

Resume

KIRAN SINGH SIRAH (he/him)

Storyteller/ Arts & Culture Thought Leader/ Folklorist/Artist/Peacebuilder
Past President, International Storytelling Center



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CONTENT LINKS:

[PERSONAL PROFILE](#)

[AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS](#)

[TESTIMONIALS](#)

[PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE, CREATIVE LEADERSHIP/ CONSULTATIONS & ENGAGEMENTS](#)

[NON-PROFIT LEADERSHIP](#)

[PUBLICATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS](#)

[EDUCATION](#)

[IN THE NEWS AND MEDIA](#)

PERSONAL PROFILE:

KIRAN SINGH SIRAH is an award-winning Storyteller, Folklorist, Arts & Culture Creative Thought Leader, Artist, and Past President of the International Storytelling Center. For more than two decades Kiran has established several award-winning arts, cultural and human rights initiatives in numerous countries. These programs have received recognition from UNESCO, The White House, The United Nations and the European Commission. He has spoken at the Library of Congress, the Kennedy Center, American Public Health Association, US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, The Pentagon, The US State Department and numerous World Peace, Arts and Culture assemblies.

In 2015, he was invited to the White House in support of storytelling efforts for national grassroots peacebuilding efforts. An advisory member to UNESCO Scotland and a Rotary World Peace Fellow, he has developed articles, talks and advises on interdisciplinary storytelling and creative approaches to relationship building in communities around the globe. Kiran has been a thought leader/speaker on projects with the Smithsonian, League of American Orchestras, Google Arts & Culture, Dollywood, Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, The British Council, American Folklore Society, Library of Congress, South Arts, NASA, National Endowments for Arts & Humanities, and special collaborations with Yo-Yo Ma and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

Kiran passionately believes in the power of human creativity, arts, storytelling and the notion of a truly global multicultural society. In 2017, he was one seven people worldwide selected to receive the "Champion of Peace" award at Rotary International Day at the United Nations in Geneva and was recently nominated for work to receive a National Education Association Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights and Civil Rights award. www.kiransinghsirah.net

Sirah also serves in advisory roles: Senior Fellow for the Alliance for Peacebuilding, USA Ambassador for Generations for Peace, Collective Impact Leadership Council of STRONG ACC, East Tennessee Foundation and New York City's City Lore Project. And has also served previously with Tennesseans for the Arts, The Association of American Cultures, African and Caribbean Network (Scotland), Scottish Refugee Week.

[Back to CONTENT LINKS](#)

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- Nominated for the National Educational Association Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights award. 2023.
- United Way Unsung Heroes' Award. 2022.
- Purdue Peacebuilding Big Idea Challenge winner; Purdue University, 2019
- "Champion for Peace" Award for advancing storytelling for world peace. Rotary International and the United Nations. Presented at Geneva Peace Week, 2017.
- Invited by chairwoman Jane Chu to present at the Kennedy Center, for the 50th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Arts. 2016.
- Received "exceptional ability" Greencard by US Government, for specialist and unique contributions to benefit the citizens of the United States. 2015.
- Paul Harris Fellow Award; Rotary International, 2011 & 2022.
- Rotary World Peace Fellowship. 2011-213.

- Invited to serve as an advisory member to UK National Commission for UNESCO Scotland and invited to meet with UNESCO Director General, 2011
- Scottish Arts Leadership Achievement. Creative Scotland. 2010.
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Scotland recommendation for "Bigot Busters," 2007
- Invited to present exemplar project at the First Minister of Scotland Summit on Sectarianism, 2006
- Enterprise for Scotland award for "Sense over Sectarianism," 2005
- Invited to chair session on "Diversify" at the UK Museums Association Conference, 2004

[Back to CONTENT LINKS](#)

TESTIMONIALS:

"Kiran understands at a very deep level that art not only holds intrinsic value but is a powerful tool for social change. I have seen him link poetry, storytelling and photography with issues as diverse as gang warfare, human trafficking, peacebuilding, and countering violent extremism. This ability to link disparate world views and modalities for peace is extremely rare, and Kiran is a genius in this regard. His ability to link different cultures, his brilliant ingenuity, his vast creativity, his love for a wide range of storytelling traditions – and his modesty -- strike me as the values we desperately need during a polarizing and traumatic time in the world. Kiran is a once-in-a-generation social leader" - **Melanie Greenberg, Managing Director, Peacebuilding, Humanity United. Omidyar Group.**

"Kiran is an exceptional individual that has led outstanding arts and humanities projects towards collective impact. By scaling up his Storytelling for All approach to ensure equity, diversity and critical conversations are core to the arts, and public discourse at large. Kiran is constantly working for social change, whether he's training troops in using storytelling for non-violence conflict prevention strategy at the Pentagon or empowering grassroots student activists across the US South to share stories on their own terms. His goal is always to amplify the voices and stories of America's most historically marginalized groups and help advance multiculturalism as a foundational core value for our nation. Kiran brings a mastery and unique expertise to the field of storytelling and narrative change for the benefit of the wider American public, where his accomplishments are undeniably far above what is expected from his peer group. Although newer to our nation, he has established himself as a national leader, an interdisciplinary specialist, a public folklorist and educator, whom is always creating important national dialogue collaborations across the United States, and beyond." – **Dr. William Ferris, Joel R. Williamson Eminent Professor of History. Senior Associate Director. Center for Study of the American South. Former Chair of the National Endowment for Humanities.**

"Kiran's work building community and cross-cultural constructive ties among people through their most cherished and meaningful cultural assets is much needed in our globalized societies, in search of a creative, peaceful future. I applaud him for his talent, devotion, innovation, and energy in service of his cause—the cause of all of us." --**Dr. Daniel Sheehy, Director Emeritus, Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage**

"Kiran's contributions explore culturally diverse approaches through working with communities affected by conflict and marginalization." - **Joanne Orr, Chair of UK National Commission, UNESCO Scotland Committee**

“Compared to other education and public relations professionals whom I have worked with, Kiran Sirah has a sharp instinct for presenting complex information from a relatable and fresh perspective.” --**Dr. Alice Wessen, Public Engagement Manager, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory**

