



LIVING TRADITIONS

A Portfolio Analysis of the National Endowment for the Arts'
Folk & Traditional Arts Program

Workclothes Quilt by 2015 National Heritage Fellow Mary Lee Bendolph of Gee's Bend, Alabama. Photo courtesy of Souls Grown Deep Foundation, Steve Pitkin-Pitkin Studio



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Cover image: A scene from the 2018 Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival in New York, New York.
Photo by Kate Milford, courtesy the Museum at Eldridge Street



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About the Report

This report, *Living Traditions: A Portfolio Analysis of the National Endowment for the Arts' Folk & Traditional Arts Program*, examines the agency's grant and fellowship awards in the Folk & Traditional Arts during the period of 2013 through 2015. It is the first study of its type in the history of the program. Major findings can be grouped into three themes:

1. The National Endowment for the Arts reaches a high proportion of **rural residents, high-poverty areas, and historically underserved or marginalized communities** through its Folk & Traditional Arts awards portfolio.
 - Over half of all organizations that received direct grants (**52 percent**) to support Folk & Traditional project activities were located in poverty-bound areas. Regarding the activities themselves, **45 percent** took place in poverty-bound areas. This figure is comparable to the share of all Arts Endowment grant-supported project activities (not Folk & Traditional Arts alone) that occur in poverty-bound areas (43 percent), but it is larger than the concentration of U.S. residents in poverty-bound areas (31 percent).
 - Nearly half of Folk & Traditional Arts grantees (**49 percent**) reported engaging one or more underserved populations—a greater percentage than the share of all Arts Endowment grantees who reported engaging such groups (32 percent). In addition, Native Americans/Alaska Natives/ Native Hawaiians, immigrants, and rural communities were among the populations most frequently targeted by Folk Arts Partnership grantees.
 - More than a quarter (**27 percent**) of Folk & Traditional Arts project activities that the Arts Endowment supported through its direct grantmaking occurred in rural areas. This is nearly double the level of rural activities associated with the agency's grantmaking in general (13.8 percent). The rate is also twice as large as the share of the U.S. population that live in rural areas (14 percent).
- 2) The agency's grant-supported activities have a dual focus on **engaging the public and documenting and sustaining** folk and traditional arts.
 - The most commonly reported project activities include fieldwork, research, and documentation of traditional arts; public performances; and knowledge dissemination (through conferences, lectures, and presentations), workshops, festivals, and exhibitions.
- 3) Across the agency's awards portfolio, **strategic partnerships** with a variety of individuals, organizations, and sectors are vital to promoting and sustaining the folk and traditional arts.
 - On the whole, the range of grantees' partners is expansive. It covers tribal governments, media organizations, school districts, libraries, religious groups, and historical societies. Indeed, the far-reaching objectives of many Folk & Traditional Arts projects and partnerships typically demand (and obtain) the buy-in of community partners from multiple sectors.

Table of Contents

- Preface 1
- Policy Action Items 3
- Introduction 5
- Findings 9
 - Reaching Rural and Underrepresented Communities 9
 - Direct Grants to Organizations 9
 - Folk Arts Partnerships 13
 - National Heritage Fellowships 15
 - Preserving, Sustaining, and Engaging through Folk & Traditional Arts Projects 18
 - Direct Grants to Organizations 18
 - Folk Arts Partnerships 22
 - The Multiplier Effect of Partnerships 24
 - Direct Grants to Organizations 24
 - Folk Arts Partnerships 24
- Conclusion 27
- References 29

Preface

The folk and traditional arts are a vast bounty of aesthetic and cultural practices we continually receive from generations of families and the communities with whom we work, play, and pray. These traditions can be described as the nation’s cultural roots. Here at the National Endowment for the Arts, the roots of the Folk & Traditional Arts division are intertwined with the American bicentennial celebrations of 1976.

In the years leading up to the bicentennial, the Arts Endowment began funding comprehensive efforts to record and present the nation’s cultural traditions. It also began seeding Folk Arts Partnership programs at state arts agencies to stimulate a national network of cultural heritage programs. Today we support roughly \$3 million of Folk & Traditional Arts projects annually; Folk Arts Partnerships in 46 states, regions, and territories; and—since 1982—we have honored more than 430 individuals from every state and four territories with a prestigious National Heritage Fellowship.

Therefore, through its Folk & Traditional Arts portfolio, the Arts Endowment has been committed to the cause of cultural equity for more than 45 years. And yet, the agency has not begun telling the story of this work. The present document marks the first-ever review of our investments in this nation’s diverse and dynamic cultural traditions.

Among the bright spots: Folk & Traditional Arts grants turn out to be the agency’s most effective tool for serving rural and poverty-bound communities. As the Arts Endowment seeks to deepen and enrich its commitment to folk and traditional arts, this report illustrates which regions and populations are particularly well-served by current resources, and where the agency might consider making greater investments.

As we look ahead to 2026, which will mark the country’s 250th anniversary, we proudly reaffirm our goal to recognize, sustain, and celebrate the living roots of this culturally vibrant nation.

Clifford R. Murphy, PhD
Folk & Traditional Arts Director
October 2019

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Policy Action Items

Recommendation #1: Fix “Gaps in the Maps” in Rural and Poverty-Bound Regions of the United States:

- **Create pilot programs in the Great Plains, Rocky Mountain West, and Alaska** to celebrate the distinct cultures of these important rural regions. Given the diffuse population density of these vast regions, new regional consortium/networks of folklife and cultural heritage programs and institutions should be developed in the Northern Plains, Southern Plains, Rocky Mountain West, and Alaska. Such programs would address the largest gaps of funding by geography, as shown on the Arts Endowment’s maps of Folk & Traditional Arts grant activity. Using Folk & Traditional Arts’ success at serving the nation’s most rural communities, and acknowledging the infrastructural challenges facing these regions, the pilot programs could leverage regional institutional assets (universities, museums, state and regional arts agencies) to support and celebrate folklife and cultural heritage in the nation’s most rural regions. Targeted funds supporting these programs over the five years would culminate in programs and exhibitions marking the United States Semiquincentennial (America 250).
- **Create pilot programs in cities across the nation to celebrate urban folklife** and its contributions to regional and national culture. While state and regional folklife programs (Folk Arts Partnerships) have proliferated across the country since 1974, there are fewer than ten city folklife programs in the United States. This initiative would seed programs at existing institutions to record and celebrate the community life of American cities while channeling the effectiveness of Folk & Traditional Arts projects to serve the nation’s most poverty-bound communities. As with the previously described pilot initiative, these programs could be supported over the five years prior to the 250th anniversary of our nation. Priority could be given to pilot proposals that originate or partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and other Minority Serving Institutions.

Recommendation #2: Develop best practices and impact analyses related to signature Folk & Traditional Arts programs:

- **Encourage a structural and longitudinal analysis of traditional arts apprenticeship programs** to better understand their geographic and demographic reach and their impact on sustaining traditions over time, and to identify best practices. Similarly, analysis of State Folk Arts Partnership models and practices can help to articulate why their work is so effective at serving rural and poverty-bound regions. Maps of current funding levels suggest that states with a strong Folk Arts Partnership program have more robust (and diversified) support for traditional arts activities statewide. Further analyses may illustrate how these programs can work optimally and effectively to benefit all residents of a state.
- **Host a national gathering of National Heritage Fellows in 2022 to mark the 40th anniversary of the program**, in advance of the Semiquincentennial (America 250). This gathering would celebrate the strength and diversity of the nation’s many cultural communities, would generate symposia and other public events focused on cultural sustainability and social cohesion, and would gather information about how the Heritage Fellowships have positively affected individuals and their cultural traditions.



Otto Rosfeld performs during the school program Cowboy Songs & Range Ballads at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, supported by a National Endowment for the Arts grant. Photo by Sean Campbell

Introduction

The National Endowment for the Arts has provided support for the folk and traditional arts since its founding in 1965. Among the agency's initial grant recipients was a grant for \$39,500 to the National Folk Festival Association, later renamed the National Council for the Traditional Arts. In 1973, the Arts Endowment began to seed a network of Folk Arts Partnerships within state arts agencies across the country to connect grass-roots communities—specifically working-class, rural, immigrant, and inner-city—to the resources of state and federal arts agencies. The goal was to promote awareness of heritage arts and to assist communities in documenting and sustaining living traditions (Malloy 2017). Under the agency chairmanship of Livingston Biddle (1977- 1981), Bess Lomax Hawes was appointed as the first director of the Folk Arts Program at the Arts Endowment. During her directorship, which extended to 1992, funding for folk and traditional arts grew from about \$100,000 to over \$4,000,000, and the staff grew from one to six, according to the Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage. The Arts Endowment's program of National Heritage Fellowships also originated with Hawes's tenure, boosting folk and traditional arts to a new level of national prominence (Bauerlein and Grantham 2008).

