



# TENDING THE TAPROOT:

Opportunities to Support Folk & Traditional Arts  
in the United States



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**TENDING THE TAPROOT:  
OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT FOLK &  
TRADITIONAL ARTS IN THE UNITED STATES**

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Above: 1996 NEA National Heritage Fellow  
and founder of Harlem-based Puerto  
Rican ensemble Los Pleneros de la 21, Juan  
Gutierrez (L), with performers. Photo: Tom Pich  
Photography.

Cover: Master basket weaver Margaret  
Lee Peters (Yurok) (L) and her 2018 ACTA  
Apprentice, Nelia Marshall (Hupa), dig  
together in Humboldt County, California, for  
hazel sticks and spruce roots in the Yurok,  
Karuk, and Hupa cultural practice of making  
traditional baby baskets. The roots will be  
cleaned and trimmed to become weaving  
material. Photo: Jennifer Joy Jameson/ACTA.

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Through this work we have challenged ourselves to think with even greater granularity about the field with many important thought-partners. First and foremost, the artists and culture-bearers are the heart of this initiative. They represent the focal energy that will continue to strengthen traditional practices and their communities. Their artistry and knowledge are foundational to this study. We centered this group as the principal advisors and interviewees, reminding us of the abundant vitality and problem solving that is possible from collective wisdom and shared histories, particularly when it is offered so generously. Reflecting Native worldviews, immigrant and diaspora experiences, a range of religious practices, languages, geography, and age, a common understanding was that their personal work is based in a continuum of legacy or ancestry. The pathways of exchange this shared theme created is really what this work underscores.

Our respected colleague Dr. Maribel Alvarez, Jim Griffith Chair in Public Folklore and Associate Research Social

Scientist at The Southwest Center, University of Arizona, was a steadfast primary thought-partner, meeting with us weekly to provide a provocative sounding board as we drew forth the thematic relevance of our research.

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**Amy Kitchener M.A., Shweta Saraswat-Sullivan Ph.D.,  
and Lily Kharrazi M.A.**

**WE “MUSTEK  
CYEAR ADE ROOT  
FA HEAL DE TREE”—WE  
MUST TAKE CARE  
OF THE ROOTS TO  
HEAL THE TREE.**

Gullah Geechee Proverb

## Executive Summary

Every cultural community in the United States is rooted in a sense of belonging, shared by members, and anchored by collective wisdom and aesthetics. These roots of cultural heritage are maintained, strengthened, and expanded through the practice of folk and traditional arts. The realities of slavery, displacement, structural racism, systemic poverty, and cultural appropriation have tested the strength of these cultural roots. The stresses are even more apparent, viewed against our present-day national reckoning with these harms amidst a global pandemic. In this context, **traditional arts practices are potent political acts of social belonging, power, and justice.** From this field have emerged works and artists of beauty, technical prowess, and meaning. Music, dance, craft, oral tradition, foodways, and other heritage ways are transmitted and engaged in, as part of the cultural life of a community. We invoke the metaphor of the taproot, a term borrowed from botany, to describe a community's central cultural root, growing downward to a considerable depth. In our extended metaphor, key artists and culture bearers tend these taproots, serving as teachers, creators, and visionaries as well as advocates, managers, fundraisers, curators, planners, and actors.

Yet, the vast majority of traditional artists—and the organizations, collectives, and informal networks of practice they lead—have never received the philanthropic investment that would allow them to realize

long-term visions for change in their communities. There has been little national effort to invest in, convene, or capitalize these artists and organizations, **a fundamental inequity in arts funding in the US.** As a result, artist-leaders at the pinnacle of traditional arts practices lack the financial and infrastructure stability to plan for succession and to set goals at a more forward-thinking scale for their organizations.

This report, *Tending the Taproot: Opportunities to Support Folk & Traditional Arts in the United States*, presents the findings of the Alliance of California Traditional Arts' (ACTA's) Taproot Initiative. This national planning effort, aimed to re-center traditional and folk artists and their art forms as catalysts for transformation and restoration in our larger society, is aligned with other important movements in the arts and culture sector to spur critical thinking and action during this hallmark moment of radical change. The report describes the resource landscape of folk and traditional arts. It offers operational recommendations as a call to action to support taproot artist-leaders and organizations with focused investment in funding and development to do more and do better, resources for infrastructure, elevated national recognition, and new standards for robust data and research infrastructure. Our recommendations are evidenced by qualitative and quantitative research findings, grounded in ACTA's quarter century of experience as a funder and advocate in this field.

**Here is our challenge to national, regional, local, and philanthropic organizations and funders of folk and traditional arts:**

- 01.** **Invest in taproot artists and culture bearers** through sustained fellowships for accomplished artists and multi-year support for large arts projects, institute continuing operating support for artists' cultural enterprises, and provide technology transfer and training for taproot artists and administrators
  
- 02.** **Invest in ongoing operating funding** to the many organizations that sustain the taproot ecosystem and that develop and host key programs and performances; invest in economic opportunities and training for organizations and culture bearers to develop and expand their arts-related income
  
- 03.** **Raise the visibility and position of this field** through a national communications strategy and partnerships with public agencies, philanthropies, and private partners to widely disseminate traditional arts education and materials to the public
  
- 04.** **Update data collection and research infrastructure** with investment in new quantitative and qualitative research to illuminate the roles and impact of traditional artists and their organizations; upgrade cultural heritage documentation, data collection, and dissemination infrastructure to establish new standards in the field; elevate the regional and national research repositories of living cultural heritage in collaboration with the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress

*Performer from the Lan Nartthasin Thai Dance Group at Promise Zone Arts Live! at Levitt Pavilion in MacArthur Park, Los Angeles in 2019. Photo: Timo Saarelma/ACTA.*





**“We understand the responsibility as a community to bring our ancestors to the forefront. Who they were, what they’ve endured, the triumphs, the trauma, understanding that they made it through because of their religious ceremonial rites. We stand on sacred ground in New Orleans.”**

**Michelle Gibson**

Second Line Artist

The New Orleans Original Buckshop



*Mary Jane Manigault, 1984 NEA National Heritage Fellow, is a basket maker in the Gullah Geechee tradition. Photo: Tom Pich Photography.*

## Introduction

Gullah Geechee elders have long taught that we “mus tek cyear a de root fa heal de tree”—we must take care of the roots to heal the tree.

America’s living cultural heritage is an essential feature of our national biography and is a critical component of individual and community identity. Each cultural community is rooted in a sense of belonging shared by its members and anchored by collective wisdom and aesthetics. The health and vitality of those underground roots, the taproots, contribute directly to the vigor of the community above ground.

These roots of cultural heritage are maintained, strengthened, and expanded through the practice of folk and traditional arts. From this field have emerged artists and works of great mastery, beauty, and meaning. Traditional arts and practices include music, dance, craft, oral tradition, and foodways among its myriad forms. From Mariachi musicians to Hmong textiles, from Appalachian storytelling to South Asian classical dance, these heritage ways are fundamentally important to both our collective American identity, and the vibrancy and cultural health of specific communities.

However, the nature of the United States as a settler-colonial nation, composed of hundreds of indigenous tribes and countless diasporic groups contending over notions of “American” culture, directly damages the roots of cultural heritage. The realities of slavery, genocide and displacement, structural racism, systemic poverty, cultural appropriation, and other historic harms have tested the strength of these cultural roots and created conditions for deepened cultural belonging. In this context, **traditional arts practices are potent acts of social belonging, power, and justice for cultural communities.**



*Ashley Julian (L) and Kendra White (Jicarilla Apache) wear traditional attire while demonstrating cooking in micaceous pottery created by culture-bearer Sheldon Nunez Velarde (Jicarilla Apache) based in Dulce, New Mexico. Photo: Cougar Vigil.*

Fundamental to the traditional arts is the **position of the artist or culture bearer as an organic community leader on the frontline of social justice work**. Their practices convene, inform, and inspire community members within a framework of cultural ways of knowing, lifting up local or ancestral knowledge and practices as a source of strength, resilience, and creativity to grapple with and counter disparities in health, education, jobs, and individual freedom. This framework of creative agency and community responsibility precedes, by decades, the contemporary interest in the artist as an animator of civil society. In this segment of the arts sector, the artist and community are integrated as a synergistic force for cultural vitality and aesthetic expression. The relationship demands *de facto* accountability between artists and their communities.

Most traditional artists—and the organizations, collectives, and informal networks of practice they lead—have never received the philanthropic investment that would allow them to realize long-term visions for change in their communities. There has been no concerted national effort to invest in, convene, or capitalize these artists and organizations. As a result, leaders of traditional art forms and the organizations they have founded lack the stability to strategize for the future. The constant effort to make-do with limited resources creates an artificial ceiling, constraining their ability to imagine and execute their art for maximal impact and scale. **Here, writ large, is a fundamental inequity in arts funding in the US.**

For the last quarter of a century, this gap in funding and infrastructural support has animated the work of the Alliance of California Traditional Arts (ACTA) within California and beyond. What we've learned through

decades of grantmaking, fieldwork, advocacy, and relationship-building is that traditional artists and traditional arts organizations often exist outside formal nonprofit organizational models and lack consistent identifying terminology, holistic data mapping, and targeted funding programs for field development. As a result, **the immense value and documented impact of the traditional arts in areas of racial equity, social justice, and community health are not well understood nor sufficiently visible at the national level.** In addition, many cultural heritage organizations do not meet the minimum budget threshold for funding foundations, which means their work consistently flies under the radar of private funders. Only 11% of foundation giving overall is awarded to arts and cultural institutions, and a small fraction of those funds go to organizations that center the traditional arts in their work. Instead, the majority of foundation funding goes to a small handful of multi-million-dollar organizations. **Traditional arts organizations, overwhelmingly led by people of color, have not received a fair share.**

In this report, *Tending the Taproot: Opportunities to Support Folk & Traditional Arts in the United States*, ACTA reviews findings from a recent qualitative and quantitative study of key needs of the field and offers recommendations for increasing investment in folk and traditional arts organizations and the artist-leaders at the center of these groups.

We describe the current landscape of infrastructure, resources, and barriers to continuity experienced by folk and traditional arts organizations and their artist leaders, as related in individual interviews and at convenings.

At this moment of country-wide reckoning with our legacy of racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, and amid an ongoing pandemic that threatens the most vulnerable of our people, it is critical that national, regional, and community efforts be mounted to bring long-deserved attention and support to these traditional artists. Their work embodies the highest level of artistic production and community organizing to advance the work of social justice. In this report, we offer actionable recommendations to achieve this goal.

### A Note on Terminology

The beauty of the folk and traditional arts lies in the breadth of art forms, practices, and cultural communities that make up the rich fabric of this field. Recognizing and respecting the specificity of diverse communities, their unique cultural treasures, and the distinct roles of individuals in maintaining those cultural treasures is a critical part of field-building in this sector.

The corresponding challenge lies in the lack of a unifying terminology for the field. In this report, we adopt the term “folk and traditional arts” to describe this diverse sector in alignment with the National Endowment for the Arts’ official classification.

We describe the artists, practitioners, elders, creators, and myriad other leaders in these forms as “traditional artists.” We acknowledge that some of these individuals may not self-identify with this term, and recognize that the terms “traditional” and “artist” do not fully embody the holistic nature of their work.

Appropriate nomenclature remains an open question in this field. In relation to the “taproot” metaphor we introduce in this report, we define “taproot artists” as those traditional artists whose work directly relates to the care and repair of a community’s cultural taproot.

**Intangible Knowledge Made Visible**

Learning traditional arts involves not only training in skills and techniques, but also in the deeper cultural aspects of values, protocol, and spirituality. This work can take place formally in apprenticeships and classes, or informally among kin and community members. The eminent folklorist Barre Toelken wrote of hosting a residency in Native California Hupa basket-making with master artist Elvira Matt. She first taught her students several Native songs, traditionally sung during the arduous gathering and preparation of weaving materials. When Matt finally began the weaving instruction, one of her students asked why so much time was spent learning songs, rather than on making baskets. She replied: “Well, after all, you know, a basket is a song that’s become visible.”

**What Are Taproots?**

We invoke the metaphor of the taproot, a term borrowed from botany, to describe a community’s central cultural root, growing downward to a considerable depth. This root spreads a network of secondary, tertiary, and many smaller root systems. **A community’s cultural taproot is comprised of ancestral knowledge and practices that embody the shared values, aesthetics, memory, language, and sacred knowledge.** However, the taproot is also solidly centered in future-thinking; as a source of knowledge, the taproot is an essential means by which communities build collective power, engage in healing, and strengthen their identity.<sup>1</sup>

Traditional artists and culture bearers are the primary caretakers of a community’s cultural knowledge. They act as vessels for taproot aesthetics and practices, stewarding cultural wealth within communities and ensuring its safe transmission to future generations. In this report, we refer to these artists as taproot artists to indicate their fundamental connection to the community’s cultural taproot and ways of knowing.

**What is the Taproot Initiative?**

In 2020, the ACTA launched the Taproot Initiative, a national planning effort to re-center the value of the traditional arts and artists as a catalyst for the transformative and restorative impact of arts on society (see Appendix A for Initiative Team). The goal: to formulate a plan of action to cultivate and support leading taproot artist-leaders to do more or do better. This has entailed a yearlong research and formation phase, including thought partnerships that have engaged artists, culture bearers, community leaders, and traditional arts advocates across the U.S. Our goal was to interrogate the gap in funding for taproot artists and organizations and create a series of recommendations aimed at bridging this chasm. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation generously supported the Initiative’s planning and research.

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<sup>1</sup> The taproot metaphor was first coined at a gathering convened by the National Endowment for the Arts and the McKnight Foundation in 2019. Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson suggested that the traditional arts provide “root repair from harms that have been done,” and Erik Takeshita, then with the Bush Foundation, elaborated the idea that traditional arts and artists are, in fact, “taproots” for communities, and need repair themselves.



*Hopi silversmithing students crafting hand-made stamps from steel taught by Gerald Lomaventema (Hopi). Photo: Dr. Atsunori Ito, National Museum of Ethnology, Minpaku.*

Completed in early 2022, the Taproot Initiative gathered quantitative and qualitative information in conjunction with researchers and through thought partnerships with key practitioners in the folk and traditional arts field. These taproot advisors, sited across the country, provided counsel on the research and planning process and subsequent study design and presentation. Dr. Maribel Alvarez of the University of Arizona served as a principal thought-partner in shaping the planning process, research design, and report.

**Quantitative research** interrogated the current field of traditional arts organizations, termed “Ethnic, Cultural, and Folk” (ECF) nonprofits. Dr. Carole Rosenstein, Associate Professor of Arts Management at George Mason University, scanned data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics, Candid (formerly known as the Foundation Center/Guidestar), and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies to identify the number, span, geographic location, and funding support of these organizations. The co-authors of this research report include Mirae Kim, PhD and Neville Vakharia, MS. (For key quantitative findings and biographies see Appendix D.)

