We have 3 STRATEGIC GOALS

Bring the Museum Campus to Life

Sustain & Increase Strategic Relationships

Optimize Mission-Driven Facility Use

When we achieve our goals, we become

THE COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACE

How do we Measure Success? 3 Resources
Relevance Relevance
Relationships Relationships

HIGH

LOW

Maintaining the Collection Strawberry Festival Teen Coffee House Facility Rentals

Self-Determination Innovation Collaboration

Inclusion Community Stewardship

These VALUES Support Our Work.

2020-2022 Operational Priorities

Collections Accessibility

Grounds Enhancement

Increased Human Resources

Sustainable Finances

From SSM's Strategic Vision, 2020–2022
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LEADERSHIP AND STAFF OF REGIONAL FOLKLIFE CENTER, 2021

Regional Folklife Center Advisory Committee
Camila Bryce-LaPorte
Bruce Evans
Suteera Nagavajara
Douglas Peach, Folklife Specialist
Mark Puryear
Albita Rivera, President
Darab Shabahang
Michelle Stefano
Allison Weiss, Executive Director
Naomi Yadin-Mendick, President

TOP: Member of D.C. Beauty of Beijing Opera, an organizational folklife partner. Photo courtesy of A. Claire Vision Photography
BOTTOM: Folklife Partner, Thai Musician, and NEA National Heritage Fellowship Recipient, Chum Ngek. Photo courtesy of Edwin Remsberg.
STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In November 2020, staff at Sandy Spring Museum (SSM) began a strategic planning process for the Regional Folklife Center to formalize the Museum’s folklife-related work. In February 2021, the Museum hosted six community conversations with twenty-five stakeholders to understand how the Regional Folklife Center could serve community needs. Museum staff used these conversations to draft a strategic plan, asked community members to review, and incorporated community comments into the plan’s final draft. The Regional Folklife Center’s Advisory Committee approved the strategic plan on June 3, 2021. Sandy Spring Museum’s Board of Directors approved the strategic plan on June 9, 2021. Moving forward, SSM will create an implementation plan that will detail how RFC staff will carry out this strategic plan.

Goals of the Strategic Plan

• Define the mission, vision, and values of the Regional Folklife Center
• Develop a strategic plan that identifies goals and measurable objectives
• Identify long-term and short-term actions that will take place during the next 1 – 3 years, while envisioning what the center could look like in 5 years

Strategic Planning Focus Group Participants and Stakeholders

Community members, Museum staff, and Museum board members interviewed for strategic plan:


Jeff Ross  Josanne Francis  Josette Young  Laura Sanchez  Lauren Peirce  Louisa Huang  Lydia Fraser  Mei Wang  Naomi Yadin-Mendick  Phillip-Alexander Downie  Sarah Xie  Steve Bloom  Suteera Nagavajara

Planning Consultant and Facilitator

Sheri Parks, PhD—Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, Maryland Institute College of Art

Thank you to these participants, stakeholders, and Dr. Parks. Sandy Spring Museum also recognizes the Maryland State Arts Council and Maryland Traditions for their support of this strategic planning and our folklife-related work.
REGIONAL FOLKLIFE CENTER

Imagine the museum buildings and grounds filled with people…

Learning bomba and plena dances from Puerto Rican artists and classical court music from Thai-American artists

Eating Salvadorian-style tamales and sharing the tradition of Ethiopian coffee ceremonies

Hosting social club meetings whose origins date back to the early 19th century

Planning and hosting community traditions like the Strawberry Festival and celebrating the long-standing Hospital Picnic

Playing fiddle in a bluegrass music jam session

Imagine that Sandy Spring Museum’s Regional Folklife Center serves as a model of community-driven, participatory activities that foster intercultural understanding and community building.
TOP: Folklife partner Joon-Souk Park and a student learning Korean percussion. Photo courtesy of Edwin Remsberg.

MIDDLE: Members of Cultura Plenera during Bomba and Plena en el Museo—a collaborative event hosted at Sandy Spring Museum. Photo courtesy of Edwin Remsberg.

BOTTOM: Folklife partner Ramon Tasat.
MISSION AND VISION

Mission

The mission of Sandy Spring Museum’s Regional Folklife Center is to help build a more equitable society by sustaining and advancing the folk arts of Montgomery County through celebration, education, and support.

