

**STATE FOLK ARTS PROGRAMS:  
ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND NEEDS**

July 2011

State Arts Agencies Folk Arts Peer Group Planning Committee

in association with the

American Folklore Society  
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies  
National Endowment for the Arts, Folk and Traditional Arts Program

## **Executive Summary**

The relationship between state folk arts programs and the NEA is a model federal/state partnership, generating an extraordinary number of programs and services from an annual investment of less than two-thirds of one per cent (0.65%) of the NEA's annual budget. Recognizing that this is a highly opportune time for a collective conversation about achievements, challenges, and new directions, state folk arts program directors have engaged in a series of initiatives over the past year about the present state and future prospects of state folk arts programs. These initiatives have been carried out by the State Arts Agencies Folk Arts Peer Group Planning Committee in association with the American Folklore Society (AFS), as well as NEA's Folk and Traditional Arts Program. Through surveys, conference calls, a peer group meeting at the National Association of State Arts Agency's (NASAA) 2010 meeting in Austin, Texas, a PowerPoint presentation titled "Keys to a Successful Statewide Folk & Traditional Arts Program," and a State Folk Arts Programs Infrastructure and Professional Development gathering held in Chicago in early June 2011, folklorists associated with state folk arts programs from around the country addressed the following issues:

- The defining characteristics of state folk arts programs;
- Challenges currently faced due to state fiscal constraints and organizational restructuring;
- Successful initiatives and their long-term impacts;
- Rationale for continuing NEA support to folk arts infrastructure;
- Ways in which state folk arts programs address the four major outcomes of NEA's Strategic Plan: Creativity, Engagement, Livability and Learning; and
- Professional development, technical assistance, and resource sharing needs of the folk and traditional arts field as a whole.

## **Findings from the Field**

The country's infrastructure for folk arts is supported by the NEA's Folk Arts Partnership Program which reaches out to the states that have folk arts programs.

The NEA infrastructure grant is the only national funding source to support state infrastructure projects. Without dedicated fieldwork (supported by infrastructure and positions) traditional artists and organizations that sustain presentation and transmission would not be represented in the ecology of state public funding.

NEA Folk Arts support allows an agency to expand its programs in a meaningful way and in direct response to the stated needs of its constituents.

Ensuring that arts programs include traditional artists and communities is key to bridging cultural differences and to building understanding, respect, and civility in our diverse nation.

## **Ties to NEA's Strategic Goals**

**Creativity:** Folk arts programs support artistic excellence and innovation recognized within diverse communities as expressed through the creation and mastery of a broad spectrum of often overlooked aesthetic traditions.

**Engagement:** Folk arts cultivate broad networks, active participants and creators, and deep cultural understanding, all rooted in the excellence of local artists and traditions.

**Livability:** Folk arts sustain communities by building sense of place, encouraging respect for local cultures, and identifying and cultivating home grown cultural assets.

**Learning:** Folk arts learning is unique to each local community, and ranges from the lifelong learning of a master traditional artist to children discovering the artistic traditions in their own backyards and neighborhoods.

## **Conclusions**

Responses to our survey of state folk arts programs consistently underscored that NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Partnership funding is indispensable to maintaining their core missions as well as for continuing and initiating important programs. Everywhere in the nation, NEA Folk Arts Partnership funding is the bedrock of state folk arts programs, enabling them to provide services and programming which exponentially expands the federal investment.

As state folk arts program officers engaged in a national conversation about their programs' characteristics, challenges, successes, and the justifications for NEA support, the American Folklore Society requested that they also provide perspectives on professional development needs. The Chicago gathering underscored the importance of effectively mobilizing our networks for professional development and resource sharing, expanding in-depth peer-to-peer learning, and learning from specialists in related disciplines. These discussions highlighted the professional development and communication needs of the field as an essential part of the collective efforts among state folk arts programs to assess their challenges and achievements, plan future directions, and articulate rationales for support.

## STATE FOLK ARTS PROGRAMS: ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

For over three decades, state folk and traditional arts programs have served as pillars of a national infrastructure that presents, safeguards, supports, and documents traditional culture in the United States. These programs were established and continue to be sustained through ongoing funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. They are at the nexus of a national network of folk arts activity, bringing together national, regional, state, and local organizations, and government agencies. The relationship between state folk arts programs and the NEA epitomizes a model federal/state partnership, generating an extraordinary amount of programming and services from an annual investment of less than two thirds of one per cent (0.65%) of the NEA's annual budget<sup>1</sup>.