“Kiran has already made an enormous impact, both in the United Kingdom and since 2011, in the United States, and he will continue to do so. On November 3rd, 2012, Kiran was invited by the Rotary International Representative to the United Nations to deliver a keynote address to discuss his work and ideas for using the arts as a force for social change. He spoke to an audience of more than 1,300 Rotarians, United Nations officials and representatives from worldwide international development organizations in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. During the two days before his keynote address, Kiran walked all over the city, listening to stories of residents’ experiences with the storm, which led him to dedicate his speech “to the people of the city who took me in and offered inspiration, truly Telling Stories that Matter.” - **Susan E. Carroll Managing Director. The Duke-UNC Rotary Peace Center.**

“Through the story arts, he has been able to break down barriers, heal hearts and improve the human condition. Working with teachers, he supports the use stories to fuel the imaginations of students and build their self-image and self-determination. He is firmly on building community. I don’t believe there is any element of our society that Kiran could not- and would not- face for the purpose of bringing peace and well-being to our world. His gentle and caring spirit fills all the space around him. Being with Kiran is both inspiring and soothing. He has a calming and peaceful nature putting you at ease and making a space for open and meaningful dialogue. Through our work at the Niswonger Foundation, Kiran has provided support for our college leadership program, for the educators across the region, for school children, and to me, personally, as a mentor and friend. Kiran is the very definition of nonviolent activism. He doesn’t shy away from the hard questions. He merely uses his tremendous talents to share life lessons peacefully, respectfully, and convincingly. I want to keep learning from him.” --**Dr. Nancy Dishner, President and CEO, Niswonger Foundation.**

“He is a true leader in advancing the role of storytelling in our nation’s historical and cultural research. I was a first-hand witness to Mr. Sirah’s approach to his craft. Many social scientists may view it as an intellectual exercise, but Mr. Sirah sees the connections between storytelling and real-world social issues with unusual clarity. He uses it as a tool to build empathy, defuse painful divisions, and construct a more peaceful world. Mr. Sirah’s work is directly relevant to some of the United States’ most urgent national interests today. A country that is in severe need of increased cross-cultural compassion and awareness should take heed of the potential contributions of Mr. Sirah.” --**Harold Closter. Director [former) of Smithsonian Affiliates.**

“With his background in the arts as well as an ability to teach effectively, Kiran gives individuals and communities new ways to approach collaborative efforts aimed at conflict resolution on any level.” - **Rebecca Popham, Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation-USA**

“Kiran Sirah is an exceptional individual who brings a broad background and a true mastery to the field of storytelling. Kiran Sirah’s significant accomplishments have enjoyed widespread acceptance and implementation by the storytelling community and are undeniably far above what is expected from his peer group and have established him as a nationally and internationally outstanding researcher in his field. His work is certainly important to the field and to the United States” --**Congressman [Former] Phil Roe. 1st district, Tennessee. (a sponsor for Kiran’s 2016 exceptional ability Greencard)**

In my career, talent like Mr. Kiran Sirah's is difficult to find, both in terms of professional practice and in terms of theoretical understanding." -- **David Stanley, Protocol Officer, U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence. Fort Benning, GA**

He gave an outstanding talk about the power of stories for community building and peacemaking." - **Nicole Saylor, Head of the Archive, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress**

"Kiran brought a fresh, creative energy to our team and helped us to think about creative storytelling in new ways. The toolkit he developed while he was with us continues to be a useful resource for the global network of Partners all over the world." --**Julia Roig, President, Partners for Democratic Change**

"We have engaged the work and expertise of Mr. Sirah to enable our fellows' experiences to focus on developing personal narratives that promote the core values of our program in particular to advance comprehension of democracy and religious liberty as core values in the United States" -- **Barbara Zasloff, Ph.D., President. International Center for Contemporary Education**

"Kiran's scope of work and influence are not limited to Tennessee. He recently received a call from the White House asking him to speak about response to recent tragic events through storytelling. Calls like this across the country and the world are not uncommon for Kiran as he is a known leader in his field of professional storytelling, expertly communication its impact on community development, social justice, and peace. Kiran Sirah's brilliance in purpose, message, and action is a gift to Tennessee and our country. His accomplishments and impact are unique and significant and his work propels him toward his personal goal of peace in the world." - **Stephanie B. Conner. Immediate Past Chair. Tennessee Arts Commission.**

"Kiran is one of those thinkers whose ideas often seem, at first glance, brilliantly outside of the box; on closer examination, however, one realizes that they're not so much outside of the box as busily re-framing the box, re-conceptualizing possibilities in strikingly original ways. What emerges is not necessarily what one expects, but instead what one couldn't even have imagined . . . but which seems to make complete sense once it's in place." -**Dr. Glenn Hinson, Acting Director, Folklore Program, University of North Carolina**

"Kiran is truly an expert in the field of professional storytelling." --**Dr. Brian Noland, President, East Tennessee State University**

"He is very creative and accomplished in a variety of visual and performing arts and uses these talents to facilitate the expression of identity by marginalized and troubled communities for which he demonstrates compassion and understanding. His work has shown the value of the arts in bringing together communities in conflict, promoting mutual understanding that lays a foundation for conflict resolution. Most important is that Kiran has the will and an abundance of charm needed to inspire others to support him in positive actions towards these ends." --**Frank Webb, D.Phil. Professor of the Practice of Public Policy, Duke Center for International Development, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University**

"Kiran's commitment to thoughtful dialogue, connecting people across difference and conflict, and creating transformative educational experiences is exceptional, and I am grateful to have

had the opportunity to work with and learn from him.” --Emily Chavez, Outreach, The Consortium in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University

“Kiran embodies the transformative power of storytelling. A mosaic of cultural influences have shaped his identity, and his journey from a multicultural upbringing to becoming a global advocate for using stories as bridges for peace and understanding is truly awe-inspiring. From childhood lessons in resilience to empowering marginalized communities, Kiran's life is a testament to the potency of narratives in healing, connecting, and fostering change. His work as a Rotary Peace Fellow, his successful ten-year leadership tenure at the International Storytelling Center, and his involvement in pioneering initiatives like Freedom Stories exemplify his dedication to social justice and community empowerment. Kiran's passion for global peace through storytelling is both palpable and impactful. Every day he illuminates a path toward a more interconnected and empathetic world. We need leaders like Kiran now more than ever”-
Mark Cruise- Health and Social Impact Leader, Innovator and Advocate.