The Folk & Traditional Arts discipline at the Arts Endowment was organized with the specific purpose of addressing issues of cultural equity and reaching the nation's most underserved communities. Initially, "folk art" was understood to represent art forms and traditions that were not a part of the fine art or "high art" traditions. Early Arts Endowment grants supporting folk and traditional arts were often awarded to organizations working in underserved communities, including working-class, rural, inner-city, mountain, maritime, and Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. Since the program's inception, the definition of "underserved" in this context has grown to include both new and long-established communities of non-Western origin (Ethiopian, Chinese, Indonesian, etc.) or Western immigrants of primarily working-class peoples (Mexican, Central, and South American immigrants).

Today the Arts Endowment provides support to folk and traditional arts primarily through the Folk & Traditional Arts office, which is one of 20 disciplines reflected in the agency's grantmaking. This office supports the field through three award mechanisms: (1) Folk Arts Partnerships with state arts agencies and nonprofit organizations; (2) direct grants to organizations; and (3) National Heritage Fellowships to individual artists.

Folk Arts Partnerships support activities that strengthen the folk and traditional arts throughout a state or region. Partnerships are typically directed by state folklorists. While these funds are predominantly awarded to state arts agencies (SAAs) and regional arts organizations (RAOs), nonprofit organizations in some states have assumed this leadership role. About 20 percent of Folk Arts Partnerships are held by nonprofit organizations that are not SAAs, and SAAs may work in partnership with nonprofit organizations to support the folk and traditional arts. State arts agencies and nonprofit organizations receiving Folk Arts Partnership funds leverage them to support statewide activities, including through direct grants to other entities within their states. The Arts Endowment only supports one Folk Arts Partnership program per state, with more than 40 Folk Arts Partnerships nationwide. Partnership grants typically range from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

The Folk & Traditional Arts office awards **direct grants** to organizations supporting projects that celebrate creativity and cultural heritage. These grants support a variety of folk and traditional arts projects, including apprenticeship programs, community engagement, and documentation of traditions. These matching grants range from \$10,000 to \$100,000. While all discipline offices at the Arts Endowment consider grant applications involving the folk and traditional arts, projects supported by the Folk & Traditional Arts office tend to support projects that emphasize the transmission of tradition; documentation (especially through fieldwork and archiving); and interpretation or sharing of culture with different communities through festivals, exhibitions, publications, and other means.

The **National Heritage Fellowship** is a lifetime achievement award, considered to be the nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. These fellowships recognize America's foremost folk and traditional artists and celebrate outstanding stewardship of living traditions. Guidelines for nomination of candidates describe folk and traditional arts as crafts, dance, music, oral traditions, visual arts, and others, learned as part of the cultural life of a community whose members share a common ethnic heritage, cultural mores, language, religion, occupation, or geographic region. All persons considered for the National Heritage Fellowships are nominated by the public. As many as nine fellows are recognized each year (a duo or a group is considered one fellowship), and each fellow receives a \$25,000 honorific. All nine fellows are invited to participate in a ceremony in September at the Library of Congress, where they are recognized by Congressional members and receive National Heritage Fellowship medallions. Fellows are also celebrated at a concert that is hosted in the Washington, DC, area and broadcast online.

Projects with a folk and traditional arts focus are also supported by other agency programs such as **Our Town**, and by other disciplines (e.g., Arts Education, Design) within the agency. The Arts Endowment awards matching grants to organizations ranging from \$10,000 to \$200,000.

During the past few years, the agency has set out to understand the nature and impact of projects supported by the Arts Endowment's Folk & Traditional Arts office. The agency analyzed grant-related data associated with the Statewide Folk Arts Partnership Grants; findings from this analysis were released earlier in an evaluative report (Malloy 2017), summarizing a three-year analysis of Folk Arts Partnerships during fiscal years 2013-2015. Subsequently, a qualitative analysis focused on direct grants to organizations made through the Folk & Traditional Arts office, which provides support to organizations working in the folk and traditional arts. Using a similar approach to the earlier study, the qualitative analysis examined project objectives, inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes reported by grantees. The resulting analysis, which considered a sample of direct grants to organizations from fiscal years 2013-2015, was presented by the Arts Endowment at the Close Listening Folk & Traditional Arts convening held in association with the 2018 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies meeting in Baltimore, Maryland.

To provide a portfolio analysis of the Folk & Traditional Arts program, the current report summarizes findings from preceding analyses and reports them in tandem with an additional analysis of grants data from the same time period (fiscal years 2013-2015). This report also aims to answer study questions about the communities served, activities/outputs supported, inputs, outcomes, and barriers to intended outcomes for agency-supported projects across the country. Due to constraints on time and effort, the study excludes analysis of awards in other Arts Endowment grant categories and/or disciplines that support the folk and traditional arts but does offer basic statistics on these grants in the "Folk & Traditional Arts by the Numbers" section.

Data sources for this report include agency documentation and data for Folk Arts Partnerships, direct grants to organizations, and National Heritage Fellowships from fiscal years 2013-2015. In addition to descriptive analyses of grant data, including geographical locations and budget information, a qualitative analysis was conducted of a representative sample of direct grants, which provide support to organizations for folk and traditional arts projects. Selected grant project and partnership directors and a National Heritage Fellowship awardee were also interviewed during the summer of 2018 to gain a more in-depth understanding of their experiences as grantees/awardees and how those contributions benefited them and their organizations. Interviews were transcribed and developed into a series of vignettes for this report.

National Endowment for the Arts grantees that participated in interviews are not in any way considered superior to any other grantees, nor does their selection and participation affect the chances of these organizations being funded in the future. The grantees were chosen simply to illustrate the range of grant awards in the agency's Folk & Traditional Arts' portfolio. They were selected by the following criteria: location, organization and project type, award timeframe, and availability.

Folk & Traditional Arts by the Numbers

Over the span of the study period (FY 2013 through FY 2015), the total funding awarded for Folk & Traditional Arts projects across all funding mechanisms was over \$13,800,000. Figure 1 shows the distribution within the United States of the total funding for Folk & Traditional Arts projects, including direct grants to organizations, Folk Arts Partnerships, and National Heritage Fellowships, and Chart 1 shows the distribution by funding type.

Folk & Traditional Arts grants (partnerships and direct grants to organizations) were awarded to organizations in 43 states. A total of 357 direct grants were awarded to 296 nonprofit organizations during fiscal years 2013-2015, with a number of grantees receiving awards multiple times across the three-year period. Through the Folk Arts Partnerships program, 87 grants were awarded to state and regional agencies (SAA/RAO) and 28 partnership grants to nonprofit agencies. Twenty-eight traditional folk artists representing 20 different states were recognized through the award of a National Heritage Fellowship. In addition to awards made by the Folk & Traditional Arts office, other agency discipline offices or programs collectively made 33 grants for folk and traditional arts projects, including Arts Education, Challenge America, Challenge America Fast Track, Creativity Connects, and Our Town.

Chart 1: Percentage of Folk & Traditional Arts Project Funding by Award Category, FYs 2013-2015

