



# **ANNUAL REPORT 2019**

**Smithsonian Institution  
Office of International  
Relations**



# OUR MISSION + VISION

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*Greater Reach. Greater Relevance. Profound Impact.*

These ideas guide the Smithsonian in its ambitious mission to pursue “the increase and diffusion of knowledge” for all people. Working on all seven continents and in more than 140 countries, we are a truly global organization, uniquely positioned to collectively harness our worldwide networks, partnerships, and knowledge.

*“The breadth of the Smithsonian is part of the wonder of it.”*

— Lonnie G. Bunch III, 14th Secretary of the Smithsonian

The Office of International Relations (OIR) works to support the Institution’s mandate by linking the deep expertise of the Smithsonian’s body of researchers, curators, educators, and professionals with partners and colleagues around the planet. It is through our collections, deep research, and strategic partnerships that the Smithsonian can most effectively address our world’s increasingly complex challenges—and also stimulate truly meaningful, lasting impact across the globe.

## OIR works to fulfill its mission in four priority areas:

- **Managing Smithsonian Global Engagement**
- **Promoting Smithsonian Global Thought Leadership**
- **Supporting Smithsonian Global Programs**
- **Coordinating Smithsonian Global Operations**



The 2019 Smithsonian Office of International Relations team.  
Photo: Smithsonian Global



# MANAGING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

“The worth and importance of the Institution is not to be estimated by what it accumulates within the walls of its building, but by what it sends forth to the world.”

— *Joseph Henry, first Secretary of the Smithsonian (1850)*

When we at the Smithsonian (SI) join together with our colleagues at home and abroad, we collectively transform big ideas into bold action and deeper impact.

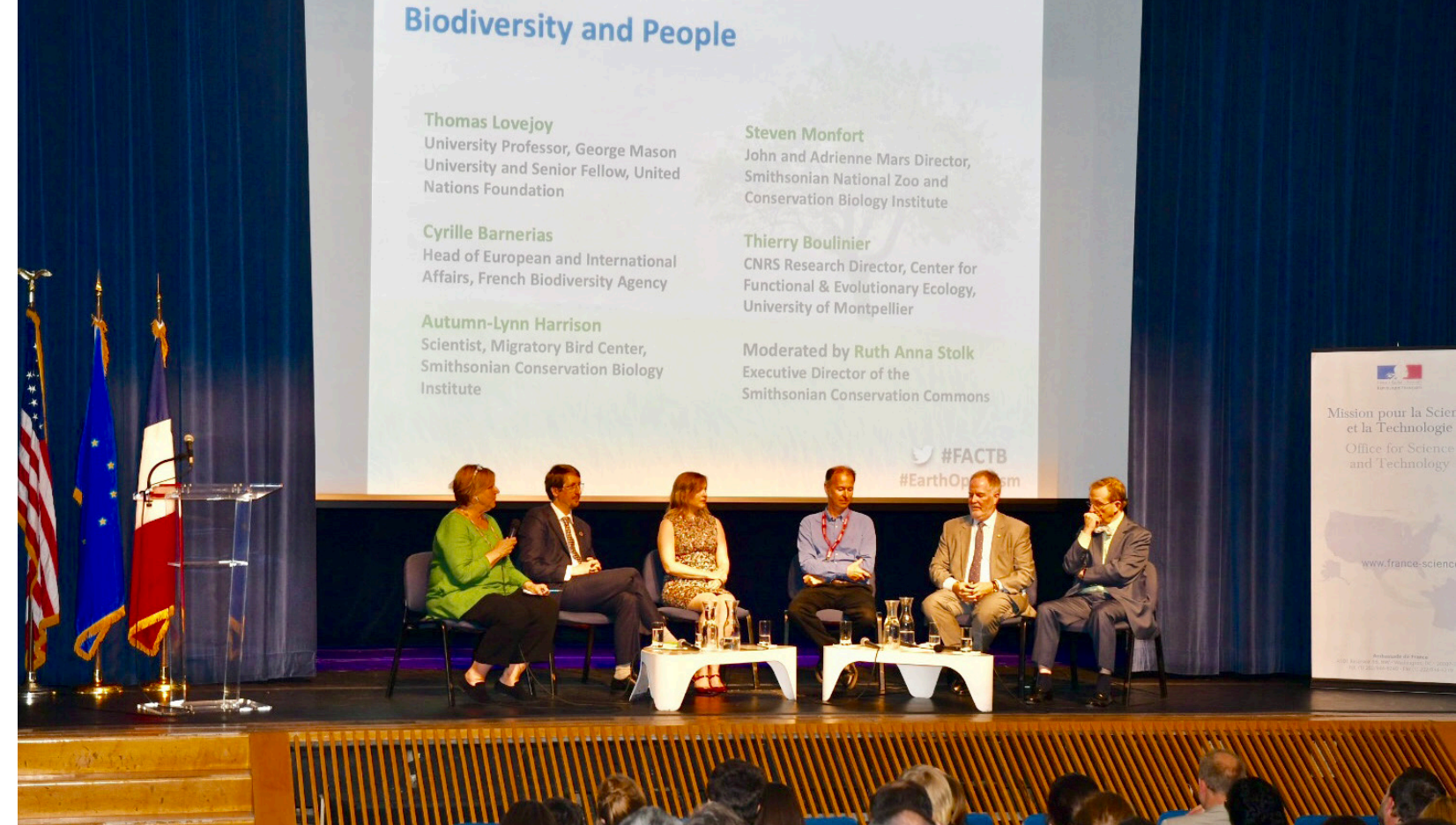
To advance our mission of forging and strengthening international partnerships, OIR manages many strategic relationships with key institutions, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and multilateral entities, and shares information across the Smithsonian about major international programs and priorities.

