



National Folklife Network
PHASE 1: Implementation Evaluation

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

In fall 2019, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released [Living Traditions](#), a portfolio analysis of the agency's Folk & Traditional Arts program. The report identified significant regional gaps in funding and infrastructure for the folk & traditional arts. Consequently, the NEA established the National Folklife Network (NFN), an initiative to build the capacity of cultural heritage artists and communities, strengthen folk & traditional arts infrastructure, and foster a thriving ecosystem for one of the most vital, horizontal, and accessible sectors of the arts national scene. Through a Cooperative Agreement, Southwest Folklife Alliance (SFA), in partnership with First Peoples Fund and the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, is in the process of implementing the NFN initiative by creating cohorts in seven regions and conducting training, fieldwork, convenings, community collaborations, and cultural asset mapping. Additionally, the activities of the NFN will be enhanced by a new website to share program highlights and resources. Key activities of the NFN include:

- Creating seven regional cohorts, four in rural areas (Rocky Mountain West, Northern Plains, Southern Plains, Alaska,) and three in urban areas (San Juan, PR; Memphis, TN; Washington DC)
- Conducting a field scan of potential NFN participant sites.
- Providing consulting services and logistical support to the regional cohorts. This includes training-related resources, fieldwork, convenings, and technical support for finding long-term funding strategies.
- Aggregating and sharing best practices of each regional cohort.
- Developing a website and communications plan to disseminate information to participants and the broader public.

Over the last several months, the NFN has completed field scans in two sites and is working to refine the methodology to complete scans in five additional areas; designed a website; made a call for original writing by youth and adult authors about the distinctive sense of folk-life (home) in each area; generated a bank of ideas for interrogating and expanding the vocabulary and methods of folklife practices (alternative ways of naming what we do and how we do it); and held a retreat of key partners to clarify scope, timeline, and core values guiding the work forward.

2. STUDY SCOPE

As part of the NEA Cooperative Agreement, SFA will work with the NEA Office of Research and Assessment to conduct a mixed-methods implementation evaluation of the launch of the NFN and propose a design for an outcomes evaluation that will be conducted during a renewal period of the Cooperative Agreement. The initial evaluation phase will focus on ***documenting and supporting the processes of development and implementation*** for the purpose of improving operations and support services. Goals for this phase are:

- To learn about regional cohort needs and distinct characteristics.
- To document the structure and format of SFA and partners service offerings to regional cohorts.
- To support the progression of program activities as they are implemented (through identifying successful methods, challenges, and missing components).
- To highlight emerging strategies for successful activities and services that will aid cohort development.
- To develop capacity for the NEA and the NFN to conduct an outcomes evaluation in the future.
 - Work with SFA, partners (Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) and First Peoples Fund (FPF)), and cohorts to develop a logic model and theory of change for the NFN.
 - Generate early metrics and indicators of programmatic outcomes.
 - Develop data-collection methods for program activities.

3. ACTIVITIES AND DELIVERABLES

- Prepare an evaluation plan for cooperator approval.
- Prepare and maintain a project budget and timeline for cooperator approval.
- Lead regular project check-in meetings with SFA staff.
- Work with NFN participants and regional cohorts to develop a logic model and theory of change for the NFN.
- Participate in NFN/SFA staff, partner (ACTA and FPF), and regional cohort meetings (approximately 1-3 meetings monthly: via Zoom).
- Present interim findings and facilitate discussions to support reflection on and learning from NFN activities.
- Observe program activities and service offerings to regional cohorts (# of observations are flexible and to be agreed upon as needed. Most observations to be conducted virtually; NFN has available funding to support evaluator's travel as needed).
- Interview a selection of regional cohort participants (9), SFA staff (3), and partners (ACTA and FPF, 1-3 interviews per partner organization).
- Work with SFA to design a one-day, in-person or virtual assessment and evaluation convening with the NEA Office of Research and Analysis and staff/anchor organizations. The event will include a presentation and discussion of findings, including best practices, and a planning session for a future outcome evaluation study.
- Produce a final report outlining results from the developmental evaluation and a pathway to design an outcome evaluation.
 - Summary of activities and findings, including discussion of promising practices
 - Recommendations for future programmatic work

- Research questions, design, and evaluation framework (including metrics) for future outcome evaluation
- Written in plain language
- No more than 30 pages
- Include charts, infographics, and photographs of activities

4. KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the theory of change for the NFN?
- How does the NFN's charge and mandate interface with the existing national infrastructure of the field of folk and traditional arts?
- In what ways can the NFN help uplift aspirational and practical models of creative heritage work that takes place adjacent to or outside of the known universe of NEA and other state and organizational support mechanisms?
- Did the NFN regional cohorts reach the intended constituencies? Are these constituencies adequately involved in activities (i.e. trainings, regional convenings, and technical support)?
- What are the NFN's feedback mechanisms for tracking programmatic changes growth as they occur?
- How is the SFA functioning—administratively, organizationally, and in terms of personnel—to implement the NFN?
- Is the partnership model (SFA with ACTA and FPF) being implemented as originally intended? Is the model effective in serving current and future work together? If not, how can this model be developed or is another model more viable for this initiative? What are emerging, effective strategies for building capacity in the Folk and Traditional Arts field?

5. EVALUATOR QUALIFICATIONS

The NFN is looking to engage an individual or group of individuals or a firm that can demonstrate:

- A track record of equitable commitment, intellectual engagement, and authentic relationships with community-based artistic expressions, including but not limited to Black, Latinx, APIDA, Native American, Rural, Urban, and/or Economically Disadvantaged populations.
- Experience leading culturally responsive developmental and outcome evaluations.
- Expertise facilitating evaluation learning frameworks for dynamic teams thinking outside the normative categories (i.e. engaging in critical interrogations of ideas, assumptions, and vocabularies that can often equally include and exclude communities in the arts field).
- Experience with quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for evaluation and performance measurement. This includes developing and imbedding data literacy, collection, and analysis practices into new and ongoing program activities.
- Comfort working at the intersection of strategy, learning, and evaluation.
- Expertise with development of logic models and theories of change to guide values-informed actions.
- Demonstrated ability to navigate a processual and developmental system of meaning-making, identifying major themes from seemingly diffuse data in a blend of aspirational goals and contractual constraints.

- Evidence of strong project management skills.
- Ability to communicate in plain language with a variety of stakeholder audiences. This includes the ability to communicate quantitative data to broad audiences through visualizations and storytelling.

6. TIMELINE

The contract will span 12 months from the time of engagement, with options for renewal as part of the ongoing development of the NFN. The ideal team or evaluator will be able to start engaging with the NFN partners no later than September 2022.

Milestones in the Evaluation timeline include:

- Delivery of an evaluation plan (October 2022)
- Convene study session with NEA, NFN Cooperator (SFA), Partners (ACTA and FPF) and Community Connectors team (December 2022/January 2023)
- Attendance to all NFN partners and regional connectors/collaborators in South Dakota (Spring 2023)
- Produce final report (May/June 2023)

7. COMPENSATION

A total of \$50,000 will be available for the evaluator's fee. Additional funding will be available for travel as needed.

8. HOW TO APPLY

Send:

- (1) a Statement of Qualifications (no longer than 3 pages) that makes evident competency in the desired skills and attributes that align with the goals of the NFN.
- (2) a Statement of Interest that addresses how you would approach the evaluation work requested by NFN.

In either or both Statements above, please address:

- Track record of equitable commitment, intellectual engagement, and authentic relationships with community-based artistic expressions, including but not limited to Black, Latinx, APIDA, Native American, Rural, Urban, and/or Economically Disadvantaged populations.
- Expertise facilitating evaluation learning frameworks for dynamic teams thinking outside the normative categories (i.e. engaging in critical interrogations of ideas, assumptions, and vocabularies that can often equally include and exclude communities in the arts field).
- Experience leading culturally responsive developmental and outcome evaluations.
- Comfort working at the intersection of strategy, learning, and evaluation.
- Expertise with development of logic models and theories of change to guide values-informed actions.

- Experience with quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for evaluation and performance measurement. This includes developing and imbedding data literacy, collection, and analysis practices into new and ongoing program activities.
- Demonstrated ability to navigate a processual and developmental system of meaning-making, identifying major themes from seemingly diffuse data in a blend of aspirational goals and contractual constraints.
- Evidence of strong project management skills.
- Ability to communicate in plain language with a variety of stakeholder audiences.

Please include relevant supportive documentation (CVs, reports, sample materials) and two (2) references.

Interested candidates may submit questions in advance of submitting a Statement of Qualifications to NFN Project Director Dr. Maribel Alvarez at alvarezm@arizona.edu

**RFQs will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis through August 5, 2022.
Submit all documents Attn: Evaluator RFQ at: nationalfolklifeteam@gmail.com**

