

NATIONAL
MUSEUM
of the
AMERICAN
INDIAN

✶ Smithsonian

2022–2026 Strategic Plan



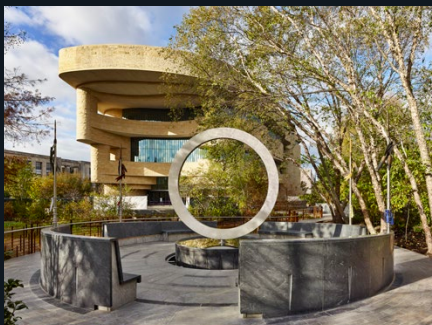
*Front cover: Emma Yattaue and Anthony Staccone, participants in the 2018 Native Knowledge 360° teacher institute, take in the central gallery of *Americans*. The exhibition shows how Americans have always been fascinated, conflicted, and shaped by their relationship to American Indians.*

Vision Statement

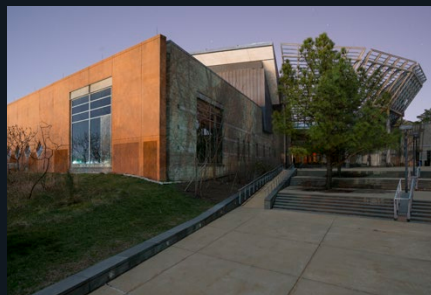
Equity and social justice for the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere through education, inspiration, and empowerment.

Mission Statement

In partnership with Native peoples and their allies, the National Museum of the American Indian fosters a richer shared human experience through a more informed understanding of Native peoples.



Washington, DC



Cultural Resources Center
Suitland, MD



New York City

MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR



Throughout the thirty-two-year history of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, and specifically during the many years I have served in a leadership role, we have tapped into our collective experience to navigate the path forward. Recently we have done so with increased urgency and heightened awareness of our mission. As we cope with the impact of a worldwide pandemic and sweeping societal change, we rely even more deeply on the knowledge of the museum's founders, staff, board of trustees, and Indigenous communities of the Western Hemisphere. Every decision is informed by our past and considers the museum's future. We have pushed the boundaries of what we thought we could accomplish and have a clear vision for continued success.

I am grateful to lead the museum with an incredibly talented team and am proud to share our next steps in strategic planning. Our areas of focus reach across disciplines, including collections management, information technology, volunteer corps development, scholarship, education, and fundraising. We are dedicated to thoughtful interpretation of our content, integrating the goals outlined here with our commitment to respecting and reinforcing traditional knowledge and Indigenous innovations.

The digital goals of this plan will enhance our reach while fine-tuning our ability to welcome and guide visitors within our facilities. They build on our recent successes in combating stereotypes and mascots through symposia, exhibitions, and online discussions with Native activists. We share in the communal struggles against environmental and human threats to Native people and lands, providing a forum for solutions. Focused on opportunities for advancing change, we feel a deep responsibility to convene critical conversations about social justice and provide access to accurate cultural narratives.

Central to the museum's mission are collaborations with Native and non-Native allies and advocates. We rely on these partnerships and encourage you to join us in providing the support critical to our work. We hope you will continue to engage with us in delivering precedent-setting messages of equity and diversity to visitors, fellow museums, and classrooms near and far.

Machel Monenerkit
Acting Director, National Museum of the American Indian

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY



The National Museum of the American Indian's people-first, collaborative approach has served as a model for the Institution, proven by its success in opening two museums and the Cultural Resources Center between 1994 and 2004. Partnerships with Native communities and respect for cultural knowledge have remained at the core of the museum's mission and are recognized by our colleagues around the globe as inherent aspects of all its work. This strategic plan unveils another chapter in the museum's history and demonstrates its continued alignment and deep engagement with the Smithsonian's goals.

The National Museum of the American Indian has long been at the forefront of the Smithsonian's dialogues on race, cultural exchange, and equity. Through its groundbreaking national education initiative, Native Knowledge 360°, the museum has begun to reconstruct cultural narratives for the benefit of K–12 students and educators across the country. Through curriculum development and partnerships, the museum embraces the Institution's goals for external collaborations. Its galleries present thought-provoking exhibitions that reveal our nation's complex backdrop of American Indian stereotypes while addressing the current struggles of tribal nations to uphold their treaty rights. The museum's commitment to social justice for Indigenous peoples guides its collections policies and ensures that its programs, symposia, and scholarly resources are presented from a Native perspective.