## New Partnerships

In 2019, OIR continued developing new relationships to support the Smithsonian’s work across disciplines. As part of OIR’s work supporting the Smithsonian’s **Conservation Commons (CC)** network, OIR expanded SI’s collaboration with the French government to advance our mutual goals of biodiversity conservation and fighting climate change.

In April, the Smithsonian and the **Embassy of France** co-hosted “The Night of Biodiversity” in Paris in collaboration with the French Foundation for Biodiversity

Research and others, presenting innovative scientific solutions in the field of biodiversity conservation. In June 2019 the Smithsonian was invited to speak at the launch of the **French-Ameri-Can Climate Talks-Biodiversity (FACT-B)**, a science diplomacy initiative developed by the French government to elevate the issue of biodiversity on the global agenda. Building on the momentum around the Smithsonian’s Earth Optimism initiative and the shifting narrative towards action and opportunity, the Smithsonian will continue to work closely with its French partners at the **2020 International Union**



The French-Ameri-Can Climate Talks - Biodiversity (FACT-B) event “Is There Hope?”  
Photo: Embassy of France in the U.S.

**for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress** in Marseille, France.

As co-chairs of the **Consortium of Scientific Partners**, a global network of leading institutions with expertise in the field of biodiversity, OIR and CC co-organized two side events at the **United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity** meeting in Canada in November. The events focused on multidisciplinary approaches to biodiversity conservation with diverse perspectives from museums, research institutes, policymakers, indigenous leaders, NGOs, and youth representatives, and provided scientific and policy recommendations for the new

biodiversity framework which is set to be adopted in 2020.

OIR is also leading a new relationship with the country of Qatar so that the Smithsonian can be a key partner for the **Qatar-U.S. Year of Culture in 2021**. The Year of Culture will showcase Qatari cultural practices, contemporary artists and innovation through a range of exhibitions, public programs, and more, in partnership with multiple Smithsonian units. SI joined an Arts and Culture delegation to Doha in November 2019 to experience its new museums, national library, universities, and cultural sites.



