

**ASF FOLK ARTS & CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN THE UPPER MIDWEST
2025-2026 GRANTEES**

The American-Scandinavian Foundation is pleased to announce the awardees of ASF's 2025-2026 Folk Arts and Cultural Traditions grant program. Introduced in 2017, this program helps to nurture the rich Nordic folk art traditions in the Upper Midwest (North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan) by deepening the skills of master artists, fostering long-term relationships among masters and apprentices, and enhancing the traditions' visibility through public programs and community projects.

Dedicated to carrying on traditional Nordic arts and skills, the 15 individuals and 10 organizations are an inspiration to us all. We look forward to seeing their projects unfold while we marvel over innovative ways that our grantees from previous years continue to share folk-art traditions with their local communities.

ARTIST FELLOWSHIPS

Kathleen Almelen from Washington, IA



Kathleen Almelen standing next to a vertical loom.

Kathleen Almelen will travel to southern Norway to further her expertise in Scandinavian bandweaving—a centuries-old craft used to create narrow, patterned woven bands that adorn traditional textiles. Working with master weavers Eli Vesaas and Sigrunn Brattekaa in West Telemark and Magnhild Gilje in East Agder, Almelen will deepen her understanding of regional bandweaving methods and techniques. Upon her return, Almelen will share her knowledge of this craft through a combination of exhibitions and workshops aimed at preserving and revitalizing Scandinavian bandweaving in the Upper Midwest.

Alexandra Blust from Grand Marais, MN

Alexandra Blust will travel to Norway to study traditional Norwegian shoemaking, focusing on the origins and craft of the *Aurlandsko*, or “Penny Loafer.” Designed by the Norwegian shoemaker Nils Tveranger in 1926 after his studies in the United States, the *Aurlandsko* blends elements of the Norwegian *teser* fishing shoe and Indigenous American moccasins. Under the mentorship of master shoemaker Jan P. Myhre, Blust will gain hands-on experience in Norwegian welting, last making, and *Aurlandsko* construction. Once back, she plans to help preserve the Aurland shoe tradition by sharing her learning with communities in the Upper Midwest.



Work boots, original design by Alexandra Blust (2023).

Johannes Carlsen from Minneapolis, MN



A set of three spoons, a small cup, and a cooking spatula, all with a kolrosed basket weave design. Carved by

Woodworker Johannes Carlsen will travel to Sweden to participate in a 40-week immersive program at Sätergläntan Institute for Handicraft, where he will expand his practice in *slöjd*—the Scandinavian handcraft tradition that unites skill, creativity, and a deep connection to nature. He will study under master woodworkers Maria Lindberg and Jonatan Malm. Following his return to Minnesota, Carlsen plans to share his expertise by holding woodworking workshops and courses, fostering Scandinavian woodworking traditions and communities throughout the Upper Midwest.

Liesl Chatman from Minneapolis, MN

Liesl Chatman will travel through central Norway to study the traditional Scandinavian woodcarving technique of *kolrosing*—a decorative art involving fine incisions in wood filled with pigment. While in Norway, she will collaborate with renowned Swedish craftsman and folk artist Jögge Sundqvist, engage with the few remaining Norwegian *kolrosing* practitioners, and document techniques, design motifs, and historical context to inform her own work in *kolrosing* ornamentation and craftsmanship. Upon returning, she will share what she has learned in the Upper Midwest through teaching, lectures, and demonstrations to preserve and sustain this traditional Scandinavian folk art.



Liesl Chatman kolrosing a serving ladle.

Carol Colburn from Duluth, MN



Workshop participants pictured in Vinje, Telemark, Norway. All clothing patterns drafted and fitted by Carol Colburn.

In summer 2026, Carol Colburn will travel to Vinje, Telemark, Norway, as the American master weaver in a 10-day intensive project pairing three master weavers with apprentices to produce *vadmel*—a sturdy, windproof, water-repellent cloth historically used for everyday wear. The team will weave the *vadmel* cloth, design and sew traditional folk patterns, and finish the cloth using a historic water-powered fulling mill (*stampa*), which harnesses melting snow for its operation. Through this project, Colburn aims to transfer knowledge of historical Scandinavian textile techniques, elevate awareness of using a *stampa*, and foster hands-on engagement with Scandinavian folk weaving traditions.

