



NATIONAL
MUSEUM
OF THE
AMERICAN
INDIAN

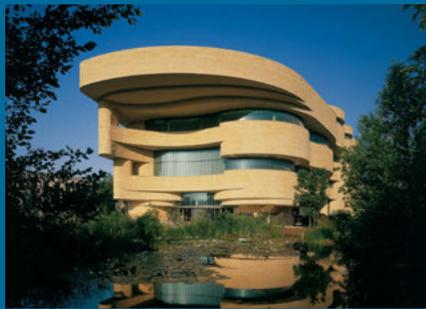
Strategic Plan

2017-2021

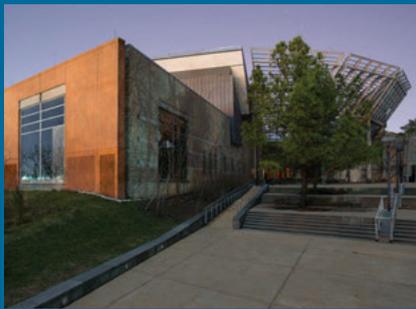


Mission Statement

The National Museum of the American Indian is committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere—past, present, and future—through partnership with Native people and others. The museum works to support the continuance of culture, traditional values, and transitions in contemporary Native life.



NMAI in Washington, DC



NMAI Cultural Resources Center
in Suitland, MD



NMAI in New York

Message from the Director



NMAI director Kevin Gover at the Indian Memorial, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency, Montana

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is an institution born out of necessity and committed to serving indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere in their continuing struggle for social, economic, and political justice. We seek to counteract ignorance and bias with knowledge and perspective. We believe in the American people and American institutions, and we are convinced that when they are properly informed, they will support programs, projects, and policies that promote the self-determination of Native Nations.

The National Museum of the American Indian is uniquely capable of improving and expanding what Americans learn about the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere. These histories and cultures have too often been devalued and distorted, so we partner with Native Nations to tell a more complete and accurate story. It is a complex story, and one that all peoples share. History has long been taught from a narrow perspective that overlooks and diminishes the contributions of many. In our diverse country, we must learn to present history with complexity, fearlessness, and integrity.

We seek to lead by example. Our objective is to change how and what Americans learn about Native American history and culture. If we do it well, we will change what Americans know, not only about American Indians but also about many diverse peoples throughout the world. We are fortunate to have allies in this endeavor, and especially fortunate to have colleagues throughout the Smithsonian Institution who support our efforts.

Changing what Americans learn is not the work of a single year, or five years, or ten. Rather, it is the work of generations of scholars and advocates. The objectives we set in this strategic plan are intended to build toward a time when visitors to our museums find stories about themselves and come away with a better understanding of how our country has evolved. Our job is to give voice to the perspectives of Native Nations on these matters and, in so doing, to help all who encounter our work understand that the Native American story is their story, too; see how Native American contributions helped make the world we know today; and experience more deeply their human connection to the first peoples of the Americas and their descendants.

Kevin Gover (Pawnee)
Director, National Museum of the American Indian

Message from the Secretary



Dr. David J. Skorton,
Secretary of the
Smithsonian Institution

The National Museum of the American Indian is an important and valued asset of the Smithsonian Institution. As the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and a trustee of the NMAI, I take great personal pride in seeing the continued success of this organization translate into a sustaining impact that is felt throughout the Smithsonian and beyond. The NMAI has a unique responsibility as a leader and a steward of our nation, the hemisphere, and underserved populations; it is a museum about people, and a reminder of what connects us all.

By encapsulating the vision of the NMAI's director, Kevin Gover, this plan serves as an inspired call to action that highlights the passion enlivening the everyday work of the museum. The NMAI is well positioned to achieve the goals articulated in the plan as the museum attracts ever wider public support and visibility. Each aspiration and objective reflects the commitment of the staff and trustees of the National Museum of the American Indian.

Work that is measured in generational change can be difficult to quantify. When we see that change begin to occur and accelerate, I know we will look back to this time and remember this moment of awareness and determination when together we decided on this path.