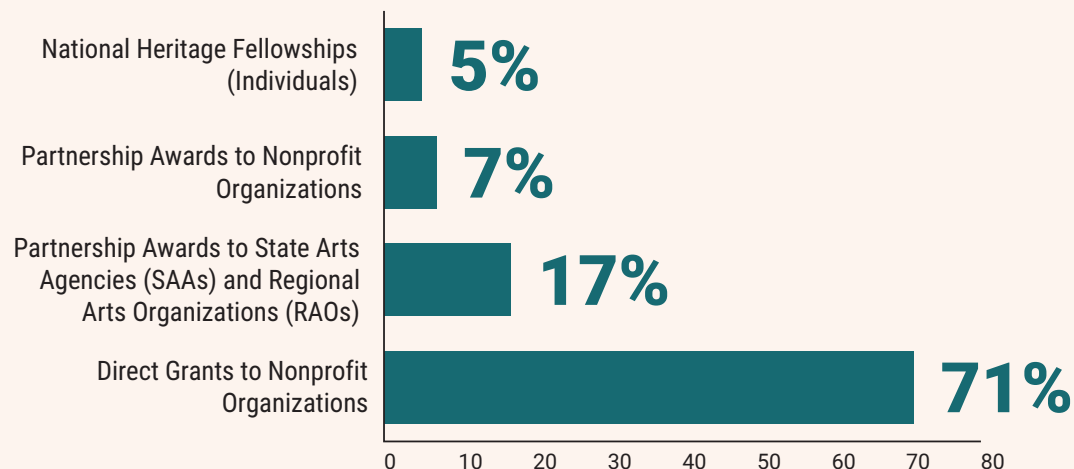
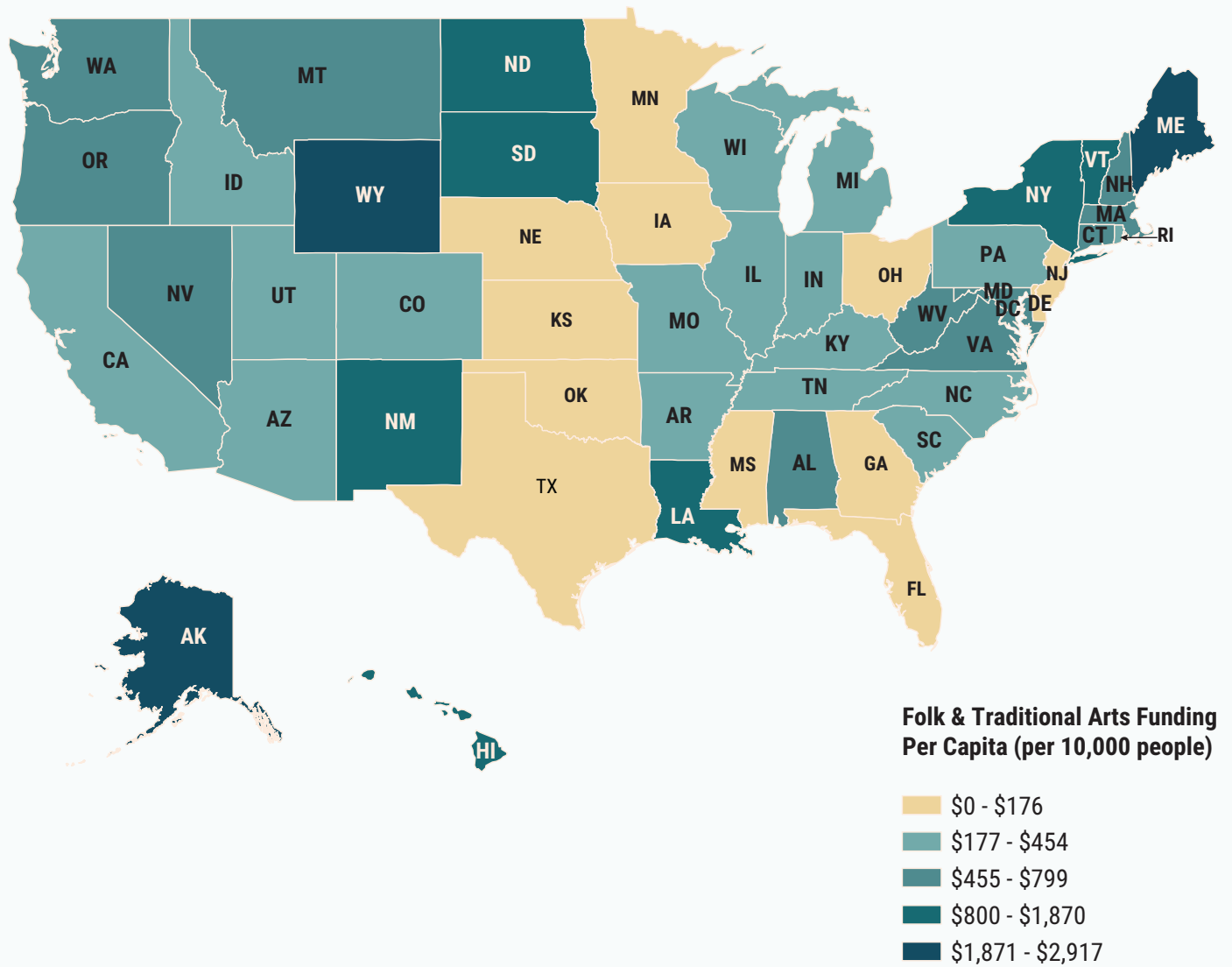


Figure 1: Arts Endowment Funding Per Capita for Folk & Traditional Arts Direct & Partnership Grants by State, FYs 2013-2015



Source: Arts Endowment Folk & Traditional Arts Direct & Partnership Grants Data from FYs 2013-2015
 Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2018
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division

Findings

This report examines the National Endowment for the Arts' Folk & Traditional Arts portfolio for FYs 2013 through 2015. Findings about the impacts of these awards align with three major themes:

1. The National Endowment for the Arts reaches a high proportion of **rural residents, high-poverty areas, and historically underserved or marginalized communities** through its Folk & Traditional Arts awards portfolio.
2. The agency's grant-supported activities have a dual focus on **engaging the public and documenting and sustaining folk and traditional arts**.
3. Across the agency's awards portfolio, **strategic partnerships** with a variety of individuals, organizations, and sectors are vital to promoting and sustaining the folk and traditional arts.

Reaching Rural and Underrepresented Communities

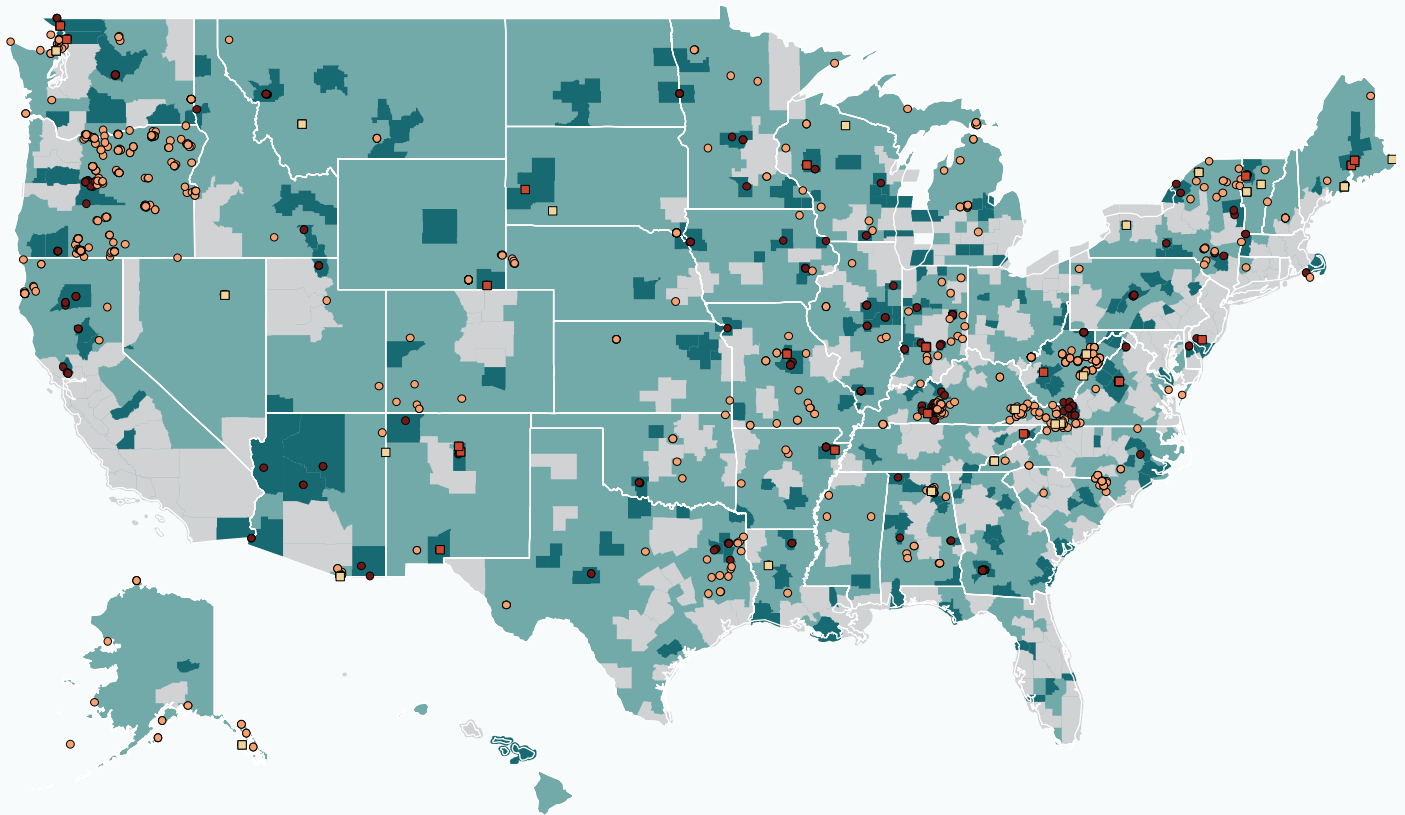
Folk & Traditional Arts projects supported by the Arts Endowment during the study period of fiscal years 2013-2015 demonstrated strong reach into rural and poverty-bound areas. Within those areas, the funded activities benefited populations generally held to be underserved. Such grant projects engaged folk and traditional arts practitioners from historically underserved groups or communities, including immigrants, rural communities, Native Americans/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians, and refugees, as well as communities underserved by other arts funders. In this section, detailed findings report the geographic reach of direct grants to organizations, Folk Arts Partnerships, and the National Heritage Fellowship program funded by the Folk & Traditional Arts discipline office, and the nature of communities served.

