

Museum at Eldridge Street

New York, New York

Background

In a New York City neighborhood that includes Chinese, Eastern European Jewish, and Puerto Rican populations, language and culture can sometimes be a barrier to interaction. The Museum of Eldridge Street—founded in 1986 to restore the 1887 Eldridge Street Synagogue and now established as a cultural and education center—had a solution. The museum created the Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival to celebrate the culture and traditions of the three largest immigrant groups in the Lower East Side community. The festival, which has received multiple National Endowment for the Arts grants, showcases the cultural commonalities and distinctive voices of the community through a mash-up of festival tastes, traditions, sights, and sounds.

In addition, the museum also hosts a number of cultural events, including concerts, festivals, lectures, adult education programs, K-12 educational programs, and historic building tours that explore the community's immigrant history and experience, Jewish cultural traditions, and the potential for cultural and architectural preservation.

Folk and Traditional Arts Awards (2013-2015)

Fiscal year 2013 (\$10,000)

Project: Egg Rolls & Egg Creams Festival

Category: Direct Grants to Organizations

Fiscal year 2014 (\$10,000)

Project: Egg Rolls & Egg Creams Festival

Category: Challenge America

Fiscal year 2015 (\$20,000)

Project: Egg Rolls, Egg Creams
and Empanadas Festival

Category: Direct Grants to Organizations

Activities

The annual Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival is a free, day-long event of dance, music, and storytelling performances accompanied by lectures and folk artist demonstrations. Featured performances include selections from Chinese opera and Jewish klezmer music, as well as *bomba* and *plena* forms of traditional Puerto Rican music and dance.

Additionally, festival visitors can watch demonstrators discuss and create ethnic foods that include—as the festival name suggests—egg rolls, egg creams, and empanadas. All three cultures are reflected in the displayed art forms, games, performances, crafts, food, and even languages of the festival. Chinese and Spanish translators are on hand at the festival, and printed materials are provided in Mandarin and Spanish. Altogether, the festival helps to establish a mutual understanding of and appreciation for these groups' cultures.



A parade during the Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival.
Photo by Kate Milford

Perceived Impact

The Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival programming is seen as a way to break down those cultural and language barriers that contribute to the segregation of the neighborhood. The festival also provides traditional folk artists with opportunities for exposure and performance.

As a result of the festival, the museum has increasingly incorporated the featured cultures and languages into its programming throughout the year. The museum has developed lectures on intercultural subjects and concerts that feature and engage the surrounding ethnic communities. Staff has also seen festival attendees coming back to the museum for concerts, lectures, and programs.



A booth at the Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival. Photo by Kate Milford

“The folk arts program at the Arts Endowment is critical. It’s really critical to support folk artists to make sure that they have the means to continue their craft and then to continue to pass it down to the next generation.” –Eva Brune, Museum at Eldridge Street

This sample grant was developed by the National Endowment for the Arts as part of "Living Traditions," a report that examines the agency's grant and fellowship awards in the Folk & Traditional Arts program between 2013-2015. The full report is available for free as a downloadable PDF at www.arts.gov.