



# Standards for Museums with Native American Collections

A guide to all aspects of work within museums holding Native collections



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# Standards for Museums with Native American Collections (SMNAC)

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# PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS

## Introduction

Museums and cultural institutions have the power to educate, inform, and change the way people engage with the world. Countless examples exist of museums making significant impacts on collective thought through the reinterpretation of histories. It follows that misinformation, blind spots, and insensitivities that continue to pervade public understandings about Native American peoples can be redressed through these powerful, highly impactful institutions (Reclaiming Native Truth 2019).

Native communities themselves have a deep investment in museums. As buildings for the storage and exhibition of precious cultural materials, museums have the power to interpret the cultures, histories and experiences of Native people. Too often, the communities being represented are not included or invited to participate in interpretation.

A growing number of institutions recognize value in the inclusion of Native perspectives, protocols, and expertise, particularly in collections-centered work, such as conservation, documentation, and curation. However, many museums have yet to recognize the benefits of Native involvement and input across all areas of the museum. This document aims to reveal the mutual value of collaboration, as well as to provide paths toward institutional change.

The Standards for Museums with Native Collections (SMNAC) has adapted the National Core Standards developed by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), to reflect the needs, values and goals of Native communities, in seven functional areas: PUBLIC TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY; COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP; EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION; MISSION AND PLANNING; LEADERSHIP

& ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE; FINANCIAL STABILITY; and FACILITIES and RISK MANAGEMENT. It also provides practical recommendations for each functional area.

Recommendations may be taken in any order according to what is most feasible for each institution. The issues that museums face were created over a long period of time and as such, it is important to maintain realistic expectations. That said, the process toward change should be constant, measurable, and incorporated into the day-to-day management of museums.

A note on language use: For the purpose of this document, the core team made the decision to primarily use the word “Native” to refer to American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native people individually and as a group. Terms used throughout the document can be found in the Glossary of the Resources section near the end of the document.



## Goals of SMNAC

Museums seeking meaningful engagement with Native peoples need examples that, at minimum, build a foundation of understanding of the issues and complexity of working with Native people. SMNAC meets the need for a shared set of standards and benchmarks that guide all facets of operation in museums charged with stewarding Native cultural belongings.

SMNAC provides these standards as well as case studies from several institutions that exemplify meaningful collaboration and inclusion. At the end of this document is a list of resources for further exploration and research. The specific goals of SMNAC are to:

- Provide actionable recommendations for Native inclusion;
- Motivate museums toward collaboration and partnership with Native communities;
- Emphasize the responsibility and accountability inherent in the stewardship of Native collections as well as the teaching and representation of cultural content;
- Recognize the colonial legacy of museums and provide opportunities to educate others about this history and its ongoing impact on Native people;
- Address the need for cultural sensitivity and competency;
- Provide support for Native American museum professionals, staff, board members, and volunteers;
- Inform museums about the unique status of Tribal governments and sovereignty; and
- Develop inclusive and respectful methodologies for working with Native communities.

Regardless of size or capacity, all museums with Native collections are expected to act in good

faith towards realizing these core standards. This contributes to building better relations with originating communities.

## How This Document Was Developed

In October 2017, Dr. Deana Dartt, a Coastal Band Chumash museum scholar and curator, gave a presentation at the Association of Tribal Archives Libraries and Museums (ATALM) conference, pointing out that for real change to occur in museums with regards to Native American communities and collections, there has to be awareness through all areas of the museum about the history of the land where the facility sits, the trauma associated with collecting the materials now held there, and most importantly, how to appropriately engage Native stakeholders. This knowledge must exist across the museum, and ideally, not only are Native constituencies addressed in these museums, but Native leadership recruited in all areas of the institution.

Dr. Dartt's ATALM presentation stimulated dialogue and a challenge to reach out to the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) to suggest that they develop a set of standards that align with Native-appropriate practices. These conversations led to the development of a [core group](#) of individuals to develop these standards in collaboration with the School for Advanced Research (SAR), and in consultation with AAM.

SAR, already a leader in the field of developing museum guidelines, had published another collaborative document to help bridge the gap between communities and museums, the [Guidelines for Collaboration](#), in 2017. While the Guidelines focused primarily on the areas of collections management and conservation, it was agreed upon early on that these new standards would address all areas of the museum field.

The goal was that the Standards for Museums with Native Collections (SMNAC) would create a baseline for museums housing Native collections to strive for, and put the onus on the museum field as a whole to take responsibility for its colonial legacy.

Drawing inspiration from the AAM [Welcoming Guidelines](#) developed by the LGBTQ+ Alliance, the core group began work in 2019 to align Native best practices with the function areas in AAM's core standards, making clear recommendations for museums with Native collections on how to be accountable and responsive to Native stakeholders.

Over the course of two years, the core team worked to develop an initial draft document. In addition, the SMNAC document was vetted four times by Native museum professionals and those working for museums privileging Native perspectives. Between each vetting session, the results were synthesized and the document revised by the core group before going back out. During the final vetting session in late 2022, based on an open call to the museum field, the document was read for usability and clarity by AAM stakeholders. All in all, over 70 people have viewed, reviewed, and shared their experiences to make this document a reality. This has truly been a tremendous effort put forward by many people who have come together with the desire to assist museums by providing them with the tools for making meaningful change within the field.

## Background: US Governmental Policy and Its Impact on Native Relationships to Museums

For Native peoples, cultural belongings are not merely objects of art and antiquity, but are significant links to traditions, family, and spirituality. Many are regarded as living beings, ancestors, and members of the community. The importance of reconnecting Native peoples with their cultural heritage cannot

be overemphasized. In fact, research has shown that ownership and control of cultural materials and the ability to develop one's own narrative have the capacity to heal. Many examples of this impact can be seen in communities where a Tribal museum or cultural center exists. Rich, contemporary stories rooted in deep history are combined with programming for preserving, perpetuating, and revitalizing cultural practices. These places are often the hub of community activity, informed by and reflective of the cultural belongings held in their trust. It follows that



museums holding Native cultural materials have a deep responsibility to the communities whose cultures are represented in their collections. Over time there has been increasing pressure on museums to share or relinquish control over the care and interpretation of these materials. As Native peoples have protested the exhibition, insensitive use, and in some cases, illegal ownership of their cultural materials, federal and museum institutions have developed new laws and policies.

Below is a summary of some influential events and US governmental policies impacting Native American relationships to museums. A key to understanding these histories and experiences is recognizing their complexity. The next several paragraphs address six important issues. More detailed descriptions and resources are available in the Resource section.



### Indian Removal Era

- 1830 Indian Removal Act
- 1838 Cherokee Removal Act
- Creation of Indian Territory
- Dawes Act 1887

### Early Collecting

- Salvage ethnography
- Formation of large ethnographic museums
- Antiquities Act of 1906
- World's Fairs and Expositions



### Activism

- 1938 Tribal museums and cultural centers begin to be formed
- 1944 Establishment of National Congress of the American Indians
- American Indian Movement
- Alcatraz Takeover

### Legislation Sparking Change

- 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act
- 1989 National Museum of the American Indian Act
- 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
- 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act
- 1996 National Historic Preservation Act amendments



### Post-NAGPRA Trends

- More consultations due to NAGPRA
- Increase in Native American museum professionals
- Establishment of organizations like the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums
- Partnerships

### Ongoing

- SAR Guidelines for Collaboration and SMNAC shape equitable partnerships
- Policy for inclusive practices
- Accountability to Native people



**Indian Removal:** The involuntary movement of Native peoples from their original territories manifested in many ways across the United States of America. After initial settlement, and the impacts of foreign diseases, the new colonial American government began a campaign to forcibly remove and contain Native peoples. The ultimate goal of these removals was to seize land for white settlement and to contain what was seen as the “Indian problem” on reservations. The separation of Native peoples from their lands was directly related to the collection of their cultural materials by museums. As Native lives and cultures were disrupted, villages and communities decimated, salvage ethnologists and archaeologists aggressively collected cultural materials, as did a plethora of looters and pillagers.

**Early Collecting:** Early museum collecting was characterized by the belief that Native Americans were vanishing and that their belongings were rare commodities for teaching about their presumably extinct cultures. Even Native peoples themselves, living and deceased, were collected to preserve scientific and cultural information of “vanishing” peoples. The imperative to collect was so pervasive that buried remains were exhumed by the thousands and precious cultural materials scavenged, questionably purchased, or confiscated for breaking colonially imposed laws, such as the Potlatch ban from 1885 to 1934 for the USA and 1885 to 1951 in Canada. There are many recorded instances of outright theft and other unethical collecting practices, as a market for these materials.

**Activism and Pro-Indian movements:** Native peoples have resisted and persisted through devastating systemic oppression over centuries; therefore, highlighting a short moment in this long history can be misleading. But one important period to recognize is

the Civil Rights Era (1954-1968), which was characterized by intertribal Native activism, and its legacy. In the 1970s especially, the Red Power Movement, which included organizations such as the American Indian Movement and several protest occupations, walks, and demonstrations, brought media attention to the human rights issues impacting Native communities. Some museums, responding to the outcry for justice, began working with Native peoples to remove exhibited Native remains, return sacred materials, and exhibit the work of contemporary Native artists as a way to demonstrate that Native people are not relegated to the past and are still here.

**Legislation Sparking Change:** Native ancestral human remains are over-represented in museum collections. As G. Timothy McKeown notes in *In the Smaller Scope of Conscience*, “In testimony to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Jan Hammil, director of American Indians Against Desecration, estimated the number of Indian bodies in university, museum, and laboratory collections to be between 300,000 and 600,000.” (2012:10)

The passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966 mandating the establishment of State Historic Preservation Offices was pivotal for Native involvement in environmental and archaeological work at the national level. And in 1992, the amended law provided for the establishment of Tribal Historic Preservation Offices.

Activism and protest by Native peoples and allies pressured museums to remove human remains from view and return some of them home, along with sacred belongings. This led to the development of local and state preservation laws, and the establishment of federal laws such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Passed in 1990, NAGPRA requires federal agencies and institutions receiving federal funds to create and distribute inventories, and work with

communities for the possible return of Native American ancestral remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony to their respective descendants. While NAGPRA has been the most significant, other laws have shaped Native/museum relations such as the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), and the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA).

**Post-NAGPRA:** NAGPRA provides a mechanism for museums and Native communities to begin conversations, some leading to more inclusionary practices and eventually true collaboration. Such initiatives and innovative approaches to collections care and curation have led to myriad language, culture, and art initiatives for and within Native communities and between museums and communities. Another result of collaboration and openness has been a growth in the number of Native museum professionals in all areas of museum work, as well as the establishment of professional organizations such as the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM). Such organizations provide support, education, and networking opportunities for those professionals.

Unfortunately, some museums have not been legally or ethically compelled to change and continue to operate with little, if any, input from descendent communities. These institutions continue perpetuating misinformation that could be corrected through Tribal consultation and collaboration.