Direct Grants to Organizations

The agency's direct grants to organizations support high levels of folk and traditional arts activities in rural areas. Since project grants often support activities in locations other than the physical address of the grantee organization, the Arts Endowment collects geographical location data for activities associated with a grant project. When looking at the project activity locations associated with grant awards in **Figure 2**, 27 percent of project activities took place in rural areas—almost double the level of rural activities associated with other Arts Endowment grants (13.8 percent) during the same study period, and double the share of the U.S. population that live in rural areas (14 percent). Folk & Traditional Arts grantees' project activities also occur in metropolitan areas,¹ with 12 percent of grant activities taking place in small communities or small metro areas with populations of at least 50,000 people and fewer than 250,000 people. Grant awards and project activity locations are heavily represented in the eastern half of the country, often coinciding with regions that enjoy a high profile in the traditional arts (Appalachia, Louisiana), as well as in states with historically robust Folk Arts Partnerships (California, Kentucky, Louisiana, New York, Oregon).

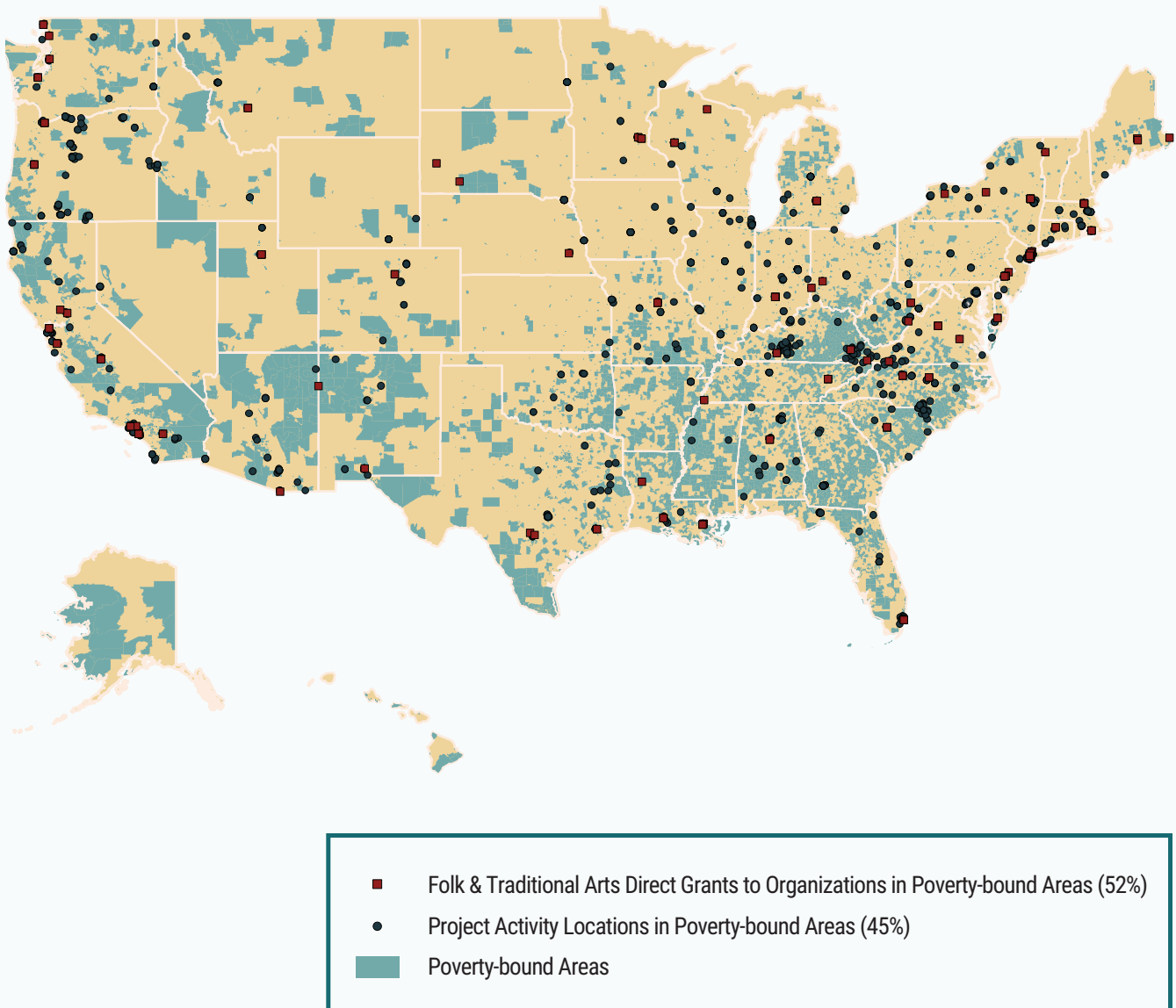
¹ Large metro areas are defined as populations with more than 250,000 people, small communities/small metro areas are those areas with at least 50,000 people and less than 250,000 people, and 'rural' encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within a metro area.

Figure 2: Folk & Traditional Arts – Direct Grants to Organizations and Project Activity Locations in Rural Areas & Small Communities, FYs 2013-2015



Large Metro Areas = 250,000 or more people
 Small Communities/Small Metro Areas = at least 50,000 and less than 250,000 people
 "Rural" encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within a metro area

Figure 3: Folk & Traditional Arts – Direct Grants to Organizations and Project Activity Locations in Poverty-bound Areas, FYs 2013-2015



"Poverty-bound areas" are defined as Census tracts where 20 percent or more of the population live below the poverty line.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of grantees and projects in poverty-bound areas.² Over half of the organizations receiving direct grants (52 percent) from fiscal years 2013-2015 were located in poverty-bound areas. Of the direct project funding activity locations across the country, 45 percent took place in poverty-bound areas—a figure comparable to the 43 percent of Arts Endowment activity locations in poverty-bound areas, but slightly above the 31 percent of the U.S. population that live in poverty-bound areas.

² For this study, "poverty-bound areas" are defined as Census tracts where 20 percent or more of the population live below the poverty line.

Recipients of Folk & Traditional Arts direct grants to organizations often focused on reaching generally underserved populations. This included engaging underserved folk and traditional arts practitioners and addressing communities underserved by arts funders. During the study period, almost 49 percent of Folk & Traditional Arts grants reported engaging one or more underserved populations—a greater percentage than the larger group of recipients of direct grants to organizations across the agency (32 percent). In particular, Folk & Traditional Arts grantees were concerned with documenting/presenting the traditional arts of populations with little to no access to arts resources. Projects often targeted low-income communities and youth, as well as rural populations.

“While [...] the arts thrive in the cities and large towns of Indiana [...] the rural reaches of the state remain underserved, and traditional artists are rarely recognized for their skill and talent beyond their communities. This project will benefit both the underserved artists and the underserved communities where these exhibits and artists will travel.” –Grant application from Traditional Arts Indiana (Folk Arts Partnership program for the Indiana Arts Council, based at Indiana University)

Profile: Los Cenzontles Mexican Arts Center

The Los Cenzontles Mexican Arts Center, an annual recipient of the agency’s direct grants to organizations during the study period, conducts activities in diverse settings (rural and urban) and directly engages with an underserved population, including youth-at-risk and individuals living in poverty and with limited English proficiency. Los Cenzontles, through its activities as a nonprofit cultural arts center, a community space for youth and families, and a hub for Latino artists, seeks to amplify Mexican roots in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. Through its programming, it engages and supports a cross-section of the different Latino constituencies represented in its community and promotes personal and collective resilience through shared cultural heritage and artistic practices. In reporting on its FY 2015 grant award, Los Cenzontles shared that its audience composition for grant-funded activities was nearly 70 percent Latino.

Figure 4.

