

Summary Report
Visioning Retreat for the Center for Washington Cultural Traditions

Melanie Beene and Robert Baron
January 2016

Three decades ago the first of three Washington State folklife programs was established. Now the state program is once again in transition. The folk arts program of the Washington State Arts Commission (now ArtsWA) was discontinued in June 2013 and the director of Northwest Heritage Resources will soon retire. Led by Northwest Heritage Resources, folklorists and representatives from government and nonprofit cultural organizations have been engaged in a series of conversations to strategize rebuilding the state folklife program and building a sustainable statewide network for the field. The results of these efforts has been the decision to establish a Center for Washington Cultural Traditions in July 2016 at Humanities Washington, as a collaboration with ArtsWA, Northwest Heritage Resources, and a network of nonprofit organizations and government agencies. The Center is envisioned as something more ambitious and sustainable than previous state folklife programs, engaging collaboration with multiple disciplines in the arts and humanities and attracting significant private and government funding.

On January 11, 2016, a day-long visioning retreat was held at the State Capitol Museum in Olympia, facilitated by arts and foundation consultant Melanie Beene with folklorist Robert Baron. Beene and Baron developed the agenda with Northwest Heritage Resources Executive Director Jill Linzee, Humanities Washington Executive Director Julie Ziegler, and ArtsWA Executive Director Karen J. Hanan. The agenda was designed to achieve consensus among participants about the Center's mission, vision, and values; address issues of structure and sustainability and develop ideas for funding, an advisory board, a timeline, collaboration and the hiring of a director for the Center. Participants included board and staff from ArtsWA, Humanities Washington, Northwest Heritage Resources, Jack Straw Cultural Center, and 4 Culture, along with folklorists Debbie Fant of the Folk and Traditional Arts Program of the Washington State Park and Recreation Commission and Willie Smyth, retired director of the folk arts program of ArtsWA. (A complete list of participants is attached.) Many of the participants did not know one other and others had worked together for years. Funding for this convening was provided by Northwest Heritage Resources and by the American Folklore Society with funds provided by the Folk and Traditional Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts.

The retreat in Olympia included the following goals:

- To lay the groundwork for a Center for Washington Cultural Traditions
- To create a shared vision among key folklife & traditional arts stakeholders
- To explore the potential structure and sustainability of the Center
- To consider the Center's relationship to other programs, organizations and agencies involved with folklife

- To deepen participants understanding of heritage resources in the Northwest

Participants arrived in Olympia from throughout the state on a rainy, cold January morning and spent an active day working through the issues. After the meeting opened with greetings and an introduction to the purposes of the meeting by Beene and Linzee, public folklorist Robert Baron addressed the issue “What is ‘public folklife’ ” and Why should we care?” with a talk built around a PowerPoint presentation “Keys to a Successful State Folk Arts Program” created in 2010 by a group of state folk arts program directors.

An overview by Baron of the folklife field in the U.S. focused upon the distinctive features and varieties of state programs and outlined the components of successful programs. There are currently over 40 state folklife programs. He discussed their scope of activities and the partnerships created with other state agencies and nonprofit organizations. These programs need to function as distinctive, professionally directed programs devoted to field research, programming, apprenticeships and services. Noting that these programs are located in state arts councils, non-profit organizations, universities and humanities councils, Baron emphasized the importance of shaping them to the kinds of organizations where they reside. While most state programs are not situated in humanities councils, a humanities framework enables folklife programs to be more expansive in reaching beyond circumscribed arts rubrics, to contain robust interpretive and educational dimensions and to engage issues relating to traditional culture such as land rights and sustaining traditional occupations. As non-profit organizations, humanities councils provide more flexibility than state government agencies.