Kiran is a master storyteller and a dynamic facilitator whose work brings people together across lines of difference in pursuit of a more just and peaceful world. I've been involved in storytelling for social change projects around the world for the past 15 years and I have yet to meet someone as skilled and passionate as Kiran in this work-
Dr. William McInerney- Gates Cambridge Scholar.

I had the immense privilege of working with Kiran to engage our disability community on impactful storytelling, and his insight, passion, and adoration for the art of storytelling was ever-present. His content expertise took our programming to the next level, and his ability to engage and empower others in their own journeys to storytelling is incredible to watch. Not only has his work ignited a fire for storytelling within my own work, but his mentorship has inspired both my professional and personal growth -
Margaux Whitehead, Program Specialist, Public Health Professional. Association of University Centers on Disability.

[Back to CONTENT LINKS](#)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE, CREATIVE LEADERSHIP/ CONSULTATIONS & ENGAGEMENTS:

- **Storytelling to Build a Culture of Belonging.** Closing Plenary Speaker for the 39th Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, on the theme of Storytelling to build a culture of belonging. [Pacific Rim Conference Ancestral and Indigenous Storytelling](#) 2024.
- **AUCD conference.** Presented two plenaries and two storytelling workshops for the Association for University Center on Disability [AUCD conference 2023](#) theme: Emerging Leaders Shape the Future Through the Power of Storytelling. 2023.
- **Appalachian Big Ideas Festival.** Narrative Change Thought Leader for the Appalachian Big Ideas Festival, in Hazard, Kentucky. An Appalachian centered convening focused on disrupting the narrative, advancing social justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and inclusive dialogues. October 2023. Write up by Tasha Sams, [Program Spotlight](#)

- **Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Creative Encounters;** Living Religions. Storytelling Creative Thought Leader. Imagined, design and delivered dozens of daily storytelling community conversations, presentations and facilitation of main stage narrative session panels, as part of a Storytelling as a Sacred Gift- theme. The National Mall, and Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. July 29 and July 9, 2023. Write Up: [Humanity Stories](#)
- **Rotary leadership Global Support.** Led Storytelling training in Evanston, Illinois that took place at Rotary International Headquarters' One Rotary Center. This was part of Rotary leadership Global Support Seminar to train and introduce regional leaders from 19 different countries on storytelling as a community building practice. February 2023.
- **“Changing the Narrative”** Hosted and facilitated a “Changing the Narrative” roundtable discussion with The Emancipator’s Co-Editors. The Emancipators project is part of The Boston Globe and Boston University Center for Antiracist Research led by anti-racist activist scholar Dr. Ibram X. Kendi. January 2023.
- **Yo-Yo Ma project.** Kiran collaborated with UN peace ambassador and international cellist Yo-Yo Ma on a project that celebrated Appalachian traditions. Kiran was tapped as a thinking partner and workshop leader for a special storytelling and music convening that took place May 13-15 in Western North Carolina. Other partners included The Office of Performing Arts and Film, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Service, community members and elders of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and Cherokee Nation, Cherokee museum, Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, Black in Appalachia, Big Ears Festival, National Park Service, Radio Lab and others. The project convened around 45 cultural and eco-activists and practitioners from across Appalachia and beyond, to help explore the emerging story of how culture connects people to the natural world and how biodiversity and human diversity strengthens our relationship to nature and to each other, brings us empathetic connections as we imagine and build our collective future. 2022.
- **Artists at Work:** Kiran provided creative thought leadership to Artists at Work (AAW), with The Office of Performing Arts and Film. Project includes a WPA-inspired approach to recovery that puts artists at the forefront of social impact and transformation. AAW was awarded \$3 million from the Andrew Mellon Foundation. Kiran strategized on “storytelling as a radical gift of hope” philosophy. The project has since formed over 80 partnerships and employed hundreds of artists across the USA. 2021-2022.
- **Main Street America.** Kiran presented the Keynote at Main Street America - A subsidiary of The National Trust for Historic Preservation. A nationwide network of coordinating programs and local communities. It includes thousands of members from small to large rural and urban towns and cities, representing around 2,000 communities across the country with a goal of bringing economic vitality back downtown, while celebrating their historic character, and bringing communities together. The conference took place in Richmond, VA. 2022
- **CADRE.** Kiran led a keynote and workshop, in Denver, CO for The National Center on Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education on behalf of the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. The national conference had 600 attendees, made up of conflict specialists, attorneys, mediators, parent centers, special education needs representatives and advocates for special educational needs, mediation and early dispute resolution. 2022.
- **Rotary Presidential Conference.** Presented the plenary keynote in Houston, a special event held ahead of the annual Rotary Presidential Peace Conference, & International Conference and attended by Rotary presidents from all over the world. 2022.
- **World Artists Experience.** Presented a keynote for World Artists Experience's “Culture Is People: Storytelling into the Future” conference. 2021