## Embassy Hubs for Coordinated Engagement

The Smithsonian works in over 140 countries, many of which have diplomatic missions in Washington, DC. OIR is developing a **diplomatic corps strategic framework** to more deeply engage with these missions. This framework will feed into a larger strategy for the whole Smithsonian to identify priority areas for collaborative opportunities. OIR aims to deepen existing embassy relationships, cultivate new ones, and provide comprehensive insight into the diplomatic corps in a way that is beneficial for all of SI. Ongoing efforts include strategic discussions with the **embassies of Brazil, China, Colombia, France, Qatar, Germany, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates**. Targeted outreach included a briefing on opportunities to participate in the Earth Optimism initiative, attended by four ambassadors and diplomatic staff from 12 countries.

## Transatlantic Seminar for Museum Curators and Educators

How do museums serve as spaces for social discourse and learning? In November of 2019, the Smithsonian hosted a group of German and U.S. curators and educators to deepen international understanding, discuss critical issues, and support hands-on professional development. During four days of discussions and presentations, the 26 seminar participants dove into salient topics for museums – diversity, equity, accessibility, inclusion, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Particularly relevant themes were the role of national missions in an increasingly globalized world and the decolonization of museum practice.

Developed in partnership with **Germany's Leibniz Association** and **Fulbright Germany**, the seminar furthered the role of the Smithsonian as a valuable convener, and supported higher-level relationship cultivation with these two organizations.

Transatlantic Seminar for Museum Educators participant Samuel Black, Director of African American Programs at the Senator John Heinz History Center. Photo: Mike Maguire



Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board Meeting at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Photo: Grace Goulding

## Fulbright Partnership

In the fall of 2019, OIR hosted its first Fulbright Fellow. Fernando Sanchez, a **Fulbright-Creative Ireland Museum Fellow**, represented a growing cohort of Fulbright scholars, both coming into and fanning out from the Smithsonian.

In April 2019, the Smithsonian renewed its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the **J. William Fulbright Program**, the U.S. government's premier international academic exchange program. The **MOU, signed by the Smithsonian, the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Board**, aims to increase the number of Fulbright participants affiliated with the Smithsonian and to ensure more participant diversity and program impact. The MOU ensures an ongoing effort to expand international academic exchange opportunities by taking advantage of existing relationships and building new partnerships in key research areas.



# PROMOTING SMITHSONIAN GLOBAL THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

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With thousands of scientists, curators, researchers, historians, and scholars, the Smithsonian is a deep repository of knowledge. Our world-class professionals are a trusted source of expertise, inspiration, and innovation.

That reputation enables us, as an institution, to stimulate discussions around the big questions that affect us all. Working closely with Smithsonian leadership, OIR facilitates conversations on these critical issues between our experts and partners around the globe, with the aim of multiplying success, enacting sustainable change, and turning ideas into reality.

OIR strives to bring Smithsonian expertise to critical platforms and global stages where we can move the needle on issues as diverse as climate change, accessibility, biodiversity conservation, and cultural heritage protection.



The Smithsonian Global website shares stories from across the Institution with key international partners, and features **40** projects, **16** videos, and **75** staff from across the Smithsonian.



*This page:* From the Salmon and People Project page on the Smithsonian Global website. Photo: Kelsie Moore  
*Facing page:* From the Alonge Project video on the Smithsonian Global website. Photo: Ben Elekwachi

## Smithsonian Global Website

OIR's Smithsonian Global website, which highlights international programs and activities from across the Smithsonian, expanded its content and reach by publishing and developing **eight new videos** highlighting some of the impact of the Smithsonian's work around the world, thanks to a generous grant from the **Smithsonian Women's Committee**. These videos feature projects from across units, disciplines, and continents, with topics including environmentally sustainable coffee cultivation in **Colombia**, cultural heritage research and wild horse conservation in **Mongolia**, museum renovation in **Nigeria**, astronomical observation in **Greenland**, cultural heritage preservation in **Iraq**, orchid conservation in **Palau**, and salmon ecosystem research in **Alaska**.

