Background to Client Project
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Indiana University of Pennsylvania students from Dr. Poole's Applied Anthropology class (ANTH 457/561) collaborated with a community organization, NaffInc, to conduct research that assisted with their effort to document and assess the impacts and significance of the Northern Appalachian Folk Festival in our region.

The Northern Appalachian Folk Festival (NAFF, Inc.) is a local 501(c)3, that describes itself as "dedicated to preserving the past, promoting the present and securing the future of music, art, folkways, food ways and other related forms of cultural expression in Northern Appalachia. Through the annual Folk Festival, the newly launched Folk School, and other Organization-sponsored events, NAFF, Inc. contributes to improving the region's quality of life by enriching the cultural environment, creating jobs, stimulating the economy, and strengthening relationships with local communities and the general public" (NAFF Inc., n.d.). With the sudden loss of its founder, Dr. Jim Dougherty, NAFF, Inc. is facing a moment of transition, including the pressure of having to grow community support and seek new sponsorship. The leadership of NAFF, Inc. is seeking to engage in a strategic rebranding based on the 'legacy' of the Folk Festival in our community. There has already been a strong local legacy ethos to NAFF, evidenced by the Walk of Fame, various historical markers, and the Folk Fest School, named after notable local musicians.

Students in Amanda Poole's ANTH 457 Applied Anthropology class conducted problem-based research to contribute to the mission of the organization. The students divided into three groups, responsible for conducting and video-taping ethnographic interviews, intercept interviews, and producing a 5-minute video promoting the Folk Festival and its legacy. Ethnographic and archival research explored the significance of NAFF locally and regionally to varied publics, focusing on the questions: What does the Folk Festival mean to people? What is its legacy and how can we best tell that story? What needs does/can it meet? This research also has broader significance, as it explores the role of arts and music-based development in crafting resilience and community-building in Appalachia (Chaney 2025, McGrath et.al. 2020). The outcome of the study resulted in an original video for use by the organization, a PowerPoint presentation, and academic papers. We presented our results to our community partner and ACRN on May 2, 2025, and have begun disseminating the video. We are hopeful that connections made during this project will continue to support the folk festival and create meaningful and sustaining links between this important community arts event and the campus community.

References

Chaney, R., 2025. Place-Making Through Heritage Tourism: A Tradition of Music and Culture of Commodity in Appalachia. Tourism Culture & Communication, 25(1), pp.39-49.

McGrath, B. and Brennan, M.A., 2020. Tradition, cultures, and communities: Exploring the potentials of music and the arts for community development in Appalachia. In Culture, community, and development (pp. 147-169). Routledge.

NAFF Inc. (n.d.) NAFF Inc. Available at: https://www.naffinc.org/ (Accessed: 21 February 2025).