

Close Listening: Summary

A National Case for Value and Impact of the Folk & Traditional Arts



African-American Quilter and 2018 NEA National Heritage Fellow Marion Coleman.

Photo by Tom Pich

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Introduction

Folk & Traditional Arts is a field that excels in spaces where arts infrastructure is particularly thin: rural, poverty-bound, immigrant, and working-class communities. It is a field that has been recording and archiving the stories of the American people for a half-century. Through ethical fieldwork and close listening, Folk & Traditional Arts has been an innovator in cultural equity within the arts.

These are all assets to the national arts infrastructure that have long been underutilized, underfunded, and under-the-radar.

The Close Listening convening was designed to start a conversation about the value and impact of this field; not only articulating what it *does*, but also what it *can do* when its value and impact is more widely understood, and the field is more fully resourced.

From October 30-November 1, we convened 120 people from 46 states, 2 territories, and several indigenous communities to showcase the breadth of Folk & Traditional Arts programs in the United States and to articulate our collective value and impact. What follows is a running summary of that convening.

The summary follows the course of the three-day agenda. For the most part, these summaries are brief synopses. There are a few notable exceptions, however, where the substance of the discussion warranted a longer-form summary.

As a courtesy to the reader, we have condensed a list of recommendations from the meeting, which are foregrounded at the front of this publication.

We are grateful for all those who committed their time, ideas, and passion to this work, particularly Holly Sidford, Betsy Peterson, Robert Baron, Maribel Alvarez, Amy Kitchener, Lori Pourier, Tony Chauveaux, Jennifer Hughes, Andi Mathis, Maria Jackson, and Pam Breaux who were instrumental in the germinating ideas behind the convening. Additionally, the steering committee went above and beyond their call of duty, contributing significant time and energy toward creating a dynamic and inclusive conversation about this remarkable field. We thank you for your work and commitment to the living traditions that make up this extraordinary nation.

Finally, we would like to thank Anna F. Needham and Ellie Crowley for their valuable assistance in preparing this report for the public.

Recommendations from Close Listening:

- **The Field of Folk & Traditional Arts must identify and fix gaps in the existing national infrastructure.** Research shows that state and federal Folk & Traditional Arts funding performs best in rural and poverty-bound regions. Looking at the current funding map, infrastructure is weakest in the nation’s poorest and most rural regions. In other words, the “gaps in the map” are precisely in the spaces where Folk & Traditional Arts programs are most effective.
- **The Field of Folk & Traditional Arts must develop a strategy for cross-pollination of intersecting fields (Folklife and...).** As articulated at the convening, the practice of “close listening” and community collaboration eventually leads to an awareness of community traditions and needs that fall outside of the funding/mission parameters of many arts organizations. To holistically support Folklife, we must acknowledge that much of Folklife practice lives in fields parallel to the arts (humanities, public health, food and agriculture, etc.). A strategy supporting the creation of interlocking disciplinary infrastructures is of paramount importance.
- **Participants called for regionally based convenings as a follow-up to the national Close Listening convening,** with more community leaders involved, a focus on regional identity and resources, and a focus on intersecting fields and critical issues such as the role of Folk & Traditional Arts programs in building social cohesion; the efficacy of Folklife programs within museums; the development of a universal language for the field; climate change and its impact on cultural heritage practices, communities, and landscapes; and structural racism within the institutions and programs that support Folk & Traditional Arts.
- **The convening revealed that there is a need for a regular forum to share best practices in the field of Folk & Traditional Arts** in order to transform and strengthen the field. Many participants expressed the sentiment that this was the first time that they had ever participated in such a meeting—and that it helped them to see the relationships between seemingly culturally disparate programs.
- **An analysis of traditional arts apprenticeship programs is needed in order to better understand the impact of these programs, and to advocate for their value and support.** An analysis might include a longitudinal study of impact/practice and a summary of best practices. To this latter point, the convening revealed that the funding structures of apprenticeship programs vary wildly from state to state and program to program. Additionally, many programs have had flat funding/budgets for the past 20 years.

- **An analysis of State Folk Arts Partnership models is necessary in understanding and articulating why their work is so effective when serving hard-to-reach communities.** Funding maps show that states with a strong Folk Arts Partnership program have more robust (and diversified) support for Traditional Arts statewide. An analysis can articulate how these programs are most effective, and how more robust support for such programs will benefit all of the residents of that state. Likewise, an analysis will lead to more streamlined idea sharing and better practices.
- **There is a need for a field-wide assessment of ethnographic fieldwork archives, and a dedicated strategy for connecting communities of practice (local or diasporic) to these materials that the field has collected over the past 50 years.** Fieldwork collections are, quite simply, one of the most unique resources in federal, state, local, and tribal government. And yet, they are one of its most under-utilized assets.

TUESDAY – October 30

Welcome: Value of Folk & Traditional Arts

Cliff Murphy, director of Folk & Traditional Arts at the National Endowment for the Arts welcomed participants and outlined the agenda. The Close Listening convening is intended to be the first of many steps in collaboratively developing a national strategy that elevates awareness, appreciation, and support for the field. Cliff then introduced Pam Breaux, executive director of National Association of States Arts Agencies (NASAA).

Pam Breaux welcomed participants, thanked the Arts Endowment, and acknowledged her previous work and study as a folklorist and graduate student of Maida Owens in Louisiana. Breaux shared how this experience inspired her to dedicate her life's work to the public sector. She recognized the public sector's support for traditional culture bearers and applauded the access it provides to resources and opportunities to sustain cultural knowledge and expressions. She also commended folklife programs at state and regional arts agencies for their significant achievements in building the field of Folk and Traditional Arts.

Introductions

Steering Committee: Karen Abdul-Malik, Perkins Center for the Arts; Pat Atkinson, Nevada Arts Council Folklife Program; Chad Buterbaugh, Maryland Traditions (Maryland State Arts Council); Juan Díes, Sones de Mexico Ensemble; Chitra Kalyandurg, Kalanidhi Dance; Jon Kay, Traditional Arts Indiana/Indiana University; Amy Kitchener, Alliance for California Traditional Arts; Selina Morales, Philadelphia Folklife Project; Theresa Secord, National Heritage Fellow and Penobscot Nation Basketmaker.