- **Maker City Summit.** Presented a closing keynote for the Maker City Summit; Knoxville, TN: 2021
- **“How Do We Talk to Each Other?”** Participated in “How Do We Talk to Each Other? Storytelling for Racial Justice,” a panel discussion for the final Freedom Stories presentation; virtual: 2021 collaboration with Southern Poverty Law Center and Highlander Center.
- **Rotary District Conference** Presented a keynote for the Greely Rotary District Conference. 2021
- **Western Europe.** “Telling Your Story.” Keynote for the Future Assistant conference held across western Europe. 2021
- **Center for Rural Strategies.** Delivered a plenary talk for the annual Rural Assembly Everywhere conference presented by the Center for Rural Strategies. 2021
- **Rotary E-club of World Peace.** “The Power of Storytelling,” a keynote for Rotary E-club of World Peace. 2021
- **New Pluralists Collaborative.** Kiran was invited to participate in this focus group, aimed at developing a focal area for future New Pluralists/ Rockefeller Philanthropies, grant-making. Other change leaders included those associated with projects such as, On Being Project, One America Movement, Braver Angels, Common Ground USA, Mediators beyond Borders International, Faith Matters Network. New Pluralists plan to distribute \$100 million dollars over 10 years. 2021.
- **Peace Speaks Up.** Kiran delivered a plenary session for the "La paz se toma la palabra" (Peace Speaks Up) project presented by the Cultural Affairs office of the Bank of the Republic of Colombia. 2021.
- **Princeton, WV.** Presented a plenary talk and Q&A for artists with the RiffRaff Arts Collective’s “We Need to Talk!” initiative, funded by an Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts; Princeton, WV: 2021
- **Building Peace.** Kiran initiated and led peacebuilding through storytelling with activists from Palestine and Israel- led virtually with other Peace Fellow colleagues from Brazil, Colombia, India, and the United States. The story platform created a safe healing space for sharing stories and personal testimonies around complex issues of human rights, conflict resolution, and peace building. 2021.
- **“commUNITY,”** Led and designed a community-building talk/workshop joint event presented in partnership with Stuart Rotary of Stuart, Virginia. 2021
- **Niswonger Regional Learning Day.** Delivered an applied storytelling Keynote for 600 educators and teachers as part of a professional development summit for regional K-12 teachers across disciplines sponsored by the Niswonger Foundation; Greeneville, TN. 2021
- **Big West Zone Institute.** Delivered a keynote speech and a one-hour workshop for approximately 600 Rotary leaders including Rotary International President Shekhar Mehta at the Big West Zone Institute; Tucson, AZ: 2021
- **“Finding Your Story,”** a workshop for young adults presented as part of the Young Appalachian Story Summit; Jonesborough, TN: 2021. A three-year program Kiran sought federal NEH funding, established and created.
- **National Council of Tradition Arts.** Presentation to the National Council of Tradition Arts on the impact of the Freedom Stories initiative; virtual, 2021
- **Stories for Racial Justice.** Led a series of community town-hall style conversations in a small town called Stuart, Virginia, named after a Confederate general, J.E.B. Stuart. Project aimed to illuminate more than one story in community wide discussions on symbols like flags and statues—complex histories related to the US South and notions of “home” that is inclusive to all members of the community. 2021.

- **“Hope in Action.”** Invited to be part of an award panel for “Hope in Action” – a grant administered by the East Tennessee Foundation to address systemic racism and support racial equity in East Tennessee. Also served on review panels for the NEA Heritage Fellows with NEH grants. 2021.
- **Stories as Medicine.** Designed and established Stories as Medicine program, trained over 300 healthcare workers at the start of the 2020 Covid 19 pandemic. The training followed up with trainings in Ballarat, Australia, for community healthcare workers, focused on the power of storytelling to create safe spaces for community dialogue and foster empathy and understanding. "Weaving Our Stories," "Strengthening Voices," and "Stories for Change," were presented virtually in the summer of 2020 to participants in Melton, Ballarat, and Maribyrnong, Australia, all located in the state of Victoria. 2020.
- **League of American Orchestras—**Kiran led a plenary keynote, “Your Values, Your Story, Your Impact,” focused on the reimagining the narrative, the intersection of music and storytelling, and using these arts to build cultural diversity. Around 1500 participants were in attendance representing both small and large orchestras. 2020
- **ISC’s Freedom Stories initiative** Opening remarks and welcome for the ISC’s Freedom Stories initiative; virtual: 2020. Kiran initiated this project, sought and established federal funding, and hired staff to lead. Project has since reached around 1.5 people worldwide.
- **“Telling Stories that Matter”** led training for members of the interpretive staff at the Bureau of Land Management, the National Parks Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Forestry Service. 2020
- **Presentation to Biden-Harris Arts and Humanities Transition Team** on the importance of the arts and humanities in rural regions such as Central Appalachia; virtual: 2020
- **Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico—** Led a thinking exercise and two-part training for colleagues at the Bureau of Land Management and their invitees from other state and federal agencies working in New Mexico. Focusing on how to gather and tell the stories of “The Land of Enchantment” including BIPOC stories of the land more ethically and holistically. It included training with practitioners from the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the Forestry Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service on how to understand storytelling as a community building tool to support telling the story of nationally designated “wilderness” locations, participants attended from all four US times zones. 2020.
- **Ballad Health Partnership-** Kiran imagined and developed a unique storytelling seal of excellence Arts & Health partnership to enable a new rural hospital to become designated the world’s first storytelling designated hospital. A place not just for high quality care to treat illness, but also a community center that fosters and encourages wellness through the arts. This included designing storytelling-related elements embedded into the architectural design, to community storytelling events and health literacy workshops, to specially story trained staff and establishing a Junior Board of youth storytellers. 2019.
- **Scotland.** Presented on the power of storytelling and personal narrative to effect change for colleagues around Scotland. 2019
- **“Lights for Liberty.”** Kiran was invited by activists, to present the opening story, set the tone and raise awareness in a “lights for liberty” vigil aimed at raising understanding to end human suffering and human (children) detention camps on the US/Mexico border. The story Kiran told was a personal one, he performed to appeal to not only to vigil attendees, but also to the news channels, news reporters, cross cultural and political spaces, that could help people at home, imagine with their own values. 2019.
- **New York, NY.** “Storytelling and Peace,” +Peace Coalition Launch and United Nation’s International Day of Peace plenary lecture; New York, NY: 2019