While nearly all state folk arts programs continue to survive at a time of reorganization and severe fiscal constraints for state governments, like all public sector programs they are obliged to demonstrate their importance, effectiveness, and relevance to their funding sources. Recognizing that this is a highly opportune and critical time for a collective conversation about achievements, challenges and new directions, state Folk Arts Program Directors have engaged over the past year in a series of initiatives about the present state and future prospects of state folk arts programs. These initiatives are being carried out by the State Arts Agencies Folk Arts Peer Group Planning Committee in association with the American Folklore Society (AFS) and NEA's Folk and Traditional Arts Program. Through surveys, conference calls, a peer group meeting at the National Association of State Arts Agencies' (NASAA) 2010 meeting in Austin, Texas, generation and use of a PowerPoint presentation titled "Keys to a Successful Statewide Folk & Traditional Arts Program," and a culminating State Folk Arts Programs Infrastructure and Professional Development gathering held in Chicago in early June, 2011, state folk arts programs have addressed the following issues:

- The defining characteristics of state folk arts programs.
- Challenges currently faced due to state fiscal constraints and organizational restructuring.
- Successful initiatives and their long-term impact: locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Rationale for continuing NEA support.
- How state folk arts programs address the four major outcomes of NEA's Strategic Plan: Creativity, Engagement, Livability, and Learning.
- Professional development, succession, technical assistance, and resource sharing needs of the folk and traditional arts field as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Average funding of Infrastructure grants given by NEA to state and regional partners in fiscal years 2007-2010, shown as percentage of total NEA appropriation. Infrastructure grants approximately 0.78% of monies available for grants. (<http://www.nea.gov/about/budget/AppropriationsHistory.html>, accessed 7/28/2011) and National Endowment for the Arts: Folk & Traditional Arts Funding History, 2005-2010.

## State Folk and Traditional Arts Programs – Who They Are and What They Do

While state folk arts programs share many characteristics, each one undertakes programs and services that fit with the needs of its state and its agency's organizational mission. There are a total of 48 state and jurisdiction folk arts programs of varying size and scope. Most state programs specifically dedicated to folk arts are situated in state arts agencies (28 in all). State programs are also located within non-profit organizations (7), colleges and universities (4), a state historical society (1), state historic preservation office, state humanities council (1), contracted to a private organization or individual (2), or through a partnership of two or more of the above (5). Those located outside the SAAs maintain close working relationships with their state arts agencies. In addition, folk arts programs in two Regional Arts Organizations are deeply involved with the state programs in their service area.

The defining features of state folk arts programs include:

- **Shared definitions:** Folk and traditional arts are viewed as encompassing community-based artistic activities that are learned and communicated in face-to-face situations and small groups, generally through oral tradition and by example. These traditions express the shared aesthetics and cultures of distinctive groups, including ethnic, regional, occupational, age-peer, and religious communities. Folk and traditional arts are maintained in communities over time, often across generations. Within this continuity, artists innovate within traditions, balancing fidelity to past practices with subtle changes brought about through the creative contributions of traditional artists, changes in technology, and the effects of memory.
- **Field research** to identify artists and traditions provides a foundation for the work of state programs. Field research identifies artists who are often unknown outside of their own immediate communities. Public programs are developed following the discovery phase of fieldwork. Field research also generates artistic products incorporated within recordings, media productions, exhibitions, and websites. The documentation undertaken through state programs is of enduring value to artists, communities and scholars. Over the past three decades, state folk arts programs have made possible documentation of traditional communities to an extent unprecedented in the history of the United States. This documentation is often stored in public archives and other kinds of repositories outside of state arts agencies.
- **Programming** undertaken and supported by state programs often includes exhibitions, concert series, festivals, cultural tourism projects, media productions, residencies, presentations of traditional narrative, and lecture/demonstrations. These public programs may deal with the traditions of the state as a whole, the cultures of sub-regions, or particular themes like children's folklore, ranching culture, or textile traditions.

- **Individual traditional artists are served** through technical assistance with promotion, marketing, portfolio development, and apprenticeships. Most state programs maintain robust apprenticeship granting programs which enable master artists to teach a tradition to members of their own communities. Often, these traditions are no longer widely practiced, so apprenticeships are vital for preserving and perpetuating traditions. In many states, apprenticeships are the only folk arts grants program. In some states, a variety of project and organizational support is provided through grant making, magnifying the impact of the state program and making possible activities which these programs are unable to carry out on their own.
- **Education and interpretation are fundamental** to the mission of state folk arts programs. For public presentations, traditions are often interpreted to new audiences unfamiliar with the cultures and art forms represented. In-depth K-12 educational programs may include residencies by local artists; discovery by young people of the living cultural heritage of neighbors, community, and family members; and the development of curricula focused upon local cultural resources. These programs are often tied to state educational standards and benchmarks.
- **State folk arts programs are designed to sustain traditions** within the communities where they are customarily practiced as well as to present traditions to new audiences of multiple cultural backgrounds. Partnerships enable local communities to present, document and interpret their own traditions. Programming for general audiences builds respect and mutual understanding between and among cultural communities, bringing together people who might not ordinarily encounter one another in their everyday lives.
- The leadership of state folk arts programs requires **professional direction undertaken by specialists** with training and experience in folklore studies or related disciplines. Their academic background and professional experience enables discernment of excellence within specific traditions, cultural sensitivity in working with communities, appropriate documentation, and interpretation of traditions for various kinds of audiences. Peer review of folk arts applications within states and by the NEA requires expert evaluation by specialists serving on grant panels with the assistance of the agency's professional staff.
- Within state agencies, **state folk arts programs maintain autonomy as dedicated programs while working in collaboration with other agency divisions**. Such collaborations may involve discipline-based programs devoted to arts education, community arts, touring, and performing arts presentation. State folk arts programs also collaborate with a wide variety of public and private agencies and organizations, including state and national parks, economic development and tourism agencies, humanities councils, and social service organizations.