Discussion: Several tables around the room initially reported focusing on terms they would avoid using, for example, instead of using “giving voice to,” there was a preference to use “amplify voices of.” The discussion continued with debate and consideration of many different terms, including, but not limited to folk, folklife, living culture, living traditions, and contemporary as they relate to different organizational functions and/or ethnic groups.

National Folk and Traditional Arts Infrastructure Report

In September of 2018, the American Folklife Center (AFC) and the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) co-convened a small working group to discuss the state of the field’s national support systems. Betsy Peterson and Amy Kitchener presented a summary of findings and observations from this meeting.

- **Amy Kitchener**, Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA)
- **Betsy Peterson**, American Folklife Center (AFC), Library of Congress

Betsy and Amy remarked that periods of instability in funding and resources have produced an informal support network for the field; the AFC/ACTA meeting reflected a desire to analyze and develop a more formal national field strategy for the Folk & Traditional Arts. Prior to the AFC/ACTA meeting, participants completed a questionnaire to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the field. Responses and discussion included the need to consider federal support systems and their capacity, the range of program areas, the need for continued attention to terminology and the context for which it is used, and the need for field-mapping across sectors and allied fields.

A summary of successes of the field included federal folklife structure, peer networks, local leadership, and activism. A summary of gaps of the field included lack of coordination; need for more diversity, equity, and inclusion work; lack of sustainable and robust funding, especially for general operating support; no clear pathways to applied work; and no central organizing entity.



From left to right: Carolyn Mazloomi, Theresa Secord, Vicky Holt Takamine, and Wisa Uemura

Presenting Ourselves: The Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Folk & Traditional Arts field is one of the primary ways that the arts sector engages with cultural heritage and community identity. This panel featured celebrated traditional arts practitioners and organizations who have harnessed local, state, and federal arts resources to fortify and amplify cultural heritage in a variety of contexts.

- **Vicky Holt Takamine**, PA'i Foundation
- **Bau Graves**, Old Town School of Folk Music
- **Carolyn Mazloomi**, National Heritage Fellow, Women of Color Quilters Network
- **Wisa Uemura**, San Jose Taiko
- **Discussant: Theresa Secord**, National Heritage Fellow, Penobscot Nation Basketmaker

Presenters shared how their cultural practice has impacted their lives and the communities they serve. The discussion outlined ways in which their cultural practice created a space for dialogue and free exchange of ideas. Cultural practice in Hawaii (PA'i) and Chicago (Old Town School) can also be linked to community development based on providing space for art-making and taking away focus from where to get next meal or paycheck. Wisa Uemura spoke of the role San Jose

Taiko plays in navigating, interpreting, understanding, and adapting to the community's ever-changing demographics. There was also a discussion of the lack of capacity for some organizations to document their work, and the need to partner with other organizations. Carolyn Mazloomi has been documenting the quilts from her network members for the past 38 years and collaborates with Michigan State University on its Quilt Index. Vicky Holt Takamine stated that they *are* the community—they are woven into the fabric of the community and recognize they all have contributing roles in community life, from the economy to celebrating lives, and so forth.

WEDNESDAY – October 31

State of the Field

Cliff Murphy, Director of Folk & Traditional Arts, presented an overview and highlights from a forthcoming Folk & Traditional Arts field scan from the Office of Research & Analysis at the National Endowment for the Arts. This presentation examined where we've been, where we are, and where we may be going.

- **Cliff Murphy**, National Endowment for the Arts

This is an abridged excerpt from the presentation

“As a field of practice and practitioners, our work is expansive, inspiring, and stunningly diverse. And while this diversity encompasses strikingly different ways of moving in the world—the quilter, the dancer, the boat builder, the folklorist, the arts administrator, the government worker—what binds us together is our shared practice of close listening, and our work in honoring and amplifying those voices we are listening to. Close listening has led towards the transformation of the arts, leading us towards a more culturally equitable arts and heritage landscape. Yet close listening also demands that we go down roads not easily accessible through existing arts-based infrastructure. This is a challenge for an under-resourced field, and from a field that does not enjoy a high profile. When close listening directs us to be more responsive to community needs, where is the overlapping infrastructure between traditional arts and healing, for example?

Standing here today, we are a half century into the building of a national infrastructure to support Folk & Traditional Arts in the United States. While we need to remain vigilant in sustaining, renewing, and strengthening the existing infrastructure, close listening also tells us that we need new, interlocking infrastructures that are not rooted in the arts, but which complement the work we do and provide a more holistic portrait of Folklife, and more comprehensive resources for the communities we serve.

Being an under-resourced field, we must take collective stock in our work and consider how best to utilize our resources. What are our priorities? Where do we work most effectively? Where are we most needed? On average, the Arts Endowment invests \$4 million annually into Folk & Traditional Arts, and state and regional arts agencies invest \$7 million annually into Folk & Traditional Arts. That's \$11 million in federal and state arts dollars per year. Over ten years, that's \$110 million. Certainly, we can have an impact with a \$110 million investment between now and 2028.

Remembering the demands that close listening brings—to connect the communities we serve to resources in healthcare, or humanities, or tourism, or linguistics, or economic development—and the need for new, interlocking infrastructures, what might happen if a national strategy for Folk & Traditional Arts could bring about a match, from philanthropy, to build new roads and new programs? What if philanthropy matched our investment, 1:1? What might we do with \$220 million in ten years?

This is our charge: to map our landscape, to understand where it is we are most needed and effective, and to identify where new roads must be built.”

State of Communities: State Folklife Programs

Most states and territories in the country have an agency tasked with the mission of documenting, sustaining, and promoting traditional arts and cultural heritage. These programs were seeded by the National Endowment for the Art in 1974, and provide a variety of resources and strategies useful to a wide range of cultural communities and practices. Each program has a different structure, and this panel consists of a cross-section of programs and roles.

