

The logo for BorderLight Theatre Festival. It features the word "BorderLight" in a white sans-serif font, with "Border" and "Light" joined. A white line graphic forms a partial frame around the text. Below it, "THEATRE FESTIVAL" is written in a smaller, white, all-caps sans-serif font.

BorderLight
THEATRE FESTIVAL

The background image shows three performers in a theatrical setting. Two performers in the foreground are seated on a wooden bench, wearing light-colored, button-down shirts and dark trousers. They have dark skin and are wearing large, stylized masks that appear to be made of wood or a similar material. The third performer is in the background, standing and striking a dynamic pose with arms raised, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. The lighting is warm and focused on the performers.

2026 IMPACT REPORT

ARTISTRY IN MOTION.

WELCOME

Dear Friends,

Each summer, BorderLight brings artists and audiences together in the heart of Cleveland for a festival built around discovery, connection, and the shared experience of live performance. Across four days the Playhouse Square District fills with work from Cleveland and beyond, creating opportunities for audiences to encounter new stories and for artists to take risks, connect with new communities, and share work that matters to them.

At the center of BorderLight is a commitment to making adventurous, high-quality theatre more accessible while giving artists the support and platform they need to bring their work to the stage. That impact can be seen in the numbers throughout this report, but it is perhaps best expressed by the people who experienced the festival firsthand.

One audience member described BorderLight as, “Wonderful shows and a great vibe in the theater district. The staff and volunteers were all very welcoming. The booklet and signage were all great. Thank you.” An artist shared, “Thank you for making this process a dream and allowing me to share such an important story.”

As BorderLight continues to grow, we remain focused on expanding access to our programming, strengthening the resources and opportunities available to artists, and creating a festival that contributes to Cleveland’s cultural life while inviting more people to be part of it.

Thank you to the artists, audiences, volunteers, partners, donors, and supporters who make BorderLight possible. The impact reflected in these pages belongs to all of you.

With gratitude,

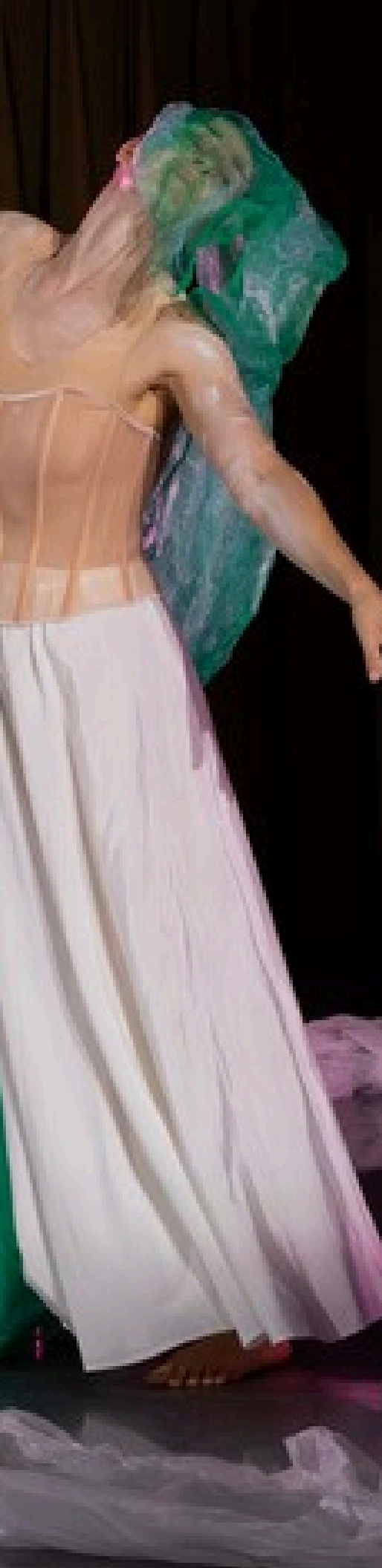


Dale Heinen
Co-Founder,
Executive & Artistic Director



Rachel Costanzo
Board President





BORDERLIGHT THEATRE FESTIVAL

2026 FESTIVAL SCOPE

JULY 8-11, 2026

PLAYHOUSE SQUARE DISTRICT

124+
PERFORMANCES

6
VENUES

6,022
ATTENDEES

191
ARTISTS

45
PRODUCTIONS

21
NEW WORKS

OUR MISSION

BorderLight's mission is to present innovative theatre that inspires, builds cross-cultural understanding and celebrates the diversity of the human experience.

