Defining terms: For the purposes of this document,
- the term “museum” applies to any institution with collections.
- the terms “community” and “community members” refer to tribes and tribal members, as well as Native corporations or any community seeking to collaborate with a museum.

The following guidelines were developed over a three-year period of collaboration between Native and non-Native museum professionals, cultural leaders, and artists. The guidelines are intended as a resource for community members who are working in collaboration with museums. This is not a set of rules; instead, it offers ideas to consider when working with museums.

Your work with a museum might consist of reviewing the collections to learn what the museum has from your community; sharing information about items from your community that are part of a museum’s collection; helping to develop museum exhibits; or if you are an artist, you might use a museum’s collections for artistic inspiration. These are just a few of the ways you might engage with a museum.

Although the Guidelines may be useful for many kinds of engagement with museums, they are not specifically intended as a resource for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) consultations.

If preferred, this document can be printed as a booklet.

WHY WORK WITH MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS?

Museums can serve as valuable resources for communities, and many museums are collaborating with community members to improve their understanding of and care for collections through meaningful engagement. In recent years, some communities have established long-term relationships with museums that have provided opportunities for enhancing their own initiatives, while also providing guidance on collections stewardship. Ultimately, community members determine when and how they wish to interact with museums. Providing communities with access to collections is a fundamental responsibility of museums—and access to collections from your community is your right.

Some benefits of collaborating with a museum may include:

- Reuniting collections with communities.
- Establishing relationships and dialogue based on mutual respect.
- Effecting change in museum policy.
- Adding to and correcting museum collection records.
Depending on the community’s priorities, collaboration with a museum can lead to various outcomes including:

**CULTURAL REVITALIZATION**

![Image of people playing instruments](image1.png)

Bringing museum research back to the community

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BKC53TDMto

**ARTISTIC INSPIRATION AND ARTS REVITALIZATION**

![Image of sketch](image2.png)

Sketching and inspiration

![Image of person taking parka patterns](image3.png)

Taking parka patterns
IMPROVING A MUSEUM’S INFORMATION ABOUT ITS COLLECTIONS

Setting the record straight

INCORPORATING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CARE OF COLLECTIONS

Community experts

Collaborative planning and building a new Collections housing facility.
COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION

The art and science of Tlingit baskets

Sharing expertise

Fitting harpoon parts

Traditional repair
LOANS FOR MUSEUM EXHIBITS, COMMUNITY-BASED EXHIBITS, PROGRAMMING, AND CULTURAL USE OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Loans to tribal museums

Long-term loans to tribal museums

Bringing museum collections to communities

PROVIDING GUIDANCE ON EXHIBIT DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

Games and toys exhibit, NMAI
PROVIDING INPUT TO THE MUSEUM’S PUBLIC PROGRAMS, INCLUDING PRESENTATIONS AND PLANNING

A collections review as a public program

USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

3D replication of museum items

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN WORKING WITH MUSEUMS

Museums have different histories and purposes, and the staff may not have collaborated with communities before. Your experience will vary depending on the museum, its policies and procedures, the purpose of your visit, and the staff involved.

Most museums have a similar plan of organization. In a small museum, one person may be responsible for multiple jobs, whereas in a large museum, responsibilities are divided into different departments.

You will usually work with people in following positions: Curator, Collections Manager, Registrar, Conservator, Archivist or Director.

Collaborative work associated with collections often takes place where the collections are stored, in the conservation laboratory, or in the archives. These spaces might be in a different building than the main museum.
COLLECTIONS HOUSING
Ideally, collections are kept in clean spaces with controlled temperature, humidity, light, and filtered air. The environment is stabilized to assist in the long-term preservation of collections.

The following rules are typical; their purpose is to prevent damage to the collections. Exceptions are generally made for cultural practices.

- Food and beverages are kept out of collection areas to prevent pest infestations.
- Large bags, purses, backpacks, etc., are prohibited to prevent damage to the collections.
- Pencils are used instead of pens because ink is very difficult to remove.