Baron traced the trajectory of state programs that have thrived continuously and those that were discontinued and revived by another organization or agency. The most successful programs have a stable funding base with substantial government and, in some cases, private support. They maintain strong, structured partnerships with a wide range of communities and organizations, provide or facilitate funding to artists and organizations, work closely with advisory boards or funding panels, provide services to individual artists and tradition bearers and relate to the cultural character of their state in a holistic manner. He noted that the culture of Washington State is a microcosm of the cultural variety of the West, including ethnic, immigrant, refugee and Native American cultures; pronounced regionalization; traditional maritime, ranching, farming and forestry occupations; and an innovative new consciousness engendered by tech industries and social media innovations that thrive in the State. He stressed that the nature of folklife is emergent, not codified, and that it changes over time within the conventions of a community’s traditions. State folklife programs both sustain local traditions and present traditions across cultural boundaries. It is one of the few examples in civil society of people learning and experiencing other cultures. As such, it is a key to cultural democracy.

The meeting then turned to a series of group discussions and break-out groups to define the mission, values and vision of the Center, propose its scope of activities, define markers of success, develop parameters of collaboration, propose funding sources, outline the roles of the advisory group and Center director, discuss where the Center will be located, and determine the next steps for the development of the Center.

I. Mission, Vision, Values

The group reached the following consensus about the Center's mission and vision:

The **mission** of the Center for Washington Cultural Traditions is to recognize, sustain, advance, and celebrate the living cultural heritage of Washington State.

The **vision** of the Center for Washington Cultural Traditions is that the many, different cultural communities of Washington State better understand, respect and appreciate one another.

The **values** mentioned included a number of themes that were grouped as follows, with the number following each corresponding to the number of participants mentioning each theme:

Inclusivity (8), inclusiveness, inclusive, welcome, promotes cultural equity (fairness)

Respect (6), respect for diversity, understanding, honor/respect

Collaboration (4), collaborative, scholarship risk taking collaborating, collaborate, partnership

Integrity (3), authenticity

Affirmation (2)

Accessible (2), public access/accessibility

One each for: **dialog**, **dignity**, **educate**, **encourage**, **empowerment**, **harmony** (builds humane world), **happiness** (celebrates art as a vehicle of fun and joy), **honor**, **innovation**, **nourish**, **promote**, **recognition**, **vibrancy**.

II. Scope of Activities

After brainstorming the work the group would like to see the proposed **Center for Washington Cultural Traditions** carry out, they came up with the following themes. The numbers indicate the number of participants who submitted that idea.

Be a Statewide Connector/Partner/Collaborator (13): Sustainable and focused on folklife statewide, serve as connector for cultural communities across state, be truly statewide (outreach), promote local and regional cultural traditions as a cohesive statewide whole, develop partnerships to implement events, exhibits, resource materials, education, connect (5), partnership (in public programs, in documentation, in education), build network for advocacy, resources, partners, make meaningful intra-community connections, build partnerships between agencies/collaborate, participatory structure,

facilitate collaboration among like-minded agencies, coalition building with other organizations and traditional communities

Support and sustain the field (13): Sustain, support, fund, fund traditional artists with other agencies, support cultural expression, secure funding, hire a grant-writer to provide funding for all cultural communities, support and promote artists, make grants to the field

Educate/Convene/Public Programs (8): Partner with other local and regional organizations to produce programs, provide opportunities through wide variety of programs, present/celebrate traditions, education (develop a pathway from folk artist to teaching artist), enable communities to represent their folklife, facilitate the passing of traditions and cultural practices from one generation to the next, bring out the richness of traditions and culture being brought to a community by new residents (perhaps offsetting negative reactions to the new group), develop community driven public dialogues.

Do Fieldwork (7): Fieldwork and research, identify artists/traditions that reach different communities, fieldwork/research of statewide cultural traditions, document, fieldwork-strategies to reach across the state, honor and validate traditions and practices that may be beginning to be seen as passé by others, identify new traditional/folk communities

Advocacy/Promotion (4): To other agencies, to the legislature, promote

Technical Support Services (3): Provide technical support to community-based artists working folk/traditional arts (capacity building), provide support for community and traditional artists (e.g., training and funding), support apprenticeship program

Provide Space (3): Provide a permanent communal space for groups (e.g., First Nations People), a place of learning for all, community centered with easy access

Create/Maintain Archives (2): Create & maintain archive of traditional arts statewide; prioritize apprentice program, maintain folk/traditional arts archives & provide broad public access through both a physical archives and virtually through digitized materials.