Sheila Coughlin from Kettle River, MN

Along with 2025 ASF Folk Artist Fellow Diane Jarvi, Sheila Coughlin will travel to Finland to study Finnish kantele and *runolaulu* (traditional rune songs), focusing on women's song traditions underrepresented in Finnish-American communities. Guided by folklorist Dalva Lamminmäki, ethnomusicologist Pekka Huttu-Hiltunen, and master kantele player Maija Pokela, Coughlin will conduct archival research, document historical sites, and study traditional playing styles and accompaniment techniques. The project will be documented through presentations and performances, ensuring the preservation and transmission of Finnish women's songs and folk music practices.



Sheila Coughlin performing the kantele in 2025. Photo credit: Michael Ludgate Photography.

Oliver Hunter from Minneapolis, MN



A concert at the American Swedish Institute, organized by Oliver Hunter.

Oliver Hunter will travel to Sweden to study with master folk musician and saxophonist Jens Comén in Östersund. While there, Hunter will focus on saxophone ensemble playing in the Swedish folk style, learn folk tunes and performance practices, and participate in the annual Bingsjöståmman festival in Dalarna. Upon returning, he will share his knowledge through three public engagements in Scandia, MN, Canton, SD, and Hancock, MI, each featuring a free tune workshop and a concert with his band Vårvindar.

Diane Jarvi from Minneapolis, MN

Along with 2025 ASF Folk Artist Fellow Sheila Coughlin, Diane Jarvi will travel in summer 2026 to Eastern Finland, the birthplace of Finnish rune singing, to study with folklorists at the University of Eastern Finland and contemporary rune singer Liisa Matveinen. Jarvi will adapt previously unknown rune melodies into new compositions, creating song cycles that honor the historical material while offering contemporary interpretations. Upon returning, she will share her research through concerts and presentations, fostering cultural exchange and expanding the presence of Finnish rune singing traditions in Finnish-American communities.



Diane Jarvi pictured with a guitar.

Nate Johnson from Bemidji, MN



Brain tanned moose and elk hides by Nate Johnson.

Hide tanner and knife maker Nate Johnson will travel to Norway and Sweden to study traditional Scandinavian leather tanning and knife sheath making. During his time abroad, he will work with master tanners Karl Karlsson in Sweden and Sofie Kleppe in Vågåmo, Norway, as well as master knife makers Olav Mortensen and Morten Håkonsen in Skien, Norway. His project will culminate in a free public presentation and workshop at North House Folk School, where participants will learn traditional tanning methods and craft knife sheaths from naturally tanned leather, blending Scandinavian craftsmanship with Upper Midwest traditions.

Bailey Kroll and Bozena Scheidel from Ashland, WI

Bailey Kroll and Bozena Scheidel are willow basketweavers who teach classes in Minnesota and Wisconsin. They will travel to Denmark to study the stake-and-strand style, a traditional Scandinavian craft in which a flat base is woven and upright stakes are inserted to form the basket's sides, while weaving is interlaced around them to create functional and artistic forms. Through work with both wild and domesticated willows, they seek to return this knowledge to the Upper Midwest, sharing it with students and the public to deepen the appreciation and practice of Scandinavian willow basketry traditions.



Fishing creel with 4 cranked handles by Bozena Scheidel, 2024

Laura MacKenzie, from St. Paul, MN



Säckpipa, Månmarkapipa, Spilåpipa, Seljefløyte, Sälglöjt, all traditional wind instruments.

Laura MacKenzie will travel to Sweden to study Swedish wind instruments: the *säckpipa* (Swedish bagpipe), *spilåpipa* (wooden whistle), and *sälglöjt* (overtone “willow” flute). She will study with master players and makers—including Olle Gällmo, Anna Rynefors, Stefan Ekedahl, and Jean-Pierre Yvert—to deepen her understanding of both the performance and craftsmanship of these traditional wind instruments. Upon her return, MacKenzie will share her knowledge through workshops, performances, and community programs, expanding access to these distinctive instruments in Swedish folk music traditions.