Along with the Smithsonian Board of Regents, I invite you to consider the far-reaching and future-looking goals of the NMAI for the next five years. The aspirations of the NMAI staff and their drive to succeed speak to the urgency and importance of their mission. Interpreting stories of marginalization and disenfranchisement can be challenging, but working toward a more inclusive and truthful narrative promises a future that benefits from the lessons of our collective past. Now, more than ever, the Smithsonian is focused on embracing the many facets of history from the most informed and broadest perspectives.

Dr. David J. Skorton
Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution

Message from the Chair



Brenda Toineeta Pipestem, chair of the NMAI's board of trustees and an associate justice on the Supreme Court of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

The National Museum of the American Indian is charting a course that pays equal respect to all facets of Native culture: history, artistry, intellect, and contemporary life.

In successfully blending the beauty of objects with the dignity of their creators, the museum has furthered our mission to elevate the true stories, the innovation, and the leadership of Native peoples beyond myth and stereotypes.

We will use lessons from the past to inform and enrich a dialogue about identity and social struggle in order to build greater awareness and inclusivity to reach a shared future. We will continue to develop relationships with Native peoples and provide a national forum to discuss issues important in Native life. Together we will fight injustice. We will support the work of tribes and communities to share their histories, hardships, and contemporary advances as we work to correct the misinformation and stereotypes in textbooks and popular culture.

We understand that our collective national culture is at its best when diverse voices are heard and understood. The National Museum of the American Indian is the institutional leader in the interpretation, research, and stewardship of indigenous material cultures and is a model of successful collaboration and partnership with Native peoples.

Our greatest contribution is to educate and inform all peoples. Through our enriched programming we will achieve our ambitious goals: to launch a nationwide education program of Native history and culture in classrooms; to engage audiences through groundbreaking exhibitions, programs, and symposia; and to expand online access to our collections.

Can a museum change the world? We will try. Over the next five years, the National Museum of the American Indian will educate, provoke, and demonstrate the context, artistic expression, and perseverance that define Indian Country and the impact Native peoples continue to have on the world.

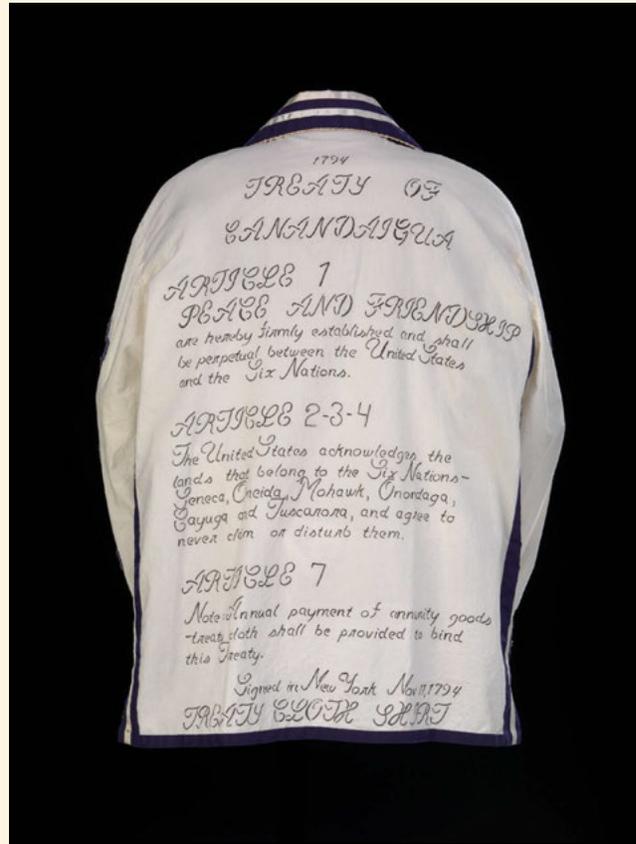
Brenda Toineeta Pipestem (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians)
Chair, NMAI Board of Trustees



In April 2014, the Cowboy-Indian Alliance—representing ranchers, farmers, and tribal communities along the proposed Keystone XL pipeline route—staged a week-long protest in Washington, DC. The Alliance commissioned artist Steven Tamayo (Sicangu Lakota) to create this tipi cover to honor President Obama, and then presented it to the NMAI (26/9288). Protest items collected by staff represent the museum's efforts to document contemporary Native lives and issues.