**Qualitative research** began with the appointment of the 16 taproot advisors (see Appendix B for complete list of taproot advisors and their affiliations) representing artists, culture bearers, administrators, and advocates knowledgeable about the folk and traditional arts funding landscape. During two online convenings, the Taproot Advisors further refined ACTA’s understanding of cultural taproots, advised on the direction of qualitative research, and made recommendations regarding the selection of key interviewees to provide first-person accounts of the experience of taproot artists and organizations. Several advisors served as interview respondents themselves.

We created a selection rubric for the interviewees, aimed at constituting a cohort of diverse Indigenous, racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, immi-

grant, and non-conforming gendered perspectives. The interviewees also represent people in their 20s to their 80s, from urban, rural, and island locations across the U.S. Their traditional arts practices include dance, music, theater, storytelling, language perpetuation, foodways, and ritual arts. They encompass material arts such as Native basketry, silversmithing, and African American quilting. Practices typically cross many genres, as exemplified by Hawaiian hula, which is established by a chant that drives the movement and is followed by related arts of regalia-making (see Appendix C for complete list of interviewees).

Twenty-four (24), hour-long, semi-structured interviews were conducted by interviewers trained in ethnographic fieldwork. Interviews were recorded with permission, transcribed, and coded to seek broad themes and more specific insights from the field. Each interviewee received compensation and information on the Initiative and the interview questions, but interviews did not require advance preparation. Accordingly, they were conversational and, as with all stories, often led down unanticipated but illuminating paths.



*"Singing Praises to the Lord" by master quilter Carolyn Mazloomi. Image: Courtesy of the artist.*

We framed broad categories of research questions using metaphorical and ecological-systems thinking to instigate conversation across the following domains of findings:

## **01. SOIL CONDITIONS:**

What is your community dealing with/burdened by? Healing from? What needs care? What may be in disrepair?

## **02. CARE ACTIVITIES:**

What is the work? What does the practice of traditional arts do for your community? What does it heal, change, or counteract?

## **03. GARDENERS:**

Who takes part in taproot repair? How are knowledge and skills transmitted? What relations are at play? How are people interconnected?

## **04. TOOLS AND SUPPLIES:**

What supports your work? Curtails it? Who are your collaborators? What is your scaffold of leadership skills? What does sustainability require?

## **05. SCALE - DEPTH AND BREADTH:**

What are different ways of understanding scale? What happens underground? Which is more important: depth or breadth? What are your metrics of success?



# FINDINGS

*Mentor artist in Korean folk dance, DaEun Jung (R) with 2019 ACTA apprentice Melody Shim, at a studio in Los Angeles. Photo: Shweta Saraswat-Sullivan/ACTA.*



## 01. SOIL CONDITIONS:

### What nourishes the taproot? What harms it?

The interviews were designed to provide rich detail about the context—the soil condition—in which traditional arts are practiced, and the variegated roles they play. We hypothesized that in addition to maintaining the cultural fertility, vitality, and memory of the community soil, the taproot of traditional arts practice contributes directly to the healing of past and ongoing harms. To that end, we asked interviewees to share what requires ongoing care or repair in their communities. Two broad areas of significance emerged:

#### **Generational rootedness and identity:**

Interviewees revealed an ardent sense of belonging, realized by an innate relationship with their forebears and an understanding that traditional practices are meant to continue into the future. Maintaining this sense of belonging emerged as a driving force behind acts of taproot care. Actions that strengthen belonging include:

- A sense of responsibility to preserve the artist’s or culture bearer’s practice
- Leadership development through the practice and mastery of specific skills, and continuous organizing in community
- Dynamic innovation within the tradition by taproot artists

*Linda Yamane (L) and Vera Bocanegra Powers (Rumsen Ohlone) work together to prepare acorn, an indigenous food with cultural and medicinal significance to the Ohlone. Photo: Russell Rodriguez/ACTA.*



**“It’s such an enlightening thing to walk through your own land in your own way with your own knowledge. It’s been handed down to you, not from somebody else, from your own people. It’s priceless. It’s a gift from the creator that we’ve been handed. And it seems so simple, but it’s not.”**

**Alfred Bud Lane III**

Basket weaver and language teacher  
Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

- Centering intergenerational opportunities and settings
- Ally-ship with other communities based upon shared experiences of marginalization to create intercultural models of communication

**Response to historical trauma:** Our intention is not to characterize any community from a deficit perspective. Rather, we seek to articulate and center how cultural practices witness, validate, and serve as an antidote to historical and interconnected generational traumas. However, we heard repeatedly about historical trauma and its impact on communities. Interviewees cited these sources of generational trauma as ones that traditional arts and artists address:

- Systemic racism stemming from histories of slavery and colonization, which have led to traumatic legacies of historical poverty, health and wealth disparities, displacement, and gentrification
- Immigration whether voluntary or forced as the result of political, social, or physical violence, and the sense of being severed from one's homeland
- Compounding loss of elders, language, practices, ancestral knowledge, and land (among Native communities)
- Lack of understanding, visibility, or value for a community's unique cultural identity from outside the community

## TAKEAWAYS

**The characteristics of belonging and sources of harm are complex and multifaceted.** Both strength of identity and threats exert historical and present impact on community wellbeing. They represent nodes on an interconnected matrix of attributes of identity and burdens borne by cultural communities across the country. Generations of colonialist and white supremacist practices have literally robbed some communities of their languages, their property, and their health, challenging their very identity. But the practices of cultural heritage are a tonic for both the soil conditions and the communities they support - offering affirmative sources of belonging, connection, and healing. Acknowledging historical traumas, as well as the multiple ways these burdens manifest in community life today is critical to any program designed to support cultural taproots.



**“THOSE OF US THAT DO THIS  
KIND OF WORK, IT’S NOT  
THAT WE’RE SPECIAL. IT  
CALLS TO YOU, AND IT’S  
A CALL THAT YOU HAVE TO  
ANSWER.”**



### Sustaining the Root Through Political Erasure

## Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians US Northwest

In 1954, the official federal status of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians in the northwestern US was formally terminated by the government. According to Alfred Bud Lane III, a Siletz tribal elder, culture bearer, and board president of the Northwest Native American Basketweavers Association, the termination of the tribe's federal recognition was a severe blow to the already precarious cultural root of the Siletz people: "Even with federal recognition, our languages were really threatened, and our traditional arts were threatened by a lot of different forces. Societal exclusion is the worst, where people belittle you and make you feel ashamed of who you are for speaking your language. Many of the elders I worked with over the years would never even utter words in public. It just made me sick to think about what they went through, what happened to make them want to never be proud of that language." Advocacy among tribal members led to the reestablishment of the tribe's federal status in 1977. The investment and willpower of the tribal members then and now remind us that, despite external forces of harm, the rich commitment to belonging and generational connectivity continues to fertilize the soil around the community's cultural taproot. As Lane describes it, "Those of us that do this kind of work, it's not that we're special. It calls to you, and it's a call that you have to answer."

*Bud Lane III and Cheryl Lane (Siletz) pose with a pack basket and baby carrier woven by Bud Lane using hazel sticks and spruce roots. Photo: David Cournoyer/ First Peoples Fund.*



## 02. CARE ACTIVITIES:

**What is the work? What does the practice of traditional arts do for your community? What does it heal, change, or counteract?**

*Master batá drummer Juan Carlos Blanco Riera (R) and his 2010 ACTA apprentice Menelike Turner. Photo: Sherwood Chen/ACTA.*

Care activities to support taproot artists and their communities both safeguard traditions and push them into contemporary times. Several culture bearers referred to their work as “medicine” that heals individuals and communities—physically, emotionally and spiritually. While there are important nuances in the interviewees’ views, some universal insights underscored that **the practice of traditional arts provides care and that these practices can be a pathway for connection, healing, and building power within a community.** Interviewees emphasized the power of these heritage expressions to ground people by virtue of legacy. Such practices embody cultural values and aesthetics that are recognized by the community as their own and contribute to community care.

**Building generational identity and power:** Taproot artists are agents in building collective power. These individuals contribute to group identity through the transmission of their practices and acquired knowledge. While transmission typically occurs between generations, knowledge is also shared between people of the same generation.



**“Yes, people called. We told the mothers, we will come on the anniversary of your child’s death, on their birthday. Anything that you want, we will come at no charge to you. This is what we have to offer. So, we went until we couldn’t go, and we couldn’t go because of the pandemic.”**

**Wanda Ravernell**

Executive Director, Omnira Institute

In this circular system, an individual’s practice, in collaboration with their community, reinforces group identity which ultimately fortifies all. Traditional arts practices invert the dominant Western paradigm in the arts which valorizes individualism and solo talent. Here, group identity and practices fortify the community and nourish the innovator.

**Leadership:** Transmission methods (see Gardeners section, following) serve to assure leadership development among learners who will become the next generation of expert practitioners and teachers. Leadership means many things: artistic accomplishment, authority, flexibility, responsibility, and continuous role-modeling. The study and practice of traditional arts, thus, positively impacts other aspects of a participant’s life.

**The power of gathering through spaces, networks, media:** For refugees and immigrants, the safety of gathering in community—in one’s own language, with familiar foods—and participating in arts practices with origins in spiritual teachings offer a welcome respite from the challenges of acculturation. Whether the gathering is at a brick-and-mortar location, pop-up event, or virtual space, they offer critical lifelines to communities. For example, the Bronx Music Heritage Center, an essential hub for its Spanish-speaking community, is expanding to provide rehearsal rooms and recording studios for the many Caribbean American artists and community members who find a home there. Networks (guilds, fraternal or national associations) such as the Women of Color Quilters Network provide both a national convening and a vital communications core for its many elder members at high risk in these pandemic times. Broadcast radio offers other spaces of belonging, exemplified by the work of Radio Bilingüe, the largest Spanish-language public broadcasting network in the nation. Radio Bilingüe delivers content to migrant farm workers and the larger Latinx population of the U.S., providing wide-ranging cultural programming in Spanish and in multiple Indigenous languages of Mexico, supplemented by crucial pandemic health updates.

**Wellness and “medicine” as care interventions:** “Medicine” references the way in which some Indigenous and Native peoples speak of their cultural practices as the medicine of life. This terminology is increasingly being used by allied communities to signal that their practices can support, salve, or spiritually address what may need healing.



### Agents of Social Justice

## The Omnira Institute Oakland, CA

The shooting of Oscar Grant on New Year's Day 2011 at a transit stop in Oakland, CA was by no means the first incident of police violence against an unarmed African American man, but it was the event that spurred Wanda Ravernell and Tobaji Stewart, African American culture-bearers and priests in the Lucumi/Santeria tradition, to action. Their work is organized through the Omnira Institute, a nonprofit organization that holds an important educational role in Oakland. They were determined to bring the medicine of Yoruba-based ritual to a grieving community. At sites of violence throughout Oakland, they built altars, poured libations, activated the sacred bata drums, and sang prayers. To date, the members of Omnira Institute have traveled considerable distances to honor bereaved and traumatized families who find the power of ritual drum, song, and altars to be valued healing moments.

Omnira also provides program content for Black History Month to schools, plans an annual Juneteenth commemoration, and more recently has created and curated Oakland's Black-Eyed Pea Festival. The throughline in all of this work is to make African cultural connections visible to the Oakland African American community as realized in foodways, ring shouts, spirituals, dance and music, and rich storytelling traditions. There is much joy to this work, Wanda Ravernell explains, but perhaps Omnira's greatest calling to date has been to repeatedly stand witness at the sites where African American men have been killed due to police action.

*Members of the Omnira Institute gather to perform ceremonies to honor ancestors and comfort bereaved community members in the Bayview-Hunter's Point neighborhood of San Francisco, CA in 2018. Photo: Lily Kharrazi/ ACTA.*

While not all communities use the term in the way that Native peoples do, a wide range of traditional arts practitioners are delivering health services to communities that may otherwise not receive them. One such example is the House and Ball community of Los Angeles, where the community organization Reach LA hosts competitive voguing balls for queer men and trans people of color. Planting the seeds of preventive care, free HIV testing is a prerequisite to attendance. Here, the community's time-honored arts activities are cultivated and deployed to organize, safeguard, and care for its members with novel, and potentially lifesaving, traditions.

**Recognition is a care activity:** Folk and traditional arts have been marginalized or ignored in national and philanthropic funding policies, which renders the sector largely invisible to the American public. Discussed elsewhere are issues that stem from mistaken but widespread stereotypes in which folk and traditional arts are depicted as calcified, unchanging practices. But this issue goes deeper than language and stereotype. One reason for the absence of support may be rooted in fear of “the other,” rooted in white supremacist values. As the demographics of America become a racial and ethnic plurality, arenas where white Western cultural dominance is present have become increasingly contested. **Taproot artists and their communities offer a vision of who and what American arts are (and can be) that embraces multiple aesthetics and worldviews.**

External validation is a vital care strategy, important for acceptance, respect, and equity. Public agencies have provided some of the necessary recognition. The National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowship—the highest governmental honor bestowed on traditional artists in the US—is a high-profile example of recognition and has honored more than 430 individuals from every state since 1982. NEA-funded programs supporting folk and traditional arts exist in 46 states, regions, and territories, but programs vary in scope and support is not available nationwide.

In recent years, several private foundations have instituted programs to support traditional artists. These include the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, which funds dedicated regional Folk Arts programs in the Upper Mid-West and Appalachia; Creative Work Fund supporting the creative collaborations of artists and organizations in making new work in the greater San Francisco Bay Area; and the national United States Artists

fellowships funding for traditional artists. In 2021, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation made 10 awards of \$150,000 each to traditional artists, enabling them to create ambitious new works that will speak to a large audience. These are welcome developments but serve to underscore the relative paucity of programs focused specifically on folk and traditional artists and their exemplary practitioners.

## TAKEAWAYS

**Care activities center transmission and build power.** Traditional arts are generative processes that contribute both to the vitality of the art forms themselves and to cultural organizing. These art forms and their leading practitioners convey cultural history and meaning from one generation to the next, both affirming identity and boosting community power. The act of gathering provides safe spaces for taproot artists and communities to advance creative practices and nourish cohesion. Outside recognition enables artists to sustain their work, to dream bigger, and to develop greater potential within their practices. Creating visibility and external validation of this realm of practice provides leveraging opportunities for new sources of support.

### **Building Intergenerational Community Leadership**

## **Angkor Dance Troupe Lowell, MA**

Linda Chan Flynn, child of Cambodian refugees, dance artist, and now second-generation leader of the Angkor Dance Troupe located in Lowell, MA, exemplifies this phenomenon. Linda grew up surrounded by the sounds and sights of the Khmer classical dance and music ensemble co-founded by her father. Primed for leadership, she advocated for educational opportunities and interceded to bridge language access issues on behalf of family members with less English fluency. Always, she was steeped in two, often-contradictory, cultures. Today, Chan Flynn is a health advocate for marginalized communities in Lowell, and her training as an artist, along with her bi-cultural history and professional path reinforce a scaffolding of leadership capacity.



### 03. GARDENERS:

#### Who Engages in Taproot Care and Repair?

To effectively support taproot care and repair activities, we must understand the ecosystem of taproot support and the broad landscape of individuals and organizations who work within it. The gardeners, or stewards, of traditional arts-based care activities transmit practices and knowledge between generations within a cultural community. These interdisciplinary endeavors can encompass lessons in language, history, theology, mythology, philosophy, social etiquette, and other culture-specific beliefs and practices that are embedded within traditional art forms.

