

## MEETING SUMMARY

A GATHERING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS  
FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE ARTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Wheelwright Museum, Santa Fe, New Mexico

June 3-4, 2004

Organized by the Fund for Folk Culture

Supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

Summary prepared by Andrea Graham

### *In Attendance:*

Rahim AlHaj, Iraqi Musician and Composer, Albuquerque, NM

Anan Ameri, Arab Community Center for Economic & Social Services, Dearborn, MI

Robert Baron, New York State Council on the Arts and FFC Trustee, New York, NY

Marta Brenden, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Silver Spring, MD

Carolyn Bye, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, St. Paul, MN

Kurt Dewhurst, Michigan State University Museum and Chair, FFC Board of Trustees, East Lansing, MI

Moy Eng, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, Menlo Park, CA

Andrea Graham, Independent Folklorist, Pocatello, ID

Bau Graves, Center for Cultural Exchange, Portland, ME

Joel Jacinto, Search to Involve Pilipino Americans and Kayamanan Ng Lahi Philippine Folk Arts,  
Culver City, CA

Maria-Rosario Jackson, The Urban Institute, Washington, DC

Tshibangu Kadima, Congolese Musician, Stoneham, MA

Elzbieta Kaleta, Polish Paper Artist, Albuquerque, NM

Bobby King, Refugee Family Services, Clarkston, GA

Batya Kramer, Fund for Folk Culture, Santa Fe, NM

Laura LaBlanc, Hmong American Partnership, St. Paul, MN

Michael Lee, Hmong Association of Long Beach, Buena Park, CA

Lavinia Limón, Immigration and Refugee Services of America and US Committee for Refugees,  
Washington, DC

Laura Marcus, Fund for Folk Culture, Santa Fe, NM

Mai Neng Moua, Hmong American Institute for Learning, Minneapolis, MN

Nancy Nusz, Oregon Folklife Program, Portland, OR

Kerry O'Connor, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, Menlo Park, CA

Betsy Peterson, Fund for Folk Culture, Santa Fe, NM

Ethel Raim, Center for Traditional Music and Dance, New York, NY

Antonio Ramos, Purepecha (Mexican) Woodcarver and School Teacher, Woodburn, OR

Ann M. Rynearson, International Institute, St. Louis, MO

Joan Shigekawa, The Rockefeller Foundation, New York, NY

Sandra Smith, The Columbus Foundation, Columbus, OH

Shalom Staub, Institute for Cultural Partnerships and FFC Trustee, Harrisburg, PA

Claude Stephenson, New Mexico Arts, Santa Fe, NM

Edwin Torres, The Ford Foundation, New York, NY

Thomas Walker, Independent Folklorist and FFC Trustee, Washington, DC

Bill Westerman, New York Foundation for the Arts and Art Knows No Borders, Bound Brook, NJ

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, The Rockefeller Foundation, New York, NY

## **Introduction**

This meeting was the first in a series of gatherings that will continue into 2005, focusing on support strategies for refugee and immigrant arts. This inaugural gathering convened artists, folklorists, social service workers, cultural community organizers, federal administrators in refugee and immigrant services, researchers and funders for two days of formal presentations, informal discussions and break-out groups that explored specialized issues relating to refugee and immigrant artists and the relevance of cultural heritage and traditional arts to the resettlement process. Case studies, successful organizational models of melding the social services with the arts, and national trends in refugee and immigrant resettlement were topics providing points of departure for discussion.

The larger framing question - does heritage matter? – was a thread running through the gathering. As the group worked towards future collaborations and strategies for future action, they explored “push-pull” factors, the cluster of dynamics and tensions that inform the refugee and immigrant experience, such as grappling with tradition and change; intergroup and intragroup conflict; intergenerational relationships; relationships with countries of origin; the emergence of transnational identities; and the effects of mass culture and dominant culture, among others.

In bringing together such a unique learning community, the FFC hoped to develop a coalition of people who will be committed to dealing with this topic over a period of time. While the gathering was seen as an opportunity for everyone to learn from each other across sectors, it was also intended to be a first step towards shaping a much bigger and more long-term agenda. At the beginning of the gathering, the group was given the charge to use their individual and collective past experience with immigrants and refugees to understand not only what is happening now but also to anticipate what will be happening in the next five to ten years. What will be the experiences of future immigrants and refugees, some of whom may not even be represented currently? How do we imagine future trends and issues, in the midst of many unknowns? In envisioning this future, different service sectors will face different and specific challenges. For folklorists, the big issue is how to deal with change in cultural heritage and traditions. In the arts field, the issue is recognizing the importance of heritage to many communities and finding a place for it in their services. For social service agencies, the challenge is to redefine the immediate survival needs of housing, jobs and food to include cultural and mental health as critical components of basic survival. For refugees and immigrants themselves, it is about finding a secure place in the world where they can be and express who they are, for themselves and their families.

The following summary addresses these topics, provides a few answers, raises many more questions and invites future dialogue.

*Editor’s note: In this meeting summary, invited presenters and speakers who make longer statements are identified. Shorter comments and questions are not attributed in order to allow the ideas to flow.*

## Session One: Multiple Perspectives on Hmong American Cultural Activities

*Carolyn Bye, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, St. Paul, MN*

*Laura LaBlanc, Hmong American Partnership, St. Paul, MN*

*Michael Lee, Hmong Association of Long Beach, Buena Park, CA*

*Mai Neng Moua, Hmong American Institute for Learning, Minneapolis, MN*

FFC Program Associate Laura Marcus introduced the panel as a group that exemplifies a model of immigrant arts programs for and by one specific cultural group, with collaborations between social service and arts groups in two communities—Minneapolis and Long Beach.

**Laura LaBlanc** has worked for ten years with Hmong American Partnership (HAP), a social service agency. The agency was formed in 1990 after the Hmong community had been in Minnesota for fifteen or twenty years. It was started by young Hmong professionals who had been raised here, had gone to college, and wanted an organization to help support a culture that was being changed dramatically. The organization has always been bi-cultural; its goal was to draw from the ancient Hmong culture as well as the strengths of modern American culture. Some of HAP's programs include helping kids with homework, teaching Hmong history, culture and language, and teaching traditional dance, which has been Americanized and blended with Hmong groups from China and other places. Some young people and families come to HAP in crisis—with marriage problems, school and delinquency problems, gang activity, etc., and the organization has been a tremendous resource in addressing these issues. There is also a lot of anti-immigrant sentiment in their area, with hateful letters to the newspaper about a new wave of Hmong from Thailand who are being resettled this summer. Art is a vehicle that can capture and embrace our human condition, and is also a great institution of social and cultural change. Culture is a pattern of living, and art helps to deal with the inevitable changes of those patterns.

**Mai Neng Moua**, Executive Director of the Hmong American Institute for Learning (HAIL), began by giving some background in Hmong culture and its role in her project. Hmong culture is strongly based in oral tradition, but the elders are no longer telling stories, and young people are no longer raised in the village culture. Young Hmong people no longer speak Hmong, and a lot of the elders have passed on. Until the 1950s, there was no Hmong writing system, so there is no tradition of written literature. There are books about the Hmong by outsiders, but little has been written by the Hmong themselves. While she was in college, Moua started the magazine *Paj Ntaub Voice* to promote and preserve Hmong culture, and to let the people speak and write for themselves. The current issue of *Paj Ntaub Voice* is about war, and the upcoming issue is called "Becoming American." In 2002 HAIL published *Bamboo Among the Oaks*, the first anthology of Hmong-American writing, which has been used in school and college classes. Without a written literature, the Hmong have been left out of Southeast Asian Studies programs, a situation that Moua would like to rectify through her publications. In the next ten years she envisions a publishing house for Hmong writing, because communities have to publish their own literature and achieve recognition on their own.