- **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library *Homecoming*' Pigeon Forge, TN.** "Home," Invited by Dolly Parton's team to lead keynote address for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library *Homecoming*' Pigeon Forge, TN: 2019
- **Reclaiming Appalachia conference.** Kiran was invited to lead the storytelling for change narrative for Reclaiming Appalachia conference, for FAHE and NeighborWorks America. Keynote and deep-dive leadership workshop on storytelling as a tool to help eradicate systemic and persistent poverty in the Appalachian region. 2019
- **Freedom Stories: Unearthing the Black Heritage of Appalachia.** Following the murder of George Floyd, Kiran wanted to go beyond just issuing a statement but to create a program that served the community at a time of need and during this critical moment, when people had a right to talk about what's on their minds. The program, 'Do Black Lives Matter in Appalachia?' emerged as the first public event of that program, which launched on July 3, 2020. It brought together Black activist youth, scholars, historians, community leaders, and artists to discuss topics such as "race bias in education," "the continual struggle for civil rights," "Jim Crow Appalachia; slavery by another name" and aspirations for a more just and equal community. Over 12,000 people attended that first virtual event and it has since reached around 1.5 million people worldwide through a free multimedia co-owned community resource for dozens of Black cultural and community organizations. The program culminated in a cross partisan congressional briefing and has been received exemplary recognition for its depth and innovation by organizations such as National Humanities Alliance, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. 2019-2021.
- **Purdue Peace Institute. The Big Idea Challenge.** Presented plenary on protect and preserve human stories, building on cultural sustainability and global citizenship. Project won inaugural Purdue Peace Institute innovative idea contest to help reduce armed conflict and political violence in the world. Project incorporates games theory, with storytelling tools, to help young people imagine a story of the world without conflict. 2021.
- **National Museum of African American Music. Nashville, Tennessee.** Kiran's keynote speech opened the Rivers of Rhythm Institute for Social Education conference, a teacher training focusing on music as a tool for equitable education practices. The talk introduced storytelling as a tool for embedding equity in education. Based in Nashville, Tennessee, the National Museum of African American Music (NMAAM) is the only museum dedicated to preserving and celebrating the many music genres created, influenced, and inspired by African Americans. The museum's collections share the story of the American soundtrack by integrating history and interactive technology to bring the musical heroes of the past into the present. 2019.
- **Rotary International Conference and Peace Symposium, Hamburg, Germany.** Presented series of talks and interactive workshops at the bi-annual Rotary International Conference and Peace Symposium held in Hamburg, Germany. 2019.
- **Institute for Integrated Transitions:** Participated in a global discussion with the Institute for Integrated Transitions, focused on the role of narrative to help fragile and conflict-affected states achieve more sustainable transitions out of war and crisis. 2019.
- **Idaho Commission on the Arts.** At the invitation of the Idaho Commission on the Arts, Kiran presented talks and workshops on the role of storytelling and the arts in education, leadership, and building cultural community. 2019
- **"Storytelling: The Power of Peace,"** US Department of Defense opening keynote and workshop for Collaborative and Adaptive Security Initiative (CASI;) Arlington, VA: 2017
- **Smithsonian Folklife Festival 50th Anniversary, Washington DC.** Presenting *On the Move* program as an immigrant artist/storyteller, folklife curator. A series of

performances and conversations based on the 50th anniversary of the immigration act, theme. 2017

- **Creative Placemaking Leadership Summits.** Presented Keynote for South Arts (covering 14 southern US states) and Appalachia conferences, Columbia, SC 2017, Chattanooga, TN, 2019.
- **NASA- JPL: Storytelling & Space Exploration.** Kiran provided consultation with NASA-JPL teams to develop arts and culture strategies for its Cassini Solstice Mission that explored Storytelling & Space Exploration. The ideas included an educational initiative to use storytelling in a variety of applications to help kids better understanding space exploration, Saturn, and even life on Planet Earth. 2016.
- **TEDx talk; Nashville, TN** “Storytelling: A Peaceful Power,” TEDx talk; Nashville, TN: 2016
- **Washington, DC:** “The Transformative Power of Storytelling: A Social Force for Social Change,” Botkin Lecture Series, 40th Anniversary of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress; Washington, DC: 2016
- **Story Circle Leadership advocacy.** Developed a strategy to host partnership meeting with House Foreign Relations Committee; eventually helping to enable Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2019 being signed into US law. US Senate, Washington, DC: 2016
- **Mother Emanuel AME Church.** Invited to Charleston, South Carolina, following the deadly shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church--which took nine parishioners' lives--to lead a series of events aimed at fostering healing and community dialogue. It included a storytelling proclamation of friendship between Jonesborough and the city of Charleston, a round table to discuss symbols, a conversation with educators and artists, and finally a workshop for students from the only inner-city high school in Charleston, Burke High School. 2016.
- **Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.** Kiran developed a partnership with US State Department via its Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and Institute for Contemporary Education and the Dialogue Institute. The project brought 20 youth leaders from Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq to Cherokee, North Carolina. Kiran cooked a traditional Indian “halal” meal for all the participants and led the fellows in using story to explore and make sense of their experiences and develop stories that they may wish to use to foster relationships with one another, their respected communities, and in building relations between the US towards cultural dialogues. A follow up storytelling meeting was arranged at the US State building in DC in which Kiran led and advised on a series of global storytelling pilot programs for 50 global nations in collaboration with US embassies. 2016.
- **Building Dolly Parton’s First Resort. A Storytelling Site of Excellence.** Kiran initiated, led and established a unique Arts and Culture partnership with Dollywood. Kiran’s expertise helped Dollywood’s Dream More Resort realize Dolly’s vision of using storytelling arts to bring families together—not just during their vacations, but long after they return home. As Dolly Parton’s first resort hotel, the envisioning took place prior to the resort’s official opening in 2015, to ensure story concepts were embedded in the design from the outset, to include shared values, family philosophies and mutual commitment to cultural preservation, regional development, and promoting positive change in using storytelling to bring families together. Located just minutes from Dollywood’s award-winning theme parks, the new resort is committed to maintaining and building new multigenerational storytelling traditions, training, performances, and other special activities. Kiran envisioned a site of storytelling excellence, for the new resort—and a multi-arts family festival for artists, songwriters, and storytelling performers. Kiran

also received a personal thank you letter and flowers from Ms. Dolly Parton and an invitation to a special event hosted by Dolly. 2015