FROM LEFT: Steven Tamayo and NMAI curator Emil Her Many Horses (Oglala Lakota) examine the painted tipi door.



TOP: Carla Goodleaf Hemlock (Kahnawake Mohawk, b. 1961), *Treaty Cloth Shirt*, 2012. Muslin, cotton cloth, synthetic ribbon, glass beads, quahog clam shell beads (purple wampum), thread, ink, 90 x 133.5 cm. 26/9144

The NMAI's exhibition *Native New York* not only engages the public but also serves as an authoritative resource for educators to enrich their curricula about the Native peoples of New York State.

BOTTOM: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish, b. 1940), *Trade Canoe: Adrift*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 102 x 305 cm. 26/9791

Through exhibitions, publications, and acquisitions, the NMAI's contemporary art program strives to recognize renowned artists and provide a platform for emerging artists working in a wide range of challenging and thought-provoking media.

Why Us? Why Now?

Students from Kenmore Middle School in Arlington, Virginia, learn about the 19th-century removal of American Indians from their homelands. The new online lessons are part of Native Knowledge 360°, the NMAI's national initiative to improve classroom education about American Indians.

The National Museum of the American Indian has had a transformative effect on the way the histories and cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere are presented in museums. Museums have adopted new practices based on our simple insistence that Native people are the leading authorities on their own cultures and materials. Responsible historians no longer write as if American Indians have disappeared. There are more tribal and Native community museums now than ever before. They are collecting, researching, and sharing compelling histories and cultural insights with a broader public.

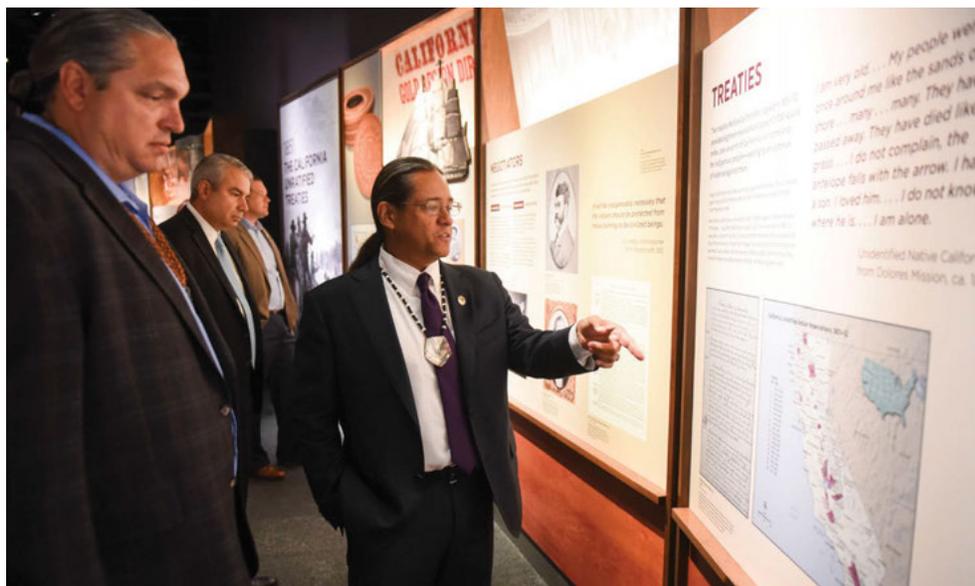


There is much more to be done. Negative stereotypes of Native people remain common in popular culture worldwide. Inaccurate and incomplete versions of history still prevail in classrooms. These realities profoundly affect Native youth and Native Nations.

The NMAI must expand its capacity to reach larger audiences. We must leverage the Smithsonian Institution's well-known scholarly integrity to bring Native perspectives and content to classrooms throughout the United States. We must develop groundbreaking exhibitions that deliver history, culture, and art in an introspective, inclusive, and rigorously honest way. We must



Dr. Maylei Blackwell of the University of California at Los Angeles speaks at the “Strong Women/Strong Nations: Native American Women and Leadership” symposium, March 2016. The NMAI’s seminars and symposia provide a national forum for discussion and dialogue.