The museum has enhanced its digital capacity to reinforce its commitment to a broad national conversation that extends beyond the walls of its buildings. It remains focused on accessibility for all, consistently evaluating the various methods of visitor engagement. With a collection that spans more than fourteen thousand years and more than fifteen hundred Indigenous cultures across the Western Hemisphere, the museum seeks out collaborations to enhance its understanding of its objects and archives. The museum also mirrors the Institution's current priorities with its interdisciplinary approach to education, exploring topics within art, culture, science, and technology.

Although it is one of the Smithsonian's newer museums, the National Museum of the American Indian has deep experience in addressing difficult histories and contemporary issues, engaging with its audiences, and facilitating dialogue. As the Smithsonian launches new initiatives on our shared future, I look forward to our continued work together.

Lonnie G. Bunch III
Secretary
Smithsonian Institution

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



As a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, the People of the Big, the Strong, and the Sacred Voice, I am proud and humbled to follow in the footsteps of the passionate and community-driven leaders at the National Museum of the American Indian. Not long ago, these women and men came together with a vision to create the museum, and they used their voices to communicate positively and constructively for the benefit of a collective future. Those who serve on the Board of Trustees, past and present, well know the critical need to respect, understand, and preserve the true histories of Indigenous communities.

Great leaders are the most active supporters of their organizations' people and core missions. Our terms on the board are a clear reminder of the need to act swiftly and with conviction. We share with the museum staff the responsibility to encourage others and center voices that may not have been heard. This Strategic Plan is an example of how a museum can amplify the personal narratives that may have been hidden while also leveraging our well-known communal histories.

I am committed to advancing these Indigenous stories and voices, which are astoundingly diverse and come to the museum imbued with profound lessons. One of my goals is to engage more consistently with Indian Country, starting with our former trustees, to bring together ideas and encourage communication. Generational knowledge passed down in Native communities guides the museum's perspectives, decisions, and everyday practices, from collections handling to creating materials for its national education initiative. The lessons of past generations are worthy of preservation, and the museum's staff and leadership strive to sustain them in all we do.

I look forward to the realization of this plan's goals, the hallmark of which is celebrating Indigenous successes and impacts and addressing the challenges we all face. Fundamental to the necessary and critical conversations around inclusion, race, and engagement taking place at the museum is respect for every individual, nation, and culture.

Our voices as Indigenous people are foundational to the success of this great country and to the Americas as a whole. I invite you to engage with us at the National Museum of the American Indian and add your story to our collective histories.

Kathy Hopinkah Hannan, PhD (Ho-Chunk)
Chair, Board of Trustees
National Museum of the American Indian

Since its founding, the National Museum of the American Indian has sought equity and social justice for Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The museum has worked with Native people to uplift Indigenous voices, counteract inaccurate narratives, and center community inclusion. Yet a worldwide pandemic and protests against racial injustice as well as the continued exclusion of Native peoples from historical and contemporary narratives have made clear that more work is needed to effect real, meaningful, systemic change.

Central to the museum's mission is fostering a better informed, empathetic, and just society in which the cultures, histories, achievements, and perspectives of Native peoples are included, valued, and respected. This Strategic Plan is anchored in a series of focus objectives that are achievable within five years and sustainable into the future. These objectives are encompassed by one overarching goal: advancing equity and social justice with and for Indigenous peoples.

As the National Museum of the American Indian pursues this overall goal, it also commits to principles that will serve as touchstones and standards of excellence. It will consistently ask itself:

Are we confronting history to illuminate how entrenched systems have perpetuated injustice?

The museum commits to deconstructing and reconstructing accepted truths to counter inaccuracy and stereotyping. Its work will spark audiences' awareness, enhance their understanding, and compassionately inspire them to learn more.



The Native Knowledge 360° education initiative's online video *What Does a Beaver Felt Hat Have to Do with Manhattan?* explains for educators and students how beaver-fur trade during the 1600s between and Native and Dutch people established Manhattan as a center of global exchange.

Are we connecting conversations about the past to contemporary issues and cultures?

The museum will lead national and international conversations on equity and social justice. Facilitating meaningful dialogue among visitors, the museum will explore how Native histories resonate in the contemporary world.

Are we inspiring action and building a shared future together?