- **São Paulo, Brazil.** Kiran presented a talk on using storytelling to build collaboration at the world peace symposium in São Paulo, Brazil. 2015.
- **Fort Lauderdale, Florida.** Kiran traveled to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to present at the Association of American Cultures convening. Here, he led roundtable discussions with members of the Black/African American, Latinx, Native American/First Nations, Asian-American/Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ+ communities, focused on building a culture of equity using the arts. 2015
- **South African Storytelling Delegation.** Kiran invited and hosted a delegation of artists and leaders from across South Africa as part of an international collaboration for building storytelling festivals and events across the African nation. Kiran advised and supported their process to create South Africa's national storytelling festival, integral to South African traditional heritage. 2015,
- **Arts, Social change and Conflict Transformation** Invited as arts & narrative participant in an Andrew Mellon Foundation-funded convening of arts, social change and conflict transformation (ACCT) resolution specialists. A project to establish a global field and platform to support the arts and culture in conflict as a values-driven collaboration to design and activate strategies to strengthen the arts, culture and conflict transformation ecosystem, worldwide. Brandeis University. 2015.
- **National Poetry Out Loud Mentorship.** Kiran led a mentorship for the national Poetry Out Loud partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, The Poetry Foundation and all State Arts agencies. These exceptional 17 year spoken word poets, compete in a national contest with around 80,000 participants. Kiran helped five POL champions prepare, build confidence, and support their future endeavors as artists, activists, present new works for national stages, and supported them in college applications or as change-makers. 2014- 2019.
- **UN Storytelling Partnership.** Developed a collaboration partnership with UN Education and Master Peace, for a global storytelling youth program. Mentored a 24-year-old Kenyan storyteller-activist, Velma Mukuro, to enable her to present her story live at the UN's International Day of Peace event in New York City, alongside Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, UN Peace Ambassadors; Dr. Jane Goodall and Yo Yo Ma, on International Day of Peace, 2014.
- **Community Partners Action Summit** Invitation to the White House; Washington, DC: 2015 as part of selected group of 80 community building leaders' summit.
- **Singapore City.** Presented plenary talk on World Storytelling at Singapore's old parliament building. 2014.
- **Consultations.** Led a series of consultations to advise the possibilities for storytelling center startups in East Africa, and for a National Center for Storytelling for Ireland. 2015.
- **Durham, NC.** "Narratives of Hope," paper at the Society for Anthropology North American conference; Durham, NC: 2013
- **"Beyond the Comfort Zone": Chapel Hill, NC.** "Beyond the Comfort Zone": Challenging Conventional Narratives of Peace," a speech for the Rotary Spring Conference: 2013
- **Washington DC.** "Social Justice Folklore," an address at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage; Washington DC: 2013
- **United Nations; New York, NY** Keynote address on Arts for Social Change, to international delegation at United Nations; New York, NY: 2012
- **New Orleans, LA.** "Ethnography at Street Level," paper delivered at the American Folklore Society conference; New Orleans, LA: 2012

- **Greenwood, SC.** “Poetry for Social Change,” lecture at the Peace-to-Peace Conference; Greenwood, SC: 2012
- **Helen Keller International Award.** Managed the Helen Keller International Award exhibition including 120 artists and 26 supporting countries; led and developed national and international arts and communications programs supporting people with complex and diverse dual disabilities. Established formal UNESCO recognition for Sense Scotland’s Arts & Disability center, Touchbase, as part of UNESCO Creative Cities. Oversaw all Arts, Drama, Performing Arts and Music programming. 2009-2011.
- **Colombia.** Presented around 20 talks and projects across Colombia focused on social responsibilities, Arts & Education, and peace promotion with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); Bogotá, Ibagué, and Cartagena, Colombia: 2009
- **UNESCO British Council. Edinburgh, Scotland.** “The Engaged Museum,” speech at UNESCO British Council Managing World Heritage Sites conference; Edinburgh, Scotland: 2008
- **World Refugee Day.** Designed a multi-arts centered program and workshop for World Refugee Day; Glasgow, Scotland: 2008
- **Freedom of Nine Cities Revisited.** Led and initiated special remembrance event and community conversation, to honor legacy of Nelson Mandela’s freedom visit to Glasgow. In which Freedom of Nine Cities was first established by ACTSA. People’s Palace, Glasgow. 2008.
- **UK Museums Association.** Panel speaker on “museums of the future” at the “Moving on Up” development session; UK Museums Association: 2008
- **European Commission.** Glasgow representative in sister-city project “Societies in Crisis” sponsored by the European Commission aimed at better structuring and enriching educational approaches to youth initiatives across Europe, Middle East and North Africa and the Mediterranean; Marseilles, France: 2007
- **Glasgow, Scotland.** “Challenging Sectarianism,” lecture at the Gallery of Modern Art Lecture Series; Glasgow, Scotland: 2007
- **Conference on World Religions, England.** Keynote speaker at Conference on World Religions: 2007
- **“Faith to Faith: F2F,”** developed adult social justice learning program community conversation series, aimed at allowing visitors to discuss and debate issues relating to religion in Scotland and the world; Glasgow, Scotland: 2007
- **“Sense over Sectarianism,”** Designed a 16-panel exhibition produced by working with two schools and using artworks produced by students; Glasgow, Scotland: 2004. Project also included establish artist grants, to work with youth gangs, and incorporate their artworks in the museum exhibits. A program using the arts to support restorative justice. 2007.
- **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland.** Kiran was part of the management curatorial team that had been tasked to develop a £30 refurbishment of radically rethinking the way in which the Kelvingrove museum presented objects, history and connected stories to a 21st century audience- as participants. Kiran’s job was to make sure that the exhibits and the entire museum experiences were accessible, inclusive, aligned with contemporary topics, supportive to young people and families, and could attract traditional and new audiences to the museum’s immersive experiences, and work more closely with the surrounding community, as well be a global destination. Kiran established a Junior Board to make sure their youth input (and humor) was incorporated into the redesign, developed the immersive arts, and conceptualized interactive galleries on themes of communication, the Arctic, and Arts Discovery centers, social justice issues. In the first year of opening, the museum received unprecedented visitor numbers -3,000,000 in the first year, in a city of 600,000 people. The museum

received world acclaim for the future of museums, using storytelling approaches within a traditional context. Kiran also helped host the Queen and Prince Phillip, as part of the official opening. 2004-2007.