The exhibition Nation to Nation features a rotating selection of original treaties loaned by the National Archives. In September 2016, tribal chairman Mark Macarro, right, and tribal council member R.J. Munoa (both of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians), left, and John Plata (Comanche), tribal counsel for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, tour the gallery during the first public viewing of California Treaty K. Never ratified by the U.S. Senate, Treaty K left the Native people who signed it without legal protection.

expand our online presence to become a leading resource for information about the histories, cultures, and artistry of Native Americans.

The NMAI must also work to further empower our allies—tribal and regional museums, Native Nations, cultural organizations, the education community, and others—in this effort. We must increase our efforts to make our collections available for use and exhibition in tribal and regional museums, as well as to scholars both in person and online. We must provide forums for presenting the research of the growing number of scholars of Native America.

We must participate in and even provoke candid and inclusive dialogues on the history of the Americas and the people who live here.

We see clearly the need for ongoing conversations about the persistence of social, economic, and racial inequalities in the nations of the Western Hemisphere. We believe that these problems cannot be resolved without deep and broad understanding of their historical origins. We must be generous and brave in embracing all aspects of history.



Artist Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee), left, discusses an artwork treatment plan with conservator Kelly McHugh. The NMAI’s conservation department works with artists not only to prepare their work for exhibition but also to preserve their artistic legacy.

PRIORITY I. Engage

Strengthen and sustain relationships with Native people and the broader public.

To this end, we will:

- ▶ Enhance our reciprocal relationships with the indigenous peoples of the Americas, including communities, educators, advocates, artists, and Native Nations.
- ▶ Reunite Native communities with elements of their heritage under our care through long-term loans, digital access, study visits, and repatriation.
- ▶ Using the best practices of visitor research, collect data to understand our audiences' baseline knowledge, measure our success, and improve the impact of our initiatives.
- ▶ Leverage the respected reputation of the Smithsonian to engage the media and the public.
- ▶ Prioritize the development and delivery of digital content to expand worldwide access to the museum's resources and to provide enhanced learning experiences for students and lifelong learners.
- ▶ Broaden our impact on young learners by increasing school visitation and providing rich interactive and personal experiences for them.
- ▶ Work with leaders and artists to document contemporary Native life and collect Native art for future generations.

Fifth graders from Fredericksburg Academy in Virginia explore *The Great Inka Road: Engineering an Empire*. Bilingual, hands-on activities reveal the engineering feats of indigenous peoples throughout the Inka Empire.



PRIORITY 2. Inform

Inspire a citizenry of informed, critical thinkers to understand the complexity and scope of the American Indian experience.

To this end, we will:

- ▶ Lay a foundation of widespread, inclusive, and accurate knowledge through symposia, exhibitions, public programs, digital resources, and publications.
- ▶ Change what educators and students learn about Native American histories and cultures through a national education initiative that provides teaching materials and training to foster new perspectives.
- ▶ Adopt methods of interpretation that achieve a deep personal connection with visitors in order to enhance learning.
- ▶ Develop complex, integrative narratives about indigenous history and culture by collaborating with Native peoples.
- ▶ Bring to a wide audience the best of Native visual and performing arts.

The imagiNATIONS Activity Center storybook program invites families to listen to traditional Native stories, discuss related objects, and view photographs that deepen their understanding of indigenous cultures.



Cultural interpreter coordinator Mandy Foster (Mnikowoju Lakota) leads a tour of the *Nation to Nation* exhibition. The NMAI's cultural interpreters provide a uniquely Native American perspective for visitors.

PRIORITY 3. Excel



The museum's interpretive services program hosts professional development sessions to encourage staff learning and community.

Encourage an organizational culture that embraces institutional change and meets challenges on the path towards excellence.



In 2016, the U.S. Green Buildings Council recertified the NMAI in Washington, DC, at its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) gold level. Maintaining certification—and seeking it again in 2022—is one way the museum holds itself accountable for environmental sustainability.