Additionally, HAIL will strive to provide professional development training for Hmong writers and artists. Officially 40,000 Hmong live in the Twin Cities community, although other estimates are as high as 70,000; half of them are under eighteen. HAIL has a storytelling project in which

elders share both folk tales and personal narratives with younger people. They want to transcribe and translate these stories, and develop them into interactive CDs or cassettes for use in other groups, classrooms, etc. The organization is also starting a Hmong oral history project, training kids to interview parents and elders about their experiences, and creating a space for youth to ask questions. Moua is HAIL's sole staff person—she writes grants and produces the magazine. But she also needs the time to think long term. She wonders, how do we build a house that will stand for a long time?

**Michael Lee** works with the Hmong Association of Long Beach, and previously served as its treasurer. The organization was founded in 1981, and its cultural program, *Qeej Not Gangs*, started in 1998. They sponsor classes in dance, *qeej* (mouth organ), *paj ntaub* (needlework), songs, wedding and funeral traditional songs, and Hmong language reading and writing. The kids who commit to these programs have great success in other parts of their lives—they graduate from high school, and go on to college. Many kids did not know their culture, but they now know how to play *qeej*, read and write Hmong, and sing wedding songs. Lee and the organization believe it is very important to carry on these traditions, to teach kids respect for others and an understanding of their culture, and to carry it on to the future.

**Carolyn Bye**, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) in St. Paul, explained that her organization provides both training and funding for small and community-based organizations. She presented four myths about working with new immigrant and refugee communities. The first is that new immigrants live in central cities, even though many immigrants settle directly in rural and suburban areas, as well as urban core areas. The question becomes how to provide funding to all those areas. The second myth is that each immigrant and refugee group is homogenous. In truth, their subcultures are varied, and they often have long-standing traditional rivalries that are carried on in the new country and cannot simply be ignored or erased. The third myth is that new immigrants suck up public dollars and strain educational and community resources. This view fails to recognize the assets new residents bring, and it overlooks their strong work ethic. Immigrants contribute more than they take. Fourth, there is a misperception that immigrants are not educated. Yet many are highly educated, and just need opportunities. Language, discrimination, and other barriers often mean they can't get work in their field.

MRAC's grant criteria pertaining to diversity, access, and community need and support have benefited immigrant groups. MRAC has found that immigrant groups are often better at articulating these issues than mainstream arts organizations. Immigrants propose projects similar to those of established organizations: there are artist-driven projects, where literature, dance and music are most often funded; and there are community-based projects, primarily for families and children. The latter are a powerful way to build self-esteem for youth and to validate the experience and knowledge of elders. Most of the groups who apply have become settled enough that they can focus beyond survival needs, but MRAC also tries to fund newer immigrant and refugee projects that tend to fly "under the radar." The Liberian and Somali communities provide examples—they need a cultural broker to work with funders, help negotiate difficulties like transportation, arrange for exhibits, etc. A broker helps facilitate the activity but doesn't direct or dominate it. A very small amount of money will often help a great deal—purchasing art supplies,

arranging a meeting or rehearsal space, etc. Many funders don't deal with such small amounts of money, but MRAC's program is specifically geared for that level of help.

There are a number of things that MRAC does to minimize barriers to funding and support. For years they have not required 501(c)3 status, but allow groups to use fiscal agents; they regrant from larger foundations so they are able to do this. They focus on community value rather than capital-A art, they trust that the community knows what they need, and that the process and participation are what count. They work where the action is—in social services organizations, schools, housing complexes, etc., and use alternate venues like malls, churches, hotel ballrooms, or playgrounds. They first focus on “bonding” activities within a group, and only later go public with “bridging” activities to the rest of the community. They are committed for the long haul and understand that it's a labor intensive process. “To work at the grassroots level, you can't keep pulling up the grass to check the roots,” Bye said. They trust the group to tell them what they need. They are very aware of complex language issues, not just translating their guidelines, but understanding that many of their standard terms have no meaning in other cultures. MRAC understands the need to be flexible, and that formal standards for art do not always fit with those of the new groups. We need to keep close to the ground and help where the community says they need help. Boards and panels need to be educated and trained to understand these issues. MRAC understands that cultural leaders need support and help, and that they should not be dumped on for everything once they are identified—they need to build their own houses first. New evaluation questions have to be developed, such as “How is your community stronger because of this project?” and “What value does this group add to community life?”

## **Session Two: National Trends in Refugee and Immigrant Resettlement; Why Does Cultural Heritage Matter? How Does It Matter? When Does It Matter?**

*Lavinia Limón, Immigration and Refugee Services of America and  
US Committee for Refugees, Washington, DC  
Ann M. Rynearson, International Institute, St. Louis, MO*

**Lavinia Limón**, Executive Director of Immigrant and Refugee Services of America and the US Committee for Refugees, provided a broader political context for the discussion with a review of US and UN immigration policy. 1986 was a watershed year for US immigration policy, when almost four million undocumented immigrants were legalized, and strict new regulations regarding hiring undocumented immigrants were implemented for employers; however the employers were never closely monitored for compliance. More recently a shift has occurred toward more punitive systems, and 1996 saw immigration and welfare reforms which were very harsh. There was a need to change welfare incentives so people would go to work, but a big change was the removal of benefits from non-citizens, which affected immigrants. Recent immigration reform strengthened anti-immigrant laws, and retroactive deportations were put into place. September 11, 2001, was a watershed event, so we cannot discuss immigrants and refugees today without understanding its impact. It gave anti-immigrant forces license to do whatever they wanted, it affected both non-citizens and citizens who were immigrants, and it has led to many illegal actions being carried out in the name of immigration reform and homeland security. It is important to note that none of the September 11 terrorists were here as

refugees—refugees are monitored, and their location is known. It is the illegal immigrants and tourists who are unknown.

In the fiscal year before September 11, 63,000 refugees were admitted to the US; 27,000 came in the following year, and in the fiscal 2002-2003 there were 28,000 admitted. A refugee caucus has now been created in Congress, and there has been a lot of education and lobbying conducted on behalf of refugees and their issues. This year they expect between 45,000 and 50,000 refugees to be admitted to the US, including the Hmong coming to Minnesota.

There is a worldwide trend of punitive treatment towards immigrants and refugees. The European Union is passing punitive anti-foreigner laws, following the lead of the US, and Australia is also sending immigrants to an island. Canada is trying to resist the trend, but they are under tremendous pressure from the US. There is more trafficking, people paying to be brought into a country, prostitution, child labor, etc. There are twelve million refugees in the world this year, and last year there were almost fourteen million; the reason for the reduction is the regime changes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Angola—people have gone back to formerly threatening countries. The US Committee for Refugees publishes an annual world refugee survey, and has looked at the practice of warehousing refugees—the long-term holding of refugees in camps or segregated settlements in countries of refuge. Over seven million people have been warehoused for ten years or more, eight million have been so for five years or more. The durable solutions for warehousing are: first, going home; second, settling in place; and third, resettlement in a third country. Only a tiny portion are resettled, and 99% are warehoused and continue to live in “temporary” quarters.