Our research and field experience suggest that gardeners comprise five broadly defined categories: **individuals** who participate in traditional arts practices, **community-based collectives and organizations** that generate community interest and offer localized infrastructure, **service organizations** such as First People's Fund and the Philadelphia Folklore Project, which offer services, resources, and advocacy across communities of practice, **knowledge centers** that foster the art forms and increase visibility for traditional arts practitioners, and **funders** who provide critical financial support. Together, these gardeners represent the extensive, interconnected ecosystem of taproot care. These entities are not mutually exclusive; rather, the ecosystem involves significant hybridity and fluidity between formal and

*Los Angeles-based artists Peter de Guzman and Jasmine Orpilla demonstrate Pangalay dance from the Philippines at a gathering of traditional artists and cultural workers at the TARS event in Los Angeles, 2019. Credit: Timo Saarelma.*



**“One of the biggest things that I think unfortunately still rings true almost 40 years later, is that when my dad and his peers founded the Angkor Dance Troupe there was no understanding by the public why my traditional dance needed to be preserved. It’s still just a nicety. I think that’s a common perspective placed on art forms because it’s pleasurable to watch. But when you link Khmer traditional and classical dance to human values, like my identity and who I am and that it’s grounded me and my connection to my parents’ history and my community’s history and how that’s shaped and informed me, how do we build that value add-in as a regular part of our community’s life in Lowell?”**

**Linda Chan Flynn**

Cambodian American artist, Angkor Dance Troupe  
Lowell, MA

informal structures as well as between the work of individuals, collectives, and other entities.

**Individual practitioners uniquely convey a community’s cultural**

**inheritance:** At the center of most modes of taproot care and sustainability are artist leaders and cultural practitioners who serve as critical repositories of aesthetics, knowledge, and practice who sustain and evolve the traditions. Transmission from elders and expert practitioners takes place within formal structures such as classes, multimedia documentation, and formal apprenticeships, as well as informally within families or within a community. The role of kinship and family networks in the intergenerational transmission of cultural practices and ancestral knowledge is a hallmark of this field. Gardeners, tending the root of community practice, impart lineages of contributions, leadership, and artistic standards.

**Community-based collectives and organizations, centers of cultural**

**practice:** These entities often host events to connect practitioners with community members, offer physical space for arts practice, administer educational programs, and support the financial or material needs of the artists, where possible. Many groups are practitioner-led and sometimes go well beyond artistic training and production to offer wrap-around social services like childcare, legal resources, or job training. Responding to contexts where entire cultural legacies were systematically shattered by colonialist and white supremacist values, community-based organizations offer healing from trauma, cultural revivification, and active resistance through cultural practice rooted in community values. These practices remain central to establishing intergenerational networks of support, communal gathering, and collective action. Community-based organizations exist at different scales. **Some function as loosely organized collectives** powered solely by the conviction and willpower of individual practitioners and advocates. Because of their informal, unincorporated status, many of these groups are invisible to funders or government agencies. Many do organize within the nonprofit structure, and most operate with small budgets, under \$25,000. At another tier are **mid-sized and larger organizations** with budgets ranging from \$25,000 to over \$1M, funded by grants, capital investments, membership programs, and fees for service. These are often helmed by culture bearers or co-led by administrative and artistic staff. These larger organizations often act as fiscal sponsors for individual artists or informal collectives, facilitating grant funds to reach their projects. Dr. Rosenstein identified 7,250



**“MY DAD DID NOT START THIS DANCE TROUPE BECAUSE HE WAS A DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR OR MARKETING SPECIALIST OR ANY OF THE THINGS THAT YOU PUT UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF NONPROFIT RESPONSIBILITIES. HE LEARNED HOW TO DANCE AT A REFUGEE CAMP, AND HE WANTED TO TEACH IT TO HIS KIDS...”**



**Thousands of Years of Artistic Legacy Transplanted**

## The Angkor Dance Troupe Lowell, MA

Linda Chan Flynn’s professional bio begins in this way: “Daughter of Cambodian refugees, I was born and raised in Lowell.” This declaration by the second-generation Khmer American artist and health advocate is a statement affirming her path to leadership. She grew up with the Angkor Dance Troupe, a nationally recognized U.S.-based Cambodian traditional arts organization and now holds many leadership roles there. Established in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1986 by her father, Tim Thou, and a passionate group of Cambodian refugees, their sole purpose was to revive the near decimation of their culture following the genocidal rampage of the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975-1979. Surrounded by the sounds of instruments, the ornate gestural language of the dance, as well as the Khmer language and spiritual teachings, Linda also learned to be assertive in helping the multigenerational troupe adapt to American norms to stay viable. After 35 years, many cultural aspects of the troupe’s operation still do not easily translate into the non-profit model; charging a fee to send dancers to bless an event, for example, contravenes spiritual teachings within the practice. “My dad did not start this dance troupe because he was a development director or marketing specialist or any of the things that you put under the umbrella of nonprofit responsibilities. He learned how to dance at a refugee camp, and he wanted to teach it to his kids... But there’s definitely a lot more added pressure on this small, local nonprofit that is a passion project of my dad’s. To this day [he] is still trying so hard to build an infrastructure that is sustainable.”

*Angkor Dance Troupe artists perform Robam Trot for Khmer New Year to bring prosperity and happiness to the community in Lowell, MA. Photo: Courtesy of Angkor Dance Troupe.*

nonprofit organizations in operation in the US under the Ethnic, Cultural and Folk (ECF) category (see Appendix D for key quantitative findings). Beyond 501(c)3 nonprofits, however, lie scores of other traditional arts organizations and artist leaders. For example, IRS data do not include the 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribal entities, small and large, which fund and support Indigenous cultural practices and native language. These categorizations are also insufficient at representing the uniquely cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary organizations where traditional arts practices are embedded within healthcare, social work, economic development, education, environmental stewardship, and other efforts. As taproot practices rooted in community care, the traditional arts serve as pillars in multidisciplinary organizations and, as such, are not always captured by data that look only at ECF or “art” categorizations. While the field has not been fully mapped, our peers and thought-partners agree it is considerably broader and more nuanced than that painted by government statistics—a strength for the taproots, but a challenge for comprehensive study.

**Service organizations connect taproot entities to multiple opportunities and resources:** Service organizations exist between culture- or practice-specific organizations and play an indispensable role in building networks, distributing resources, and offering support to traditional artists. They provide funding for performances and projects, offset costs of equipment and travel (and, occasionally, living expenses), document culture bearers’ work, and offer a variety of other lifeline services that enable artists to continue to deepen their artistic practice and influence within and outside their communities. Service organizations engage in re-granting, technical assistance, fieldwork, convening, interpretation and information services, and advocacy.

**Institutional knowledge centers as partners for the field:** Knowledge centers such as universities, museums, theaters, archives, festival organizers, research centers, and other curating organizations are additional nodes in the taproot ecosystem. By providing opportunities for collaboration, exhibition, presentation, education, inquiry, and engagement, these institutions provide a key platform for recognition of taproot care work. Many of our interviewees report that building one-on-one relationships with individual professors, curators, and presenters at these institutions has led to increased visibility, greater funding, new opportunities to monetize their practice, and vital networking with other artists, leaders, and funders.

Within knowledge centers, cultural heritage archives act as important repositories of unique “primary source/primary voice” collections and information. Archives containing collections of traditional knowledge and practice (whether national or focused on a specific community or region) ensure long-term preservation and accessibility of these primary resources that are often unavailable to source communities (particularly BIPOC, immigrant, refugee, and other marginalized communities), nor broadly available via mainstream cultural publications and education networks. Many cultural heritage archives provide important services and resources to individual artists and other cultural leaders interested in deepening and enhancing their community’s connections to past taproot practices and knowledge, including language, music, storytelling, and community oral history. In our digital age, with information seemingly everywhere, it is nonetheless fragile and inaccessible if hidden behind paywalls. Thus, archives play a critical, dual role in safeguarding and proliferating taproot practices alongside the efforts of artists and culture bearers.

**Funders, the linchpin of growth and sustainability:** Funders such as philanthropic foundations, nonprofit intermediaries and government entities at the local, state, and national level help sustain taproot care through fellowships, grants, and investment in stabilizing the infrastructure of



Master artist Snigdha Venkatramani (L) trains her 15-year-old apprentice Anagaa Nathan, in the south Indian classical dance form bharatanatyam, at the Sri Maha Kaleshwar Temple in Santa Clara, CA. Photo: Shweta Saraswat-Sullivan/ACTA.



smaller organizations and collectives. Many taproot artists rely on these funders to sustain their practice through project-based support, general operating support, or artist fellowships. Funders are well-positioned to act as advocates for taproot artists and their communities—funding priorities they select can determine the financial future of taproot artists.

*Students in an Afro-Colombian Drumming workshop taught by Alberto Lopez and Eduardo Martinez at Chuckawalla State Prison in 2018, as part of ACTA's Arts in Corrections program. Photo: Peter Merts.*

## TAKEAWAYS

**Support of Gardeners supports the ecosystem.** Funding traditional arts practice takes place in an ecosystem with multiple nodes. Individual artists and community-based organizations are the principal cultivators of taproot work, engaging in the direct practice of transmission. Support from knowledge centers and service organizations bolster the work of the artists and organizations and create the webbing and networks that nourish the field. Funders, whether giving direct support to artists, or investing in community-based service organizations or institutional knowledge centers, help to advance sustainability. Together, these entities contribute to the growth and continued nourishment of cultural taproots.



**“We’ve learned over the years how to operate on a tight, tight budget. This is one of the reasons why we have not reached younger people... we have not had ... classes for younger people to entice them to learn quilt-making because it takes money and manpower.... We never had that kind of money to properly teach.”**

**Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi**

African American Quilter

Founder, Women of Color Quilters Network

## 04. TOOLS AND SUPPLIES:

### What supports taproot care work? What stunts it?

To understand sustainability from the viewpoint of taproot artists and administrators, we asked interviewees to reflect on the tools and supplies that support their work, as well as persistent gaps in support that threaten the sustainability of taproot care in their community.

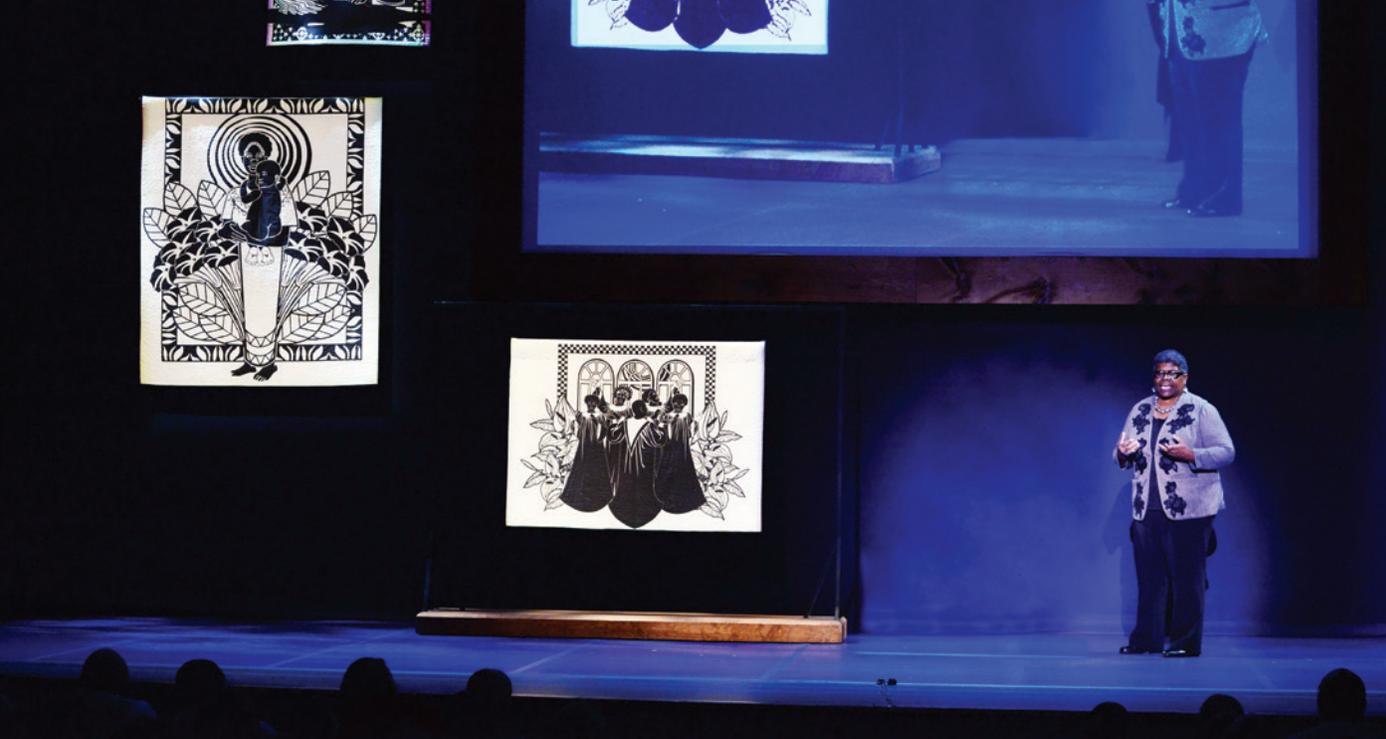
**The importance of community champions and engagement:** Community engagement requires a multitude of activities by its members. These include cultural events, maintaining heritage transmission and artistic development, assuming leadership responsibilities as both artists and administrators, and fundraising. With little to no sustained external funding, folk and traditional arts community members contribute substantial unpaid labor to these sustainability activities. These activities can be as visible as volunteering to direct a large-scale community dance production, or as easily overlooked as the donation of outgrown costumes from one child to the next. This ongoing, unpaid commitment underscores the degree to which taproot care within these communities is considered essential work.

**The benefits of cross-sectoral networking and connection:** Caretakers appreciate opportunities for co-learning and resource-sharing among communities. They rely on one another for news of opportunities, advice on navigating the funding landscape, and for education about successful models to increase visibility and impact. Service organizations dedicated to the folk and traditional arts field fill this role at larger scale, creating opportunities for knowledge-sharing among disparate cultural groups. As well, these convenings provide an advocacy forum for folk and traditional artists' cross-sectoral work in social justice, health, and other fields. Finally, institutional knowledge centers—and individual actors within them—are another key source of connection, and access to additional opportunities for funding, visibility, and growth. However, unless the work is seen as fundamentally valuable, it often recedes from institutional priorities once the individual champions of the taproot artists move on.