The museum will develop and share tools, approaches, and resources that can grow and support intergenerational communities of learners and doers. This work will emphasize empathy and community building.

ONE OVERARCHING STRATEGIC GOAL, THREE FOCUS OBJECTIVES

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

- 
1. Deconstruct and Reconstruct Cultural Narratives
 2. Champion Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion
 3. Convene Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations

1. Deconstruct and Reconstruct Cultural Narratives



In the *Native New York* exhibition, comic narrative panels offer fresh takes on common misperceptions about Native history.

Popular media and textbooks have exposed most people to incomplete or inaccurate portrayals of Indigenous peoples. The real stories are deeper, richer, and more nuanced. Complete and accurate narratives told from Native perspectives are urgently needed. The National Museum of the American Indian offers an unvarnished and multifaceted view of the role of Native peoples in U.S. and world history, including contributions to the arts, sciences, and literature. The museum challenges common assumptions, providing a view of the richness, vibrancy, and diversity of Native cultures, both of the past and today.

The museum will:

- ▶ Commit planning and resources to support the Smithsonian's Our Shared Future initiative on race, increasing awareness of stereotypical perspectives.
- ▶ Consistently evaluate its commitment to and practices of advancing equity, social justice, and shared understanding as it creates opportunities for continued engagement and diversification of programming.
- ▶ In alignment with its Interpretive Master Plan, establish thematic priorities that guide the museum's work across departments, while allowing for the flexibility needed to respond to current events.
- ▶ Elevate and expand accurate narratives about Indigenous peoples. The museum also will assert its expertise beyond the Smithsonian on issues relating to the presentation of Native cultures and contemporary life.



An interactive table in the *Native New York* exhibition's Onondaga Lake section tells how the Peacemaker brought together the Five Nations to form the original Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy.

2. Champion Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion



Educators Jennifer Baumgartner and Dr. Kehau Glassco (Native Hawaiian) participate in the 2018 Native Knowledge 360° teacher institute.

The National Museum of the American Indian embraces diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. While working to advance equity and social justice with and for Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere, it recognizes the humanity of all its audiences, collaborators, and communities. It commits to an inclusive approach to training, recruitment, philanthropic outreach, and public engagement.

The museum will:

- ▶ Build a workforce that reflects the country's evolving demographics and societal values, consistently monitoring progress.
- ▶ Develop strategic partnerships with other organizations to enable the understanding and adoption of benchmarks and inclusive practices.
- ▶ Engage new audiences by nurturing relationships with local Washington, DC, and New York City organizations that can link the museum and its mission to relevant issues in its surrounding communities.

Iroquois Nationals helmet, 2018; Lent by Jack Johnson (Akwesasne Mohawk)

Player Lyle Thompson (Onondaga) wore this helmet during the 2018 World Lacrosse Championship in Netanya, Israel. The *Native New York* exhibition shows how lacrosse continues to be an expression of sovereignty for Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) nations.



Rodslen Leeann King Brown (Black/Cherokee Nation, 1960–2020); *Lace Moxie Purse*, 2014; Oklahoma; Root runners, flat reed, dye, hide; 14 x 10 x 14 inches; 27/0589

An award-winning basket maker, Rodslen Brown was an outspoken advocate for Cherokee Freedmen descendants like herself. She is one of six Black-Indigenous women artists featured in the online exhibition *Ancestors Know Who We Are*, which focuses on artists whose work speaks to issues of race, gender, intersectionality, and community.

3. Convene Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations



Objects conservator Caitlin Mahoney films a beaded shoulder bag for a videoconference with members of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe.

Formed in 2020, the Virtual Engagement Working Group facilitates virtual visits to the museum's collections. The visits support conservation work and community collaborations when travel is limited.

To support its mission, the museum will establish, maintain, and expand on reciprocal partnerships that amplify the voices of Native people and the impact of collaborative programming. These partnerships will focus on enhanced digital access to the museum's collections and educational materials as well as those of other institutions. Key to this engagement will be partnerships that facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources among Native communities across the Western Hemisphere.

The museum will:

- ▶ Develop measurable, meaningful, reciprocal engagement with Native communities across all platforms and activities to increase dialogue, support youth, and develop a more inclusive workforce.
- ▶ Expand collections-access experiences to increase virtual engagement with Indigenous constituents.
- ▶ Promote Indigenous perspectives within the Smithsonian and across the museum field.