**Ongoing Activities:** Recent and ongoing social justice activity has spurred renewed commitments to inclusionary practices, equity, and diversity. As described in this document, additional consideration beyond race is needed to understand the unique position of Tribal governments as sovereign Nations. Eventually, SMNAC may provide a model for museums outside the USA that work with Native American communities and steward Native



collections to support collaborative efforts. In recent years, the overall trajectory of museum practices has been a positive one, and includes the efforts of foundations that are promoting diversity in curatorial and conservation work, as well as organizations that promote Native leadership.

This document, too, is intended to serve to center Native priorities. SMNAC is inclusive of Native perspectives at an institutional and policy level and guides the development of partnerships with Native communities. In so doing, SMNAC provides support for the growing number of Native people working in these institutions, as well as non-Native museum professionals navigating the historically fraught landscape of Native and museum relations.



## PART TWO:

# Aligning Native Goals With AAM Core Standards by Functional Areas

## A. Function Area: Public Trust and Accountability

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**AAM CORE STANDARD:** The effectiveness of a museum is directly related to the public's perception of its integrity.

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Native Americans are members of the public whose interests should be prioritized. In order for Native people to trust, benefit from, visit, and support museums, institutions need to appropriately represent them and their interests. Museums are accountable to laws that apply to sovereign Tribal Nations and Native American collections such as NAGPRA and the Indian Arts and Crafts Act.

### Recommendations

A.1. The museum demonstrates responsibility and accountability to Native communities through responsible stewardship of Native collections, by:

- a. Acknowledging and contributing to changing the ongoing impacts of the colonial history of collecting and misrepresentations of Native peoples.
- b. Committing to collaborate with Native communities. The museum recognizes that Native expertise is essential to the accuracy and cultural appropriateness of information provided to researchers and presented to the public through exhibitions and programs.

A.2. The museum 1) identifies the Native communities it serves by conducting research and then reaching out to them and 2) makes appropriate decisions on how to serve them.

- a. These communities may include those that are indigenous to the area, such as state and federally recognized Tribes, as well as removed Tribes, individuals from tribes elsewhere living in the local area, and descendant and affiliated communities with a cultural relationship to collections.
- b. To serve those communities, the museum engages in meaningful dialogue with them in an effort to better represent their histories and cultures. This may include developing an advisory board of Native community members, appointing Native people to boards, and recruiting Native people to staff positions.
- c. The museum develops long-term partnerships with Native communities.

A.3. The museum serves the Native people on whose traditional territories it is located. This includes:

- a. The development of Native acknowledgements. This can be developed in a number of ways. For example,
  - i. A statement of accountability can describe how the organization is responsible to Native communities with ancestral ties to the land on which the museum occupies as well as the communities represented in their collections.
  - ii. Acknowledging institutional history and the harms it may have caused to Native communities.
  - iii. This can be shared in a variety of formats such as public program introductions, websites, permanent signage, promotional materials including banners and other external marketing.
- b. Inviting local Native communities to engage with program and exhibition development.
- c. Working to create transparency about the inner workings of the museum with Native communities. This might include being transparent about budgets and/or making collections, exhibition, and DEAI policies and procedures publicly available.

A.4. The museum commits to mutually beneficial collaboration with Native people internally and externally, by:

- a. Providing a welcoming and respectful environment for Native people (Tribal delegations, visitors, consultants, collaborators, staff, board and volunteers).
- b. Recognizing the status of Tribal leadership and government officials as dignitaries.
- c. Educating governing board, staff, and volunteers by providing community informed cultural competency and sensitivity workshops. This enables culturally appropriate exhibitions, programs, policies and advertising.
- d. Creating opportunities for community engagement through online platforms.
- e. Sharing authority and decision-making with appropriate community advisors, including cooperative planning, definition of outcomes and roles, task accountability, and clear structures for continued communication, and developing open and transparent relationships with communities to create culturally informed policies, practices, and content.

A.5. As an institution of learning and understanding, and a repository of material culture and information, the museum is responsible for meaningful collaboration with Native Americans in order to:

- a. Represent Native American voices, cultures, knowledges, and perspectives;
- b. Support shared stewardship.

A.6. The museum is dedicated to increasing public understanding and appreciation of Native art, history, knowledge, and culture through collections preservation, and interpretation, by:

- a. Serving as a resource for Native communities as well as the general public in terms of accurate and culturally appropriate education and support for cultural continuity;
- b. Collaborating with Native communities, enabling the documentation of the context, meaning, and relevance of collections, and committing to sharing authority on what information is shared to the public through exhibitions, programs and websites, and;

- c. Establishing and working actively with a Native advisory committee or board to identify considerations for stewardship and programming related to Native materials and communities;
- d. Understand and facilitate culturally appropriate access and restrictions to archives and collections.

A.7. The museum addresses the lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity that has historically characterized museum treatment of Native collections, recognizing that Native collections have meaning that goes beyond western interpretation, by:

- a. Writing, publishing, and making accessible information for new board members, staff, and volunteers which describes community-informed efforts.
- b. Connecting Native American collections with originating communities for more meaningful, relevant, and culturally appropriate interpretation, care, loans, and documentation. This benefits all parties, including the communities, the museum, and visitors.
- c. Making available all relevant and appropriate materials (archives, accession records, photographs, etc.) to originating Native communities.
- d. Recognizing sensitivities surrounding human remains, funerary items, and sacred items, and making every effort—through staff and docent trainings, signage, maps, etc.—to be transparent about any presence of human remains or images of human remains onsite (mummies, posters of burials, etc.).

A.8. The museum supports and enforces state and federal repatriation law, including NAGPRA regulations and processes, cultural and intellectual property rights, copyright law with respect to Tribal sovereignty, by:

- a. Providing training opportunities for staff and board pertaining to such laws;
- b. Keeping Native stakeholders abreast of compliance with these laws and regulations;
- c. Recognizing there are ethical responsibilities that go beyond the law, for example with protection of contemporary Native artists and their designs, and;
- d. Building trust with Native communities by discussing and agreeing on how collected information is ethically used, shared, and archived.

## B. Function Area: Collections Stewardship

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**AAM CORE STANDARD: Collections are held in trust for the public and made accessible for the public's benefit, as important means of advancing the museum's mission.**

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Collecting and caring for Native materials requires ongoing collaboration to understand the profound connections between Native people and their cultural heritage held in museums. It also requires a deft understanding of past and present legal conditions, acknowledgement that historic exclusion from museums resulted in distrust, and an awareness that cultural sensitivity must be prioritized.

The development of appropriate cultural protocols for care, study, preservation, storage, and access are necessary for the development of trust. Ultimately, cultural preservation outweighs the risks associated with access, and as such, the most generous possible access for use of the collections is expected for Native communities.

*This document is not meant to serve as a guide for NAGPRA processes. The resources pages in the back of this document will direct you to information on NAGPRA, its processes and consultation. There are areas where this document may fill in gaps where the federal law does not apply. Close working relationships defined in the pages that follow can help your museum navigate these issues.*

## **Recommendations**

- B.1. The museum stewards, exhibits, and uses Native collections as appropriate to its mission, by:
- a. Reviewing its mission in relation to its responsibility to Native cultural sensitivity and authority;
  - b. Ensuring that the collections policy accommodates Native ways of knowing, understanding, and caring for the Native collections in its care;
  - c. Being aware of and respecting limitations to the access and use of certain Native collections;
  - d. Curating exhibitions in collaboration with Native experts.
- B.2. The museum legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections, by:
- a. Recognizing that Native peoples have an inherent right to access their tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
  - b. Adhering to laws relating to Native collections management such as NAGPRA;
  - c. Understanding that museums may have different policies as they relate to different communities and collections. For example, Native collections might broadly have one set of care policies while another area of the museum might have another set;
  - d. Updating outdated, racist, or insensitive nomenclature in a collaborative manner;
  - e. Posting warnings or disclaimers about items or documentation that may be culturally sensitive;
  - f. Collaborating with communities to integrate cultural care methods into collections management and conservation;
  - g. Supporting collaborative conservation and curation processes including examination, documentation, decision-making and treatment;
  - h. Integrating community knowledge as standard practice into museum databases, as appropriate.
  - i. Developing a process for the protection of intangible knowledge.
- B.3. The museum's collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate Native ethical standards.
- a. Processes for collections related research are developed to include review, notification, and permissions from Tribal leadership for accessing potentially sensitive collections or conducting invasive and destructive analysis.

- b. Native cultural protocols need to be considered as part of any collections-related research.
- c. Community experts are recognized as having equal standing to Western-trained professionals and compensated accordingly.
- d. Access to cultural collections should be prioritized for originating Native community members.
- e. Encourage researchers to develop components within their projects that are inclusive of and beneficial to the community of origin.
- f. Recognize that the outcomes of research on Native collections may have an impact on living Native communities.
- g. Consider tribal opinions with regards to Institutional Review Boards (IRB), if applicable, especially if the tribe has their own board already established.

B.4. The museum strategically plans for engagement with and development of Native collections within its care.

- a. Through collaboration with community members, the museum integrates Native protocols and consultation to guide its collections policies and procedures.
- b. Where collecting scope allows, the full breadth of Native materials considered for acquisitions includes contemporary work, reflecting the continuity of cultures.
- c. Collection policies are developed that reflect ethical standards and the interests of Native stakeholders. For example, a policy might require Native consultation before making decisions about destructive analyses.
- d. When deciding upon materials for acquisition, the museum considers whether donations are more appropriate for a Tribal museum or cultural center, and makes the appropriate recommendations.
- e. Museum policies should consider the complications and the needed tribal consultation involved with accepting items that are considered culturally sensitive or have questionable provenance/provenience.
- f. When considering the removal (including deaccessioning) of cultural materials from the museum, the community of origin should have first right of acceptance.

B.5. Guided by Native consultation, the museum provides culturally appropriate access, applies cultural protocols, and includes cultural use considerations in the policies for preservation and care, such as:

- a. Including ceremonial use and cultural practice in loan, deaccession, and repatriation policies;
- b. Providing transparency about pesticide treatments;
- c. Offering a “clean hands” option rather than requiring gloves;
- d. Notifying Native visitors about human remains and/or funerary objects in collections areas/exhibitions prior to entrance;
- e. Excluding collections from public access that are, or may be, culturally sensitive, and;
- f. Recognizing that the cultural benefit of loaning to Tribal museums may outweigh conservation concerns.

## C. Function Area: Education and Interpretation

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**AAM CORE STANDARD: Museum education enhances each visitor's ability to understand and appreciate museum collections, exhibitions and public programs.**

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The museum is dedicated to developing culturally informed narratives and appropriate materials for exhibitions and programming, utilizing Native knowledge content experts and in dialogue with Native stakeholder communities. Content should include a contemporary component to counter stereotypes, such as historic extinction narratives.

### Recommendations

C.1. The museum is dedicated to overall educational goals, philosophies, and messages that are in line with its mission and challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Native peoples. Native stakeholders are included in the development of that material. In line with these objectives, the museum:

- a. Includes programs with Native peoples as developers, presenters and participants.
- b. Prioritizes Native perspectives.
- c. Counters stereotypes and misconceptions by highlighting complexity and sophistication of knowledge.

