

The South Carolina Folk Heritage Award was created by the South Carolina legislature in 1987 to recognize lifetime achievement in folk arts. In 1997 the name was changed to the Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Award in memory of Representative Harris' long-time support of South Carolina's cultural heritage. The artistic traditions represented by the Awards are significant because they have endured, often over hundreds of years. Award recipients have demonstrated excellence in a particular folk art tradition, maintained a high level of artistic commitment, and enriched the lives of people across the state through their unique talents and dedication.

South Carolina was one of the first to formally recognize folk artists through a state-sponsored award. The establishment of this award is a testament to the significant role folk artists and traditional arts advocates have in maintaining the diverse cultural heritage of both South Carolina and the country. The awards process is administered by the University of South Carolina's McKissick Museum and the South Carolina Arts Commission and an advisory panel appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker of the House selects the winners. The wealth of traditions honored includes gospel choirs, basketmakers, bladesmiths, storytellers, and fiddlers.

**Criteria for the Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Award as established by 1986 legislative bill include:**

- Emphasis on the authenticity of the tradition, giving the highest priority to those crafts with a long history of practice in the state.
- The significance of the individual folk artist or group in maintaining or stimulating the craft to higher levels of artistic achievement; or, the significance of the folk arts advocate in supporting authentic South Carolina traditional arts or interpreting it to a wider audience.
- The award must be given to folk artists living and practicing in South Carolina.
- The Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Award may be presented to no more than four recipients each year by the General Assembly. An advocacy award may also be presented.