Information Management (2): Provide clearinghouse for statewide activities, compile and maintain a catalogue of folk/traditional artists working and living in Washington State

Language/Naming of things (1): Wrestle with definitions

III. Collaboration

In response to the question of what collaboration means to the participants in this endeavor, the group came up with the following:

- Mutual needs met
- Mutually beneficial

- Everyone is a stakeholder providing equitable, but different resources
- Symbiotic
- Distinct but overlapping goals
- Bring expertise to new audiences
- Able to do more
- Using complimentary resources of different organizations or groups
- Identifying resources
- Coordinated fundraising at different levels
- Multiplies effectiveness
- Collaborate on aspects of programs
- No duplication of efforts
- Leveraging resources
- Some things can only be done through partnerships
- Many presenting partners
- Seamless
- New ideas
- Different strengths
- More youth

IV. Markers of Success

In response to the question “What does success look like?” the group came up with the following:

- Meeting community needs
- Program could not begin or work without partners
- Begin to identify cultural resources statewide
- Recognizing assets (value) of the partner
- Staff hire
- Visible product built on existing framework
- Defining the need for the program
- Paid dedicated staff
- More statewide recognition
- Technical support
- Authentic engagement involving multiple partners
- Stakeholder involvement in policy and direction
- Web page/social media/online presentation
- Ongoing funding (not vulnerable)
- Line item in budget (state, etc.)

V. Funding the Center

The group as a whole participated in an exercise to determine possible sources of support for the proposed Center. They suggested the following sources of funding:

Contributed Income

Government:

Federal: NEA, IMLS (with the State), American Folklife Center, National Parks, DOE for teaching artists, Veterans Administration

State: ArtsWA, Humanities Washington, State Parks, State Education, State Historical Society, Capitol Budget, Direct Legislative Appeal, DAP

Regional/Local: 4 Culture (King County)

Foundations:

Community foundations in towns where programs occur, Everett, family foundations, Ferguson, Ford, Icicle Fund (Bullitt Fdn.), Littlefield/Sage Fdn., Murdock Charitable Trust, NW Area Foundation, Inland NW Community Fdn., Seattle Fdn., Setterberg, tribal foundations

Corporations:

Bank of America, Cargill Foundation, Microsoft, Target (not a lot of prospect but perhaps in the area of diversity).

Individuals:

Social Ventures, patron model, Kickstarter, Indigogo

In-Kind:

Academic institutions or professors, interns, workstudy, park venues, library and museum venue, college archives, bus tours/Road Scholars, Americorps

Earned Income

Contracts for programming undertaken with other organizations

School programs

Sales of recordings and publications

Admissions to events

VI. Who will make the vision happen?

The group agreed that for this vision to happen successfully it will require the cooperation, coordination and good will of the folklife community throughout the state, sister organizations in other arts and humanities disciplines, and the leadership and partnering skills of Humanities Washington and ArtsWA. The Center will be a program

of Humanities Washington. Its Director, when hired, will be the linchpin in implementing the shared vision of the arts, heritage, and humanities communities in Washington State. The single most critical act will be making the right hire for this position, which will report to the Executive Director of Humanities Washington. In making the hire and in implementing the vision the Executive Director and eventual Center Director will be advised by an Advisory Board. The inaugural Advisory Board will be the executive directors and two board representatives from each of ArtsWA, Humanities Washington and Northwest Heritage Resources, and several public folklorists working in the Northwest. This group will meet and create its job description and design a process to add other members as needed. It was envisioned that the Advisory Board would provide the folklife expertise, perspective, and fieldwide knowledge to Humanities Washington and it would be diverse in age, ethnicity, and geography. Since much of its work will be accomplished through contracts with folklorists, the policy would be not to have any one on the Advisory Board who has a potential conflict of interest with the Center. Specifically, no one on the Advisory Board can be paid by the Center.

Members of the group recommended that a sub-committee of the Advisory Board advise on the hiring of the Center Director. Sub-committee members could also participate in interviewing candidates for the position.