CONSERVATION LAB
The conservation lab is a clean and controlled environment. Conservators are concerned with the science, technology, cultural context, and meaning of collections.

Items are brought to the lab for examination, documentation, and, if appropriate, conservation treatment to prevent the item from deteriorating. When community members identify an item as having been made with the expectation that it would eventually deteriorate, conservation treatment may not be appropriate. Increasingly, conservation decision-making, examination, documentation, and treatments are carried out in collaboration with community members.

ARCHIVES
People visit archives to find original, historical information about the world, their community and family. Archivists identify significant cultural and/or historical records for their community and preserve them. Preserved records can include paper documents such as letters, reports and other data, newspaper articles, photographs (plates, negatives, film, prints and digital images), videos (originals and digitals) and much more.

Like Collection Housing areas, Archivists strive to ensure records will be available for future researchers by storing items in climate-controlled spaces in acid-free folders and boxes. To access these unique records, an archive might require you to fill out a form and make an appointment.

GLOVES
Museums have differing policies about wearing gloves when working with collections. In some cases, wearing gloves is mandatory. Gloves protect the items in the collections from your hands' natural oils and may protect you if the items have been treated with pesticides.
THE MUSEUM VISIT

BEFORE
As a first step, you need to establish why you are meeting with the museum staff and what you intend to learn. This is important whether the work has been initiated by you or by the museum. Both museum staff and community members must understand and agree to the results of this first step. Once you agree and have set up a visit, there is still a lot to consider. This can be a complicated logistical process, and you are also building a relationship with the museum. This takes time.

You might consider asking these questions when planning your visit:

1. Who is the primary museum contact person for arranging the visit?
2. How many staff will be participating in the visit? What are their roles (hyperlink to videos re: museum jobs)?
   [Depending on the collections you will be working with, you may want privacy or you may request that more staff be present so you can share information]
3. If invited by the museum, will you be compensated for participation? What expenses will be covered?
4. If the institution pays expenses, will you be reimbursed or will the museum be billed directly?
5. Where will you be meeting? How will the collections be accessed (for example, will they be pulled from storage and set on tables in the conservation lab? Or will they be viewed where they are housed?)
6. What do you want to see? [Museum staff may need to pull items for you to view or research, and this takes time and preparation. Let them know what you want to see, even if you can only give them a general idea.]
7. What items do you want to avoid? Are there culturally sensitive collections in the building? [Specify whether you want to avoid certain collection items or types of collections (for example, medicine bundles, funerary items, and/or human remains)]
8. What is the proposed schedule for the visit? [This gives you an opportunity to discuss and negotiate the schedule]
9. Have the collections you will be working with been treated with pesticides? [Historically, many collections were treated with mothballs, or even arsenic, lead, or mercury, to prevent insect infestations. For your safety, museum staff may recommend that you wear gloves and sometimes lab coats while studying some collection items].
10. Can information about the collections be provided to us before our visit? [You can request reports and/or copies of catalog records with images, if available. This documentation gives you an idea of the number of items, what they are, and what they look like].
11. Will the museum want to record (video/audio/photos) the meeting? Will we be asked to sign permission/release forms? What kind of recording is acceptable to me and/or my group? [Request a copy of the permission/release form prior to your visit. If you have any questions or want to edit the form, discuss this with the staff prior to the visit]
12. What forms will I have to fill out? [such as collections access forms, payment and reimbursement forms, and tax forms; see Addendum II for examples of various forms]
13. What will happen to information about the collections that we share with the museum?
Let the museum know:

1. Who in your group will be the primary contact for the museum. If there is a change, inform the museum.
2. If you need to spend time alone with specific collections, will require a private space to do so, or plan to make offerings, including burning substances. You may want to discuss how your offerings will be handled by the museum after the visit.
3. If you would like a general tour of the museum or would like to see collections outside the project’s scope.
4. If you want to take photographs and/or record audio/video, and how you intend to use them.
5. If non-English speaking community members will be participating in the visit and you will need additional time for translation.
6. If people in your group need special assistance, such as a wheelchair.