- **Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland.** “Engaging with Communities and New Arrivals,” keynote at Northern Ireland Museums Conference; Belfast, Northern Ireland: 2005
- **UK Museums Association conference.** Invited to chair session at the UK Museums Association conference: 2004

[Back to CONTENT LINKS](#)

NON-PROFIT LEADERSHIP:

President, International Storytelling Center (ISC)- Arts, Humanities, and Educational Non-Profit). Jonesborough, TN; August 2013 - June 2023

Sirah dedicated a decade to advancing ISC as the global flagship for storytelling through expanding the definition of storytelling, highlighting marginalized and underrepresented narratives, celebrating unsung heroes, increasing accessibility to storytelling for all, for families, and promoting storytelling as a tool for peace and social inclusion. Overseeing 111 jobs, and an annual economic impact of 8 million dollars. In his time, he also brought significant cultural, operational direction, financial stability and growth to ISC (transforming the institution from Chapter 11 bankruptcy to a thriving institution) and developed a variety of values focused innovative new programs including Freedom Stories, Stories as Medicine, Appalachian Youth Story Summit, the *More than* One Story Initiative, while also steering the National Storytelling Festival through to its 50th anniversary, as the leading festival of its kind in the world. Through his work, ISC has received recognition and major funding from the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, Purdue, the Mellon Foundation, South Arts, New Pluralists Collective, Rockefeller Philanthropies, Omidyar Group, Acton Family Giving, East Tennessee Foundation, and led the institution to become among the top rank of Major Cultural Institutions (MCI) for the state of Tennessee. Sirah has represented ISC at numerous world peace and national assemblies and developed partnerships with major cultural institutions including the Smithsonian, the United Nations, the Library of Congress, Google Arts & Culture, Dollywood, and Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. During his time at ISC, he has been honored as a “Champion of Peace” at Rotary International Day at the United Nations for advancing storytelling for world peace and invited to develop storytelling and healing programs with the City of Charleston following the 2015 massacre at “Mother” Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. He has collaborated as a creative thought leadership with Yo-Yo Ma on amplifying Appalachian traditions, and used story methods in advocacy for a bipartisan peace initiative at the US Senate, which became US law, known as the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Mass Atrocities Prevention Act. [Namaste Y'all Write up](#)

Fellow, Rotary Peace Fellowship: UNC/Duke Chapel Hill, NC; Duke University Certificate in international peace and conflict resolution/conflict prevention. 2011-2013

Two years Masters Fellowship at the University of North Carolina’s Department of American Studies Folklore, combined with International peace and conflict resolution/conflict prevention. Research focusing on “Aesthetics of Home through Narratives, Memory, and the Arts”

emphasizing the power of human creativity; finding a sense of home. Thesis: A Stone in the Brook. Kiran was one of ten people worldwide selected to this fellowship for advancing the arts for social change and peacebuilding in the world.

Arts Manager, Sense Scotland Glasgow, Scotland; 2009-2011

Managed the Helen Keller International Award exhibition including 120 artists and 26 supporting countries; led and developed national and international arts and communications programs supporting people with complex and diverse dual disabilities. Kiran established formal UNESCO recognition for Sense Scotland's Arts & Disability center, Touchbase, as part of UNESCO Creative Cities. And oversaw all the national Arts, Drama, Performing Arts and Music programming.

Learning Curator, Glasgow Museums, Scotland; 2002-2009

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life & Art- Glasgow Kelvingrove 21st century project, Gallery of Modern Art, and Glasgow People's Palace Museum of Social History. Worked to develop city wide social justice initiatives across 13 museums, 40 libraries, and community health initiatives, that served a population of 3 million people.

Project examples:

- **Arts for Social Change.** In 2002, Kiran became the first Learning Curator of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow, the UK's only museum of religion. Kiran established and built a program and developed a city-wide arts action plan to establish Scotland's first museum citizenship and understanding sectarianism heritage project. At that time, Scotland had few resources in which to understand this subject fully, which was politically challenging to do so. It included building relationships across the Christian denominations, including Protestant societies such as The Orange Order and Roman Catholic run Republican groups, such as The Hibernian Lodges. As well as programs with diverse group of artists, poets and musicians and cross border community relations from across the divided communities within Scotland and Northern Ireland. Kiran built a 'Societies Emerging from Conflict' partnership with Ulster Museum, in Belfast, which used museum objects, and stories by people affected by the sectarian 'troubles'. Projects included empowering community leaders, people of diverse faith traditions, dialogues with ex-paramilitary members, as well as 'football old firm' supporters and territorial gang members, to collect stories, songs, and sectarian related objects. Examples include poetry written on prison-issued toilet tissue by Republican hunger striker Bobby Sands as well as sectarian 'football songs' that related to Protestant 'hero' King William of Orange. This program went on to become one of the largest and most successful programs of its type in the UK and Ireland. It received recognition from both The Scottish Government and The Northern Ireland Assembly to which around 100,000 people across communities have since participated. The program supported cross political dialogues, from Scotland and Northern Ireland, and, by invitation of the European Commission was shared as a model of practice with counterparts from Palestine, Israel, The Middle East and North Africa. The programs established around 70 creative partnerships, dialogues between youth gangs and the police, restorative justice and more. As a result, Kiran was invited to be the City of Glasgow's representative in a twinning program with the City of Marseilles, France, as part of the 2007 European year of International Dialogue.

- **Exploring contemporary issues,** In the lead-up to the 2007 bi-centenary commemorations of the abolition of the British slave trade, Kiran initiated a city-wide coordinated response to marking this important and significant year which came to be known as “Towards Understanding Slavery: Past and Present”. It included relationships and research with Scotland’s African diaspora community, people of different faith traditions, artists, poets and musicians. This led to the development of a series of community exhibitions and public programs that used objects from museum collections historically collected and interpreted through only western institutional Euro-centric structures. An ‘African Voices’ program sought to reinterpret these objects through first-person narratives of artists from Scotland’s ‘new communities’, encouraged the relinquishing of institutional control and empowering diverse interpretations of the aesthetics of cultural property. This work challenged the idea of ‘static’ culture and utilized contemporary traditions drawn from African and Caribbean folk traditions, including a Glasgow Haitian Voodoo alter, a Rastafari reggae sound system, and the commissioning of new contemporary art works for the museum collections on themes of ‘products of slavery’ by working with artists of mixed British and African Caribbean heritage.