In 2018, five museum staff members traveled to Pueblo of Pojoaque's Poeh Cultural Center & Museum to conduct a workshop for Poeh staff on making exhibit mounts. Here Poeh Museum assistant Chaz Quintana (Pojoaque Pueblo) and collections manager Lynda Romero (Pojoaque Pueblo) discuss condition details of an *olla*, or jar.

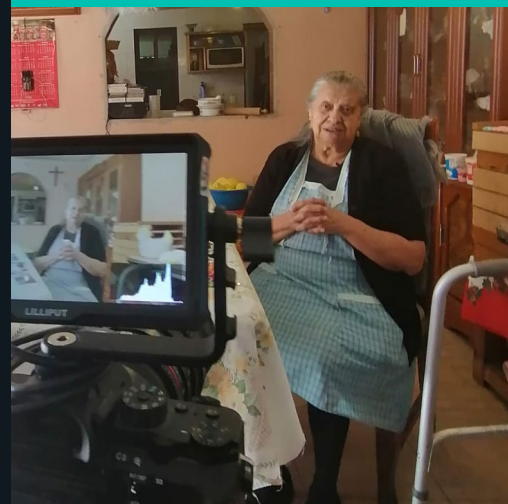




National Native American Veterans Memorial, Washington, DC, designed by Cheyenne and Arapaho artist Harvey Pratt and Butzer Architects and Urbanism.

BUILDING A SHARED FUTURE TOGETHER

In the documentary *The Sweet Story of Alfeñique*, Margarita Mondragón, a renowned Mexican sugar artist, discusses her work, a tradition central to Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations. In 2020 and 2021, with visitor access restricted because of the pandemic, the museum's programming staff took an array of events, festivals, and films online.



Master teacher Jeff Kānekaiwilani Takamine leads a *hula* performance. The museum's online video series *The Story of the Lū'au* explains the lū'au's unique position within Hawaiian celebrations and the importance of hula as an expression of cultural understanding.



To support its strategic goals, the museum must focus its internal culture on four fundamental practices: digital integration, audience engagement, increased impact, and nimble decision making. While there are milestones for each, progress toward our three focus objectives must also be measured against them. In everything we do, we will ask ourselves, “Is this audience-focused? What will be its impact? Have we considered both digital and onsite audiences? How can we focus themes consistently and respond quickly to emerging issues?” This internal shift in how the museum carries out its work is key to reaching our bold, strategic goal of advancing equity and social justice with and for Indigenous peoples.



In 2021, the museum honored the 60th anniversary of the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, held in Fairbanks, Alaska. Social media and editorial staff collaborated to feature the event both on Instagram and in *American Indian* magazine.

Digital Integration

The museum commits to expanding the benefits, capabilities, and integration of its digital tools and approaches to increase its reach, deepen its relationships, and evaluate experiences.

The museum will:

- ▶ Create plans that provide audiences with rich, inclusive experiences.
- ▶ Develop digital infrastructure to support ongoing program development and assessment.
- ▶ Develop and incorporate into work processes digital tools to facilitate closer coordination and long-term planning of the museum’s initiatives.

Audience Engagement

The museum commits to creating audience-centric experiences across a spectrum of ages and demographics, incorporating data and analysis into planning, development, and assessment.

The museum will:

- ▶ Create welcoming and powerful audience experiences for all its physical and virtual spaces.
- ▶ Expand and interact with audiences through outreach, cultivation efforts, and engagement strategies.
- ▶ Develop interpretive strategies that sustain and grow audiences across the demographic spectrum.

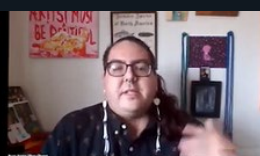


In 2021, The Other Slavery virtual symposium explored the hidden stories of enslaved Indigenous peoples, focusing on the impact of Spanish colonization on the present-day Southwest. In this session, an intergenerational panel explores how Genízaro identity is passed down from elders to younger generations. *Left to right:* moderator Patricia Trujillo with panelists Delilah, Virgil, Chavela, and Dexter Trujillo.

Smithsonian



Indigenizing Love: A Toolkit for Native Youth to Build Inclusion.
Published by Western States Center, 2019.
Indigenizando el amor: Herramientas de aprendizaje para jóvenes indígenas para forjarse la inclusión. Publicado por el Centro de los Estados del Oeste, 2019.