The 1951 UN Convention on Refugees is supposed to be the guiding document for treatment of refugees. The language of the convention does not refer to camps, because of associations with Hitler and Stalin when it was crafted, but many refugees are in fact living in camps. Refugees have the right to work, own property, move, and get an education. Out of the world’s twelve million refugees, at least eight million have had their rights taken away—by the host countries, by the UN Commissioner for Refugees, by the World Food Program, and by being kept in camps; they are international charity cases. “International burden sharing” and “donor fatigue” are buzzwords at meetings in Geneva concerning refugees, but that doesn’t undo the fact that their rights have been taken away. The 1951 document did specify that people were not to be sent back to countries that were persecuting them, so at least that was an improvement on the previous situation. And some refugees prefer warehousing to living on the run, but their rights have still been taken away. The 1951 Convention on Refugees was written for European refugees and written by European leaders; it needs to be revised for the current world situation, which is completely different. Limón is convinced that the anti-immigrant forces are not going to win this war—people are not going to stay home, the world is on the move. Some people will always want to move, and others don’t have a choice. The sentiments of anti-immigrant forces must be recognized—their feelings are real, they are scared, but we need to figure out how we can move on from there in facing the reality of migration and immigration in the world today

**Ann Rynearson**, Senior Vice President of the Culture and Community Program of the International Institute in St. Louis, discussed differences between immigrants and refugees as well as their common concerns. Immigrants know they are coming and have time to prepare,

save money, line up a job, and establish networks. Immigrants have more leeway in getting settled and finding a job, but they also have a hard time. Refugees don't have this luxury; they come from a variety of backgrounds, but all come through a program. There is pressure to get a job right away, so they take jobs that don't meet their needs or match their skills, and for artists this is especially hard. The refugee resettlement system treats everybody the same, which means the singer gets the same factory job as the farmer. Limited language skills also mean they often get unskilled jobs. Refugees start out as nobody in the new environment, especially if they are one of the few members of their group—they have no social and cultural context.

Concern for continuing traditions to the next generation is a major issue for parents in both immigrant and refugee communities. Children move quickly away from their traditional culture, a trend more common in immigrants than refugees. Both groups work very hard to build up knowledge and understanding about who they are, both in the general public and in their children. “We want people to know who we are and where we came from” is a ubiquitous phrase. The complexity of each culture makes this difficult, since there are many subgroups and subtleties. Sometimes it is the in-group fighting that brings groups together, their differences remind them of their commonalities. Often it is the arts that are the best educational avenue for outsiders.

### **Session Three: Hearing from Artists and Others About Needs, Access and Barriers to Resources**

*Rahim AlHaj, Iraqi Musician and Composer, Albuquerque, NM*  
*Tshibangu Kadima, Congolese Musician, Stoneham, MA*  
*Elzbieta Kaleta, Polish Paper Artist, Albuquerque, NM*

Polish paper artist **Elzbieta Kaleta** came to this country in 1981 as a refugee, and was amazed at how much help there was for refugees, but she had a different experience from most. She has a Ph.D. in biology so she was able to get a job, as was her husband. But she was thrown into a totally new and unfamiliar system, both cultural and political. She taught herself English because scientific work is in English, but she had to figure out the culture for herself. They lived at first in the Northeast, but then her husband got a job in Albuquerque so they moved there in 1985. She worked for a few years, then had to stay home to take care of an ailing son and needed something to fill her time, so she turned to her traditional art. She had done scientific illustration and had an artistic bent, so quickly learned *wycinanki*, the traditional Polish style of papercutting. But she also had to learn about the art world, galleries, museums, craft fairs, competitions, etc., and had to teach herself, which was difficult. *Wycinanki* is striking and unique, which helped with marketing, but she started expanding her forms, trying different styles and more contemporary work in paper and collage, to appeal to different tastes. She has done demonstrations, school and senior presentations, but they are mostly free. She makes a living at her art by participating in juried art shows and craft fairs, and selling in galleries and museums. She has been well received, but it's a lot of work and very time consuming, especially the marketing and selling. Kaleta added that she has had some negative feedback as well, and her art is not always accepted. For instance, she was refused access to an artist studio on the grounds that she would not contribute anything to the public or to the art world. When she had an

exhibition in Tokyo, she saw a complex of artist's studios where artists had to do public work two days a week to help with expenses, and thought that was a great model. Space to work for artists is a tremendous need, and this would be a solution that helps the artists and also contributes to public education.

Oud musician and composer **Rahim AlHaj** came to the US in March 2000 as a political refugee from Iraq, and was resettled in Albuquerque. He has degrees in music and Arabic literature, and was a teacher and performer in his home country. The first job he was assigned was at McDonald's, about which he knew nothing. When he was told it was a restaurant, he thought they wanted him to play music as entertainment, which he didn't want to do. When he finally understood the job, he was appalled and asked the social worker, "Do you know me?" He refused to take the job and said he would have to go back because his skills couldn't be used here, so he eventually got work as a security guard to pay for a ticket back to Syria. However, he found he couldn't save enough money while paying his expenses on a wage of \$6 an hour, although he did have time to practice his music during his security shift. He had a friend who asked him to give it six months, and helped him set up a concert in Albuquerque at the university. The concert was sold out. He later made a CD called *The Second Baghdad*, which was recorded in one take, with the cover art designed by a friend, so it was affordable. It was sold out in three months. He has since produced a second CD called *Iraqi Music in a Time of War*. He has been doing some local concerts and some touring, but it is extremely hard to start a musical career in the US. He can't afford to travel with a five-piece ensemble, so has to perform solo. Promoting his work is also hard, but being a musician is his life. He feels that either he has to work as a professional musician here, or he has to go home. He feels that music can make a bridge between cultures, and that is one reason he continues.

**Tshibangu Kadima** is from Congo and came to the US to study computer engineering. He has been playing music since he was a child and says it is in his blood. After his arrival in the US he saw a group of touring Congolese musicians and dancers who put on a sold-out show, and was inspired to develop his own music, so he started a group called Rumbafrica because he saw an interest and a need. He's been playing for more than ten years in the US. Before, he was used to African musicians playing in clubs and restaurants, so playing in museums, libraries and universities was a new idea for him, as it would be for other immigrants. Ethnic-specific clubs like Irish bars or blues clubs will not hire him except on Mondays or Tuesdays, their slow nights, so he cannot get an audience. Cultural centers are a new venue, and artists need to look at the organizations' mission statements and see where they merge with those of the performers. Artists also need to do research, look on the web, etc., to get ideas for new venues. Organizations that promote the well-being of refugees and immigrants need to help artists. Artists need help in touring, which is imperative for performing arts, and also information on how to produce and market a CD or video. No one location will support a group, so you need to travel and tour. Artists need help setting up small regional tours. As an example, Kadima did a mini-tour of schools and cultural centers in the Boston area. How do you measure success? Presenters define success as a nice event, artists define success as making a living, but as an artist how can he support a ten-person band playing on lousy days in tiny towns or schools? He develops his own promotional package and sends it out, with photos, a bio, and a CD. He needs help getting the word out and promoting his group, and he can't afford to do it on his own. The network of cultural presenters needs to kick in to help immigrant and refugee artists get jobs.



## Discussion Themes and Comments

*Many of the themes emerging from the artists' personal stories and the discussion following revolved around problems or gaps in existing support systems – for artists and for immigrants and refugees.*

### 1. Identifying Artistic Expertise Early On

Government RFP's always exclude cultural approaches. Those regulations are in their legislation, so we need to get the laws changed. The purpose of the Refugee Resettlement Program is early economic resettlement, it's the law, so we need to broaden their definitions of economic success to include cultural or artistic expertise.

Immigrant and refugee service workers are not used to dealing with artists, so don't take their skills into consideration when finding them jobs. In Rahim's example of a professional musician being offered a job at McDonald's, the case worker technically did his job, but he could have gone beyond that to work with Rahim's training and expertise. There is a specific Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) regulation about no funds being used for cultural preservation, but that does not mean cultural businesses can't be supported. If artistic activity can be defined as economic activity it can be included. The purpose is to get refugees "off the dole." They have also found that the quickest way for refugees to learn English is in a job.

Micro-loan programs and micro-enterprise programs could be potentially useful for immigrant and refugee artists to get started.

We need to have a national list of resources and a bibliography we could share. In Oregon, they started a program in the refugee service agency to find artists and help them keep up their art. The other staff members felt it was unrealistic and offering false hope to suggest that refugees continue their art. You need to learn the culture of the agency, and reassure people that your work with refugees is not meant to undermine the other programs of the organization.

The Institute for Cultural Partnerships put together a handbook on dealing with artists for refugee workers, with suggestions for finding out what they do, the right words to use to elicit information on artistic practices, and lists of contact people in those arenas who could help them continue their art.

