

Special Guidance for Applications in Folk Arts

Diversity is one of New Jersey's most significant and valuable characteristics. The state's many geographic and demographic settings are interwoven with ethnic, cultural and occupational networks, creating a dynamic array of communities. In them, traditional folk arts are often valued ways of expressing identity and strengthening group ties. To support this cultural richness, as well as the broader public appreciation and understanding of it, the Council has established a multi-faceted Folk Arts Program, of which this grant making function is one important part.

Folk arts and crafts are those that are learned as part of the lifestyle of a community whose members share identity based upon ethnic origin, religion, occupation, or geographic region. These highly varied traditions are shaped by the aesthetics and values of the community and passed from generation to generation. Some are fleeting - the decorative mehendi painted on a Rajastani Indian bride's hands before her wedding, or Karpathian Greek mandinathes composed and sung for the funeral of a friend. Others are enduring - a finely crafted cuatro, the ten-stringed guitar that is the hallmark of Puerto Rican jibaro music, or the Seabright skiff used by central New Jersey lifeguards. Some are for work - the rhythmic chanteys sung by menhaden boat crews pulling in fishnets. Still others are for play - wooden dreidels spun to win Channakah treats, or festivals - West African American-derived Trinidadian stilt dances performed for Carnival, or just daily life - the strip quilts made by African American women.

What is essential about them all is that they are practiced as part of community life and play important roles in events and activities of the community. These art forms are traditions that have been continuously practiced by communities and are not revivals of no longer practiced art forms. Folk artists are practitioners who learn these arts in community contexts by watching, practicing and apprenticing to other community members. While they consider it important to maintain traditional forms and standards, they also bring their own individual interpretations and stylistic touches, and it is the community itself that evaluates the excellence and traditionality of the art.

Grants in the discipline of Folk Arts are opportunities for applicants to help preserve and share with a broader public the unique folk arts that are practiced in New Jersey communities. In composing the narrative and assembling support material, keep the above information in mind, and detail the following:

- Include resumes and other information showing the involvement of personnel or consultants with training and experience in folk cultural programming.
- Include biographies and other information on folk artists that demonstrate their traditionality by explaining how they learned and developed their arts and how they are connected to the community whose arts they perform.
- Include audio/visual support materials that demonstrate excellence and traditionality of the folk artists (required) and descriptions of how the folk arts/artists will be presented, i.e. formats, facilitators, program notes, signage, - that help audiences understand and

appreciate them and achieve the goals of the project (use specifications set for other disciplines).

- Describe how the community of people whose arts are being presented and cultural specialists were involved in the planning, and how folk artists and art forms were identified for inclusion in programming.
- In discussing evaluation of success, be sure to discuss how the applicant has ascertained or will ascertain community evaluations or quality based on community standards.
- Describe how materials and documentation of folk artists will be archived and made accessible to others.
- Include samples of the applicant's previous folk arts program or project materials, if applicable.
- Include letters of support from community members who are involved in planning projects about their culture.

It may also be helpful to discuss a potential application with the Council's Program Officer for Folk Arts.