Finding Shared Values

Methods for Aligning Cultural Management with Practitioners







Center for Traditional Music & Dance

Texas Folklife

Oregon Folklife Network

Prepared by Oregon Folklife Network: Division of the University of Oregon's Museum of Natural and Cultural History, Designated Program of Oregon Arts Commission.

Museum of Natural and Cultural History

Creative West

Freedom 250

National Endowment for the Arts arts.gov

Oregon Arts Commission

University of Oregon

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Executive Summary	4
Overview	6
Project Goals	7
Project Participants	8
Methodology	11
Results	13
Data Analysis, Culturally Specific	13
Data Synthesis, Shared Values	15
Key Findings	18
Recommendations	19
Programmatic Structure	19
Programmatic Values	21
Future Research	22
Working Group Engagement	22
Data Collection	23
Visual Synthesis	24
Creating Tools	25
Conclusion	26
Appendix	27
Recent Fieldwide Momentum Timeline	27
Apprenticeship Data by State	28
Partner Site Comparison	29

Acknowledgements

This project came from ambitious roots, with the aspiration to simultaneously solve a longstanding research gap and center the humanitarian values that both culture bearers and cultural managers hold. Folk and Traditional Arts is a field that has been historically under-resourced while supporting communities with the greatest barriers to these scarce resources. Taking our first steps opened creative imagination to see future steps and illuminated the tremendous need to take on more. We owe gratitude to the many culture bearers whose wisdom shared as advisors and program participants reinforce the primacy of the culture keeping standard to work "in a good way." Prioritizing relationships grounded our first steps and built confidence that the foundation we nourished will grow strong future research.

We are grateful to the many folk and traditional arts managers who shared feelings of being caught between worlds. Self-described "cultural translators," they straddle the gap between agency offerings and culture bearer needs. Such arts managers often practice the heritage arts of their own communities and hold deep empathy for the cultural leaders they serve in community and professionally. Thanks to the American Folklore Society's professional development institute and annual conference platforms, our team was able to learn from folk and traditional arts managers how this research can best support them.

The National Endowment for the Arts, Research Division, generously supported this project with critical tools like the NEA Research Lab Summit. Finally, we appreciate Creative West for their partnership in this report's design and dissemination.

Without such collaborative support, the research team and the field would have been unable to launch this important research.



Executive Summary



In the misty spray of coastal Oregon, a traditional basket weaver from the Hanis Coos Nation sorts natural materials gathered on her ancestral homelands. An elder who lost her family heirlooms in a housefire decades ago now works to restore for her granddaughters the gifts that her parents were unable to make for her. Because of the various ways the US Government sought to eradicate First Nations' cultures, languages, and peoples, the previous generation did not often learn their traditional lifeways. But this particular elder (a composite drawn from Oregon Folklife Network record), worked for her Tribal Museum, studied the history, and learned from two elder women who helped awaken their sleeping traditions. She has been honored to teach several younger women in her Tribe how to start a basket, how to keep the weave tight enough to hold water, preserve food, or gentle enough to cradle a baby. She also conveyed the critical cultural value of doing this work only when one feels well in heart and body; one day that basket will hold food, water, or a baby, which bad feelings or illness mustn't contaminate.

Being a culture bearer isn't easy; it's a calling, not a profession. Many are raising grandchildren, working full-time jobs with their Tribes, and making many baskets for mothers who are proud to surround them with the personally crafted symbols of their cultural heritage. Their embodied knowledge informs them of the right time to harvest good weaving materials, when the sap is running. Many elder traditional artists very much wants to pass this deep cultural heritage on to other women so that they can gather the plants and weave baby carriers for the next generation. But traveling to gather grasses is expensive; it involves actual cash for increasingly expensive gas, taking unpaid leave from work, and paying friends to watch grandchildren. A grant from the state could balance those costs, but the application is long, requires work samples, support letters, and more. Nor are grant deadlines negotiable. And for all their efforts, applicants may not be awarded funds.

We think that music, arts, cultura should be accessible, not just to everybody, but to the populations who need it most.

- Keli Rosa Cabunoc Romero

Such stories reinforce how traditional artists emerge as critical leaders in their communities and how their engagement with publicly funded programs like Traditional Arts Apprenticeships can provide insight into their values. Local communities living in diaspora, displacement, and dispersion across the United States hold culturally distinct values grounded in ancestral homes from around the world. These values guide children, inform family decisions, and help navigate social challenges.

Cultural programs like Traditional Arts Apprenticeships are institutional offerings meant to support these communities but come with workplace cultures of their own: values used to guide policies, inform strategic plans, and navigate business challenges may conflict with actual community needs. Friction develops in the middle, wherever the values of cultural practitioners and cultural managers collide, and threaten the opportunities that support cultural sustainability efforts.



This report shares a method for cultural managers to identify underlying cultural values shared among constituents as a framework for program evaluation and a tool for aligning cultural management with practitioners. The process yielded results—a set of culturally distinct and commonly shared values—that provided valuable insight for participating sites. Our results are not meant to replace a site-specific effort. Instead, we provided replicable model for community engaged programming, especially useful among funders giving awards and grants. Our recommendations outline ways that foregrounding community values in cultural program evaluations can reveal program-specific improvements, leverage structural change, and lay a groundwork for fieldwide impact analysis.