- **Joey Brackner**, Alabama State Council on the Arts
- **Bradley Hanson**, Tennessee Arts Commission
- **Amanda Hardeman**, Florida Folklife Program
- **Steven Hatcher**, Idaho Commission on the Arts
- **Ellen McHale**, New York Folklore Society
- **Langston Wilkins**, Tennessee Arts Commission
- **Discussant: Cheryl Schiele**, NEA Folk & Traditional Arts

In a casual presentation setting, Cheryl Schiele interviewed panelists about their respective state folk arts partnership programs, including structure and how each state's cultural geography contributes to and determines their priorities, initiatives, and fieldwork. Each panelist represented a different node of partnership structures: A state arts agency program that is central to its agency's identity with a strong nonprofit partner (Alabama); a nonprofit partner to a state arts agency folk arts program with exemplary robust reach and funding (New York); a

single state arts agency folklorist working with lean funding and without regional partners in a large, rural state (Idaho); a state folklife program situated outside of an arts agency (Florida); and a tandem team of state folklorists working at one state arts agency (Tennessee).

Several panelists gave a detailed examination of geography and demographics of their state, identifying migrant and immigrant population changes in recent years, and how these factors have shaped their fieldwork, grants, and programs. Some states identified occupational traditions and cultural convergence with environmental issues. There was some discussion about increasing relationships with tribal nations at a state governmental level. The dichotomies that exist for several states include a rural vs. urban divide, cultural identities bound up in region vs. state, and a fraught political climate on immigration as a whole. Underlying challenges for all of these programs were issues of capacity and funding; programs have been resourceful and collaborative, but ultimately need a deeper pool of funding to draw from to meet the needs of diverse constituents.

Checking in with Friends of the Field

A group of civic leaders and innovative thinkers in the arts and cultural heritage talk about the value they have found in collaborating with traditional artists and cultural heritage organizations.

- **Jamie Bennett**, ArtPlace America
- **Stephen Kidd**, National Humanities Alliance
- **Holly Sidford**, Helicon Collaborative
- **Erik Takeshita**, Bush Foundation
- **Discussant: Amy Kitchener**, Alliance for California Traditional Arts

Participants in this panel consisted of funders and a national humanities service organization gathered as “thought partners” who have longstanding relationships with Folk & Traditional Arts. The forum for this panel was designed to learn from allies who work adjacent to our field.

Stephen Kidd felt that the folklore world has a tremendous amount to offer to the humanities world. This is particularly true in higher education, where humanities are focused on public engagement, and are looking to demonstrate public relevance of humanities between university and community. He regarded that public folklorists have deep experience engaging diverse communities, community engaged research and programming: the broader humanities community needs to learn from this. Support for community-focused humanities has typically come from Whiting Foundation, American Council on Learned Societies, and Mellon Foundation.

Holly Sidford has been involved in building and funding folk arts infrastructure since the 1970s, and garnered \$20 -30 million to support regional folklife entities in the 1990s. She shared what she characterized as “tough talk” to the field, encouraging those gathered to consider:

- Private foundations provide almost 3x what comes from public agencies. Individual donors provide nearly 7x the amount. It is important to think of public money in these terms.
- The field of Folk & Traditional Arts is not perceived as a field by anyone outside of the public folklore sector. This complicates matters because funders aren’t thinking about fields. Funders are moving towards the intersection of arts and community development, etc. In other words, conversations with funders may be hampered if you attempt to frame your work as a field.
- Private funders represent a real opportunity, because Folk & Traditional Arts are so integrated with community life. Private funders are interested in diversity, inclusion, inequity, and social justice. This field knows how to organize on this issue and it can do a better job to get funders and meet their interests, otherwise, you are leaving money on the table.
- To do this requires:
 - Making friends, reaching out, educating, going to funders meetings, inviting them to your own meetings, thinking of them as allied friends, and switching up the language (the folk arts language does not translate with funders). Articulating distinct impacts of the field will be helpful, as well.
- As a field presented with many challenges, begin by choosing a few issues that can be worked on to move and strengthen the field.

Jamie Bennett discussed ArtPlace America’s mission to strengthen the field of people who are committed to enlisting artists as allies to equitable community development. Those persons working to advocate for Folk & Traditional Arts and for cultural communities are, in essence, “giving ears to the earless” when engaging with the broader public and with funders. Jamie asked, “For a field that is 400,000 years old, why did we need new language? Because the work is not always visible and legible to those not in power.” He urged the convening to make sure that the language and definitions we use are centered on inviting in and expanding, not centered on exclusion.

Erik Takeshita explained that the Bush Foundation holds \$1 billion in assets, investing in projects in ND, SD, MN and the 23 Native nations therein. His work focuses on a couple of questions: “How do we make our nation better for everyone, and help those who are doing least well?” Erik’s program wants to help build people’s capacity to solve problems. In this way, Bush was able to support Troyd Geist’s (North Dakota Council on the Arts) folk arts and aging program. He noted that all of us need to ask, “How can arts and culture help people make a difference in their

own lives?” Additionally, we need to focus on connections: how can we help people connect to place, history, and future?

Following panel presentations, Amy Kitchener facilitated a discussion between the panelists and the convening. She identified recurring strands: mainly, the need to articulate what our work is. Amy asked the panel “how we can productively create a new articulation of what this work is about? What productive directions are there? Tell us about why this discipline matters.”

Holly stated that the greatest gift of this field is the process, not the product. The way the field thinks about its own work and how it engages communities is distinctively different from other arts and humanities organizations. Focusing this way may result in greater receptivity in private funding—it’s not about products, but about engaging people and creative capacity.

In terms of figuring out language to describe the field and the different elements that it encompasses, Jamie felt that there is something very othering about defining a field by what it is not. Defining Folk Art as a different form of art reinforces Euro-centrism. Instead, how does one build a field as a “we,” inclusive of everyone? Effectively building the field with enough people who appreciate it will require thinking about our commonalities rather than our differences.