This is not a complete list of questions or things to consider; you will likely come up with additional questions based on your specific situation.

DURING
Once you have scheduled your visit, you may wish to consider the following:

As the community representative, you might feel pressure from the museum staff to be the overall authority or expert about the collections you are working with, but only you know what knowledge you possess, and what you can and cannot share. It is your right to decline to answer a question or to say “I don’t know.”

It is also your right to tell staff when they should stop any recording (such as video, photographs, audio recording, and notetaking), and whether any information shared during the off-the-record period is private and not to be shared further. You may request a review of notes taken by museum staff before they are entered into the official museum records. This will allow you to make changes or delete information.

If you have never visited the museum before, the experience of seeing collection items from your community may be overwhelming. It is important that you express your needs to museum staff to let them know if:

• you have to cut the day short.
• you need longer or more frequent breaks.
• you need to engage in your own cultural practices, whether alone, with collections, or with staff present.

AFTER
Reflect on the entire experience. Were you satisfied with the visit? If not, do you feel the need to discuss this with museum staff? Are you interested in future visits and/or a long-standing relationship with the museum?
THE COMMUNITY VISIT

Opportunities may arise for museum staff to learn more about the communities from which museum collection items originate. A visit to your community by museum staff allows you to introduce, on your own terms, aspects of your history, culture, and arts that you feel are important to share.

It may be beneficial to consider the following in setting up a visit to your community by museum staff:

- Develop an agenda with the appropriate community members and museum staff.
- Share relevant community policies, cultural protocols, and governance structure.
- Recommend literature and online resources about your community.
- Assist with local travel logistics including directions to the meeting location, and lodging and meal options.

DOCUMENTATION

During your visit to the museum, you will likely share information with staff about the collection items and associated records. Collection records often include catalog records, accession records, and conservation reports. The accuracy and amount of information in collection records varies from one museum to another, from one part of the collection to the next, and from item to item.

When working with museum staff, everything you share during the visit might become part of the museum’s permanent records. For example, museum records may include photos taken of you in collections storage areas, a story you shared about a collections item, or a transcript of the audio recording of your meeting with staff. Ask questions and talk with museum staff to reach an agreement regarding access to the information you share. With your permission, museums might use information and images from your visit for educational, noncommercial purposes such as publications, research, websites, social media, and exhibits.

Museums retain much of their documentation as digital files. Digital technology raises many questions and issues regarding access, ethics, and appropriate uses.

Let the museum know:

- If you want to review and/or edit the information and comments you shared before they become part of the museum’s permanent records.
- If you want to restrict any of the information you shared.
- If you want the museum to provide you with copies of the notes, photographs, audio, and video recordings generated during the visit.
- If you plan to make your own recording using video, audio, and/or photos.

If the museum is unable to limit access to parts of its records, this might influence what you decide to share.
GLOSSARY
Definition of terms used in this document.

**Accession:** (1) An object acquired by a museum as part of its permanent collection (Buck & Gilmore 1998:479); (2) the act of recording/processing an addition to the permanent collection (Nauert 1979); (3) one or more objects acquired at one time from one source constituting a single transaction between the museum and a source, or the transaction itself (Burcaw 1997).

**Accession number:** A control number, unique to an object, whose purpose is identification, not description (Nauert 1979).

**Accession records/register:** Accessioned objects should be recorded in the museum’s Accession Register. This is an unalterable written record of the museum’s collection and exists in addition to the catalogue or computerized database. It contains information relevant to ownership of the item—how and when it is acquired—and includes the initial storage location, the entry/lot number, the accession number, the date accessioned, the person or organization from which the item was received, a brief description (Paolini 2007:25).

**Acid-free materials:** Papers and other materials that are often pH neutral or alkaline buffered; could be any pH from 6 to 11 (Rose and de Torres 1992). These materials are used for museum storage and museum exhibition.