Overview

Background

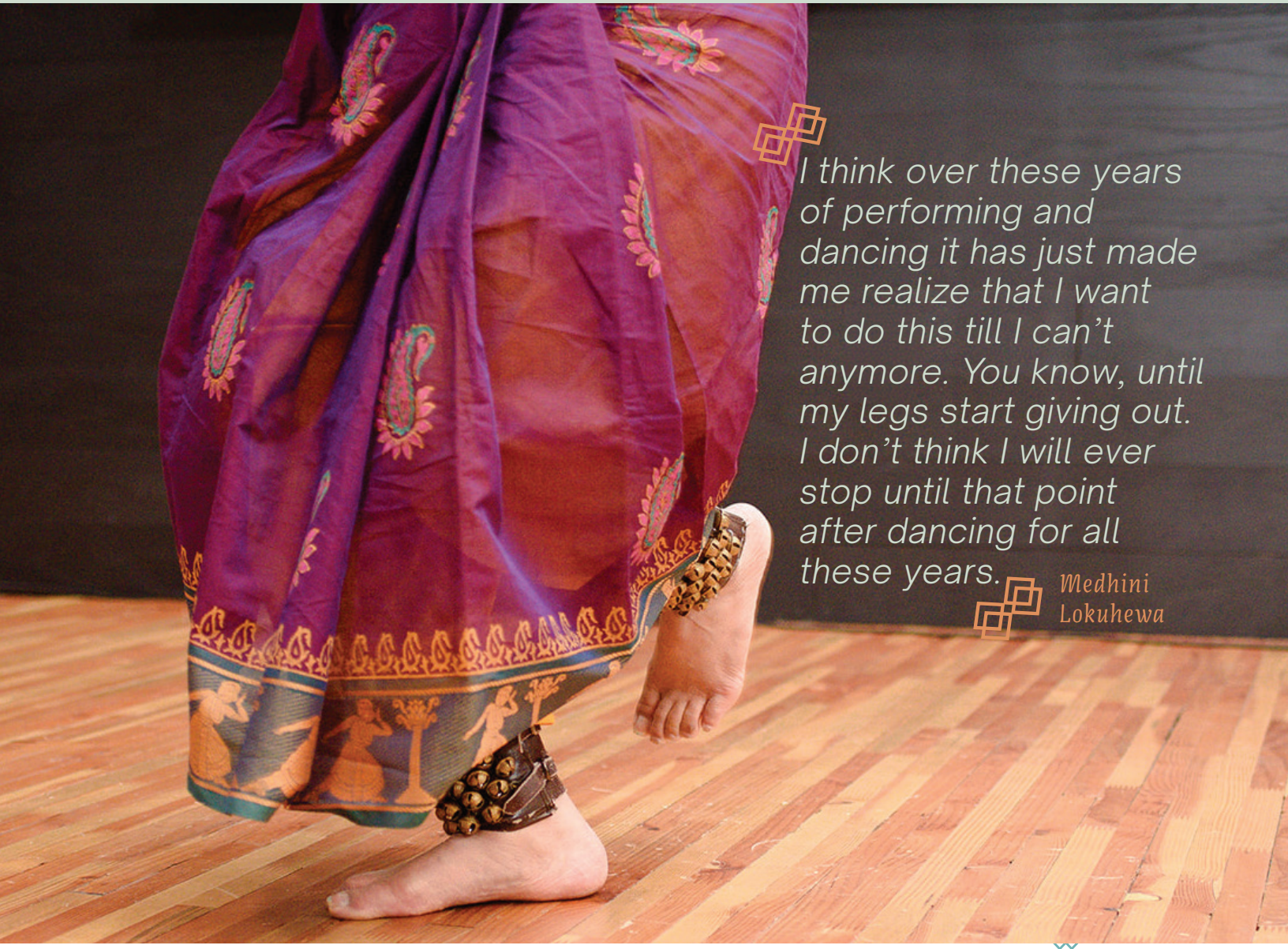
While potentially applicable to cultural management programs broadly, this project focused on Traditional Arts Apprenticeship (TAA) programs, a cornerstone offering of most state arts agency Folk and Traditional Arts (FTA) programs. In 2024, an estimated 30 states/territories reported annually awarding between five to 10 apprenticeship pairs per state at a funding level of $1,000 to $10,000 each; they delivered an estimated $800,000 through NEA state infrastructure funds to support a wide range of cultural forms and communities across the nation. In addition, federal agencies also support TAA programs administered by nonprofit cultural organizations like the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, the City of San Fernando's Mariachi Master Apprentice Program, and the Hydaburg Cooperative Association's Haida carving program in Alaska.

Despite TAA awardees' strong testimonials, there is a lack of research that pulls together the effects of state-specific, independently produced programs. This makes it hard to describe the far-reaching impact of TAA programs and their ability to sustain cultural practice in America's many different communities. While federal reporting structures produce generic data such as the number of hours awardees spend in practice and percent of demographic populations served, TAA programs hold a wealth of ethnographic data in applications, interviews, and apprenticeship team reflective reports that could be used to close the research gap. Without requirement, compensation, or guidance for collecting more meaningful data, TAA programs are not designed to track outcomes that nourish the needs and values of participants or their cultural communities. Our project bridges this gap by introducing new methods that center TAA awardee and community-defined values and makes recommendations to help TAA program coordinators respectfully collect, measure, and represent community impact. Working together, FTA managers and TAA awardees have great potential to transform TAA programmatic structures and broadcast the nationwide, cross-cultural benefits of investing in culturally specific local practices.