**The exhaustion of chronic precarity:** Nearly every interviewee emphasized the urgent need for greater sustained and flexible funding. Without it, many taproot artists remain in a state of perpetual insecurity that threatens the continuity of their practices and organizations. Artists and administrators are often not paid for their work; materials for art practice and learning are supported by dipping into their own pockets. Among the few available grant mechanisms, application criteria and adjudication panels are often not knowledgeable about the unique needs of this field. When these artists do receive external funding, the duration is often short and



**“I’M 75. WHEN I’M GONE, I HAVE NOBODY THAT WILL MAINTAIN THE WOMEN OF COLOR QUILTERS NETWORK. SO IF YOU LOOK AT WHAT WE HAVE PRESENTED OVER THE PAST 40 YEARS AS A UNIT—THAT WILL BE GONE, AND IT WILL BE A HUGE HOLE IN THE TRADITIONAL ARTS COMMUNITY.”**



### An Uncertain Future in the Pandemic's Wake

## The Women of Color Quilters Network West Chester, OH

Master quilter and 2014 NEA  
National Heritage Fellow  
Carolyn Mazloomi. Photo:  
Tom Pich Photography.

The Women of Color Quilters Network is a national organization dedicated to the practice and promotion of African American quilting. Founder and director Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi, an accomplished quilter and force of nature in advocacy, organizes national exhibitions, educational programs, and other resource-sharing opportunities for the wider African American quilting community. The Network was founded to support the work of independent quilters and arm them with an understanding of the monetary value of their work in the art marketplace as public demand for their quilts increased. According to Mazloomi, “Just by word of mouth, the organization grew and became about preservation, presenting, and teaching... this was one of the art forms that Black folks participated in as marginalized people that gave us a voice. ... This is what quilts and art should be about—invoking change in human beings and providing these difficult conversations.”

Mazloomi is the sole administrator. Without operational support, she has no funds to attract a successor. The precarity of the organization is underscored by the fact that the quilters in the Network are almost all over the age of 70. COVID-19 has exacted a terrible mortality; indeed, the Network’s membership has dwindled from a high of 1,500 at one point to roughly 500. In Mazloomi’s own words: “I’m 75. When I’m gone, I have nobody that will maintain the Women of Color Quilters Network. So if you look at what we have presented over the past 40 years as a unit—that will be gone, and it will be a huge hole in the traditional arts community. It will be a huge hole in the American quilt making community.”



rigid spending directives do not permit adaptive allocation of funds according to the grantee's own judgment about evolving needs. Without reliable salary support, it is difficult to recruit a younger generation of administrators, organizers, and practitioners. Succession planning is extremely difficult, and elder artists struggle to identify their inheritors. These limitations imperil the future of taproot care work and risk the health and wellbeing of numerous communities of color across the US.

## TAKEAWAYS

**Efforts to make-do with limited local resources showcase the ingenuity and will-power of these taproot caregivers and communities.** Yet, this resourcefulness also enforces a low ceiling for traditional artists. Their ability to imagine and execute their arts to the highest standards and to build their organizations to sustainable scale are sadly limited. Any program designed to address these funding and support disparities must consider the historic underfunding of the traditional arts sector and the impacts of this longstanding condition, as well as the supports that taproot caretakers report that they require: engaged individuals and communities; connections across cultures, practices, and sectors; and sustained, informed, and flexible funding. Addressing the inequity in U.S. arts funding requires pioneering and informed support to bolster and elevate the scores of vibrant, essential traditional arts practitioners in our communities.

*Tableau from a 2019 Danza Azteca class with instructor Marty Natividad, as part of ACTA's Arts in Corrections program at Substance Abuse Treatment Facility and California State Prison in Corcoran. Photo: Peter Merts/California Arts Council.*



**“It’s really important,  
the narrative that we  
tell ourselves, the work  
we do internally with our  
partners and our friends.  
We have to bring their ideas  
into our work so that they  
see themselves in the  
outcome. It’s about flexibility.  
It’s about development.  
It’s about trust. It’s about  
keeping the mission alive.”**

**Alexander Gibson**

Executive Director, Appalshop

Whitesburg, KY

## SCALE:

### Depth and Breadth

Thirty years ago, when the entire workforce of Mexican seamstresses was laid off from the Levi Strauss factory in San Antonio, TX, the women organized to protect their livelihoods and established the organization Fuerza Unida, or United Force. Today, Fuerza Unida creates traditional Mexican regional clothing and household textiles while continuing to advocate for all aspects of their community's wellbeing:

*“The historia de nosotros (our history), our reality, we came from the bottom, we didn't start in the middle and arribar (arrive), no, ya bajo en pensando (I'm already thinking about) how we knew nothing about organizing, we didn't know the language. We didn't know the system. We didn't know how the police worked. We didn't know the political system and who makes decisions. All that we had to learn. And now we want to inform our members of our community to learn about that, too.”*—**Petra Mata**, Community activist and co-founder, Fuerza Unida, San Antonio, TX

Scale, depth, and dissemination are paths to current and future sustainability. For taproot artists and their communities, appropriate scaling of their activities, whether to individuals who will be the next generation leaders, small groups, or to national audiences, advances the artistic practices themselves, and contributes to long-term community stability. Importantly, each community determines its own metrics of impact and success in line with its internal values. Broad distribution of practice is one possible goal; others may center on continuing activities and traditions that ensure deep intergenerational work will endure. Breadth activities and depth of practice are both highly valued and taproot artists operate seamlessly and simultaneously in each mode. Our interviewees described their visions for scale across this hybrid continuum.

**Individualized instruction reaches deeply into communities:** While seemingly small in scale, mentorship, often taking the form of one-on-one apprenticeships, has outsized effects. This “deep practice” is particularly salient for communities whose traditions have been suppressed or are under threat. For Native Hawaiians, the sounds of their near dormant language come alive through traditional hula chant; the practices of Bomba y Plena, the Afro-Puerto Rican dance and music traditions found in diaspora communities affirm that their history is alive through the art they continue to create from generation to generation.

**Cross-sectoral work is a strategy that requires scaling broadly:** Arts practices do not exist separate from community life, and the path to activism with “breadth



### Representing an Entire Landscape

## The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor US Southeast

Championed by Gullah Geechee residents and allies, a 2006 Act of Congress established the Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor as a National Heritage Area under the National Park Service. The Corridor is a hub for advocacy and preservation, uniting communities across 43 counties in coastal North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. In the words of the Corridor’s former Executive Director, Heather Hodges, reliable annual funding is a primary benefit of formal government designation: “We’re not in a constant fundraising posture for survival. That is probably the key benefit for the community.”

With the federal investment, the Corridor is able to offer technical assistance for the interpretation and documentation of Gullah Geechee culture and promotion of heritage tourism. Public programming in service of the traditional arts economy—which includes sweetgrass basketry, ironworking, language preservation, sacred music, herbalism, indigo dyeing, and more—is a key feature. According to Hodges, “...a lot of what we do is about providing a platform. What the artists themselves are doing, a lot of it is rooted in helping forge and cement a sense of collective identity. When we talk about 43 counties, we’re talking about people living on a small island as well as people living in downtown Charleston. They have very different lived experiences on a daily basis.” By supporting the diversity of local Gullah Geechee identities, arts, and practices, the 12,000-square mile Corridor is a critical model for federal infrastructure support that advances both the breadth and depth of taproot care work in Gullah Geechee communities.

*The Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters of Darien, Georgia, teaching community members how to do a traditional “ring shout” at a community festival at the 2016 Geechee Kunda Cultural Center in Riceboro, Georgia. Photo: Heather Hodges.*



*Left: Members of Los Originarios del Plan performing at the Madera flea market to promote pandemic safety as part of the ACTAvando ContraCovid project aired on Radio Bilingüe in 2021. Photo: Jenn Emerling/ACTA.*



*Right: Dancing to the Mixtec Chilena band Grupo Recreación at La Fiesta Patronal de San Juan Mixtepec, in Arvin, CA, co-sponsored by Radio Bilingüe. Photo: Hugo Morales/Radio Bilingüe.*

activities” is a frequent theme reported by interviewees. These are often achieved by working across sectors to address a community’s pressing needs, such as economic support, access to healthcare, and other social imperatives. For Kentucky-based Appalshop, a hybrid nature as an arts organization embedded within an ethos of civic leadership has led to surprising developments. Appalshop documents and disseminates the spectrum of traditional and contemporary Appalachian storytelling arts. Using regional storytelling artists and techniques, they have advocated for bringing solar power to eastern Kentucky, where coal and fossil fuel extraction have often resulted in devastating environmental and health outcomes. After the historic 1,000-year floods that devastated Whitesburg and the wider area in July 2022, Appalshop artists and staff were first responders and facilitators of mutual aid laying the groundwork for rebuilding in the years ahead. Appalshop leadership installed solar panels on their own office/pavilion, offering electricity access to the whole community. Exerting leadership to benefit the community at large is how traditional arts leadership can assert their cross-sectoral relevance.

**Approaching scale through depth and breadth impacts communities:** Radio Bilingüe presents an example of an organization simultaneously focusing hyper-locally and scaled across a broad geography in their position as the national Latinx public radio network and content producer. An empowering voice for Latinx and under-served communities, Radio Bilingüe broadcasts in the Spanish-language as well as other Indigenous languages of Mexico with the express intent of reaching migrant farm workers. They produce cultural programming, offer traditional music of Latin America, and broadcast vital information through the airwaves. Regional and vernacular forms of music that represent the plethora of Latinx cultural aesthetics make this platform an effective medium. Their broader impact reaches into more communities via national affiliates. From the launch of a single station, Radio Bilingüe now owns and operates 25 full power FM stations with 84 affiliates across the US and Mexico.

**Networks provide visibility for advocacy and advancement:** Networks and affinity groups like guilds strengthen collaborations and help to unify advocacy efforts.



**“So there’s all these different wounds or incidents of poverty that these families have to deal with. And I think the camaraderie and the friendship that comes through and the connection with our music on the air and the voices of other Mixtecos makes us feel at home and makes us forget all that pain and difficulties you may find, and find comfort in the fact that some of the folks may be dancing to the music and also remembering the village and remembering your hometown and hearing voices from Oaxaca or San Quentin of people actually talking and saying that things there are OK. It makes you be able to relax a little bit and remind yourself that, things can be OK.”**

**Hugo Morales**

Co-Founder + Executive Director

Radio Bilingüe, Fresno, CA



Critical issues such as the effects of climate change on the growing and gathering of natural materials for Indigenous basket weavers or regalia makers impact entire communities. Heritage networks have coordinated to successfully advocate for policy changes with the US Park Service and local authorities to maintain access to materials that may be in more remote locations. Additionally, for taproot artists who produce material goods, the safeguarding of artistic heritage and the custodial function a network or guild can provide assures that collectors do not underpay artists for their work.

Interviewees emphasize that formal and informal networks provide camaraderie and connection in addition to safeguarding and complementing circles of learning. West African dance and music immersive workshops that are held on an annual basis in Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Oakland, and Hawaii are one such network. These multi-day workshops provide training to new and returning students, foster relationships between émigré virtuoso artists, and create economic opportunities for these culture bearers. Panel discussions on topics such as curriculum development for the teaching of West African dance outside of the academy or the effects of gun violence on particular communities have been topics for gatherings. These communities of practice are unified through time and distance by their allegiance to these annual events.

**Achieving scale through breadth and/or depth hinges on resources:** In addition to volunteer grassroots fundraising, taproot communities with brick-and-mortar spaces often leverage their assets through the rental of their buildings, recording studios, classrooms, and more, generating income by reaching within or beyond their communities. Breadth of practice may also expand a traditional arts practice in novel ways. For Hopi silversmith Gerald Lomaventema, teaching women an art that was once the exclusive domain of tribal men has introduced more artists to Native art marketplaces and the wider commercial network, significantly contributing to these artists' income. Many of the examples discussed in this report speak to the adaptability and resiliency of traditional arts. Yet, the hard reality of being under-resourced or lacking access to funding is a repeating theme. Examples abound from our interviewees: funding shortfalls directly impact the production of gatherings, annual festivals and celebrations, and workshops. Such gatherings provide a crucial nexus of learning, conviviality, and group strength and identity, frequently serving as bridging opportunities to invite others to share a community's cultural treasures. Although of short duration, their evergreen place on a community's calendar belies the extraordinary effort in management and volunteerism required year-round to bring these events to fruition. Managing the logistics for these key community scaling events pulls the taproot artist's focus away from their work as artists and teachers.



Even well-established traditional arts organizations with a beloved public presence may be overlooked for funding and cannot scale as they would like. The experience of the Angkor Dance Troupe in Lowell, MA, a part of the city's arts ecology for 36 years, is illustrative. While featured on city websites and brochures to heighten the city's diverse profile and acknowledge its large Southeast Asian émigré population, the company still struggles to secure sustainable funding from public and private sources. (see Gardeners section)

*Members of the Bangladesh Academy of Fine Arts perform at the Bronx Music Heritage Center in 2020. Photo: Saba Aragui.*

## TAKEAWAYS

**Taproot organizational scale can be deep and/or broad, and often moves along a continuum for artists and organizations.** These groups' metrics of effectiveness are based upon community-derived values. Focusing small and local or big and broad are both highly significant and effective strategies. However, depth practices and breadth activities are all undercapitalized, limiting meaningful programs' reach and impact. Vital and creative taproot artists often express exhaustion and indicate that undercapitalization can temper their ability to dream beyond basic workability. This all-too-frequent scenario could be ameliorated by more sustained funding, ensuring that traditional arts are scaled to reach the stability they require.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

*Members of La Familia Feliz with National Poet Laureate Emeritus, Juan Felipe Herrera (back R) after performing at the Madera flea market to promote pandemic safety as part of the ACTAvando Contra Covid project, 2021. Photo: Jenn Emerling/ACTA.*

The Taproot Initiative has enhanced and confirmed our understanding of traditional arts practice as an ever-evolving creative movement grounded in community-centered processes, and it has underscored the relevance and value of these practices to our time in U.S. history. These are the deeply rooted, living cultural expressions of people who have been historically marginalized, notably Black and Brown people, Indigenous people, rural people, and immigrants from all over the world. They are critical to individual and group identity and are embodiments of how communities make sense of their experience, muster their collective history, and creatively assert their humanity and raise their voices.

**The quantitative and qualitative components of the Taproot research underscore what is widely known but inadequately documented: this field suffers from a profound and longstanding pattern of under-investment and disregard from both public and private philanthropic sources.** The Folk and Traditional Arts program at the National Endowment for the Arts is the smallest of the agency's programs—granting approximately \$3M per year, less than 2% of the agency's grantmaking. Similarly, where they exist in state and regional arts agencies, folk and traditional arts programs are only modestly supported. In private philanthropy, funding has been both erratic and inadequate. Since the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Community Folklife Program ended in the late 1990s and the Fund for Folk Culture in 2009, there have been no national philanthropic programs focused on this field's development. Recent initiatives by United States Artists and the Hewlett Foundation's Commissioning program to fund traditional artists are encouraging signs, but their scope is limited—the number of traditional artists recognized in these programs is disproportionately low compared with the number of exemplary artists producing meaningful work in their communities. Such efforts further underscore the gap between the diverse opportunities that traditional and folk arts offer philanthropic investors and the actual resources that funders make available to practitioners and the larger field.

