



A Proposal to Support Traditional Arts DC

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PRESENTED TO THE DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

ON BEHALF OF HOWARD UNIVERSITY BY JOY FORD AUSTIN

About Traditional Arts DC

▶ Who We Are

- ▶ The idea for Traditional Arts DC was initiated in 2019 by Dr. Cliff Murphy, Director of Folklife and Traditional Arts for the National Endowment for the Arts, who reached out to Dr. Natalie Hopkinson, then-Howard University professor and go-go scholar, in response to the need to fulfill the function of preserving DC's traditional art forms possibly as a nonprofit partner
- ▶ The pilot period lasted from 2019-to the present and was funded by approximately \$250,000 in grants to Howard from a variety of funders. As proposed here, the organic collective will become a formal center supported by DCCA, housed at Howard University, and guided by a community-based advisory board.

▶ What We Do

- ▶ Increase the public's access to and appreciation of DC's traditional arts, heritage and history;
- ▶ Create a safe space for DC heritage amid the reality of gentrification;
- ▶ Provide support DC's tradition-bearers across disciplines to create, preserve, and share their work with generations to come.

▶ Why We Do It

- ▶ As the city's arts agency (and the NEA's state arts council), DCCA is expected to preserve and encourage DC's traditional and local arts and humanities activity.
- ▶ As the nation's HBCU, Howard University is committed to preserving local histories and contextualizing them amid national and global histories and to encouraging scholarly engagement with and participation in arts and humanities initiatives.

What Are Traditional Arts?

- ▶ NEA defines traditional arts this way: “The folk and traditional arts, which include crafts, dance, music, oral traditions, visual arts, and others, are those that are learned as part of the cultural life of a community whose members share a common ethnic heritage, cultural mores, language, religion, occupation, or geographic region.”
- ▶ Traditional arts include the full range of creative and humanistic practices that are passed down from generation to generation, from elders to apprentices.
- ▶ Traditional arts are closely associated with folklife, because they are important parts of our cultural heritage. They grow out of shared languages, geographical spaces, ways of life, experiences, and aesthetics.

From Invaluable *Ad Hoc* Work to Sustainable Work That Is Also Valued

- ▶ Between 2019 and 2023, much work has been done to preserve DC's traditional arts.
 - ▶ Researching folklife and traditional folk arts programs across the country;
 - ▶ Documenting and preserving DC's best-known traditional art: Go-Go;
 - ▶ Mapping DC's cultural arts; and
 - ▶ Building and leveraging relationships with existing institutions that share a commitment to preserving DC's traditional arts, including Howard University, DC Public Library, and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.
- ▶ Now is the time to formalize this work—to shift it from invaluable work done on an *ad hoc* basis to work that the Commission values for the ways it can fulfill the function of an NEA state arts council.

Budget Highlights

- ▶ The budget for TADC (proposed just over \$1.5 million annually) is informed by the 2.75% income DCCAHL receives from the NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Program. This program enacts the NEA's expectation for and justification for this income.
- ▶ The proposal requests support for five years with an annual evaluation and opportunity for renewal.
- ▶ The budget includes support for core staff, archival projects, public programming, community fellows, and conferences and symposia.