That won’t work,’ or ‘We already tried that, forget it,’” Fraher said. “Instead, the response to a new idea always was, ‘That’s interesting. Give it a try! Let’s see where it takes us.’ That space for experimentation, that cautious trust invested in my sometimes naive ideas, has been a remarkable gift and it has afforded me many opportunities to try things that others might have imagined, but unfortunately, may never have had the same underlying, risk-tolerant base of support I had to move forward.”

This path toward innovation and carefully managed risk-taking has been a hallmark of Fraher’s tenure at Arts Midwest. In 1985, he collaborated with two forward-looking boards of directors to lead the merger of the Affiliated State Arts Agencies of the Upper Midwest with the Great Lakes Arts Alliance, creating Arts Midwest. While mergers in the arts nonprofit world were uncommon at the time, the goals of the enterprise were similar to mergers in the corporate world. The hope was that by reducing operational overlap and redundancies within the two organizations and unifying the cultural resources of the vast region served, reaching from the Dakotas through Ohio, the new organization could leverage the savings and combined capacities of both groups to invest in new and expanded approaches toward strengthening the creative vitality of the region.

In the 33 years since, Arts Midwest has delivered on that founding objective by designing and implementing a remarkable array of innovative and progressive programs that have had a lasting impact on the region’s cultural landscape. An early example can be found in the late-1980s, when Arts Midwest launched what was then a groundbreaking project to nurture a new generation of arts leaders in the Midwest from communities of color. The project provided significant fellowship support to early and mid-career arts leaders of color, positioning them in residencies at the senior level of arts organizations regionally and nationally, and providing training, professional development, and networking opportunities with the goal of breaking the glass ceiling for leaders of color in the field.

Ultimately, the program graduated more than 25 fellows, many of whom are holding leading positions in the cultural community today. Regina R. Smith, a former Arts Midwest Minority Arts Administration Fellow who now is managing director of the Arts & Culture Program at The Kresge Foundation, said the fellowship program was emblematic of the vision with which Fraher guided Arts Midwest over the decades. “The arts, artists, and communities throughout the Midwest and abroad have benefitted greatly from David’s leadership and commitment,” said Smith. “He has left an indelible imprint on the lives and careers of many aspiring to make a difference in the arts and culture field and their communities, and I include myself on that long list. He’s always taken risks and been a fierce advocate of diversity, equity, and inclusion. And, it is through that lens that he has permanently changed the way arts is produced and integrated into the daily lives of many grateful people.”

Fraher has also made a deep commitment to nurturing connections between the Midwest and the world, helping to craft deep and lasting cultural exchange relationships with more than three dozen nations around the world. Arts Midwest’s international programs have included exhibitions of Midwestern visual artists which have toured to Central Europe, China, and South America; tours of performers as diverse as Native American hoop dancer Kevin Locke and hip-hop vocalist/writer Dessa to communities across China; and partnerships with the U.S. Department of State and the National Endowment for the Arts, one of which built multi-year community-wide reading programs with Egypt which commissioned new

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translations into Arabic of significant American novels and encouraged American communities to read the work of Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz.

Such international ventures have brought significant acclaim to Arts Midwest, but for Fraher and his colleagues, the primary focus of their work has always been on the nine-state region where the organization has built a broad portfolio of programs that have nurtured arts organizations and the cultural infrastructure for decades. To this end, Arts Midwest is continually bringing innovative and critical programming to the region. The Arts Midwest Conference annually serves over 1,100 arts professionals through a four-day performing arts booking and education conference. Arts Midwest's ArtsLab provides Midwest cultural leaders with the skills, ideas, and mindset of adaptability and resiliency needed to thrive in a world of continuous change. And one of its newer ventures, Creating Connection is a research-based communication movement working to change social norms so creative expression, arts, and culture are embraced as a recognized, valued, and expected part of everyday life.

One of the organization's most impactful programs is Arts Midwest World Fest, which brings international music ensembles to smaller communities across the Midwest for in-depth school and community workshops, conversations with civic leaders and service clubs, jam sessions with local musicians, and more. Stacy Braun, executive director of the Aberdeen Arts Council in Aberdeen, South Dakota said, "Hosting Arts Midwest World Fest was an incredible experience and opportunity for Aberdeen and for me personally. Having the ensembles spend an entire week in our community allowed us to gain a deep appreciation of their culture and a more global perspective. Without World Fest, many in our community—especially the students—would never have had the opportunity to experience a performance by international ensembles. After hosting World Fest, community leaders recognized as the demographics of our region started to change, using the arts is an excellent way to bridge gaps between cultures. Working with the World Fest ensembles were some of the best weeks in my 15 years with the Arts Council."

At a national level, for the past 16 years, Arts Midwest has been chosen to develop and manage an array of major programmatic initiatives on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts, including the NEA Big Read and Shakespeare in American Communities. Together, these two programs invest more than **\$2 million dollars each year** and have, over their life span, served communities in all 50 states of the nation. Former NEA Chair Dana Gioia, who launched these initiatives during his tenure at the helm of the federal agency, remarked, "David Fraher is one of most effective people I've ever worked with in either arts or business. He not only did things of historical importance, such as the NEA's Big Read and Shakespeare tour, the two largest federal arts programs since the New Deal—David and his team made them look easy. His career at Arts Midwest measurably changed American culture for the better."

Fraher's vision and leadership have been recognized by numerous national and international awards. In 2007, he received the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies' Gary Young Award for contributions to public support for the arts, and in 2008, he received the National Endowment for the Arts Chairman's Medal for distinguished service to that agency. In 2012, Fraher was selected as a Fellow to the Salzburg Global Seminar, and in April 2014, Fraher became only the second American ever to receive the Cultural Exchange Contribution Award presented by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China for his efforts promoting mutual understanding between Chinese people and people around the world.

As he reflects on his time at Arts Midwest, Fraher is overwhelmed by the countless opportunities he has had while leading Arts Midwest. "To steal a line from baseball legend Lou Gehrig," he says, "I have to

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say that I feel I am the luckiest man on the face of the earth. I was given the chance to spend 35 years with a single organization and in that time experienced nothing but support and encouragement from literally dozens of current and past board members. I was given the gift of working each day with a remarkably creative and dedicated staff. And I spent the better part of my working life focused on a cause which is deeply personal and important to me—not so much about working with the arts per se, but playing a small part in sparking imagination and curiosity for people, wherever they live, across the Midwest, our country, and the world. What could be better than that?”

“David’s departure comes after more than two years of intensive planning and preparation by Arts Midwest’s board and leadership team,” said Board Chair Capell. “During that period, in addition to engaging in deep strategic planning, we have taken an array of very intentional steps toward nurturing a more distributed and shared leadership model within both the board and staff. While we will miss David’s leadership as we move into the years ahead, we also know we are fully prepared to continue Arts Midwest’s successful trajectory into the next phase of our work.”

Arts Midwest has retained the services of Koya Leadership Partners to conduct a national search for its next president and CEO. That search will launch in early 2019, with the goal of having a new leader in place by August 2019. Fraher will remain with Arts Midwest until late 2019 as president emeritus and senior advisor.

About Arts Midwest

Arts Midwest promotes creativity, nurtures cultural leadership, and engages people in meaningful arts experiences, bringing vitality to Midwest communities and enriching people’s lives. Based in Minneapolis, MN, 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 nonprofit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest’s history spans more than 33 years. For more information, visit www.artsmidwest.org.

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