

Since 1982, the National Endowment for the Arts has honored our nation's master folk and traditional artists with the National Heritage Fellowship. This lifetime achievement award recognizes the ways these individuals demonstrate and reflect our nation's living cultural heritage and the efforts of these artists to share their knowledge with the next generation. The National Heritage Fellowships celebrate the vitality of America's folk and traditional arts, supporting ethnic and cultural diversity as a strength national of character.

Number of
NEA National
Heritage
Fellowships,
1982-2021:

458

HONORING THE MASTERS

The NEA National Heritage Fellowships help to sustain artistic traditions of culturally-distinct communities and promote the vitality of those traditions.

Past recipients include:

- ballad singer, musician, and storyteller
Sheila Kay Adams
- oud player and composer Rahim AlHaj
- quilters of Gee's Bend Mary Lee Bendolph,
Lucy Mingo, and Loretta Pettway
- Irish-American fiddler Liz Carroll
- Japanese classical dancer
Gertrude Yukie Tsutsumi
- Tejano musician and singer
Manuel "Cowboy" Donley
- Passamaquoddy basketmaker
Molly Neptune Parker
- bluesman B.B. King
- Lakota flute player/singer/dancer
Kevin Locke
- cowboy poet Wally McRae
- bluegrass musician Bill Monroe
- gospel and soul singer Mavis Staples

In 2000, the National Endowment for the Arts inaugurated the Bess Lomax Hawes NEA National Heritage Fellowship, given to an individual for achievements in fostering excellence, ensuring vitality, and promoting public appreciation of the folk and traditional arts. Recipients include:

- quilting community advocate
Carolyn Mazloomi
- musician, cultural scholar and
advocate Mike Seeger
- ethnomusicologist and folklorist
Daniel Sheehy

Anyone can [nominate an artist](#) to be considered for a fellowship. Fellowship recipients are nominated by the public, often by members of their own communities, and then judged by a panel of experts in folk and traditional arts on the basis of their continuing artistic accomplishments and contributions as practitioners and teachers. The Arts Endowment awards up to nine National Heritage Fellowships each year, with each recipient receiving a one-time award of up to \$25,000.



CONNECTING THE MASTERS TO THE AUDIENCES

To give the public an opportunity to learn more about the National Heritage Fellows and their art forms, each year the National Endowment for the Arts holds a public event in honor of that year's recipients.

The National Endowment for the Arts will commemorate the 2021 NEA National Heritage Fellows with a film that visits with the fellows where they live and practice these traditional art forms. On November 17, 2021, the virtual presentation will be webcast free to the public at [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov).

CREATING AND SHARING CONTENT

In addition, the [National Endowment for the Arts website](#) contains a wealth of content about the NEA National Heritage Fellows, including:

- [Bios, photos, and interviews](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Videos](#) from past events and tributes to Fellows
- [Photos](#) from past NEA National Heritage Fellowships Events

“Of all activities assisted by the Folk Arts program, these Fellowships are among the most appreciated and applauded, perhaps because they present to Americans a vision of themselves and of their country, a vision somewhat idealized but profoundly longed for and so, in significant ways, profoundly true.”

—Bess Lomax Hawes, director, NEA Folk & Traditional Arts, 1977-1992

