

# Providing Culturally Responsive AND Ethical Access to Indigenous Collections

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**S**AA's Code of Ethics states, "Archivists promote the respectful use of culturally sensitive materials in their care by encouraging researchers to consult with communities of origin, recognizing that privacy has both legal and cultural dimensions." For repositories with Native archival materials, it's especially important to develop clear guidelines for handling material. Six archivists share how their repositories are shifting policies and practices to promote respectful use of Native archival materials.

## Building Collaboration into the Plan

*Melissa Stoner, University of California, Berkeley*

Thanks to advancements in digitization, institutions are able to make more collections accessible to more users. For many materials, however, librarians, archivists, and educators need to consider the complex issues of representation, the context of materials accessed online, and opportunities for collaborating with source communities, particularly when those communities are historically marginalized.

In the Ethnic Studies Library at the University of California, Berkeley, many of the collections are an important resource not only for student researchers but also for Tribal communities. As the library develops its new digital lab, which seeks to "digitize materials that represent the communities we serve," we have the opportunity to consult now with local Tribal communities regarding the digitization of culturally sensitive materials. Behind the content management systems and metadata, institutions should consult with Tribal communities to consider issues of access, navigating systems of power, and how the institution can best partner with the community—from the very beginning of a project.

## Drafting Guidelines for Cultural Stewardship

*Liza Posas, Autry Museum of the American West*

The 100-word statement that guides the Autry Museum of the American West's approach to cultural stewardship and ethical responsibilities was years in the making. This brief statement resulted from frequent discussions among Autry's archaeologist, archivist, and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act coordinator, often centered on the accessibility of archival holdings related to archaeological expeditions from the early to mid-1900s. They critically examined past researcher activities, exemplary work in the archaeology and archives professions, tribal

consultation, and administrative commitment to draft a guiding statement for the institution:

The Library and Archives of the Autry Museum works to preserve and provide access to collections through proper and ethical stewardship. We provide a wide range of access in order to promote scholarship and study. As stewards, we have also taken an active role in consulting with different Native nations and indigenous communities on how to best describe and manage holdings that contain culturally sensitive information or restricted tribal knowledge. As we foster these relationships, we have a responsibility to review upcoming publications that cite archaeological expeditions and other content that may contain restricted material. We also encourage researchers to foster similar relationships and practices.

This statement is now included in the library's access policy, researcher application, and reproduction policy. It also influenced similar statements, such as the following, to be drafted in collections care, loan agreement, exhibit, and imaging policies:

There is a long history of the circulation of imagery of Native American peoples who have been used as icons by non-Native image makers without their involvement, consent, or consultation. Many historical images may have been taken without the consent of those pictured. The Autry seeks to be more collaborative with Native peoples regarding the images in our care.

In order to use these images, we request that the researcher/requester consult with the [NAME OF TRIBE], or the descendants of those pictured.

These statements are not created lightly and cannot be done without interdepartmental

cooperation and consultation with Tribal communities. By providing transparent language and documenting intent in policies, we ensure regular review and decision-making guidance to our approach, and we challenge Autry staff to be conscientious stewards.

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## Implementing Cultural Sensitivity Guidelines

*Brian Carpenter, American Philosophical Society*

The American Philosophical Society (APS) is the continent's oldest repository of materials relating to the languages, cultures,

histories, and continuing presence of Indigenous peoples of the Americas. From 2011 to 2014, APS developed its own *Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials* through its Native American Advisory Board, composed of representatives of Native nations with whom APS has partnered, along with non-Native scholars and APS archivists. The *Protocols* were formally adopted as APS policy and recognize “the sovereign right of Indian tribes to protect culturally sensitive materials.” They provide guidelines for identifying and restricting the publication of culturally sensitive materials in the library’s collections and outline APS’s approaches to consulting and entering into agreements with Native nations.

The *Protocols* propose an ethical imperative for implementing culturally responsive policies in archives, but the experience of implementing them has demonstrated their concrete, practical benefits to other archival operations. The APS *Protocols* are publicly available, which serves to communicate APS’s awareness of these issues and gives greater transparency to its policies. By defining steps APS can take to heed guidance from Native nations, Native communities are more willing to collaborate through activities such as improving descriptions of archival collections and lending the expertise of Indigenous

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elders and language speakers. This gives the archives time to demonstrate commitment to an ongoing relationship, to learn and be guided by the community’s protocols for knowledge exchange, and to present materials in ways that can have a broader impact than standard reference request fulfillment with individual researchers. The results of these collaborations, enabled by transparent policy commitments, have mutually benefited APS and its Native partners, and in turn benefit the research public by enabling fuller and more accurate archival resources.

To learn more about APS’s implementation of the *Protocols*, see “Archival Initiatives for the Indigenous Collections at the American Philosophical Society,” Case 1 in SAA’s *Access Policies for Native American Archival Materials* (<https://www2.archivists.org/publications/epubs/Native-American-Archival-Materials-Case-Studies>).

## Decreasing Barriers to Access

**Diana Marsh, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, and Caitlin Haynes, Smithsonian Transcription Center**

The Smithsonian’s National Anthropological Archives (NAA)—part of the National Museum of Natural History—is one of the world’s largest repositories of anthropological and Indigenous archival materials. Over the years, NAA has worked to ensure ethical access to these collections by following the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* (<http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/>); collaborating with source communities; and revising collection descriptions,

digitization practices, and access policies. Yet more work remains. In an effort to better understand user needs and behavior, NAA began a three-year project in 2017 to study the difficulties that its users (primarily anthropologists and Native communities) have in discovering NAA materials and how NAA might improve collection representation and access.