Defining Terms: Culture Bearer

The field of folk and traditional arts applies the term "artist" broadly to cultural practitioners who may not self-identify as artists. Their work stewarding ancestral lifeways is often rooted in community service, heritage preservation, history keeping, and ceremonial embodiment. For some, the term artist feels uplifting while for others it feels misplaced. This report widens the umbrella of terms to include artist, culture bearer, tradition keeper, lifeways practitioner, and uses these interchangeably to ground the reader in community rather than institutional values.





Project and Goals

The project is a collaboration among arts agencies (three folk arts programs); arts communities (three focus cultures); an advisory working group (of traditional artists and arts administrators); and arts research (public and private).

The long-range goals are to

1) better serve cultural communities;

2) support cultural managers

3) improve decision making in the arts through community-informed research.

The near-term goal is to work with culture bearers to define "cultural sustainability" based on community values. The team purposefully integrated cultural practitioners because their expertise and needs are often too far removed from funders' goals.

Project Participants







Lead team

provided oversight, coordination, and expertise

Emily Hartlerode, OFN director, Principal Investigator and research coordinator, led the team.

Deana Dartt, Ph.D (Coastal Band, Chumash/Mestizo), principal of Live Oak Consulting, created the methodology and analytical framework, and advocated for relevancy to cultural practitioners and their wider communities.

Ashanti McGee, and Natalie Scherlong, Creative West, coordinated the design and publication by America's largest regional arts organization serving the greatest number of state arts agencies.

Cultural Managers

provided TAA program data, professional experience with arts agencies and cultural practitioners, and their own personal values

Center for Traditional Music and Dance (CTMD serves New York City) coordinates and administers one of the largest and most diverse TAA programs in New York State.

Texas Folklife (TXF serves Texas statewide) has spent 30 years independently operating TAA programs that serve rural and urban communities in a border state.

Oregon Folklife Network (OFN serves Oregon statewide) administers TAA programs from a research university museum.

All three source funds from their state arts agency. Both OFN and TXF are their respective states' designated FTA programs. See Partner Site Comparison chart in the appendix for more.



Community Practitioners
provided cultural experience, values and goals

First Nations (Oregon Folklife Network)
Five traditional artists from four Native nations practicing weaving, beading, materials harvesting, and garment making.

Sri Lankan (Center for Traditional Music and Dance)
Five apprenticeship teams living in diaspora practicing dance, foodways, and poetry.

Tejano (Texas Folklife)
Five apprenticeship teams of Mexican descent with deep regional roots practicing dance, music, and clay sculpture.

The team analyzed and interpreted data (reports and comments) from culture bearers of these distinct cultural communities who engaged significantly in each participating TAA programs during 2010-2025.

Advisory Working Group

The team embraced the advice of a 10-person working group composed of traditional artists, past TAA awardees from each research site and beyond, staff from state and national arts service providers, and cultural arts managers who coordinated similar apprenticeship programs. They gave feedback in four group sessions, private phone and zoom calls, and over email. Their interpretations deepen our consideration of the impacts and are integrated into this report's recommendations.

Traditional Artists

Sichandara Navinna, NY

Juan Longoria, Jr., TX

H'Klumaiyat-Roberta Kirk, OR

Arts Administrators*

Lisa Rathje, Local Learning

Eugene Rodriguez, Los Cenzontles

Fabiana Chiu-Rinaldi, New York State Council on the Arts

Elisha Oliver, Texas Folklife

Liora Sponko, Oregon Arts Commission

Aliah Najmabadi, Alliance for California Traditional Arts

Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts

**Note that many Arts Administrators are also artists, some have been awarded Apprenticeships and/or are arts mentors in their cultural communities.*



Methodology

Our primary goal was to include and center community definitions of cultural sustainability. Our ethnographic process used readily available archival records of TAA interviews, applications, and surveys often presented in awardees' own words. Using archival rather than collecting new data from over-burdened leaders of local cultural communities eased effort during our first phase of research and helped us accommodate the relatively small funding and short timeline. This step-by-step outline of our process provides quick reference to our model. Our results follow with details of how we applied the process. We provide these as an example of how cultural managers can work with their own data.

1. Data collection

Although each site runs an independent TAA program, each shares these elements with most programs across the nation:

- **applications:** a series of narrative answer questions about the artist applicants, their artform, how they learned it, why it is significant to their community, what elements they will teach and learn. These become programmatic records housed on servers, share drives, or state archives.

- **final reports:** a summary submitted at the end of the TAA project about what was produced, achieved, shared, taught/learned, presented. These are collected through online surveys, phone calls, emailed forms, etc., and archived as programmatic records and/or funding source reports.

- **interviews:** a conversation between artists and arts administrators about the awardee team, their community, their project, and its significance. These are collected as notes, audio recordings, and/or video recordings, made public or private, and archived in various official or unofficial repositories.