OUR VISION

To serve as a catalyst for Cleveland's cultural and economic growth.

To expand Cleveland's reputation as a theatre destination.

To develop the next generation of artists, producers, and theatre workers.

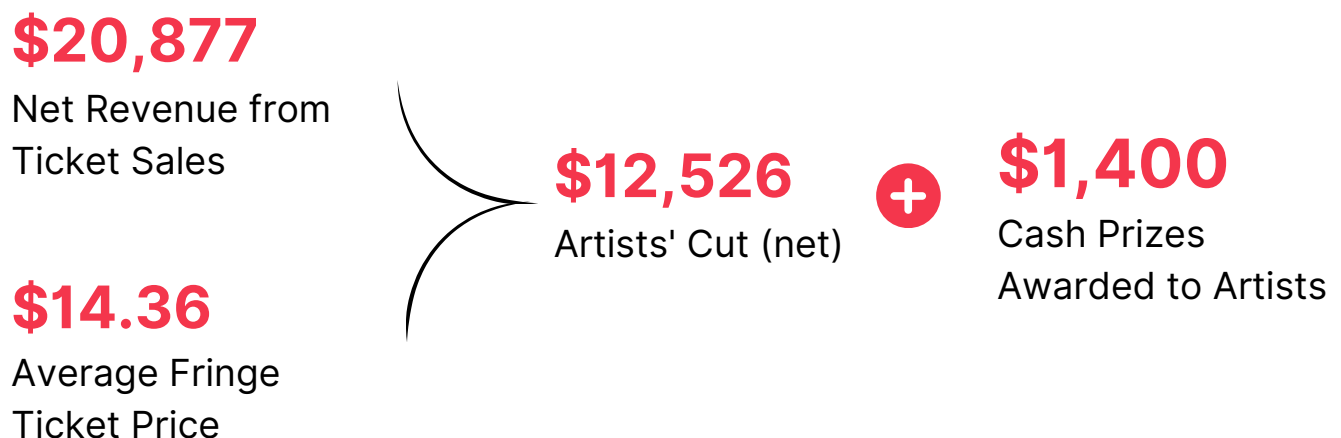
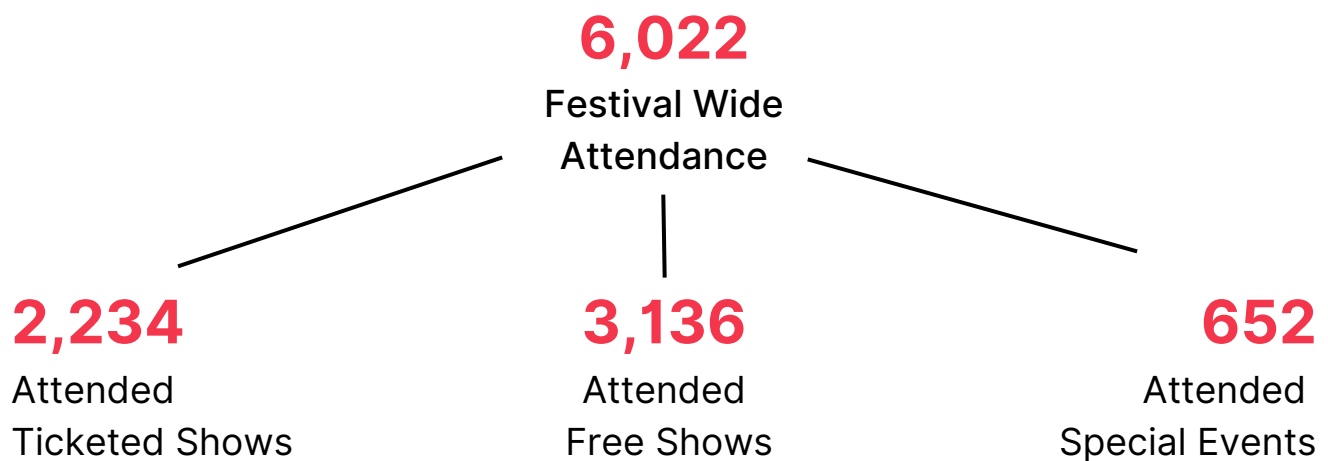