Vision

Sandy Spring Museum will be a nationally recognized public folklore/community arts organization because of its role as the Regional Folklife Center. The RFC’s practice of shared authority with community members and community-driven programs will serve as a model for building social cohesion through the traditional arts. With dedicated funding to support its staff, programs, research, and infrastructure, the RFC will be a conduit for Montgomery County residents to understand and appreciate the diversity of cultural expressions and lived experiences in the county.

“As museums have the potential to be relevant, socially engaged spaces in our communities, acting as agents of positive change,” writes Museums Are Not Neutral co-founder Mike Murawski.

As a Regional Folklife Center we serve 5 major audiences
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Strategic planning participants identified three major goals for the Regional Folklife Center: to celebrate the traditional arts, to educate about the traditional arts, and to support folk artists. Below we outline our objectives to meet these goals. These objectives are inclusive of work the RFC is already doing and potential future work of the RFC.

1. Celebrate the Traditional Arts
   • Document the region’s traditional arts for relationship-building, programs, exhibits, and festivals
   • Integrate work of the RFC into existing departments at Sandy Spring Museum
   • Market traditional arts opportunities, news, and programs through social media
   • Nominate artists to local, regional, and national awards in the traditional arts
   • Host folklife conferences and seminars

2. Educate about the Traditional Arts
   • Create cross-cultural engagements, performances, exhibitions, and podcasts
   • Facilitate an annual event featuring folklife traditions of Montgomery County
   • Organize activities open only to folk artists
   • Raise awareness of the region’s traditional arts among residents, media outlets, and politicians
   • Offer opportunities to artists for teaching, performing, hosting workshops, and exhibits
   • Invite artists from other regions to host master classes

3. Support Folk Artists
   A. Create Capacity Building Opportunities for Traditional Artists
      • Provide grant writing assistance
      • Organize educational workshops:
         » filing taxes, marketing, maintaining a mailing list, using event registration software, livestreaming an event, planning/running successful events, financial management
      • Provide archival consultations (how to document folklife traditions and preserve the documentation, either in SSM’s archives or elsewhere)
      • Offer translation services for traditional arts-related work
      • Provide audio and video equipment for recordings and performances
   B. Use Sandy Spring Museum’s Resources to benefit artists and their communities
      • Connect artists with RFC’s network of scholars, arts organizations, and folklife professionals
      • Leverage the Museum’s facility, technical resources, and staff expertise for the benefit of folklife partners
      • Create idea/resource message board to allow artists to connect with other artists for collaborative opportunities
HOW WE DO OUR WORK

Values

1. **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility:** The RFC was founded with the conviction that any work in the traditional arts must involve considerations and action with respect to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). The RFC’s goal is to build DEIA into each facet of work and ensure that expressions from all cultural, ethnic, religious groups are equally valued. We celebrate the diversity of Montgomery County, seek to understand differences, and pledge to create space for those whose humanity may be undervalued.

2. **Social Justice:** The RFC values work that advances social justice, while not requiring collaborators to foreground social justice in their work.

3. **Collaboration, partnership, and shared authority:** We build partnerships with artists/community advocates and work collaboratively as a means of sharing authority. Practitioners, not the Museum staff, are the arbiters of what is valuable within their own community. Reciprocity, respect, dialogue, and accountability are at the heart of our collaborative approach and ground our work with the region’s traditional arts communities.

4. **Prioritizing community need:** Our work prioritizes the needs of folk artists and their communities. We regularly conduct assessments with folklife partners to understand their needs. We then design support initiatives to address these needs.

5. **Building social cohesion rather than entertaining audiences:** We prioritize opportunities for participatory activities over traditional performances for audiences. While the RFC will offer programs of cross-cultural presentations, activities at the RFC are, first and foremost, about building social cohesion.

6. **Prioritizing artists/groups who wish to work with the RFC:** Given Montgomery County’s diversity, there is the temptation to prioritize work based on the demographics of the region. Yet, we acknowledge that all communities do not require the RFC’s resources and may have well-established organizations that sustain their community’s living cultural traditions. As such, the RFC may engage in strategic engagement efforts with specific communities, but we prioritize artists/community groups who see a benefit to working with the RFC.

7. **Honesty and transparency:** The RFC is dedicated to transparent decision-making in order to foster trust, honesty, and equitable relationships.

8. **Welcoming environment and an open door policy:** Everyone is welcomed to participate, share, or experience folklife.

