

A man with a beard, wearing a blue t-shirt and jeans, is working in a workshop. He is using a hammer and a chisel to shape a piece of wood. The workshop is dimly lit, with a strong light source from the left, creating a dramatic effect. The background shows various tools and materials, suggesting a traditional craft environment.

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CULTURAL VITALITY PROGRAM

Semiannual Report, June 2020

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On Cover: Vazgen Gevorgyan, an artisan supported by the My Handmade Armenia initiative, takes a ceramic piece from a handmade mold. Photo by Narek Harutyunyan, My Armenia Program

This page: Photograph from Folklife Magazine essay *The Power of “Bears Ears” and Indigenous Place Names*. Essay and photo by Angela Baca

INTRODUCTION
Building the Ship in a Storm

The **Cultural Vitality Program** was officially launched in September 2019 and kicked off with hiring for the new positions afforded by the program funding. We completed the hiring process just as the Smithsonian began lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March.

As a result of travel and gathering restrictions, we—like the broader Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH), the Smithsonian Institution, and the world—have had to redesign our work processes and to pivot activities.

In the sections that follow, we highlight the pre-pandemic plans as well as the new activities designed in response to the constraints of this new environment. Despite the challenges, we have been able to build new relationships and find innovative ways to serve communities and partners from a distance.

MEET THE TEAM

The Cultural Vitality Program provides the resources necessary to establish a new department at CFCH, transitioning existing staff and hiring new staff into their roles for impactful programming. These additional human resources and specialized skill sets—in project design and management, impact evaluation, and communications—are central to the success of the program and provide critical support to curators and other teams across CFCH. The team brings a diversity of fresh knowledge, experience, and networks to the Center and works together to create and implement strategies to advance our Cultural Vitality Program goals.

Halle Butvin
Program Director

Halle joined CFCH as director of special projects in 2016, following three years as an advisor at the Smithsonian's Office of International Relations. She brings fifteen years of experience designing and implementing impact-driven, community-based programming around the world. Halle leads the cultural vitality team and is responsible for expanding the reach of the program through partnerships and new funding opportunities.

Hali Dardar,
Language Reclamation and
Media Project Coordinator

Hali brings seven years of experience in collaborative project management, research in new media design, optimizing program workflows, and community-based Indigenous language reclamation. She supports our language revitalization and indigenous media initiatives with project design and management.

Claudia Foronda,
Program Administrator

Claudia brings seven years of experience as a manager at Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, handling sales, procurement, and administration. Her knowledge and background of Smithsonian systems are invaluable to cultural vitality projects, ensuring efficient management of human and financial resources.

Yuri Horowitz,
Cultural Heritage Tourism Manager

Yuri leads the Center's projects focused on developing sustainable and community-based cultural heritage tourism experiences in partner communities. Prior to joining CFCH, he spent over twenty years working throughout the travel and tourism industry in more than eighty-five countries—from front-line hospitality to high-level tourism planning and policy.

Anne Sandager Pedersen,
Impact Evaluation Specialist

Anne has been with CFCH for seven years and transitioned from project management into leading our impact evaluation efforts. She is developing our first impact evaluation framework and step-by-step guide for measuring impact of cultural vitality projects. Anne conducts surveys and field research, and supports the design, development, and implementation of cultural vitality projects.

Cecelia Halle,
Strategic Communications Assistant

Cecelia just completed her Bachelor of Arts at The George Washington University. She previously worked with Amalia Cordova as an Indigenous Media Hub intern and brings experience in event planning, education programming, communications, and graphic design.

Sloane Keller,
Cultural Industries Project Coordinator

Sloane brings ten years of experience in designing and implementing sustainable management and operations solutions for small businesses and nonprofits in the United States and around the world. She supports our cultural industries initiative with project design and management.

LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE

Led by CFCH Curator Mary Linn, the Language Revitalization Initiative collaborates with communities to support their long-term language and cultural vitality.

As **Sustaining Minoritized Languages of Europe (SMiLE)** winds down, our team is focused on reporting and analysis. In summary, the program produced a multitude of research outputs that will continue to inform language revitalization work throughout Europe. A productive eighteen months of research concluded with SMiLE fellows participating in fifty-four academic conferences and invited talks; forty media stories (radio and print); twenty-three academic publications; twenty-eight collaborations with institutions and programs; seventeen community collaboration meetings; eleven websites and digital content; six comparative case studies; three theses/dissertations; and three Smithsonian internships. The principal research teams continue to work on an edited volume that presents major findings from the case studies.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the team had committed to partnerships and collaborative workshops at two key institutes in 2020: the **Institute for Collaborative Language Research (CoLang)** and the fifth

annual **Sino-Tibetan Language Research Methodology Workshop (STLRMW)**.

With both major events canceled, we are working with our partners to pivot funding into collecting and organizing materials from the past workshops and making them accessible online. With CoLang we are developing a multilingual website for the dissemination of learning materials and information for linguists and language practitioners. With our STLRMW partners at Nankai University in China we are developing a series of eight online workshops to support planning documentation for existing research projects and supporting STLRMW attendees to develop proposals for small language and cultural grants (Firebird, Endangered Languages Documentation Programme). The top three pilot projects will be funded for 3,000-5,000 CNY (approximately \$425-\$700 each).

Through the newly developed **Language Revitalization Incubator**, we are working with community partners on leadership training for Native American language practitioners in collaboration with the Multicultural Initiative for Community Advancement; a North Frisian creative writing competition for middle and high school students mirroring the biennial *Ferteel iinjse!*; and Lower Sorbian young adult connections in learning and using their language.

