WESTAF

Arts + the Rural West
Virtual Workshop Session Report

April 3, 2020

© WESTAF, 2020

Seminar Directors
Chrissy Deal, David Holland

Seminar Advisors
Christian Gaines, Jennifer Joy Jameson, Amy Kitchener, Nikiko Masumoto

Report Editors
David Holland, Laurel Sherman

For permission requests, please contact WESTAF (the Western States Arts Federation) at the address below:

WESTAF
1888 Sherman Street, Ste. 375 Denver, CO 80203
Phone: 303-629-1166
Fax: 303-629-9717
Email: staff@westaf.org

Design Layout by Alexandria Jimenez | alexandriajimenez.com

Cover photo by Simone Hutsch via Unsplash

Table of Contents

1 Introduction 6

Key findings and recommendations 8

2 Participant list 10

3 Are rural arts a rural development strategy? 12

3.1 Transcript of key insights from group discussions 12

3.2 Group A Discussion 14

Discussants: Catherine Bryan, Margie Johnson Reese, Nikiko Masumoto (Lead), Brandy Reitter, Kelly Stowell, Stephen Sugg

3.2.1 Discussion of prompts

3.2.2 Other topics of discussion 15

3.2.3 Conclusions and points of departure for future discussion

3.3 Group B Discussion 16

Discussants: Juta Geurtsen, Jenn Jameson (Lead), Bob Reeder, Courtney Spearman, Maria Sykes, Abi Whiteing

3.3.1 Discussion of topics

4 Are arts in rural areas different? 18

4.1 Transcript of key insights from group discussions

4.2 Group C Discussion 19

Discussants: Anne Bown-Crawford, Meg Glaser, David Holland (Lead), Sarah Lillegard, Ruth Saludes, Carly Tex

4.2.1 Discussion of topics

4.2.2 Other topics of discussion 20

4.3 Group D Discussion

Discussants: Kate Belton, Matthew Fluharty, Christian Gaines (Lead), Chelo Montoya, Hunter Old Elk

4.3.1 Discussion of topics

4.3.2 Other topics of discussion 21

5 Do rural arts face a resource challenge? 22

5.1 Transcript of key insights from group discussions

5.2 Group E Discussion 23

Discussants: Kate Belton, Meg Glaser, Margie Johnson Reese, Nikiko Masumoto (Lead), Ruth Saludes

5.2.1 Major conclusions and highlights from discussion

5.2.2 Discussion of topics 23
5.2.3 Addressing the challenges identified 24
5.3 Group F Discussion 25
Discussants: David Holland (Lead), Bob Reeder, Kelly Stowell, Maria Sykes, Carly Tex
5.3.1 Discussion of topics
5.3.2 Other topics of discussion 26

6 What's next for arts in/and the Rural West? 28
6.1 Transcript of key insights from group discussions
6.2 Group G Discussion 29
Discussants: Matthew Fluharty, Jenn Jameson (Lead), Hunter Old Elk, Brandy Reitter, Courtney Spearman, Abi Whiteing
6.2.1 Discussion of topics
6.2.2 Other topics of discussion 30
6.3 Group H Discussion
Discussants: Anne Bown-Crawford, Catherine Bryan, Christian Gaines (Lead), Juta Guertsen, Chelo Montoya, Stephen Sugg 31
6.3.1 Discussion of topics

7 About WESTAF 32

8 Participant bios 34

Appendix: Provocation Paper on Rural Arts 46
Are rural arts a rural development strategy?
Are arts in rural areas different? 48
Does rural arts face a resource challenge? 49
What's next for arts and/in the Rural West? 51
Understanding the Rural West
Rural arts development and regional economic development 53
Arts funding and the Rural West 54

1 Introduction

WESTAF's Arts + the Rural West Seminar virtual workshop brought together a diverse group of arts and culture professionals and practitioners to explore the context of and opportunities for "rural arts," particularly as it is known and experienced in the American West. The format and style of this convening represents a departure from the academic style of organization and presentation of some prior WESTAF cultural policy symposia. Developed as a collaboration between WESTAF's new Alliances, Advocacy, and Policy and Social Responsibility and Inclusion divisions, the convening builds on WESTAF's history of organizing cultural policy meetings and reaching rural communities through TourWest, our regional touring program, and research on rural creative economies. It aimed to bring together funding and policy organizations with practitioners to consider future directions for rural arts as a policy priority and practice of the field. This first convening was also designed to elevate and clarify WESTAF's future work in this area while building a western rural arts network.

