

Michigan State University Museum

Michigan Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program

APPLICATION GUIDE

About the program

The Michigan Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program (MTAAP) is a statewide program of Michigan State University Museum, with support by the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the National Endowment for the Arts, to encourage and preserve traditional knowledge in the state of Michigan. Grants of \$2000 are awarded, through a competitive review process, to master artists to teach their traditional skills, techniques, and knowledge in a one-on-one learning context to an apprentice during a seven-month period, February - August. Although the number of apprenticeships awarded each year varies depending on the amount of support from NEA and MCACA. Usually, at least eight awards are given out.

What are traditional arts?

Every group with a sense of its own identity is made up of individuals who share in what they *believe, know, say, do, or make*. Over time, these beliefs and activities become folk traditions. These traditions are manifested in stories, songs, dance, music, material culture, foodways, and rituals practiced both every day and on special occasions. Traditional artists are those who practice and perpetuate the skills and knowledge of these tangible and intangible elements of culture.

Traditional arts are often learned by example, through imitation and repetition, rather than through formal instruction such as classes or workshops. Ordinarily, traditional art practitioners are brought up learning a specific repertoire and style from others in their community. Through a lifetime of practice, tradition bearers refine and reshape their skills, while maintaining the cultural and aesthetic values of their own communities. These traditions are at the heart of all the world's cultures.

What kinds of traditions are supported by MTAAP awards?

Apprenticeships may incorporate a wide range of ethnic, regional, and occupational traditions. Applications are welcomed for all forms of Michigan traditions—from old-time fiddling to Laotian mouth organ, from trapping skills to beekeeping, from musical instrument making to sauna building, and from Ukrainian egg decorating to African-American quilting.

For a list of apprenticeships awarded since 1988, go to:
<http://museum.msu.edu/s%2Dprogram/mtap/mtaap/awardees.html> .

Who can apply?

Both the master artist and the apprentice must be residents of Michigan.



Apprentices should have some experience in the tradition they wish to study and must be willing to make a commitment to learn it well and continue the tradition.

Master artists should be recognized by their communities as authorities within a tradition and display exceptional skill and knowledge.

Apprentices are encouraged to study with master artists within their own neighborhoods, families, or ethnic and cultural groups whenever possible. For example, a quinceañera cake decorator in one city might teach planning, baking and decorating skills to a Mexican-American who recognizes a need for such a specialist in another region. An Ojibway artist might wish to learn quillwork from one of the foremost masters in his or her area. Master-apprentice teams who are already working together informally are also encouraged to apply, if MTAAP support will help them to continue.

How to apply

The following must be submitted to the Michigan State University Museum by December 1st.

A. Completed MTAAP form

The master artist and apprentice must complete and submit the MTAAP application form. Before you complete this application, it is important for the two of you to meet with one another and talk about your ideas for the apprenticeship. Without a clear, shared understanding of what is to take place, many problems can result, not only in the application, but also in the apprenticeship itself.

Questions include information about your background, why you qualify for this support, what you will do if you receive an apprenticeship grant, and why you wish to work together.

It is important that you be specific. Use additional pages if necessary. Strong applications typically have a clear plan of work including location, frequency, and length of your meetings. We strongly suggest weekly or bi-weekly meetings at least one hour if geography and scheduling permit. Meeting this often will allow for the richest possible partnership. If this is not possible, applicants are encouraged to attempt to complete a similar amount of hours over the course of the seven-month apprenticeship.

B. Examples of master artist and apprenticeship work

Both master and apprentice must include support materials as evidence of your abilities. For material traditions (such as a craft or foodways), include five to ten photographs of each person's work. If possible, send actual pieces of your work. For oral performances (such as music, song, storytelling, etc.), include ten minutes of each person's performance in audio or video formats, whichever is most appropriate for the tradition. Links to audio and video hosting sites (YouTube, Vimeo, Soundcloud, Bandcamp, etc.) are accepted. Please include a short written description for each file or link included.

*Please note that any materials submitted (flash drives, DVDs, pieces of work, etc.) will not be returned and will be added to the MTAP archive. Please make special arrangements prior to your submission if you would like materials to be returned to you. If you have any questions about this requirement, contact the program coordinator.



C. Two letters of support

Provide two letters in total from people who know you well, who can provide information about one or both of you and the tradition. Consider asking people who can talk about the history of and culture surrounding the art form, the community that nurtures it, and about your skills.

