

Entertainment
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Folklife Festival has been postponed. But here's how you can celebrate your own mini fest at home.

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Folklife works to celebrate the cultural traditions of the diverse communities of the Pacific Northwest. Pictured is the Cultural Attire Showcase at the 2017 festival. (Christopher Nelson)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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For many local families, Northwest Folklife's annual festival at Seattle Center is the free music festival that kicks off the summer season. Beyond the musical performances, Folklife works to celebrate the cultural traditions of the diverse communities of the Pacific Northwest.

But this year, in consideration of the public health risk associated with large gatherings during a pandemic, the 49th annual Northwest Folklife Festival, which would've taken place Memorial Day weekend, [has been postponed](#) indefinitely, organizers announced earlier this month. It's uncertain when, or if, the festival will be rescheduled. But organizers say they remain committed to connecting friends and neighbors through the songs, dance and culture of the Pacific Northwest even if a physical gathering is impossible.

"Postponing at this time seemed like the best way that we can support the health and well-being of our communities," said Kelli Faryar, executive artistic director of Northwest Folklife. "It's so hard to say what August or September will look like. If

there is an opportunity to host a gathering later in the year, we would love to do that. Right now, our most immediate look to the future is the possibility of hosting elements of the festival virtually.”

Here's how you can celebrate and support Folklife — listening to music and watching dances from various traditions, learning crafts and more — at home.



The crowd at Folklife Festival in 2017. For many families, Folklife kicks off the summer season. But it's been postponed this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. (Christopher Nelson)

Folklife at home

The virtual programming during one recent week for Folklife's “[Movin' Around the World](#),” a seasonal event under the umbrella of the youth and family Our Big Neighborhood program, hints at what is possible for online festivals. Each day starting at 11 a.m., Folklife livestreamed on its website a new demonstration of a different dance tradition: flamenco, modern, traditional Indian, Appalachian flatfoot and Brazilian capoeira. Additional learning materials, including family-friendly crafts and activities, were also posted to the website where all of those materials remain available.

“This was kind of our beginning of taking our programming virtual and a fun way to see how our communities would respond and where their interests are. Our hope and our dream is to continue to provide the opportunity for discovery,” Faryar said.

Northwest Folklife does not have specific plans for additional new online content yet, but even before the festival was postponed, Folklife had developed some digital resources. Its [Listen & Learn](#) website contains seven years' worth of festival audio recordings, as well as collections of performance videos and video stories about

artists ranging from Hawaiian dancers to makers of old-time crankies — handcranked shadow-puppet scrolls.

Living legacies

“Our theme, our cultural focus for 2020 is ‘Living Legacies’ and with that we are looking to our elders and our culture bearers to honor them and to share their stories,” said Faryar. “Northwest Folklife is looking ahead to 2021 where we will be celebrating 50 years. We really wanted to take 2020 to celebrate the living legacies among your neighbors, in your families, some of your teachers — there’s legacies attached to all of us.”

The downloadable [Living Legacies toolkit](#) helps individuals connect with elders and culture bearers to document and transmit cultural knowledge with a how-to guide for legacy interviews. People are encouraged to share their interviews on social media using the hashtag #NWFLLivinglegacies or to submit their content directly to Northwest Folklife on its website.

“All of these stories will be collected and reshared throughout the 50th anniversary,” said Faryar.

Artist support

“Our mission is to share and celebrate the cultural traditions that make up the Pacific Northwest. Mostly we are known for the Northwest Folklife Festival, but we also host youth and family programs and youth residencies — really, however best we can support the needs of our communities. In order to preserve the songs and the stories, we need to reach out to the people and make sure they have what they need,” said Faryar.

To that end, even though Northwest Folklife relies heavily on revenue generated from the Folklife Festival, it has not furloughed employees. It is also accepting donations and researching funding options to hold the 50th anniversary Folklife Festival in 2021. In the meantime, Northwest Folklife has redirected staff to finding resources to meet the immediate needs of [artists](#), families and students. The resulting compilation of financial, legal and mutual-aid [resources](#) is updated daily on its website.

“There are a lot of specific community funds that are available for artists and music venues, like [Seattle Artist Relief Fund](#), [COVID-19 Survival for the People Fund](#) and

Mutual Aid Support. If there is a way that folks can give, give. If there is a way to check in with your neighbor, sometimes it's just the person that's right next door to you that needs you to reach out and see if they're OK," Faryar said.

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