Visit [global.si.edu](https://global.si.edu) to see the full Smithsonian Global Video Series.



## World Economic Forum Partnership

Our multiyear partnership with the **World Economic Forum (WEF)** continues to expand year-round and connect SI to the pressing challenges facing the planet.

In July 2019, research scientists at the **National Museum of Natural History** joined a cohort of **21 WEF Young Scientists** at the **World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting of the New Champions in Dalian, China**, where they spoke to the critical role of collections-based research in addressing future conservation challenges. As featured members of the Forum's Young Scientist community, they raised the visibility of Smithsonian science on the international stage. In September, OIR participated in the WEF's **Sustainable Development Impact Summit** as part of the Forum's Friends of Ocean Action framework.

And in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2020, an interactive adaptation of the **Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum's Nature** triennial at the **Forum's Annual Meeting** highlighted the massive potential of working with nature as a partner in economic production, using natural materials and decisively low-tech approaches to revitalize agriculture, industry, and the labor economy. The exhibition was featured for 3,000 government leaders, heads of state, CEOs of corporations and foundations, and influential thinkers, creating moments to reflect on nature, sustainability, and design, and offered a hopeful message tied to Earth Optimism, SI's signature conservation initiative.

Our ongoing partnership with the World Economic Forum enables the Smithsonian to showcase our thinking, writing, and research to a diverse audience of more than 100 million people engaged in-person and online.



will.i.am visits the *Partnering with Nature* exhibition at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2020 in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland with designer Sam Van Aken. Photo: World Economic Forum /Pascal Bitz

*Department of Seaweed* featured in the *Partnering with Nature* exhibition at Davos. Photo: World Economic Forum / Ciaran McCrickard

*Tree of 40 Fruit* featured in the *Partnering with Nature* exhibition at Davos. Photo: World Economic Forum/Sikarin Fon Thanachaiary



## 15 Years of the Protecting Cultural Heritage Training Program

In 2019, OIR supported the **Smithsonian's Museum Conservation Institute (MCI)** in implementing the 15th **U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement/Homeland Security Investigations (ICE/HSI)** training program "**Preventing Illicit Trafficking/Protecting Cultural Heritage.**" This program was funded by the U.S. State Department in collaboration with ICE/HSI and administered by the Smithsonian. Through these **15 workshops, 339 law enforcement officials** from more than **100 domestic and international locations** have been trained in how to identify and protect looted or trafficked cultural heritage. Participants have worked with collections and staff from across the Smithsonian, learning about the material composition and physical needs of various objects that may be trafficked, while building relationships with specialists that can provide assessment and advice on individual artifacts. In 2020, MCI will implement the **16th workshop** to continue this important training.



# SUPPORTING SMITHSONIAN GLOBAL PROGRAMS

Smithsonian programs span the globe in over 140 countries. Through understanding the priorities of our museums and research centers, OIR seeks to expand institutional opportunities and engagement in regions and countries of high importance to the Institution.

## Conservation Commons

The Smithsonian's Conservation Commons network was founded to link science from across the Institution and develop solutions around key action areas including Earth Optimism, fostering resilient land and seascapes, sustainable food production, and species conservation. With OIR support, the Commons continued to build momentum and broaden a growing network of internal and external conservation experts, scientists, practitioners, and researchers.

Progress has accelerated under some of the Conservation Commons action areas. In particular, OIR worked with teams from across the Smithsonian's science units to launch a **large internal grant program** under the **Working Land and Seascapes** action area. Over the past year, more than **\$1.2 million** has been disbursed to over **15 research projects across**

**five units** that will fund innovative applied solutions using existing research and work from Myanmar to Gabon to Panama. High-profile projects like the **Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute's** Agua Salud Project and the **National Museum of Natural History's** Healthy Reefs for Healthy People initiative have received support and have been linked together in a global strategy and network to elevate the work and impact of Smithsonian experts. Coupled with this grant program, the Working Landscapes and Seascapes team has created a **One Smithsonian strategy** to better utilize Smithsonian science to address issues affecting environmental health, economic production, and community engagement across a number of key landscapes and seascapes where there has been a long legacy of Smithsonian research and data.