- **State folk arts programs work closely with every national and federal folklife program**, including the American Folklore Society, American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Program, Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, and National Council for the Traditional Arts. Artists documented and presented through state folk arts programs are frequently presented at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in Washington, DC, and the National Folk Festival at sites around the country, providing national recognition. The relationships with national programs are well articulated and ongoing.
- **State folk arts programs expand the constituencies of their agencies to include a broad spectrum of cultural communities**, many of which have not been adequately served by initiatives designed to reach the “underserved.” They include rural communities, working class people who may not regularly attend arts events, communities of color, and both well-established and refugee ethnic communities. Individual artists served by folk arts programs are typically overlooked by arts organizations.
- Through their appeal to people of all political persuasions and culturally conservative communities, **state folk arts programs are of great value for political advocacy, demonstrating that participation in the arts is for all citizens.**

### **Current Challenges and Opportunities**

State folk arts programs have demonstrated exceptional resilience during this time of severe fiscal pressures on state governments. In fact, the California state program (situated in the non-profit organization Alliance for California Traditional Arts) has expanded. Discontinued programs in Florida and Oregon were revived, and agency reorganization induced the expansion of some activities along with the suspension of others in several states. In many cases, services to the folk arts field expanded at the same time as grant funds diminished. Only one state folk arts program (in Utah) has been discontinued, although contract folk arts specialists will continue to carry out some of its activities.

Large cuts to agency operational and grant making budgets can have additional adverse effects on folk arts programs. The elimination of positions means that state folk arts program directors may also direct other agency programs. Travel has been severely restricted in many states, limiting the capacity of folk arts programs to provide services, initiate programs, and carry out fieldwork, especially in underserved and geographically remote regions of their states. State programs relocating to tourism and economic development agencies (as in Wisconsin and Nevada) face new challenges in articulating and sustaining their missions.

Responses to our survey of state folk arts programs consistently underscored that NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Partnership funding is indispensable to maintaining their core

missions as well as for continuing and initiating important programs. In Louisiana, for example, NEA funding supports the only new folk arts project undertaken by the folk arts program director. In many states, services to individual folk artists through apprenticeships are possible only through NEA funding. Without NEA support, positions in a number of state folk arts programs would be eliminated. Everywhere in the nation, NEA Folk Arts Partnership funding is the bedrock of state folk arts programs, enabling them to provide services and programming which exponentially expands the federal investment.

## **Successes**

NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Partnership support has had substantial long-term impacts in every state that has received funding. This is most manifestly evident in projects that have developed far beyond what was initially envisaged and articulated in grant applications and that have continued beyond the initial grant period.

In their responses to the survey of state folk arts programs, folk arts program directors provided abundant evidence of the continuing impact of NEA support. Examples of these responses, in the respondent's own words, include:

- Support has resulted in the development of at least two new programs at our agency; *Art for Life* and *National Park Service/Amtrak Trails & Rails Program*. Ongoing fieldwork supported by NEA Infrastructure laid the foundation for the development and publication of a large, coffee-table size book published by the North Dakota Council on the Arts, through state funds, titled *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*. This publication will serve as the foundation for arts education lesson plans as well as art/health activities for elder care facilities.
- [NEA funding is] a cornerstone of administrative and program support for the whole state folk arts field. We build out and leverage it. This grant was in part what established Alliance for California Traditional Arts as the state folk arts program with California Arts Council. We've grown it from this base, now we're a \$1.2 M organization and we're making over \$500,000 worth of grants and contracts to the field. The Traditional Arts Development program has made strategic contracts to artists and organizations to help them reach a new level of growth. This is often the first point of entry for these constituents to arts services or contracts. We see over and over how this creates new opportunities and seeds greater impact.
- Artists are more aware of and are better able to successfully access our programs, grants, professional development services, and anti-fraud support. Artists have increased trust in our agency as a connector to important state and federal enforcement agencies that help protect Alaska



Native artists' work in the public market place. Artists utilize technical support services in drafting and submitting successful grant applications for master/apprentice training. Strengthened relationships with local and regional partners in the delivery of grants for Alaska Native community based arts and cultural programming. Connected Alaska Native cultural centers' staff and constituencies with museum services to accomplish institutional professional standards towards national museum accreditation. Enhanced enforcement agents/agencies understanding of Native artists' challenges in producing and marketing their work. This improved educational goals of these agencies and enabled artists to develop constructive rather than punitive relationships with agents. Made elders and youth aware of Arctic Studies Center facilities and ASCA's expanding Native arts programming.

