



Smithsonian

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Cultural Heritage Forward: A Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns Exchange Program Supported by the U.S. Department of State / Implemented by the Smithsonian Institution

Context

Around the world, communities and museums of various sizes and kinds are engaged in a growing conversation about ethical stewardship of cultural heritage. From this conversation, new modes of inclusive museum practice are emerging that reexamine whose stories are told in museums, who tells these stories, who is considered to be part of the audience, and how these stories are relayed to audiences. To further and deepen the sharing of ideas about museums and cultural heritage stewardship, the U.S. Department of State and the Smithsonian Institution (SI) are launching *Cultural Heritage Forward*, a new exchange program for museum professionals and community-based cultural heritage practitioners.

Cultural Heritage Forward will:

- examine a range of topics including equity, access, inclusion, shared stewardship, and ethical returns;
- provide technical assistance and professional development for its participants, rooted in a multi-directional exchange of ideas and approaches;
- build the capacity of individuals and institutions to conserve, manage, and display and interpret objects; and
- build and strengthen networks of dialogue around these key topics.

Cultural Heritage Forward is funded by the Cultural Heritage Center (CHC) in the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The program was developed and is managed by the Cultural Heritage Center and the Office of Global Affairs (OGA) at the Smithsonian.

Program Structure

The exchange program will involve three distinct phases that take place over two years – a virtual discussion series; an in-person, experiential learning exchange in Washington D.C.; and a follow-on, hybrid applied learning period. Each of these three phases is outlined in more detail below. Participants will be partnered with a Smithsonian unit that will serve as host and organize significant parts of the shared learning program. Specifically:

- The Smithsonian's [National Museum of African Art](#) (NMAfA) will serve as host for approximately 8 participants from **Nigeria** and **Cameroon**;
- The Smithsonian's [Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage](#) (CFCH) will serve as host for approximately 8 participants from **New Zealand** and **Vietnam**;
- The Smithsonian's [National Museum of the American Indian](#) (NMAI) will serve as host for approximately 8 participants from **Chile** and **Peru**.

During the virtual discussion series (Phase I), the entire *Cultural Heritage Forward* cohort from all six participating countries, the Smithsonian units and organizers, and the CHC will collaborate in discussions and activities. In the experiential learning exchange (Phase II), program organizers and host units will coordinate regional and community-specific activities in Washington, D.C. In the final hybrid series (Phase III), the host units and program organizers will support participants as they plan and implement activities

and programs in their countries. Phase III will also include virtual activities involving the entire cohort as global colleagues working together to navigate complex museum issues and explore what it means to be ethical and responsible stewards of cultural heritage.

There will be simultaneous interpretation available for virtual activities in Phases I and III, between English and Spanish and between English and French. There will be simultaneous interpretation available between English and Spanish for the site visit and participants working most closely with NMAI. A solid proficiency in English (spoken and written) and comfort working in a professional context in English is recommended but not required.

Details on the learning and exchange programs planned by the three host Smithsonian units are outlined below, along with information on how to apply.

Program Phases

Phase I: SI will host a virtual launch of the program for participants to meet each other and colleagues from multiple SI units and disciplines, as well as members of State Department's Cultural Heritage Center. Over the course of 4-6 sessions, discussion topics will include, but are not limited to, collections management, conservation, provenance, repatriation, curatorial and exhibition planning, education and public programs, and seeking support for programs (ex. Grants and fundraising). The virtual sessions may also draw upon non-Smithsonian perspectives by inviting others, including smaller or regional museums in the United States or internationally. Sessions will also consider different scales and resources in local contexts. Finally, these virtual sessions will allow the cohort to contribute to the planning of what they would like to see, do, learn, and experience as part of their Washington, D.C. site visit.

Phase II: Participants will spend approximately two weeks in the United States (Washington, D.C. area), with their Smithsonian host unit serving as the hub of all activity. During the site visit, the group will participate in facilitated in-person meetings, observations, and experiential learning with SI colleagues and representatives from the Cultural Heritage Center and other U.S. government agencies. Site visit activities will also expose the cohort to various facets of the Smithsonian, including public-facing as well as behind-the-scenes activities. Organizers will encourage program participants to think in practical ways about how they apply program learnings in their home countries. Participants will conceptualize a capstone project based on learning/discussion during the site visit that they will complete in Phase III.

Phase III: Participants will refine and implement capstone projects. To support on-the-ground application of program learning, staff members from the State Department and the Smithsonian will visit some program participants in their home countries, in coordination with U.S. embassies, to work with cohort members and extend the knowledge co-production. These site visits will allow for continued exchange between the cohort and select SI colleagues they met during their visit to Washington, D.C. During this site visit, to extend knowledge exchange, there may also be an opportunity for cohort members and SI staff to facilitate roundtables or host discussions with a larger, more diverse audience on issues related to shared stewardship, allowing for the inclusion of additional perspectives and approaches to ethical museum practice.