The Los Cenzontles Touring Group. Photo by James Hall



Folk Arts Partnerships

Using their deep understanding of the folk and traditional arts and cultural heritages within their region or state, Folk Arts Partnership grantees provide much-needed support for the folk and traditional arts across their jurisdiction. Typically, Folk Arts Partnerships are directed by folklorists who utilize fieldwork to build collaborative public programs and build heritage archives.

Folk Arts Partnerships support high levels of folk and traditional arts activity in rural and small metro areas. Folk Arts Partnerships at nonprofit agencies held 20 percent of their project activities in rural areas and 13 percent in small metro areas. Similar to direct grants awarded by the Folk & Traditional Arts office, this percentage is higher than the percentage of the Arts Endowment's grant project activities that took place in rural areas and also above the percentage of the U.S. population in rural areas.

Notably, Folk Arts Partnerships are located in mostly poverty-bound areas. At 62 percent, the majority of SAA/RAO agencies are located in poverty-bound areas, while 43 percent of the nonprofit organizations receiving Folk Arts Partnerships awards are in poverty-bound areas. Forty-one percent of the nonprofit partnership activity locations can also be found in poverty-bound areas. Note that not all states and regions supported by nonprofit Folk Arts Partnerships are characterized by widespread project activities. Nebraska and Texas are examples of states where activities are not widely distributed within their jurisdiction. This may be due to the clustering of the traditional arts within a jurisdiction, a more centralized approach to Partnerships programming, or insufficient organizational capacity and/or funding.

Partnerships frequently engage groups that are underrepresented and marginalized. Of the partnerships under review, many provided direct support of folk artists through residencies, apprenticeships, or grants, and many of the artists came from historically underserved groups or communities, including immigrants, rural communities, Native Americans/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians, and refugees. Moreover, fieldwork efforts were often in rural or tribal communities to both identify and document the artists and the traditional arts they mastered (Malloy, 2017). Such fieldwork is also directly connected with technical assistance to traditional artists, connecting individual traditional artists (as well as the artist's community organizations) with SAA and RAO grantmaking.

Partnership grantees targeted the following populations (listed in order of frequency) (Malloy 2017):

- Immigrants
- Tribal/Native Communities
- Rural Communities
- Refugees
- Pacific Islander and Asian Communities
- African-American Communities
- Latino Communities
- Older Adults

Profile: Idaho Commission on the Arts

The Idaho Commission on the Arts, which received Folk Arts Partnerships awards in FY 2013 and FY 2015, has made deliberate efforts to document and share folk and traditional arts from underrepresented and marginalized groups, often in rural settings. Idaho's Mexican Music Project set out to document traditional and non-traditional Mexican music through music creation and the recording of live performances in small agricultural towns in Southern Idaho, where Latino populations are growing. Another initiative, the Story Quilt Project, involves a touring exhibit of narrative quilts put together by refugees in Boise that amplify their community's experiences. These efforts require persistent outreach to communities across the state by the state's folk and traditional arts director—a sometimes daunting task for a one-person office with an annual budget of \$40,000 or less.

Figure 5.

Apprentice Aydee Gonzalez (l) and mentor Norma Pintar (r) before a public performance for their 2015 Traditional Arts Apprenticeship project supported by the Idaho Commission for the Arts. Photo by Steven Hatcher



National Heritage Fellowships

As demonstrated in the previous section, the Arts Endowment’s support for folk and traditional arts reaches across the country through its grantees and awardees. Similarly, the National Heritage Fellowship—the nation’s highest honor in the folk arts—has been awarded to 413 folk and traditional artists (through fiscal year 2015) representing every state and four U.S. territories and recognizing more than 200 distinct artistic traditions since its establishment in 1982. These fellowships recognize America’s foremost vernacular artists and celebrate outstanding stewardship of living traditions. Heritage Fellows are nominated by the public, and both Folk Arts Partnerships and nonprofits focused on folklife and cultural heritage are often the nominee’s strongest advocates. In other words, states with robust folklife infrastructure tend to have more nominees, which leads to more National Heritage Fellows from that particular state over time. **Figure 6** illustrates the broad geographic reach of the National Heritage Fellowship program; red squares highlight the residences of National Heritage Fellows during the study period.

The National Heritage Fellowships were designed to both honor and draw public attention to the diversity and excellence of our nation’s folk and traditional artists. Looking across the pool of the National Heritage Fellowship recipients, the distribution of fellows by gender shows that men have been awarded almost twice as often as women and only 3 percent have been duos or groups. Additionally, the ethnicity distribution displays special emphasis on Anglo American, African American (including African, Creole), and American Indian/Alaska Native (**Chart 2**).

Chart 2: Number of National Heritage Fellowship Recipients (1982-2018), by Race/Ethnicity

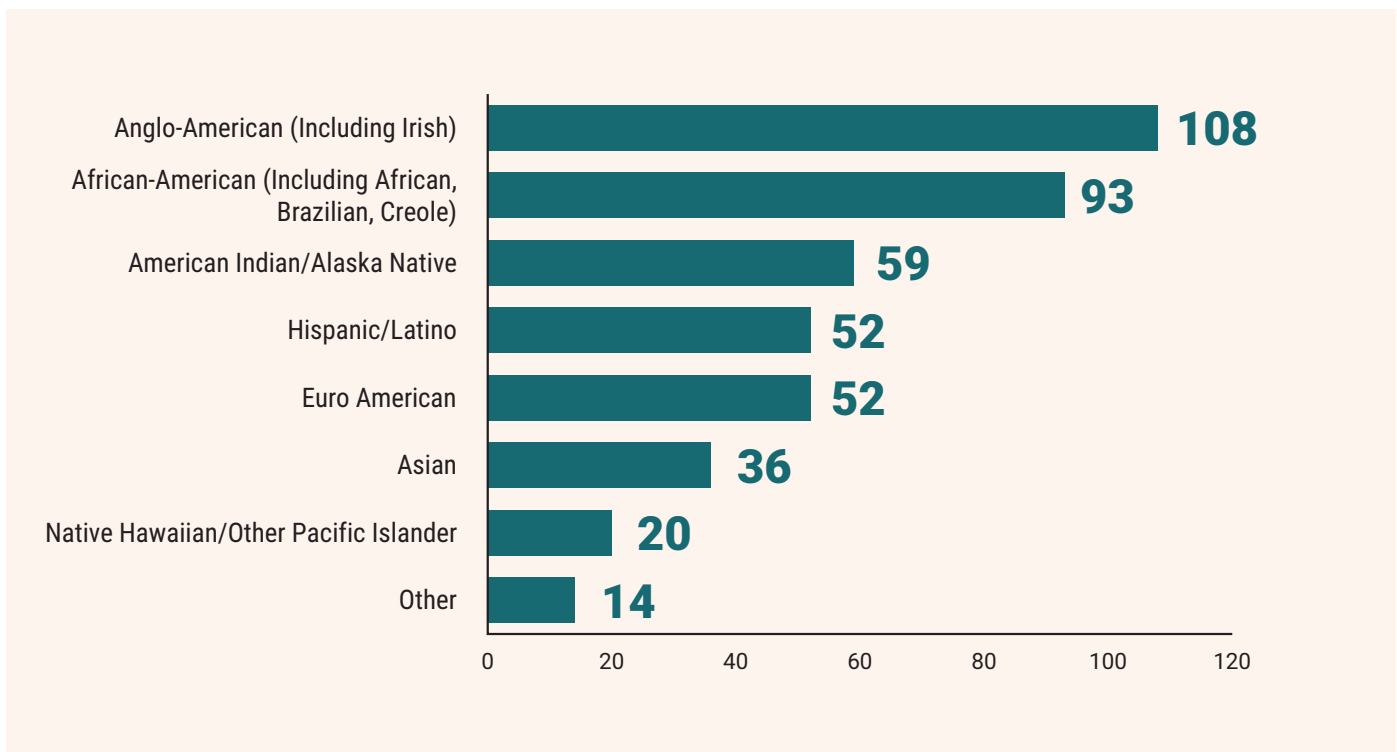
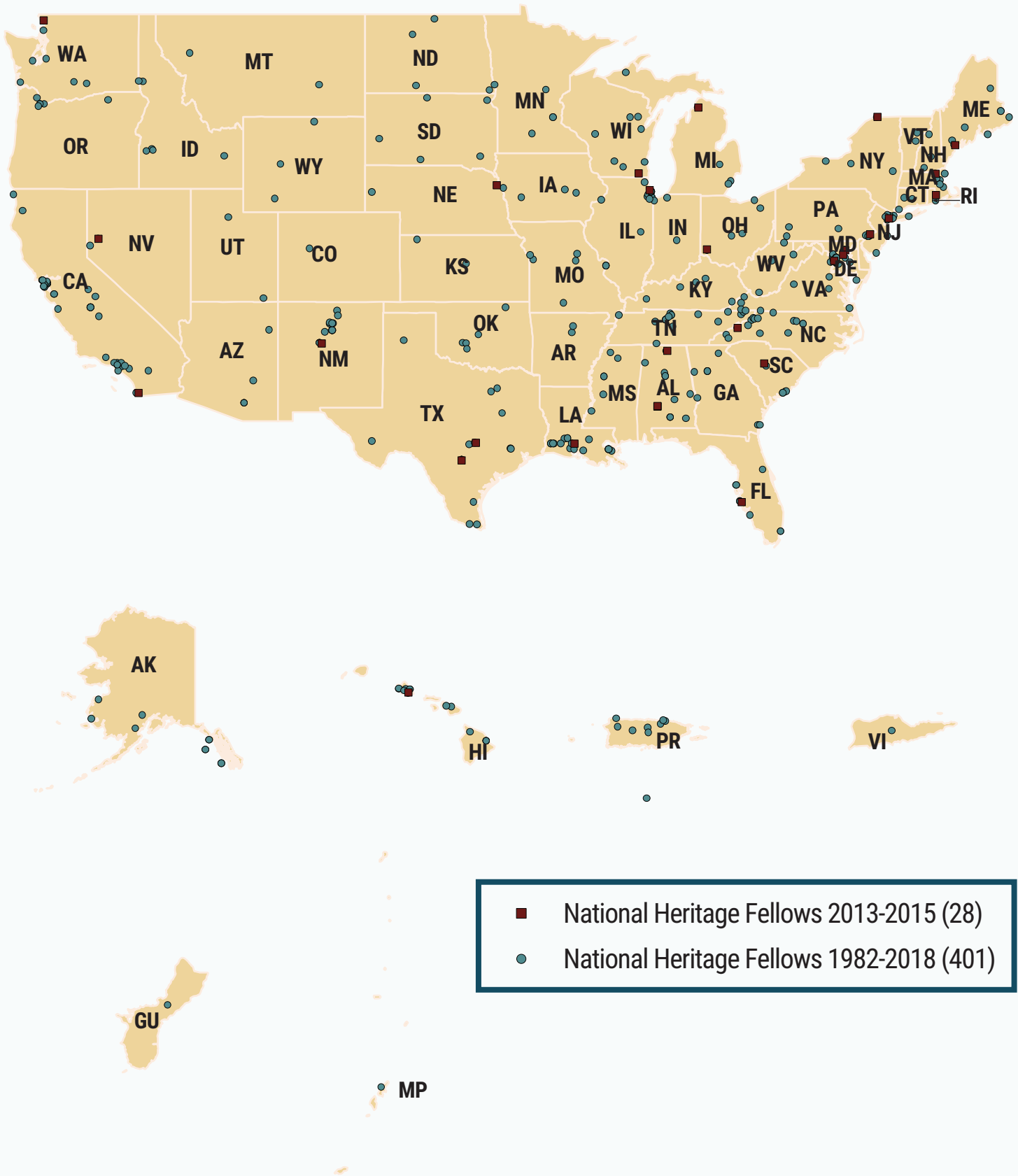