Each site identified a single cultural community referenced frequently in their records and scanned archival records for applications, interviews, and reports from five awardees who represented that community. Managers highlighted passages in these records that suggest important cultural values and excerpted sample quotations into a table of community-specific values. Those comprised our raw data.

2. Data analysis, synthesis

After assembling lists of artist quotes into a spreadsheet specific to their site's target community, managers used their professional experience to interpret any themes present within and among these quotes. Next, Dr. Deana Dartt analyzed any patterns that emerged and summarized those within a set of underlying values.

A	B	C	D
Original Quote	**Translation**	**Value interpretation**	**Value interpretation (DD)**
Mi familia ya empieza a cambiar también su estilo. La misma necesidad que ha provocado la sociedad. Los artistas tenemos que cambiar también nuestra manera de cómo vamos a expresar. Entonces, a través del arte es una herramienta muy poderosa, podemos usarla para hacer cambios. Este, no totalmente cambios grandes sociales, pero puedes cambiar o impactar [00:05:30] a una pequeña comunidad. Eso es muy bueno.	My family started changing their style. The same necessity that society creates. Artists have to change also, our way of expressing. And so, art is a tool, very powerful, we can use it tomake changes. Not big social changes, but we can change or make an impact on a small community. That's good.	artists have a social responsibility and power to impact communities	Responsibility/Accountability

Our "Folklorist Value Interpretation" benefited from cultural managers' first-hand knowledge of the TAA participants and their work within local communities. The secondary process of "Live Oak Values Interpretation" benefited from Dr. Dartt's expertise evaluating grantmaking from the perspectives of Native communities. Those combined interpretations enriched our understanding of the core values that cultural practitioners expressed and allowed commonalities to emerge.



3. Retool analysis with advisors

We shared the summary value sets with our advisors for feedback and retooling. Discussions among cultural managers and practitioners helped expose how programming structures (like application, panel evaluation, reporting, etc.) which are needed to satisfy fairness, accountability, and transparency for arts administrators and funders, may also get in the way of and compromise cultural values. Applying insight like this to better align program structures with community norms relies on cultural managers to use their skills and authority to make practical changes to programmatic structures.

4. Identify values within AND across groups

We adopted a final set of shared community values; while culture bearers initially expressed these in culturally specific ways, further analysis enabled consistency across cultural differences. Because the team included and involved culture keepers as well as administrators, we were able to make sure that the final set made sense for all. Identifying those core values can help managers **1)** anchor programmatic decisions to values that benefit practitioners, and **2)** design their own framework for systematically aligning program policy with what fundamentally serves cultural communities. The model can be iterative, providing a working definition that evolves in response to what communities need to sustain cultural practice.

5. Identify limitations

Before making recommendations based on shared cultural values, we recognized the limited scope and danger of extrapolating our preliminary results too far. This realization came from rich and sometimes tense team and advisory board discussions. Their insights clarified that we could not share our results in this report for cultural managers to apply them directly, but, instead, as a model to follow for other sites to bring to the surface culturally specific values embedded in their data. By respecting our research limitations, arts managers who adopt and tailor this method will better understand the cultural communities in their locales and also help the field articulate tangible ways to improve TAA programs broadly.

6. Shape recommendations

The combined insights and limitations gleaned through the project helped us shape our recommendations to the field and for future research phases, detailed later in this report. Following this methodology, cultural managers will likewise be able to shape recommendations to agency leadership that is grounded in community input and aligned with cultural practitioner advice. With additional resources, the project holds great potential for more expanded structural and long-range analysis with impacts beyond local use as well as benefits across TAA programs and the cultural sector broadly.

Results

Data Analysis: Finding Community Values

Live Oak Consulting analyzed these community values lists and determined themes that all three communities consistently referenced but expressed through their own cultural lenses. For example, while Tejano musicians emphasized community celebration, Native Oregon artists spoke of ceremonial obligations, and Sri Lankan practitioners highlighted diasporic resilience. Culturally distinct expressions of these may appear as:

- A musician who is consistently invited to play at community celebrations such as quinceañeras
- A garment maker who is honored with requests to create funerary clothing for their community
- A food preparer whose expertise is critical for knowing when and how to serve traditional foods for celebrations

While culturally distinct, all reflect forms of aesthetic excellence and success that are not captured by conventional metrics such as awards or institutional recognition, but through cultural relevance and social accountability. Other themes that emerged as culturally distinct:





Themes of land-based practice, ceremonial responsibility, and intergenerational knowledge:

- Engagement in seasonal and land-based cultural practices tied to Tribal protocols
- Transmission of ceremonial knowledge through language, song, regalia, and ritual preparation
- Cultural stewardship expressed through responsibilities to community and ancestors

Oregon First Nations

Sri Lankan Communities

Themes of diasporic resilience, cultural continuity, and process-focused practice:

- Adaptation and teaching of traditional arts while living away from homelands
- Use of ritual and symbolic materials to maintain spiritual and familial ties
- Language and cultural transmission through informal, community-led efforts





Themes of community accountability, celebration, and cultural preservation:

- Participation in communal events that mark life transitions and affirm identity
- Preservation of musical traditions through performance, archiving, and education
- Building and sustaining cultural infrastructure that supports mutual aid and belonging



Tejano Communities

Data Synthesis

Shared Values Across Cultural Communities

The quotes collected through interviews, applications, and advisory sessions with practitioners from Indigenous, Tejano, and Sri Lankan communities revealed a set of shared values that transcend geographic and cultural boundaries. While each community expresses these values through distinct practices, the underlying principles show strong alignment.