C.2. The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential Native audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation. It also recognizes the pervasive misunderstandings about Native peoples among the general public and partners with Native advisors to create diverse, dynamic, and myth-busting interpretation and programs. Towards these ends, the museum:

- a. Identifies the Native communities as an audience they serve.
- b. Recognizes that local and originating communities are key stakeholders in the development of material for Native audiences.
- c. Evaluates existing programs and exhibitions and identifies where Native inclusion and programming is absent.
- d. Educates the public and is transparent about the role the museum has had in creating misunderstandings about Native peoples past and present. This, for example, might be done in the telling of how the institution was formed or through an extended land acknowledgment.
- e. Creates opportunities for Native community participation and inclusion such as conducting outreach to schools and recruiting Native youth for internships.

C.3. To prioritize Native traditional knowledge and oral histories in interpretive content rather than relying solely on Western research and academic scholarship, the museum:

- a. Involves Native advisors with the content and programming at the development stage and continues through execution of the exhibition or program.
- b. Develops exhibitions featuring Native collections, including Native advisement from the appropriate communities or vetting by cultural knowledge keepers.

- c. Prioritizes Native presenters who can share about their own communities and/or experiences in their respective fields.
- d. Avoids culturally sensitive designs and subject matter when developing content and materials.

C.4. Museums conducting primary research utilize Native scholarship in addition to Western scholarship. In order to do so, they:

- a. Seek out primary sources written by Native scholars, artists and other cultural knowledge keepers.
- b. Recognize that Native primary resources can offer a deeper, more nuanced understanding than Western academic research, and should be prioritized in research efforts.
- c. Conduct historic research and scholarship in dialogue with stakeholder Native communities, to ensure cultural protocols are followed and adhered to. In some cases, Tribes have already developed such protocols for research.
- d. Develop and produce new research in collaboration with stakeholder Native community members.
- e. Prioritize Native cultural and intellectual property rights, using proprietary information only with permission.
- f. Recognize and reference unpublished content, adhering to the above.

C.5. Technologies, techniques, and methodologies utilized for interpretation are done in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner. The museum endeavors to:

- a. Recognize and reference already published content by Native authors, artists, and scholars and incorporate them into exhibits and programs.
- b. Support the development of new content by Native community members.

C.6. The museum presents accurate and appropriate content by working closely with Native people on the development of that content. Towards that goal, the museum:

- a. Recognizes the complex nature and histories of Native communities and presents this information as such.
- b. Understands that many historical texts on Native American communities and cultures can reflect inaccurate and/or inappropriate content and should be carefully vetted before use.
- c. Understands that one individual cannot speak for their entire Tribe, unless they have been appointed by that community as their spokesperson on a specific topic.
- d. Hires Native interpreters to deliver this content wherever possible.

C.7. The museum understands that high quality Native-centered programs need to feature Native community perspectives and include participation when possible.

C.8. The museum seeks and implements Native perspectives in its surveys and assessments of its exhibits and programs.

- a. The museum makes an effort to distribute these surveys to local communities and those whose land the museum resides on.

## D. Function Area: Mission and Planning

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**AAM CORE STANDARD: A museum’s mission guides museum activities and decisions by describing the purpose of a museum — its reason for existence.**

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A mission statement articulates that the museum understands its role and accountability to the public and its collections. While this may not be Native-centric, it can demonstrate institutional awareness of a multifaceted public responsibility. Native originating communities are members of the public and have unique connections to museum collections that should be considered when creating or revising mission statements.

Strategic planning produces a mutually agreed-upon vision of how the museum meets the needs of its audiences and communities. Such plans, covering all aspects of museum operations, should be actively relevant to Native stakeholders and should document diverse participation of Native communities in the planning process. Good plans establish measurable goals and methods by which the museum evaluates success in its inclusion efforts with Native communities. All staff should be aware of the museum’s mission and strategic plan.

### Recommendations

D.1. The museum has a clear understanding of how its mission impacts Native communities and how Native communities impact the museum. It recognizes its responsibility to Native stakeholders.

- a. The museum partners with Native stakeholders to determine how the mission and strategic plan serves Native interests.

D.2. Native interests are considered in all aspects of operations as they relate to its mission.

- a. The museum develops policies related to Native interests.
- b. The museum conducts regular evaluations to ensure implementation, reporting those results to museum governance and identified Native stakeholders.

D.3. The museum makes a clear commitment to acquiring, developing, and allocating resources to engage and support Native interests that have been articulated in their mission and strategic plan.

D.4. The museum engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes consultation/ collaboration with Native stakeholders.

- a. The museum commits to including Native people in all facets of museum planning from the outset of these activities and throughout the process(es) as appropriate.
- b. The museum’s inclusion strategies support ongoing, meaningful engagement with Native communities.

D.5. The museum establishes measures of success through the application of these core standards. Its evaluation of success includes Native interests and feedback, articulated through meaningful community consultation, and implements and adjusts its activities accordingly.

- a. The museum works with Native partners to identify mutual benefits and shared measures of success.
- b. The measure of success for collaborative work may not be quantifiable but assessed in terms of the establishment of positive, long-term, and ongoing relationships between museums and Native constituencies.
- c. The museum recognizes that success may take time and have a different meaning for Native communities.
- d. The museum's strategic plan and goals should include specific goals related to Native engagement in ways that can be measured. This may include fulfilling recommendations within this document.
- e. The museum conducts debriefings at the conclusion of collaborative projects with staff and Native partners to build dialogue and identify areas of improvement and opportunity.

## E. Function Area: Leadership and Organizational Structure

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**AAM CORE STANDARD: The effective operation of a museum is based on a well-functioning governing authority that has a strong working relationship with the museum staff.**

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Inclusive governing authority and museum leadership are expected to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve and to prove they are accountable to those stakeholder communities. Because museums with Native collections have a particular responsibility to Native communities, including Native peoples at all levels of the institutional structure is recommended, particularly at the board and executive leadership level. A Native advisory group is also key for supporting Native staff and board members.

### Recommendations

- E.1. In alignment with the museum's mission, the governance, staff, interns, and volunteer structures and processes support Native interests by:
- a. Recognizing the barriers that prevent Native people from entering the museum field, and actively working to remove those barriers.
  - b. Formally evaluating the diversity of their governance, staff, interns, and volunteers, and creating dedicated positions to increase diversity where gaps exist.
  - c. Acknowledging the Native communities represented by their collections and those represented in the geographic location of the museum, and working toward including Tribal representatives among governance, staff, and volunteer structures.
- E.2. The governing authority, staff, and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities related to Native interests.
- a. Cultural competency trainings are provided for all staff, volunteers and board. This includes administration and executive staff.
  - b. Staff, volunteers, and board are educated about the Native history of the area.

- c. Onboarding materials are developed for staff and board related to the museum's responsibility to Native communities including these core standards.
- d. Boundaries of professional roles are respected by recognizing that no one Native individual staff, board member, or volunteers should be expected to speak for all Native peoples. Roles and responsibilities of Native staff should be no different than those of non-Native staff in similar positions within the organization.

E.3. The governing authority, staff, and volunteers legally, ethically and effectively carry out their responsibilities related to Native interests.

- a. The museum recognizes Tribes as sovereign nations.
- b. Board, staff, and volunteers are trained on Tribe-state-federal relationships and the laws that dictate these relationships such as Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990), the Antiquities Act (1906), Archaeological Resource Protection Act (1979), etc.
- c. The museum has written, approved, and published a policy of non-discrimination.
- d. The museum implements policies that include Native peoples and their interests in its functions, investments, and activities.
- e. Governing authority, staff, interns, and volunteers acknowledge and support the unique relationship between collections and the communities from which they originate.

E.4. The composition, qualifications, and diversity of the museum's leadership, staff, and volunteers enable it to carry out goals related to Native interests, by:

- a. Actively recruiting Native peoples for board and staff positions at all levels;
- b. Assessing and revising human resources processes to support the hiring of Native peoples. For example, Native cultural knowledge and experience should be given equal weight to formal education and should be compensated accordingly;
- c. Providing flexibility to Native staff, board members, and volunteers to accommodate cultural responsibilities, and;
- d. Promoting and supporting professional development of staff to increase understanding of Native cultures past and present.

## F. Function Area: Financial Stability

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**AAM CORE STANDARD: Nonprofits like museums look to their constituencies for support in establishing and maintaining financial sustainability.**

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Transparent and solid fiscal performance can foster trust and demonstrate accountability to the public and funders, which include Native communities.

## Recommendations

F.1. The museum legally, ethically, and responsibly acquires, manages, and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances Native interests, as determined by sustained relationships with Native stakeholders.

- a. Campaigns and donor outreach should include Native peoples and communities. Institutions should consider that community and Tribal priorities may limit contributions.
- b. Avoid exploiting Native staff and volunteers for development purposes.
- c. Commit to financially supporting the care, access, and programming for Native collections. This commitment extends to community outreach, events, and/or programming. It is the responsibility of the museum to continually support these initiatives and should be normalized as part of the annual budget.
- d. Develop gift acceptance and acknowledgement policies that align with Native interests and ethics.

F.2. The museum plans for long term fiscal sustainability for the advancement of Native interests as determined by sustained relationships with Native stakeholders. These should include allocating funding for: the stewardship of Native collections; hiring and retention of Native staff, board members, and volunteers; engagement with communities; and regular Native programming and exhibitions.

## G. Function Area: Facilities and Risk Management

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**AAM CORE STANDARD: Museums care for their resources in trust for the public. It is incumbent upon them to ensure the safety of their staff, visitors, and neighbors, maintain their buildings and grounds, and minimize risk to the collections that they preserve for future generations.**

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For Native visitors and staff, risk and safety may extend beyond the physical to include cultural sensitivities, protocols, and historic trauma associated with museums that could affect an individual's well-being. Additional risk may include the loss of cultural knowledge related to deterioration of collections items and archival materials. By acknowledging and addressing these risks, museums can create a welcoming and safe place for Native communities, staff, and visitors.

## Recommendations

G.1. The museum works with Native advisors to identify and be responsive to the physical needs of the community, collections, visitors, and staff as they relate to Native concerns.

- a. The museum facility has areas that can be used for quiet and/or private contemplation, prayer, and quiet discussion, or any other need of Native staff and visitors such as seating for Elders.
- b. The museum provides access to spaces for Native community gatherings.
- c. Facility policies are implemented to accommodate the ceremonial needs of Native visitors and staff. This may include providing spaces for and negotiating safe practices related to the placement or use of organic materials as offerings or cleansing, including within collections and exhibition spaces.

- d. The museum protects Native staff and visitors from exposure or proximity to culturally sensitive materials, human remains, burial items, or posted images of remains or burial items. Conferring with appropriate Tribal authorities can help museums find solutions. These may include providing separate facilities or spaces where the items in question can be segregated, coverings over objects or spaces, or clear signage.
- e. The museum provides private spaces where tribal visitors can be alone with the collection (to be able to visit with their ancestors and relatives in a healthy way).
- f. The museum provides a place for eating and nourishment for people.
- g. In consultation with appropriate communities, the facility may develop processes for the proper disposal of materials associated with sensitive collections, such as storage mounts/frames/etc., when appropriate.
- h. Cultural appropriateness is taken into consideration, such as the placement of cameras in storage areas. For example, Native communities may not want cameras in spaces with culturally sensitive materials/human remains.