Education Officer, National Museums Scotland. 2001-2002

Established ‘Side by Side: A Celebration of World Faiths in Scotland,’ a national post-9/11 educational interfaith public folklife festival and dialogue program, in partnership with Scotland’s diverse faith communities. The first event took place 6 months after 9/11 and invited around 6000 people of Scotland diverse faiths and traditions, to share stories, objects, and participate in an Understanding Scotland’s Faith Traditions, program series. Six museum handling kits were created in collaboration with six major religions (Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism) communities and multiply museum and *places of worship* school visits program.

[Back to CONTENT LINKS](#)

PUBLICATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS:

- **Contributed Forward for *Speak Peace: Words of Wisdom, Work, and Wonder*** in response to the murder of Alton Sterling; 2019
- **“Storytelling and Community in Jonesborough, Tennessee,”** Main Street America article for The National Trust for Historic Preservation; 2016
- **“Telling Stories that Matter,”** a toolkit for exploring one’s potential as a storyteller, used in communities and schools across the US and 18 countries: 2013 (rev. 2016)
- **“Challenging Stigmas, Celebrating Disability,”** Deaf Blind International; 2010
- **“Towards Understanding Slavery,”** an article for Glasgow Museums exhibitions commemorating the bicentennial of Scotland’s abolition of the slave trade; 2007
- **Review and Critique of the British Museum’s Guide to World Religions.** Material Religion. 2005
- **“St Mungo Museum: Thick-skinned but Full of Faith!”** an article for *SHCG News*, the Social History. Curators Group biannual newsletter; 2003
- Numerous Op-Eds in support of congressional support for the Arts & Humanities.

- **“Museums must be aware of their place and responsibilities within the wider discourse of their societies.”** Op-ed for UK Museums Journal. 2007.

[Back to CONTENT LINKS](#)

EDUCATION:

- **University of North Carolina/Duke University; Chapel Hill, NC:** M.A. in Folklore/American Studies & Graduate Certificate in International Peace & Conflict Resolution; Rotary Peace Fellowship. 2011- 2013.
- **Newcastle University; Newcastle Upon Tyne, England:** M.A., in Museum, Gallery, and Heritage Studies; 2001- 2003
- **University of Leicester:** Postgraduate in Art Education. 1999.
- **University of Wolverhampton; Wolverhampton, England:** B.A., Honors in Art & Design, 1994- 1998 (inclusive of Erasmus program at National College of Art & Design (NCAD), Dublin, Ireland.

[Back to CONTENT LINKS](#)

IN THE NEWS AND MEDIA:

Selected examples.

- [A TEDx Talk Storytelling: A Peaceful Power](#), an example of how Kiran displays creativity, through storytelling, to advance peacebuilding calls for action.
- [Article](#) from *The Johnson City News & Neighbor* outlining Kiran’s work initiating ISC’s Stories for Change initiative, “Storytelling Programs for At-risk Youth Resonate with Sirah.”
- ["Namaste Y'all"](#) Rotary Peace Fellow fosters peace through storytelling.
- [Radio Podcast](#) Interview with John Shuck, host of *Progressive Spirit* on NPR, Aug. 2014
- [AA Magazine for the Arts feature.](#)
- [BBC Scotland Interview](#)
- [Blue Ridge Country feature.](#)
- [This American Life Blog.](#)
- [Video Podcast](#) 2023 Video Podcast. Kiran describes his journey as a storyteller and cultural practitioner for social change. His beliefs in the value of folk arts storytelling to build community.
- [Viewing the South through three lenses.](#) A 1-minute reflection in which Kiran Singh Sirah describes the value of listening to unheard but important stories. Recorded as an introductory video from a partnership between ISC and E Pluribus Unum in 2022.
- [“What We Bring: Immigrant Gifts” Blog.](#) As an immigrant artist/storyteller, curator. A series of performances and conversations based on the 2017 Smithsonian Folklife Festival’s *On the Move* program.
- [Rotary Peace Fellow/United Nations "Champion of Peace" honoree](#) Storytelling Center president to be honored by UN.
- [Elie Wiesel Conflict Prevention act advocacy](#) Kiran leads a story-circle dialogue at the US Senate in D.C, introducing a peace initiative- this conversation led to a cross cultural and bi-partisan agreement to advance The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention

Act getting passed by both the House and Senate, receiving 367 to 4 vote and was signed into law by the President on January 14, 2019.

- [International Speaker discusses social justice and peacebuilding](#) Information poster for Kiran's engagement in Charleston, SC. 2016.
- [Article](#) describing the impact on students from Kiran's storytelling and empowerment workshop as part of the Charleston stories for healing initiative.
- [Examining Thumbprints](#) Blog for Main Streets America.
- [Congressional Briefing](#) presentation of Freedom Stories, as the first ever marked project to center Black heritage storytelling integral to celebrating our nation's 50th anniversary storytelling revival.
- [Blog](#) The news coming out of Afghanistan in 2021 reminded Kiran of his own family's experience as refugees, 50 years ago, when they were forced to flee their home in Uganda along with 50,000 others. Kiran wrote a blog and led numerous advocacy efforts with humanitarian organizations, media outlets, to encourage people to explore how they could feel empowered themselves to help.
- [Blog](#). Kiran advocated with Pentagon, for how stories can save lives and be used to prevent us going to war.
- [Stories as Living Political Movements.](#) Blog. Stories as Medicine/trauma-informed storytelling designed to build empathy, communication, and self-care. This blog outlines story is such a sacred and politically important act.
- Other project examples: [Kiran's project profile](#)

[Back to CONTENT LINKS](#)