



Preservation through Partnership: Care of Culturally Sensitive Objects

Glenna Nielsen-Grimm, Natural History
Museum of Utah

Emily Johnson, Utah Division of Arts and
Museums

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11 am - 1 pm



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES



UTAHHUMANITIES
Ideas in Action



Utah Division of
Arts & Museums

PROGRAM OVERVIEW: Year at a Glance

~~1. ACCESS AND ARTIFACT HANDLING~~

JANUARY
FEBRUARY
MARCH

- Workshop (pt A & B)
- ~~1. Webinar~~
- ~~2. Webinar~~
- ~~3. Webinar~~

~~2. PRESERVATION IN STORAGE AND DISPLAY~~

APRIL
MAY
JUNE

- Workshop (pt A & B)
- ~~1. Webinar~~
- ~~2. Webinar~~
- ~~3. Webinar~~



3. ENVIRONMENT AND BUILDING SYSTEMS

JULY
AUGUST
SEPTEMBER

- Workshop (pt A & B)
- 1. Webinar
- 2. Webinar
- 3. Webinar

4. RISK MANAGEMENT, EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & DISASTER RESPONSE

OCTOBER
NOVEMBER
DECEMBER

- Workshop (pt A & B)
- 1. Webinar
- 2. Webinar
- 3. Webinar

GOALS

Gain a better
understanding of Key
Themes...



Key Themes

1. Increase understanding of types of “Culturally Sensitive” collection objects
2. Learn strategies for researching and approaching the use and preservation of culturally sensitive collections
3. Explore specific needs for the preservation of culturally sensitive objects
4. Learn about case studies as examples of sensitive and sacred collections

AGENDA

- Welcome!
- Introductions
- Housekeeping
- Format Explainer/Ground Rules
- Discussion



INTRODUCTIONS

Please tell us:

- Your name
- Your organization
- Are there objects in your museum collections that you think MIGHT be culturally sensitive or sacred? Why do you think that?



INTRODUCTIONS - Glenna Nielsen-Grimm, PhD

AS NHMU's Anthropology Collections Manager, Glenna Nielsen-Grimm, P.h.D., is responsible for the care of over one million objects that date as early as 10,300 BP and represent North America, South America, Mesoamerica, Pacific Islands, Middle East, Great Basin and Northern Colorado Plateau. She manages all aspects of care of ethnographic and archaeology objects from donated, state and federal collections housed at the museum.



WHAT IS CULTURALLY SENSITIVE OR SACRED?

A dictionary definition of the word *sacred* is: Dedicated, set apart, exclusively appropriated to some person or some special purpose.

Examples:

- Objects associated with death and burial
- Human remains
- Religious and ritual objects
- Secret/sacred objects
- Monuments?
- Tombstones?
- Politically or symbolically violent items or images? (ex: flags, photos of executions)



WHAT IS SACRED?

- Definition of sacred by NAGPRA (what is NAGPRA?)
- How do you determine the difference between contemporary craft traditions vs. sacred objects
- What are objects of cultural patrimony?
 - What is NARRC? Why does that exist?
- Be flexible! Guidelines may change over time, with different authorities or representatives



WHAT IS SACRED?

- Different definitions of *sacred*
 - NAGPRA definition
 - Glenna always asks “How was this used? Would you find it in the home?”
- Finding the best source and respecting the authority of the source community
 - Cultural Resource Officer?



WHAT IS CULTURALLY SENSITIVE?

- What is *culturally sensitive*? What concerns should we consider in displaying these?
- **Case study:** Veteran's flag
- **Case study:** Synagogue silver
- **Case study:** Headstones



DISCUSS

How do we know if these things are in our museum's collections?



WHAT ROLE DOES RESEARCH PLAY IN MANAGING SENSITIVE MATERIALS?

- **Case Study:** Cradleboards, Navajo baskets
- **Case Study:** Moccasins with beaded soles



DISCUSS

Have you changed your interactions with specific objects in your museum after learning new information?



WHAT ROLE DOES DOCUMENTATION PLAY IN MANAGING SENSITIVE MATERIALS?

- Database updates
- Notes, photos, collected documentation
- Critical handling or care alerts
- Leave a paper trail for collections stewards who come after you



DISCUSS

Are you documenting your collections research? How?



WHAT VALUE DO SENSITIVE MATERIALS HAVE TO COLLECTIONS?

- When are they not an asset? When to consider deaccession?
- Can they be researched? What can we learn from them?
- Can they be displayed?
- What is the most respectful choice?
- Be flexible! Guidelines may change over time, with different authorities or representatives



UTAH MUSEUMS SENSITIVE COLLECTIONS - GETTING STARTED

- We are working to make consultation with tribes a bit easier -- but this is work in progress.
- Identifying who the appropriate stakeholder is
- Community entities with less formal structure
- Seriousness of purpose
- Commitment to real engagement to build trust
- May need to be codified in policy to avoid changes when boards and staff change
- Starting with a basic inventory as a point to start
- Calling for help to get started



Summary

- Overarching ethical considerations and ways of approaching sensitive materials:
 - Museums acting in the public trust
 - Seeking community input
 - Learning about your objects through research
 - Documenting your objects and stakeholder-provided contextual information
 - Establishing significance

Address special needs for storage and display, where possible



Resources

- <https://guidelinesforcollaboration.info>
- NAGPRA and Utah NAGPRA
- American Association of Art Directors [Stewardship and Acquisition of Sacred Objects, 2006.](#)
- NARRC Committee -
indian.utah.gov/aboutus/native-american-remains-review-committee/



Thank you!

Glenna Nielsen-Grimm | gnielsen@nhmu.utah.edu

Emily Johnson | emilyjohnson@utah.gov
<https://artsandmuseums.utah.gov/utah-collections-preservation/>

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