G.2. The museum works with Native communities to develop and implement an effective and culturally appropriate plan for the proper maintenance and long-term growth and updating of its facilities, including the housing of Native collections.

- a. Cultural protocols are considered with this care, including pest management.
- b. Outside vendors and staff should be advised of cultural protocols that are in place for Native collections and museum spaces.
- c. Financial support is provided for the care and long-term maintenance of these facilities.
- d. Processes are developed for renovation of current facilities.

G.3. The cleaning, maintenance, and monitoring of museum facilities holding and exhibiting Native collections is part of a preventive, non-toxic, and non-invasive approach to care, including pest control.

- a. Cultural protocols are followed to maintain the appropriate physical and cultural care of, and access to, the space.

G.4. The Museum incorporates appropriate Native cultural protocols when defining risk and loss to the museum. It recognizes that western museological standards of risk may differ from Native views.

- a. The museum works with Native communities on evacuation procedures and notification protocols in the event of disasters or loss.
- b. The museum works with Native communities to develop priority lists for evacuation and procedures for culturally appropriate handling guidelines for sensitive collections during disaster recovery.
- c. Ethical, legal, and reputational risks such as those relating to Native identity or collecting sensitive materials should be considered.

### Glossary

#### **Collaboration**

Collaborations between museums and communities are built on a foundation of positive, ongoing relationships. The deep expertise and perspectives of Native partners are recognized as essential to the accuracy and cultural appropriateness of work in museums with Native American collections. From conservation to public programs and fundraising, collaboration is a transparent, reciprocal, and iterative process rather than an extractive one, and includes activities such as decision making, implementation of programs, and governance. Each collaboration is unique to the people and institutions involved, but all are rooted in relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

#### **Consultation**

Consultation implies a short and focused session between museum staff and community members, rather than a long-term relationship. A consultation, whether NAGPRA or not, has the potential to become a collaboration, and therefore be designed to employ the principles of collaboration in terms of providing a positive experience, shared authority, and respect for indigenous expertise and knowledge.

#### **Community/Native advisor(s)**

Subject experts may include members of a particular cultural group, representatives, or delegates from the tribal council, historic preservation office staff, or cultural leaders. Selection of appropriate advisors depends on the nature of the project and subject matter.

#### **Cultural and intellectual property rights**

The right to protect cultural knowledge (tangible and intangible) belonging to a particular Native group, including but not limited to, aspects of cultural heritage represented in the visual arts, literature, and performing arts, as well as in science and traditional medicines. For more information, see UNDRIP in the References section.

#### **Culturally appropriate**

To be responsive to, and affirming of, a culture's beliefs and values, ethical norms, language needs, religion, and individual differences.

#### **Cultural belongings**

Items, both individual and communal, that are tied to heritage and ancestral significance. This term is often used to replace the term "objects."

#### **Cultural competency and sensitivity (also cultural humility)**

The capacity to engage sensitively and respectfully with communities and individuals from Native cultures. Although constantly a learning process, a training may provide museum staff with information relevant to the Native group or groups represented or whom they are working with, including history, culture, contemporary life, and political issues, addressing settler privilege and biases associated with Native Americans. Trainings often provide tools on how to better engage, collaborate, and navigate cultural differences.

### **Cultural patrimony**

A cultural belonging that is owned collectively by the cultural group or sub-group itself, rather than property owned by an individual. For a full definition as applied under NAGPRA, see <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/glossary.htm>

### **Cultural protocols**

An agreed set of guidelines or procedures that govern etiquette and behavior within a particular community in order to uphold the community's cultural norms. They are embedded within a community's cultural belief system and make visible the position of communities as custodians of traditional knowledge. These vary from group to group.

### **Descendant and affiliated communities**

Descendant and affiliated groups and individuals have a direct lineal affiliation to the collections and their origin community. The [National Park Service adds](#) that "cultural affiliation should be based upon an overall evaluation of the totality of the circumstances and evidence pertaining to the connection between the claimant and the material being claimed and should not be precluded solely because of some gaps in the record." As such, descendant and affiliated communities may include individuals from non-recognized tribes in addition to state and federally recognized tribes.

### **Federally recognized Tribes**

A federally recognized Tribe is an American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity that is recognized as having a government-to-government relationship with the United States, with the attached responsibilities, powers, limitations, and obligations. There are 574 federally recognized Indian Nations (variously called tribes, nations, bands, pueblos, communities and native villages) in the United States. Approximately 229 of these ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse nations are located in Alaska; the other federally recognized tribes are located in 35 other states. Additionally, there are state recognized Tribes located throughout the United States recognized by their respective state governments.

### **"Indian Problem"**

In the 1950s, the United States came up with a plan to solve what it called the "Indian Problem." It would assimilate Native Americans by moving them to cities and eliminating reservations. The 20-year campaign failed to erase Native Americans, but its effects on Native peoples are still felt today.

### **Intangible cultural heritage/knowledge**

See Tangible and intangible cultural heritage/knowledge.

### **Land Acknowledgement**

A formal statement to acknowledge the primacy of indigenous people and the lands from which they come. For more about land acknowledgments, see [Landacknowledgements.org](http://Landacknowledgements.org)

### **Native**

A complex and nuanced term, Native essentially means indigenous to or having biological, cultural, and social ties to a place (See Guidelines for Museums Recognizing US Tribal Identity). For the purposes of this document, we are speaking specifically about Native Americans.

**Native Expert** (see Community/Native Advisor)

**Non-recognized Tribe (also Unrecognized Tribe)**

A Native American community that is not designated as a state recognized or federally-recognized Tribe. According to the [National Congress of the American Indian](#), “Non-recognized tribes face the arduous task of submitting applications for federal acknowledgment that satisfy the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Part 83 Criteria. These criteria are extensive and are meant to ensure that recognized tribes are district autonomous communities, existing as such since historical times and recognized as such prior to 1900. In many instances, non-recognized tribes find it difficult and costly to compile the historical data expected to supplement applications for acknowledgement. However, tribes may also seek recognition through the less arduous process of Congressional legislation.”

**Red Power Movement**

Social movement led by Native Americans to demand self-determination for Native Americans in the United States. Organizations that were part of the Red Power Movement included the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), among others.

**Removed Tribes**

The United States governmental policy of forced displacement of Native Americans from their ancestral homelands. For example, in the eastern United States, tribes were removed to lands west of the Mississippi River — specifically, to a designated Indian Territory (roughly, present-day Oklahoma.)

**Sacred Objects**

Under NAGPRA, sacred objects are defined as “Specific ceremonial objects which are needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions by their present day adherents.” [25 USC 3001 (3)(C)]

**Sensitivities surrounding human remains**

According to the [Guidelines for Collaboration](#), “**Human Remains:** The presence of human remains in museum spaces can be a serious issue for many communities. People may not want to be near or see human remains. Talk with the community contact about human remains in your museum’s collection to determine if there are concerns about being in the vicinity of remains, including those from other cultures. Discuss what accommodations can be made, such as avoiding certain areas in the museums. Be aware that images of human remains can be an equally sensitive issue.” In addition, the remains themselves and how they are stewarded may require specific accommodation.

**Shared Stewardship (also stewardship)**

In contrast to outright ownership, shared stewardship is a philosophy supporting shared authority in how collections are managed and interpreted and inviting engagement on all other areas of museum operations.

**State Recognized Tribe**

According to the [Administration for Native Americans](#), “State recognized tribes are Indian tribes and heritage groups that are recognized by individual states for their various internal state government purposes. State recognition does not confer benefits under federal law unless federal law authorizes such benefits...According to a 2013 listing of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), there are sixteen states that have recognized Indian tribes (i.e., Native American groups with self-

government authority) outside of the federal processes—Alabama, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. State recognized Indian tribes are not federally recognized, but federally recognized tribes may also be state recognized.

### **Source communities**

Cultural groups and/or communities from which collection items originate.

### **Sovereignty**

“Sovereignty is a legal word for an ordinary concept — the authority to self-govern. Hundreds of treaties, along with the Supreme Court, the President, and Congress, have repeatedly affirmed that tribal nations retain their inherent powers of self-government. These treaties, executive orders, and laws have created a fundamental contract between tribal nations and the United States. Tribal nations are located within the geographic borders of the United States, while each tribal nation exercises its own sovereignty.” For more about sovereignty, see: [Indian\\_Country\\_101\\_Updated\\_February\\_2019.pdf \(ncai.org\)](#) (page 18)

### **Tangible and intangible cultural heritage/knowledge**

Cultural heritage does not end at tangible monuments and collections of objects. It also includes intangible traditions or living expressions inherited from ancestors and passed on to descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festival events, and traditional ecological knowledge, or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional arts.

### **Tribal Leadership**

Appointed or elected officials that represent a Native community in intertribal, state, and federal matters.

## **Other Guidelines Documents**

### [Guidelines for Collaboration](#)

Guidelines for Museums Recognizing US Tribal Identity for Exhibitions, Collections, and Research Purposes

### [International Council of Museums - ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums](#)

### [Protocols for Native American Archival Materials](#)

### [Smithsonian Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns Policy](#)

### [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\) \(unesco.org\)](#)

## Laws and Acts

The [American Indian Religious Freedom Act \(AIRFA\)](#), 1978, “protects the rights of Native Americans to exercise their traditional religions by ensuring access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites.” (Citation: 42 U.S.C. § 1996)

The [Antiquities Act \(16 U.S.C. 431-433\)](#), 1906, was the first United States law to provide general protection for any general kind of cultural or natural resource. It established the first national historic preservation policy for the United States. (Citation: 225, 54 U.S.C. §§ 320301–320303)

The [Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979](#), also referred to as ARPA, is a federal law passed in 1979 and amended in 1988. It governs the excavation of archaeological sites on Federal and Indian lands in the United States, and the removal and disposition of archaeological collections from those sites. (Citation: 96–95, §1, Oct. 31, 1979, 93 Stat. 721)

The [Dawes Act](#), 1887, “ ‘An Act to Provide for the Allotment of Lands in Severalty to Indians on the Various Reservations,’ known as the Dawes Act, emphasized severalty — the treatment of Native Americans as individuals rather than as members of tribes.” (Citation: Statutes at Large 24, 388-91, NADP Document AI887, National Archives)

The [Indian Arts and Crafts Act \(IACA\)](#), 1990, “prohibits misrepresentation in marketing of American Indian or Alaska Native arts and crafts products within the United States. It is illegal to offer or display for sale, or sell any art or craft product in a manner that falsely suggests it is Indian produced, an Indian product, or the product of a particular Indian or Indian Tribe or Indian arts and crafts organization, resident within the United States.” (Citation: Public Law 101-644, U.S.C.)

The [Indian Removal Act](#), 1830, “was signed into law by President Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830, authorizing the president to grant lands west of the Mississippi in exchange for Indian lands within existing state borders. A few tribes went peacefully, but many resisted the relocation policy. During the fall and winter of 1838 and 1839, the Cherokees were forcibly moved west by the United States government. Approximately 4,000 Cherokees died on this forced march, which became known as the ‘Trail of Tears.’ ” U.S. Department of State, Office of The Historian: Indian Treaties and the Removal Act of 1830 (Citation: Public Law. 21-148, U.S.C.)