Based on the Taproot research and ACTA's 25 years of work in this sector, we offer four recommendations for action that could significantly strengthen core elements of these taproots. These recommendations elevate the public visibility of this dynamic realm of artistic expression and lay the groundwork for more accurate taxonomies and data-gathering, to better understand the unique contours and contributions of this field.



Top: Master percussionist Faisal Zedan worked with 2019 ACTA Apprentice Nicole Hoffschneider to train her in Arabic frame drumming in the Bay Area. Photo: Courtesy of the artists.

Middle: Garifuna American Heritage Foundation dance and music ensemble perform at an ACTA event co-hosted by Grand Performances in downtown Los Angeles in 2012. Photo: Abel Gutierrez.

Lower left: Percussionist Tacuma King works with 2016 ACTA Apprentice Rumi Hawthorne-Vaughan on West African rhythms in Oakland, CA. Photo: Sherwood Chen/ACTA.

Lower right: Karen refugee community members who immigrated from Myanmar continue backstrap weaving in their new San Diego home. Photo: courtesy Karen Organization of San Diego, 2016.





*Lavagem Festival participants pose in samba regalia outside of the BrasArte Brazilian Cultural Center, Berkeley CA. Photo: Lily Kharrazi/ACTA.*

## 01. INVEST IN TAPROOT ARTISTS AND CULTURE BEARERS

Artists and tradition bearers are the heart and soul of the field—they are the vessels and caretakers of the taproots that sustain the cultural soil of their communities and nourish the ties between previous generations and those to come. Thousands of these artists operate in every genre, from mariachi music to Palestinian embroidery, from traditional Delta blues to Khmer classical dance. Masters in each form weave a profound understanding of the art form’s ancestral tradition with their own individual creative sensibility, and all combine these threaded talents with deep commitment to their cultural community and its welfare.

### What is needed:

- **Sustained fellowships for master artists.** Significant, multi-year, unrestricted support for individual artists will capitalize their ongoing practice and help them plan for the future.
- **Operating support for artists’ cultural enterprises.** Many taproot artists have created entities to support their work and serve their communities. These nonprofit and commercial enterprises, frequently relatively small, play numerous sustaining roles, particularly in offering events for their communities and transmitting cultural practices to the next generation.
- **Large-scale, multi-year project support.** Taproot artists and their entities are rarely eligible for large-scale, multi-year project support offered by private funding sources. Like their counterparts elsewhere in the arts sector, taproot artists need multi-faceted support—to travel and conduct research, to employ and work with valued partners, to plan and realize multi-dimensional events, and to document outcomes.
- **Technological support.** Taproot artists—often based in low-income and under-resourced communities—suffer from a lack of access to technological infrastructure and training to make effective use of these tools, from computer hardware and software to broadband access. These tools could be addressed in fellowships, operating support, and the project support suggested above.



## 02. INVEST IN ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUSTAIN THE TAPROOT ECOSYSTEM

A diverse cohort of organizations operate at the local, state, regional, or national level to sustain and advance the work of culture bearers and traditional artists. They employ artists; organize cultural events, convenings and networking; and engage in fundraising and regranting. They also manage publicity and communications, conduct field research and documentation, and more. They may focus on a particular art form, a specific geography, or an ethnic or cultural identity. Examples include the California Indian Basketweavers Association, the North American Taiko Alliance, the national Women of Color Quilters Network, City Lore, and the Southwest Folklife Alliance; there are hundreds more. These groups represent the infrastructure of the field, and as Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson has noted, they are its “gas and glue”—essential to the sector’s health and vitality.

### What is needed:

- **Organizational operating support.** Significant, multi-year, flexible, operating support is required to stabilize and empower these organizations, to undergird the programs and services they offer, and to enable them to plan sustainable programs and operations.
- **Project support.** These groups need project support for special programs and projects, including research and field work to preserve and archive the practices and cultural contexts of diverse culture bearers; documentaries and media projects; large-scale touring exhibitions; and an array of public programming.
- **Economic development opportunities.** Many traditional artists and culture bear-

ers are low-wage workers who glean most of their income from working in other fields—as laborers, domestic workers, or restaurant employees, for example. Job development opportunities are needed for culture bearers in their crafts—jobs such as teaching in schools, prisons, or senior centers, or developing their ability to sell handcrafts or traditional foods. A number of taproot ecosystem organizations sponsor programs of this kind—ACTA employs 40 teaching artists to work in California prisons, for example, and City Lore employs 35 teaching artists working in New York City schools. These employers need additional resources to reach more artists and take these programs to scale.

*Students of the Au Co Vietnamese Cultural Center meet weekly to study music, language, and cultural arts. Here, they perform at ACTA’s 2018 Sounds of California: Bayview-Hunters Point concert in San Francisco. Photo: Sonia Narang/ACTA.*



*A member of Calpulli Tonalehque based in San Jose, seeks to uphold the indigenous roots of Mexico's Aztec ancestors through dance and ritual, 2017. Photo: Lily Kharrazi/ACTA.*

### 03. RAISE THE VISIBILITY OF THE FIELD

The broad field of living cultural heritage and traditional arts is not well understood by the public and receives minimal coverage in mainstream media. Traditional artists are rarely covered in the arts or business sections of news outlets; documentaries about culture bearers rarely see wide distribution; podcasts and other forms of independent media production and distribution rarely feature these artists and their traditions. The dynamic diversity of this field needs better exposure to overcome the lingering negative stereotypes “folk artists,” and to position taproot artists more prominently in the American cultural treasury.

#### **What is needed:**

- **Sustained support for a national communications strategy.** One or more intermediary organizations could work in a sustained way with communications specialists on a multi-year strategy to raise the profile of folk and traditional arts in national and local media and other venues for public attention.
- **Partnerships with public agencies to raise visibility.** As part of its National Heritage Award program, the National Endowment for the Arts produced *The Culture of America: A Cross-Country Visit* with the 2021 National Heritage Fellows. This film powerfully shares taproot artists’ work in the context of their communities and is a potential model for other films that public agencies might commission and distribute. Compendia of this type could broaden awareness of the field considerably.

## 04. UPGRADE DATA COLLECTION INFRASTRUCTURE

The folk and traditional arts field suffers from a lack of robust data as to its scale and scope, the distinctive features of its practitioners, and the organizations that support them. As Dr. Rosenstein’s research for the Taproot Initiative showed, the field of ethnic and cultural arts organizations encompasses at least 7,250 organizations. But structural inequities in standard data collection systems means this total omits organizations that play critical roles in the ecosystem, such as tribal entities, commercial or unincorporated organizations, and interdisciplinary organizations that encompass traditional arts practice. To validate this field and better understand its features, better data are essential.

### What is needed:

- **Review taxonomies and nomenclature of existing datasets and establish new standards.** Working with the National Center for Charitable Statistics, Candid, and other agencies that collect and analyze data on the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, a national advisory group could delineate improvements in data collection and analysis for the folk and traditional arts and propose methods to better capture and understand important activity in this field—such as work in tribal communities, commercial establishments, and interdisciplinary or cross-sectoral organizations.
- **Invest in new quantitative and qualitative research to illuminate the roles and impact of traditional artists and their organizations.** The Taproot Initiative has raised as many questions as it has answered, and many important issues about this field and its practitioners warrant additional study, such as the mechanism by which traditional artists integrate artistic practice with community development, and lessons other creative practitioners can learn.
- **Elevate the national research repositories of living cultural heritage.** The American

Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and other national and regional knowledge centers should be appropriately funded to increase their capacity to make accessible and visible their rich primary source collections. These resources document the taproot knowledge and practices of multiple communities throughout the U.S. Archives and other knowledge centers (including universities, museums, and nonprofits) also serve as repositories of unique “gray” literature about this field (including catalogues, white papers, and other policy reports) and make it more visible to funders, researchers, and policymakers. To date, research on the folk and traditional arts has been scattered and hard to access. Seminal studies, such as Elizabeth Peterson’s *The Changing Faces of Tradition: A Report on the Folk and Traditional Arts in the United State* (1996) and *Living Traditions: A Portfolio Analysis of the NEA’s Folk and Traditional Arts Program* (2019), do not receive wide circulation and therefore have had limited impact on the field.



# CARING FOR THE TAPROOT, CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

The Taproot Initiative took place during a historic national and global crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has torn through the folk and traditional arts community—communities of color bore the brunt of the pandemic's morbidity and we have lost culture bearers to the disease. Artists lost essential income and traditional practitioners fell through the gaps of relief funding. When these artist-leaders and their support structures are devastated, the cultural lineage and social fabric of their communities, and all of ours, suffer.

Over the course of this project we have also been reminded that traditional practices, expressions, and identities have survived generations of change and upheaval. As ever, traditional artists have stood fast in their frontline work of taproot care and repair for their communities. As our country continues to account for generations of inequity, a critical part of this reckoning must be to uplift the voices, stories, and traditions that sustain cultural taproots. These practices and the taproot artists who sustain them illuminate the breadth of human creativity, enrich our understanding of the human condition, and move us all toward a more just and equitable world.

*Japanese Tea Ceremony practitioners from the Urasenke School of Chado in Los Angeles guide participants in preparing matcha at the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, 2018. Photo: Timo Saarelna/ACTA.*

## APPENDIX A:

### Taproot Initiative Team



#### **AMY KITCHENER, M.A.**

##### **Project Director, Interviewer**

Co-Founder + Executive Director, Alliance for California Traditional Arts  
Fresno/San Francisco/Los Angeles, California  
<http://www.actaonline.org>

Amy Kitchener co-founded the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) in 1997. Understanding California's unique position as the nation's epicenter for diverse cultural and multi-national communities, ACTA's work has focused on social change through grantmaking, capacity and leadership development, technical assistance, and bilingual program development. Trained as a public folklorist with an M.A. from UCLA, Amy has piloted participatory cultural asset mapping in neglected and rural areas of the state and consults with other organizations and across sectors on this method of discovery and inclusion of community voices nationally.

She continues to serve as a consultant for many national organizations and has taken part in two U.S.-China Intangible Cultural Heritage exchanges. She has published on a variety of subjects involving California folklife, including immigrant arts training and transmission, and Asian American folk arts. She has a certificate in Nonprofit Leadership in the Arts from the Stanford University Graduate School of Business. She served two terms on the board of the national Grant-makers in the Arts and was appointed by Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi as a Trustee of the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. In 2019, she was elected Chair of the American Folklife Center. Amy and husband Hugo Morales are the proud parents of twin boys who dance and sing with regularity.



#### **MARIBEL ALVAREZ, PH.D.**

##### **Thought-Partner, Interviewer**

Jim Griffith Chair in Public Folklore and Associate Research Social Scientist, The Southwest Center, University of Arizona  
Tucson, Arizona  
<https://sbs.arizona.edu/people/maribel-alvarez>

Maribel Alvarez, Ph.D., is a principal thought-partner with the ACTA in shaping the planning process, research design, and publication of this report. She is an anthropologist, folklorist, curator, author, and community arts expert. At the University of Arizona, she is Associate Dean for

Community Engagement for the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, the Jim Griffith Chair in Public Folklore and Associate Research Social Scientist in the Southwest Center, and Associate Research Professor in the School of Anthropology. She founded, and until recently served as executive director of, the Southwest Folklife Alliance, an independent nonprofit affiliated with the University of Arizona. In 2009, she was a Fulbright Fellow conducting research in rural Mexico. Maribel is a past trustee of

the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress; in addition, she has served as faculty for ten years at the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture's summer Leadership Institute in San Antonio, Texas. Maribel was born in Cuba and came to the United States at the age

of seven; she lived in Puerto Rico for eleven years before moving to California in 1980, where she became active in the Chicano arts community and multicultural arts movement of that decade.



**LILY KHARRAZI, M.A.**

**Research and Planning Partner, Interviewer**

Director of Special Initiatives, Alliance for California Traditional Arts  
San Francisco, California

<http://www.actaonline.org>

Lily Kharrazi began working with ACTA in 2005, first as the Living Cultures Grants Program Manager and most recently as a Director of Special Initiatives. Lily has been an advocate of culturally specific art genres in the Bay Area for three decades. She has a MA in Dance Ethnology and interdisciplinary Ethnic Arts from UCLA, training under a pioneer of the field, Allegra Fuller Snyder. Lily worked with the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival from 1991-2003, where as program director she crafted nine seasons of work. She served as faculty/mentor to

the 2006 initiative of the Regional Dance Development Initiative, was a co-curator for the Performing Diaspora Series in 2013, and has organized symposiums for Dance USA conferences, CounterPulse SF, and with ACTA on topics of dance and culture. She has served as an adjudicator and consultant to local, regional, and national arts and culture foundations such as the Ford Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, and California Arts Council. Dance is a first love informing all her passions: she has studied and performed numerous styles of world dance, including contemporary dance, Yemenite, Balinese, Balkan, and Haitian. She has recently found Yoga and is an avid practitioner.



**SHWETA SARASWAT-SULLIVAN, PH.D.**

**Research and Planning Partner, Interviewer**

Former Media + Development Manager,  
Alliance for California Traditional Arts  
Los Angeles, California

<http://www.actaonline.org>

Shweta Saraswat-Sullivan is a media producer and writer born and raised in Los Angeles. She recently graduated with a Ph.D. in Culture and Performance from the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance at UCLA where her research looked at the relationship between diasporic identity and cultural production in the US and the UK. Before that, she completed

an M.A. in Journalism at USC's Annenberg School of Journalism where she specialized in short form documentary. Shweta has written and produced for The Atlantic, On Being, The Global Post, and KNBC, exploring the social, cultural, and political impact of the arts in communities ranging from Belfast to Long Beach. Shweta most recently worked with the J. Paul Getty Museum, where she produced interpretive digital content for exhibitions and education initiatives. She is also a longtime practitioner of Kathak, a classical dance



from north India, having studied under Guru Rachana Upadhyay in the San Fernando Valley for two decades. Shweta has produced content for ACTA's digital channels, and

### MEG GLASER

#### Interviewer

Program Director Emeritus, Western Folklife Center

Elko, Nevada

<https://www.westernfolklife.org>

For 37 years, Meg Glaser served as the program director for the Western Folklife Center and the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. In her time as program director, Glaser documented rural western life and developed programs to showcase it, including 45 exhibitions on global ranching cultures for the Western Folklife Center's gallery, as well as in community venues and as trav-

worked across ACTA programs as an ethnographic researcher, as well as having managed ACTA's development efforts.

eling exhibitions that have been hosted all over the West and virtually. Her programs featured cattle and sheep ranching, rural life, cowboy gear, youth radio workshops, newcomer experiences, and international cultural exchange. Prior to her 1990 return to her hometown of Elko, Nevada to become Western Folklife Center's program director, Meg worked for the National Endowment for the Arts, the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution, and at the National Council for Traditional Arts.