Figure 6: National Heritage Fellowship Recipient Locations, FYs 1982–2018



Profile: Dolly Jacobs, National Heritage Fellow

Recipients of the National Heritage Fellowship are recognized throughout the country and the world, bringing visibility to their communities and to their art forms. Dolly Jacobs, who was recognized as a National Heritage Fellow in FY 2015, emphasized the importance of the award to her circus art form and her professional colleagues. She was the first circus artist to receive the award—an honor that Jacobs felt validated the arts of the circus and gave her profession credibility. She invested her award in the work of the Circus Arts Conservatory, a nonprofit organization which she and her husband, Pedro Reis, co-founded in Sarasota, Florida, 23 years earlier. The Conservatory focuses on performance, training, outreach, and sharing the legacy of the circus.

Figure 7.

Dolly Jacobs performing at the 2015 National Heritage Fellowships Awards Concert in Washington, DC. Photo by Michael G. Stewart



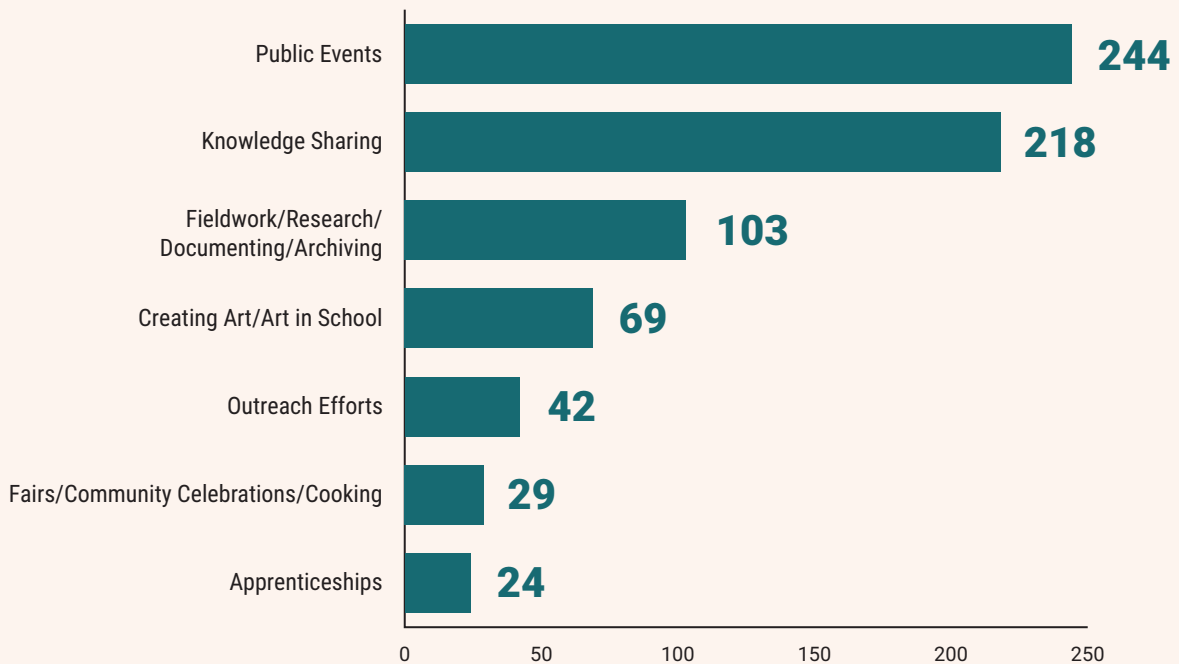
Preserving, Sustaining, and Engaging through Folk & Traditional Arts Projects

As the previous section demonstrated, folk and traditional arts projects supported by the Arts Endowment reached rural and poverty-bound areas and, within these areas, benefited underserved populations. Activities included engaging folk and traditional arts practitioners from historically underserved groups or communities. A review of the activities associated with direct grants to organizations and Folk Arts Partnerships clearly shows that grantees often pursue ambitious project objectives such as documenting the traditional arts, sustaining living traditions through education and apprenticeship programs, and broadening the public's understanding and appreciation of these art forms.

Direct Grants to Organizations

Among the direct grants to organizations awarded by the Arts Endowment's Folk & Traditional Arts office during fiscal years 2013-2015, the most commonly reported project activities included public events, knowledge sharing (including conferences, lectures, presentations), fieldwork, research, and documentation of traditional arts, and school-based activities (**Chart 3**). This diverse set of activities led by grantees also includes apprenticeships, storytelling, youth education, and cooking demonstrations.

Chart 3: Most Commonly Reported Project Activities by Recipients of Direct Grants to Organizations, FYs 2013-2015



The documentation of folk and traditional arts was a leading project activity reported by recipients of direct grants to organizations awarded through the agency's Folk & Traditional Arts office. During the study period, almost 12 percent of Folk & Traditional Arts direct grants intended to sustain artistic traditions. Fieldwork and documentation are important tools used by organizations to build relationships with underserved communities, and to connect traditional artists and community organizations to state art agency and Arts Endowment resources. Fieldwork also serves as a vehicle by which organizations work with traditional artists to achieve community objectives for cultural sustainability. By comparison, only 2 percent of the larger pool of Arts Endowment's direct grants to organizations shared this intent. Los Cenzontles, for example, utilized its fiscal year 2015 grant award to support the recording and release of two CDs. One CD documented a cross-cultural collaboration in which Los Cenzontles and Andre Thierry united their Latino and Creole traditions to tell the stories of their Richmond, California, neighborhood; the album utilized a mix of zydeco accordion, Mexican brass banda, congas, and washboard. The second album featured acoustic rancheras and corridos that told stories of generations of Mexican families.