Social Responsibility & Community Accountability

Upholding duty to community, culture, and ancestors. Practitioners are embedded in and responsive to their cultural communities. Artistic merit is defined through service to and recognition by the community

"It is important for my tribe, my community and my family that I continue the old ways for our people. And for others to see we are still here and we are still practicing our old lifeways."

OREGON

"Our kids are facing fentanyl dealers, heavy drugs. Our young ladies are raised in the sense that they're growing up way too quickly. .. For us, it's more about safe space and giving these kids options other than the school to prison pipeline."

TEXAS

"I think holding those traditions -- it gives us very valuable life lessons for our future or even in our past, teaching us what we should and should not do. Dance class is not just about dancing."

NEW YORK

Cultural Continuity & Lineage

Upholding intergenerational traditions, practices, and knowledge systems. Cultural knowledge is passed through family and community lineage.

"I'm honored that way.. that I see my grandkids wearing my beadwork."

OREGON

"Before he died, [my mentor said], 'you can take this instrument and do whatever you want to it. Take it to the next level, you know. Cause where I left off, you take off.'"

TEXAS

"It is something that's really important especially for my daughter because she's even further removed from Sri Lanka. She's never been there and .. her dad is not Sri Lankan so [her connection is] even less."

NEW YORK

Connection to Land, Stewardship & Materials

Practices are tied to place, ritual, and seasonal cycles.

"Without our relationship within the plant world, we as Native Americans lose a huge part of who we are and what we represent: living with the land and being good stewards."

OREGON

"Someone who masters clay is privileged also, because working with the elements of life is a blessing, right? Here if you don't have water, you can't give the texture that the clay needs, the earth. The air to dry the pieces before putting them in the oven where the fire is. So, there are 4 elements that we use."

TEXAS

"[We have a] folk dance depicting how women in the villages would bring their clay pots to the river to get water and bathe themselves; that was one of my favorites as a child."

NEW YORK



Resilience, Resistance & Individual Expression

Art and practice as a form of survival, strength, or justice.
Emphasis on preserving while adapting traditions across generations.
Honoring personal style or voice within inherited forms.

"That's the fun part because you can play with your designs and colors and get it how you want it."

OREGON

"The technique never changes. It will always be the same technique. Style, yes. The way I express myself through the clay is completely different from my parents. Their work is more traditional. [For me it's] giving voice to the clay more than anything."

TEXAS

"[My teacher] does something that really no one else does which is that she evolves this tradition in its traditional format and so she writes her own couples and she does so in a way that narrates her life in New York .. and often with important and traumatic events that she experiences so she's like this .. living archive of immigrant life in New York through her poetry which is .. sometimes under underrepresented .. even in the Sri Lankan community."

NEW YORK

Cultural Generosity & Hospitality

Acts of feeding, teaching, or welcoming others through tradition. Value placed on how work is done, not just the final output.

"It's no longer just a strip of bark, but it's a piece of art, a piece of what's going to be passed down to other family members. And so you take that life force and you put it into the basket."

OREGON

"I think that's also something that connects us. We're not really trying to make the next best dancer. Best musician. I think, for us, it's about creating a safe space, a community space."

TEXAS

"There was no monetary gain for anybody yeah it was purely for the love of dance for the love of our culture."

NEW YORK

Key Findings and Insights

The data collected through interviews, applications, and practitioner reflections shows how cultural values shape community practice and engagement. Ignoring these values allows programmatic structures that are misaligned with community values to persist, potentially harming cultural practitioners, their artforms, and community networks. TAA programs that refer to awardees as "master artists," for example, harm community practice where a high degree of humility is critical to social networks. Apprenticeship policies that restrict participation of minors disrupt development of artforms that require rigorous early learning in order to create adult practitioners.

The process revealed critical insights gleaned from communities

Many practitioners define artistic merit through community roles and ceremonial responsibilities, not through institutional recognition.

There is a shared desire across communities for slower, more process-oriented engagement that honors relational accountability.

The density of irrelevant and/or jargony questions in applications and reports limits practitioner interest in the program and the program's ability to gather meaningful data.

The process helped TAA program managers articulate several needs to support field-level transformation

The data must be gathered with a values-based framework in mind and professionally archived, otherwise key cultural indicators are missed, underreported, or become inaccessible.

Application questions and surveys must be designed to elicit community-defined metrics of artistic excellence and success, or else gaps grow in understanding what practitioners truly value.

Interviews and community consultations are critical to going beyond transactional grant applications and reporting.

These insights point to a clear need: additional data collection that is intentionally designed to illustrate cultural values, priorities, and community definitions of quality, skills, and success

This will require:

Revised application and survey language that invites practitioners to articulate their own definitions of value and impact.

A shared evaluative framework that is flexible enough to honor cultural specificity while offering translatable tools across independent state TAA programs.

A larger sample size and the depth of engagement across communities, making it easier to generalize findings and build comparative tools.