What happens after your application is submitted?

The MSU Museum invites a panel of cultural specialists to review the applications who select the awardees based on the information in the answers on the MTAAP form, and on the work samples and letters of support. The panelists evaluate your application according to the following criteria:

- The master artist must excel in the tradition, be recognized in their community as an excellent performer or practitioner of the tradition, and be actively practicing the tradition.
- The tradition must be shared actively or passively at some level by other members of the master artist's community, and learned informally by word of mouth or by example.
- The commitment of the individuals to the apprenticeship must be evident and the apprentice's commitment to and interest in the tradition must be unquestionable.
- The commitment of the master artist and apprentice to continue practicing the tradition after the apprenticeship has ended must be evident.
- The work plan must be feasible.
- The impact of the apprenticeship on the vitality of the tradition in the community as a whole must be evident.

The panel meets in January (typically in the third week) and the meeting is open to the public. Applicants will be notified as to the date and location of the review panel meeting.

The \$2,000 Award

When an application is selected by the panel for funding, the master artist will receive a \$2,000 award. It is intended that all or most of the funds should go to the master in recognition of their expertise and the time they will be spending teaching. If there are unique reasons why part of the funds should be used for other purposes (i.e. tools and materials, transportation or either master or apprentice, etc.) in support of the apprenticeship, the applicants need to clearly explain what and why. If the master artist normally charges for lessons, consider their typical hourly fee in comparison to the apprenticeship award and time spent together. Master artists may have to pay taxes on the amount they receive. It is their responsibility to look into this possibility and to pay any taxes due.

What happens if your application is selected?

Notification and payment

We will notify you in writing about the panel's decision on your application and to arrange for the first payment (75%) of the honorarium. Apprenticeships are expected to begin in February and completed by the end of August. In July arrangements will be made to make the second (25%) payment. A press release is sent statewide to publicize the apprenticeships.



Site visit

During the summer, a member of the Michigan Traditional Arts Program staff will arrange a time to visit with the two of you at the location where you typically hold your sessions. They will conduct an interview with you about your tradition and about the apprenticeship. The interview and visit will be recorded with photography, audio, and video. MTAP staff will immediately use this documentation to write a biographical description about your partnership for use on the MSU Museum/MTAP websites as well as create a blog post about your apprenticeship. The documentation will also be archived into the Michigan Traditional Arts Research Collections so that it can be used for future research, recruiting for future apprenticeships, and educational activities.

Report and Evaluation

Shortly before the apprenticeship is completed, both master and apprentice will be sent a two-page final report form. These will be kept confidential and will be sent out separately. The questions ask you to describe the apprenticeship experience and make recommendations for improvements in future programs.

Potential participation at the Great Lakes Folk Festival

Some masters and apprentices may also be invited to participate in public programs at the Great Lakes Folk Festival (www.greatlakesfolkfest.net) produced annually by the Michigan State University Museum in East Lansing on the second weekend of August. Those who participate will receive a separate small stipend for their time and travel costs. Participation could include one or more of the following: a short presentation or interview on stage, leading activities in the children's area of the festival, or demonstration and display of your tradition.

Deadlines and project activity timeline

December 1	Annual deadline for applications
January	Review panel meets to review and decide on applicants
Late January	Applicants notified of awards
February	Apprenticeships begin and continue through August
March	First payment is made to master artist
April-August	Site visits are made for interviews and documentation
Early August	[if invited] Presentations at Great Lakes Folk Festival
September 15	Final reports due to coordinator
Late September	Final payment is made to master artist

Contact

If you have questions or want additional information, contact the Michigan Traditional Arts Program, Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, MI 48824 (517) 353-5526 or (517) 355-2370 – msum.mtap@gmail.com

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The Michigan Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program is one of the many activities of the Michigan Traditional Arts Program (MTAP), a statewide arts partnership of the Michigan State University Museum and the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. The mission of MTAP is to “advance cross-cultural understanding and equity in a diverse society through the documentation, preservation, and presentation of folk arts, folklife, and every day culture in Michigan.”

Through the activities of the program, the museum has become a major repository of traditional cultural collections and information, an innovative supporter of the state’s traditional artists and arts organizations, and a dedicated facilitator of statewide community engagement in research and education on traditional culture.