FESTIVAL AT A GLANCE

"BorderLight brings something fresh and global to the heart of Cleveland."

One minute you're seeing a boundary-pushing piece from halfway across the world, the next you're watching local artists light up a black box. It's bold, it's inclusive, and it brings a real energy to Playhouse Square. The city shows up for it—and that's exactly why it belongs here." —Craig Hassall AM, President & CEO, Playhouse Square

4 DAYS 124 PERFORMANCES
+ INTERNATIONAL PLAZA

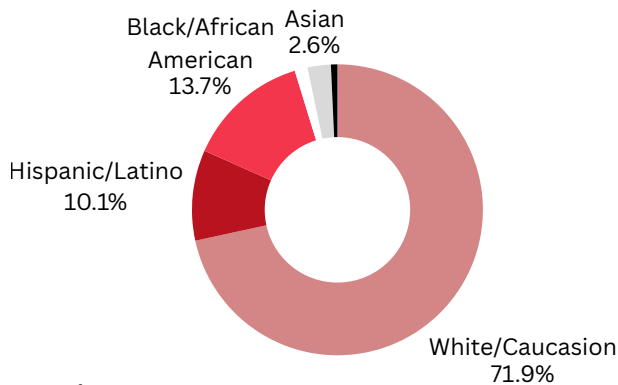




MEET THE CREATIVES

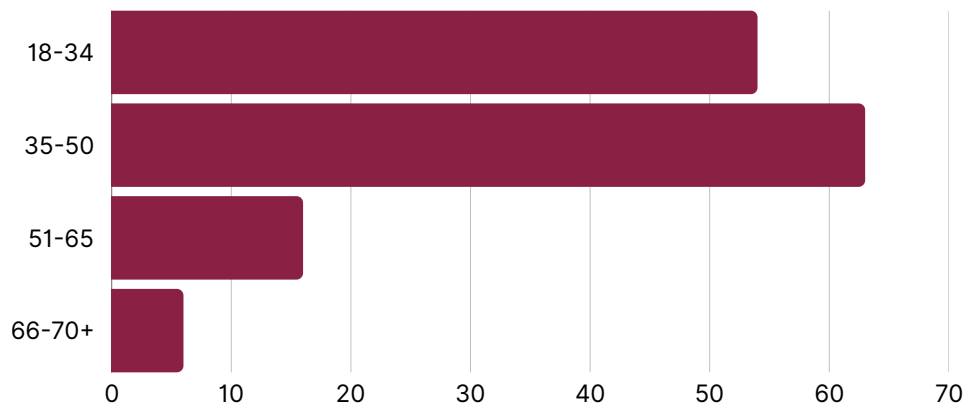
BorderLight 2026 featured the work of 191 **artists** representing **45 shows** from around the country, including individual artists and companies from the local Cleveland theatre community and around the world.

Artist Race/Ethnicity



95%
of Artists rated
their experience as
Excellent or Good

Artist Age



Investments in the Artist Community

Housing

Free Housing
for Out-of-State
Artists

60%

Of Box Office
Returned
to Artists

Travel Stipend

Offered to Artists
in Need to Travel
to the Festival

Artist Pass

Participating Artists
can See All Fringe
Shows for Free

10
States
Represented

36%
of Greater
Cleveland
Artists from
Underserved
Communities

74%
Of Fringe
Artists from
Northeast Ohio

23.5%
of surveyed artists
self-identified as
having a disability



Gr33n Hamzies and Eggoes
Photo by Steve Wagner



INTERNATIONAL PLAZA

2026 brought free music, dance, circus, and cultural performances to Playhouse Square Plaza throughout BorderLight Festival week. Across four days, local artists and community groups transformed the plaza into an open, accessible performance space for audiences of all ages.