[Indian Territory](#). According to the Library of Congress, “In the early nineteenth century a movement began in the United States to remove Indian tribes from their ancestral lands in the rapidly developing eastern states and settle them in the newly acquired lands west of the Mississippi River. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 established the government policy of relocating the eastern tribes to a separate, reserved “Indian Territory” on the Great Plains. A chronology of contemporaneous maps of the Indian territory reveals the continuous loss of portions of this reserved land, owing to the pressure from non-Indian settlers and the commercial interests in opening Indian lands for non-Indian use. By the 1870s, Indian Territory — which had once extended from the present Texas-Oklahoma border to the Nebraska-Dakota border — had shrunk to encompass only what is today most of the state of Oklahoma. The Geography and Map Division has a strong collection of maps, both federally and commercially published, which document the diminishing of Indian Territory. There is also good coverage of Indian and Oklahoma Territories from the post-Civil War period to 1907 (when the

remaining portions of Indian Territory were incorporated into the newly formed state of Oklahoma), and maps of individual parcels of land, such as the “Cherokee Outlet,” which were ceded to the United States and opened for non-Indian settlement.”

The [National Historic Preservation Act](#), 1966, “was passed primarily to acknowledge the importance of protecting our nation’s heritage from rampant federal development. It was the triumph of more than a century of struggle by a grassroots movement of committed preservationists.” (Citation: Public Law 89-665; 54 U.S.C.)

The [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act \(NAGPRA\)](#), 1990, “was enacted to outline a requirement and process for museums and federal agencies to return certain Native American cultural items (including human remains) to lineal descendants, culturally affiliated Indian tribes, or Native Hawaiian organizations.” It should be noted that NAGPRA only applies to federally recognized tribes, which often excludes opportunities for repatriation by state and non-recognized tribes. (Citation: 3001 et seq., 104 Stat. 3048)

The [National Museum of the American Indian Act \(NMAI\)](#) was enacted on November 28, 1989, as Public Law 101-185. The law established the National Museum of the American Indian as part of the Smithsonian Institution. (Citation: Pub.L. 101–185)

The [Potlatch Ban](#) was legislation forbidding the practice of the potlatch passed by the Federal Government of Canada in 1885 and lasting until 1951, under the Indian Act (Loi sur les Indiens, also known as An Act to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians), a Canadian act of Parliament.

The [Tamaki Makau-rau Accord on the Display of Human Remains and Sacred Objects](#). Adopted in 2006 by the World Archaeological Congress, and in recognition of the principles adopted by the Vermillion Accord, this document recognizes the display of human remains and sacred objects as a sensitive issue. It provides principles to be taken into account by any person or organization considering displaying or already doing so. This includes taking into account cultural appropriateness and obtaining permission from the affected community or communities.

The [Vermillion Accord on Human Remains](#) was created in 1989 and adopted at the World Archeological Inter-Congress, South Dakota, USA, in 1990. The Vermillion Accord is a set of six clauses adopted by the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) which concerns science and the treatment of the dead. It is of high significance to the archaeological profession and Indigenous groups, and its development and adoption is a key moment in the history of the reburial movement. The Vermillion Accord was the first document developed together by archaeologists and Indigenous people to provide a set of principles for behavior, decision making, and mutually agreed ethical approaches to the question of archaeological (and other scientific) interest in the mortal remains of the dead.

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Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act [Glossary](#)

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[U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs Tribal Leadership Directory](#)

## Photo Credits

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Moccasin makers visiting the School for Advanced Research. Courtesy School for Advanced Research.

**Page 2:**

Collections review with representatives from Acoma Pueblo. Courtesy School for Advanced Research.

**Page 3:**

Pottery workshop with Head Start Students from San Felipe Pueblo Headstart. Photo by Elysia Poon.

**Page 5:**

SMNAC Core Group first meeting December 2019. Photo by Elysia Poon.

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Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. “[National Museum of the American Indian](#)” by [angela n.](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

**Page 9:**

Young Sugpiat men with their completed model angyaat. Photo by Sven Haakanson.

**Page 36:**

Ramah Navajo Weavers and staff members from the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture examine a Navajo dress woven around 1850 and a Navajo rug from around 1940. Photo by Landis Smith.

### **Tohono O'odham Apprenticeship in Conservation at Mission San Xavier del Bae Collaborative Conservation and Training Future Conservators**

Nancy Odegaard and Tim Lewis

Apprentice training for preservation of the interior wall paintings, polychrome sculpture, and altar of the 18th century Spanish Baroque style church on the San Xavier Reservation first began in the 1990s with funding from the Patronado San Xavier (a support group that was founded in 1978 for the sole purpose of preserving the Mission San Xavier del Bae). An international conservation team was assembled to begin a 10 year project that included 3 tribal apprentices. After 4 years only one apprentice, Tim Lewis, remained and he sought further training, coursework, and experience in Italy, Austria, and Spain. For the past 20 years Tim and his conservator wife, Matilde Rubio, have lived near the church and have provided conservation continuity for the inside.

Recently, the Patronado has raised funds for the selection and support of two younger tribal members to begin a three-year apprentice program. The program involves supervised hands-on learning for 20 hours a week with their mentors at the church and in the nearby conservation studio where moveable artworks can receive conservation examination, documentation, and conservation treatment. The apprentices receive special training in scaffold safety and solvent/chemical safety. They complete several introductory on-line courses/lectures/webinars related to the care of heritage collections, preservation basics, issues in collections care, and curation concerns. They also attend professional conservation conferences.

An important collaboration in this training program involves input and support from



the Arizona State Museum Conservation lab which regularly hosts interns and is available to augment the curriculum of the Tohono O'odham apprenticeship program. For example, a chemical laboratory safety training course and various analytical apparatuses are already available. The apprentices will document their activities and competency will be evaluated with assistance of the ASM in specific areas of training, knowledge and skill sets that are part of the standard practice for professional conservators in the United States.

## Burke Museum Camas Field

Aaron McCanna, Burke Museum



Photo by Timothy Kenney/Burke Museum

As part of the planning for the new Burke Museum, which opened in October of 2019, a meadow featuring a variety of native plants was also designed, and planting began in March 2019. This meadow is now known as the Camas Field, as the camas takes a significant role both in the meadow as well as having deep significance to many Tribes. Our Tribal Liaison, Polly Olsen (Yakama), was hired in 2017, and assisting in the latter part of the Camas Field planning was one of her first projects in her new role. Because the role of the Tribal Liaison (and subsequently, the role of our Native American Advisory Board (NAAB)) was introduced late into the planning process, the consultation process was fairly rushed. The NAAB was invited to take part in an introduction of the people to the camas plants, and to share the intention of bringing the plants to the field. During the event, Polly noticed that one of the elders was distancing herself from the rest of the group, disengaged from the conversation. She talked with the elder and was told that bringing the camas to this field, out of their natural place, in plastic pots was against their religious beliefs, and was blasphemous. This was a very difficult thing for

Polly to hear, and to realize that this process which seemed so good was actually harming some people.

After consulting further with NAAB members, elders, and the camas itself, Polly worked to revise the way the NAAB was consulted with on important issues. Instead of reporting out to the NAAB, late in the project and notifying Tribal members what the Burke was doing, the new model for working with the NAAB would involve more detailed consultation and collaboration. This process is exemplified in the further development of the Camas Field.

In 2020, the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington (UW) allowed a grad student to do their research on the Camas Field. Because the Burke Museum is part of the UW, the UW owns and operates the land the Burke Museum is on, and the Department of Landscape Architecture was not technically required to consult with the Burke Museum on the work with the Camas Field. They notified a staff member from the Burke Museum about the work, and the staff

member told Polly. Initially, the researchers were taken aback by the suggestion that they should have consulted with the Burke prior to their research project. The researchers were invited to a NAAB meeting, where the NAAB expressed their disappointment in how little the researchers had considered how what they were doing might impact local Native communities, and many of the desires the NAAB had in regards to what could be done with the Camas Field. The following conversations were difficult, and many relationships were damaged, but the NAAB, Polly Olsen and the Department of Landscape Architecture worked over several years to fully adopt a better way of consulting that both honored the importance of camas and the NAAB's desire to use the Camas Field to support Native students at UW, and also accomplished the Department of Landscape Architecture's research goals.

Today, the Camas Field collaboration is still very much active. The camas has struggled due to rabbits and lupine takeover, but the deeper collaboration between the UW Facilities and Grounds, Department of Landscape Architecture and the NAAB, guided by Polly Olsen has greatly strengthened the relationship between the individuals involved and shown the value that consulting early and earnestly can have.



Photos by Rachel Ormiston/Burke Museum

## Achieving More-Equitable Stewardship via a Long-Term Collaborative Agreement

Jennifer Day, School for Advanced Research

The Navajo textile known as the Chief White Antelope Blanket is identified as such because it is believed to have been taken from the body of Chief White Antelope, a chief of the Southern Cheyenne, after the Sand Creek Massacre on Nov. 29, 1864. For this reason, the blanket has great significance to members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes and descendants of the Sand Creek Massacre survivors. In addition, it is generally regarded as the finest example of Navajo weaving dated from the Classic period.

The blanket is currently housed at the Indian Arts Research Center (IARC), a division of the School for Advanced Research (SAR), in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It came to the Indian Arts Fund (IAF), the IARC's predecessor organization, in 1929 when it was purchased from a family in Denver, Colorado, and has been stored at various facilities related to the IAF and IARC since that time.

In summer of 1996, Chief White Antelope descendant and Tribal Coordinator of Cultural Property for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, Gordon Yellowman, Sr., and Lightfoot Hawkins, also a descendant of Chief White Antelope, contacted IARC staff about viewing the blanket. The tribal representatives visited in August 1996 to spend time with the blanket and perform a purification ceremony. During the visit, the representatives requested that the blanket be brought to Oklahoma so that Joe Antelope, a Chief White Antelope descendant and elderly tribal chief, could see it. The trip was arranged and the blanket was displayed for viewing by tribal leadership in February 1997.

During the 1997 trip, tribal leadership and IARC staff initiated discussions about a

stewardship agreement that would benefit both parties; however, due to deaths in the Antelope family and some staff changes at IARC, the agreement took many years to finalize. The blanket has travelled to various locations in Oklahoma since the initial 1997 trip, for cultural and memorial events including four Sand Creek Descendants gatherings.

In December 2014, the SAR and the Sand Creek Massacre Descendants Trust (SCMDT) entered into a formal stewardship agreement for the blanket whereby it remains in the collection at IARC and is made available to the SCMDT for specific purposes. The agreement outlines the history of the blanket and sets forth conditions for its storage, community visit access, access during collection tours, return of the blanket every two years to the SCMDT annual gathering and other special events as needed, how said transport is financed, and specifies that the SCMDT must be consulted regarding requests for research, exhibition loans, or image use. The language of the agreement serves as a guide for IARC staff members in their care of the blanket and informs both parties of responsibilities in respect to its ongoing stewardship.