One artist reported that he was undocumented for a few months when he first came to the US, and he had no support in finding a job, since he was an immigrant rather than a refugee. He worked as a field worker even though he had a degree as a teacher in Mexico. How can we identify talents in the immigrant and refugee populations? Visual artists have a harder time getting exposure, it took him nine years to get recognized for his woodwork.

### 2. Access to Touring/Presenting Networks

Those of us who are active in presenting performances are aware of the need for a non-profit booking agency for traditional arts to promote to local presenters. There are a few agents who represent a few traditional artists, but there is a much greater need—there are incredible artists

who are unknown to the presenters' network. It won't make an agent a fortune, so the initiative won't come from the presenters; maybe it can come from funders.

The Center for Traditional Music and Dance started a program to be a non-exclusive booking agency for the artists with whom they work. Such efforts have to be done locally, at least at first, not nationally. There has been a strong movement to get world music presented, but it is mostly big-name artists. Local and regional programs are the way to get new artists started, provide training for artists in presenting, and provide work in schools and help in developing educational materials. For an artist, being your own manager and marketer takes a lot of time, and takes away from the art itself. A regional network of bookers would be a good way to start. Their agency does contracts, helps with travel arrangements, etc., and they take a percentage of the fee. They go to APAP (The Association of Performing Arts Presenters) and a children's presenter conference, and there are regional booking conferences as well. They also got a small grant to produce DVDs of artists.

APAP has also realized that the US is the world, and presented a whole week of Mexican artists from Mexico, but the local Mexican artists were not included. There is still the feeling that the authentic is out there, in other places, not here in our own country and neighborhoods.

ACCESS received a \$230,000 grant in 1997 from the Wallace Foundation to promote and tour Arab artists. However the money didn't go very far when they had to pay travel and promotion, per diem, hall rental, etc.—touring is very expensive in this country. They try to connect artists with existing festivals, instead of organizing tours themselves. Visual arts exhibits are expensive, too, and the people who appreciate it most can least afford it. In other countries art is supported better, is often institutionalized and funded by the government.

The New Mexico Presenters Network likes to present traditional artists, and they work in cooperation with surrounding states to block book artists for a mini-tour of six or seven gigs, to make it worth the artists' while. In traditional arts presenting the demand side is organized, but the supply side isn't.

There is also some demand for artists touring to perform in other communities of their own culture in other locations.

What could the Fund for Folk Culture do in this realm? An example might be to gather presenters together to learn how better to work with them. We also need to help partner the artistic and social service agencies, and broaden the venues for cultural programs—libraries, boys & girls clubs, schools, museums, community centers. Budget cuts have forced use of local artists more—presenters can't afford to bring in outsiders—and this could be used to advantage in promoting immigrant and refugee artists. We hope for a more responsive, democratic, and activist America. One of the Fund's roles can be to share ideas of best practices.

### 3. Access to Broader Audiences

In Oregon, it is sometimes difficult to convince people to present music or dance traditions from other cultures, because they have a hard time getting audiences from the predominantly Anglo

residents. The audience is not knowledgeable about other musical forms. Educating the larger population is very hard, even getting them to come try it once.

Some agents represent traditional arts, and the regional arts organizations have done some promoting of traditional artists as well, although maybe not to the level that it should be. There are many community-based presenters who would and do present traditional artists. Getting audiences is hard. The performance is the last piece, after you have built community interest, done school residencies, and educated the audience. In Columbus, Ohio, they used an outside artist and a local community artist together. They did a lot of educating and exposure beforehand—it's not about the stage, it's about building relationships and education. When the visiting artist came, the community was already prepared and they could connect because of the work that had been done ahead of time.

We need to develop clubs for the new cultural groups. If you give artists a chance and a venue, the people will come. "Beauty is the only thing you cannot deny." If you do good art, people will go. The audience is there. We just need to be creative to get them in the door. We could create a program featuring several cultural groups to increase the audience.

Too much emphasis is placed on artists and audiences as separate. We need to think about the artist as an educator, catalyst, and community member.

In Los Angeles, a Filipino performing arts organization wanted to work on connections between Filipino and Mexican artists. They did a series of workshops and dialogues, and taught people about the historic connections between the two cultures. The communities are now attending each other's performances.

#### 4. Legal Barriers & Other Obstacles

We need to remember that many local immigrant artists are not documented, which makes it even more complicated to hire them. There is a lot of off-the-record hiring of undocumented artists, and payment under the table. For awhile amounts under \$600 were not required to be reported, but then their auditor said they needed Social Security numbers for all checks. Another issue is parents worrying about INS agents coming to programs where their kids are. A lot of artists don't do their art, and a lot of community members lay low and don't attend events, because they're afraid INS officers will be there.

Many artists have no health insurance, and that's a big issue.

One artist feels fortunate to have insurance through the University of New Mexico, but practices his music at home in a one bedroom apartment and has to negotiate with his wife for time and space for his art. He believes he and other artists can make a difference, that's what keeps him going, but he can't do it alone, he needs a community of support. He has a friend who volunteered to be his manager, designed a web site, helped produce a CD, etc., otherwise it wouldn't have happened.

It is important to hear the stories of the artists firsthand. We are a young culture, and many refugees come from old, established cultures. We need a more mature vision that includes art in much more of our culture.

#### **Session Four: Dealing with the “Push-Pull” Factor**

*This session began by breaking the group into six smaller discussion groups, each of which brainstormed around critical issues based on the previous discussions. The emphasis was on the “push-pull” factor identified by several participants in a pre-gathering request for topics. The groups were asked to consider issues such as maintaining and rejecting heritage, inter- and intra-group conflict, generational issues, mass culture, and individual versus group and community needs. When the group reconvened, one person from each sub-group presented their findings, which were written on large sheets of paper and posted around the room. Participants were asked to note similarities and differences, and to look for commonalities found in all the suggestions. The following list is a summary of the ideas and issues generated by the breakout groups. They have been consolidated and organized by areas of concern.*

##### Issues Relating to Building Effective Support Systems

1. Need better understanding of issues specific to refugee and immigrant artists.
2. “Project” focus of many funders is a mismatch to community needs.
3. Recognizing and understanding the role of “cultural brokers” (internal and external) in successfully identifying and supporting newcomer artists.
4. Developing strategies for overcoming language barriers.
5. Flexibility of fiscal sponsorship and organizational structures needed to work with the broadest range of newcomer communities.
6. Need to build critical understanding of cultural vitality in communities, and the role of arts and culture in refugee and immigrant groups.
7. Persistence of “art world” vocabulary and aesthetic systems confounds the ability to see the value and role of the full range of artistic activity in newcomer communities.
8. Need to build and support appropriate infrastructure for fragile groups (think outside the non-profit and government boxes).
9. International exchange to connect refugee and immigrant communities with cultural resources and opportunities in their countries of origin.
10. Long term support is critical.

##### Issues Relating to Newcomer Artists and Communities

1. Building understanding among immigrant artists of American cultural support systems.
2. Need for greater access to technical assistance, materials, musical instruments, booking services, promotion, space, etc.
3. Intergenerational tension, transmission, teaching and learning. Rethinking concepts of authenticity as cultures adapt to change and reinvent themselves.
4. Support systems to build and sustain artistic careers.
5. Leadership development and mentoring of emerging young people.
6. Tension between maintaining culture and assimilating.

### Legal and Public Policy—Relevant Issues

1. Finding the “sweet spot”—the intersection of different sectors and approaches to working with newcomers holds the key to shift the dialogue and the direction of thinking and action. Create opportunities for greater linkage across sectors.
2. Relationship of arts to opportunity for economic self-sufficiency.
3. Relationship of arts to social adjustment and mental health.
4. Status and documentation issues for newcomers.
5. Cultural and intellectual property rights.