Figure 8.

A scene from the Museum at Eldridge Street's Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival. Photo by Kate Milford



Many direct grant projects supported activities designed to build a community's understanding of folk and traditional arts while providing entry to other cultures. Projects such as the Museum of Eldridge Street's Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival in New York City, which was supported annually through direct grants during the study period, brought together live performances, workshops, exhibitions, and

demonstrations in the local community. These activities sought to build awareness and contribute to an increased understanding of traditional art forms and artists but also to build bridges between the diverse cultural groups that live in the Museum’s Lower East Side neighborhood.

Other Folk & Traditional Arts direct grant projects engaged community members in art-making, workshops, and classes. Grantees recruited master artists and other participants to host and teach various workshops and demonstrations in a variety of settings, including schools. As with Los Cenzontles, such organizations were deliberate in recruiting master traditional artists to participate in their programs. The grantees often are guided by the community’s knowledge of these veteran/master artists, helping to ensure the local relevance and cultural appropriateness of arts programs.

Apprenticeships are an important feature of the activities offered in communities across the country. Recipients of direct grants to organizations ran apprenticeship programs to teach traditional art forms as diverse as carving hunting decoys and Native-American storytelling and drumming (see **Chart 4** for a table of selected apprenticeship programs supported through direct grants). Apprenticeships are time-honored programs allowing master artists to train apprentices, often over an extended period of time, who will then go on to teach others and share what they have learned with their own communities. Formal learning programs of this nature are instrumental in passing on cultural knowledge to the next generation. Apprenticeships build greater visibility for specific traditions while sustaining these traditions for future generations.

Figure 9.

Congolese featured guest artists perform at the 2017 Florida African Dance Festival at the Lee Hall Auditorium, Florida A&M University. Photo by Alvin McBean



Chart 4: Apprenticeship Programs Funded through Folk & Traditional Arts Direct Grants to Organizations, FYs 2013-2015

TYPE OF APPRENTICESHIP	AGENCY	PROJECT NAME	LOCATION
Alaska Native Traditional Crafts	Alaska Native Heritage Center, Inc.	Alaska Native Heritage Center Summer of Alaska Native Arts 2014	Anchorage, AK
Cambodian Dancers	Khmer Arts Academy	Khmer Arts Academy	Long Beach, CA
Chinese Music	Mencius Society for the Arts	American Chinese Music Heritage; Silk & Bamboo New York	New York, NY
Crafts – Folk Arts	Arkansas State University	Arkansas Folklife Program	State University, AR
Fieldwork Mentorship (Professional Development/Folklorists)	University of Oregon	Folklife in the Columbia Gorge	Eugene, OR
Hunting Decoy Makers/Carvers (American Folk Art)	Ward Foundation, Inc.	Carving Out Future Decoy Makers	Salisbury, MD
Piñata (Mexican Artists)	Fell's Point Creative Alliance, Inc.	Folk & Traditional Arts: Piñata Apprenticeship Program	Baltimore, MD
Basketmaking (Native American/Alaska Native)	Northwest Indian College	Expanding the Basketry Skill & Techniques of Native American Weavers	Bellingham, WA
Storytelling (Native American/Alaska Native)	Wisdom of the Elders, Inc.	Wisdom of the Elders Radio Program's STEAM Video Series; NISA Apprenticeship Project	Portland, OR
Various Skills	Michigan State University	2014 Michigan Traditional Arts Apprenticeships and Heritage Awards Program	East Lansing, MI
Various Skills	Institute for Community Research, Inc.	Southern New England Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program Year 16	Hartford, CT
Various Skills (i.e. Missouri fiddling, dance, drumming, boat building, etc.)	Curators of the University of Missouri at Columbia	Missouri Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program (29th Year)	Columbia, MO
Various Skills (Material Arts, crafts, storytelling, food)	Alliance for California Traditional Arts	Alliance for California Traditional Arts' Apprenticeship Program	Fresno, CA
Various Skills/Folk Arts	Houston Arts Alliance	Houston Folklife and Traditional Arts Program	Houston, TX

Profile: African Caribbean Dance Theatre

Recipients of Folk & Traditional Arts direct grants to organizations often seek to accomplish multiple objectives, including public engagement, artist professional development, and sustainability of traditional art forms. The Florida African Dance Festival hosted by the African Caribbean Dance Theatre in Tallahassee, Florida, engages and educates its surrounding community through a festival featuring live performances of African drumming and dance and associated workshops and demonstrations. The event brings many people to Tallahassee and is considered a local contributor to tourism revenue. The festival strives to improve the professional capacity of artists, who can utilize the opportunity to network with their peers and to enhance their portfolios through new resources, such as photography and video of their work. Separate from the festival, the African Caribbean Dance Theatre also invests in youth education with the intent of sustaining the traditions of African dance across generations. The Florida African Dance Festival received support from the National Endowment for the Arts in FY 2013 and FY 2015.

Folk & Traditional Arts grantees discuss the immediate outcomes associated with their projects in the final reports they submit to the Arts Endowment. During the study period, grantees most commonly reported outcomes associated with engaging the public, including increased public knowledge, appreciation, and interest in traditional arts. Also reported were outcomes associated with sustaining living art forms through education and apprenticeship programs, with improvements in economic and professional advancement of artists, increased practice of traditional arts, and the transmission of artistic skills and knowledge. Nearly half of grantees reported that projects led to strengthened economic and professional opportunities for artists within the communities served by their projects, taking the form of increased income or new business skills.

“Four of the artists went on to participate in fiber arts festivals in Colorado and New Mexico, practicing first-hand their new skills under the guidance of mentors. These artists kept records of their sales; each sold items at the festivals they attended.” (Dine be iina, AZ)

Finally, and to a much lesser extent, grantees reported outcomes for individuals engaged in grant-related activities, including a greater awareness and understanding of one’s own cultural heritage.

Folk Arts Partnerships

Activities supported through the Folk Arts Partnerships mirror activities supported by direct grants to organizations. The most commonly reported program activities were: 1) fieldwork and research to identify and document traditional and folk artists or organize and archive data; 2) exhibitions and demonstrations by traditional, occupational, or folk artists; and 3) apprenticeship programs in which master artists were paired with apprentices for mentorship and training. Also common were community workshops or trainings regarding traditional and folk arts, information and dissemination activities (e.g., creating brochures, updating websites, publishing artist directories), and technical assistance and capacity-building efforts for artists or the organizations that serve them. Other prevalent activities included outreach efforts to specifically engage underserved audiences or artists; programming in schools; direct program grants to organizations focused on the traditional or folk arts; artist workshops; achievement awards or fellowships; and convening or networking events for folklorists and/or artists (Malloy, 2017).

The Idaho Commission on the Arts typifies a Folk Arts Partnership that embraces the multiple objectives of documenting, sustaining, and engaging. Digitization activities, such as the Archives Project, seek to preserve and share past efforts to document the state’s traditional arts heritage as captured through program documentation, fieldwork, oral interviews, photographs, audio recording, and other media. Idaho’s Story Quilt Project presented a touring exhibit of narrative quilts put together by refugees in Boise that documented their experiences. The commission also provides two grant opportunities—the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship

Program and Quick Funds—that support learning partnerships between recognized master artists and one or more qualified apprentices to continue artistic traditions of a shared cultural heritage. Both historic and contemporary folk and traditional arts in Idaho are shared with the public through workshops, symposia, traveling exhibitions, and other community educational activities.

During the study period, Folk Arts Partnerships’ most frequently reported outcomes included a greater awareness of culture, tradition, heritage, or art in the general community, and transmission through apprenticeships and workshops of artistic skills to the next generation. Grantees reported projects leading to stronger arts ecosystems, where infrastructure supporting arts, artists, and communities was strengthened. Other outcomes involved greater access to arts experiences, and stronger bonds within and among communities of underserved populations (Malloy 2017).

“Bring a community together through the arts where they have opportunities to share stories, experiences, and join in fellowship... Plant seeds of interest and knowledge in communities to facilitate the passage of artistic traditions from one generation to the next.” – Alabama Folklife Association, Inc.

Figure 10.

A presentation by quilters involved in the Idaho Commission on the Arts’ Story Quilt Project at the Lincoln County Historical Museum in Shoshone, Idaho. Photo by Steven Hatcher



The Multiplier Effect of Partnerships

The objectives of many folk and traditional arts projects and partnerships—often concurrently focused on public engagement, documenting and sustaining living traditions, and developing innovative approaches to tradition—typically demand the input of community partners from across sectors. Research has shown a rise in cross-sector collaboration—coalitions of individuals and organizations from the nonprofit, government, philanthropic, and business sectors—that come together to address a societal issue and achieve a shared goal (Becker and Smith 2018). Cross-sector partnerships are apparent in other sectors of the arts, such as arts education and creative placemaking; findings from this study also found ample evidence of such strategic partnerships in the folk and traditional arts.

