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Title: EDITORIAL - Loving the arts, one payday at a time

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SUMMARY: Portland-area employers lacking a worthy cause may find inspiration in a regional campaign for art and culture

Workplace charity campaigns can be tricky. Some people would rather be pressured by a dozen co-workers selling gift wrap and bad candy than a single manager urging "voluntary" donations to the company's pet cause.

But the right workplace giving campaign can be magical, if it reflects the values of the staff. Scores of businesses in the Portland tri-county area may find that magic through **Work for Art**, a growing regional effort to raise private money for local arts and culture.

Work for Art is a brainchild of the Regional Arts & Culture Council, a nonprofit organization that oversees most of the public funding of the arts in Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties. This umbrella group supports arts and cultural organizations of every size, from the Oregon Symphony to Sojourn Theatre. It also helps arts programs in schools and gives small grants to individual artists.

A few years ago, arts council leaders decided to pay more attention to private funding. They had two good reasons to do so. First, Oregon ranks 47th in the nation for state funding of the arts. Second, local funding is not always reliable during lean years, when public safety and other needs take first priority.

So the arts council kicked off a private giving campaign as a way to connect more people --and more donors --to the region's music, art, dance, theater, film, visual arts and literary arts scenes.

The initiative started small. Very small. Fewer than two dozen employers signed up in the first two years, with employees donating about \$80,000 through payroll deductions and direct donations. But momentum is growing: Five more employers, including The Standard and Umpqua Bank, already have joined the

2006-07 campaign.

What's more, the city of Portland has promised to match all private contributions. The **Work for Art** group hopes to raise at least \$100,000 this year, which would double with the city match.

Signing on to **Work for Art** may not be appropriate for businesses that already have one or more workplace charities. (The Oregonian, for example, directs most of its charitable energies toward social services through the United Way and the newspaper's Season of Sharing campaign.) Employees are a captive audience, and overloading them with solicitations may backfire.

But **Work for Art** should appeal to businesses that lack a charitable cause --particularly to businesses that depend on creative and innovative employees. Ernie Bloch, vice chairman of the arts council, says the benefits are hard to beat: Employees can get discounted tickets to concerts and other arts events, which helps offset the high cost of living. Their cultural enrichment, in turn, can spur on-the-job inspiration.

As a result, Portland's arts scene thrives and attracts more talent to the area.

Portland holds its own among U.S. cities for public arts funding, but it lags behind on the West Coast. It invests less than San Francisco and Los Angeles, unsurprisingly, but also less than Seattle, Sacramento, San Diego, San Jose and Oakland. An infusion of private dollars will help Portland's small but vibrant arts scene continue to grow.

ILLUSTRATION: photo by The Oregonian/Portland's BodyVox and Third Angle New Music Ensemble in collaboration.

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