- Through the Community Scholars program, we've trained scholars who then went on to create a cultural district in the Horse Cave area. We helped to develop seven arts councils in the eastern part of the state through fieldwork and support. Through fieldwork specifically related to projects and presentations, we've created a driving tour that has encouraged others to create tours of neighborhoods and cultural resources in their area. In the several years we've had the infrastructure support, we've been able to help many communities and the arts through in-depth staff support. Many artists have been included in many public programming and outreach events, such as ethnic communities. We've presented ethnic cultures at *Kentucky Crafted: The Market, the Kentucky Folklife Festival*, and various Thursday programming events.
- Infrastructure funded projects have created the base of the Wisconsin Arts Board's folk arts program. Through them we have been able to present artists to the general public and K-12 professionals via Wisconsin Folks website. This has allowed many traditional artists to have a place on the Internet, for many the only way that they are represented there, thereby enabling them to be hired in many more places than otherwise possible. Not intended as a source for sales, it has nevertheless allowed artists to generate income through sales. More than a hiring directory, the detailed info on artists in WF has served as content for student reports, press releases, highlight stories on other websites, and international connections.
- Maryland Traditions apprenticeship grants gave visibility to two significant traditions in Baltimore: Krug Iron Works (a family business, founded in early 1800s) and Globe Poster (letterpress posters, defined R&B aesthetic of 20th Century). Both businesses were on brink of collapse - Maryland Traditions grants and programs gave elevated visibility which stabilized the businesses and have secured their continuance for the foreseeable future. These are easily measurable outcomes. Another measurable

outcome is the function Maryland Traditions plays in bringing in a diverse constituency that is otherwise entirely absent from its programs and grants: immigrant communities, working-class Marylanders, mountain, maritime, and agricultural communities, and Native Americans. Additionally, infrastructure support goes directly into the hands of artists in many cases - often artists from these aforementioned communities - through apprenticeship grants, showcases, festivals, public programs, project grants, and so on. Folklife Infrastructure funds effectively enable Maryland Traditions to be a critical ambassador to communities often skeptical of the role an arts council could possibly play in their lives.

- NEA Infrastructure funds, routed through the NC Folklife Institute, have been key to implementing arts-driven economic development in rural communities across our state. The *African American Music Project*, an eight-county heritage tourism initiative in eastern NC, is the most recent example of cultural trails projects in NC that have arts traditions as their focus. Similar projects in western NC that present traditional music and the traditions and culture of the Eastern Band of Cherokee led to the creation of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. The Institute has also used Infrastructure funds to assist in the revitalization of small towns and cities that want to use cultural assets for development. The Institute's work in Wilmington to identify a broad range of cultural assets and increase community engagement around the goal of creating a local arts council has received some attention around the country.

### **Rationale for Continued Support**

All of us who work in the arts and culture field recognize that public funds cannot be taken for granted, and therefore we have sought compelling rationales for government support of our work. In articulating why NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Partnership support is indispensable for sustaining America's cultural heritage, it is important to note the fundamental commitment of the U.S. federal government – shared with countries all over the world – to support folk culture. Federal folklife programs and initiatives have been carried out for many decades by the Smithsonian and American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, complementing the NEA's granting support to states and non-profit cultural organizations. Unlike other federal folk culture programs and initiatives, NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Partnership support is directed, towards the priorities and interests of states through a decentralized approach. In the aggregate, the support provided functions as a national program with exceptional impact unobtainable through a more centralized approach.

The responses to the survey of state folk arts programs which follow speak passionately about how folk arts funding reaches communities otherwise untouched by public arts funding, which enables the NEA to foster true cultural democracy. They stress the lack of other sources of support, the absence of institutional infrastructures and the range of communities reached. The case they make for NEA folk and traditional arts

infrastructure support is aligned with their arguments for supporting folk and traditional arts in general. Projects undertaken locally such as those described here are catalyzed by state programs which receive funding from the NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Partnership program. These statements are cited verbatim from our survey of state folk arts programs:

- The constituents that we work with do NOT have an institutional infrastructure or access to such infrastructure as other areas of the arts.... [They] often are culturally, economically, and institutionally marginalized partly because lots of outreach is required. Unless that outreach is extensive, deep and ongoing, a significant part of the country and of arts will not be represented nor included for a variety of reasons. If the NEA is sincere about reaching every American, then a focused folk arts-disciplined initiative is necessary. Arts education has a well-developed infrastructure – schools and universities. Symphonies have a well-developed infrastructure. Local arts agencies have a well-developed infrastructure – local arts agencies, galleries, etc. In reality, the country's infrastructure for folk arts is the NEA's Folk Arts Partnership grant which reaches out through the states that have a folk arts program.
- I would put it in the same category as arts education, which does get partnership money specifically allocated, and for which they only need to apply every three years. Folk arts programs serve a huge constituency, and the infrastructure on the local level is almost nonexistent, so a state agency or organization working statewide is the best way to serve that population and help spur services and organizational development on the local level.
- Folk arts (program) serves communities that often lie on the margins of our society: immigrants, persons of color, speakers of English as a second language, the elderly. Arts organizations which have formed to support the arts in their communities have often disregarded those who are on the margins, opting to promote those who fall within the canon of fine arts or those who have popular or celebrity appeal. Money follows wealth, and as folk arts [often] serves a working class constituency, fewer resources have been allocated to the arts and heritage of these communities. NEA folk arts infrastructure helps to apportion support to communities who are less likely to receive mainstream support from corporations or foundations.
- If you compare the folk arts field with other disciplines, it is immediately apparent that the field of public folklife programs is sparse at local, state and regional levels. Further, the constituents that are served largely come from non-institutionalized frameworks. The NEA infrastructure grant is the only national funding source to support state infrastructure projects. Without dedicated fieldwork (supported by infrastructure and positions), traditional artists and organizations that support presentation and transmission would not be represented in the ecology of state public funding.