Nils Langer speaks with students on Föhr, Germany, about studying North Frisian. Photo courtesy of Nils Langer

Film still from *Restless River*, a Inuk film made by Marie-Helene Cousineau and Madeline Ivalu screened at the 2020 Mother Tongue Film Festival.

INDIGENOUS MEDIA INITIATIVE

Led by CFCH Curator Amalia Cordova, the Indigenous Media Initiative seeks to create a platform for learning about and engaging with the production of Indigenous media in the digital age.

In February, the Fifth Annual **Mother Tongue Film Festival** highlighted and honored the role of language in community life and the people who tell these stories with four days of programming across the Smithsonian and Washington, D.C. The Festival is a part of Recovering Voices, a collaboration between CFCH, National Museum of the American Indian, and National Museum of Natural History. For the first time our team was able to conduct a visitor survey to gauge impact of the films presented at the Festival. A five-year report on the Mother Tongue Film Festival is forthcoming.

Planning work on the **Indigenous Media Hub** began earlier this year. Prior to COVID-19 travel restrictions, our team had planned to host conversations at a range of conferences and events. With these events canceled, we are now working digitally to develop the structure of the Hub’s online platform. This includes ongoing consultations with film

practitioners and an internal design week to refine the concept to approach the changes in digital use. The first steps, now underway, will provide technical support to partners to upgrade their content management systems. In addition to providing this often-under-resourced service to our partners, the upgrades will ensure that the Hub will be able to easily surface content available on their websites. Along with developing a site structure and content timeline, we aim to launch the first web prototype of the Hub by the end of the calendar year.

2019 was designated by the United Nations as the **International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL)**. Our team worked with more than thirty partner organizations throughout the year to present major public programs—both nationally and internationally—on Indigenous languages. In total we presented over fifty films to an in-person audience of more than 5,000 people, and produced five web outputs, including our own bilingual Mother Tongue Film Festival website. Building on this work and key partnerships, our team is well-positioned to develop meaningful activities for the upcoming **UN Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages** launching in 2022.

CULTURAL INDUSTRIES INITIATIVE

Prior to the pandemic, Conde Nast named Armenia as the #1 travel destination for 2020. Our partners on the **My Armenia Cultural Heritage Tourism Program** are grappling with the loss of the 2020 tourism season. Despite challenges, the team, led by Yuri Horowitz, continues building out the program [website](#), training new tourism experiences through digital formats and pivoting efforts to target local and diaspora travelers. We also worked with the Folklife Festival team to launch a new relationship with online retailer NOVICA to provide access to global markets for artisans in Armenia and beyond.

Our planned **exchange program for Tibetan cultural heritage specialists**, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is postponed due to COVID-19. The team selected three candidates in March. Planning for the program will resume when it is possible to travel from China. In the meantime, CFCH curator James Deutsch is developing online learning modules to kick-start our engagement with the selected candidates.

While travel to work with the **Royal Textile Academy of Bhutan** was canceled due to

COVID-19, our team, led by CFCH consultant Joseph Lo, continued virtual work to plan research studies, planning for the design resource center, and creating a color theory workbook for weaving training participants. A local partner will lead research this fall and trainings will begin as soon as travel restrictions are lifted.

Our pilot **Crafts of African Fashion** project in Senegal, led by CFCH curator Diana N'Diaye, was postponed due to COVID-19. The project, designed in partnership with the West African Research Center, aimed to address inequity between artisan makers and fashion designers through a roundtable and public symposium at the Dak'art Biennale in June. Resources are being redirected to respond to current needs in the United States, with planning for an **African American Craft Summit** now underway.

To further expand the **Smithsonian Artisan Initiative** within the United States, we began partnering with the American Craft Council for the [American Craft Forum Craft Thinking](#) series, a series of three digital programs exploring the role of craft thinking in social innovation.

Weavers at work at the **Gagyel Llundrup Weaving Centre** in Thimphu, Bhutan.
Photo by Jake Naughton



WHERE WE’RE HEADED

While our team has been working from home, the last six months has been a very busy period for **new opportunity development**, especially in our cultural industries work. Our team led efforts on four major proposals for more than \$2.77M in potential new work.

My Armenia Cultural Heritage Tourism Program (\$1M) from USAID to extend and expand our work in Armenia for an additional fifteen months.

Resilience for American Makers (\$844K) proposal submitted to Smithsonian leadership for potential stimulus funding developed with American Craft Council. The focus is on trainings for American makers to diversify their income streams in response to COVID-19.

Atyrau Youth Development Initiative: Cultural Heritage Programming, Kazakhstan (\$405K) submitted to British Council for cultural heritage research and a range of workshops on artisan craft traditions and creative industries. Expected to finalize grant in late summer/early fall.

Cultural Heritage Tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (\$522K) developed in

partnership with the International Executive Service Corps submitted in response to USAID Bosnia and Herzegovina request for proposal. This five-year program would utilize approaches developed through My Armenia to develop sustainable, community-based tourism experiences and artisan craft enterprises.

During July and August 2020, our team will begin work planning efforts for FY2021. Work plans for each initiative, which will include project descriptions, impact evaluation frameworks, and detailed budgeting, will be available in early September.

An attendee participates in Last Whispers, an audiovisual installation and a virtual reality experience made by Lena Hertzog at the 2019 **Mother Tongue Film Festival**. Photo courtesy of Lena Hertzog



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