Stephen noted that there is a lot that folklorists do and know that they also take for granted (e.g. the way they do research, programming, etc.). This gets overwhelmed within the context of the dominant arts narratives and development narratives. The Humanities Alliance has begun working with sociologists and economists to explore ways to articulate value. The Alliance has been asking questions such as: How do you talk about public value in nuanced ways? Surveys (evaluating and measuring our work) are important. Designing surveys that can be used with communities you are collaborating with in order to evaluate the question “How does what we do affect trust in a community?” Survey data support is compelling to a wider range of funders interested in building trust in communities.

Erik expressed the sentiment that he is more agnostic about the art, and more interested in change at the community level.

Storytelling: The Art of Performance, Preservation, and Practice

Since its founding in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts has recognized storytelling as an integral element of Folk & Traditional Arts. A half century later, it has become one of the most significant public mediums in folklife and cultural heritage. Our panel shares stories of the value and impact of the performative, preservation, and practical roles of the art of storytelling. We will explore why telling our stories matters.

- **Charlie Lockwood**, Texas Folklife
- **Kiran Singh Sirah**, International Storytelling Center
- **Discussant: Karen Abdul-Malik**, Perkins Center for the Arts

Sharing the art form of storytelling relies on partnerships and relationship building. Kiran Singh Sirah looks to partnerships with institutions as a way to investigate how different peoples are presented in institutions. Kiran recommends that institutions relinquish power in order to bring people and communities to the forefront. There was discussion about making sure recordings of stories stay with those who they belong to, and are repatriated to those owners if not already set-up. Lori Pourier spoke of how First Peoples Fund aligns with artists to determine which models to use (for sharing) based on needs. For indigenous peoples and their tradition bearers, the conversation goes beyond solely arts and cultural institutions and must include land management (as land affects the ability to practice certain traditions). Capacity building for organizations with a mission to preserve cultures must strategically expand to focus on populations where traditions are dying. Look for examples of how community involvement can lead towards small experiments of radical intent. Storytelling is one of the oldest artforms; this relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the relinquishing of institutional power and youth empowerment. Storytelling allows for a different type of listening for those who need to hear different types of dialogues and removes the rigid nature of these conversations.

Storytelling as a Medium for Media

This panel focused on how folklorists and cultural advocates have harnessed the power of modern media to share community stories and amplify awareness of cultural heritage.

- **Sara Camp Milam**, Southern Foodways Alliance
- **Emily Hilliard**, West Virginia Humanities Council
- **Ada Smith**, Appalshop
- **Discussant: Selina Morales**, Philadelphia Folklore Project

Panelists shared a variety of media platforms including, a [radio segment](#) from Appalshop's WMMT radio station, an accompanying [video piece](#) to a West Virginia Humanities fieldwork project in Helvetia, WV, and a [Gravy podcast clip](#) from the Southern Foodways Alliance. It was acknowledged that through extensive relationship building for years, or in some cases decades, each piece was able to stand by the integrity and respect of the subjects featured. Additionally, essential to media being shared with the public is using first-person narrative perspectives, contextualizing historical contexts into contemporary matters, and involving the community to assist in documenting the experience. Consequently, the potential for national recognition, whether media pieces go viral or are picked up by national outlets, may result in unintended consequences of many sorts. Essential to the process is a continued relationship with featured

subjects, when following up on their experiences and on the impact that the media has had on them and their communities. As an example, Smith shared an Appalshop radio segment from its “The Struggle to Stay” series, highlighting an African-American man in his 20s talking about the economic challenges to staying in his coal mining home town of Lynch, KY. The pieces were then picked up by NPR, as oftentimes southern West Virginia and east Tennessee serve as places that others wish to understand and interrogate. In the case of foodways, Milam acknowledged that these programs can cause an increase in demand from food businesses without the infrastructure in place to support the new demand. Southern Foodways Alliance, in turn, tries to be a resource. Different mediums have different impacts and some mediums, like Facebook, can be very interactive with the public. In this vein, Hilliard regarded a video piece about a broom maker that resulted in many shared comments and stories, creating an inadvertent digital folklore project.



From left to right: Lori Pourier, Amy Kitchener, Troyd Geist, and Laura Orleans

Intersections & Collaborations with Other Sectors

Cultural heritage work is not confined to the realm of the arts. Key figures discussed how they have collaborated with a variety of non-arts sectors to fortify communities and cultural heritage in surprising ways.

- **Troyd Geist**, North Dakota Council on the Arts - Wellness and Ageing
- **Amy Kitchener**, Alliance for California Traditional Arts - Correctional Facilities and Recidivism
- **Laura Orleans**, New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center - Working Waterfront Festival and Economic Development
- **Lori Pourier**, First Peoples Fund - Financial Literacy and Banking
- **Discussant: Jon Kay**, Traditional Arts Indiana

Panelists presented different programs and ways that their organizations have collaborated with a variety of non-arts sectors to fortify communities and cultural heritage. These traditional arts and non-arts intersections included wellness and ageing, correctional facilities and recidivism, economic development on a working waterfront, and financial literacy and banking. Geist introduced the NDCA [Art For Life](#) program, which seeks to improve the emotional and physical life of elders through Folk and Traditional Arts by collaborating with local arts agencies, elder care facilities, schools, and traditional artists from the area. Kitchener discussed ACTA's involvement in Arts in Corrections, a rehabilitation program out of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. ACTA has been able to [employ traditional artists](#) including Mexican folk guitarists and storytellers to work with inmates in about half of the state's facilities. Orleans gave an overview and history of the [Working Waterfront Festival](#) in New Bedford, MA. Orleans examined how a grassroots beginning led to a collaborative process in building-out the festival to its current iteration. Pourier presented on the [Rolling Rez Arts](#), a state-of-the-art mobile arts space, business training center, and mobile bank on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The addition of financial services to the Rolling Rez Arts uniquely provides banking services to live-in and home-based artists who work from remote and traditionally underbanked areas.

Impact & Apprenticeships

In 1978, the National Endowment for the Arts launched a Traditional Arts Apprenticeship program. This program has since become a staple of the field, with deep impact in cultural communities across the nation. This panel included perspectives from different apprenticeship models.