A quick brainstorm of a job description/role of the Advisory Board included:

- Folklife expertise
- Advise and counsel Center and its director
- Provide feedback on proposals submitted
- Provide policy input
- Liaison with statewide folk and traditional arts community
- Tracking mutual goals
- Advocacy
- Assist in convenings

A quick brainstorm of a job description for the Center Director included:

- Field depth
- Skilled communicator
- Capacity to network and build relationships
- Ability to conduct or oversee fieldwork
- Ability to design and implement public programs
- Ability to plan
- Ability to provide direct services to the field
- Interest in continuing existing programs

VII. The Center's Location, Real and Virtual

The Center will live at Humanities Washington in Seattle. The Center Director has also been offered additional ad hoc office space in Olympia at ArtsWA and will no doubt travel throughout the state. A presence throughout the state will be critical in order to serve all regions and communities. Since regions east of the Cascades often feel

overlooked by the rest of the state it will be especially important to frequently undertake field research, services and programming in these areas. There was discussion of the fact that programming will no doubt happen in partnership with other organizations throughout the state. Organizations outside of Seattle and Olympia could provide office and programming space for the Center in the future, functioning in effect as program affiliates or satellites.

The precise details of how this position will be structured and where the Director will work will need to be determined after the Director is hired.

VIII. Next Steps

The target date for launching the Center is July 2016. Humanities Washington expects to hear about NEA funding in April, hopefully amounting to at least \$25,000 - \$30,000. It has also budgeted \$50,000 to \$60,000 from its own operating budget. An application is in process to the Murdock Charitable Trust for \$200,000 over three years.

Over the next five months, the following will happen:

- Write job description for Center Director.
- Write description of responsibilities for the Center's Advisory Board.
- Establish the search process and search committee. The search panel would advise Humanities Washington on the job search and candidates, and assist with interviewing, with the final hiring decision to be made by Humanities Washington.
- Determine initial membership of the Advisory Board. In addition to the executive directors and board members of ArtsWA and Humanities Washington and NW Heritage Resources, other members will be decided by the core members of the Board.
- Update NWHR database in preparation for transfer to Humanities Washington.

During the initial months of the new director, the following will occur:

- Draft a one-year program plan. Collaborative activities in the program plan may include a new immigrant equity/social justice project with Jack Straw and 4Culture and participation in the ongoing Headwaters project with the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, and potentially the National Park Service. A proposal for holding the National Folk Festival in Washington State might be developed.
- Draft a fundraising plan
- Draft a communications plan, which could include an e-newsletter.

Accomplishments

Participants agreed that the gathering was exceptionally productive. There was a candid exchange of views with great collegiality, resulting in consensus about a number of key issues. Participants left the meeting with a shared sense of accomplishment as the arts and

humanities team learned more about the depth of expertise in the folklife community and the folklorists participated in crafting the mission, vision and values for the proposed Center for Washington Cultural Traditions. The work of the Center was outlined, what success looks like was described, and potential sources of support were brainstormed. Finally, the structure of the Advisory Board and its relationship to the Center and to Humanities Washington was discussed, and a rough job description for the new Center director was outlined.

Challenges

A concern was raised at the retreat about ArtsWA and Humanities Washington moving ahead with plans for a public presentation about the new Center without the inclusion of the third key collaborator - the current state folklife program (NW Heritage Resources) - whose director had initiated this collaboration – and/or other folklore professionals. In response, the board chair from Humanities Washington pointed out: we could all do well to try and live the Center’s newly articulated vision: “that the many different cultural communities of Washington State better understand, respect and appreciate one another.” The resolution of this issue was indicative of the will to collaborate and reconcile the interests of multiple partners.

Participants recognized that the establishment of the Center should help to strengthen other organizations involved with folklife in Washington, and vice versa. The folklife field will greatly benefit from restored and increased funding from ArtsWA, for activities like apprenticeships and organizational support. There is significant potential for ArtsWA to provide support for folklife through other grants programs and technical assistance funding. The Director of the Center for Washington Cultural Traditions could work with ArtsWA to assist with these programs. The participants share the deep concern of the arts and cultural community of Washington about the low level of funding to ArtsWA. Advocacy by the folklife community and heritage field should be directed towards substantial funding increases to both ArtsWA and Humanities Washington, drawing from its diverse representation of the state’s cultural communities and regions.