12

Free Performances

9

Participating Groups

16+

Hours of Free Programming

5

Dance & Movement

3

Circus Performances

3

Cultural & Martial Arts Performances

1

Theatre Performance



Cleveland Phoenix Club | Photo By Steve Wagner

“

The festival provided a lot of energy and exceptional artistic quality. Plus it's a very fun event. Loved the mural being created on the Plaza, the artists on the street...” -2026 BorderLight Attendee



Portrait of MATTMATT
Photo by Steve Wagner



ARTIST LAUNCH PAD

BorderLight gives artists more than a stage, it gives them momentum. From world premieres to international tours, works launched here continue to grow and thrive long after the festival. In 2026 we had:

11

No. of “Premieres”
in 2026

10

No. of “New Works
in Development”

8

“Partner Productions” in
2026

Works developed at BorderLight appeared at:



Artist Offerings:

- **Professional Photography:** Every production received high-quality photography to support future promotion and touring.
- **Marketing Training:** Artists were provided with tools and workshops to strengthen their ability to market themselves and their work.
- **Press Exposure:** Coverage across print, television, radio, and digital platforms elevates artists and connects them to wider audiences.
- **Touring Pathways:** Works developed here went on to reach stages regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- **Collaboration & Networking:** The festival fosters connections that spark new projects and long-term partnerships.



ACCESSIBILITY

Our commitment is to create spaces where all people can connect, share, and be represented. We strive to reflect the diversity of our community and to offer a festival that is welcoming, accessible, and meaningful to all.

Our goals include:

- Creating opportunities for a wide range of artists and audiences to engage with the festival
- Supporting local talent, especially voices that have historically had fewer platforms
- Ensuring that participation in BorderLight is not limited by economic, social, or physical barriers
- Building a culture of welcome where every person feels valued

4

ASL interpreted
Performances

100%

of people seeking ASL
interpretations said they felt
included

9

Relaxed
Performances

100%

of people seeking relaxed
performances rated their
experience “Excellent”

Accessible Offerings:

- **Accessibility Items:** Headphones, fidgets, and sunglasses were available to audiences at relaxed performances for a lower stimulation experience.
- **Know-Before-You-Go Guides:** Detailed sensory guides were developed for specific venues and performances, available online and in print.
- **Web Accessibility:** Festival website featured filters for ADA accessible venues, ASL shows, and relaxed shows.
- **Inclusive Audience Tools:** Created ASL-signed survey questions so Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing attendees could participate fully in audience feedback.



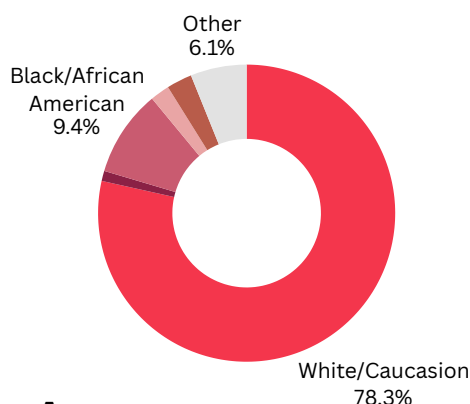
Cleveland Phoenix Club
Photo by Steve Wagner



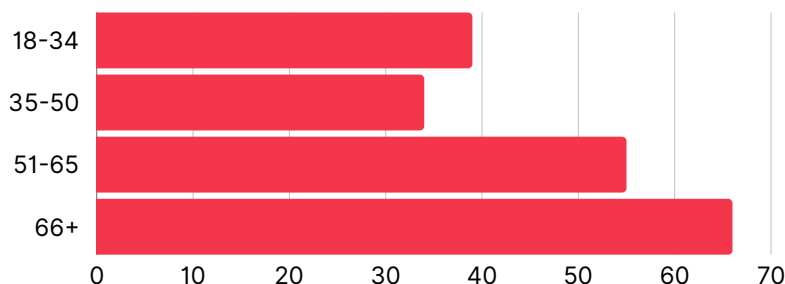
MEET OUR AUDIENCE

BorderLight welcomed **6,022 attendees** in 2026. Feedback from 189 respondents provides insight into festival impact, audience experience, and intentions to return.