Recommendations Program Structure

The independence of each Apprenticeship Program is both a strength and a challenge. Autonomy helps each program develop site-specific policies that are responsive to ever changing demographic, political, and funding contexts. These variables challenge development of uniform standards that benefit research methods and fine-tune programs with best practices. Examples of nuanced differences that currently defy fieldwide structural analysis include:

Funding teams with familial relationships. Some programs uplift intergenerational teams, others consider it a conflict of interest, and in between are those requiring additional information to substantiate need. Centering the value of familial relationships in Apprenticeships provides clear justification for policy change.

Funding teams including minors (youth under 18 years of age). Some programs operate within agencies that have rules against funding minors, others welcome minors as the essential future of traditions, and in between are those requiring extra background checks for those working with minors. Centering the value of intergenerational transmission in Apprenticeships provides clear justification for policy change.

Funding teams for multiple years. Some programs support long-term, multi-year Apprenticeships, others limit repeat awards to spread funding equitably across their service areas and demographics, while in between are those that require compelling justification for return Apprenticeship applicants.

We recommend further study to analyze and align other shared structures of TAA programs alongside shared cultural values: guidelines, review panels and rubrics; awards and contracting; and team-driven teaching and learning models. Looking beyond these structures and drawing from practitioner feedback and values-based analysis, the following recommendations aim to reimagine the overall structure of TAA programs in ways that uplift cultural difference, remain legible within institutional contexts, and support meaningful data collection.

1. Uplift Cultural Values

- Center community values as metrics of artistic excellence and success, such as ceremonial roles, relational accountability, and intergenerational transmission.
- Avoid flattening cultural nuance by allowing space for narrative, context, and non-linear career paths.
- Widen terminology to include practitioners who may not self-identify as artists but serve as tradition keepers in service of sustaining cultural community.

2. Make It Legible to a Broad Audience

- Translate values-based insights into frameworks that can be understood and adopted by funders, reviewers, and administrators.
- Use annotated quote tables, values maps, and thematic graphics to bridge cultural specificity with institutional reporting requirements.
- Use tools like Digital.gov Plain Language resources to avoid jargon and instead adopt the language of communities to ensure clarity and consistency.

3. Gather More Values-Based Data Through the Application Process

- Revise application processes to invite rich narrative responses about community roles, cultural responsibilities, and values-driven impact.
- Include prompts that ask how practitioners are recognized within their communities, rather than by external institutions.
- Use application follow-up interviews as a tool for foregrounding cultural values and not just assessing eligibility.

We intend these recommendations to support a culturally grounded program structure that can be adapted across state networks.



Strategies for Aligning Programming with Community Values



1. Co-define core values with community members

- Facilitate values-brainstorming sessions to identify shared principles.
- Use tools like a "Living Into Our Values" worksheet to assess whether values can guide difficult decisions.
- Ask whether these values reflect the community at its best and whether they can inform programming pivots.

2. Translate values into actionable agreements

- Develop clear guidelines that reflect community values and in form programming choices.
- Apply cooperative culture frameworks to balance individual and collective needs.
- Revisit agreements regularly to ensure they remain relevant and responsive.

3. Embed values in decision-making structures

- Design rubrics and evaluative tools that make cultural relevance and community-defined impact the priorities.
- Align funding criteria, timelines, and engagement strategies with values such as reciprocity, ceremony, and intergenerational learning.

4. Measure and reflect

- Track how programming decisions support or challenge stated values.
- Use qualitative feedback methods like storytelling, reflection sessions, or annotated quote tables.
- Remain open to evolving values as community priorities shift.

Future Enhancements to the Research



Working Group Engagement

An advisory working group guides project interpretations and recommendations to align with their lived experiences. While our advisors offered valuable insights, the compressed timeline of this preliminary research limited the number and length of information sharing opportunities to quarterly, one-hour virtual meetings. More frequent and longer meetings, starting in earlier stages—including planning—of the research, are needed for iterative feedback and collaborative framing. Deeper engagement with these advisors and expanding to include other members of their broader communities, as well as higher levels of arts agency leadership, will meaningfully shape core decisions.

Moving forward, it is essential to allocate more time for working group collaboration at earlier stages, including planning. This will allow for

- Co-development of frameworks and language before the project begins.
- Iterative feedback loops that strengthen cultural relevance and field alignment.
- Exploration of cross-sector tools like The Kaizen Method that can help teams make critical improvements.
- A more equitable and inclusive process that honors the expertise of community partners.



Data Collection

Professional archives management helps make existing data accessible for immediate and long-term analysis. Our challenges accessing existing records showed a need for greater investment in archiving. Improved skills training and project timeline allowance, digital storage systems and retrieval policies will give cultural managers easier access to programming data already collected across years to help track trends related to changes in policy, staffing and community needs. These investments recognize that program administration records store a wealth of information that can liberate existing and newly captured data for valuable use. New data collected in future iterations, with deeper involvement of cultural advisors, will help us determine how consistently these and other values persist across more cultural communities, and across all community members.

To yield a larger set of data, with stronger analysis and conclusions

- Collect new testimonials from past and current awardees.
- Include interviews with awardees' broader community members.
- Ensure data is professionally archived for future access and longitudinal analysis.