- The state legislative general fund match does not underwrite unique folk arts projects. NEA folk arts support allows our agency to expand our programs in a meaningful way and in direct response to feedback from the field.
- Folk artists ...deserve services and the general public needs access to them. Going the extra step to ensure that arts programs include traditional artists and communities is key to bridging cultural differences and to building understanding, respect and civility in our diverse nation.
- We know from the past that folklife projects do not fare well in competition with other art forms. This is not because they are not as valuable, but those outside of the field do not know how to judge their worth or value. The lack of focus on context, process, and meaning to the folk group that produces the art work prevents traditional artists from being competitive and most likely would mean that they would no longer receive support.

### **State Folk Arts Programs and NEA's Strategic Plan**

Folklorists at the Chicago gathering discussed and analyzed at length the perspectives and data about the state of state folk arts programs generated through surveys, conference calls, and meetings of the State Arts Agencies Folk Arts Peer Group Planning Committee. When it came time to craft summary statements about the character and significance of state folk arts programs, participants in this gathering turned to the outcomes of NEA's current strategic plan. The gathering produced a single sentence for each strategic plan outcome, encapsulating how folk arts programs are aligned with NEA's strategic plan. While these statements can apply to any strong folk arts program, they are especially well suited to state programs because of the broad range of services, programming and activities produced and fostered through state programs. The summary statements which appear below are followed by elaborations on each of them, drawing from the discussions at the Chicago gathering.

*CREATIVITY: Folk arts programs support artistic excellence and innovation recognized within diverse communities as expressed through the creation and mastery of a broad spectrum of often overlooked aesthetic traditions.*

The folk arts are embedded in everyday life and produced in every American community. They embody community standards of artistic excellence and demonstrate that creativity is found among all cultural groups and in every community. The folk arts field is uniquely positioned to identify, present, and celebrate this broad aesthetic and stylistic diversity found in the most familiar and unexpected places. Discovering, presenting and safeguarding traditional aesthetic expressions found among and within the broadest range of a state's cultural communities in a state are fundamental to the mission of each state folk art program.

While anchored in deep local heritage, folk arts traditions change constantly in subtle ways, due to the creativity of individual artists and the effects of memory. Unlike other,

codified forms of artistic expression (preserved, for example, in a musical score or literary text), folk arts are emergent, created anew every time they are crafted and performed. Folk and traditional artists are often highly creative “ordinary” people who do not identify themselves as artists and who are brought to new audiences by state folk arts programs.

*ENGAGEMENT: Folk arts cultivate broad networks, active participants and creators, and deep cultural understanding, all rooted in the excellence of local artists and traditions.*

Every state folk arts program broadens the constituency of its agency and enables it to respond to a broad range of cultural preferences, through engaging communities who do not customarily attend publicly funded arts activities. Cultural democracy is practiced through fostering engagement and participation in the arts by community groups that are usually overlooked by arts organizations or categorized as “underserved.”

Folk arts events are participatory in nature, encouraging interaction through dancing to dance music, trying one’s hand at a craft, or engaging in dialogue with an artist to learn about his or her tradition. Programs frequently feature diverse traditions, and audience members learn to respect and appreciate other cultures through experiencing their traditional arts and lifeways.

State folk arts programs collaborate extensively with other programs in their agencies and community-based organizations as well as other state and federal programs. These collaborations leverage resources and help to generate new audiences.

*LIVABILITY: Folk arts sustain communities by building sense of place, encouraging respect for local cultures, and identifying and cultivating home grown cultural assets.*

At a time when American communities increasingly look and feel alike, the folk arts remain distinctively local expressions, emblematic of distinctive places and cultural groups. They are invaluable resources for community self-understanding, and they are often represented in cultural tourism programs. For economically depressed communities, folk arts programming builds community pride and self-worth, and it can motivate local residents to remain in hometowns whose uniqueness they treasure. State folk arts programs identify and present local folk cultural assets, presented in programs to new audiences and providing sources of income to musicians and crafts persons. These assets are often overlooked and neglected by local elites.

*LEARNING: Folk arts learning is unique to each local community, and ranges from the lifelong learning of a master traditional artist to children discovering the artistic traditions in their own backyards and neighborhoods.*

Learning through folk arts encompasses apprenticeships between artists to ensure cultural sustainability, teaching youth to practice local heritage arts, and K-12 programs which include informal learning as well as teaching linked to the curricula of various

disciplines. For young people, learning about folk arts means discovering traditions practiced by family, friends and neighbors. It may occur during the school day through learning about local folklore within the context of curriculum in English, social studies or the discipline of folklore studies. Or it may involve classes outside of school settings to learn music, dance, foodways, or crafts of the student's own ethnic or regional community. State folk arts apprenticeship programs bring together master artists and apprentices from a shared cultural community, in a series of sessions designed to teach style, repertoire, technique and local traditional knowledge.