Attendee Race/Ethnicity



Attendee Age



Audience Feedback

- “It”s just perfect”
- “I’ve gone to Borderlight ever since I started working at Playhouse Square three years ago and discovered it. It has been an amazing experience every single time.”
- “I love theater and this was like shopping in a candy store!”

Attendee Responses

78%

Specifically Came Downtown to Visit BorderLight Festival

49%

First Time Attending BorderLight Festival

98%

Positively rated their BorderLight Experience

16%

Of BorderLight attendees saw 5 or more performances



Linedance is My Therapy
Photo By Steve Wagner



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In 2026, BorderLight deepened its commitment to collaboration by partnering with 20 community organizations across Northeast Ohio. These partners aligned with the festival's mission and helped amplify its reach by sharing events through newsletters, social media, and direct community engagement.



189,047

Approximate number
of additional reach via
Social Media

46

Confirmed Partner
Outreach Commitments



PRINT AND PRESS

BorderLight 2026 received widespread media coverage, including an insert in the New York Times. This visibility built anticipation for the festival, sparked conversations, and connected our work with a wide and diverse audience.

12,500

Festival Guides
Printed

6,000

New York
Times Inserts

26

Digital Ads

7

Print Ads

2

**Neighborhood
Outreach Partners**

Beachwood Buzz
Downtown Cleveland, Inc.

7

Media Partners

CAN Journal
Cleveland Jewish News
Cleveland Scene
Freshwater
ilrish
The Land
Signal Cleveland

Media Reach

171,283

Social Media
Views

27%

Social Media Follower Growth
5,297 to 6,736

4,599

Social Media
Engagements

35

In-Kind Ads
Up 52% from 2025

31

Earned Media
Up 41% from 2025

3,861

Email
Recipients



ART IN THE COMMUNITY

In 2026, BorderLight partnered with DayGlo Color Corp. and Something Good Social Kitchen to bring a new public mural to Cleveland. Created by artist Charlie Malta, aka Guice Mann, the project brought local organizations and community members together, resulting in a lasting work of public art beyond the festival.

"I'm so grateful for this amazing collaboration with you all, Something Good, Dayglo and Playhouse Square. Been such a blast being a part of Borderlight and I've had so much fun working with you!!"

-Charlie Malta aka Guice Mann

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN

BorderLight • DayGlo Color Corp. • Something Good Social Kitchen



Charlie Malta | Photo by Davin Jacobs

SEASONAL STAFF

BorderLight thrives thanks to the commitment and energy of our seasonal staff.

23

Seasonal Staff
Hired in 2026

90%

are "Very Likely" to work
with BorderLight again

90%

of Seasonal Staff
"Had a Blast"

What did you enjoy most about your experience with BorderLight?

"The people. Staff, artists, volunteers, patrons. BorderLight attracts good people."

-2026 Seasonal Staff

"I enjoyed connecting with different crew and artists throughout my shifts and seeing the fresh art they created."

-2026 Seasonal Staff

VOLUNTEERS

Our crew of 40 volunteers worked 77 individual shifts and donated a total of more than 308 hours of their time.

46

Volunteers
in 2026

282

Number of
Volunteer Hours

70%

of Volunteers
"Had a Blast"

81%

of Volunteers are
"Very Likely"
to return

"Getting to work with amazing people and being exposed to so many fantastic performances." 2026 Volunteer, when asked what they enjoyed most about their BorderLight experience.