Direct Grants to Organizations

Folk & Traditional Arts grantees reported working with partners on some aspect of their projects. Over half of grantees mentioned partnering with other artists and arts organizations (57 percent or 77 grantees), and nonprofits and community-based organizations (55 percent or 74 grantees). Other commonly reported partners include state and local government agencies (49 percent or 66 grantees) as well as colleges and universities (48 percent or 64 grantees). Moreover, the range of partners was considerable, including tribal governments, media organizations, school districts, libraries, religious organizations, and historical societies.

Partnerships, often characterized by a shared purpose or values (Wildridge, Cawthra and Madge 2008), enabled recipients of direct grants to access resources or reach audiences normally out of their reach. The Mammoth Cave National Park (MACA), for example, was a key partner for Folklorists in the Park, a project supported by a FY 2015 award to the Western Kentucky University Research Foundation, Inc. MACA—a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the core of an International Biosphere Reserve—shared Western Kentucky University’s commitment to documenting and sharing information about cultural resources and practices in their community. MACA provided work space for the project’s folklife specialist for three months during the project term and contributed staff time and salary, as well as event space for the project’s evening programs.

Other partners of Folk & Traditional Arts grantees offered technical expertise in archiving or dissemination. For instance, an FY 2015 award made to the Hula Preservation Society preserved the 1961 film *Hula Hoolaulea: Traditional Dances of Hawaii*, featuring the 20th century’s foremost expert of ancient hula, Master `Iolani Luahine (1915-1978). A partnership with Ulukau: The Hawaiian Electronic Library, an online, digital library of Native-Hawaiian reference material, allowed the digitized film and associated educational materials produced as a result of the Arts Endowment grant to be made widely available online.

Other partnerships allowed grantees to broaden the scope of their audience, with partners acting as cultural brokers for grantees who wished to host a program that targeted specific cultural or ethnic groups. An FY 2013 award supported a yearlong series of arts programming based in the Ojibwe Woodlands culture and traditions. In collaboration with the Tribal Government of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and three existing Native arts and cultural institutions in Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, the Woodland Indian Art Center was able to facilitate the development of a training curriculum for Native artists. The center also provided leadership for a series of student workshops, a Native youth mentorship program, and a public event that engaged members of the Lac du Flambeau Band.

Folk Arts Partnerships

As is similar with direct grants to organizations, the majority of Folk Arts Partnerships grantees acknowledged that their various projects incorporated partners, many of which played an integral part in their programming. Commonly mentioned partners included local nonprofits or community-based organizations, workgroups, councils, and associations focused on arts. Museums and cultural centers were also commonly noted as

partners on exhibits and events, and colleges and universities often provided fieldwork and research support to grantees (Malloy 2017).

Collaborations with partners often involved developing and implementing projects, including exhibits and events; apprenticeship, fellowship, and awards programs; and fieldwork and research efforts. Partners also provided event space or co-sponsored events, and their networks were commonly used to reach underserved audiences (Malloy, 2017).

“ASCA used [Arts Endowment funding] to bolster statewide folklife research and programming through our partnership with the Alabama Folklife Association. Our biggest tool in maintaining and improving the state’s infrastructure for folk and traditional arts is strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations...Having this solid organizational footing has paid great dividends in board development, archiving, and the presentation of new programs.” –Alabama State Council on the Arts

Partnerships were considered critical by grantees to support the folk and traditional arts. Given limited funding to support state and regional programs, other funding and resources had to be sourced in order to grow and/or sustain programs. Moreover, in a few states, there is no longer support for commissions funding folk and traditional arts. A few agencies also noted that they were the sole source of support focused on traditional and folk arts in their respective regions. Grantees also acknowledged that many traditional, occupational, and folk artists remain “under the radar,” and direct technical assistance was needed to support them in both sharing and sustaining their crafts (Malloy, 2017).

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Conclusion

The National Endowment for the Arts reaffirmed its commitment to sustaining artistic and cultural traditions in its 2018-2022 Strategic Plan through its first objective to “honor and support artistic activities and traditions across the nation” (Strategic Objective 1.1). Through this study, the agency sought to shed light on the grants and fellowships awarded by the Folk & Traditional Arts office, including the impact of these awards across the country. Through quantitative and qualitative analyses of grant project applications and final reports and interviews with project directors and National Heritage Fellows, we identified themes that distinguish this portfolio of direct grants to organizations, Folk Arts Partnerships, and National Heritage Fellowships.

Similar to Arts Endowment grant awards in other artistic disciplines, Folk & Traditional Arts grants are awarded throughout the country. However, relative to the agency’s support of all artistic disciplines, **Folk & Traditional Arts grants are more broadly distributed in rural and poverty-bound areas.** Regarding project activity locations associated with direct grant awards, 27 percent of project activities took place in rural areas—almost double the level of rural activities associated with other Arts Endowment grants (13.8 percent) during the same study period, and double the share of the U.S. population that live in rural areas (14 percent). Of the direct project funding activity locations across the country, 45 percent took place in poverty-bound areas—a figure comparable to the 43 percent of all Arts Endowment project activities that occur in poverty-bound areas, but slightly above the 31 percent of the U.S. population that live in poverty-bound areas. Project activity locations associated with Folk Arts Partnerships at nonprofit agencies followed a similar pattern, with 43 percent of the nonprofit agencies receiving Folk Arts Partnerships awards located in poverty-bound areas and 20 percent of their project activities taking place in rural areas. These grants often serve **communities historically underserved and marginalized**, including immigrant populations and Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities, or those with comparably low access to arts funding.

Grant-supported activities have a **dual focus on engaging the public and documenting and sustaining folk and traditional arts.** Activities associated with direct grants to organizations and Folk Arts Partnerships clearly show that grantees often pursue ambitious project objectives such as documenting the traditional arts, sustaining the living art forms through education and apprenticeship programs, while simultaneously seeking to broaden the public’s understanding and appreciation of these art forms through festivals, exhibitions, publications, and public programs. Outcomes reported by recipients of direct grants to organizations included increased public knowledge, appreciation, and interest in traditional arts, improvements in the economic and professional advancement of artists, increased practice of traditional arts, and the transmission of artistic skills and knowledge. Activities supported through the Folk Arts Partnerships mirror activities supported by direct grants to organizations, with a strong prevalence of activities seeking to document, sustain, and engage the public in the folk and traditional arts. This synergy between direct grant awards and Folk Arts Partnerships is evidence of how Folk Arts Partnerships seed and cultivate traditional arts programs at municipal, tribal, and nonprofit organizations in their states and regions. Folk Arts Partnerships also work to connect already existing community organizations in underserved areas to Arts Endowment (and state arts agency and regional arts organization) arts resources.

Strategic partnerships are vital to promoting and sustaining the folk and traditional arts. Recipients of direct grants to organizations frequently reported working with partners on some aspect of their projects, with over half of grantees partnering with other artists and arts organizations (57 percent) as well as nonprofits and community-based organizations (55 percent). Similarly, the majority of Folk Arts Partnerships grantees acknowledged that their various projects incorporated partnerships, many of which played an integral part in their programming. Commonly reported partners included local nonprofits or community-based organizations, workgroups, councils, and associations focused on arts. Museums and cultural centers were also commonly noted as partners to Folk Arts Partnerships on exhibits and events, and colleges and universities often provided fieldwork and research support to grantees.

The **National Heritage Fellowships** signal to the American public the importance of stewarding these living traditions. For the National Heritage Fellows, these awards also bring visibility for themselves and to their communities and art forms. National Heritage Fellow Dolly Jacobs is a case in point, with the award bringing visibility and, in Jacobs' words, credibility to the circus arts.

Throughout its history, the National Endowment for the Arts has continually lauded significant cultural contributions to and traditions of the country's artistic legacy. This report provides insight into how the agency's support to nonprofit organizations, state and regional arts agencies, and individual folk and traditional artists has contributed to sustaining artistic and cultural traditions in the United States.

See page 3 of the report for policy recommendations based on this portfolio analysis. These action items could be undertaken as part of a multiyear initiative. Such an initiative would help prepare the field to play a vital role in celebrating the nation's 250th anniversary. It also would leave a lasting legacy for folk and traditional infrastructure in the United States.

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Flower detail in leather by 2019 National Heritage Fellow James F. Jackson of Sheridan, Wyoming. Photograph by the artist



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