**AIC (American Institute for Conservation):** U.S. professional organization for conservators (AIC 2016).

**Archive:** (1) The records of an organization or institution that have been preserved because of their continuing value; (2) an agency responsible for selecting, preserving, and making available records determined to have permanent or continuing value; (3) a building in which an archival institution is located (Daniels and Walch 1984).

**Archivist:** An individual responsible for appraising, acquiring, arranging, describing, preserving, and providing access to records of enduring value, according to the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control to protect the materials' authenticity and context (Society of American Archivists website) http://www2.archivists.org/


**Climate control:** The ability to adjust and regulate the temperature and relative humidity of a particular environment (Nauert 1979).
**Collaborative conservation:** Process of decision-making through partnership with the appropriate source community individual(s) who possess the cultural expertise and responsibility for items being conserved. The possibility of a traditional treatment by a community member may be included in the range of options. Dialogues with conservators may focus on tangible, or physical, aspects of collections, such as materials, how things are made, indigenous repairs, past restorations, residues, and evidence of use, as well as intangible aspects of collections, including contextual information regarding original uses, meaning and significance, associated stories, and memories.

**Collections manager/care specialist:** “an individual who is trained and experienced in specific preventive care activities and who works in conjunction with or under the supervision of a curator” (AIC 2016).

**Community/Community members:** Here, tribes and tribal members as well as Native corporations.

**Condition report:** An accurate and informative account of an object’s state of preservation at a moment in time. It provides a verbal and/or visual description of the nature, location, and extent of any damage in a clear, consistent manner (Demeroukas 1998:223, quoted in Buck & Gilmore 1998).

**Conservation:** “The profession devoted to the preservation of cultural property” with “activities including examination, documentation, treatment and preventive care supported by research and education” (AIC 2016).

**Conservation documentation/reports:** Recording in a permanent format the information of activities related to the examination, analysis, treatment and preventive care of collections (AIC 2016).

**Conservation scientist:** “a professional scientist whose primary focus is the application of specialized knowledge and skills to support the activities of conservation in accordance with an ethical code, such as the AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines of Practice” (AIC 2016).

**Conservation treatment:** The stabilization and/or restoration of an object or work of art through physical or chemical processes (AIC 2016). Conservation treatment decisions may result in a range of actions from full restoration to no treatment at all. A no-treatment option may result in the deterioration of the physical object in accordance with the wishes of the source community.

**Conservator:** A professional whose job is to preserve cultural property “through specialized education, knowledge, training, and experience and in accordance with an ethical code such as the AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice” (AIC 2016).

**Consultant:** A person who provides expert advice. The term is customarily used in NAGPRA proceedings.

**Curator:** The professional who acquires, cares for, develops, and interprets a collection of artifacts or works of art (Ruge 2008:16).
**EA (Environmental Assessment) and EIS (Environmental Impact Study):** Two procedures required under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (2 U.S.C. §4321 et seq.) to assess the impact of federal undertakings on the physical, social, and cultural environment. See https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-national-environmental-policy-act

**Exhibit preparator/handler:** The person who supervises the installation of objects for museum exhibitions; plans and directs the fabrication, installation, and disassembly of temporary and permanent exhibits; coordinates the exhibit schedule; supervises installation/disassembly crew (Traditional Fine Arts Organization, Inc.).

**Exhibit designer:** The person who plans and implements the design of an exhibition, in collaboration with the exhibition curator and the museum team (Ruge 2008:23).

**ICOM (International Council on Museums):** See http://icom.museum/

**Intellectual property:** A group of intangible rights that protect creative works, including copyright, trademarks, patents, publicity rights, performance rights, and rights against unfair competition. Intellectual rights may be divided into industrial rights, which include patents, trademarks, industrial designs, and geographical indications, and copyright and related rights, which include the rights of reproduction, adaptation, distribution, exhibition, and performance, and moral rights (Society of American Archivists 2016).

**Media release forms, or media permission forms:** Consent to photograph, film, or videotape people, activities, materials, and so on, for nonprofit use. Participants sign the form to approve use of their image, voice, video, or words.