### **Professional Development, Technical Assistance, and Resource Sharing**

As state folk arts programs engaged in a national conversation about their characteristics, challenges, successes, and the justifications for NEA support, the American Folklore Society requested that they also provide perspectives about professional development needs. The AFS is the only national provider of support for technical assistance and professional development for the folk arts field. Since 2009, it has administered the Best Practices Technical Assistance Program, which succeeded the Traditional Arts Growth fund administered for over two decades by the National Council for the Traditional Arts in association with the NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Program.

AFS Executive Director Timothy Lloyd asked that our survey of state programs elicit the professional development needs of state programs and the folk arts field in general. Twenty two areas for consultation were listed. The respondents (37 in all) could indicate interest in more than one area, and specify other areas of interest not included in the list. We also asked about the extent of interest in seven modalities for providing technical assistance, and about additional modalities not included in the list. The results of the survey were distributed to the Chicago gathering, which engaged in a general discussion of professional development needs of the folk arts field, considered how professional learning could best be achieved, and how to motivate colleagues to request technical assistance. Several types of technical assistance of particular interest were discussed in detail, and additions were made to the list in the survey. Discussion also occurred about enhancing communication and the sharing of resources within the folk arts field.

Following are results of the survey and highlights of the discussion about professional development and technical assistance at the Chicago gathering:

### **Interest in Types of Professional Development and Technical Assistance**

<b>Area of Assistance</b>	<b>Percent Interested</b>	<b>Number Interested (of 37)</b>
Social Media, web design/production	67.6%	25
Funding Strategies	64.9%	24
Archiving	59.5%	22

Folk Arts in Education	59.5%	22
Organizational Sustainability	59.5%	22
Leadership Succession	59.5%	22
Assistance to Individual Artists (e.g. marketing, self-presentation, Portfolios)	54.1%	20
Documentation Practices (photography, video, audio)	51.4%	19
Heritage Tourism	51.4%	19
Organizational or Program Development	43.2%	16
Expertise about Traditions (e.g. ethnic, new immigrant, occupational, regional)	40.5%	15
Fiscal Management	40.5%	15
Exhibition Production and Design	35.1%	13
Performing Arts Presentation Technical Practices	32.4%	12
Exhibition Development and Curation	32.4%	12
Interpretive Practices	32.4%	12
Organizational Management	32.4%	12
Organizational Transition	32.4%	12
Curation of Performing Arts Programs	29.7%	11
Integration, Maintaining Autonomy for Programs in Non-Folk Arts Organizations	29.7%	11
Development of New State Folk Arts/Folklife Programs	24.3%	9
Management of Apprenticeship Programs	21.6%	8

In addition to the types of professional development and technical assistance listed above, respondents listed the following additional areas of interest for consultancies:

- Development of regional centers and partnerships within a state
- Supervision of employees and interns
- Planned giving strategies suitable for small nonprofits
- Accessing and integrating with non-arts agencies and organizations beyond the “usual suspects”
- Evaluation

Participants in the Chicago gathering emphasized the importance of technical assistance and training in digital media, which they saw as critically important at a time of reduced staffing and resources in their organizations. Such professional development would involve web design, use of social media, and enhancement of a folklife presence on the web. Discussing their professional development needs relating to archiving, participants indicated that they needed to learn how to process fieldwork materials effectively in digital form -- through identification, description, logging and storage. They noted that digital file preservation, backup and formats would be dealt with in a

procedures manual to be written as part of a major AFS archiving project recently funded by NEH.

Discussing specific professional development needs for fundraising, the Chicago gathering listed understanding funding strategies, cultivating donors, diversifying funding sources, and developing relationships with community foundations. They agreed that technical assistance in these areas would also enhance the ability of folk arts programs to work with other organizations which need fundraising expertise.

The Chicago gathering underscored the importance of orienting new directors of state folk arts programs. The past practice by the NEA of bringing new directors to Washington, DC, to introduce them to national folk arts organizations and the NEA folk arts staff should be revived. Ongoing mentoring of new directors by their peers in nearby states could be carried out with the help of technical assistance support. Participants also spoke of the value of mentoring non-folklorists responsible for administering folklore funding categories in state arts agencies, and indicated that the field would benefit from learning how to work most effectively with contract workers, particularly through learning how to develop contracts with them.

While 80% of states now have dedicated folk arts programs, those states without programs do not engage with the national infrastructure. Several state arts agencies question whether the NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Infrastructure funding category is relevant to their own agencies. Through consultancies sensitively delivered by experienced and sympathetic state folk arts program directors, states without programs could begin to develop a professionally directed folk arts presence suitable for their needs and interests. The folk arts program at the South Dakota Arts Council is exemplary in its highly efficient use of an experienced folklorist from another state as an ongoing consultant, carrying out field research, programming and administration intensively on a part time basis. Other programs could be developed with the long term involvement of a consultant focused initially upon a particular theme or cultural group, such as Native Americans. The gathering also called for the creation of folk arts programs in all Regional Arts Organizations, and expressed interest in helping RAOs plan and develop these programs.