To this end, we will:

- ▶ Investigate the past and present experiences of indigenous peoples in the Americas through groundbreaking scholarship.
- ▶ Systematically collect and use data to monitor internal practices, build staff competency, and inform planning and decision making.
- ▶ Through active leadership, inspire staff creativity, experimentation, and innovation in order to help the institution learn, evolve, and grow.
- ▶ Enhance our outreach efforts to enlist new donors and create easier ways to give.
- ▶ Develop internal talent, grow diversity and inclusiveness, and increase employee satisfaction.
- ▶ Cultivate high-performing advisory and governing boards, communicate to them effectively, and draw upon their skills and advice.
- ▶ Strive to adopt the best technology to support the museum's mission.
- ▶ Increase efforts to reduce our impact on the environment.



Sicangu Lakota cultural expert Duane Hollow Horn Bear speaks to NMAI staff, including Diana Gabler, Mellon Fellow in Object Conservation, about the components of an eagle-feather headdress once owned by Hunkpapa Lakota war chief Rain in the Face (20/1419). This interdisciplinary workshop—involving conservation, collections, curatorial, film, and education staff—was part of the museum's ongoing collaboration with Native knowledge keepers to enhance care and understanding of the collections.

PRIORITY 4. Advocate

Expand our impact by leading change beyond our own walls.

To this end, we will:

- ▶ Lead national and international dialogue about present, past, and future issues of significance to indigenous communities.
- ▶ Partner with others to educate the public about the importance of respect for the cultural patrimony of indigenous peoples and to improve protocols and policies for repatriation.
- ▶ Recognize and support the work of Native contemporary artists through scholarship, symposia, publications, and exhibitions.
- ▶ Train and mentor future generations of museum professionals to care for and interpret Native cultural material.

LEFT: Reuben Martinez (Pojoaque) from the Pueblo of Pojoaque's Poeh Cultural Center and Museum discusses loan selections with NMAI assistant director for collections Cynthia Chavez Lamar (San Felipe/Hopi/Tewa/Navajo). Artists and Poeh Center staff selected 100 ceramic pots for a long-term loan that will return the objects to a community near where they originated.

RIGHT: In May 2016, the NMAI hosted a press conference to denounce the sale of Native American human remains and sacred objects by a Paris auction house. Officials from the Pueblo of Acoma; Hoopa Valley Tribe; U.S. Congress; Department of State; Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs; National Congress of American Indians; and Association of American Indian Affairs issued a joint statement in protest.



In the next five years, we will:

- ▶ Host ten million visitors.
- ▶ Open five permanent exhibitions to offer a broad history of the indigenous experience in the Americas and vibrant educational spaces for school audiences.
- ▶ Launch our national youth educational initiative, Native Knowledge 360°, by producing 12 instructional units and a variety of other materials, distributing them online and in print, and using multiple approaches to train teachers in their use.
- ▶ Develop initiatives specific to communities in Washington, DC, and New York City.



Navajo Code Talker Thomas Begay greets the Native American Women Warriors color guard to celebrate the launch of the NMAI's National Native American Veterans Memorial project, Veterans Day 2016.

