



THE WASTE REPORT

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DANCING WITH THE CARS

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS SPENDS TENS OF THOUSANDS IN TAXPAYER FUNDS TO SUPPORT CHOREOGRAPHED DANCES WITH VEHICLES AND MACHINERY

Readers of *The Waste Report* may recall the April 18, 2016, edition, "Waste: A Documentary," highlighting the \$2 million State Department program to send filmmakers around the world to discuss their projects.¹ One of the films noted in that report was *Trash Dance*, which depicts sanitation workers dancing with their equipment.

While the State Department is paying to showcase such performances after the fact, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is actually using your tax money to help present or create them.

Congestion in Austin

One such project, which apparently needs \$20,000 in support from federal taxpayers for another presentation, is called *Traffic Jam* and features "[a]rtists working with local youth" to "choreograph automobiles, bicycles, golf carts, and pedicabs to perform skilled movements in a parking lot, making art inspired by Austin's traffic congestion."²

A highlight video of *Traffic Jam* shows pedicabs driving in a circle with a trombone player riding and playing in the passenger seat, numerous parked cars honking their horns with their 4-way flashers on, and people playing music on bicycle spokes.³

Trash Dance, Part Deux

While you will be happy to know the *Trash Dance* project mentioned in the introduction was not funded with taxpayer money, similar ventures by Forklift Danceworks (makers of *Trash Dance*) have received federal tax dollars.

One such project was *Power UP*, which "showcased 50+ linemen, electrical technicians and Austin Energy employees in a choreographed full-length dance with cranes, bucket and field trucks," as well as "a set of 20

utility poles. ..."⁴ This cost taxpayers \$10,000 despite Forklift raising over \$22,000 for the project on Kickstarter – 146 percent of its goal.^{5 6}

Power UP was, as noted in the grant description, the "third in a series of large-scale civic spectacles" and included "an original music score by Graham Reynolds, accompanied by a string orchestra led by Austin Symphony Conductor Peter Bay. ..." ^{7 8}

In total, Forklift has received more than \$100,000 from the federal government to do work with the City of Austin.⁹ Of course, one might think the city would provide the funding itself if it thought the projects were so important. In fact, Forklift is not short of donors. In addition to individual private contributions, their website features several "Funding Agencies" and corporate "Season Sponsors," such as Juniper Systems, IBC Bank, and Alamo Drafthouse Cinema.¹⁰ Not exactly the profile of starving artists in need of federal assistance.

At least the latest Forklift project funded by the NEA does not involve the City of Austin. Thanks in part to \$20,000 in federal support, Forklift is producing *Served*. "Featuring the skilled movement of a group of campus employees, such as dishwashers, cooks, custodial staff, physical plant employees, or grounds and maintenance crews," according to the grant, *Served* "will highlight the work life of campus staff [at the University of Houston and Wake Forest] as performed by the employees themselves."¹¹

Of course, there is no shame in praising and featuring these workers, but taking their hard-earned tax money to help fund the project seems a little unfair.

⁴ <http://www.forkliftdanceworks.org/projects/powerup/>

⁵ <https://apps.nea.gov/grantsearch/SearchResults.aspx>, Grant #13-3300-7173

⁶ <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1140543784/forklifts-next-epic-production>

⁷ <https://apps.nea.gov/grantsearch/SearchResults.aspx>, Grant #13-3300-7173

⁸ <http://www.forkliftdanceworks.org/projects/powerup/>

⁹ <https://apps.nea.gov/grantsearch/SearchResults.aspx>

¹⁰ <http://www.forkliftdanceworks.org/>

¹¹ <https://apps.nea.gov/grantsearch/SearchResults.aspx>, Grant #17-5400-7202

¹ <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/download/senator-rand-pauls-waste-report-film-diplomacy>

² <https://apps.nea.gov/grantsearch/SearchResults.aspx>, Grant #17-5400-7133

³ <https://vimeo.com/152757329>