

Background

The [Idaho Commission on the Arts](#) is a state agency in Boise, under the Office of the Governor, with a mission of enabling access to the arts, arts education, and Idaho's cultural and artistic heritage.

Like many of the state arts agencies throughout the country, the Idaho Commission on the Arts has a Folk & Traditional Arts Program to document and highlight the state's rich folk and traditional arts. The program has a strong educational focus that includes workshops/symposia, professional development for artists, and community education on folklife.

Folk and Traditional Arts Awards (2013-2015)

Category: Folk Arts Partnerships

Fiscal year 2013 (\$20,000)

Fiscal year 2015 (\$30,000)

In his role as director, Hatcher travels extensively throughout the state to meet traditional artists, going door-to-door to recruit potential candidates for the Traditional Arts Apprenticeships and the Quick Funds grant program. These two grant programs provide a learning partnership between recognized master artists and one or more qualified apprentices to

continue artistic traditions of a shared cultural heritage, along with funds to assist with materials and other expenses.

The Idaho Commission has made deliberate efforts with the program to share folk and traditional arts from underrepresented and marginalized groups, often in rural settings, through projects like the Story Quilt Project, which involves a touring exhibit of narrative quilts put together by refugees in Boise. Another key project is the Mexican Music Project, which documents traditional and non-traditional Mexican music through music creation and the recording of live performances in small agricultural towns in Southern Idaho, where

Latino populations are growing. The Idaho Commission also supports the Archives Project in an effort to organize, digitize, and make accessible online more than 35 years of folk arts history comprised of program documentation, field work, oral interviews, photographs, audio recordings, and more.



Jeff Minor and Jon Mendiola use tools to scrape hair off of a cowhide at a hands-on hide preparation class during the 2016 Idaho Rawhide Rendezvous in Salmon, Idaho. Photo by Ilona McCarty

Activities

For the last five years, Steven Hatcher has been director of the Folk & Traditional Arts Program, which has received Folk Arts Partnership awards from the National Endowment for the Arts that account for about half of the program's budget; the other half is from state, partnership, and individual funding.

Some of the Folk & Traditional Arts Program's offerings are workshops and symposia for medium-specific traditional artists or like-minded artists, such as those that work in the traditional cowboy arts (e.g. saddle makers, silversmiths). These workshops provide professional development, including instruction on building sustainable businesses, marketing, and price setting. The Community Scholar Project hosts workshops in various communities on the fundamentals of folklife. Attendees learn how to define folklore and folklife as well as how to document oral history through interviews. Following the training, attendees seek out traditional artists to interview, and these interviews are compiled and shared with the public.



A presentation by quilters involved in the Story Quilt Project. Pictured from l-r, Storay (AF), Maria (AF), Wafaa (IQ) at the Lincoln County Historical Museum in Shoshone, Idaho.
Photo by Steven Hatcher

Perceived Impact

Over the years, the commission has seen an increase in applications for the Apprenticeship Program and quarterly grants as a result of the outreach Hatcher has been doing throughout the state. The increase in applications also has made the application process more competitive.

The direct investment in the community through the Folk & Traditional Arts Program has increased residents' awareness of the folk and traditional arts, while recognizing the challenge of soliciting community participation, given that Idaho is a large state and the budget supports only one staff person.

"...I think people know more and more that we're out there, and we're paying attention, and we're trying to support." – Steven Hatcher