The agreement, and open communication between the two parties, encourage problem-solving for collection management and access issues that could, in a less collaborative situation, become points of contention. For example, members of the tribe have expressed their wish that an offering of tobacco be kept with the blanket at all times. In order to accommodate this without attracting insects into the collection, IARC staff consulted the SCMDT about placing the tobacco in a plastic bag, to be kept inside the archival tube on which the textile is rolled. This arrangement

was agreed to and the tobacco remains stored with the blanket, with no negative impacts.

Another example of this sort of collaboration is an agreement that was reached regarding public access to the blanket. The SDMDT understands that there is great public interest in the blanket, and that IARC receives many requests from non-tribal members to view it. At the same time, the SCMDT feels that it's a demonstration of respect to leave the blanket undisturbed as much as possible. In order to resolve these conflicting access issues, SAR and the SCMDT agreed that the history of the blanket and the present stewardship arrangement should be shared with visitors; a photo of it can be displayed; and the textile rack where it is stored can be pulled out and the rolled textile identified during public tours. Otherwise, the blanket is not made available to the public, and can be accessed by researchers only with approval from the SCMDT's appointed representative.

When the blanket returns to Oklahoma, many tribal members experience deep emotions and want to touch the textile. However, due to health and conservation concerns, this is not an option. The blanket was treated with arsenic in 1950 (to preserve it from insects), and as such, handling with bare hands presents health and safety concerns. Additionally, if the blanket were safe to be handled, oils from hands would stay on the fibers and eventually cause discoloration and physical instability. To address these concerns, the SCMDT has constructed a display case for the blanket with a Plexiglas cover so that tribal members can be near the blanket and interact with the important item of cultural patrimony.

This collaborative agreement, thoroughly consulted and vetted by the involved parties is written in the spirit of mutual concern, generating creative and thoughtful solutions that bridge respectful stewardship and community access objectives.



Chief White Antelope Blanket in storage and a photograph of it, as shown during public tours.

## **The National Museum of the American Indian's (NMAI) Artist Leadership Program**

Kelly Church and Keevin Lewis

The National Museum of the American Indian's (NMAI) Artist Leadership Program (ALP) for Individual Artists enables indigenous artists to research, document, and network in Washington, D.C., then return home empowered with new artistic insights, skills, and techniques to share with their communities and the general public the value of Native knowledge through art. The program aims to rebuild cultural self-confidence, challenge personal boundaries, and foster cultural continuity while reflecting artistic diversity.

After being accepted into the NMAI Artist Leadership Program and completing her research in December 2010 of cultural material associated with the black ash at NMAI's Cultural Resources Center, Kelly Church (Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Ojibwe Indians) coordinated a community arts symposium titled "Black Ash Basketry and the Emerald Ash Borer: Sustaining Traditions" in April 2011 that brought together 16 Native nations, 4 governmental organizations and 4 state universities that attracted approximately 62 symposium participants from Canada, NE United States, and the Great Lakes to Plainwell, Michigan. This symposium addressed the effects of the Emerald Ash Borer, the loss of ash trees, and ways to sustain the traditions of black ash basket making for generations to come. Panel participants included Jennifer Neptune, Richard David, Michael Benedict, and Cherish Parrish share their personal stories on why they participated in this symposium and support the cultural arts of black ash basket making. This video was directed by RJ Joseph.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4LEkWX\\_mdo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4LEkWX_mdo)

## Collaborative Conservation and Revitalization of Basketry in Community

Jim Enote, A:shiwi A:wana Museum and Heritage Center

Nancy Odegaard, Arizona State Museum

In 2010 the Arizona State Museum shared detailed images of the Zuni basketry objects from the collections and loan for use in a basketry weaving workshop held at the A:shiwi A:wana Museum and Heritage Center. Only two elder basketry weavers were known to have practical knowledge of traditional basket weaving. Members from the Zuni community worked with, Ruby Chimerica, a Hopi weaver to learn about basketry materials. They also learned about basketry material, when and where to gather them, how to prepare them, and as well as the methods of construction. The new weavers learned to work with wicker and plaiting techniques.

Several months later, the weaver group traveled to the Arizona State Museum for a collaborative workshop organized by Alyce Sadongei and held in the conservation lab with Nancy Odegaard. The entire collection of nearly 20 Zuni baskets was placed on tables so they could be handled and examined. The baskets were from acquired from multiple donations but the largest group included a baskets made in 1900-1925 that had come from E.C. Kelsey, a Zuni trader in 1953. Most of these baskets and others in the collection had seen considerable use prior to becoming part of the ASM collection. Details of the start, addition of new weaving elements, and the finish were highlighted and discussed. Plant material samples were compared to the basketry examples. An ethnobotanist, curator, and conservator were present to participate in the discussions of materials, museum records, and technology.

The use of collections by the new weavers resulted in new ideas about size, form, use, and tradition. Several individuals have continued to weave baskets, a discussion/presentation was made at a conference, and additional notes now



accompany the museum records. Additionally, the conservators gained important insights towards preserving the past history in heritage baskets which has greatly influenced a major housing, storage room, and conservation stabilization project for the entire holding of basketry at the museum.

## In-Community Program with Ramah Navajo Weavers Association, 2012

Landis Smith, Museums of New Mexico Conservation Unit

Cathy Notarnicola, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture

(This case study was originally published in the [Guidelines for Collaboration](#))

As part of the 2012 In-Community Program organized for the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) by Landis Smith, Cathy Notarnicola and Valerie Verzuh from the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (MIAC) in Santa Fe, traveled to the Ramah Navajo Weavers Association in Pine Hill, New Mexico. They carried with them several nineteenth- and twentieth-century Navajo textiles from MIAC's collection. Some of these textiles might even have been woven in the Pine Hill area by the ancestors of today's Ramah weavers. On this day, the textiles were returning to the Navajo Nation for a visit with community members.

The textiles were carefully transported from the MIAC storage areas in Santa Fe to Pine Hill, where the Ramah Navajo Weavers Association was meeting in the community *hogan*. They were placed on tables inside, where the weavers, young and elderly, novices and masters, came to visit them. Deep respect was felt for the blankets and rugs. The weavers sat next to the textiles, carefully examining and commenting in Navajo and English on what they were seeing. Both whispers and laughter were heard as technical traits, such as the warps and wefts, color changes, selvage cords, and design complexes, were discussed, as well as more personal observations regarding the weavers of these textiles. Observations included speculation as to what the weaver might have been thinking or feeling when she created a certain blanket or rug. How the textile was woven, the colors and designs she chose, and what was happening in her life at the time were all factors that were combined in these creations.



NMAI conservators and Navajo community weavers examine a Navajo poncho sarape (1820–1840) from the MIAC collections. Photo by Landis Smith.



Ramah Navajo Weavers and staff members from the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture examine a Navajo dress woven around 1850 and a Navajo rug from around 1940. Photo by Landis Smith



Ramah weavers dye yarn with lichen at the Ramah Weavers Association. Pine Hill, New Mexico.

The main focus of the conversations was the processes, thoughts, and lived experiences of the women who wove these textiles. What were their lives like, and what were they thinking when they made these weavings? Were they patient and happy? What prayers and songs did they sing while weaving?

The Ramah weavers expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to view these Navajo textiles, as most of them had not had the opportunity to visit the museum. The bringing of Navajo textiles to Ramah enabled many weavers, elders, tribal members, and youth to view these remarkable and important objects of deep cultural, artistic, and creative significance.

## Record Keeping for a Long-Term Collaborative Project: The Acoma Collection Review at the Indian Arts Research Center at the School for Advanced Research

Jennifer Day, School for Advanced Research



Acoma Collection Review session in progress, June 2015. L-R: Jennifer Day, Pearl Valdo, Brian Vallo, Robert Patricio, Brenda Valdo, Dolores Lewis Garcia, Lisa Barrera, Landis Smith, Stephanie Riley, Melvin Sarracino.

(This case study was originally published in the [Guidelines for Collaboration](#))

Since 2015, staff at the Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) at the School for Advanced Research (SAR) have been working with representatives from Acoma Pueblo to comprehensively review each object from their community to improve the records for each piece by adding new information (as approved by the community representatives), correcting inaccuracies, and sharing the newly improved records with Acoma Pueblo's Haak'u Museum so community members can have access to them. The majority of the collection consists of pottery, and most of the representatives have been potters, so much of the new information shared for the records relates to pottery building and decorating techniques. The project is referred to as a "collection review process,"

since each object from the source community is reviewed in detail.

A central component of the collection review process has been planning for and carrying out record keeping so that that information gathered during the sessions can be easily retrieved and understood in the future, even after all the involved staff members have left. At IARC, record keeping is realized primarily through a collections management database, though paper-based records are still common for many institutions. All staff have access to the database, and it's their primary source for information about objects in the collection.

At IARC, the collection review process is broken down into three main parts, and each part contributes to maintaining thorough and accurate object records. These steps would likely vary at other institutions and should be formulated with

each museum's needs, goals, and record keeping realities in mind.

### Part 1. Before the Review Sessions: Data Entry

The goal of this part of the process is to input all known information about each object in the database so that useful object reports can be printed for use during the review session. All known information about makers, provenance, materials used, stories linked to the piece, or conservation that has been done on it in the past are added to the record ahead of the first visit. Having the complete known story about a piece available during the review session makes each conversation as productive as possible and saves time. This level of data entry takes months of staff time, so it's carefully planned for in the timeline of each review project.

### Part 2. During the Review Sessions: Taking Notes and Making Voice Recordings

These steps take place during the review sessions. Good notes are vital to the next part of the process, which is the first round of post-visit data entry. Permission is sought from each participant to make voice recordings before the sessions begin. (Participants can request the recorder be shut off during sensitive discussions.) The recordings are referred to when a discrepancy or deficiency is observed in the notes during the post-visit data entry phase. Some communities might not feel comfortable with voice recordings, in which case good note taking is even more important.

### Part 3. After the Review Sessions (In Three Steps)

Post-Visit Data Entry: Staff try to complete data entry as soon as possible following a collection review visit, so that the memory of the session is as clear as possible. Certain fields in the database have been identified for inputting the new information, and they are used consistently so that staff always know where to find it. A combination of notes and voice recordings are used to ensure the accuracy of the data that is

entered. Though this is a short step to describe, it's often one of the longest steps in the entire collection review process, depending on the number of objects involved and the amount of detail that the community participants wish to see added to the records. As such, this step is planned for accordingly during project development.

Data Review: Following the post-visit data entry, the newly added information is shared with the community representatives to ensure that it's accurate and culturally appropriate. The goal is for IARC staff and the community participants to "be on the same page" regarding what information is shared with potential users. As with the review sessions with the physical objects, the data is reviewed during visits by community members to IARC, or sometimes IARC staff goes to the community to meet with the representatives.



Three community participants view a large storage jar, Acoma Collection Review, June 2015. L-R: Pearl Valdo, Dolores Lewis Garcia, Brenda Valdo.

Final Data Entry: During this step, any needed edits, changes, or additions identified during the data review are made to the records.

During the collection review process at IARC, staff has learned that a few items are culturally sensitive. These are items that may require access and publication restrictions and special handling and storage instructions. The special instructions are recorded during the Post-Visit Data Entry phase, to guide staff in culturally appropriate stewardship. When items require further evaluation by cultural authorities, or possible NAGPRA repatriation, those situations are also noted so they can be planned for in the near future. Contact information is recorded for tribally designated cultural authorities who staff should contact when questions arise about culturally sensitive items.