- **Sergio “Checo” Alonso**, Mariachi Master Apprentice Program – City of San Fernando
- **Maggie Holtzberg**, Massachusetts Cultural Council
- **Theresa Secord**, National Heritage Fellow, Penobscot Nation Basketmaker
- **Discussant: Chitra Kalyandurg**, Kalanidhi Dance



From left to right: Chitra Kalyandurg, Sergio “Checo” Alonso, Maggie Holtzberg, and Theresa Secord

Chitra Kalyandurg began with a history of apprenticeships and how they have been a mainstay of state Folklife programs, and have been utilized powerfully by community-based nonprofits for 40 years. Apprenticeships serve as the face of Folk & Traditional Arts programs, and one of its most important strategic tools. Master artists are often identified through fieldwork, apprenticeships connect arts resources to hard-to-reach communities, and they connect sometimes disparate generations in a process of sharing and sustainability. In some cases, apprenticeships have helped to save and reanimate endangered or dormant traditions. Participants were asked, “What are the shared values that emerge from these programs? How have they impacted traditions and cultural communities? How are programs evolving, and what can we learn from them?”

Checo Alonso built an afterschool program in a Mexican-American community of San Fernando, CA for kids to learn from master artists in a manner different from formal classroom learning. Checo relayed that apprenticeships helped students learn the cultural context of music in a way that is unattainable in the classroom. He has enjoyed that it emphasizes process over product.

Maggie Holtzberg’s program at the Massachusetts Cultural Council serves the diversity of cultures/communities/forms in the entire state. As the highest funded of state folklife apprenticeship grants (up to \$10K per grant), it has helped to sustain a variety of traditions, validating the work of master artists, and addressed pressing needs for cultural continuity (e.g. Khmer community in Lowell, MA; boatbuilding in Essex, MA). Apprenticeship pairs are documented for the archives, and sometimes have led to National Heritage Fellowships and USArtists Fellowships.

Theresa Secord said an apprenticeship grant from the Maine Arts Commission led to the creation of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA), which consists of apprenticeships with Maine's elder/mentor basketmakers of Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Mic-Mac heritage. MIBA caused a proliferation of the art form(s), fluency in the commercial side of selling baskets, a lowering of the median age of basketmakers (from 60 to 40), and an elevated profile in Native arts nationally. There is now a new generation of basket makers in their 20s and 30s making intricate baskets selling in high level art markets. MIBA has been a nurturing environment for young people recovering from drug addiction. It has also led to the tradition/culture being celebrated in places like the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which is empowering for communities who are not accustomed to being acknowledged or celebrated. Despite these successes, Theresa observed that there is always a threat to traditional culture, and there is not a smooth interface between organizations like hers and foundations. MIBA's apprenticeship program became the model for the creation of Native Arts & Cultures Foundation's mentorship program (which is funded at \$35K/team).

Impact & Heritage Tourism

Cultural Heritage Tourism is a booming industry that carries financial potential and unintended consequences. Key figures in Folk & Traditional Arts discussed how they have served as a critical mediator between heritage tourists and cultural communities.



From left to right: Jen Hughes, Michelle Lanier, Amy G. Cisneros, Adrienne Decker, and Jack Hinshelwood

- **Amy G. Cisneros**, Indian Pueblo Cultural Center
- **Adrienne Decker**, Utah Division of Arts & Museums
- **Jack Hinshelwood**, The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail
- **Michelle Lanier**, North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites
- **Discussant: Jen Hughes**, NEA Design & Creative Placemaking

Heritage tourism uses cultural landscapes as a basis for tourism, but there needs to be consideration of whose heritage has more attention in presentations for outsiders. Part of cultural heritage is contextualizing place with history beyond the main narrative. In an industry

like tourism where commodification of heritage can be prevalent, shareholders in the community must determine content while the institutions act as a platform to highlight how the community wants itself seen. In approaching heritage tourism work, organizations must articulate how going beyond recreational tourism will be beneficial and show that it is tied to the investment in the local economy (when tourism centers on artists). Cultural heritage also acts as a way to hold onto community members or entice them to return. Tourism’s focus on those from outside of the community can be counteracted by the way folklore seeks to gain information about the human experience. Those involved in heritage tourism work must be ever-cautiously aware of positionality in their conversations with the community (no matter how “let in” to the community they might feel). Michelle Lanier shared “the four G’s” for inclusion and diversity in heritage tourism work: geographic, generational, gender, and genre.

Impact & Archives

Virtually all of the Folk & Traditional Arts organizations funded by the Arts Endowment have robust cultural heritage archives—some public, some private, but all vital to understanding who we are and where we are going. Key figures from the field discussed how archival materials inform and impact living traditions and art making.

- **Meg Glaser**, Western Folklife Center
- **Ruth Olsen**, Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Culture
- **Nicole Saylor**, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress
- **Chad Buterbaugh**, Maryland State Arts Council/Maryland Traditions, Discussant

Chad Buterbaugh shared the idea that archives fall into the category of work/programs that folklorists take for granted. Nicole Saylor reminded the audience that “the reason this stuff exists is for reuse,” and reuse requires organization and accessibility. Partnerships with libraries and museums are critical—they enable Folklife programs to focus on public programs and fieldwork, while ensuring that the “stuff” is safeguarded and publicly accessible. The Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Culture partners with libraries at UWI to manage archives so that they can focus on programs/public humanities. Funding for fieldwork collections requires three things: 1) Proper assessment of collections by an archivist (to articulate what/how much you have, what your needs are, and what your preservation priorities are); 2) Partnership with a library or museum with climate-controlled archival facilities; 3) Plan for processing the collections (creation of finding aids, collection of metadata, etc.). Discussion focused on power of community collaborations (AFC’s work with the Passamaquoddy as a model—both in processing the collection, and meeting the “reuse” idea behind archives), and the typically untapped power of volunteers to help process collections. Participants identified NEA, NHPRC, NEH, and IMLS as resources for archival initiatives. Some participants noted dissonance between the “process, not product” discussion earlier in the convening and the idea that archives

can/should be useful tools. Joey Brackner urged folklorists close to retirement to organize their metadata so their collections are useful to future generations. He also urged the audience to consider holding public events to help identify people, places in photographs and collections (Alabama has had success with this). Other public events might include “digitizing day” and “heritage preservation day” events.