The critical next step will be the hiring of the Center Director. Will the folklife field have sufficient input to head off the hiring of a wrong fit for their community? Substantial involvement of representatives from the folklife field in the recruitment and selection of a finalist for the center director position through a committee of the advisory board can address this concern. Humanities Washington will develop a program that meets their needs and interests. At the same time consultation with the advisory board on a regular basis will be of great value to assure that it also addresses the priorities, professional standards and community concerns of the folklife field in Washington. The January 11th meeting represented a good start to a strong and mutually supportive collaborative endeavor.

RETREAT PARTICIPANTS

Facilitators – **Melanie Beene** and **Robert Baron**

Humanities Washington (statewide nonprofit) –

Julie Ziegler (Executive Director)

Keri Healey, Grant writer for HW (& former employee)

Antonio (Tony) Gomez, HW Speaker's bureau presenter & collaborator (musician), cultural programmer for Broadway Center for the Performing Arts

Sue McNab, HW Board Chair, PEMCO Insurance Executive

John Baule, HW Executive Committee Member, Yakima Valley Museum Director

ArtsWA (formerly known as the Washington State Arts Commission) –

Karen Hanan (Executive Director)

Miguel Guillén, Program Manager, Grants to Organizations

Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs, WA State Arts Commissioner, Chicana poet, literary critic, cultural worker, and Professor at Seattle University in Modern Languages and Women and Gender Studies.

Frank Video, WA State Arts Commissioner, Legislative Aide, Seattle City Council, who provides strategic advice on arts, culture and technology. Also a visual artist specializing in design, public art, and site-specific installation.

Northwest Heritage Resources (statewide public folklore non-profit) –

Jill Linzee (Executive Director)

Phyllis Harrison, NWHR Board President, folklorist, owns/runs The Art Stop in Tacoma

Sam Schrager, NWHR Board member, folklorist, professor at The Evergreen State College

4Culture – **Eric Taylor**, Heritage Program Coordinator

Jack Straw Cultural Center – **Joan Rabinowitz** (Executive Director)

Washington State Parks, Folk & Traditional Arts in the Parks Program – **Debbie Fant**, Program Coordinator

Willie Smyth – former Director of the Folk & Traditional Arts Program at the WA State Arts Commission

Jens Lund – retired public folklorist who ran the first state public folklore program (was unable to attend)

AGENDA
Visioning Retreat for Center for Washington Cultural Traditions
Monday January 11, 2016 in Olympia, WA
9:00 am to 5:00 pm
Facilitator: Melanie Beene

Agenda

Goals of the Retreat

- To lay the groundwork for a **Center for Washington Cultural Traditions**
- To create a shared vision among key folklife & traditional arts stakeholders
- To explore the potential structure and sustainability of the Center
- To consider the Center's relationship to other programs, organizations and agencies involved with folklife
- To deepen participants understanding of heritage resources in the Northwest

Introductions and housekeeping

Jill Linzee & Melanie Beene

Jill welcomes and explains how this meeting came to happen.

I review the goals, the agenda, two breaks and working lunch, bathrooms at back. Introduce Robert. In planning this meeting we wanted the participation of public folklorists to share a broader frame for the work and to ground it in an understanding of what has gone before and what has tried and worked and not worked in other places.

Many of you know Robert for those of you who don't, he has a long and distinguished career as a folklorist and he is currently at the New York State Council on the Arts. Thanks Robert for being here and sharing with us your expertise about this undertaking.

What is "public folklife" and why should we care?

Robert Baron

Q&A

What will be the work of the *Center*?

11:00

10 Minute break

Why do we need a *Center for Washington Cultural Traditions*?

Mission, Vision, Values

Noon

LUNCH Three breakout groups will discuss:

- 1) What does collaboration mean to the participants in this endeavor?
- 2) What does success look like?

1:00

Breakout Groups Report Back

How will the *Center* be sustained?

Who will make this vision happen?

Where will the Center be physically/virtually located?

3:45

15 minute break

When will the *Center* be launched?

Next Steps

Summary of the Day

5:00 Adjourn