### LEIA MAHHS

#### Interviewer

Executive Director, Southwest Folklife Alliance

Tucson, Arizona

<https://southwestfolklife.org/>

Leia Maahs is an arts administrator with two decades of nonprofit arts and cultural project development and management expertise. With a background in public policy, grant making, and creative placemaking, Leia is Executive Director at the Southwest Folklife Alliance. The Southwest Folklife Alliance builds more equitable and vibrant communities by celebrating the everyday

expressions of culture, heritage, and diversity rooted in the Greater Southwest and U.S. Mexico Border Corridor. The Alliance provides direct support to heritage-based artists in the region, produces festivals and public programs that increase understanding and respect for folklife practices, and documents folklife and amplifies the voices of artists and cultural workers. Nationally, they amplify models and methods of meaningful cultural work that center traditional knowledge, social equity, and collaboration.

## APPENDIX B:

### Taproot Advisors



#### ANANYA CHATTERJEA

Founder + Artistic Director, Ananya Dance Theatre

Leader, Shawngram Institute for Performance and Social Justice

Professor of Dance, University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

<https://www.ananyadancetheatre.org>

Ananya Chatterjea's work as choreographer, dancer, and thinker brings together contemporary dance, social justice choreography, and a commitment to healing justice. She is the founder of Ananya Dance Theatre and creator of their signature movement vocabulary, Yorchhā – a unique movement aesthetic of contemporary dance that draws on Classical Odissi, the martial art Chhau, and Vinyasa

Yoga – and is the primary architect of the company's justice- and community-oriented choreographic methodology, Shawngām. She is a 2011 Guggenheim Choreography Fellow, a 2012 and 2021 McKnight Choreography Fellow, a 2016 Joyce Award recipient, a 2018 UBW Choreographic Center Fellow, a 2019 Dance/USA Artist Fellow, and recipient of the 2021 A. P. Andersen Award. Ananya Dance Theatre came together in 2004 as an ensemble of women and femme artists of color who were interested in exploring the intersection of dance and activism in order to shift the landscape of mainstream culture, build understanding about arts and social justice, and empower artistic voices.



#### DILLON DELVO

Co-Founder + Executive Director, Little Manila Rising

Stockton, California

<https://www.littlemanila.org>

Dillon Delvo is a second-generation Filipino American, born and raised in South Stockton, California. In 2000, Dillon, together with Dr. Dawn Mabalon, created the nonprofit organization Little Manila Rising (LMR) in response to developer attempts to destroy the Little Manila Historic Site in downtown

Stockton. Since then, and under Dillon's leadership, LMR has expanded its focus from historical preservation to seeking equitable solutions from the effects of historical marginalization in issues such as education, environment, redevelopment, and public health. For 8 years, LMR was home to the LMR Cultural Arts Programs, which brought traditional arts instruction, practice, and performance to Stockton's Filipino American community.



### JUAN DÍES

Musician + Folklorist  
Co-Founder + Executive Director, Sones de México Ensemble  
Chicago, Illinois

<https://www.sonesdemexico.com>

Juan Díes is a multi-instrumentalist musician, a studio and live concert producer, an educator, and a storyteller. He learned to play the guitar as a child in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, and has worked professionally in music since the early 1990s. Juan is a co-founder of Grammy-nominated Sones de México Ensemble, the country's premier folk music organization specializing in Mexican son (a style of Mexican folk music that

encompasses various regional genres). He holds an M.A. in folklore and ethnomusicology from Indiana University and has devoted his professional life to presenting, researching, advocating, teaching, and performing traditional music and culture. Juan is a Distinguished Alumni at Earlham College, a 2019 US Artists Fellow, and a 2009 Chicago Community Trust Fellow. Juan has also been a program director for the Old Town School of Folk Music and the National Museum of Mexican Art and a consultant for the Smithsonian Institution and several US state arts councils.



### NANSI GUEVARA

Designer + Artist + Teacher, Corazón Contento  
Co-Founder, Las Imaginistas  
Brownsville, Texas

<https://www.nansiguevara.com>

Nansi Guevara is a graphic designer, illustrator, and textile/rasquache-based (an aesthetic in Chicano art celebrating the “underdog” perspective) public artist. She holds a B.F.A. in design from the University of Texas at Austin and a Master's in Education from Harvard University. She is currently focused on design, education, and community public art to create spaces of resistance

and affirmation, and economies of community cultural wealth and support. She is an adjunct lecturer at the School of Art at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Nansi has been awarded residencies, fellowships, & grants from the NEA, Artplace America, a Blade of Grass, NALAC, and most recently the Santa Fe Art Institute Artist Residency. She runs her own freelance design and education practice, Corazón Contento, and is a co-founder of Las Imaginistas, a collective of socially engaged artists and recipient of a 2022 US Artists Fellowship.



### JUAN GUTIÉRREZ

Founder + Executive Director, Los Pleneros de la 21  
1996 NEA National Heritage Fellow  
New York, New York

<https://www.losplenerosdela21.org>

Founded in 1983 by leading Afro-Puerto Rican musician and NEA National Heritage

Fellow Juan Gutiérrez, Los Pleneros de la 21 (LP21) is a performing arts nonprofit created to foster awareness and appreciation of Puerto Rican traditional expressions – particularly percussion-driven musical traditions of African descent, such as bomba & plena – as indispensable to healthy community life.

For nearly four decades, LP21 has accomplished its mission through a unique model combining both community programming and widespread international touring. LP21's landmark community-based



**PJ + ROY HIRABAYASHI**

Co-Founders and Artistic Directors Emeritus, San Jose Taiko  
 Founder, Taiko Peace (PJ)  
 2011 NEA National Heritage Fellows  
 San Jose, California

<https://taikopeace.love>

PJ and Roy Hirabayshi are founding members of San Jose Taiko and are recognized pioneers in contemporary taiko (ensemble drumming featuring the Japanese drum). They have been instrumental in the growth of this art form and have nurtured an ecosystem that now supports more than 500 North American groups. In 2011, they were named National Heritage Fellows by

cultural and educational programs have created a common space for the recognition, education, and practice of Puerto Rican culture and identity.

the National Endowment for the Arts. San Jose Taiko was founded in 1973 by young Asian Americans searching for an outlet to convey their experiences as third generation Japanese Americans, or Sansei. Since then, San Jose Taiko has become a world-class ensemble, performing extensively both nationally and internationally. PJ and Roy are currently active with independent projects in the arts, culture, and wellness fields. PJ is the founder of TaikoPeace, a movement started to spread the kinetic energy, spiritual vibration, and pure joy of Japanese taiko drumming for positive social change and a peaceful world.



**MARIA ROSARIO JACKSON, PH.D.**

Chair, National Endowment for the Arts  
 Professor, Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, Arizona State University (on leave)  
 Los Angeles, California

<https://www.arts.gov>

For more than 25 years, Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson's work has focused on understanding and elevating arts, culture, and design as critical elements of healthy communities. Her work blends social science and arts- and humanities-based approaches to comprehensive community revitalization, systems change, the dynamics of race and ethnicity, and the roles of arts and culture in communities. After confirmation by the U.S. Senate in December 2021, Dr. Jackson became the 13th chair of the National Endowment for

the Arts in January 2022. With this historic appointment, Dr. Jackson is the nation's first NEA chair who is an African American and Mexican American woman. Dr. Jackson has a long career in strategic planning, policy research, and evaluation with philanthropy, government, and nonprofit organizations. She has served as an advisor on philanthropic programs and investments at national, regional, and local foundations. Dr. Jackson is currently on leave from Arizona State University, where she is a tenured Institute Professor in the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. For almost ten years, she also served as a senior advisor for Arts and Culture and Strategic Learning, Research and Evaluation at the Kresge Foundation.

**GERALD LOMAVENTEMA (HOPI)**

Hopi Silversmith  
 Founder + Lead Teacher, Qwa-Holo Hopi  
 Silvercraft

Second Mesa, Arizona

[http://www.southwesttraditions.com/  
 The\\_Silversmiths/Gerald\\_Lomaventema/  
 gerald\\_lomaventema.html](http://www.southwesttraditions.com/The_Silversmiths/Gerald_Lomaventema/gerald_lomaventema.html)

Gerald Lomaventema (Hopi) is a master silversmith known for his innovative use of both traditional Hopi overlay and tufa (volcanic ash) cast silver elements. He began his training at the age of 19 through a formal

apprenticeship with the Hopi Silversmith Cooperative Guild. Gerald has been a silversmith for over three decades, during which time he has researched the early methods used by Hopi silversmiths and incorporated them into his work. He is the winner of the prestigious Best of Category and Best of Division at the 2014 Southwestern Association for Indian Arts' Indian Market. Gerald is the founder of and lead teacher at Qwa-Holo Hopi Silvercraft, a studio for Hopi students of silverwork.

**LEIA MAAHS** — See Appendix A: Taproot Initiative Team

**DR. CAROLYN MAZLOOMI**

Artist + Educator + Author

Founder, Women of Color Quilters Network  
 Founder, African American Quilt Guild of Los  
 Angeles

2014 NEA National Heritage Fellow

West Chester, Ohio

<https://www.wcqn.org>

Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi is an artist, author, historian, and curator, acknowledged as one of the most influential African American quilt historians in the United States. From the founding of the African American Quilt Guild of Los Angeles in 1981 to the 1985 founding of the Women of Color Quilters Network (WCQN), Dr. Mazloomi has been at the forefront of educating the public about

the diversity of interpretation, styles, and techniques among African American quilters, as well as educating a younger generation of African Americans about their own history through quilts. Dr. Mazloomi has curated 21 exhibits across the US of quilts made by members of the WCQN, and she has published twelve books highlighting African American-made quilts. A major force as an artist in her own right, her pictorial narrative quilts have been exhibited extensively. Dr. Mazloomi has been the recipient of many state and national honors. Among them, she is a 2003 Ohio Heritage Fellow, 2014 NEA National Heritage Fellow, and a 2021 US Artists Fellow.



### **LORI POURIER (OGLALA LAKOTA)**

President + CEO, First Peoples Fund  
Rapid City, South Dakota

<https://www.firstpeoplesfund.org>

Lori Lea Pourier, (Oglala Lakota) has served as the President and CEO of the First Peoples Fund (FPF) since 1999. She has nearly 30 years of experience in community economic development with a specific emphasis on Native arts and culture revitalization within tribal communities. Lori's early work began at First Nations Development Institute and as the Executive Director of the International Indigenous Women's Network. She is a 2017 Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellow, a recipient of the 2013 Women's World Summit Foundation Prize for Creativity in Rural Life, and a 2013 Louis T. Delgado Distinguished Grantmaker Awardee. Lori serves on the Board of Directors of the Jerome Foundation and the Library of Congress American Folklife Center Board of Trustees. She served two

terms on the board of directors of the Grantmakers in the Arts and Native Americans in Philanthropy. FPF honors and supports the Collective Spirit of Native artists and culture bearers. Their work recognizes the power of art and culture to bring about positive change in Native communities, beginning with individual artists and their families. With more than 25 years of experience working alongside artists and culture bearers in tribal communities, FPF provides: direct financial support, training, mentoring and network building for individual artists; capacity building grants and coaching for Native community development financial institutions and other tribally based organizations; and national leadership around partnerships and research opportunities that support artists and culture bearers as critical agents of change in their communities.



### **BRETT RATLIFF**

Musician + Community Organizer  
Director, Traditional Music Project and June Appal Recordings at Appalshop  
Whitesburg, KY

Founder, The Lexington Gathering  
Lexington, Kentucky

<https://appalshop.org>

<https://www.brettratliff.com/>

Brett Ratliff is a multi-instrumentalist, recording artist, and lifelong Appalachian activist. Known as a master of the traditional Kentucky repertoire, especially of mountain

banjo styles and labor-rights music, he teaches and performs throughout the US, the UK, and Canada. Currently he serves at Appalshop, directing programming for WMMT-FM and working to reinvigorate June Appal Recordings, the region's longest running record label. He has also founded several festivals in his home region, including the Lexington Old-Time Gathering. In 2022, he received the prestigious US Artists Fellowship.



### **JUMANA SALAMEY, Au.D.**

Deputy Director, Arab American National Museum

Dearborn, Michigan

<https://arabamericanmuseum.org>

Jumana Salamey, Au.D., is the Deputy Director at the Arab American National Museum. As a cultural administrator for over a decade, Dr. Salamey works to hold space for artists and co-create space for communities of color. She is a fellow of the Intercultural Leadership Institute and a founding member of the International Sites of Conscience. She has a BA in psychology and women's studies from the University of Michigan-Dearborn and a Doctor of Audiology from Wayne State

University. The Arab American National Museum is the first and only museum in the United States devoted to documenting and sharing Arab American contributions that have shaped the economic, political, and cultural landscapes of American life. Since opening in 2005, the museum has worked with established and emerging artists of all artistic mediums, has offered safe spaces for open dialogue and community gatherings, and has provided educational opportunities for students of all ages to expand their knowledge and appreciation of Arab American history and culture.



### **HOLLY SIDFORD**

Co-Director, Helicon Collaborative  
Brooklyn, New York

<https://heliconcollab.net>

Holly Sidford is co-director of Helicon Collaborative, a consulting company that provides strategy development, program management, research, and facilitation for arts and cultural organizations and funders. She has more than 25 years of experience leading nonprofit cultural and philanthropic organizations. Prior to founding Helicon, she was a principal at the international consulting firm AEA Consulting. Prior to that, she was the founding president of Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), a ten-year national initiative to expand support for creative artists, and she spearheaded the national research

and planning effort that preceded LINC's creation. Before her work with LINC, Holly was program director for arts, parks, and adult literacy at the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and held leadership positions at the Ford Foundation, The Howard Gilman Foundation, the New England Foundation for the Arts, and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities. Holly serves on the board of Sadie Nash Leadership Project, an award-winning leadership program for young female leaders in metropolitan New York, and Fractured Atlas, a national organization pioneering technology-based ways to empower artists, cultural organizations, and other creative enterprises. She holds a B.A. from Mount Holyoke College and a Management Certificate from Columbia University.

**LATANYA d. TIGNER**

Artist + Administrator, Dimensions Dance Theater

Dance Lecturer, UC Berkeley  
Oakland, California

<https://www.dimensionsdance.org>

Latanya d. Tigner has performed professionally with Dimensions Dance Theater – a professional dance company and school that presents multidisciplinary works rooted in African diasporic dance forms – since 1986. She holds a B.A. in physical education/dance from San Francisco State University and a Master’s in Arts Administration from

Golden Gate University. She directs Dimensions Dance Theater’s youth company and lectures at the University of California, Berkeley and at Mills College. In her 30-plus-year dance career, Latanya has created commissioned works and set choreography for a multitude of festivals and theater works and is the founder of Dancing Cy(i)phers, an annual symposium rooted in her ongoing research on African dance retentions in African American social dance.

## APPENDIX C:

### Interviewees



#### **NOUR BALLOUT**

Founder, Habibi House  
Detroit, Michigan

<https://www.nourballout.com/habibihouse>

Beirut-born Nour Ballout is a Detroit-based interdisciplinary artist, curator, and space-maker. They received a B.F.A. from Wayne State University and are currently an M.F.A. candidate at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Nour's work as a visual artist and curator is rooted in a social practice exploring the concept of home as it manifests within bodies, built environments, and communities. Nour is the founder of Habibi House as well as the annual Book + Print Fest at the Arab American National Museum. They are the recipient of the 2019 Knight Arts Challenge Award, the

2019 Kresge Arts in Detroit Gilda Award, and the 2019 Applebaum Photography Fellowship. Nour has exhibited their work across the United States and participated in several artist residencies including the Ghana Think Tank in Detroit and Flux Factory in New York. In 2017, Nour transformed their own home into Habibi House, a neighborhood-based community art space and social engagement residency. By inviting artists, curators, and individuals from different communities to engage through art, music, food, and conversation, Habibi House reimagines home outside of traditional institutional structures and collectively builds a stronger intersectional future.