### **Preferred Modalities for Receiving Technical Assistance**

<b>Modality</b>	<b>Very Interested</b>	<b>Somewhat Interested</b>	<b>Not Interested</b>
Travel to Observe Exemplary Projects	77.8% (28)	22.2% (8)	0
Technical Workshops	74.3% (26)	22.9% (8)	2.9% (1)
Visits by Consultant to Your Program	72.2% (26)	27.8% (10)	0
Short-Term Consultancies	67.6% (23)	38.2% (13)	0
Visit to Consultant for Advice, Observing Projects	63.9% (23)	36.1% (13)	0



Long-Term, Multi-Visit Consultancies	54.5% (18)	39.4% (13)	6.1% (2)
Webinars	50% (16)	43.8% (14)	6.3% (2)

In addition to the types of professional development and technical assistance listed above, respondents to the survey listed the following additional modalities for technical assistance:

- Best practices publications
- Compilations of “tricks of the trade” by experienced folklorists
- Downloadable materials for board members
- Face-to-face convenings, both regional and national
- Video and Skype conferencing

The Chicago gathering felt that multiple modalities of technical assistance should be employed for relevant areas of professional development. The use of multiple modalities would be especially worthwhile for training recently hired directors and other staff at folk arts programs. These could include ongoing mentoring by experienced colleagues, site visits to exemplary programs, and visits to other programs to shadow staff as they develop and implement projects, as well as short-term consultancies.

Participants at the Chicago gathering emphasized that there are many ways that electronic modalities can be used for professional development purposes. These include cyber-meetings, webinars, and online panels. The Open Folklore and AFS web sites should be used more extensively for sharing materials like catalogs and program booklets generated by public folk arts programs, as well as resumes and curricula.

Recognizing that there is an abundance of professional development resources produced by arts organizations in various disciplines, the convening agreed that we should not reinvent the wheel if there are relevant available resources. BoardSource, Grant Station and multi-discipline arts service organizations were mentioned as examples of readily accessible professional development resources. A service organization in the folk arts field could create a central gathering point for information about such resources. Folk arts programs could also look to for-profit business models for approaches to assisting individual artists, developing income generating activities, and creating social enterprise initiatives.

The high degree of professional networking in the folk arts field is due in large part to its association with the American Folklore Society. AFS serves as both a professional association and a national service organization. Participants at the Chicago gathering noted the value of professional development workshops provided by AFS. They suggested that sessions on such topics as archiving, leadership, and succession might be organized as travelling workshops to be held in different parts of the U.S. to broaden the outreach of the existing organizational venues. In their discussions of AFS,

participants stressed that the Society is well positioned to introduce folklore graduate students to the public folklore field through initiatives such as workshops focused on the connections between the academic and public sectors. They agreed that graduate students should be better informed about the opportunities and requirements for public sector folk arts work.

For state folk arts program directors, the state arts agency folk arts peer group sessions at the biennial conference of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies are invaluable opportunities to discuss shared interests and concerns. They also provide opportunities for professional development sessions geared to the needs of state programs. Evaluation, social media and international programming have been among the topics of these sessions. The folk arts peer group has also mobilized during the period between NASAA conferences to collectively discuss directions for the national infrastructure of state programs, carry out surveys, and create reports such as this one.

Convenings organized during the past decade by the Fund for Folk Culture on topics such as the needs of individual traditional artists and refugee traditions demonstrated the substantial potential of convenings for generating materials of value for the professional development of the field. Participants at the Chicago gathering noted that significant white papers and reports describing best practices were generated by the Fund for Folk Culture convenings (most FFC publications now available online at <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/3850> through a partnership of AFS and Open Folklore).

### **Resource Sharing and Connecting the Field**

Discussions at the Chicago gathering about professional development needs and technical assistance modalities were intertwined with consideration of how communication within the field could be enhanced to foster resource sharing. Facebook groups, state and regional listservs, and the Public Programs Bulletin are already being used as vehicles for sharing information and resources. Chicago gathering participants also spoke of the potential value of Jumo and Board Source for the sharing of information about organizational resources and professional issues. They noted that Linked In and the American Folklore Society have interest groups which address professional development needs.

Throughout the discussion of professional development and technical assistance, participants emphasized the value of ongoing peer to peer assistance for professional needs. For example, peer networks are useful for learning how to organize virtual meetings for review panels. Regional networks could also be mobilized for initiating technical assistance as well as recommending consultants and recipients of consultancies, functions that the AFS has limited capacity to undertake.

Participants at the gathering agreed that the folk arts field can benefit from compiling and sharing data about who we serve in order to help make the case for supporting folk arts. NASAA and the Regional Arts Organizations were mentioned as being of great value for assistance in understanding the landscape of the folk arts field. They are

capable of generating data such as community demographics and numbers of people served by folk arts programs. Folk arts programs should also take the initiative in documenting our own programs for mentoring new professionals, as a resource for colleagues, and as a historical record.

Both the survey and the discussion at the Chicago gathering recognized new possibilities for the folk arts field to work collectively to identify and address its technical assistance and communication needs. At this first discussion ever to take place about professional development at a convening of the folk arts field, the Chicago gathering underscored the importance of effectively mobilizing our networks for professional development and resource sharing, expanding in-depth peer-to-peer learning, and learning from specialists in related disciplines. Focusing upon the professional development and communication needs of the field is an essential part of the ongoing national conversation among state folk arts programs about challenges, achievements, direction, and justification.