Structural Analysis

Despite the tremendous variations among previously discussed TAA programs, there are many structures shared across them. Without greater investment in coordinated case studies and meaningful data collection, our summary of these individual programs and focus communities for this report can outline only superficial differences in the broader structures that impact how funding moves. To further develop our findings, we recommend detailed future analysis that includes:

- A broader spectrum of cultural communities
- A more diverse sample of TAA program organization types and geographies
- A collection of funding maps and comparisons
- An outline of best archiving practices to access records

Visual Synthesis



With its limited resources, this report provides few visual tools, which can aid accessibility and resonate with both institutional and community audiences. This is especially true of data with multiple independent variables. Adding to the various focus communities, artforms, and program locations in our first phase, future research should capture broader community voices, and track changes in community priorities, including the relative gains and losses when culture bearers move. When tied to state and federal administrative priorities and budgets, the terrain for arts programming can rapidly change with different impact across states. The funding and staffing balance of a TAA program relative to other programming within an agency's broader portfolio can also indicate key differences in cultural sustainability impact. Visual depictions of data help isolate and layer these and other variables so they are easily understood.

We recommend future data analysis to:

- Incorporate annotated quote tables and values maps to visually represent practitioner insights.
- Use graphics to show relationships between values, program goals, and field-level outcomes.
- Map the impacts when staff and/or awardees move service areas, when funding levels are high or low, and when a program is offered within a portfolio of adjacent, supportive programming.

Creating Tools

This report is one tool, a roadmap for one specific way. Without better guidance for site-specific collection and assessment of more meaningful data, plus the requirement and compensation to follow it, TAA program managers will struggle to track efforts and outcomes that nourish the needs and values of participants or their cultural communities. Meanwhile, TAA awardees are perfectly positioned to share feedback from their cultural communities. We recommend future projects include:

- Development of online resources for self-guided assessment and learning
- Hands-on training in programmatic interview procedures and values alignment evaluations
- Community of practice cohort creation for peer support
- Funding to train and pay awardees to use Participatory Action Research, where those opportunities are wanted, to interview their own communities and collect meaningful feedback



Conclusion

Many cultural arts managers are deeply invested in aligning their programs with community values and already mediate as much as possible between bureaucracies, scarce resources, and communities. Empowering cultural managers to align programmatic structures with cultural values using data-informed recommendations, tools, and professional guidance will improve cultural arts programming and unburden culture bearers from unnecessary translation and interpretation of arts administration policies.

Liberating culture bearers and cultural managers is particularly needed to sustain cultural communities of practice through apprenticeships. Teaching and learning traditional arts face-to-face and knee-to-knee, is a time-honored way for people to not only transmit cultural skills but also cultural values. While apprenticeships coordinated as public programs of state arts agencies may take on a more rigid structure, they nevertheless provide significant benefits to cultural arts practitioners across a range of communities and help to raise public appreciation for traditional arts. Our shared values/shared structures analysis offers to all arts and culture disciplines a model for laying a community-grounded foundation from which to measure benefits over time, and to assess best programmatic practices. This level of refinement will help cultural programs better serve their critical role in supporting cultural practices and unbridle culture keeper effort to better sustain their communities.

Appendix

This report sits within eight years momentum and investment in folklife and traditional arts.

2018

National Support Systems for Folklife, Traditional Arts, and Cultural Heritage - convening in DC + report by American Folklife Center/ Alliance for California Traditional Arts

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies/NEA Baltimore: Close Listening: A National Case for the Value and Impact of the FTA convening + report

2019

NEA "National Strategies for Cultural Heritage" convening in Minneapolis with McKnight

NEA Living Traditions: A Portfolio Analysis of NEA's FTA Program report

2020

National Council for Traditional Arts launched Living Traditions Network and news alert to network traditional arts professionals

2021-22

NEA makes a $1M investment in Cooperators Southwest Folk Alliance, First Peoples Fund, Alliance for California Traditional Arts to launch National Folklife Network, developing FTA infrastructure in spaces where it does not currently exist

Mellon: funds $15M to Library of Congress for "Of the People: Widening the Path" program of American Folklife Center

Expansion of NEA State and Regional Partnerships with additional funding

Mellon funds planning grant for Taproot Initiative (Alliance for California Traditional Arts)



Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Comparison Chart

State	Council Name	Apprentice Program	$$ Per Apprentice Team	Teams Funded						
				2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Alabama	Alabama Center for Traditional Culture (at Alabama State Council on the Arts)	Folk Arts Apprenticeship	$1,000-3,000	18	15	15	20	24		
Arizona	Southwest Folklife Alliance	Master-Apprentice Awardees	$ 5,500	10	11	10				
Arkansas	Arkansas Folk & Traditional Arts @ University of Arkansas (funds from Arkansas Arts Council)	Folk and Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program	$ 3,000					5	8	
California	Alliance for California Traditional Arts	ACTA' Apprenticeship Program	$ 5,000	16	21	21	24	24		
Florida	Florida Folklife Program	Folklife Apprenticeship Program	$2,000 (3 mos), $3,200 (6 mos), $4,300 (8 mos)	5		3	4			
Georgia										
Hawai'i	Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts	Apprentice Mentoring Grant	$ 50,000							
Idaho	Arts Idaho (aka Idaho Commission on the Arts)	Traditional Arts Apprenticeships	$3,000 to change to 5K in FY28	8	6	3	2	7	6	
Illinois	Illinois Arts Council (may partner with Company of Folk?)	Ethnic & Folk Arts Master Apprentice Program	$ 3,000							
Indiana	Traditional Arts Indiana	Traditional Arts Indiana Apprenticeship	$ 3,000	3	6	7	9			
Iowa	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship	$2000;500								
Maine										
Maryland	Maryland Traditions (at Maryland State Arts Council)	Maryland Traditions Folklife Apprenticeship Program	$5,000	10	9	13	49	15	15	
Massachusetts DISCONTINUED AFTER 6/30/24	Mass Cultural Council	Traditional Arts Apprenticeships					18			
Michigan	Michigan Traditional Arts Program (at Michigan State University)	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program	$2,000	N/A	6	5	6	6		
Missouri	Missouri Folk Arts Program at University of Missouri in partnership with Missouri Arts Council	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program	$4,400 ($4k mentor; $400 apprentice, as of 2026)	7	8	6	8	7	6	
Montana	Montana Arts Council	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program	$3,000				3			
Nevada	Nevada Folklife Program (Nevada Arts Council)	Folklife Artist Grant	$3,000							
New Hampshire	New Hampshire State Council on the Arts	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Grants	$4,000 per team (up to $3,000 for Master Artist and up to $1,000 for Apprentice)							
New Jersey										
New Mexico	New Mexico Arts	Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program	up to $3,000 (2-5 mos) or up to $6,000 (6-11 mos)	7	7	5	8	5	2	12
New York				5	11	10	24	38	42	38
North Carolina	North Carolina Arts Council	In These Mountains Appalachian Folklife Apprenticeship, Folklife Apprenticeships	$10,000			2				
North Dakota	North Dakota Council on the Arts	Folk and Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program	$4,500	24	16	16	25	28	30	37
Ohio	Ohio Arts Council	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship	$4,000							
Oklahoma										
Oregon	Oregon Folklife Network (at Museum of Natural & Cultural History, at University of Oregon)	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program	$3,500	5	6	5	5	5	5	
Pennsylvania										
South New England (Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut)	Connecticut Museum of Culture and History	Southern New England Apprenticeship Program	$2000-$3500	6	7	7	7	12	6	
South Dakota	South Dakota Arts Council	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Grant	$5,000	1	1	4	5	2	4	
Tennessee	Tennessee Arts Commission	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program	Up to $5,000	14	11	12	11	12	8	
Texas	Apprenticeship in the Folk & Traditional Arts	Apprenticeship in the Folk & Traditional Arts	3000	8	8	9	9			
Utah	Utah Division of Arts & Museum	Folk Arts Apprenticeships	Up to $5000	4	4	4		8	13	10
Vermont	Vermont Folklife	Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program	$500 to $2,000	not given	13	13	12	18		
Virginia	Virginia Folklife Program (at Virginia Humanities)	Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program	$5,000	7		8	8	5		
Washington	WACultures (formerly Center for Washington Cultural Traditions, at Humanities Washington)	Heritage Arts Apprenticeship Program	$6,000	15	15	16	16	15	16	Estimated 10
West Virginia	West Virginia Folklife Program (at West Virginia Humanities Council)	Folklife Apprenticeship Program	$4,200	7	NA	7	NA	7		
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Arts Board	Folk & Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program								
Wyoming	Wyoming Arts Council	Folk & Traditional Arts Mentoring Project Grants	$5,000	4	4	13	5	5	6	6

Three Participating FTA Sites

Org Name	TAA Structure	Relationship to SAA	Org structure	Priorities	Support	Staff to Population & Area
Oregon Folklife Network	TAA guidelines are self-determined; program outreach, review, and awards made directly	State Arts Agency designated partner	A Division of the Museum of Natural and Cultural History at University of Oregon	Award a slate of artists to distribute funds equi-tably across the state's geography and demography	Announce the deadline to media; outreach to roster and prior applicants; preview to strengthen draft applications; oversees each TAA project; disburses funds	Two full-time equivalents serve 4.3M in 90,000 square miles
Texas Folklife	TAA guidelines are self-determined; program outreach, review, and awards made directly	State Arts Agency designated partner	A stand-alone 501(c)3	Distribute awards equitably across the 9 major regions of Texas.	Announce TAA broadly, Conduct a blind review of applica-tions. Contact appli cants to be awarded. Send accep-tance letter for signature. Schedule an orientation for awardees.	Two full-time equivalents serve 29 million in 268,820 square miles
Center for Traditional Music and Dance	TAA guidelines are published by SAA; Provides outreach, technical assistance, fiscal sponsorship for SAA applications	Administers awards selected by SAA; Retains a 5% fiscal sponsorship fee	A stand-alone 501(c)3	Conduct fieldwork in priority communities to determine community-identified traditions and culture bearers to support	Complete the SAA application on behalf of the applicant based on interviews, oversees each TAA project; disburses funds	Four full-time equivalents serve New York City, home to a population of 8.5 million in 300 square miles (approximately 23.5 million live in the tri-state metropolitan area).