Originally planned as an in-person seminar in the Central Valley of California in spring 2020, the format was changed to a three-hour, facilitated video conference held on April 3, 2020 from 11:00am to 2:00pm Mountain Time due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The original convening concept and the reformatted workshop aimed to:

Engage a western network of thought leaders and community builders whose work intersects with the rural arts agenda.
Share knowledge and highlight work being done in the West.
Ensure that western rural arts perspectives inform national conversations around rural arts.
Discover potential areas of regional partnership/collaboration.
Define a rural arts agenda for the West.

The session considered topics and themes ranging from rural creative economies to the advancement of folk and traditional arts to aesthetics, identity, and place and examined program and project case studies and opportunities for artists/cultural workers/culture bearers in rural settings. The meeting brought together 25 rural arts advocates, folk and traditional arts professionals, arts administrators, rural economic development and policy specialists, indigenous culture bearers, and others to share knowledge, practice, and ideas. These individuals participated in eight small group discussions considering four topics related to rural development, rural arts practices, resourcing rural arts activity, and the specific opportunities and challenges for these activities and practices in the West.

Planning this convening has enabled WESTAF to engage its existing regional and national networks and begin to develop new networks. Representatives from 10 of the 13 states in the WESTAF region, including board members, state arts agency executive directors, and program alumni, participated in the rural arts convening, along with major national funding and policy organizations, some of which are newly engaged with WESTAF's work. Representatives from the National Endowment of the Arts; Art of the Rural; Alliance for California

Traditional Arts; Rural LISC; California Arts Council; Citizens' Institute on Rural Design/Housing Assistance Council; City of Bozeman; Epicenter; First Nations Development Institute; Mountain Time Arts; Plains Indian Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West; Advocates for Indigenous Language Survival; the City of Eagle, Colorado; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Artes Americas; Wichita Falls Alliance for Arts and Culture; Center for Education, Business, and the Arts (CEBA); and Western Folklife Center participated.

WESTAF board member Nikiko Masumoto and Amy Kitchener, executive director, and Jenn Joy Jameson, programs manager at the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, were key partners and advisors on the development of the session. Representatives from Artplace America, Aspen Institute, and other organizations were also consulted on the selection of participants and other aspects of the organization of this session.

Key findings and recommendations

The rich and spirited discussion that occurred during the session isn't easily distilled into a concise set of findings and recommendations, but highlights from the discussion that participants advocated for informing future "rural arts" work are as follows. The group sees future work as being concerned with:

Using more inclusive language and letting communities define the work for themselves rather than being required to adhere to concepts of "rural development," "rural arts development," and other notions that may be alien to practice and lived experience on the ground.

Creating platforms to showcase rural artists and culture bearers to provide role models for and greater exposure and visibility to cultural work in rural communities.

Championing authentic recognition and inclusion of rural artists and culture bearers.

Providing capacity building support and technical assistance for rural communities in developing arts and cultural groups and organizations, programs, and projects.

Improving internet connectivity and other infrastructure such as technical, creative, and design skills in rural areas to support the advancement of arts and culture.

Learning from national and regional project and program models that authentically engage communities in arts and cultural practice in rural areas.

Supporting rural networks across the region and cross pollination between networks that position the arts to have a voice at the table.

Engaging indigenous leaders, funders, institutions, communities, and artists/culture bearers as a key constituency across the Rural West.

Encouraging project- and activity-based action rather than just strategy and planning.

Empowering leaders who can act as connectors in their communities and create places and spaces in which arts and cultural activities can be experienced and shared.

Engaging non-arts organizations as advocates of arts and culture in rural communities.

Reframing folk and traditional arts, rural arts, and indigenous arts and cultural practices in terms of living cultures and thereby recognizing their dynamism and connection to communities today.

Representing the concerns of rural communities in the West within national conversations on rural life, rural arts, and rural economies and communities.

Engaging grantmakers and institutions in better understanding rural issues and contexts to facilitate more inclusive investment and grantmaking practices.

The sections that follow present transcripts of the full group report-outs and discussion summaries for each of the eight discussion groups that elaborate on the topics outlined above. These discussions are passionate, authentic, highly informed, thoughtful, and constructive expositions on the topics used to frame the session and many besides. Moments of insight were had; key champions of this work in communities identified; case studies and examples shared; biases challenged; and new paths envisioned that, taken together, have the potential to inform the advancement of arts and culture in rural communities in the West and beyond.

Photo by @bella_the_brave via Unsplash