**Mission statement:** A brief statement that summarizes the museum’s reason for existence, typically including who we are, what we do, for whom we do it, and why we do it (Boylan 2004:209).

**Museum:** Any institution that stewards collections. ICOM’s definition is “a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM Archives 2016).

**Museum catalog:** Recording detailed information about individual items or groups of related items. The creation of a full record of information about a collections item, cross-referenced to other records and files (database, card, or ledger), including the process of identifying and documenting these objects in detail. The catalogue record allows you to assess what you have, what condition it is in, and where it is kept. It is the intellectual link to the physical specimen.
Museum directors have responsibilities that may vary depending on the mission of the museum and its scale. The director is in charge of the museum within the frame defined by its governing authority or board of trustees. The director plans and develops the strategic options to increase the museum’s profile and visibility. They are responsible for the collections and for the quality of services and activities of the museum. They provide professional, cultural, and managerial leadership and management (Ruge 2008:15).

Museum documentation: Documentation is the process of recording information about the collections for which a museum or cultural institution is responsible. Proper documentation allows a museum to know what it has in its possession, whether anything is missing, where objects are located, as well as to prove ownership of objects, and create and maintain information about collections (Paolini 2007:2).

Museum educator: The professional devoted to developing and strengthening the museum’s role by enhancing the visitors’ ability to understand and appreciate museum collections (Wikipedia 2016).

Museum records: All the information that allows a museum to properly care for and access their collection, including records to prove ownership, describe the material in the collection, document loans, and locate objects. Museum records ensure that museum collections are physically and intellectually available for collections management, interpretation, exhibition, and research. They give the museum accountability for its collection (NPS Museum Handbook, Part II, 2000, p. 1:2).

Museum vision statement: A declaration of an organization’s objectives, ideally based on economic foresight intended to guide internal decision-making (why and how). The vision statement indicates where the museum wishes to be in the future and provides a framework for growth (Wikipedia, 2016).


NPS: National Park Service. See www.nps.gov

Preservation: In museology, preservation covers all the operations involved when an item enters a museum—that is to say, all the operations of acquisition, entering in the inventory, recording in the catalogue, placing in storage, conservation, and, if necessary, restoration. The preservation of heritage generally leads to a policy which starts with the establishment of a procedure and criteria for acquisition of the material and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment, and continues with the management of those things which have become museum items, and finally with their conservation (Desvallées and Mairesse 2009:65).
Preventive conservation/preventive care: “The mitigation of deterioration and damage to cultural property through the formulation and implementation of policies and procedures for the following: appropriate environmental conditions; handling and maintenance procedures for storage, exhibition, packing, transport, and use; integrated pest management; emergency preparedness and response; and reformatting/duplication” (AIC 2016).

Provenance: The history of ownership of a valued item or work of art or literature (Merriam-Webster 2015).

Provenience: The origin or source for acquisition of items, such as in archaeological site location or the original source of the item. (Merriam-Webster 2015).

Registrar: A professional with broad responsibilities in the development and enforcement of policies and procedures pertaining to the acquisition, management, and disposition of collections. Registrars maintain records pertaining to the objects for which the institution has assumed responsibility. Registrars handle arrangements for accessions, loans, packing, shipping, storage, customs, and insurance for museum materials (Buck and Gilmore 1998:12–13).

Repository: A place for receiving and managing collections and making them available for curation and research.

Restoration: Treatment procedures intended to return cultural property to a known or assumed [original] state, often through the addition of nonoriginal material. This may include aesthetic or cosmetic treatment of objects (AIC 2016).

School for Advanced Research (SAR): See www.sarweb.org

Stabilization: Treatment procedures intended to maintain the integrity of cultural property and to minimize deterioration. (AIC 2016).

Stewardship: The activity of monitoring, supervising or managing of something, especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care; for example, the stewardship of cultural heritage resources


UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
REFERENCES

Definitions of conservation terminology: http://www.conservation-us.org/about-conservation/
definitions#.V4U8CHo2Zsk


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