#### **VIOLA CASARES + PETRA MATA**

Co-Founders, Fuerza Unida  
San Antonio, Texas

<http://www.fuerzaunida.org>

Fuerza Unida's mission is to empower women workers, particularly women workers of color, to achieve social, economic, and environmental justice through education, organizing, and advocacy. Fuerza Unida was founded in 1990, when Levi Strauss closed three manufacturing plants in San Antonio leaving 1,150 workers – primarily Mexican and Mexican American women – jobless without any compensation for the sudden layoff. Viola Casares and Petra Mata banded together to form Fuerza Unida and, along with hundreds of others, fought

for the severance pay they deserved. These women spent the majority of the early '90s protesting Levis' decision through numerous boycotts, hunger strikes, and protests. Today, they are considered pillars and healers of local social justice movements. For over three decades, Fuerza Unida has served their community through El Hilo de la Justicia, a sewing collective to provide job security for displaced garment workers and elderly women; a monthly food pantry; a community garden; an annual Youth Leadership Program; and other programming to provide education, training, guidance, and accessible information.

**JUAN DÍES** – See Appendix B: Taproot Advisors



### OSHUNBUMI FERNANDEZ-WEST

CEO, Odunde, Inc.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

<https://www.odundefestival.org>

Oshunbumi Fernandez-West is CEO of the Odunde Festival, the largest African American street festival in the US. Located in Philadelphia, the festival was founded by Oshunbumi's mother, Lois Fernandez, and Ruth Arthur, in 1975. The Odunde Festival now welcomes 500,000 attendees; covers 15 city blocks; hosts over 100 arts, craft, and food vendors; and features two stages with internationally recognized African and Carib-

bean performers, folk artists, and cultural leaders. Oshunbumi has been at the head of the festival, which has become a national model for cultural street festivals, for 23 years. In 2011, Oshunbumi created Odunde365, which provides year-round African and African American cultural programming in schools, community centers and more. Oshunbumi holds a B.A. in human biology-anthropology from Temple University and an M.B.A. from LaSalle University.



### LYNDA CHAN FLYNN

Dancer and daughter of Co-Founder Tim

Thou, Angkor Dance Troupe

Program Director, REACH LoWELL, Lowell

Community Health Center

Lowell, Massachusetts

<https://www.angkordance.org>

Linda Chan Flynn, daughter of Cambodian refugees, was born and raised in Lowell, Massachusetts. Linda currently serves as the REACH LoWELL Program Director at Lowell Community Health Center and where she is an advocate for health in marginalized communities. Angkor Dance Troupe was founded in 1986 by Linda's father Tim Thou, when he and a passionate group of Cambodian refugees came together with the sole purpose to revive

a culture once almost lost. Angkor Dance Troupe's mission is to connect communities through the preservation, education, and innovation of Cambodian performing arts. As the heart of Lowell's Cambodian community – a region which holds the second largest population of Cambodians outside Cambodia – the Angkor Dance Troupe develops and teaches Cambodian dance, promotes an understanding and appreciation of Cambodian culture, and provides a positive social and educational outlet for Cambodian youth. It is nationally and internationally recognized as one of the most accomplished and experienced US-based Cambodian traditional arts organizations.



### THE LEGENDARY SEAN/MILAN GARÇON

Founder + Director of Development and

Community Relations, House of AWT

Former Arts Program Manager, REACH LA

Los Angeles, California

<https://www.houseofawt.org>

<https://www.reachla.info>

The Legendary Sean/Milan Garçon is a performance artist, advocate, and one of the

pioneering founders of the West Coast House and Ballroom scene – a network of shows/competitions for Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ drag artists and dancers which serve as a social and spiritual support for youth of this community. As the former Arts Program Manager for REACH LA, Sean Milan founded, and since 2006, has produced the annual

Ovahness Ball – where the community can showcase their artistic talents and strengthen their ties to one another. The Ovahness Ball is a program of REACH LA, a nonprofit providing resources and enrichment programs to support the LGBTQIA+ community, people of color, and the underrepresented. Founded in 1992 by three women artists, REACH LA’s mission has been to educate, motivate, and mobilize urban youth to care for themselves and their community. In 2020, Sean founded

the House of AWT (Artists Working Together) to facilitate young people working side-by-side with professional artists, offering free studio training in dance, choreography, audio/video production, fashion design, music production, and street art. AWT’s model supports each young artist to complete a finished work to share with the community and use for future professional opportunities, thereby making visible the untold stories and talents of LA’s LGBTQIA+ youth of color.

#### **MICHELLE GIBSON**

Founder, The New Orleans Original BuckShop Dance Instructor, Booker T. Washington High School of Performing and Visual Arts Faculty, American Dance Festival, Duke University  
Dallas, Texas

<https://www.instagram.com/theoriginal-buckshop>

New Orleans native Michelle Gibson is a choreographer, cultural ambassador, educator, and performing artist. She received her B.F.A. in dance from Tulane University and her M.F.A. in dance from Hollins University/ American Dance Festival at Duke University.

She is the founder of The New Orleans Original BuckShop, a masterclass series which engages communities and participants in the culture and diasporic traditions of Black New Orleans. Michelle grounds her instruction in her own “Second Line Aesthetic” that involves improvised movement, brass band music, and the embrace of communal ritual. Michelle is a long-time educator, currently serving as faculty member of the American Dance Festival at Duke University and dance faculty at Booker T. Washington High School of Performing and Visual Arts.



#### **ALEXANDER GIBSON, J.D.**

Executive Director, Appalshop  
Whitesburg, Kentucky

<https://appalshop.org>

Alexander Gibson graduated from Berea College with a B.A. in philosophy and earned his J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. He also holds certificates in International Comparative Law from Queen Mary at the University of London, and in Thai and Southeast Asian Studies from Payap University in Thailand. Before joining Appalshop, Alex practiced law in Kentucky and Pennsylvania.

Alex was raised on a tobacco farm in Jackson County, Kentucky, and in 2014 returned to his home region to serve as Appalshop’s executive director. Appalshop started as a film collaborative in 1969, and 50 years later they are still documenting, disseminating, and revitalizing the traditions and creativity of Appalachia. Appalshop tells stories the commercial cultural industries don’t tell, thereby challenging stereotypes with Appalachian voices and visions; to support communities’ efforts to achieve justice and

equity and solve their own problems in their own ways; to celebrate cultural diversity as a positive social value; and to participate in regional, national, and global dialogue toward these ends. Appalshop operates a radio station, a theater, a public art gallery, a record

label, an archive, a filmmaking institute, a reproductive justice program, and a community development program, among an array of other initiatives in an ever-expanding range of media and disciplines.

**JUAN GUTIÉRREZ** – See Appendix B: Taproot Advisors

### **LANI HOTCH (CHILKAT-TLINGIT)**

Chilkat weaver + Culture Bearer  
Klukwan, Alaska

<https://www.jilkaatkwaanheritagecenter.org>

Lani Hotch (Chilkat-Tlingit) comes from a line of weavers that spans five generations. She is committed to keeping the Chilkat weaving tradition alive and has worked to teach others through group projects and apprenticeships since 1992. Lani's work is featured in several museums and private collections. She has been awarded several recognitions for her work including the Jennifer Easton Community Spirit Award from the First Peoples Fund in 2011, the Alaska Governor's

Award for Arts in Business Leadership in 2017, the Native Arts and Culture Foundation Mentor Artist Apprentice Fellowship in 2017, and she was named a US Artists Fellow in 2020. Lani was instrumental in the planning and construction of the Jilkaat Kwaan Heritage Center, her community's first Native heritage center that serves as a hub for cultural revitalization. One of Lani's highest honors was being proclaimed a Culture Bearer by her tribe in 2017 – the first and only person (thus far) to be given that honor in her community.



### **HEATHER HODGES, J.D.**

Director of Internal + External Relations, The Historic New Orleans Collection  
Former Executive Director, Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor  
Johns Island, South Carolina

<https://gullahgeecheecorridor.org>

Heather Hodges is a lawyer and experienced nonprofit executive who served as the executive director of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor from 2017-2020. During her tenure, she placed an emphasis on developing educational programs, supporting cultural documentation and historic preservation efforts, encouraging heritage tourism, and fostering new research to facilitate interpre-

tation of Gullah Geechee history and culture. Heather completed graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania and graduated with honors from the Tulane University School of Law. She spent most of her legal career in the private practice of international law in Washington, DC. Heather was appointed to the Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress in 2020 and she also serves on the Advisory Board of the Joyner Institute for Gullah Geechee and African Diaspora Studies at Coastal Carolina University. The Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor is a federally designated National Heritage Area established to recognize the unique culture

of the Gullah Geechee people of the lower Atlantic Coast. The Corridor’s mission is to collaborate with Gullah Geechee communities and partners to preserve, interpret, and share Gullah Geechee history, traditional cultural

practices, heritage sites, and natural resources. The Corridor produces, supports, and collaborates on a broad range of community-driven cultural heritage programs and projects.



#### **REVEREND MASAO KODANI**

Founding Member, Kinnara, Inc.  
Former Reverend, Senshin Buddhist Temple  
Los Angeles, California

<https://senshintemple.org/>

Reverend Masao Kodani is a retired minister of Buddhist Churches of America and the former minister of Senshin Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles. He is a co-founder of Kinnara Taiko – the second taiko (Japanese drumming) group established in the United States and the first Japanese American Buddhist group. Rev. Kodani graduated from UC Santa Barbara with a degree in East Asian studies and later studied Buddhism at Ryukoku University in Kyoto, Japan. He served at Senshin Buddhist Temple from

1968 until he retired in 2013. In 1969, Rev. Kodani established Kinnara Taiko with fellow members of the temple. Over time, Kinnara grew to include Kinnara Gagako, an ensemble performing traditional Japanese court music. Kinnara has been a leader in the practice and performance of traditional Japanese performing arts in the United States for over 50 years. Kinnara Taiko has performed widely at schools and universities, multicultural folk festivals, Buddhist Temples, and for Japanese American organizations throughout the United States. Their composition, Ashura, has become one of the most learned adapted pieces in the American taiko repertory.

#### **ALFRED “BUD” LANE III (SILETZ)**

Language and Traditional Arts Instructor,  
Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians  
Siletz, Oregon

<https://www.ctsi.nsn.us>

Alfred “Bud” Lane III (Siletz) is a language and traditional arts instructor for the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. As a master basket weaver and one of the tribe’s most fluent speakers, he teaches students the Siletz Dee-ni dialect of the Athabaskan language, as well as traditional basket weaving, regalia making, and traditional foods gathering and preparation. Bud has also been

directly involved in the revitalization and perpetuation of the Siletz ceremonial dance, the Nee-Dash, including the construction of the Siletz Dance House. Bud’s basketry is featured in collections at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art and University of Oregon. He was a master artist in Oregon Historical Society’s Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program and a participant in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2006 and 2013. Bud is a board member and past president of the Northwest American Basket Weavers Association.

**GERALD LOMAVENTEMA** — See Appendix B: Taproot Advisors



### ELENA MARTINEZ

Co-Artistic Director, Bronx Music Heritage Center  
Bronx, New York

<https://www.thisisbronxmusic.org>

Elena Martinez is the Co-Artistic Director of the Bronx Music Heritage Center – a gallery and performance space that celebrates the Bronx’s musical and artistic legacy – and she has been a folklorist at City Lore since 1997. She has produced or co-produced documentaries such as From Mambo to Hip Hop: A South Bronx Tale (PBS 2006, winner of a 2007 ALMA Award for Best TV Documentary), We Like It Like That: The Story of Latin Boogaloo (SXSW Festival 2015), and Eddie Palmieri: A Revolution on Harlem River

Drive (Red Bull Academy 2016). She has worked as a curator or assistant curator on several exhibitions; has published numerous articles and reviews in scholarly journals and publications; and serves on the Advisory Boards for Casita Maria/Dancing in the Streets’ South Bronx Culture Trail, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies Archive at Hunter College, and Los Pleneros de la 21. She has been awarded a 2013 BOROMIX Puerto Rican Heritage Award, Comité Noviembre’s Lo Mejor de Nuestra Comunidad 2013, and a 2016 Community Award by El Maestro’s Cultural & Educational Center.

**DR. CAROLYN MAZLOOMI** –See Appendix B: Taproot Advisors

### WALLACE D. “WALLY” MCRAE

Poet and philosopher  
1990 NEA National Heritage Fellow  
Rosebud, Montana

<https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/wallace-mcrae>

Wally McRae is a cowboy, cowboy poet, and philosopher. He is a third-generation rancher, his family having raised cattle and sheep in southeastern Montana since 1885. The octogenarian has been a writer for nearly as long as he has been

alive – penning his first poem when he was 4 years old – and has since published more than 100 works. Wally was the first cowboy poet to be named a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts and has been a staple at the annual National Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada, since its inception in 1984. He was appointed by President Clinton to the National Council of the Arts in 1996.



### HUGO MORALES

Co-Founder + Executive Director, Radio Bilingüe  
2020 Bess Lomax Hawes National Heritage Fellow  
Fresno, California

<http://radiobilingue.org/en/>

Hugo Morales is an Indigenous Mixtec from Oaxaca, Mexico, who at the age of nine

immigrated to California with his family. He grew up picking grapes and attending public school in Sonoma County, California, then went on to graduate from Harvard College and Harvard Law School. In 1976, he was the moving force of a group of Latino farm-workers, artists, activists, and teachers that

founded Radio Bilingüe in California's San Joaquin Valley. He has led the organization since its founding to its current position as a major national public media service. Today, Radio Bilingüe is the only national distributor of Spanish-language programming in US public media. With 25 stations and 75-plus affiliates, it provides its listeners with news, information, music, and cultural programming in Spanish, Mixteco, and Triqui. Among Hugo's recognitions include a MacArthur

Foundation Fellowship, the Lannan Foundation Cultural Freedom Prize, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting Edward R. Murrow Award, the National Endowment for the Arts Bess Lomax Hawes National Heritage Fellowship, and the Alliance for Public Technology's Susan G. Hadden Pioneer Award for ensuring equitable access to information for the Spanish-speaking population in the US and Mexico.



