

Kansas City Museum's Process of NAGPRA Repatriation

The Kansas City Museum is in the process of repatriation of American Indian materials held in the Kansas City Museum collection. The process is lengthy and ongoing. The Kansas City Museum is 100% in compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), but more importantly, the Museum is following all the requests made by specific American Indian tribes, nations, and villages. Some of these include requests about how the Museum should care for ancestors that are in the Museum's temporary care, not custody. These ancestors do not belong to the Museum and will be returned to their homelands.

The Kansas City Museum's policy is to let the tribes, nations, and villages determine how they want to proceed with every aspect of repatriation.

According to the [U.S. National Park Services Website](#), "Since 1990, Federal law has provided for the repatriation and disposition of certain Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. By enacting NAGPRA, 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, Indian Tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations. With this law, Congress sought to encourage a continuing dialogue between museums and Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations and to promote a greater understanding between the groups while at the same time recognizing the important function museums serve in society by preserving the past."

The process of repatriation is roughly as follows for the Kansas City Museum:

- 1) We make a list of what may be an ancestor and what might have been associated with burial ceremonies or any other spiritual function. In the legal language, even one bone is referred to as an individual. The Kansas City Museum currently cares for 20 individuals, under this definition. The Museum is actively working on repatriation.
- 2) Once the draft inventory is done, copies are sent both to the National NAGPRA office and to the appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs). Part of the job of the Kansas City Museum's Curator of Collections is to scour information looking for any tribal group, nation, or village that may have at any time had a connection with the area where the ancestor was found.
- 3) After this information is sent out, the tribes, nations, and villages have time to review the information, request any other records that we might have, and establish a working relationship with us. This takes time, and we respectfully "move at the speed of trust."
- 4) Next, the tribes, nations, and villages respond with a "yes" or "no" on whether they want to consult with the Curator of Collections to determine the exact affiliation of the ancestor, if not known.
- 5) All of the tribes, nations, and villages who want to consult on a particular ancestor, to determine where that individual needs to be properly put to rest, meet with the Kansas City Museum. The Curator of Collections answers questions during the meeting, but more importantly, the representatives discuss the details and come to a decision together. Once the representatives decide the affiliation, that tribe, nation, or village makes a formal written request for repatriation and the Kansas City Museum fulfills that request by publishing the intent in the Federal Register and then following the specific tribal requests.

For additional information and inquiries, please contact Lisa Shockley, Curator of Collections, at lshockley@kansascitymuseum.org.