“The existence of the Regional Folklife Center is the result of social justice. Being represented is part of the social justice movement.”

Albita Rivera, RFC folklife partner and advisory committee president

LEFT: Folklife partner Fata Antoinette Togba-Mensah. The Regional Folklife Center worked collaboratively with Togba-Mensah to organize “The Artist’s Vibe”—a monthly program spotlighting folk artists in Montgomery County.
COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

Folklife Advisory Committee

Central to the work of the RFC is an advisory committee consisting of Museum board members, folklife artists, community leaders, public folklorists, members of the public, and Museum staff. The purpose of the advisory committee is to lift the voices of those who collaborate with the RFC—a literal seat at the table—and for the RFC to have a community body to which it is accountable. Committee members provide expertise, community insights, and advocate for the RFC on local, regional, and national levels. The RFC shares authority with the advisory committee by providing all information related to RFC activities to committee members, welcoming committee members to initiate discussion items, fielding committee recommendations, and reporting the committee’s decisions to the Museum board immediately after each meeting.

Committee members serve for three-year terms. A president, drawn from the committee’s membership, leads the advisory committee. The president holds their position for one-year, renewable for up to three years. The advisory committee does not have fundraising responsibilities but can make recommendations directly to the Museum’s Board of Directors. To address conflicts of interest, committee members sign a memorandum of understanding, where they pledge to advocate on behalf of the RFC and not their personal interests while serving as advisory committee members.

ABOVE: Photo of Suteera Nagavajara. Nagavajara serves on the Folklife Advisory Committee and is a regionally recognized Thai/Cambodian dancer and musician.
LOOKING AHEAD

Build on Our Strengths

1. **Established relationships:** Because SSM has been working with folk artists since 2014, we have well-established relationships with many different artists and groups. The fact that many of these relationships date back many years speaks well of the Museum’s ability to establish trust.

2. **Reputation for supporting folk artists:** SSM has a history of supporting folk artists through collaborative grant writing, partner programs, and project consultations. This record of accomplishment reflects positively on the Museum’s reputation among artists and partnering organizations.

3. **Established values:** The Museum’s values are well established, inform our present work, and support work engaged in social justice.

4. **Full-time, dedicated staff member:** Having a consistent SSM staff person dedicated to the RFC’s work is crucial to the continuity of the RFC. In July 2021, the Museum will employ its first full-time Folklife Specialist, a position that was part-time for the previous two years.

5. **Facility:** The most tangible resource the Museum can offer is its physical space—interior and exterior—for partners’ rehearsals, performances, classes and workshops. By sharing the facility, artists and folk organizations can invest the bulk of their resources in their art rather than in renting or owning a building. (Also see “Multiplier Effect” on page 15)
Key Operational Questions/Concerns

? In order to build a strong financial future for the Regional Folklife Center, how do we best position ourselves to receive stable sources of on-going funding?

? How do we build the folklife program when we are limited by whom we know, who knows us, the languages we speak, and our ability to market what we have to offer?

? How do we prioritize our work when our resources will always be limited? Do we want to add more artists to the folklife network or do we want to have deeper relationships with a smaller number of artists/organizations? Is it best for the RFC to prioritize work with individual artists or with folk arts organizations?

? How can the RFC integrate its work more fully into the Museum’s archival work, artifact collections, and private rentals held at the Museum?

Financial Sustainability for Artists and the RFC

Sandy Spring Museum needs funding in order to provide the services and maintain the facilities that are key to the RFC. Likewise, folk artists need funding in order to sustain their traditions, train others, and cover expenses. The Museum needs to compensate artists for their services when they perform or teach classes. The RFC anticipates that it will exchange some artist services for other resources (e.g. use of artist studio), while other services will be paid for by the Museum. Some programs can involve revenue shared by the artist and museum.

