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### Kansas Poet Laureate Program as Part of Kansas Citizens for the Arts

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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## **Kansas Poet Laureate Program as Part of Kansas Citizens for the Arts**

**PROPOSAL:** KCA take on the poet laureate position, which entails:

- ⤴ **WEBSITE:** Hosting the web pages for the position (programs, initiatives and history). (Note: all pages are now up at [www.kansasarts.org](http://www.kansasarts.org)).
- ⤴ **STAFF, BOARD AND FUNDRAISING SUPPORT:** Assisting with updating webpages for National Poetry Month, bookkeeping for all funds raised, dispersing funds to poet laureate (2-3 checks), plus acknowledging gifts received. I will be conducting a campaign to raise \$5,000 (\$2,500 for stipend and \$2,500 for expenses and travel, the amount covered by KAC), and appreciate any advice along the way. The fall campaign will consist of approaching individuals specifically interested in supporting the position and running 6-week indiegogo campaign (see <http://www.indiegogo.com/Kelley-Hunt-Tour-Van> for example) raise funds in smaller amounts.
- ⤴ **NEXT POET LAUREATE:** Providing staff and/or board support to develop a transparent process for choosing the next poet laureate, to begin his/her term July 1, 2012, and also look into what funds could be raised to support this position. Luckily, there was an excellent process used in choosing me (and Ann chaired the committee) that could be replicated easily.

**BACKGROUND & KAC INTERFACE:** The poet laureate program began in 2005 as a program offered by the Kansas Arts Commission. Previous poets laureate are Jonathan Holden and Denise Low. I'm the third poet laureate, and my term runs from July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2012 (as deemed by the KAC board). I was appointed to a two-year-term that was extended for another year by KAC (in 2010) because we all realized how it takes a solid year for a poet laureate to get the hang of the position. Since the defunding and destaffing of KAC, the poet laureate webpages were removed from the KAC website, KAC wrote in a letter to NEA that the poet laureate program was eliminated, the new chair of KAC has steadily refused for almost three months to answer my calls and emails after initially promising to let me know the status of this program, and I wasn't offered a contract for this fiscal year (I had signed a contract for the previous two fiscal years, between KAC and me on the terms of the position). Ann finally heard something from the new KAC chair recently about checking into this, but given the likelihood of hearing no further resolution, Kansas Citizens for the Arts might want to send a letter stating that the poet laureate pages are now being housed on its website and that it will be the fiscal sponsor of the program as of a certain date. Another option is to say that since the poet laureate program has been eliminated by KAC, KCA is now hosting its own poet laureate program.

**BENEFITS FOR KCA:** Right now, KCA is mainly an advocacy organization with great effectiveness. I believe it would add to KCA's credibility and reach to bring on board programs such as the poet laureate position, which would provide KCA with greater visibility and identity as providing important arts programming. The poet laureate program garners a great deal of respect, it's the kind of program that just about everyone thinks is a good idea, and it connects our state with about 40 others that have such programs. It's also very well-known and liked by many legislators.

**BENEFITS FOR POET LAUREATE POSITION:** Operating as I am now -- in the vast expanse of limbo -- is very difficult and actually untenable for an extended period. A poet laureate needs to be connected to an organization for organizational guidance and support. All of the about 40 state poets laureate in this country are connected to either a state agency or non-profit organization.

**PRECEDENCE:** Bruce Dethlefsen, the poet laureate of Wisconsin was recently booted out of his position by the governor's arts funding changes when Gov. Walker cut the Wisconsin Arts Board by 70%, placing it under the Department of Tourism. The poet laureate program was then picked up by a poet laureate commission formed by several not-for-profit organizations in the state.