Mikey Marget, from Minneapolis, MN

In summer 2026, cellist and folk musician Mikey Marget will travel to Sweden to study the role of the cello in traditional Swedish music and attend their first Swedish *Stämman*—a folk music gathering where musicians perform and share traditional repertoire. While there, they will study with culture-bearer and internationally acclaimed cellist and fiddler Anders Löfberg, deepening their understanding of Swedish repertoire, harmony, and ensemble practice. Upon their return, Marget will share their learning with the community through performances, community jams, individual cello instruction at the Center for Performing Arts, and workshops at the Duluth Stämman, expanding opportunities for students and audiences to explore the cello's role in Swedish folk music traditions.



Mikey Marget pictured with a cello. Photographed by Alondra RA (@ara.photog on Instagram).

Renee Vaughan from Woodbury, MN



Renee Vaughan, pictured with her nyckelharpa.

Renee Vaughan will travel to Sweden to deepen her expertise on the *nyckelharpa*, Sweden's national folk instrument, and to study traditional Swedish folk dance, with a focus on 16th-note *polska* from Uppland and Södermanland. She will work with master tradition bearers Cajsa Ekstav (*nyckelharpa*), Christina Frohm (violin), and Bert Persson (folk dance), learning regional repertoire, stylistic nuances, and effective methods for teaching these living traditions. Upon her return, Vaughan will share her knowledge through performances, workshops, and educational programs in schools, libraries, and rural communities, fostering the intergenerational transmission of Swedish folk music and dance throughout the Upper Midwest.

Alexander Yerks from Stillwater, MN

Woodcarver Alexander Yerks will travel to Sweden to advance his knowledge of carving *kåsa/kuksa*—traditional Scandinavian wooden drinking vessels. He will work with master woodcarver Jögge Sundqvist and other leading experts, study historical collections, document surviving examples, and collaborate with blacksmiths to develop new carving and hallowing tools inspired by traditional forms. Upon his return, Yerks will share his knowledge through workshops and lectures at folk schools, museums, and carving festivals, contributing to the preservation and revival of this rare Scandinavian craft tradition in the Upper Midwest.



Black Alder - Alnus Glutinosa - Carved in New Zealand by Alexander Yerks.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS & COMMUNITY PROJECTS

ASI Cloudberrries, Minneapolis, MN

The ASI Cloudberrries Swedish Women's Choir will travel to Sweden to study traditional Swedish folk songs, harmonies, and vocal techniques with master singers, including Cajsa Ekstav, Eva Tjörnebo, and Sofia Sandén. This immersive experience will expand the Cloudberrries' repertoire, strengthen their performance skills, and equip them to share Swedish folk music traditions with audiences across the Upper Midwest.



An image of the Cloudberrries, pictured at Turnblad Mansion at the American Swedish Institute.

Beaumier U.P. Heritage Center at Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI

The Beaumier U.P. Heritage Center at Northern Michigan University will host the Upper Peninsula Folklife Festival (UPFF), a three-day series of workshops, demonstrations, and performances in Marquette, MI, celebrating traditional Scandinavian folk arts and cultural traditions. During the festival, master artists will teach Nordic skills—including *rosemaling*, weaving, woodcarving, folk music and dance, and traditional culinary arts—ensuring these living traditions are passed on to new generations and helping sustain and expand the Upper Peninsula's rich Nordic folk arts traditions.

Center for People & Craft/Free Forest School, Minneapolis, MN

In partnership with the Free Forest School, the Center for People & Craft will host six multi-day workshops and four public events, connecting participants directly with Scandinavian cultural traditions. Its programming will feature classes and demonstrations by master artists and musicians—including woodworkers Jess Hirsh (2017 ASF Folk Artist Fellow), Paul Linden (2024 ASF Folk Artist Fellow), Fred Livesay (2021 ASF Folk Artist Fellow), and Gabe Strand, *kulning* (herding calls) practitioner Ellen Skoro, and the Norwegian fiddle ensemble *Twin Cities Hardingfelelag*. These events will bring traditionally rural traditions and performances into an urban setting, giving participants direct access to Nordic folk arts and cultural traditions in the Upper Midwest.