### **Recommendations**

- Maintain a National Endowment for the Arts Folk Arts Partnership (infrastructure) program, which, through funding from a tiny part of the agency's budget, provides indispensable support for sustaining state programs that generate extensive activity on the local and state levels.
- State folk arts programs should share a widely accepted definition of folk and traditional arts as community-based artistic activities that are learned and communicated in face-to-face settings and in small groups, generally through oral tradition and by example, and taking place over time, often over generations.
- State folk arts programs should be directed by professional specialists with training and experience in folklore studies or a related discipline. Peer review of folk arts applications requires expert evaluation by such specialists.
- State folk arts programs should undertake or support field research by professional, trained folklorists and fieldworkers
- State folk arts programs should serve the needs of their constituents through ongoing assistance in developing new programs, workshops and guidance on grant applications, advice about producing folk arts events with appropriate modes of presentation, marketing, and helping artists with promotion and portfolio development.
- State folk arts programs should develop programs for the general public and also partner with local communities to jointly develop programs suiting their unique needs.

- State arts agency folk arts programs should continue – and expand – their collaborations with colleagues in their own agencies, while maintaining their distinct identity as programs.
- State folk arts programs which are not located in state arts agencies should maintain a close working relationship with their state arts agencies. Regional Arts Organizations should provide services to their state folk arts programs and work in collaboration with them.
- State folk arts programs should collaborate and confer with national folk arts programs, such as the American Folklore Society (AFS), the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Program, the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, and the National Council for the Traditional Arts.
- New folk arts directors should travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with national leaders in the field. Seasoned professionals should mentor younger and/or newer colleagues.
- State folk arts program directors in well-established programs should consult with directors of states without statewide folk arts programs to explore development of a professionally directed folk arts presence suitable for their needs and interests.
- All six Regional Arts Organizations should maintain a folk arts program; the two existing RAO folk arts staff (at Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation and South Arts) could mentor other RAOs.
- State folk arts programs and public sector folklorists should work with AFS to develop opportunities for graduate students interested in a career in public work, including paid internships, ongoing mentoring and enhanced graduate school public folklore curricula,
- New modalities of technical assistance should be developed to enhance the professional development of the field, including new kinds of peer-to-peer consultation, expanded use of social media and the internet, workshops, and consultancies flexibly designed to meet the needs of working professionals.
- State folk arts programs should work with education professionals to develop curricula based on local cultural resources tied to their state's educational standards and benchmarks.
- Folk arts programs should collaborate with other public and private agencies and organizations.



This report is a product of an ongoing collaboration of state folk arts programs with the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, the American Folklore Society, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

At the 2008 NASAA meeting in Chattanooga, NASAA's Executive Director, Jonathan Katz, encouraged us to take stock of state folk arts programs with critical reflection and discussion of our achievements, challenges and future directions.

Under NASAA's auspices and with support from the NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Program, we pursued this agenda through meetings of the State Arts Agencies Folk Arts Peer Group Planning Committee, at the peer group meeting at the 2010 NASAA meeting in Austin, Texas, through creation of a PowerPoint presentation, "Keys to a Successful State Folk & Traditional Arts Program," through a survey of all state folk arts programs, several conference calls, and the Chicago gathering in June 2011 hosted by Susan Eleuterio, a consultant to several state folk arts programs.

The development of the Chicago convening was brought about by AFS Executive Director Timothy Lloyd, who asked us to add technical assistance and professional development needs to our agenda. AFS supported the Chicago gathering through its Consultancy and Professional Development Program, funded by the NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Program. This meeting was attended by representatives of state folk arts programs from every region, including Emily Afanador (Oregon Folklife Network), Robert Baron (New York State Council on the Arts), Brent Björkman (Vermont Folklife Center), Susan Eleuterio (Independent; consultant to Illinois Arts Council, Indiana Arts Commission, Wisconsin Arts Board and other Midwestern state folk arts programs), Andrea Graham (University of Wyoming and consultant to the South Dakota Arts Council), Lynn Graton (New Hampshire Arts Council), Lisa Higgins (Missouri Folk Arts Program), Teresa Hollingsworth (South Arts), Wayne Martin (North Carolina Arts Council, via conference call), Maida Owens (Louisiana Division of the Arts), Anne Pryor (Wisconsin Arts Board), Amy Skillman (Independent; consultant to Pennsylvania Council on the Arts), Willie Smyth (Washington Arts Council) and Sally Van de Water (Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation).

Throughout our national conversation, Barry Bergey of the NEA's Folk and Traditional Arts Program encouraged us to relate our discussions to NEA's policies and priorities.

All of our partners were indispensable for the development of this multi-faceted project which will, hopefully, model continuation of collective work by state folk arts programs as we continue to face critical challenges and respond to new opportunities.

#### State Arts Agency Folk Arts Peer Group Planning Committee

Patricia Atkinson – Nevada Arts Council  
 Robert Baron – New York State Council on the Arts  
 Wayne Martin – North Carolina Arts Council  
 Willie Smyth – Washington State Arts Commission  
 Sally Van de Water – Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation