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For Immediate Release with Images

Fairfield County Cultural Leaders, Supporters and Board Trustees Unite

FAIRFIELD, CT (November 21, 2011) – Fairfield County arts and cultural leaders, supporters and board trustees came together at the second annual Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County Trustee Network Forum. The widely attended event focused on the impact of the proposed cap on charitable deductions and featured Heather Noonan, Vice President for Advocacy, League of American Orchestras, and Doug White, former Academic Director of the George H. Heyman Jr. Center for Philanthropy and Fundraising at New York University and current Chief Philanthropic Advisor for the Ambassadors for Philanthropy. Congressman Jim Himes, State Senator John McKinney and State Representative Tony Hwang, and Actor/Director James Naughton also attended the event.

The Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County recognized this topic as especially timely, since by November 23, the Congressional Supercommittee will decide on a proposal to reduce the charitable giving incentive, a move that could have a devastating impact on nonprofits and the communities they serve. Liz Morten, President of the Board of Directors for the Cultural Alliance, addressed the crowd by thanking them for their concern. “You’re here today because you care. You care about the arts, you care about nonprofits and the work that they do, and you care about the community . . . You’re concerned about what’s happening to the precious resource that we call our culture. What’s needed is a way to express that concern and that’s what the Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County and especially the Trustee Network is about.”

The Obama Administration has proposed capping the value of charitable deductions to 28 percent for those taxpayers who choose to itemize. Currently, the value of the deduction is tied to the marginal income tax rate the donor pays, which is 35% for the highest earning families. To date, Congress has passed on seriously considering the cap and the nonprofit community has remained vigilant in opposition to itemized deduction changes. Most analysis, including a recent Congressional Budget Office study, show charitable giving would drop if the tax incentive’s value were to be reduced. Urban Institute research shows that charitable giving to the arts would be among the most affected by this kind of tax change.

“We have a history in the United States of supporting charitable organizations and creating a nonprofit sector that is really second to none in the world,” said Doug White. “The question today is how do we best do that? We have today an income tax deduction. . . That’s a big idea, and it’s an important idea and right now it’s an idea that’s under attack,” he said.

Heather Noonan shared a revenue breakdown for most arts organizations across the country, with private charitable contributions representing approximately 39% of the revenue pie. She said, “You can see how important this network of revenue is to keeping arts organizations afloat. It’s a very delicate balance of direct support from

private contributions, government grants that help leverage those private contributions and then other forms of revenue. Even the smallest of declines would be very hard to bear when every source of revenue is getting hit . . . When I bring this forward on the hill to policy makers that are unfamiliar with the arts they are shocked to see the percentage of charitable contributions, to see how high it is.”

Steve Wolff, Board Member and Chair of the Arts Committee of the Fairfield County Community Foundation stated, “It’s really important that the private sector lead the public sector in understanding how important arts and culture are to our communities and how real decisions that they will make about how they’re funded are and can impact what we do. It’s a very, very fragile system, one that needs your support, one that needs the imprimatur of work in Hartford, of work in Washington and work in our local community.”

The forum was held at the Fairfield Theatre Company with a reception immediately following at the Fairfield Arts Center. Ryan Odinak, Executive Director of the Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County, stated that advocacy is an important role for the organization. “We’re very happy to bring you the kind of information that informs conversations and will lead to decisions and advocacy around important issues to our sector,” she said.

Images and captions to accompany this release

Onstage2.jpg Heather Noonan, vice president for advocacy, League of American Orchestras, and Doug White, academic director of the George H. Heyman Jr. Center for Philanthropy and Fundraising at New York University spoke at the Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County’s second annual Trustee Network Forum.

Reception1.jpg Fairfield County arts and cultural leaders, supporters and board trustees came together at the second annual Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County Trustee Network Forum.

Groupshot1.jpg From left, Anne Keefe, James Naughton, Liz Morten, State Representative Tony Hwang, State Senator John McKinney, Congressman Jim Himes, Heather Noonan and Doug White.

About the Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County

The mission of the Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County is to support cultural organizations, artists and creative businesses by providing promotion, services and advocacy. For more information contact Ryan Odinak, Executive Director, by calling (203) 256-2329, emailing info@CulturalAllianceFC.org, or visiting www.CulturalAllianceFC.org.

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