The museum's online Youth in Action series features young Native activists and changemakers from across the Western Hemisphere who are working towards equity and social justice for Indigenous peoples.

Above: Helena Gualinga, an environmental activist from the Kichwa Sarayaku community in Pastaza, Ecuador, shares an Instagram post in the bilingual "Environmental Justice in South America" program, 2021.

Left: Artist and advocate Ryan Young (Ojibwe) shares a resource during the "Indigenizing Pride" program, 2021.



Nimble Decision Making

The museum commits to improving processes and technologies for more responsive content and programming.

The museum will:

- ▶ Establish clear pathways for content development and deployment while focusing themes and messages more consistently across program platforms.
- ▶ Anticipate and respond to appropriate community, national, hemispheric, and global issues in a timely and sustainable way.
- ▶ Adapt and respond to changing audience needs across its physical and virtual spaces.



Increased Impact

The museum commits to conceiving, developing, and assessing programming by establishing clear, measurable criteria for desired outcomes.

The museum will:

- ▶ Develop and implement an evaluation framework that integrates audience data into content development and decision-making processes.
- ▶ Seek opportunities to compare itself to and learn from other organizations and sectors.
- ▶ Establish audience-centric desired outcomes and metrics of success for all its experiences.

Top: Manager of national education Edwin Schupman (Muscogee), left, and teacher services coordinator Renee Gokey (Eastern Shawnee), right, lead a group of educators on a tour of the museum's Cultural Resources Center during the 2017 Native Knowledge 360° teacher institute.

Above: Contractors Nora Frankel and Hannah Muchnik shelve recently rehoused textiles, helping to make them more accessible. Although the collections were closed to visitors in 2020 and 2021, staff at the Cultural Resources Center maintained pre-pandemic levels of care.

Right: Mile-marker post (detail), 2016–17; Standing Rock Sioux Reservation; North Dakota; Wood, paint, metal nails; Gift of Hickory Edwards (Onondaga) on behalf of the protestors; NMAI 27/31

In 2016–17 Indigenous people and their allies worldwide joined the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to protest a pipeline that threatened the tribe's land and waterways. To show how far some had traveled, they created this mile-marker post. In 2017, the post was added to the exhibition *Nation to Nation* as a contemporary assertion of tribal sovereignty.



El Wallpay Crew realizó un mural enfocando en temas como la violencia hacia la mujer y los derechos de la mujer.

Wallpay Crew created a mural focusing on themes like violence against women and women's rights.



Above: Kichwa of Otavalo activists Alexandra Imbaquingo and Sydney Males show the paint on their hands as they work in Otavalo, Ecuador, on a mural supporting women's rights. Sydney Males participated in the museum's 2021 Youth in Action program "Environmental Justice in South America."

Below: Miriam Leticia Campos Cornelio (Zapotec, b. 1982); Face Mask, 2020; San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, Mexico; Cotton cloth, polyester, thread, elastic band; 12 x 27 x 5.3 cm; 27/601



NATIONAL
MUSEUM
of the
AMERICAN
INDIAN

Smithsonian

IMAGE CREDITS | Front cover: Adapted from a photo by Matailong Du; 2, left to right: Alan Karchmer; NMAI staff; © David Sundberg/Esto; 3: Matailong Du; 4: Robert Stewart, Smithsonian Institution; 5: Courtesy of Kathy Hopinkah Hannan; 6: still from a video by NMAI staff; 8 top: Comic poster story by Lee Francis IV (Laguna Pueblo), art by Dale Ray DeForest (Diné); 8 bottom: Courtesy C&G Partners, exhibition designers; 9 top: Matailong Du; 9 bottom, left and right: NMAI staff; 10 top: NMAI staff; 10 bottom: Terrance Clifford; 11: Alan Karchmer; 12 top: Alejandro Ramirez Corona; 12 bottom: Courtesy of Orig Media/PA'I Foundation/Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian; 13: Courtesy of World Eskimo-Indian Olympics/Michael Dinneen, screen photo by Nancy Bratton; 14 top: NMAI staff; 14 middle: Screenshot by Nancy Bratton; 14 bottom: Courtesy of Ryan Young, screenshot by NMAI staff; 15 top: Matailong Du; 15 middle and bottom: NMAI staff; Top: Courtesy of Sydney Males, screenshot by Nancy Bratton; Above: NMAI staff; Design by Nancy Bratton

AmericanIndian.si.edu