

**RALPH C. WILSON, JR. FOUNDATION
COMMITTS \$100M TO BOLSTER ARTS &
CULTURE SUSTAINABILITY, ECONOMIC
IMPACT AND ACCESS IN WESTERN
NEW YORK**

BUFFALO, N.Y. – The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation announced today a \$100 million commitment to transform the financial strength and long-term viability of Western New York’s arts and culture community through the establishment of an endowment that will support the sector now and forever.

The Wilson Foundation will contribute nearly \$60 million over 10 years to establish an endowment at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. This investment will create permanent operational funding streams for 13 of the region’s largest arts and culture institutions that play a critical role as economic drivers and provide an annual grant opportunity for additional arts and culture organizations across the region. Once fully funded after 10 years, the endowment will generate approximately \$3.75 million in annual payout to permanently support the operations and sustainability of the region’s nonprofit arts and culture organizations.

To ensure the program has immediate impact on the sector and regional economy, the Wilson Foundation will provide an additional \$3.75 million annually over nine years, for a total of \$33.75 million, allowing grantmaking to begin in 2022 while the endowment is built.

Finally, the Wilson Foundation is awarding a \$5 million capital campaign gift to The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester and the Buffalo AKG Art Museum (formerly, Albright-Knox Art Gallery).

“We are building upon years of substantial investment by critical public funding streams and philanthropic funders that have helped these institutions become the cultural treasures and economic drivers they are today,” said **David Egner, president & CEO, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation**. “As a regionally focused foundation with a limited life, we saw a unique opportunity to make this significant contribution to impact the region’s quality of life and economy through jobs, tourism and more. We hope this annual operating support will help to strengthen the financial condition of these institutions allowing them to continue to develop creative, audience-centered initiatives that make them more inclusive, welcoming, and accessible places for all.”

Of the \$3.75 million in annual funding, **a total of \$3 million will be dedicated to the following 13 institutions** including their annual grant allocation: **Buffalo AKG Art Museum** (\$500,000 annually); **Buffalo & Erie County Naval & Military Park** (\$100,000 annually); **Buffalo History Museum** (\$150,000 annually); **Buffalo Museum of Science** (\$200,000 annually); **Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra** (\$500,000 annually); **Buffalo Zoo** (\$200,000 annually); **Burchfield Penney Art Center** (\$100,000 annually); **Explore & More: The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Children’s Museum** (\$200,000 annually); **Frank Lloyd Wright’s Martin House** (\$100,000 annually); **Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor and anchor institutions** (\$100,000 annually); **National Comedy Center** (\$250,000 annually); **Shea’s Performing Art Center** (\$100,000 annually); and **The Strong National Museum of Play** (\$500,000 annually).

The overall impact of these gifts is significant as these unrestricted funds can be designated for general operating needs. Each organization will also co-design, in partnership with Community Foundation and national consultants, metrics and benchmarks that support their goals and strategic plans.

“Ralph had a deep and personal appreciation of the arts, and we recognize that arts and culture institutions collectively contribute to very fabric of community identity, making them essential in retaining and attracting top talent that fuel our business community. Through the Foundation’s economic development focus, we are proud to invest in the long-term health of these organizations as economic drivers – and in the cultural vibrancy of Western New York,” said **Mary Wilson, life trustee, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation**. “While our aim was to make a substantial impact, we know there is more to be done and hope this gift will inspire others to continue to fund operations and endowment of cultural organizations across the sector.”

The Wilson Foundation is also dedicating **\$500,000 annually to support other arts and culture nonprofits, primarily of small to medium size, across the eight counties of Western New York and Monroe County**. These funds will be deployed flexibly based on organizational and community needs. Beginning in early 2022, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo will work with sector leaders to conduct listening and engagement sessions to shape the specifics of this opportunity. The first grants will be awarded by the end of 2022.

“This thoughtful and visionary endowment gift from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation recognizes that strengthening our region’s cultural assets with operational funding forever will help fuel a powerful economic engine to positively impact Western New York for generations to come,” said **Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, president & CEO, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo**. “We are committed to deepening our community engagement with the cultural sector and ensuring that together we center inclusion and access to carry out the vision of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation.”

The remaining **\$250,000 in annual funding will support permanent capacity at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo** to manage and operate this endowment and grant program, which includes leading the efforts to advance inclusion and access within the grantee's individual operations and sector as a whole. The Community Foundation will also be responsible for annual assessment and reporting for all aspects of the grant program.

Since its inception in 2015, the Wilson Foundation has paid out more than \$540 million in grants, including nearly \$100 million within its "Entrepreneurship and Economic Development" focus area. In Western New York, this has included support for major projects including Launch NY; 43North; East Side Avenues, which supports inclusive economic growth along four corridors in Buffalo; and Open4, a partnership of community-based organizations and funders who work together to connect entrepreneurs and small businesses with resources, support and guidance they need to thrive.

"The pandemic laid bare the fragile operational health of the arts and culture sector within both of the Foundation's regions of focus," said **Jim Boyle, vice president of programs & communications, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation**. "The decision by the Foundation's trustees to advance this broader and one-time strategic approach to support this critical sector of our economies should hopefully signal to many others the value that arts and cultural organizations bring to our communities and the importance of funding the day-to-day operations that contribute to their long-term sustainability." The mission and mechanics of the Wilson Foundation's arts and culture funding program are mirrored in Southeast Michigan, its other region of focus, with the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan as the managing partner. The following institutions in Southeast Michigan are receiving endowment grants: Arab American National Museum; Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit Historical Society, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Zoological Society, Holocaust Memorial Center, Michigan Opera Theatre, Michigan Science Center, Motown Museum, and The Henry Ford.

ABOUT THE RALPH C. WILSON, JR. FOUNDATION:

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is a grantmaking organization dedicated primarily to sustained investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two areas reflect the devotion of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his beloved Buffalo Bills NFL team. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson provided that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the Foundation that bears his name. Based in Detroit, the Foundation began with a grantmaking capacity of \$1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires January 8, 2035. This structure is consistent with Mr. Wilson's desire for the Foundation's impact to be immediate, substantial, measurable, and overseen by those who knew him best. For more information visit www.rcwjrf.org (<http://www.rcwjrf.org>).