In addition to object records, IARC staff also maintain an Event record for each review session. The record contains a list of all attendees (both IARC staff and community representatives) and a list of all objects reviewed during the session. It also includes where and when the session took place, a summary of the purpose of the session, and a summary of topics discussed. Future staff can use this record to understand the goals and outcomes of the collection review projects.

Photography and recording permission forms are another set of records that are maintained. At IARC, these are kept in the files with the other paper documentation resulting from each session. This way they can be located easily when needed.

Record keeping methods will vary from institution to institution, though they will typically involve some combination of paper-based records and database records, much like at IARC. Record keeping and data management are truly integral parts of planning for any community visit or long-term collaboration, and they should be given their due consideration and

time during the process. Integrating adequate time for them in the project workflow will ensure thorough and accurate records that will be of maximum help during community visits and continue to serve staff, community members, and other researchers far into the future.

## Chickasaw Nation Council of Elders Approval of Creating Replicas of Artifacts

Valorie Walters, Chickasaw Cultural Center

(This case study was originally published in the [Guidelines for Collaboration](#))

### Summary:

In 2015, the Department of Culture and Humanities requested the advice and guidance from the Council of Elders on the topic of replicating culturally sensitive items to be placed in our collection and for culturally appropriate items that may be placed on display in exhibits and viewed by the public. The Council consists of Chickasaw elders who are knowledgeable in the fields of Chickasaw history, culture and language. The group meets monthly and is asked to provide guidance to the Chickasaw Nation on important matters. The request to replicate items was brought before the Council during a Council of Elders monthly meeting.

### Key Issues and Goals:

- The goal was to seek the advice and approval or denial from the Council of Elders to replicate culturally sensitive items for our collections and for display.
- Replicas will be placed in our collection.
- Replicated items that are deemed appropriate, will be displayed in exhibits and used for educational purposes.
- The final decision was solely that of the Council of Elders to give approval, denial or suggest changes to this request.

### Conclusion:

The Council of Elders approved a memo indicating the Department of Culture and Humanities could produce replicas from artifacts that are culturally sensitive.

This decision was based on the Council's understanding of the importance of using replicated items in appropriate museum exhibits and educational opportunities.



The Council explained the use of replicated items is necessary to *further the education of Chickasaw people of its early history*. They are concerned that younger generations may not be learning about the rich Chickasaw history because the practice has been to store culturally sensitive replicas away from public viewing. The Council believes it is their duty and the duty of the Chickasaw Nation to use these items for outreach to its people.

This decision was made with the agreement that any items replicated will be cared for just as the originals and must be to handled and displayed with appropriate respect and honor.

The Council also determined that no original associated funerary object will be placed on display due to his sensitive nature.

## The Shalako Film Remade

Nell Murphy, American Museum of Natural History

During a 2011 visit to review collections at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), five members of the Zuni Tribe learned of a nearly century old ethnographic film entitled, *The Shalako Ceremony at Zuni, New Mexico*, that is housed in the AMNH's Library and Special Collections. Throughout the summer of 1923, ethnographer Frederick Webb Hodge and filmmaker Owen Cattell recorded daily life in Zuni Pueblo (these films are now housed at the National Museum of the American Indian). Following that field season, Cattell was contracted by the AMNH in collaboration with Elsie Clews Parsons to film the Shalako ceremony that took place in November of that year.

The footage obtained during that single day is silent with inter-titles that explain, often incorrectly, the course of the Shalako events. The Zuni team expressed a number of concerns upon seeing the film. First, there were scenes depicted that, to this day, should not be viewed by individuals who have not been initiated into certain religious societies. Some of the team had not seen portions of the ceremony revealed in the film and felt discomfort that Zuni non-initiates and non-Zuni could watch it. The team was also troubled with the film's inter-titles that misrepresented the meaning of Shalako and the roles of its participants.

The AMNH Research Library provided an enhanced digital copy of the film to the A:shiwí A:wán Museum and Heritage Center in Zuni, New Mexico for further study. Viewings were arranged for several additional Zuni advisors and subsequent discussions confirmed that the film in its original form misinterpreted the Shalako ceremony. Together, the advisors determined that the film was a valuable historical resource but, without Zuni



intervention to correct the faults and protect the meaning and significance of the Shalako, it would continue to serve as an instrument of misinformation. Consequently, a Zuni team drafted new English intertitles to be edited into the film and to be shown along with the original inter-titles. A Zuni language voiceover was also introduced. The footage was re-mastered and re-edited under Zuni supervision, omitting sensitive scenes and integrating the new inter-titles and Zuni voiceover. Two years from the initial re-discovery of the Shalako film, the revised version entitled *The Shalako Film Remade*, was shown at the 2013 Margaret Mead Film Festival at the American Museum of Natural History.

Through *The Shalako Film Remade*, the A:shiwí A:wán Museum and Heritage Center is furthering its efforts to regain control of the message and representation of Zuni visual culture held in museum archives.

## Bringing Museum Research Home

Sven Haakanson, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, U of Washington, Seattle

(This case study was originally published in the [Guidelines for Collaboration](#))

When we are talking about cultural revitalization it is important to keep in mind we are working with losses and tragedies that continue to impact our communities health. While the term can be seen in many ways it is my own understanding that doing this we are take the knowledge that is embodied in each piece so it can to be returned, understood and used once again in our lives. I have called this repatriating knowledge that was once forgotten and is now being reawakened once again through pieces from the past.

In starting a major project in a community one needs to start with establishing a consistent and long-term goal that brings a community together. Over the last twenty years this has been one of the lessons I have learned over and over in working on such projects. Just remember consistency is key to long term success.

What is the long-term vision and goal for doing such a project and how sustainable will it be once it takes off? Are you willing to work for free if it comes down to that? If you are then you will be okay for a time.



In 2015 we worked with the Akhiok kids camp and constructed a 16-foot frame of an angyaaq from scratch.



In 2016 we finished the tying, wrapped the frame with a fabric and went paddling in the angyaaq. This was the first time an angyaaq was sailed on Kodiak since the late 1800's.

What has made the projects I have worked on most successful is ensuring that the communities I am working with have ownership and control over what we are doing and having the willingness to step aside once this becomes part of how they see a project.

In starting the angyaaq project I had the privilege to research, document and photograph the 13 angyaat “open boats” that I helped identify in museums in Germany, Russia, France, and the US. These models were collected in the mid to late 1800's and the largest collection is in Russia at the MAE. Currently we don't know of any full sized Angyaaq from Kodiak that exists from this time. We were only able to learn about this boat from models, drawing from Cooks expeditions in 1778 and archaeological pieces from a site at Karluk, Alaska dating back 600 years.

Thanks to these museum collections, in my case the Burke Museum, I was able to fully examine the details of this boat and out of this reversed engineered the model to create kits so that we could make them. In the summer of 2014



Young Sugpiat men with their completed model angyaat. This was the first time on Kodiak to have this boat made in a camp with students.

I worked with the community of Akhiok at their Kids Camp held in August to construct 13 angyaat models following traditional methods taught to us by a traditional kayak builder Alfred Naumoff, “no glue or nails.”

## Stories from Clay: Intersections of Collections Care and Community-Engaged Institutional Planning

Colleen Lucero, Hopi Museum

Marianna Pegno, Tucson Museum of Art

Christine Brindza, Tucson Museum of Art

With support from Karen Abeita, Karen Charley, Kyle Kootswatewa, Garret Maho, Emmaline Naha, Terran Naha, and Fawn Navasie

The Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block (TMA) is a regional art museum that reflects and amplifies the diverse heritages and cultures of the Southwest as a means of fostering connections with its surrounding communities. TMA's mission—to *connect art to life through meaningful and engaging experiences that inspire discovery, spark creativity, and promote cultural understanding*—is supported by eight core values that guide actions and decisions. One of these values is to serve as an incubator of ideas that link the museum's broad, diverse collection with the life of the community—an activity that is made possible through community-engaged practices.

In 2021, TMA was awarded funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to support *Stories from Clay*, a collections research project that seeks to examine, catalogue, and provide context to TMA's historical Indigenous art pottery. This collection consists of vessels with possible ancestral origins to Indigenous communities in present-day New Mexico and Arizona. Most of these items date prior to 1800 and have incomplete provenance information and probable misattributions. Significant dialogue, collaboration, and research was, and is, necessary to better understand our collection and the proper steps for its care. To develop practices of co-stewardship and culturally relevant collections documentation, TMA developed a team of staff members and external collaborators including tribal representatives, Indigenous potters, and culturally specific institutions.

TMA worked with Indigenous potters from Hopi and the Tohono O'odham Nation to begin building knowledge about the collection, clarifying museum records, and determining next steps for care/stewardship. In addition to working with communities, TMA reached out to tribal governments and updated NAGPRA registrations of current holdings. Museum staff worked closely with organizational partners from the School for Advanced Research and the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico, as well as scholars affiliated with the Arizona State Museum in Tucson, Arizona.

Insights on this project and approach to collections care may be best illustrated by the relationship between TMA and the Hopi potters. Hopi and Hopi/Tewa potters reviewed and discussed a selection of TMA's historic Indigenous pottery with presumed ancestral ties to Hopi. Photography, extended descriptions, and known provenance was shared by the museum, but discussions were completed



Ancestral Hopi Vessel, Homolovi orange ware, (ca. 1100 AD). Collection of the Tucson Museum of Art. Museum Purchase. Virginia Johnson Fund. 1994.25

without TMA staff. These consultants provided valuable information about vessel attributions, insights on appropriate terminology, and further cultural knowledge they felt was appropriate to share. Original descriptions provided by TMA were from an anthropological perspective, and each potter found it interesting to learn more about the “museum” language in comparison to what they have been taught from generation to generation.

During this process, the balance of sharing information was important to consider. The potters agreed that the information they provided back to TMA was appropriate to share. In their discussions, some sensitive information was offered—something only possible without the participation of TMA staff—which enabled the group to supply certain explanations passed down by their teachers of traditional pottery practices. Parts of the conversation were internal, while other parts of the conversation could be shared beyond the Hopi community. A major part of the Hopi learning system is that knowledge is earned not privileged, and the private portion of these conversations are only for the tribe.

*These are our people—we should be able to learn from them.* – Kyle Kootswatewa

The following reflections showcase Hopi approaches to care of vessels, often the opposite of many “best practices” for museums.

- Activating the senses is a major part of collections care. To smell it, feel it, or look at it in the sun is crucial to understanding each vessel. Every piece is an ancestor, and embracing it, asking questions, and requesting guidance is essential. Encourage the Indigenous communities to sit and visit to ask those questions, to learn about pottery and themselves. These communities are the experts and leave them to do this so their values and culture can carry on.

- Care is subjective, and each potter had a different version and definition of what it means to care for a vessel. Pottery (Tsaqapta) is to be used to their fullest potential or purpose for it being made. This is the understanding of care that is known by Hopi: for them to be used. When they are stored, they are stored within the home, and they help occupy a shared space of interaction. They hear the joys, sorrows, and laughter of the families they were created for.

