Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (1979-1992): Correspondence 16

Bess Lomax Hawes

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August 9, 1983

Mr. Christina A. White
Executive Director
Rhode Island State Council on the Arts
Six Wickenden Street
Providence, RI 02903-4444

Dear Christina:

I must first apologize for delaying this letter so long. I returned from Rhode Island to face a marathon -- 4½ day-long -- National Council meeting and the inevitable pile-up of work that accumulates during such an absence.

Next I want to thank you officially for your cordial hospitality during my recent visit to Rhode Island and for arranging the interesting discussion with Representative Frederick Williamson, Vito Saritelli, and Charles Walton. I learned a lot during my fleeting visit and enjoyed myself as well. I do hope I can come again soon for a somewhat more relaxed stay.

Now I must regretfully turn to a less pleasant matter. I was deeply concerned to hear that the salary allotted in the Folk Arts 1982 grant (32-5536-157) for the Rhode Island Folk Arts Coordinator had once again not been paid in full. During the previous first year of this project, before your appointment as director, the same thing had happened, but this office was assured that it was a bookkeeping and recording-keeping confusion and that matters would be more appropriately managed in future.

As a federal officer, I am responsible for the proper expenditure of those federal dollars that have been allocated to the Folk Arts Program. These expenditures go out as grants for which detailed budgets have been submitted by the applying organization. Our office, the Folk Arts reviewing panel, and the NEA grants office all scrutinize grant budgets carefully before recommending them to the National Council on the Arts and finally to the Chairman of the Endowment. They thus represent an agreement between the applying organization and the federal government, and it is obviously improper for one or another of the parties concerned to change the terms of that understanding without either notification or negotiation.

Shifting Folk Arts grants money between budget lines requires approval by this office. Occasionally, in the case of major shifts, I even take the request to our advisory panel for additional review, and I always submit them to our grants office
for final approval. The Endowment takes its responsibilities for
the correct and legal distribution of tax moneys with the utmost
seriousness, and most of our applicant organizations do too.

Now, in connection with the 1982 grant, the year is almost past.
I should like to have an accounting of how those funds have
been expended, most particularly what disposition has been made
of the funds earmarked for but not paid to the Folk Arts
Coordinator. This accounting need not be in the form of an
official audit — an explanatory letter might well cover the
problem, but we must have this record cleared by the end of the
granting period.

Next, in connection with your current application for 1983-4, I am
happy to tell you that it has been favorably recommended both by
the Folk Arts panel and by the National Council on the Arts.
Both this office and our reviewing panel have been greatly
impressed by the fine work done by your Coordinator, Dr. Winifred
Lambechet, and we appreciate the support of the Rhode Island
Council for the Arts for her activities throughout your state.
However, the issue of her appropriate salary plainly must be
settled before the new grant goes into effect. I am enclosing
for your interest a number of recent public notices advertising
state folk arts coordinator positions across the country. You
will find that a $20,000 salary is not out of line with other
salaries offered by other states, and my own personal view, as I
told you during our Providence meeting, is that Dr. Lambechet's
experience and qualifications make her one of the outstanding
professionals in the field.

Until we receive some assurance that the budget figures submitted
in your current grant will be adhered to or until we can negoti-
tiate a new budget, I have asked our Grants Office not to mail
out the current grant. I am sure this will not inhibit your
program or activities in any way, since we would not normally
send this grant out before October 1 under most circumstances
and your renewal start date is not until February 2, 1984. I
take this action regretfully and intend it only as a signal of
our very serious concern over the current state of affairs.
Surely this issue can be resolved within a few weeks. In the
meantime, please accept again my most earnest hopes that we can
continue to sponsor in partnership the Rhode Island folk arts
program, through which so much fine work has been accomplished
in such a short time.

Yours very sincerely,

Bess Lomax Havas
Director
Folk Arts Program

Enclosures