For example:

- Direct hire: the Museum hires performers for its seasonal Beer and Wine Gardens
- Exchange: artists use space for free at the Museum for rehearsals and then perform at the annual Strawberry Festival in exchange
- Shared revenue: Museum provides space, registration, and assistance with hosting a class run by an artist, and then registration is shared between the Museum and the artist

Other ideas for enhancing opportunities for artists to earn income:

- Consign artwork in the Museum’s gift shop
- Online sales at Museum’s website
- Offer artist services in conjunction with private rentals
  - Wedding gift registry
  - Host arts-related activities for bridal shower/girls night out, etc.
  - Performer registry shared with clients renting the Museum, or anyone looking to hire a folk artist performance group

In the future, it is possible that the RFC can serve as a folklife consortium with folk artists pooling resources to achieve shared goals.
Think Inside AND Outside the Museum

There are clear advantages to hosting activities and events at the Museum. The Museum is a relatively neutral space where people who are not members of a folklife group can attend activities without entering a space that may not feel open to outsiders. The Museum also can provide indoor and outdoor spaces for daytime and evening activities, with infrastructure like seating, sound systems, restrooms, and the expertise of its staff. The Museum can provide rehearsal space, meeting rooms, and potentially storage for equipment like instruments.

Off Campus

The goal of the RFC is not to bring all of the county’s folklife activities under one roof. The RFC can still play key roles in events that happen outside the Museum and in digital environments. We can help document, market, and draw audiences to the activities, as requested by partners. Crucially, the RFC needs to continue building relationships and conducting fieldwork among communities in spaces outside of the Museum. This will demonstrate that the RFC values others’ work, will increase the RFC’s knowledge about the breadth of traditions in the region, and will strengthen relationships with partners, future collaborators, and community groups.
Multiplier Effect

The advantages to having partners use the Museum may also hold a strong financial benefit for partnering artists—what SSM calls the “multiplier effect.” When an organization partners with SSM, the Museum staff works collaboratively with the partner on marketing, planning, and registration, in addition to providing the resources listed above. We estimate, as detailed in the graph below, that partnerships with the Museum and artists/organizations could triple (or “multiply”) the monetary benefits for artists, as compared to a traditional rental model, where the organization rents the space from the Museum and has to provide all additional equipment and work. The Regional Folklife Center is a department where this model could be tested, refined, and put to maximum use for folklife partners.

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Human and Financial Resources

Given the wide range of activities outlined in this plan, the RFC will need to hire additional staff to fulfill its long-term vision. In addition to part-time programmatic staff who would report to the Folklife Specialist, the RFC should consider the creation of a funded, summer internship program for graduate students of color interested in folklife-related work. Partnerships with local/regional universities, as well as folklife and public humanities departments, could assist these efforts. Museum staff could seek funding from private/public granting agencies or an endowed gift to the Museum to provide for the future of the RFC.
**APPENDIX I: BACKGROUND OF REGIONAL FOLKLIFE CENTER**

**History of the Regional Folklife Center**

In 2013, with seed funding from Maryland Traditions, a program within the Maryland State Arts Council, Sandy Spring Museum began conducting fieldwork to document folklife in its immediate area. Among the interviewees were Quakers; members of Sharp Street United Methodist Church, the oldest African American church in the county; members of the Muslim Community Center; traditional artists from the Cambodian Buddhist Temple on New Hampshire Avenue; and several El Salvadorian restaurant owners, among others. After the fieldwork, the Museum hosted a small-scale folklife festival featuring performances and tradition bearers. The Museum repeated this fieldwork/festival model from 2014 to 2017.

In 2019, the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) changed the function of Maryland Traditions from serving as the primary resource for folklife in the state to managing a network of organizations charged with supporting the traditional arts in their localities. In recognition of the Museum’s commitment to supporting folklife in its community, MSAC designated Sandy Spring Museum the Regional Folklife Center of Montgomery County, one of eight regional centers in Maryland. This designation guaranteed a more stable source of funding, which allowed the Museum to create a full-time Folklife Specialist position beginning in July 2021.

**Brief History of Sandy Spring Museum and Demographics of Montgomery County**

In 2012, under new leadership, Sandy Spring Museum evolved from a local history museum that served dominant cultural interests to a participatory community-driven cultural arts hub that serves an increasingly diverse constituency. One reason for the Museum’s transition was the changing demographics of Montgomery County, Maryland. Beginning in the 1950s, Montgomery County shifted

Almost 1/3 of Montgomery County residents were born outside of the United States. 31.7% of residents are native speakers of a language other than English. The most commonly spoken languages in Montgomery County are Amharic, Chinese, English, French, Korean, Spanish (17.1%), and Vietnamese.

