



Why is NASA at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival?

(Clockwise from top left) NASA supports the work of educators in the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (also known as STEM). The agency spends an estimated \$146 million annually on education.

NASA's 2004 class of astronaut candidates, along with three members of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, fly weightless in a KC-135 aircraft over the Gulf of Mexico.

Researcher Jane Thipphavong uses NASA's Surface Management System to analyze complex traffic situations on the surface of the Dallas/Fort Worth airport, one of the world's largest and most complex airports.

Christopher Boxe, on a post-doctoral fellowship at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, conducts laboratory and computer simulations to determine how Earth's surface chemistry relates to environmental occurrences such as climate change.

Photos courtesy NASA

Folklore and folklife festivals are not usually associated with the people who work for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. After all, NASA generally perceives itself as a paragon of progressive science, exploration, and technology, continually breaking new ground rather than conserving its culture.

However, on the occasion of NASA's fiftieth anniversary in 2008, its scientists, engineers, and technicians find themselves on the National Mall amidst Bhutanese archers and Texas musicians. This program, *NASA: Fifty Years and Beyond*, builds upon previous folklife festivals that have examined occupational traditions, including those of the White House, Smithsonian Institution, and USDA Forest Service.

Every occupational group has its own set of skills, specialized knowledge, and codes of behavior that not only distinguish it from other occupational groups, but also meet its needs as a community. Here, NASA employees represent a cross section of the agency's 18,000 civil servants and 40,000 contractors and grantees.

Specific areas at the Festival are devoted to NASA's work in eight major fields:

1. Space Science—seeking answers to some of humanity's oldest questions, such as Is there life beyond Earth?
2. Earth Science—including satellite views of our own planet and measurements of climate change
3. Human Spaceflight—featuring personnel involved with the Space Shuttle and International Space Station
4. Aeronautics—including research to improve the nation's air transportation system and future aircraft design
5. Future Initiatives—showcasing missions planned for the moon, Mars, and beyond
6. Space Art—presenting painters and photographers who have documented NASA's activities through art

7. Foodways—demonstrating how space food is planned, prepared, consumed, and evaluated

8. Education—allowing visitors to learn more about NASA through hands-on, family-friendly activities

Come meet the men and women of NASA who have not only helped to broaden the horizons of American science and culture, but are also helping to shape the future by stirring the public imagination.

