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The Government Shuts Down Art in San Francisco

By [Kristin Farr](#) | Oct 11, 2013



[Steve Rhodes/Flickr](#)

Kids across San Francisco are holding empty beach pails, still sniffing from the news that Saturday's sandcastle contest at Ocean Beach has been postponed. The We Players theater group is scrambling to find a new venue for their Fort Point staging of *Macbeth*. SFMOMA had to cancel public tours of its Crissy Field sculpture exhibit, and visitors to the Headlands Center for the Arts are confused. The government shutdown might seem like fodder for water cooler jokes until you realize it hurts San Francisco organizations that work on shoestring budgets to bring arts to the community.

[Leap](#), an organization that provides arts education for local students, hosts an annual sand castle contest that funds 40 percent of the organization's budget and involves thousands of people. The contest teams up elementary school students, architects and engineers. Leap executive director Julie McDonald, who's spent over a year planning and securing permits, reports, "We've spent the entire day on the phone with 26 disappointed schools and kids. That's the part that hurts the most -- hearing how sad the kids are."

San Francisco isn't the only city whose youth is suffering due to the shutdown, as evidenced by "[the absolute saddest shutdown photo you will see](#)," which went viral yesterday. The sand castle contest will be rescheduled, but the impact on this community-based organization is significant and could affect the volume of its programming. Leap's permit was issued after the shutdown took effect, so it seemed like they could proceed, but three days before the contest, McDonald says, "We were told that we could be fined for trespassing and that our permit was no longer valid."

At Crissy Field, all public tours of Mark di Suvero's sculptures have been cancelled. SFMOMA education curator Julie Charles explains, "We are hopeful that we can soon resume these tours because they are a wonderful way to get people talking about the connections between di Suvero's sculptures and the site, which holds particular significance for the artist, who immigrated to San Francisco from Shanghai as a young boy." The monumental steel-beam sculptures seem to draw an extra resonance from their juxtaposition with the Golden Gate Bridge.

[Headlands Center for the Arts](#) was allowed to remain open, but the park it lives in is closed. Seair Lorentz, communications and outreach manager at the center, says the situation has led to "general

confusion from our constituencies."

Lauren Chavez, of the [We Players](#) theater group, had to send this message to ticket holders, who still don't know where or if the show will go on: "Our current production of *Macbeth* is built very carefully and conscientiously into Fort Point, the Civil War era fortress beneath the Golden Gate Bridge. For over a year we have been integrating our work into that unique physical, sonic and energetic landscape. Because of the government shutdown we have been blocked from our stage, our most prominent scene partner and creative inspiration."

San Francisco is also home to several NEA-funded arts education organizations, such as Streetside Stories and Performing Arts Workshop, whose upcoming grantee meeting in Washington, D.C., was cancelled. Securing airfare refunds is a challenge, and any amount of rescheduling impacts precious staff resources for organizations with lean budgets. Streetside's Linda Johnson expressed gratitude for the NEA's support but added, "To launch our new project, we are already fronting thousands of dollars in project expenses."

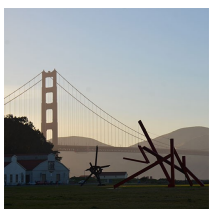
A small silver lining was pointed out by Leap's McDonald, who heard that several schools were using the sand castle shutdown as an occasion for a civics lesson: "They're using this situation as a teaching opportunity in community involvement, and are having their students write letters to their representatives, urging the federal government to get back on track." You don't have to be old enough to vote to recognize that the federal government needs to get their heads out of the sand.

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