The most common countries of origin are El Salvador, India, and Guatemala.
from a region characterized by small farms to a predominately-white suburb of Washington, DC. In the late 20th century, Montgomery County’s began a process of rapid diversification, predominately due to a large influx of immigrants. Today, 31.9% of Montgomery County residents were born outside of the United States. The county is home to four of the ten most diverse cities in the country—Silver Spring, Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown—and is the most linguistically and ethnically diverse county in Maryland.

**What is Folklife in Montgomery County?**

A dizzying array of cultural traditions exist within Montgomery County. For example, one can attend a folk festival at St. Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral, a traditional dance class at the Cambodian Buddhist Society, or an Eid celebration at the Muslim Community Center, all located on a one-mile section of New Hampshire Avenue (locally known as the “highway to heaven”). In addition to the traditions immigrant groups bring, there are also long-standing traditions in the Euro-American and African American communities. While SSM has worked with dozens of folk artists and tradition bearers since 2014, we have likely only scratched the surface of identifying folklife practices in the county.

**Assumptions and Acknowledgements**

1. Sandy Spring Museum acknowledges that the museum occupies land where, during the 1700s, enslaved Africans labored and lived under the control of white farmers. Additionally, Native American communities inhabited the Museum’s grounds prior to European colonization. We acknowledge that the Museum sits on the ancestral land of the Piscataway, Mattowoman and Chapticoe (and likely other tribes) who were forced to move as Euro-Americans colonized the region.
2. While there are numerous definitions of “folklife,” the RFC defines folklife as living cultural expressions rooted in the lived experiences of a particular community.
3. Our emphasis on shared authority and collaboration intersects with trends in public folklore. Rather than curatorship, our work falls under what Jeff Todd Titon describes as a stewardship model of cultural management, whereby the museum staff “relinquishes control, accepts uncertainty, understands the dynamic and person-centered nature of expressive culture, and . . . develops flexible policies that enable a sustainable future” (2009: 121). Leading public folklore organizations in the United States now adopt this approach.
4. When the RFC is referred to in this report, it means the services that are offered by the RFC and the Museum as the physical home of the RFC. However, not all activities supported by the RFC will necessarily take place at the Museum.

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2 These organizations include the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution, the Vermont Folklife Center, the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, and the Southwest Folklife Alliance.
## APPENDIX II: BUDGET PROJECTIONS

### INCOME

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### EXPENSES

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*All associated staff*

**Provided by Museum free-of-charge (part of organizational budget) but valued at $750/use x 10 = $7500**

***Provided by Museum free-of-charge (part of organizational budget) but valued at $8000***

BELOW: Photo by Edwin Remsberg.
APPENDIX III: EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATIONS WITH FOLKLIFE PARTNERS

Artist Profile

Josanne Francis is a steel pan musician, educator, and arts administrator based in metropolitan Washington, DC. Francis was born Trinidad and Tobago in 1988. As a child, her desire to play the steel pan was so strong that Francis took lessons using a cardboard cutout of the instrument’s playing surface and sticks instead of mallets! The RFC has worked with Josanne Francis to gain recognition for her non-profit organization (the Cultural Academy for Excellence), conducted an oral history interview with Francis, and created performance opportunities for musicians in her community. Francis was a key contributor to the strategic plan and to evaluations of the Museum’s folklife programs. This partnership is a strong model, which the RFC could continue to implement with individual artists.

Activity Profile

Understanding Islam is an annual program hosted by the Women’s Committee of the Amiddiyah Community. The Museum began hosting this event several years ago, when the group’s leadership asked whether they could host a program that answered questions about Islam. The program typically attracts over 100 people—the majority of whom are non-Muslim. The program demonstrates how the Museum can serve as a neutral meeting place, bringing people together who might not have opportunities to meet one another otherwise.
Organizational Profile

Cultura Plenera, a performance group specializing in Puerto Rican music and dance, began collaborating with SSM in 2018. What started as a single program—a pitorro-flavoring workshop—blossomed into a sustained partnership with monthly bomba classes, two large-scale festivals (Bomba y Plena en el Museo), and Spanish-language arts classes for children. Members of Cultura Plenera conceived of all of the program ideas. The Museum provided a location for indoor and outdoor activities, helped in planning and implementing the programs, marketing, online registration, and front desk and staff assistance on the day of the activities. Cultura Plenera grew their audience because the Museum reached people who had never heard of the group, but attended the event because they knew the Museum hosts quality programs. A goal of the RFC is to use this partnership as a model for future organizational collaborations.