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Executive Director

May 31, 2017

UNESCO

City of Literature Program

Dear UNESCO Selection Committee:

It gives me great pleasure to give my highest endorsement of the application of Seattle, Washington to become a designated UNESCO City of Literature. At the National Book Foundation we spend an enormous amount of time thinking about how, and where, literature is thriving around this country. Seattle has long stood out as a model and a beacon for diverse literary conversations, innovative public programming and the enthusiastic promotion of reading.

In the past year, I've traveled much of the country for literary events, book festivals, author talks and various conferences. Seattle will always stand out in my mind as a vibrant and inspiring literary destination. Seattle and the surrounding area boasts 19 independent bookstores, each with their unique imprint on the community. Rick Simonson of Elliott Bay Book Company has defined the modern day book tour, with his long standing reading series that has welcomed authors including Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Arundhati Roy. When thinking of how a city can foster a love of domestic and foreign literature, Seattle is a leader in creating cross-cultural exchanges. The Seattle Center's impressive 2017 Festál program highlights 24 different cultures, including international poetry, literature, and storytelling. Seattle Arts and Lectures programs continue to bring exciting and celebrated authors to Seattle—this season features National Book Award Finalist Viet Thanh Nguyen, as well as National Book Award winners Colson Whitehead and Jesmyn Ward. As the National Book Foundation expands its own programming around the country, we look to Seattle for its successful examples of creating unique and impactful literary events.

It's also extraordinary that Seattle's literature community is so strong that it can host both the aforementioned thriving independent bookstores and organizations, and be home to Amazon and Amazon's first brick and mortar store. I think this remarkable co-existence is possible because Seattle's literary presence is so robust. As Amazon has grown as an innovative company and provider of literature, with their own publishing arm, Seattle has grown as a city of literature. Wave Books, founded in Seattle in 2005, most recently published Tyehimba Jess' *Olio*, which won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Nearby, Copper Canyon Press has consistently published poets that make it to the national stage, including three National Book Award winners in the last twenty years. They've also worked hard to publish a wide array of international voices, from Pablo Neruda to Mahmoud Darwish to the beloved ancient Vietnamese poet Ho Xuan Hu'o'ng. Outside of the publishing world, Seattle's public library system continues to inspire, with countless programs, like their multilingual storytimes for children, and Seattle Reads, the city-wide reading program founded by rock star librarian Nancy Pearl.

Last but not least, Seattle is a nurturing and inspiring city for writers. National Book Award Winner Sherman Alexie is a hero of literary activism, with his partnership with Seattle Arts

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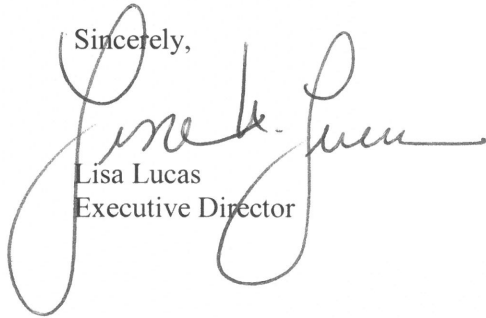
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and Lectures for the series Sherman Alexie Loves and his longtime support of independent bookstores. Indian American novelist Bhati Kirchner calls Seattle home, as does Maria Semple, Tom Robbins, Kathleen Alcalá, and Keith Baker, as well as new voices Lindy West and Ijeoma Oluo. Seattle is also home to the tenacious Hugo House. Described as a place for writers, it hosts a bevy of literary resources, youth programs, and whimsical events. Tree Swenson, after spending ten years as the executive director of the Academy of American Poets in New York, was drawn back to Seattle's rich literary community to take the helm of Hugo House, where it continues to prosper.

People often tell me that the book is dying, which is, of course, very far from the truth. But when naysayers speak that way, I point to Seattle, to a city that has been celebrating literature and fostering cross-cultural dialogue through books for decades. It's a city I reference as a model for promoting diversity through literature, for bringing fun to all its events, and to being home to some of my favorite writers. It's a one of a kind literary city. One of the core missions of the National Book Foundation is to promote a love of reading, and I look to Seattle as a city that makes that mission truth. It would be a great service to name Seattle a UNESCO City of Literature, so that even more people can discover this innovative beacon of the power of literature and be inspired.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Lucas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and end.

Lisa Lucas
Executive Director