



NAGPRA Procedures Update

Effective immediately, Ohio History Connection has instituted a moratorium on all research access to ancestral human remains. No new research requests will be considered at this time. Research projects that are in progress may continue until completion of the approved phase, but won't be extended under the moratorium. The moratorium will remain in effect until we have updated our procedures for research on ancestral human remains, in line with federal law and in consultation with the historic Tribal Nations affiliated with the State of Ohio.

We expect that new procedures will be shared in summer 2021.

NAGPRA Procedures Update FAQ

February 2021

What is NAGPRA?

The Native American Graves Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was established in 1990 to address an historic injustice perpetuated against American Indians by collecting entities such as universities and museums. It provides for the repatriation and disposition of Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural importance.

Through this federal law, Congress recognized that human remains of any ancestry "must at all times be treated with dignity and respect." Congress also acknowledged that human remains and other cultural items removed from Federal or Tribal lands belong, in the first instance, to lineal descendants, Tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations. NAGPRA encourages a continuing dialogue between museums and Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations to promote a greater understanding between the groups.

What tribes have connections to Ohio?

There are [45 federally-recognized](#) Tribal Nations connected to Ohio through ancestral homelands, historic sites and treaties. Many Tribes were forcibly removed from Ohio in the mid-19th century under Indian Removal policies. While these Tribes are now located in states across the country, we still regularly work with our Indigenous partners on historic site interpretation, exhibit planning, collections research and other projects. We also host a Tribal Nations Conference each year.

What procedures are you implementing? Why?

We recognize that in the past, we rarely included Indigenous communities in decisions made about, and the care and presentation of, their ancestors and belongings. Specifically, when we completed inventories under NAGPRA law in the 1990s, we did so without consultation. We are revising our standards to implement consultation on all the ancestral human remains and other NAGPRA-eligible categories of materials held by the Ohio History Connection.

We will establish a process for reviewing all Indigenous ancestral human remains, funerary objects, and belongings in consultation with historic Tribal Nations affiliated with the State of Ohio.



What does “consultation with Tribal Nations” mean?

Consultation is the proactive process of seeking input from appropriate American Indian governing bodies, community groups and individuals on issues that have Tribal implications. The consultation process allows us to include the expertise of Ohio’s Indigenous communities as we design exhibits, interpret historic sites and compile collections research, allowing us to tell an authentic and complete Ohio history.

In the past, our organization has shown preference towards scientists to gain understanding and context on ancestral human remains and funerary objects. To align more fully with the goals outlined in NAGPRA, we are shifting our focus to prioritize Indigenous knowledge and decisions as they relate to the care and disposition of these NAGPRA-eligible individuals and items.

How long will this take to implement?

It’s our goal to have the new procedures fully implemented by January 2021, and the process of consultation and repatriation completed within ten years, by January 2031.

Have other museums adopted similar procedures?

Yes. Many U.S. museums are working to change their procedures related to Indigenous cultural resources. The San Diego Museum of Man, Field Museum in Chicago, Burke Museum in Seattle, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC and the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor are a few that have adopted new policies.

I have more questions. Who do I contact?

For questions about these procedures, please contact Nekole Alligood, nalligood@ohiohistory.org, NAGPRA Specialist