Daneville Heritage Museum, Viborg, SD

The Daneville Heritage Museum will share the rich cultural traditions of the Danish-American community of Viborg in its Danish *Jul* (Christmas) Celebration in December 2026. The event will feature a Danish meal at Viborg's Danish Brotherhood Hall, followed by music, storytelling, folk dancing, and a Saint Lucia Day procession. Through family-friendly celebrations, the celebration will engage all generations and establish an annual event that strengthens Daneville's Danish cultural heritage and traditions.



An image of the Daneville Heritage Museum.

Folklore Village, Dodgeville, WI



Participants enjoy a dance workshop during Spring Scandinavian Weekend at Folklore Village.

Folklore Village will bring four renowned Swedish folk artists—folk dancers Stig and Helen Eriksson and folk musicians Christer and Kristina Samuelsson—to lead workshops and performances at the 2026 Spring Scandinavian Music & Dance Weekend. From March 20-22, 2026, this festival will celebrate Swedish folk traditions through intensive music and dance workshops, nightly dances, shared cultural meals, and educational presentations. With this event, Folklore Village aims to foster cultural appreciation, intergenerational participation, and community engagement with Swedish folk traditions.

Living History Farms, Urbandale, IA

Living History Farms will host a Folk Art Fair on April 25, 2026. Partnering with the Daughters of Norway Lodge #46 and other cultural organizations, this one-day event will showcase Scandinavian woodcarving, weaving, pottery, music, and dance throughout the historic 1876 town of Walnut Hill. Through this celebration of Scandinavian heritage and craft, Living History Farms aims to honor Iowa's Scandinavian roots and inspire new appreciation for living Scandinavian folk traditions that continue to shape Midwestern culture.

The Madison Art and Innovation Center, Madison, MN

The Madison Art and Innovation Center will host Lac qui Parle Norsefest, a festival celebrating the rich Norwegian and Swedish heritage of Madison, Dawson, and Milan, MN. The program will feature workshops and performances by Scandinavian folk musicians, dancers, and storytellers, alongside hands-on art activities with master artists. Events will take place at local schools, libraries, historical societies, and community venues. Designed to engage residents of all ages and backgrounds, the festival will foster intergenerational knowledge transfer, sustain Scandinavian folk arts, and strengthen community pride in the region's Scandinavian cultural heritage.

New York Mills Arts Retreat & Regional Cultural Center, New York Mills, MN



Kip Peltoniemi performing at the New York Mills Cultural Center.

The New York Mills Regional Cultural Center will produce “Window to the World: Finland 2026,” a six-month program series featuring workshops and performances, Finnish language classes, cultural celebrations, and hands-on experiences in folk music, art, and traditional practices. Through this programming, New York Mills aims to reinforce its role as a rural hub for celebrating and sustaining Nordic folk arts and traditions for future generations.

North Dakota Council on the Arts, Bismarck, ND



Bud Larsen and Elsa Ruth, two luthiers and musicians supported by the North Dakota Council on the Arts.

In early 2026, the North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA) will launch “Building Community of Practice in Scandinavian Folk Arts.” This project will foster connections between master artists—experts in folk traditions ranging from Norwegian Hardanger fiddles and *skinnfell* to Swedish *dalmålning*, *rosemaling*, and broom making—and intergenerational learners in their local communities. Throughout the year, these master artists and learners will lead workshops and public presentations, ensuring that these folk traditions are practiced, adapted, and shared with broader audiences while cultivating intergenerational networks for Nordic folk arts across Minnesota and North Dakota.

Three Rivers Fibershed, Minneapolis, MN



Photo from Three Rivers Fibershed’s Sheep to Shawl program, 2023, photos by Lily Turner.

Three Rivers Fibershed (TRF), in a collaborative weaving initiative with The Weavers Guild of Minnesota (WGM), will engage three fiber artists in creating new work in linen, a material central to Scandinavian folk life, while sharing their creative process with the public. Participating artists will lead workshops and demonstrations, culminating in an exhibition at WGM featuring live weaving, panel discussions, and cultural programming. Through this project, TRF aims to sustain and celebrate Scandinavian folk arts, foster community engagement, and deepen public appreciation of traditional Scandinavian textiles.