#### **DHAMMIKA NAVINNA**

President + Sachindara Navinna, Grant Writer  
Sri Lankan Dance Academy of New York  
Staten Island, New York

<http://www.sldany.org>

Dhammika Navinna is President of Sri Lankan Dance Academy of New York. She enrolled her daughter in dance classes at the academy in 1996 and became involved in the management of the school alongside the academy's founder, Tanya DeSilva. The Sri Lankan Dance Academy of New York began in 1992 when Tanya DeSilva, a classically trained dancer in the Kandyan tradition of Sri Lankan dance, started a dance school for young girls in her Staten Island attic. From these beginnings grew the Sri Lankan Dance Academy of New York, and its mission to preserve the significant cultural and artistic heritage of Sri Lanka in America

through both traditional and contemporary drumming and dancing. The academy offers weekly classes, and hosts an ensemble which performs Kandyan, Low Country, and other traditional dance and music forms in local and national venues. When Tanya left the country in 2009, Dhammika assumed full time management of the academy. Her daughter, Sachindara Navinna is a second-generation Sri Lankan American and an active member of the Sri Lankan Dance Academy of New York. She has been dancing with the company for nearly 20 years. Sachindara earned her BS in advertising and marketing from the Fashion Institute of Technology and works in nonprofit administration at Staten Island's Center for Traditional Music and Dance.



#### **CHERYL NORALEZ**

President + Founder, Garifuna American  
Heritage Foundation United  
Long Beach, California

<https://www.gahfu.org>

Cheryl Noralez was born in Punta Gorda, Belize. At the age of four, her family migrated to Los Angeles. She considers herself a proud

Garifuna American, and an activist and promoter of Garifuna (an Afro-indigenous people of the Caribbean and South America) culture. She founded the Garifuna American Heritage Foundation United in 2005, seeing a need in the community to re-acculturate and preserve the Garifuna culture for future

generations in America. As president of Garifuna American Heritage Foundation United, she has had the opportunity to showcase and preserve Garifuna culture, history, language, arts, and spirituality through the Annual Garifuna Community Forum held in

different colleges and universities locally and nationally, the Annual Garifuna Street Fest & Food Extravaganza in South Los Angeles since 2017, and the Garifuna Language & Culture Academy since 2005.

#### **SHELDEN NUÑEZ-VELARDE (JICARILLA APACHE)**

Jicarilla Apache potter

Dulce, New Mexico

[https://www.instagram.com/shante\\_apache](https://www.instagram.com/shante_apache)

Shelden Nuñez-Velarde (Jicarilla Apache)'s interest in micaceous pottery started at an early age with a desire to reproduce the beautiful pottery pieces made by his great-great grandmother, O'Ha Montoya. Beginning at age 13, Shelden carried on her legacy and trained under established Jicarilla Apache

potters Lydia Pesata and Felipe Ortega.

Since 1993, Shelden has exhibited at various Indian markets throughout the country, winning awards and receiving recognition for both his pottery and beadwork. He demonstrates his craft and teaches workshops throughout the Southwest and is an accomplished beadworker and basket maker, in addition to his standing as a master potter.

#### **WANDA RAVERNELL**

Founder + Executive Director, Omnira Institute  
Oakland, California

<https://www.facebook.com/omnirainstitute>

Wanda Ravernell is the executive director and visionary of Omnira Institute, a community organization dedicated to connecting African American communities to their historic and spiritual links from Africa. Wanda is a former journalist and holds a Master's of Communication from Stanford University. She has been a practitioner of the Lucumi faith since 1980, becoming a priest in 1985. Wanda began Omnira Institute in 2003 as a school for sacred knowledge for children of practitioners of the Lucumi

faith. The organization now holds an annual cycle of events that provide opportunities for ritual, remembrance, celebration, and healing through cultural practice. The Omnira Institute is home to the Awon Ohun Omnira (Voices of Freedom) choir, led by Wanda's partner and master bata drummer Tobaji Stewart, which brings practices such as Oro Egun (a Yoruba call to the ancestors) and Ring Shout (a dance and song ritual first practiced by African slaves) to the local African American community during events such as the Juneteenth Ritual of Remembrance, Black History Month programs, and the Oakland Black-Eyed Pea Festival.



### VICKY HOLT TAKAMINE

Founder + Executive Director, PA'I Foundation  
Kumu Hula, Pua Ali'i 'Ilima  
Honolulu, Hawaii

<https://www.paifoundation.org>

Vicky Holt Takamine is a renowned kumu hula (master teacher of Hawaiian dance). She is recognized as a native Hawaiian leader for her role as an advocate for social justice and the protection of native Hawaiian rights and the natural and cultural resources of Hawai'i. In 1975, Vicky graduated as a kumu hula from hula master Maiki Aiu Lake. Vicky established her own hālau (school of Hawaiian dance), Pua Ali'i 'Ilima, in 1977, where students have been taught the oral traditions, language, history, and cultural practices of native Hawaiians for over 40 years. Vicky and her students have performed nationally and internationally. Vicky earned her B.A. and M.A. in dance ethnology from the Univer-

sity of Hawai'i. In addition to teaching at her own school, Vicky has lectured at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and Leeward Community College for more than 35 years. Vicky was a 2013 Community Spirit Award Honoree by the First People's Fund, a recipient of the 2015 Native Hawaiian Artist Fellowship from the Native Arts and Culture Foundation, and a 2016 US Artists Fellow. In 2001, Vicky established a nonprofit, the PA'I Foundation, to serve the needs of her Hawaiian community and those who make Hawai'i their home. The PA'I Foundation's programs include artists residencies and cultural workshops, intensive playwriting workshops, and the Hapa Haole Hula Festival. PA'I Foundation is a key collaborator in the Intercultural Leadership Institute, a yearlong personal and leadership development program for artists, culture bearers, and other arts professionals.



### MAI NHIA VANG

Founder and Interim Executive Director,  
Hmong Museum  
Registrar of Collections and Archives, Minnesota  
Museum of American Art  
St. Paul, Minnesota

<https://hmongmuseummn.org>

Mai Nhia Vang is the Registrar of Collections and Archives for the Minnesota Museum of American Art. She is a passionate museum enthusiast with extensive experience in collection care and curation, exhibit development, museum education, and grant writing. Mai holds a M.S. in anthropology and a Museum Studies Certificate from the

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She has served as the executive director of the Richfield Historical Society and was a curator at the Minnesota Discovery Center. In 2015, Mai founded the Hmong Museum, the nation's one and only museum without walls that is devoted to documenting Hmong culture, arts, history, and personal narrative. With a mission to recognize and acknowledge the intersections of all things Hmong, the museum produces cultural programming in spaces as varied as libraries, galleries, studios, personal homes, and local Hmong businesses and restaurants.

## APPENDIX D:

### Quantitative Research Key Findings

The Taproot Initiative commissioned Dr. Carole Rosenstein, Associate Professor of Arts Management at George Mason University, to explore the scope, finances, and funding of living cultural heritage organizations in the nonprofit sector. Dr. Rosenstein and her colleagues, Dr. Mirae Kim and Neville Vakharia, M.S., examined data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics, Candid, and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies to assess the current landscape of nonprofit Ethnic, Cultural, and Folk organizations and the levels of private and state-level public funding to this sector. The full study can be found here: [Living Cultural Heritage and the Traditional and Folk Arts in the Nonprofit Sector: Data on Scope, Finances, and Funding.](#)

#### Key findings from this study include:

- Ethnic, Cultural and Folk organizations (ECFs) make up a large and distinct part of the nonprofit arts, culture, and humanities sector
- There are approximately 7,250 nonprofit organizations whose mission is to use the arts, culture, and humanities to discover, promote, sustain and share cultural, ethnic, and community heritage and awareness
- More than 70% of ECFs hold less than \$25,000 in assets
- Relative to population size, ECFs are underrepresented in the Rocky Mountain area, in Alaska, and in inland areas of the Western coastal states; it appears that Hispanic-affiliated ECFs have declined as a portion of the total since 2001
- Approximately 45% of ECFs are located in zip codes with significant levels of poverty
- ECFs are more dependent on public sources for their revenue than other arts, culture, and humanities groups but state-level funding for ECFs varies considerably; in 2005, public funding constituted as much as 29% of income for African American-affiliated ECFs and 26% for Hispanic-affiliated ECFs
- Private funding for ECFs exceeds state-level funding but is also variably distributed, mirroring the density of the general population and the presence of ECFs
- Living cultural heritage and traditional and folk arts organizations are intersectoral, often providing education, food, social services, and religious offerings as well as cultural programs, and some are sponsored by organizations classified as educational, social service, or religious in purpose

This study, along with previous reports on this sector, highlight the need to invest in better and more consistent data collection and analysis for this field. Taxonomic challenges, inconsistencies in data reporting from both nonprofit organizations and funding bodies, and methodological differences in the studies that have been undertaken to date make it impossible to accurately track this field's development over time. In addition, much activity in the field of living cultural heritage occurs outside

of nonprofit cultural organizations, e.g., in commercial establishments, in tribal entities, and in cross-sectoral contexts such as social work, healthcare, youth development, etc. These dimensions of the field are nearly invisible because robust and nuanced data to illuminate them are lacking. Capturing information about the true dimensions of the folk and traditional arts field is essential to better understand its multiple functions and evolution over time.



## QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH TEAM

### CAROLE ROSENSTEIN, M.A., Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Arts Management,  
College of Visual and Performing Arts, George  
Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia

<https://folklore.gmu.edu/people/crosenst>

Carole Rosenstein, M.A., Ph.D. received a  
doctorate in anthropology from Brandeis  
University. Her research domains include  
cultural policy, cultural democracy, diversity  
and equity, and the social life of the arts and  
culture. Among her research focuses have  
been museum public finance; arts festivals;  
and collection of data on nonprofit

humanities organizations. Her writing  
has been published widely in  
academic journals, she serves on  
the editorial board of the Journal of Arts  
Management, Law and Society, and was a  
Trustee of the Association of Arts Adminis-  
tration Educators (2011-2014). From 2000-  
2007, she worked on the cultural policy  
portfolio at the Urban Institute and was a  
2007 Rockefeller Humanities Fellow at the  
Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife  
and Cultural Heritage.



### MIRAE KIM, M.A., Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Nonprofit Studies, Schar  
School of Policy and Government, George  
Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia

<https://schar.gmu.edu/profiles/mkim216>

Mirae Kim, M.A., Ph.D. earned her Ph.D. in 2014  
from the Rutgers School of Public Affairs  
and Administration and a Master's of Arts  
Management from Carnegie Mellon Univer-  
sity. Currently, Mirae serves as a co-editor of  
the Nonprofit Policy Forum and serves on  
the research team that builds the National

Survey of Nonprofit Trends and Impacts and  
the Nonprofit Organization Research Panel  
Project (NORPP) Manager, both of which aim  
to improve how we study nonprofit organi-  
zations. She has been leading the "Nonprofit  
Organization Research Panel" project since  
2015, which she created to provide valuable  
information for nonprofit practitioners while  
producing much needed data for researchers  
in the nonprofit community.



### NEVILLE VAKHARIA, M.S.

Associate Dean for Research and Planning;  
Associate Professor, Arts Administration &  
Museum Leadership, Drexel University  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

[https://drexel.edu/westphal/about/direc-  
tory/VakhariaNeville/](https://drexel.edu/westphal/about/directory/VakhariaNeville/)

Neville Vakharia, M.S. teaches courses and  
undertakes R&D aimed at strengthening  
the arts, cultural, and creative sector. His  
research centers on the role that technology,  
innovation, and knowledge play in building

sustainable, resilient, and relevant organiza-  
tions and communities. He earned both his  
B.S. in materials engineering and his M.S. in arts  
administration from Drexel and is currently  
pursuing a Ph.D. in Information Science. Neville  
served as the director of the Cultural Data  
Project at The Pew Charitable Trusts (now SMU  
DataArts) and currently serves as an advisor to  
many creative, start-up, and social enterprises  
and community-based organizations.

## APPENDIX E:

### About the Alliance for California Traditional Arts

The [Alliance for California Traditional Arts](#) (ACTA) promotes and supports ways for cultural traditions to thrive now and into the future. Our vision is for a culturally and racially equitable California. In our increasingly fractured society, we believe ACTA plays a critical role in shaping a positive future for California and the nation where the unique value of every culture is respected, sustained, and appreciated. Through our programs, services, and funding opportunities for the traditional arts, we are weaving a more integrated, just, and empathetic social fabric with local, regional, national, and international impacts.

ACTA's original vision 25 years ago was to support traditional artists as they respond to harm caused by colonialism, white supremacy, genocide, displacement, and structural racism. Since ACTA's inception, supporting artists through funding, infrastructure, and advocacy has been part of a larger effort towards taproot repair in these communities. With 1 in 4 Californians identifying as 1st-generation immigrants, our state is at the forefront of the country's shift toward ethnic plurality. From Ohlone basketry to Japanese koto music to queer voguing competitions, we recognize California's breadth of cultural practices as sources of social belonging, power, and justice.

Designated by the California Arts Council as the state's official statewide folk and traditional arts service provider for 24 years,

ACTA has developed methods and infrastructure to support the diverse traditional cultural expressions of California's vast and often underserved traditional arts field. Since our founding by cultural workers, arts administrators, and artists, we have distributed nearly \$7.2 million in grants to 1,689 artists and organizations throughout 50 counties in the state. We facilitate this work through three offices, located in Fresno, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. ACTA's board and staff include culture bearers and community leaders—their lived experiences and first voices inform our policies, programs, and governance. ACTA's programs, communications, and internal operations incorporate the different ways of knowing, living, and communicating across California's array of cultural communities.

Nationally, ACTA serves as a thought leader and innovator in the public folklore field through research, convenings, and advocacy. In addition to leading the national Taproot Initiative, ACTA is currently engaged in a tripartite consortium with the Southwest Folklife Alliance and the First People's Fund to develop a National Folklife Network on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts.

#### **ACTA's core programs include:**

- **Apprenticeship Program:** funding for one-on-one training between mentor artists and apprentices; this program has supported 385 pairs since its launch in 1998

- **Living Cultures Grant Program:** small grants for cultural groups and organizations—often serving as an entry point for first-time grant-seekers
- **Arts in Corrections and Re-entry:** traditional arts residencies offered at 18 California state prisons and in programs for returning residents, led by ACTA’s workforce of 40 teaching artists focused on the themes of traditional arts practice as restorative justice and healing from trauma
- **Building Healthy Communities:** systems change and narrative shifting for health equity led by ACTA artist fellows who apply traditional practices in service of community health and justice
- **Traditional Arts Roundtable Series:** public events centering knowledge-sharing between traditional artists and leaders
- **Sounds of California:** a long-term recording, archiving, and community engagement project that explores music and soundscapes as vital expressions of collective experience
- **Sankofa Fund for Cultural Preservation:** grants to individual artists and organizations that foster artistic expression rooted in historically marginalized communities in San Francisco
- **California Living Heritage Award:** in recognition of individuals who uplift folk and traditional art in service of community vitality
- **Media, documentation, and resource-sharing:** fostering greater understanding and appreciation of the folk and traditional arts through digital media projects, documentation, archiving, and public communications via our e-newsletter, website, and social media channels

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Young women on accordions learning norteño traditional Mexican music as part of a youth music education program with The Latino Commission Central Valley Nuevo Comienzo in the San Joaquin Valley, established as an alternative to outside forces like gangs and drugs, 2019. Photo: Crystal Murillo/ACTA.