These reflections and recommendations do not mean that the current approaches to how TMA cares for these vessels are wrong. In fact, the Hopi and Hopi/Tewa group agreed that the current environment for how these vessels are cared for is good but encourages the museum to continue to work with the appropriate communities to ensure access to expand co-stewardship.

Museums must be open to looking at the value of the content and origin, rather than the monetary value or condition of the pottery. This will help institutions understand the paradigms that Native communities need in reclaiming their own histories. Museums must invest in their communities, just as much as their collections.

Community-engaged collections care is one of TMA’s day-to-day operations in service of the museum’s mission, core values, and strategic priorities, as well as supporting both the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access Plan and the Collecting Plan. *Stories from Clay* highlights how conversations about works in TMA’s care could promote a more nuanced cultural understanding through community-engaged collections care that re-examined knowledge/assumptions through including perspectives beyond traditional institutional walls. By broadening voice and expertise, the collection can be more deeply understood and better contextualized.

This project adheres to TMA goals and priorities that bolster the link between collections and communities:

- Within TMA's Strategic Plan, a significant objective is to *strengthen TMA's collection, exhibitions, and programs*. Strategies are outlined for cultivating relationships to better understand the collection and enhancing relationships with national and international partners.
- In the IDEA Plan, in which TMA positions itself as a responsive and community-centered institution, **Relevancy** is defined as a core principle where all individuals have the right to access art and the museum, including its collection, programs, and exhibitions, in a relevant and meaningful way.
- **Relevance** was vital in the development of the TMA Collecting Plan, a guide for current and future planning of the museum's collection areas, focusing on answering questions such as: How does this collection fit into the history of the community and to the mission of the museum? What is its value to community outreach, education, and to donors?

*Stories from Clay* centered **relevance** specifically by reflecting regional constituents, cultivating relationships to build more nuanced understandings of works in our permanent collection, and expanding interdisciplinary initiatives and partnerships to broaden and deepen its service to the community. Furthermore, by working collaboratively with Indigenous communities we learned an important component of relevancy: helping to preserve knowledge within these cultures through co-stewardship.

The Tucson Museum of Art would like to extend a special thank you to Gabriella Moreno, former collections fellow at the museum, for her attentive and detailed-oriented work on this project.

**Description: Boundaries of professional roles are respected by recognizing that no one Native individual staff, board member or volunteers should be expected to speak for all Native peoples Roles and responsibilities of Native staff, etc. should be no different than those of non-Native staff similar positions within the organization.**

Patsy Phillips, Museum of Contemporary Native Arts

As a Museum Studies student in Harvard's Certificate Program in the mid-90s, a professor asked me to tell him about the clay pots we observed in an exhibition. When I hesitated, he said, "You're Native you should know about them." My mind went blank. I had never studied ceramics and knew nothing about Native pottery. Not understanding any better at the time, I felt ashamed: "Why can't I speak about pottery? After all, Natives are recognized as ceramicists," I told myself. Since then, I have encountered many more people who expected me to speak for all Natives, and I now say I am Cherokee and do not represent other tribes. I tell them that not one individual speaks for all Indians, although that was the expectation at the time. I am no longer embarrassed for not knowing all things Indigenous.

There are more than 574 federally recognized tribes with their own cultures in the United States; therefore, one should not generalize about Native American art and culture or assume one individual can be an expert on all Indigenous cultures just because the person is an enrolled tribal member. Similarly, non-Native staff should not be asked to be experts on or represent their race within organizations. When a question arises about an artist or tribe at the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA), we re-direct them to a member of that specific community. If we do not know a person in that tribe, we typically have a contact who does, and we introduce them, if possible. Unlike twenty years ago, today, Indigenous people work in all capacities of museums as leaders, staff, board members, and volunteers. There is no reason that people

cannot go to the source for their questions. For the first time in history, major museums with Indigenous collections such as MoCNA, the Museum of Indian Arts and Cultures, and the National Museum of the American Indian, are led by Native women, specifically. When curating exhibitions and planning programs, MoCNA staff works directly with Indigenous artists and curators to embody their voices throughout the museum. We do not speak for them but encourage Native people to represent themselves. Together we are teaching others that one person cannot stand for all Natives. Indigenous people are representatives of our own cultures and present ourselves as the diverse voices of Native America.

## Enacting Community Support from A Financial Perspective

Elysia Poon, School for Advanced Research

In 2019, the School for Advanced Research's (SAR) Indian Arts Research Center (IARC), in partnership with the Vilcek Foundation of New York, embarked on a major project celebrating the centennial of the IARC's collection in 2022. *Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery*, was a community-centered project consisting of 60 community curators —known henceforth as the Pueblo Pottery Collective\*, and included a nationally traveling exhibition, catalog, documentary, audiobook, podcast, curriculum, programming, and more. Early on staff realized the importance of recognizing not only the knowledge that each curator came with, but that their knowledge also stemmed from the communities they came from. As a result, the project had a deep focus on not only supporting the Collective, but also the communities from which they came not only from a project development perspective, but also financially. To this end, the following occurred:

- Participants were paid for their participation in the project, which included choosing and writing catalog entries for the exhibition/catalog.
- When it became clear that their participation was going to extend beyond the initial scope of their contract, additional funds were raised to cover their participation. This included additional meetings, filming, exhibit design choices, permissions, etc. Because each community curator participated in different portions of the project based on their interests and availability, a blanket amount was given to each participant. Nothing was ever demanded or required of the Collective in terms of additional participation, however, close relationships between staff and members of the Collective, meant that participants were motivated to work and be participatory in their own ways.
- From the outset, the IARC envisioned supporting travel funds for each community participant to visit the exhibition as it traveled. Resources were raised via grants from foundations and the exhibit contracts. Funds were essentially unrestricted other than that they be directed toward traveling to see *Grounded in Clay* at any venue. Attendance at openings or participating in programming was not required. Funds for this were distributed on a reimbursement basis.
- The biggest exhibit opening event, and the majority of the funds relating the opening of the exhibit, was directed at the community opening. Attendees consisted almost entirely of the Pueblo Pottery Collective, their guests and families. There was no fundraising component to this opening.
- Funding was provided to support programs suggested by the Pueblo Pottery Collective during the run of the exhibit. Their participation in these programs was always paid. This funding was provided by either SAR (through foundation funding) or by host institutions.
- To provide ways for SAR and curators to give back to their community, the *Grounded in Clay* Community Grant was established to run the length of the exhibition. This provided small grants of up to \$2500 per project to support clay-related activities in the communities they came from or lived in. Due to the generosity of another foundation, the IARC has ongoing funds that are directed broadly at community-centered projects. It was decided that funds spanning the length of the exhibit project would go toward supporting projects as defined by the community curators.

- Near completion of the project, it was decided that an audiobook would accompany the catalog. Participants were paid again for their additional work on the audiobook.

While the primary funder for the project was the Vilcek Foundation, a significant portion of support was also raised by SAR separately, primarily by foundations and host institutions, to support the goals of this project. Ultimately, the success of *Grounded in Clay* could not have been accomplished without the following:

1. The support and patience of the Pueblo Pottery Collective themselves and their motivation to make the project successful.
2. The long relationships—sometimes decades-long—between staff and community curators, resulting in an atmosphere of mutual respect and aid.
3. The willingness of funders to provide SAR with significant flexibility to support the project in non-traditional ways. This included providing unrestricted travel funds to the exhibit with no specific outcome other than community support.
4. The support of the School for Advanced Research’s development/grants and finance departments who worked with the IARC director to ensure that community support remained a focal point and that flexibility in the wording of proposals that in turn, result in flexibility in working with communities and individuals.

\*It should be noted that the Pueblo Pottery Collective was established during the run of this project and used to describe the 60+ individuals who curated and wrote for *Grounded in Clay*. The group had both organic and selected origins initially based on existing relationships between IARC staff and Pueblo community members.



The community opening of *Grounded in Clay* included a feast and Pueblo throw. Photo by Terrance Clifford. Courtesy of the Vilcek Foundation.

## Building a new Collections Center: Native Collaboration with the Museum of Northern Arizona

Robert G. Breunig, Museum of Northern Arizona

(This case study was originally published in the [Guidelines for Collaboration](#))



Shortly after my return to the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff, Arizona as Executive Director after 22 years away, it was determined that building a new collection center was one of our institution's highest priorities. Over the previous two decades, the museum had commissioned several studies by conservation experts on the environmental conditions in which its collections were stored. All of these reports said the same basic thing: you have significant collections, a dedicated staff—and your facilities are putting your collections at risk. The museum's facilities at the time had leaky roofs, cracked walls, poor temperature and humidity controls and no fire suppression system. The storage cabinet drawers were made of wood which off-gassed damaging vapors and expanded when the

humidity was high, making the drawers hard to open. It was time to build a new facility. Fortunately, the museum was able to secure funding for this facility from a generous couple, Betsy and Harry Easton.

As the building went into design development, there were three major issues to be considered. 1.) Providing optimal conditions environmental for the long-term storage of collections, 2.) Making the building culturally appropriate of the storage of collections from Native American source communities, 3.) Making the building sustainable for the long-term. For each consideration a team of advisors was convened.

A Native American advisory team was established consisting of Navajo, Hopi, Zuni,

and Apache members. There were three team meetings through the design process. The first occurred before any plans were put on paper. The team discussed the principles that should be exemplified in the building. There was agreement on the following concepts: the entrance should face east, there should be some circularity of form, the building should be in tune with the cycle of the seasons, there should be a visual connection to the San Francisco Peaks, the building should have some natural light, the building should feel “as if it belongs here”, the building should be sustainable and the building should be “alive”. No human remains or remains of animals in liquid preservative storage should be maintained in the building. With this set of mandates, the architect, Jim Roberts of Roberts/Jones Architects, proceeded to design the building.

The architect incorporated all of these principles into the design of the building. As the visitor walks around the semi-circular front of the building, the San Francisco Peaks come into view as one reaches the east facing entrance. Adjacent to the front entrance is a narrow, tall glass window, call the “solar aperture”, which channels a beam of dawn sun-light in to the entrance lobby, sticking an inner door on the two equinoxes. Skylights, with flaps that open and close, bring natural light into the structure when people are present. The building is topped by a living roof of native grasses and wildflowers, providing not only a heavy mantle insulation for the roof, but giving it life. All of these measures made the structure symbolically significant to members of the Native American community. The response has been very positive. After many blessing ceremonies at its dedication, the facility has seen many visits by northern Arizona tribal community members to view collections of their heritage. As Jim Enote, the Director of the A:shiwí A:wán Museum and Heritage Center at Zuni said at its dedication ceremony, “*This moment is a monument and testimony to the spirit of a new age of collaboration with tribes as “source communities.” In dedicating this center*



*we are honoring the spirit of listening and caring. Caring to make a difference in the way objects are housed and cared for, and we are honoring the best of ourselves as workers and supporters of this new generation of ideas... For people hoping or planning for a new vision of what a museum collection center should be and look like, the Easton Center stands out as a threshold and beacon for museum workers throughout the world that the next generation of museums has been entered. The promise that new and better ways of respecting indigenous peoples and their cultures has been redeemed and it will continue to improve and knowledge will grow as long as people listen and work together.”*

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