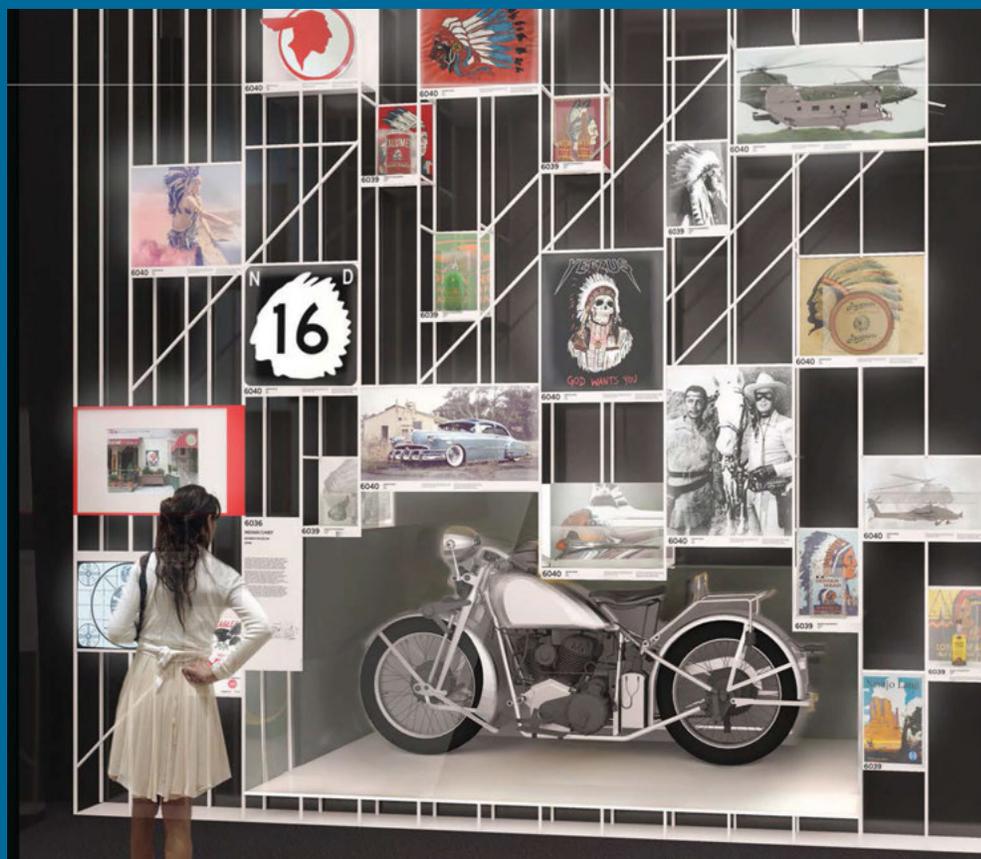
- ▶ Evaluate our programming to ensure meaningful impact.
- ▶ Enhance access to the museum's collections by presenting appropriate materials online and by making three major loans from our collections to tribal and regional institutions, placing objects closer to their locations of origin.
- ▶ Honor Native American veterans by unveiling a National Native American Veterans Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, DC.
- ▶ Help to create, in collaboration with other institutions, a training program for aspiring Native American museum professionals.
- ▶ Amplify the civic discourse on issues affecting Native Americans by conducting twenty seminars and symposia on matters of public interest.
- ▶ Increase the pace of our repatriation efforts and be an example to other museums and the international community in the conduct of relations with Native people.
- ▶ Decide all existing issues concerning the return and reburial of human remains in our collections.
- ▶ Implement emerging technologies that enhance our ability to advance our mission.
- ▶ Raise \$60 million to support our goals and mission, and grow endowment funds to support the future work of the museum.
- ▶ Increase NMAI membership to fifty thousand.



Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), a Mesoamerican celebration to honor loved ones, features dancing, a traditional ofrenda (altar), and music.



New York City teachers learn about the relationship between Native peoples of the Northeast and the Dutch in a workshop about the 17th-century Atlantic fur trade.



Americans have always been fascinated, conflicted, and shaped by their relationship to American Indians. The NMAI's exhibition *Americans*, opening in 2017, demonstrates this by exploring the ongoing significance of four familiar events in U.S. history: Thanksgiving, the life of Pocahontas, the Trail of Tears, and the Battle of Little Bighorn.



Native people were the original innovators of the Americas. Students will discover examples of ingenuity from the Arctic to the Andes when the new imagiNATIONS Activity Center opens at the NMAI in New York in 2018. Activities such as building a suspension bridge, planting an agricultural field, and doing Maya math will teach both STEM skills and cultural knowledge.



Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian

National Museum of the American Indian
P.O. Box 37012
Washington, DC 20013-7012
Phone: 202-633-6700
AmericanIndian.si.edu

Photos

Alex Jamison: front cover, 6, 9
©Max MacKenzie: inside front cover
©David Sundberg/Esto: inside front cover
Kevin Wolf/AP Images: 7