Playhouse Square Plaza
Photo by Elaine Manusakis

2026 FESTIVAL LEADERSHIP

BorderLight Staff

Dale A. Heinen
Executive and Artistic Director

Yazmin Maldonado
Operations and Communications Director

Kadijah Wingo
Producer

Board of Directors

Rachel Costanzo
President

Dr. Felicia Phillips
Secretary

Luis Cartagena
Treasurer

Amb. Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley
James Anderson
Hannah Belsito
Jon Bloomberg
Jason R. Bristol
Patrick Espinosa
Charlotte Fowler
Audra T. Jones
Dan Moulthrop
Megan O'Bryan
Jenny Pykett
Terry Stewart

"BorderLight brings artists and audiences together in ways that are adventurous, accessible, and uniquely Cleveland. Our Board is proud to support a festival that creates meaningful opportunities for artists and makes the performing arts welcoming to all."- Rachel Costanzo

THANK YOU!

BorderLight Festival is made possible through the generous support of our funders and sponsors.

**THE
GEORGE
GUND
FOUNDATION**

 **Paul Angell
Foundation**

**CLEVELAND
Foundation**


**CUYAHOGA
ARTS & CULTURE**

**Ohio Arts
COUNCIL** 

 **CLEVELAND-ISRAEL
ARTS CONNECTION**
a program of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland

 **KULAS
FOUNDATION**

 **JOHN P.
MURPHY
FOUNDATION**

**Cuyahoga
Community
College**


**MARGARET W. WONG
& ASSOCIATES LLC**
ATTORNEYS AT LAW


WOODLAND
WEALTH PARTNERS

אמנים ארטיס
artis

RPM

Char and Chuck Fowler

**James Anderson &
David Wittkowsky**

Acuity
GLE

 **CLIFFS**
THE CLEVELAND-CLIFFS FOUNDATION

Cornerstone
Family Office, LLC
WEALTH ADVISORS

**MANNING
& NAPIER**

In-Kind

 **CSU** | College of Arts
and Sciences
Department of Theatre and Dance

PALMER
event
SOLUTIONS

 **John Carroll
UNIVERSITY**

Jetpack 


**UNION CLUB
FOUNDATION**

ABM
Parking Services


**THE CITY CLUB OF
CLEVELAND**

master 
PRINTING + MAILING

**ROCK
THE
HOUSE**

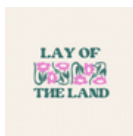


CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY
CM LAW
**Cleveland-Marshall
College of Law**



 **DayGlo**

Media Partners



Neighborhood Partners



Individual Supporters

Leadership Circle

Fran and Jules Belkin • Laura and Jon Bloomberg • Char and Chuck Fowler

Innovator's Circle

Joe Heinen • Chann Fowler-Spellman and Ed Spellman • James Anderson and David Wittkowsky

Ensemble Circle

Anonymous • Becky Dunn • Lauren Rich Fine • Audrey Heinen • Lee Heinen • Holley and Rob Martens • The Poetry Psychic Project

Patron Circle

Rab Razzak and Nazleen Bharmal • LuAnn and Andy Brown • Carrie Gustafson • Stewart Kohl • Dan Moulthrop • Pam Neides • Megan O'Bryan • Hilda Perea • Dr. Felicia Philips • Terry and Sally Stewart • Betsy Stueber • John C. Williams • Harriet Warm

Supporter Circle

Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley • Mike and Hannah Belsito • Fred Bidwell • Jason R. Bristol • Luis Cartagena • Pat Espinosa • Denis Griesmer • Audra T. Jones • Rachel Costanzo and Len Olsavsky • Jenny Pykett • Susan Spector

Friends of BorderLight

Elise and Steven Auvil • Patrick Walker

Special Thanks

Brooke Little • Charlie Malta (aka Guice Mann) • David Stoughton, Cleveland State University • Debby Rosenthal, John Carroll University • Gwyneth Seddon • Jason Hamad, No Surf House • Jeramey Parker • Jessica Vinson • Jon and Laura Bloomberg • Karina Lovins • Neil Macke, Playhouse Square • Palmer Event Solutions • Ricky Smith, Something Good Social Kitchen • Rock The House • The BorderLight Board of Directors • The City Club of Cleveland • Thomas J. Humphrey, Cleveland State University