### General Climate

1. Negative public perception of refugees and immigrants—generalized fear. Need for greater understanding of distinctions between refugees and immigrants and how they are treated in legislation, funding, status, etc.
2. Create opportunities to promote communication between newcomers and established immigrant communities. Need to understand that the established communities are not monolithic in their relationship to newcomer communities. Better understanding of power dynamics within and between communities.
3. Ongoing tension between “melting pot” and “diversity” models.
4. Global mobility has changed immigration and the process of maintaining cultures.
5. Greater recognition of the transnational nature of immigrant communities and diasporic communities.
6. Better understanding of the role of technology in relation to immigrant and refugee communication between diasporic communities and countries of origin.
7. Need more understanding of issues of class, race and education in relation to refugee and immigrant communities.
8. Need for non-artists to understand how time- and labor-intensive it is to produce art.

## Day Two: Introduction

Looking at the results from day one, several key topics emerged: support structures, bottlenecks and blocks, technical assistance (access to space, venues, etc.). Also, we realized that we are all prisoners of an old set of terms and key concepts that hamper our progress, and we need to develop new language. The gatherings are about helping the FFC, but also about working together and developing new connections, making the whole greater than the sum of the parts. We need to get out of our individual silos and work together. By the end of the day we hope to figure out what some of the next steps are in moving forward.

## Session Five: Developing Assistance Strategies that Work

*Bau Graves, Center for Cultural Exchange, Portland, ME*

*Bobby King, Refugee Family Services, Clarkston, GA*

*Nancy Nusz, Oregon Folklife Program, Portland, OR*

*Antonio Ramos, Mexican Artist, Woodburn, OR*

**Bau Graves**, Artistic Director of the Center for Cultural Exchange in Portland, Maine, opened by saying that several people had asked him about the current status of the *African in Maine* project, which was the subject of one of the readings participants received before the gathering. After the report was submitted, a Sudanese refugee who had been hired to run the program had to be laid off from the Center because funding ran out—they were unable to raise new funds when the original project funds ended. She had to go to work for Wal-Mart, but recently got a job working for a social service organization, and may now be going back to South Sudan. With the loss of the staff person and her insider understanding, the program slipped a bit. They did have a second Sudanese festival, but it was not as successful as the first. They were able to pay artists for the first festival, mostly for expenses like costumes or instruments, but without that money the second time there was less participation. They hope to do more events with the African community in the future, but there are none on their calendar right now.

They have also been working with the Somali community, and began by working with the elders. Generational issues are a big factor, as well as clan differences. They explored several different tracks with the elders but none turned into viable projects. Some of the younger men then approached them, and several successful projects came out of that, even though the elders didn't like the ideas. This was in the midst of a lot of turmoil in the Somali community. They didn't have a Somali insider on the staff so it was harder to work with that community. There was also gender tension, because the Somali men didn't want to work with the female program director, but the staff insisted, which led to some difficulties. The two men who organized the Somali programs had a falling out and each separately approached the center to do projects, and several other Somali people approached them to do projects as well, so there are now four local Somali promoters putting on events in the facility, every three to four weeks. So the results on the Somali side have been better than expected and totally unpredictable, whereas the Sudanese side fell apart—which was the opposite of Graves's expectations.

Graves likes to compare community based cultural programming to particle physics—they both operate on complexity theory. When you add a variable to a system, you multiply the possible outcomes. This is a highly complex system with many variables, so it takes more time and costs more energy and money to make things happen. In the arts and culture field there has been a great emphasis on predictable and measurable outcomes, and we have tended to put our resources into the obvious and easy things. But in a complex community setting it is much more difficult to make the correlation between cause and effect. As in particle physics, unless you have all the time and energy you need, you can't predict the outcomes. This means we need a long, long time frame—the longest grant funded project they've had was four years, which is the bare minimum. To really develop ideas that will have an impact, you need eight to ten year funding streams, which just doesn't happen. In this model, there may be programs that show no immediate results. Their funding goes largely to staff because the work is very time-intensive—you need to build relationships and understanding. We need a flexible approach that values process over product—evaluation should be on the process and relationships, not just on the outcomes. We don't know ahead of time what the solutions are in communities, so we need to create a system that can be open to the emergent solutions.

**Nancy Nusz**, Director of the Oregon Folklife Program (OFP), explained that her program is based at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland and serves the whole state. She started working there in 1991, and was originally hired to manage an apprenticeship program. When she first arrived, the program focused exclusively on refugee and Native American artists. She met with a consortium of providers of services for refugees for referrals, but they didn't know who their artists were because that was not evaluated on intake forms. She did make one contact at the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) who helped, but she realized that the information had to come from caseworkers. Eventually, IRCO and the OFP received funding for a study to explore how a staff person working at IRCO to identify artists might function. The idea was to put an arts coordinator at the refugee center to collaborate with caseworkers to help artists from the start, and steer them toward opportunities. They found several areas that needed to be addressed:

1. Caseworkers needed to ask about artists and their skills, using the appropriate language, not necessarily the word "art;"
2. They needed an internal system for that artist to be referred to the arts specialist;
3. Artists needed immediate help with access to materials and supplies;
4. Language assistance was crucial and interpreters were needed; and
5. They needed a way to connect artists to the existing arts scene, galleries, performance spaces, places for large community events, etc.

Nusz wrote grants to fund a position at IRCO—the FFC and Oregon Arts Commission initially funded the Arts for New Immigrants Program, which has now been going for five years. Laura Marcus was already working with OFP, so she was shifted to the new IRCO position, which was half time to start, and later became full time. It has made all the difference in the world as far as recognizing new artists and helping them continue their work in this country. Laura left the position a year ago, and Phyllis Laners is now the IRCO Arts Coordinator.

As Nusz traveled around Oregon as the state folklorist, she found many very remote rural areas that were lacking in many services. She kept seeing more and more Latinos in rural ranching

areas, noticing piñatas in the local convenience stores, etc. So they got NEA Traditional Arts Growth Funds to bring in Norma Cantú, a Latina folklorist from Texas, to facilitate a meeting conducted in Spanish with community members from around the state. The issues identified at that meeting included the need to pass arts and traditions on to children, greater access to arts for adults because that's what spoke to their heart, better communication among scattered rural communities, a summer arts camp for kids, and access to rehearsal, meeting and performance spaces (libraries, schools, etc). They received three years of funding for a program called *Artes Tradicionales en la Comunidad* (Traditional Arts in the Community). They set up a Yahoo e-group for statewide communication, provided technical assistance, and worked on building infrastructure across the state.

Nusz then introduced Antonio Ramos, artist who also teaches elementary school, and is now involved in a new organization that is forming as an outgrowth of the Latino project.

**Antonio Ramos** is a woodcarver, and learned the tradition from his father. He has given workshops for kids and adults, at schools and libraries all over Oregon, which has given him a chance to see what others are doing and learn about their needs. He showed some of the carving his son has done as part of the apprenticeship program, and passed around photos of his work as well. Several people from the *Artes Tradicionales* project got together to form their own group, in response to the reduced funding from the state, and the realization that there was no other organization that met their needs. The group is called the Latino American Arts and Cultural Council of Oregon, and it is in its formative stages. Their goals are to celebrate culture through the arts; organize events to preserve their culture, especially through children; promote their arts and cultures; create a network of artists, communities and organizations; and set up a database of artists and resources. They have no money yet, but they want to be inclusive of all artists and art forms. They are planning a large event for the fall, and want to become a 501(c)3 within a year so that they can apply for grant funding. They are putting on a fundraising event at a restaurant in Portland tonight. They are starting to support each other to get things done. Thinking about the parameters of what they can do has forced them to specify their goals. They want to make information available about artists and organizations, develop publicity and educational materials, develop a communication system, and build connections with other organizations.

**Bobby King** is the director of Refugee Family Services, a social service organization outside Atlanta. He has been converted to the importance of working with arts and artists in refugee services. He was approached in 2002 by some artists to do a three-year arts program culminating in an exhibit. He was overworked and underfunded at the time, but the artists were persistent. Finally the artists wrote a small grant to do an embroidery project. He'd been reading about art and mental health—in the refugee community there is lots of stress, including post-traumatic stress—and he saw the value of the arts in addressing those issues. The artists raised more money, did a carving project, then a painting project, and music projects. The most exciting was a gathering of refugee women telling their stories. The embroidery project led to a sewing group, which was organized by volunteers. Somali, Afghani and Sudanese women participated, and many women didn't even know how to sew but learned from others, despite the language barriers—sewing was the common language.



They received an Office of Refugee Resettlement grant for a school liaison program, and started thinking about how to add art to existing programs. They wanted to make parent-teacher conferences easier, so held them at their center rather than at school. They also wanted to get parents more involved in their kids' education—in many cultures parents are not—so they had kids and parents do art pieces together. An organization called Moving in the Spirit, which teaches dance, taught kids to create their own dances. This culminated in a performance at a theater in Atlanta by refugee kids that was very exciting.

Refuge Family Services eventually got an NEA grant after several years of programming, and did a cultural festival at the Atlanta History Center called Taste the World. They got food donated from local ethnic restaurants, and had performances and craft demonstrations. They have also incorporated art into women's health services. Breast cancer awareness training was uncomfortable for some women, so they started with arts and crafts projects for several weeks as the group leader built relationships and then gradually introduced the health concepts as the women got more comfortable, and finally they brought a mobile mammogram clinic to the center. In their child development programs, they give picture books to mothers to make up stories for their kids. They now try to incorporate art into everything they do. King's recommendations include finding some common ground and starting small, and the money will come. It is most important to give people ownership in a program.

## **Discussion Themes and Comments**

### 1. Thoughts about Process, Success and Ownership

Folklorists have always focused on process over product. We need to think of process as social transformation, and recognize that it takes a long time. How do we measure those changes, over the short and long term?

Whose standards do we use for measuring success? Do community members and presenters evaluate activities with the same standards and come to the same conclusions?

A common thread in successful projects involves community ownership—if they do not own it, it won't be as successful.

### 2. Youth

Another common thread is involvement of and ownership by youth—apprenticeships, school programs, etc. One of the sweet spots we're looking for may be youth involvement.

Many projects focus on young people because that's a direction that comes from the culture. Community members worry about their kids knowing who they are.

Festivals are a wonderful opportunity for intergenerational contact and interaction and learning. In one instance the Kurdish community got everyone involved in a festival they did—just asked everyone to bring food, had a boom box and Kurdish music, and went to town. The ORR does fund projects with mental health and youth and school relationships; you can incorporate arts into ORR-funded projects and still meet their guidelines.

### 3. Managing Community Factions and Conflict

Certain people rise to the top as leaders in the Hmong community, but they don't necessarily represent the whole community—the same artists appear over and over. How do you determine who the leaders are and who they speak for?

It is impossible to satisfy all the factions, and every community has these divisions. It is easy to anger parts of the community unintentionally, and hard to fix that breach once it has happened. Sometimes working with one faction means not working with another. You can try to include as many factions as possible, but sometimes they do not want to work together. The ones who show up are the de facto community representatives, but that sometimes rubs others the wrong way.

Community factionalism is a common problem. You can work for consensus, gathering stakeholders, etc., but those are very American concepts that don't always mesh with other cultural systems. A place to start is meeting with groups in their own communities, separately. They may never all come together, but that's okay. We need to listen more, and that takes time. You build a lot of credibility by asking and listening.

Communication styles around the world are very different. We like focus groups and facilitators, but that often doesn't work with other cultural styles.

### **Session Six: Developing an Organizational Voice**

*Anan Ameri, Arab Community Center for Economic & Social Services, Dearborn, MI*  
*Joel Jacinto, Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA) and*  
*Kayamanan Ng Lahi Philippine Folk Arts, Culver City, CA*

**Joel Jacinto** is Executive Director of Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA) and Program Director of Kayamanan Ng Lahi Philippine Folk Arts. He was born in San Francisco to Filipino immigrant parents. He now directs a Filipino social service organization, and is also a traditional dancer. He feels that his personal voice has led to the organizational voice. The individual, the group, and the community are central to empowerment. There is a Filipino concept called *bayanihan* which describes a group of people picking up and moving a stilt house together, in collective effort and mutual support. This is a key cultural construct for Filipinos and a critical component of SIPA's existence as a social service organization committed to collaboration and support of other Filipino programs.

Filipinos represent the third highest foreign-born population in the US. Filipinos were on display at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, and Filipinos came to the US as farm workers starting in the 1920s. SIPA was founded in Los Angeles thirty-two years ago to assist youth and provide family services. They now provide counseling, recreation, and social services. Recently they have also become a community development organization, focused on developing community assets such as housing, job services, and business loans. Jacinto's sense of himself as an artist infuses all the work he does. SIPA helped form an arts organization, Fil-Am Arts, which has now spun off on its own. The two organizations continue to work collaboratively. SIPA has an after-school program funded with social service dollars that incorporates arts and culture. They have always

learned from other organizations. For example, they have modeled their community development work on that of a Japanese organization. Currently, SIPA is building a community center, primarily for youth programs, which will also serve Hispanic and Latino neighbors in the community.

The arts organization, Fil-Am Arts, is designed to bring people together through the arts, particularly the dance group. They have organized gatherings and conferences to discuss the importance of dance in the Filipino community. They learned about this model from other organizations that sponsor national gatherings that bring people together around particular art forms, such as a hula organization and the North American Taiko Conference. Fil-Am Arts is interested in the arts in multicultural America, how they change and function in a new setting. We need to collaborate and learn from other communities, learn through best practices. This gathering has been very valuable for that purpose.

**Anan Ameri** is Director of Cultural Arts for the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS). Ameri explained that she is both a refugee and an immigrant. She comes from a Palestinian refugee family who fled that country in 1948, and later immigrated to the US in 1974. She is leading the development of the first Arab American Museum. Planning for the museum started in 2000, and it will open within a year. ACCESS was founded in 1972 and was run by volunteers for years. It was started as a support organization for the many Arab residents of the Detroit area affected by layoffs in the auto industry, and for refugees who settled in Detroit after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Today, ACCESS owns five buildings, one of which is a community health center that houses one of the few programs in the country dealing with victims of torture. The organization has twenty-five mental health workers. They also have an employment service for immigrants and refugees, as well as English and computer classes. ACCESS's youth programs help young people adjust to this country, learn English and computer skills, get up to speed in their schooling, participate in summer programs, and provide translation services.

ACCESS's cultural program focuses on the idea that art must be part of people's lives, regardless of their economic status. All cultures should be preserved and celebrated, all are equally excellent, and culture should be an integral part of life, not separated out as it is in the US. Culture is also a great bridge between communities; this country has big gaps between people, and art can bring them together. After September 11, 2001, ACCESS started a national outreach program to help other Arab-American communities develop their own organizations. ACCESS works with all forms of art, and they try to help artists find places to perform and work. Their slogan is "Reaching out through education and the arts." They do a lot of school programs, outreach, and education. They work with teachers, law enforcement, corporations, and legislators to educate them about the Arab culture. They produce concerts, art exhibits, art classes, etc., and do some programs in collaboration with other ethnic groups.. ACCESS looks at people comprehensively, and tries to meet all their needs—health, jobs, arts, etc. They have found that people are very willing to collaborate, if asked. For example, ACCESS approached the university and asked why they never presented Arab art, when they were next to the largest Arab community in the country. This outreach resulted in a successful collaborative concert.

## **Discussion Themes & Comments**

### 1. Who Speaks for the Community?

For its Investing in Creativity project, the Urban Institute conducted many interviews with artists. An issue that came up over and over related to cultural identity in a world of combined cultures and diasporic communities. Who makes decisions about representing a community?

There are twenty-two Arabic countries. Some Arabic communities have been in the US for many generations, while others are newcomers. It is hard to meet everybody's needs. Once the Arab American Museum opens, ACCESS will have the space to present more events. They plan on one event a year for long-term residents, one for new arrivals, and one to build bridges with other ethnic groups. They have found that photo classes for kids are good because they can learn it quickly, whereas music instruction takes longer. They provide a range of programs in order to appeal to different subgroups of the community because they can not please everyone with every program. Communities are very complex.

In a true cultural democracy, you have to provide broad support, let artists determine their own fate and not control them. Invest in their capacity and provide support services and let them do the rest.

At the ORR, they realized that funding a refugee organization implicitly gave their blessing to that organization. The ORR has a huge responsibility when they do this, and it is hard to know if they are doing the right thing. One artist does not necessarily represent a whole community, so why are we expecting them to do this? How much burden are we putting on artists to carry the whole community?

### 2. The Tension of Being an Individual Versus Representing the Culture

Often school talks and workshops start with literature and art, but then always lead to larger discussions of culture and history. There is always a need to talk about the larger culture first because Americans are unfamiliar with Hmong culture, which is frustrating. Other artists don't have to give that background, like Irish artists, but new cultures do. How does this compare to other people's experiences?

When a refugee or immigrant musician goes to schools and universities, curiosity begins with names, as people want to know what they mean, so that explanation has to come first. Often half the time is spent explaining the culture and half playing music.

Every program is different, so it is good to be flexible and adaptable. An illustrative example of exploring cultural diversity in the classroom might be to explain the differences between the Arab school system and the US system.

When you bring artists into the classroom, it is necessary to refocus what you want from the artist. Good interviewing can help in designing a program. It is good to prepare the students to ask specific questions that the artist can best answer. Keep the focus on "artists in their community" and keep questions about their art, not about family or history.

Art and history and culture are all interrelated. It's all part of the struggle.

Cultural contextualization is a basic tenet of folk arts programming. We need to do that to make unfamiliar cultures understandable to others, use arts as a window into a culture. One issue in folk arts programs is mediated interpretation by cultural brokers or outsiders, versus interpretation by members of the communities themselves. The challenge is how to explain without being overly didactic.

### 3) Specific Information about ACCESS and SIPA

In the Los Angeles area there is an umbrella organization of sixty-five Asian and Asian-Pacific organizations that meet monthly. They also have peer groups of specifically arts organizations, and there are many Filipino dance groups.

At ACCESS the departments are semi-independent and have different partners for their programs. The health department, for instance, works with schools, hospitals, etc. The cultural department (which will include the museum when it opens) has completely different collaborating organizations—universities, museums, etc. Several ACCESS departments may work with the university, but with different departments. Their clinic also serves Latinos and African Americans, and the torture survivor program serves other cultures besides Arabs. The youth center works in collaboration with the YMCA. ACCESS has 160 employees and a \$12 million budget. The diverse departments share some administrative functions such as personnel and accounting.

## **Session Seven: Discussion Groups**

*For the lunchtime breakout discussions, participants were divided into five groups with mixed representation (i.e. one member who was a folklorist, another an artist, another from social services, another from the funder category, etc.) pre-assigned by staff, and each group received a topic to discuss in depth. Participants were asked to come up with action items, questions, and ideas for the best thinking from various perspectives. The groups, their topics and the issues they discuss follow:*

TOPIC #1: CLASS AND RACE ISSUES IN IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE EXPERIENCES AND ARTS.

*Anan Ameri, Andrea Graham, Mai Neng Moua, Antonio Ramos, Sandi Smith, Bill Westerman.*

In America we assume that we don't have class distinctions, that class is defined by income, and that you can buy into class. In other cultures you are born into a class, it's not a mutable category. We are also preoccupied with race in this country, although we don't admit it, and immigrants are not prepared for that situation. The role of education, training and communication skills is very important in how immigrants are integrated; middle class, educated immigrants have an easier time. Our immigration policy is biased toward skilled people, and that decides who is let in and who is kicked out.

The quality of art produced is related to a community's resources, which can be a result of class. In many cultures, art is an integral part of a community, in contrast to the idea of professional artists being separated out as representing a distinct category of experience. How do you

determine what art forms represent a community? Differences between immigrants and refugees, and skill, training and education divide communities. Class distinctions from the old country play themselves out here. Every community has different ideas of race and class, and it's more or less relevant in different groups. Refugees have to focus on basic needs, and may never get back to their art, or they are criticized if they do focus on their art to the exclusion of support issues. Long-term structural and systemic change is needed. Many large institutions only focus on immigrant and refugee arts when it benefits them, when they need a new audience or want to "diversify" their offerings. How do we make long term changes, and how do we evaluate them and their success?

#### TOPIC #2: LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY.

*Kurt Dewhurst, Maria Jackson, Elzbieta Kaleta, Michael Lee, Eddie Torres.*

Language change often reflects a value shift in American society. The origins of western museums are rooted in the French Revolution, when the masses appropriated the private collections of the wealthy for public use. The diversity model started by letting outsiders into the established cultural institutions, but that model has changed. How do we validate this value shift, and how do we evaluate it? Language is federally mandated and institutionalized by funders and agencies. Much of the current descriptive language and terms are degrading and have negative connotations, both on the ground and in institutions. We still use those terms because we don't have better ones. We must address the ways in which Americans view arts in general, much less immigrant and refugee arts. America is a young country and was founded with an individualistic ethic. Mass culture/popular culture is our forté, and traditional arts are not well understood. We are entering a period of broadening understanding of arts and culture, but arts are often still assumed to be homogenous. Economic development projects often work without regard to cultural specifics. The struggle to acculturate versus the desire to maintain the old culture frequently results in conflicts between old and new immigrants. When are you not a newcomer any more? Some places want to attract new immigrants for economic reasons—in many areas, current population increases are all from new immigrants. We need to include cultural activities in city rankings. Our arts paradigm suffers from an "edifice complex," assuming that a big building is the mark of success. We need to have better training in understanding how communities operate.

#### TOPIC #3: FINDING THE SWEET SPOT, POINTS OF INTERSECTION.

*Rahim AlHaj, Marta Brenden, Bobby King, Laura LaBlanc, Lavinia Limón, Laura Marcus, Nancy Nusz.*

When seeking collaborative opportunities for arts activities, ORR funding is not a great place to look, since it is client based. Substance abuse and mental health services are potential partners. In the educational realm, teacher training, interns and volunteers, the residency model, and community outreach are all paths with promise. Other points of overlap are in the criminal justice system, museums, faith-based initiatives, housing systems, Head Start, local government, and community action councils. Strategies might include mentoring, an annual showcase for new American artists, and teaching opportunities for new artists. It is good to use local models, and then show them to federal agencies. Art touches people in a very powerful way, but right now, because of the focus on supporting survival needs, the arts are considered "the frosting on the cake that isn't baked yet."

TOPIC #4: INFRASTRUCTURE FOR FRAGILE ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES.

*Robert Baron, Carolyn Bye, Bau Graves, Tshibangu Kadima, Kerry O'Connor, Ethel Raim, Claude Stephenson.*

This group began by discussing a range of infrastructures—local, regional, national, networks, individual organizations. Leveling the playing field—not necessarily providing a leg up, but providing a way for refugee and immigrant artists to stand on their own two feet. What are the barriers we need to dissolve to bring everyone to the same level? There should be a way to encourage the NEA, foundations, local arts agencies, and state arts agencies to pay attention to the percentage of the population or audience in relation to funding streams. Currently a large percentage of resources is going to a small number of organizations, but we need a much broader distribution of funds. One thing missing in the equation is the supply side—presenters need help finding the artists, and artists they can afford. Look at small presenters like libraries and schools—they are not in the network. Several mechanisms might address these problems, including helping groups learn to become self-sufficient. How appropriate is it for all groups to become 501(c)3s? The new generation often thinks the old system is irrelevant to what they want to do. A more ambitious mechanism to develop would be the underwriting of a national presenters network for traditional arts. Perhaps we need to develop a system of micro loans, mini-grants, and revolving funds to which artists and organizations could apply, as a way of institutionalizing the broker role. We need to develop pilot models of incubators specifically for immigrant and refugee artists; to partially institutionalize the broker role; and to provide space, training, and financial help. We need consumer education and promotion about supporting immigrant and refugee artists, and traditional artists in general. We need to redefine "American."

TOPIC #5: THE TRANSNATIONAL AND DIASPORIC NATURE OF IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE.

*Moy Eng, Joel Jacinto, Betsy Peterson, Ann Rynearson, Tom Walker, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto.* Globalization, technology, and transportation have led to increased fluidity, more movement back and forth, and increased communication with countries of origin. This makes issues of identity, authenticity, and authority more complex. Distinctions between folk and fine art, high and low art, and class issues are blurred. There are conflicts between the structure of the old country and the assimilated Americans, and intergenerational complexities are increasing. There are second and third generations here now who have few links with their country of origin, but are in positions of cultural leadership. Here- and there-ness must be dealt with, we cannot just deal with the American situation any more, but funders often stop at political borders. We are in the midst of a major change and we do not have the tools or language to deal with it yet. We are dealing with the legacy of the 1960s Ford Foundation in international work, building institutions, etc. Communities are more fluid and virtual today, old structures do not work as well, and everything is open for negotiation.

Today, the nonprofit arts system is sometimes being bypassed—Asian-American kids in Silicon Valley use clubs for their own arts events, for example. There are vast implications for using technology in art making, dissemination and teaching. Artists can now self-produce music, visual art, and publications. There is a crossing of genres, a fusion of forms and cultures. European cultural edifices are dinosaurs in many ways. What's not working, what would work better, and can we take a more holistic view?

Local and regional centers of activity are really key in a global culture. The regional level is where differences are found. The Paris and New York airports look alike, the Kansas City and New York airports are very different. Also, a transnational imagination is being born, going beyond the national and local. Some people want to define themselves in new ways. The idea of community is thrown into question. There are communities of descent, of consent, of choice. There are also virtual communities that are not place-based at all. There is a tension between live performance and virtual performance.

## **Concluding Remarks**

*One way to judge the success of a gathering is to think about how it will affect our collective future work. To end the meeting, facilitator Shalom Staub asked people several questions. What can we take back to our organizations and communities and networks? What ideas and issues do we want to continue to share with each other? What might you do differently? Do you have any suggestions for the FFC to guide them in their next steps?*

There are different ways of helping, and we need activists and thinkers and skeptics. There are already some solutions that have started here.

Funders might consider providing longer-term funding.

The ideas presented here should be shared with community cultural organizations.

We can begin thinking about ownership from communities as a whole, not just working with individual artists.

There were some big important ideas on the table, and it will be good to think about short and long term agenda items and strategies. We need to get clear on what can be done soon and quickly, and what needs patience and mulling over.

A good place to start would be doing some short term work with social service agencies to identify artists and engage refugee communities in conversations about arts. Funders need to talk more about how to provide more information. It would be great to put a link to these proceedings on the Columbus Foundation web site, and start a topic study circle among refugee service providers on arts and culture.

The time is right to pursue starting a national performance network for traditional arts. It needs to happen.

From the social services perspective, there is a fuller appreciation of the human services that the ORR seeks to fund.

For folklorists, it is important to be actively involved in projects with artists. Maintaining community contacts is essential.



The report resulting from this gathering could be the basis for a meeting with the Oregon Arts Commission, Oregon Council for the Humanities, and Oregon Cultural Trust about these issues, and the need for additional support for immigrant and refugee artists.

Do the artists present feel this meeting was useful to them? One artist picked up ideas she can use, like mentorships and technical assistance, and realized that there are resources in her community she hasn't used.

Another artist said she will have to wait and see, although she did learn about some new opportunities she hadn't known about before. Her dream is to go to Poland and write about her art.

Another artist will bring back to his community the idea of empowerment. He will make sure their new organization is heading in the right direction and will serve the people they want it to serve. They are working from the heart, from the artist's perspective.

There was an appreciation of the conversations. They have provided inspiration to talk to family and colleagues about where they put their money, and to think about the richness of life today, not just saving for the future. Perhaps it is better to invest in quality of life in the present.

The different perspectives and struggles presented at the gathering have been inspirational, and can be shared widely with others.

Fund for Folk Culture Board Chair Kurt Dewhurst thanked the entire group on behalf of the Fund. He was struck by how carefully people listened to each other, and it makes him hopeful, but there are some huge challenges. Artists have always been resilient, and social service workers are creative about working in inflexible organizations. We all need to have more agility and flexibility and responsiveness, and more youth, in our work and organizations. The FFC is dedicated to investing in cultural democracy, and every one of the people at the gathering is doing that. We are making change.

FFC Executive Director Betsy Peterson concluded by reiterating the value of conversation, and said this was an important one. She asked participants to please be in touch if they have any further ideas, and to stay in communication with other participants they might not have otherwise met.

## Appendix: Comment & Idea Sheet

*The following notes were made by participants on a sheet of paper posted at the meeting for informal comments. These are transcribed directly from that sheet.*

- Globalization and its discontents.
- Inter-generational model related to organizations, i.e. older immigrant communities working with newer immigrant communities, all are in a continuum of negotiating identity, culture and belonging.
- Who is an immigrant? Are we assuming a class-based understanding of our immigrant arts?
- Infrastructure: What kinds of institutions are most capable of providing the “broker” role most effectively? Are we putting our resources into places where they can generate success on a community level?
- What can the Fund for Folk Culture do to create the most effective/responsive programs to support immigrant and refugee arts?
- Of all the issues/challenges mentioned, which are specific ones to refugees? to immigrants? vs. all artists? What are the needs, concerns, challenges of refugee artists? immigrant artists?
- How can we share “best practices” in folklore—especially collecting oral histories?
- What are other “best practices” of effective programs with refugee and immigrant arts in the US? Are there other funding partners who we should be working with?
- How can refugee/immigrant groups or other groups working with refugees/immigrants get funding for the arts when there are all these basic needs/social service needs? While the social services are getting funded so that families can get their basic needs met, young people are losing their language, culture, history, traditions. *Comment from another writer:* But the arts are a basic need!!!
- Deliberate development of bicultural organizations that build on the strengths of all partners.
- What is authentic? Where does it reside?
- How can we get the funds to support our arts? With the new immigrants residing in our area we need funds for transporting them to places, and language support. Our programs need funds to keep our culture alive and continue teaching the younger generation about where we come from and who we are. Also, we need to teach our youth to have respect for others.
- I had two embarrassing realizations when the three artists were speaking. (1) When my organization reviews grant requests of new immigrant groups, there is a “hierarchy” of who gets funded. The Eastern European (white) applicants are at the bottom of the food chain, panels find

the others “more worthy.” Why? Are they more “exotic”? Do we assume there is already “enough” Polish or Russian art? (2) I realized that I quickly put the wonderful CDs in my bag, never realizing that the artists had “paid” for them themselves.

- Just following up on Lavinia’s presentation—there are two tricks of resistance/reaction against immigrants/refugees. Local communities that are afraid and resentful of new immigrants, and in the larger scale, the systematic attempts of some world leaders to roll back the Geneva Conventions and human rights protections of the past 50 years. Just as Rumsfeld has lowered the bar in terms of the treatment of prisoners and the use of torture, so has (from the other end) there been an attempt to erode refugee protections in the 1951 Geneva protocols—primarily coming from Australia but also from the US and Europe. The upshot is there is a two-front attack on human rights protections that has an impact on what we do in refugee communities. The abuses at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere may seem remote to what we do on the local level, but they are one of a piece.