Preliminary findings from the first phase of this study indicate that while all NAA users face barriers to locating and using collections, Native community members often encounter more challenges. Community-based researchers tend to search by cultural group names or subjects, rather than record creator, making it more difficult to locate relevant collections. Outdated descriptions and legacy metadata issues for NAA records often do not include correct or complete cultural terms. Furthermore, while NAA’s location in Suitland, Maryland, and the logistics of arranging a visit (e.g., required appointments, security clearance, physical distance) make in-person research a challenge for many users, source community members often face more barriers. Native users noted the lack of grants, fellowships, and other resources for research travel; the lack of bandwidth and in-home networks for online research in some communities; and the emotional difficulty of navigating ancestral records at a federal institution. One user commented that the colonial nature of the building’s security process evoked historical trauma.

Given these findings, NAA staff plans to improve its programs and the research experience for Native communities. Current researcher forms allow Native researchers to provide information on collections and note cultural sensitivity issues. NAA hopes to incorporate this knowledge into descriptive metadata and access policies. Staff is reviewing and updating data through a collections assessment, ongoing review of digitized content online, and the use of ethnonyms and cultural thesauri to enhance records. Community-based subject guides are also being created in conjunction with the Smithsonian’s Recovering Voices initiative and Native community members to facilitate community-based research.

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Future projects include updating NAA’s website, revising the appointment and orientation process, and developing additional resources for Native and non-Native researchers. We also hope to incorporate research findings into additional collaborative projects across the Smithsonian. Pan-institutional platforms like the Smithsonian Transcription Center and online galleries for digitized collections in the Smithsonian’s Collections Search Center provide opportunities for further collaborations with Native communities and for internal colleagues to responsibly increase access to Native American and Indigenous collections.

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### Finding New Approaches to Access

*Gina Rappaport, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution*

In addition to culturally sensitive materials, NAA holds collections containing other types of content with legal and ethical concerns for access. As the archives of anthropological study, or the study of human culture and biology, much of NAA's holdings include what is classified as "human subjects research data," as defined by the National Research Act of 1974 (Public Act 93-348; CFR Title 45, Subtitle A, Subchapter A, Part 46) which established protocols for the ethical study of human subjects.

Whether collected in compliance with this law or prior to it, the data within these collections typically contain:

- Personally Identifiable Information (PII) (information about individuals that can be used to distinguish or indicate an individual's identity);
- Sensitive PII (information which if lost, compromised, or disclosed without authorization, could result in substantial harm, embarrassment, inconvenience, or unfairness to an individual); and/or
- Private Information (information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information provided for specific purposes by an individual and that the individual can reasonably expect not to be made public).

Records at NAA containing human subjects research data include anthropological field notes, physical measurements, medical information, dermatoglyphics (finger, palm, and foot prints), psychological tests, and information that could

have a negative impact on individuals or communities if disclosed. NAA has historically closed access to this content until such a time as the human subjects involved can be assumed to no longer be living, however increased requests for access to this material prompted NAA staff to consult with the Smithsonian's General Counsel and Privacy Officer to explore ways that access could ethically be provided. Diana Marsh of the Smithsonian has suggested that perhaps archival researchers could undergo the same protocol as is currently required for carrying out Human Subjects Research: applying to the Smithsonian's Institutional Review Board for approval to view the restricted material. ■

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*This article originated as a session at ARCHIVES\*RECORDS 2018, the Joint Annual Meeting of CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA in Washington, DC, August 12–18, 2018.*

We used materials from numerous sources to tell this story from a variety of perspectives. Records from student groups and alumni collections provided student perspectives, highlighting social and cultural changes. Photographs from the Harvard News Office records, as well as from student and administrative publications, provided a visual record of the look and feel of the time. Faculty's personal archives offered a glimpse into the period's scholarly trends and scientific research, as well as the social activism (or aversion to change) that was interwoven socially and in pedagogy.

Showcasing materials from Harvard's institutional records created a framework for explaining reactions to social and cultural changes and the administration's struggle to provide support for the collective anguish surrounding the deaths of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, along with those brought about by strife during the civil rights movement and Vietnam War. Our exhibit also featured a digital display highlighting a montage of images from our collections, set to music of the time, and a video recording of Coretta Scott King giving that year's Class Day speech for her husband, who was to be the speaker at the event, just days after his assassination.

The historical exhibit provided a backdrop for developing the themes of our StoryCorps project, occurring in the University Archives during the week of the 2018 Commencement and reunion events for the Class of 1968. StoryCorps, an independent nonprofit oral history program whose mission is "to preserve and share humanity's stories," worked with the Harvard University Archives to interview fifteen pairs of alumni, faculty, family members, or friends of students from the Class to discuss shared experiences of events during that year. The three days of StoryCorps interviews spanned topics such as the Vietnam War, the women's movement at Harvard, the advent of coeducation at Harvard and Radcliffe, the civil rights movement, and an increase in campus protests about US political policy. The interviews were edited by StoryCorps and will be preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The University Archives will also receive a copy that can be accessed in our reading room.

Although the exhibit and StoryCorps project involved an immense amount of work and time, both were creative and powerful opportunities to illuminate the outreach and teaching possibilities for college and university archives collections. For the most part, the processes went smoothly—although scheduling alumni proved difficult and some members of the Class contacted us later to express their opinions of our choices of interviewees.

Regardless, a major takeaway for any college and university archives is that what is happening in universities and colleges at any given time is quite often a reflection of the social, cultural, political, scientific, and intellectual discoveries and events unfolding in the larger global community. Connecting our holdings with these events whenever possible helps us raise awareness of the unique resources on national and world events that might not be obvious from being classified as a "college and university archives." ■

*This article originated as a pop-up session at ARCHIVES\*RECORDS 2018, the Joint Annual Meeting of CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA in Washington, DC, August 12–18, 2018.*