Impact & Festivals

The economic impact of festivals has been well researched and documented. Less understood is the impact that folklife festivals have on creating understanding across cultural, generational, and philosophical divides.

From left to right: Alix Webb, Don Marshall, Julia Olin, and Sabrina Lynn Motley

- **Leia Maahs**, Southwest Folklife Alliance - Tucson Meet Yourself
- **Don Marshall**, New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation - Louisiana Blues & BBQ Festival
- **Sabrina Lynn Motley**, Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage - Smithsonian Folklife Festival
- **Julia Olin**, National Council for the Traditional Arts - National Folk Festival
- **Alix Webb**, Asian Americans United - Mid-Autumn Festival
- **Discussant, Pat Atkinson**, Nevada Arts Council



Good metrics are in place for studying the economic impact of festivals, but the field needs to measure and understand the impact festivals have on building community cohesion and vitality as well. Impact can be cultural transmission and sense of place as well as address inclusion and racism. Tourism can be a catalyst to celebrate different cultures. With the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, whose mission promotes cultural diplomacy, representation of this work in conversations about cultural diplomacy is imperative. Impact means that the field needs to develop research paradigms. For the National Council for Traditional Arts’ National Folk Festival, there is an intentionality to cultural celebration as a vehicle for community revitalization—it is set up to move every four years as a way to build infrastructure in a community and investment

in local cross-cultural and institutional collaborations. For some, festivals provide a community to reclaim culture and connect generations around a celebration of the right to culture.

THURSDAY, November 1



From left to right: Juan Díes, Michael Knoll, Virginia Millington, Selina Morales, and Steve Zeitlin

Word on the Street: Urban Folk Life and Innovation through Close Listening

Folk & Traditional Arts is a field that distinguishes itself through listening. We do this not only to learn from one another, but also to understand how our programs might be most responsive and useful to the communities they serve. This panel discusses how listening and responsiveness drives the field in new and innovative directions.

- **Michael Knoll**, History Miami Museum
- **Virginia Millington**, StoryCorps
- **Selina Morales**, Philadelphia Folklore Project
- **Steve Zeitlin**, City Lore
- **Discussant: Juan Díes**, Sones de Mexico Ensemble

Listening is a skill that is utilized in public practice by folklorists and shapes their organization’s community engagement work. Stories are a primary source of context, and it is ethically paramount that stories not be manipulated to fit skewed narratives. Michael Knoll discussed how listening to artists and community surveys led to public programs presented in multiple languages and allowed for greater community interaction. Programming can be created out of, or informed by, cultural asset mapping. In communities that have experienced trauma, listening is a starting point towards healing through expressive means. Listening also extends to working outside of the arts and cultural sector, notes Steve Zeitlin, as the work City Lore has done with the healthcare sector. Post-panel discussion focused on the need to share innovations and best practices with allied fields outside of Folk & Traditional Arts, deep listening as a practice that leads to appreciation of nuances of different traditions that are not mainstream, and a concerted effort to explore new ways to listen and to share/contextualize these conversations.



National breakout group; Participants from American Folklife Center, First Peoples Fund, Folk Alliance International, Local Learning, National Council for the Traditional Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, Native Arts & Cultures Foundation, Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage, StoryCorps

Regional Breakout Session

Participants broke up into groups based on region, and were asked to discuss the following three questions:

- What are the conversations that started at this meeting that you would like to see continued at follow-up convenings?
- What topics, subjects, and issues were not addressed here that need to be addressed in future forums and convenings?
- What are some dynamics, issues, traditions that are specific to your home regions that need to be addressed on a regional basis?

Regions (“Regions” were defined using the parameters of the six regional arts organizations, with the addition of a seventh group focused nationally):

- *Midwest: Participants from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin*
 - Continue conversations about relationships with other sectors (incarceration, healthcare, etc.); building out the local and regional programs; keeping the idea of close listening and shared language. Topics not addressed (but should be) include the question of why the field is so poorly resourced, structural racism, and conversation around the use of the word “folk.”
- *Midamerica: Participants from Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas*
 - Continue conversations about reaching audiences who are outsiders to the field, increasing funding, and learning the languages/terminology of allied/adjacent fields, partners, and communities. Questioned whether future convenings should be more general or more specific with topics. Want to see more community leaders in attendance, strategies to raise the cultural competency of professionals in the field, and increased involvement of communities in future projects.
- *Midatlantic: Participants from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, US Virgin Islands, Virginia, Washington DC, West Virginia*
 - Need to have discussions about the need to increase support for artists outside of the 501(c)3 structure. Regional needs include: Strengthening mid-Atlantic regional Folk and Traditional Arts network as it currently feels disjointed.
- *New England: Participants from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont*
 - Continue conversations about building between factions and cultural identities. Topics not addressed but should be in future convenings: how to address social issues, relevance of the field to youth, and structural racism. Regional discussion needs to focus on the need for regional support.
- *Southeast: Participants from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee*

- Topics not discussed but should be in future convenings: conversations around gentrification, climate change, and migration. These topics are also significant for a future regional convening based in the South, as they have greatly affected the region. Regional convening needs include: more time to discuss Southern identity and values and who needs to be part of those conversations. Also, a need to discuss urban versus rural South, and the need to develop local and regional funders to support smaller projects.
- *West: Participants from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming*
 - The size of this discussion group made it difficult to define or to achieve consensus. Scope of the region (West) made it difficult to connect beyond commonalities of state arts agencies and or to coalesce around urban and rural commonalities. Regional convening would need to include sovereignty of tribal nations as well as land rights, and the development of cross-sector connectivity where missions intersect.
- *Nationals: Participants from American Folklife Center, First Peoples Fund, Folk Alliance International, Local Learning, National Council for the Traditional Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, Native Arts & Cultures Foundation, Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage, StoryCorps*
 - The group discussed a need for cross pollination of networks and of identifying and fixing gaps in national infrastructure. Need to continue broadening language for the field and to define/showcase best practices for transforming and strengthening the field. Look at shared tools and how new funding could affect the work as well at the global landscape of other fields.