A 2019 Teen Earth Optimism event promoting sustainable food systems solutions. Photo: Christian Lilakos, National Museum of Natural History

## Earth Optimism

As a flagship initiative of the Smithsonian Conservation Commons, Earth Optimism is a global movement focused on changing the conservation conversation from “doom and gloom” to optimism and opportunity. The aim is to **inspire 1 billion people** to take positive action towards environmental sustainability through convenings, public events, and an ever-growing digital community. In 2020, to mark the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, the Smithsonian Conservation Commons, with support from OIR, will host the second **Earth Optimism Summit** in Washington, D.C. to share and amplify stories of what is working in conservation.

Also in 2020, Smithsonian units will host public-facing activities for thousands of visitors. An array of **Global Sister Events**, both small- and large-scale, will also be hosted by a Global Earth Optimism Alliance of institutions, organizations, and communities throughout the year. OIR has assisted the planning efforts of Earth Optimism by identifying international partners and global leaders to participate in the Summit spanning across our international networks, and has developed a Sister Events planning guide including ways to make an event near zero-waste.



## Iraq Cultural Heritage Project

The Smithsonian's **Museum Conservation Institute** continued their work in Iraq in 2019 with a focus on critical needs in heritage stabilization and recovery, and conservation training, supported by OIR. Throughout the year, SI demonstrated the importance, value, and results that come from technical training programs at the **Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage**. SI also supported hands-on site work at the ancient city of **Nimrud** to recover heritage damaged by ISIS. As a trusted partner to Iraqi cultural heritage colleagues, SI plans to continue and expand its support to the Iraqi heritage establishment and the professionals dedicated to preserving their unique cultural heritage.

## Recovery of the Mosul Cultural Museum

Among the most well-known acts of cultural destruction by ISIS was the assault on the **Mosul Cultural Museum** and its collections during their period of occupation in Mosul, Iraq. With support from **ALIPH**—the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas—the Smithsonian **Cultural Rescue Initiative** is working with the **Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage**, the **Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage**, and the staff of the **Mosul Cultural Museum** in partnership with the **Louvre Museum**, to provide damage assessments, emergency stabilization, the salvage and rehousing of collections, and planning for the future revitalization of the museum.

The Nimrud Rescue Team works to fully cover the lamassu 'push pile' of large fragments in the forecourt of the Northwest Palace in Iraq. Photo: Jessie Johnson



A moment from the My Handmade Armenia Festival. Photo: My Armenia Program

## My Armenia Program

In 2019, the Smithsonian continued its work with the **My Armenia Program (MAP)**, a five-year interagency agreement with the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** that aims to build and strengthen cultural heritage tourism in Armenia through research, documentation, and storytelling.

Started in 2015 and jointly managed by OIR and the **Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH)**, the program continued to build on the success of previous years by providing material and technical support to local museums, festivals, guides, and artisans, and also embarked on several new and exciting activities to increase partnerships and visibility.

In 2019, MAP established a partnership with the **USAID/Zrda Project in Georgia**, with the main goal of improving bilateral relationships and collaborating in developing cross-border regional tours. Another highlight was coordinating the third-annual **My Handmade Armenia Festival** in Yerevan, a two-day event where **43 Armenian artisans** and **four Georgian artisans** had the opportunity to showcase their crafts and interact with the public. MAP also increased its international visibility by participating in two notable international conferences—the InTour International Tourism Expo in Armenia and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) General Conference in Japan.



# Spotlight: Building the Capacity of International Museum Colleagues

How the reciprocal exchange of museum best practices can strengthen the global cultural sector



Argentina program participants explore the educational collection at the National Museum of Natural History's *Q?rius* Learning Lab. Photo: Lauren Appelbaum



Museum colleagues discuss conservation techniques in the Tash Khauli Palace and Harem in Khiva, Uzbekistan. Photo: Sara de la Torre Beron

## Empowering Museum Professionals in Argentina

Bilateral exchange – learning from and with each other – is one way in which OIR supports the development of the global cultural sector. Through a **16-month program** sponsored by the **U.S. Embassy Buenos Aires** and **Argentina's Secretariat of Culture**, SI colleagues shared best practices in developing high impact, accessible, and engaging exhibitions and public programs with Argentinian museum and cultural sector professionals. Long-term mentor-mentee relationships, virtual trainings, and in-person experiences all helped teach the tools and skills necessary for program participants to become stronger assets for their local communities, and provided the opportunity to build and strengthen

regional and national networks within Argentina. In May, **11** program participants travelled to Washington, DC for five days of in-person meetings, observations, and experiential learning, with more than **30** colleagues from **11** different SI units. In September, **four** SI colleagues travelled to Buenos Aires to deliver an **Exhibition Development and Strategic Planning Workshop**, where participants were able to hone in on interpretive planning, label writing, and evaluation. The U.S. Ambassador to Argentina hosted a reception for program participants and the broader Buenos Aires cultural community at his residence.

## Supporting Cultural Heritage in Uzbekistan

In collaboration with **Uzbekistan's Art and Culture Development Foundation**, a delegation from OIR and the **Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery** visited four museums in the cities of Tashkent and Nukus in April 2019. The team assessed museum management practices, visitor experience and public outreach, and collections and research opportunities. The team also led a workshop series for **20 museum and cultural professionals** in Tashkent to share Smithsonian perspectives on a variety of museum practices.

develop Uzbekistan's cultural infrastructure. As part of a broader collaboration between SI and the EBRD, experts from MCI, CFCH, Office of Protective Services, and OIR traveled to Khiva, Uzbekistan in October 2019. The team visited significant historic and cultural sites within the ancient walled city of **Ichan Qala**, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and provided recommendations for ways to enhance research and interpretation, collections management, professional skillbuilding, and site security.

**The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)** is leading efforts to



# COORDINATING SMITHSONIAN GLOBAL OPERATIONS

The Smithsonian has a critical role to play in safely sending our scholars and experts abroad while welcoming international colleagues and important visitors to our Institution.

## Official and Diplomatic International Visits

The President and First Lady of Italy; the Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovation of Brazil; and the Minister of Culture of Ecuador were just a few of the high-level dignitaries who visited the Smithsonian in 2019. Last year, OIR coordinated **142** international delegation requests, representing more than **2,390** visitors from **133** countries, to **24** Smithsonian museums and units.

A delegation from Estonia donates a folk instrument to the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in April 2019.  
Photo: Grace Goulding



Members of the African Union visiting the Smithsonian for expert consultations present a gift for the National Museum of African American History and Culture Library collection. Photo: Lisa Helling

## J-1 Exchange Visitor Program

OIR manages the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, a **visa program** that enables foreign researchers to travel to the Smithsonian to collaborate with our curators, scholars, scientists, and practitioners. **198** J-1 Scholars participated in programs sponsored by Smithsonian in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, representing **48** countries. Smithsonian also sponsored other visa types in 2019, with the most sizable population represented by H-1B visa holders. More than **30** individuals holding H-1B status were working at Smithsonian in FY2019.

An exciting new initiative from 2019 is the standardization of the **J-1 Orientation and Check-in** process for arriving Exchange Visitors.

Moving into 2020, OIR is seeking to make the immigration processes clearer and more standardized across the entire institution. This includes the creation of new forms and procedures and a revamp of our immigration-centered outreach, including website content and pre-arrival communication.



**7 continents**

**140+ countries**

**Programs as diverse as our planet**

**Learn more at:  
[global.si.edu](http://global.si.edu)**

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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