

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Susan Stroupe, and I'm an interdisciplinary theatre maker and teaching artist based in Baltimore, Maryland, and a long-time collaborator and colleague of Jessica López-Barkl, who is applying to join the Representation, Equity, Diversity Team for Region 1 of the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. I'm writing as someone familiar with Jessica's work for nearly two decades, to enthusiastically recommend her for this team.

Jessica and I first worked together at the North Fourth Arts Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where we collaborated and worked with artists with intellectual disabilities. In those first formative years of our friend- and colleague-ship, I came to understand how astounding a person, artist, and advocate Jessica López-Barkl is. She has an unmatched mind and work ethic, particularly when it comes to creating artistic opportunities and processes for underserved and historically uninvited artists and communities in theater.

Jessica is one of those theater artists who notices everything, considers accessibility from all angles, and personally works continuously to implement structures and strategies that welcome and support people of diverse backgrounds and circumstances into the theater making process. Whether working with artists with and without disabilities, children from the youngest years through high school from a wide variety of socioeconomic situations, people in incarceration, or first generation college students, Jessica has this cultivated ability to listen to the needs of the specific community, and strategize with and inspire the whole group to create a work of theater with a process that centers the needs of the most vulnerable. This is something I've seen her do time and time again, and every time I am in awe.

For me personally, Jessica has been a close friend, longtime collaborator, and enormously influential mentor to my own theater practices. What I learned from her when I was fresh out of undergrad helped shape my own professional practices, particularly her directorial approach of empowering actors through collaboration and support, rather than control and judgment. Her ability to adapt and to find artistic solutions to the needs of the ensemble has been a model for me over the years, even as we no longer lived geographically near each other.

Finally, Jessica López-Barkl is a person who walks the walk over and above talking the talk. I believe one of her best qualifications for this team is her extraordinary ability to brainstorm artistically practical strategies for representation, equity, and diversity, and then implement them in a way that is collaborative and sustainable. All the steps of her career so far have made Jessica extremely qualified to join this team, and I hope you will seriously consider her for this position.

Sincerely,  
Susan Stroupe  
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