Closing Thoughts

Four participants were asked to share summary thoughts at the close of the convening:

- **Selina Morales**, Philadelphia Folklore Project
- **Vicky Holt Takamine**, PA'I Foundation
- **Jamie Bennett**, ArtPlace America
- **Robert Baron**, New York State Council on the Arts

Selina Morales (Executive Director, Philadelphia Folklore Project) encouraged those assembled to consider how our professional gatherings might be more like this convening—in the sense that it was a forum to share our practice with one another, and to assess (and address) the challenges of our public sector work. Selina also reminded the group of the important role that public folklore plays in community reflection and healing. Citing the recent episode of mass violence at a Pittsburgh synagogue, Selina shared an anecdote about a klezmer concert her

organization produced and how the concert provided the local Jewish community (and allied neighbors) an opportunity to gather together around treasured traditions in the wake of the Pittsburgh tragedy and provided a culturally rich environment to begin healing. Her parting words for the group: “The work of folklorists is important, keep it going!”

Vicky Holt Takamine (Executive Director, PA’I Foundation, Kumu Hula, Pua Ali’i ‘Ilima), in reflecting on the Close Listening theme, shared her thought that Hawaiian people have always been skilled listeners—and shared her gratitude at being included at the convening. Practitioners and cultural elders must always be involved in planning. Equity is the key issue, and those in positions to design and plan events and public spaces, and to support cultural practice must confront this. She reminded those assembled that, for Native Hawaiians and many indigenous peoples, the term “folk” is problematic—not simply because of its European vantage point, but also because it results in lesser payment for their artistic work, it undermines the value of Native Hawaiian artwork, and ultimately results in the products and practice being less valued in the broader society (monetarily and otherwise). Her question to the group was “How do we elevate *that*?”

Jamie Bennett (Executive Director, ArtPlace America), speaking as a funder/foundation, commended the field of Folklore as one that understands that, in order to succeed, we need to value experience, as well as expertise; philanthropy is good at paying for expertise but not for experience. Folklore has always blended the two; in this way, Folklore can teach philanthropy. On the other hand, in order to work from a position of strength, Folklore needs to measure and articulate its collective impact. Jamie cited the James Irvine Foundation’s [“Strong Field Framework”](#) as a model to consider:

- Five elements of strong field
 - Shared Identity
 - Standards of Practice
 - Knowledge Base
 - Leadership and Grassroots Support
 - Funding and Supporting Policy

Jamie’s assessment was that Folklore as a field needs to work on two of those items:

- Shared Identity
- Funding and Supporting Policy (in both government and philanthropy)

This observation was issued with a caveat (from Jamie) that “my organization is a product of philanthropy.” Using a newspaper business metaphor, Jamie reminded those assembled that the

field needs to worry more about its circulation (whom we are reaching) than it does about its newsroom (because we already have great stories).



Robert Baron; New York State Council on the Arts Folk Arts Program Director

Robert Baron (Program Director, Folk Arts Program and Music Program, New York State Council on the Arts) offered a sweeping reflection of the three-day convening. He viewed the convening as a landmark meeting, bringing together participants representing a broad variety of programs relating to Folk Arts and folklife. The field today is highly creative, resilient, and critical, adapting to varied institutional structures and challenges. Robert urged the assembled to consider *rhizomes* as an organizational metaphor for the field. Rhizomic structures are networks of roots and stems supporting life, organized horizontally, with multiple points of entry, in contrast to vertical and hierarchical trees. Our field, which is already tightly networked, with minimal hierarchy, is advanced in this contemporary way of thinking about organizations and networks. Our rhizomic character should be embodied in any new national Folk & Traditional Arts service provider or organization that might be developed. We have pioneered approaches that are now becoming widespread in the cultural field, which are decentralization and increased community focus.

Fieldwork anchors our discipline, embodying “close listening.” It keeps the field nimble and foregrounds the interests of communities. Fieldwork produces enduring records of traditions for artists and communities; provides indispensable materials for exhibitions, media productions, publications, and social media; and identifies artists for programming who are little known outside of their immediate community.

The arts, culture, and heritage sector is becoming increasingly cross-sectoral, engaging collaborations across agencies of government, social service organizations, tourism, and economic development agencies. Our historical tendency to collaborate within and outside of our field is a great strength.

Robert identified a variety of challenges articulated at the meeting: “amplification” is a great metaphor for the work that public folklorists do in service to communities, but we also need to amplify our own field’s voice within public discourse. How do we brand ourselves and communicate it to the world? How can we do this on multiple platforms? Likewise, the need for national advocacy is critical. Our advocacy for our field and for the arts and culture more broadly should draw from the great diversity of the communities we serve—urban and rural, ethnically and racially diverse, involving all social classes.

Cultural equity is a fundamental value of our work, with a commitment to the right of every group to practice and sustain their traditions in the face of powerful countervailing cultural forces. However, the underrepresentation of people of color in our field must be rectified. Robert spoke of a major paradigm shift: the emergence of dialogic, community-driven work, such as co-curation, designed to enable communities to represent their cultures on their own terms. Issues of authority need to continue to be addressed in this work. Dialogic engagement and yielding authority to the communities whose traditions are represented are ethical imperatives.

Robert stressed the need for, and importance of, intergenerational transmission of knowledge and ideas within the professional field. Training is needed to develop technical skills for documentation and the production of public programs. This should occur in graduate folklore and ethnomusicology programs as well as through field schools, which also train community members engaged in folklife documentation and programming.

Robert observed that there was not a lot of discussion of arts education at the convening. In his estimation—one that he feels is shared by many others in the field—the dominance of professional teaching artist-centered, sequential arts education programs typically leaves little room for other types of school programs of considerable value for teaching and sustaining local traditions. Efforts should be made for arts education to include participatory learning experiences with local traditional artists teaching in classrooms and auditoriums, folklorist in

residence programs, both single and sequential classroom and auditorium presentations, and folklorist-designed programs for students to explore the traditions of their families and neighborhoods.

Our Folk Arts and Folklife public programs are woefully underfunded. Access to foundations is an important step towards expanding funding. How can we get foundations and donors to respond to our emails and phone calls and know more about our work? Related to this, new alliances must be built—with different kinds of cultural organizations, museums, humanities organizations, healthcare, and public history, to name a few. There are persistent institutional challenges for folklorists and ethnomusicologists working in arts agencies, where increased bureaucratization limit opportunities for field research and programming. Collaborations with other types of agencies and organizations leverage our work and enable us to carry out activities that might not otherwise be possible. Arts organizations and agencies remain the most widespread home for Folk Arts programs. While in the past there was resistance to accept Folk Arts on equal terms with other kinds of artistic expressions, arts organizations and agencies are now generally receptive and congenial places for us to work. As we could see at the NASAA meeting, “we have friends!”

Appendix A: Shared Language List*

- A Field
- Advisors
- Aesthetics
- Amplify Voice
- An Identity
- Ancestral Knowledge
- Apprenticeship
- Appropriation
- Art Making
- Art of Everyday Life
- Art that is Rooted in Community/Cultural Heritage
- Artistic Knowledge that is Acquired Outside of Institutional Bodies
- Artistic Practices
- Artists
- Arts
- Arts of Consequence
- Arts of Underserved Communities
- Authentic
- Based in Community Life
- Bodies of Knowledge
- Bread-Pudding
- Bridge Building
- Career Options
- Celebrations
- Champion
- Change
- Class
- Classical
- Collaborative
- Communication
- Community
- Community Aesthetics
- Community Elders
- Community Practices
- Community-Based
- Contemporary
- Continuity
- Conversation
- Cosmology
- Craft
- Creating Community
- Creative Economy
- Creative Expressions
- Creativity
- Cross-cultural Exchange
- Cultivate
- Cultural Assets
- Cultural Communities
- Cultural Competence
- Cultural Democracy
- Cultural Heritage
- Cultural Identity
- Cultural Practices
- Cultural Preservation
- Cultural Relevance
- Cultural Traditions
- Cultural Transmission
- Culturally-Embedded Art
- Culture
- Culture Bearers
- Culture Work
- Customs
- Decolonized
- Deeply Rooted
- Demographics
- Dialogue
- Diaspora
- Dignity
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Documentary
- Doesn't Have to Be Old
- Don't Use "Craft"
- Don't Use "Folk"
- Don't Use "State Folklorist"

- Dress
- Dynamic
- Economics
- Elders
- Emerging Traditions
- Emotional
- Engage
- Ephemeral
- Equity
- Ethnic Heritage
- Everyday Art
- Evolving
- Exemplary Practitioner
- Experience
- Expressive Culture
- Facilitation
- Family
- Featured
- Festivals
- Folk
- Folk & Traditional Arts
- Folk Arts
- Folk Culture
- Folk Groups
- Folklife
- Folklore
- Folkways
- Foodways
- Funding
- Future
- Generational
- Generosity
- Grants
- Grassroots
- Group
- Handed Down
- Handwork
- Healing
- Help Sustain Traditions (State Arts Agencies) versus Maintain Traditions (The Community)
- Heritage
- Higher Art Form
- Hillbilly
- Historical
- Honor Traditions
- Honor/Award Reward
- Humility
- Identity
- Immigrant
- In Situ
- Inclusive
- Incubate
- Indian
- Indigenized
- Indigenous knowledge
- Informal Education
- Innovation with Tradition
- Insider
- Inspired by Tradition
- Institutional vs. Folk
- Intellectual
- Interdisciplinary
- Intergenerational
- International
- Knowledge
- Language
- Leaders
- Learn
- Legacy
- Lifeways
- Lineage
- Living Cultural Heritage
- Living Traditions
- Local Cultures
- Local Learning
- Maker
- Marginalized Communities

- Maryland
- Master Artist
- Material Culture
- Mediation
- Mentor
- Money
- Mores
- Museum/Exhibition
- Music
- Mutation
- Narrative Stage
- Native Art
- Neighborhood
- Networks
- Never Use “Authentic”
- Never Use the Word “Folk”
- New Generation
- Non-Academic Creative Life
- Non-Mainstream
- Not Just Rural Communities
- Not Master
- Not What’s Not True
- Nurture
- Occupational Folklife
- Old-Time Music
- Oral Traditions
- Outsider Artists
- Partnership
- Passing on Cultural Knowledge
- Performance
- Place-Based
- Poetry of Everyday Life
- Power Inequity
- Practice
- Preserve
- Pride
- Promote
- Pushing Boundaries
- Rare and Endangered
- Reclaim Traditions
- Recreation
- Regional Identity
- Representation
- Resilience
- Resources
- Respect
- Rooted
- Rural
- Sacred Arts
- Self-Expression
- Self-Trained
- Shared Aesthetics
- Shared Community
- Showcase
- Sovereignty
- Spiritual
- State Folklorist
- Steward
- Stories
- Support
- Sustainable Culture
- Taken for Granted
- Talents
- Teach
- The Business of Art
- The Other 99%
- Thriving
- Time
- Tradition
- Tradition Bearers
- Tradition-Based
- Traditional
- Traditional Arts
- Traditional Values
- Transaction
- Transmission
- Tribal
- Truth
- Understanding
- Untrained Artists

- Value
- Variation
- Vernacular
- Veteran
- Vibrancy
- Village

- Wisdom
- WoLakota
- Word of Mouth
- Working People
- Youth

*Top used terms with number of appearances.

23	Tradition(al)
16	Community
12	Folklife
12	Living Cultural Heritage (Living Cultures)
9	Culture Bearers
8	Traditional Arts
7	Culture
7	Expressive Culture
7	Folk Arts
6	Heritage
6	Identity
6	Preserve
6	Shared Aesthetics
6	Storytelling

TOP 5 MOST USED TERMS

Tradition(al)
Community
Folklife
Living Cultural Heritage
Culture Bearers