Periodic online meetings, likely via Zoom or a similar platform, will also be scheduled during Phase III as a continued method of exchange between the entire cohort and SI teams after the site visit.

Once all site visits are complete, the Smithsonian will convene one final virtual gathering, a capstone meeting, to spotlight a handful of participants and SI staff who have executed "capstones," new programs or approaches to demonstrate the impact of exchange; this could include jointly presented ideas from

cohort members and SI colleagues together. Cohort members are encouraged to participate in conferences, symposia, or publication to further amplify and advance discourse on these issues surrounding shared stewardship and ethical returns. Other potential outcomes may include collection metadata enhancement, exhibition updates or corrections, shared stewardship including shared stewardship agreements, and integration of community-based (or community-informed) collections care protocols.

Hosts

As the world's largest museum, education, and research complex with a mission to increase and diffuse knowledge, the [Smithsonian Institution](#) is continually examining how to share information and reach audiences in more accessible ways – and, more broadly, how to respond to our changing world. In 2022, SI released [an official Institution-wide policy on ethical returns and shared stewardship](#) that aligns with global conversations around the ethical stewardship and acquisition of museum collections, particularly as they relate to historic and colonial collecting practices. In doing so, SI has stepped into an important leadership role in the conversations taking place worldwide surrounding ethical care of museum collections and inclusive museum practice. With this leadership role comes the responsibility and opportunity to share with and learn from others, as museum professionals and cultural heritage practitioners continue to grow and adapt their museum practice to continue to be ethical stewards of the past and the present.

The [National Museum of African Art \(NMAfA\)](#) is the only national museum in the United States dedicated to the collection, exhibition, conservation, and study of the arts of Africa; its collection includes contemporary and traditional art from the entire African continent. NMAfA is seeking to redress the historical reliance on Western knowledge frameworks and academic expertise to conserve, document, frame, and interpret the museum's collection, at the near exclusion of the expertise of those from whom and where the collection originates (i.e., Africa and the African diaspora).

Through this exchange, NMAfA hopes to strengthen ties with local cultural heritage practitioners and museum professionals from Southeastern Nigeria and the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. In the past, the Nigerian Civil War significantly impacted these areas, and the Smithsonian is keen to re-examine the provenance and origin of objects in its collection from these areas. In addition to building mutually beneficial relationships and informing provenance, conservation, documentation, and description practices, NMAfA also hopes the exchange can support development of a digital thesaurus of African museology terms and related concepts to expand institutional knowledge and support museums worldwide with objects within their collections. The digital thesaurus will improve public understanding of African art, culture, and history by incorporating African terminology and concepts.

The [Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage \(CFCH\)](#) works with communities in the United States and around the world to encourage the understanding, appreciation, and vitality of humanity's diverse living cultural heritage through research, education, and community engagement. In July 2019, CFCH adopted its [Shared Stewardship of Collections Policy](#), affirming the Center's commitments to culturally respectful collections management, enhanced community access to cultural documentation, and considering alternative collections custody arrangements, such as co-curation, long-term loans, or digital returns. CFCH is eager to be in dialogue about all of these commitments with participants to ensure source communities are at the center of these practices. The Center's flagship activities include the annual [Smithsonian Folklife Festival](#) (established 1967), the Smithsonian's non-profit record label [Smithsonian Folkways Recordings](#) (established 1987), and the [Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections](#), which is home to 55+ years of Festival documentation, 35+ years of record label acquisitions, and a wide range of curatorial research, programs, and [Cultural Vitality](#) projects. Together, these collections represent more than 5,300 cubic feet of audiovisual media, photographs, and documents, the [CFCH Material Culture Collection](#), and a rapidly expanding digital footprint of content created, produced, and acquired by the Center.

CFCH is excited to host Cultural Heritage Forward exchange participants from Vietnam and New Zealand's Māori communities. Working with participants from Vietnam allows CFCH to (re)connect with communities from past relationships based on the [cultural documentation](#) from previous Smithsonian Folklife Festivals, along with several record label collections from Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. Increasing the accessibility of collections for cultural heritage practitioners can support the vitality of community-driven uses of that content. Working with Māori communities of New Zealand supports new institutional relationships related to possible participation in the 2025 and 2027 Smithsonian Folklife Festivals (small group observation in 2025 and full program in 2027), resulting in a more proactive process to share stewardship of cultural documentation generated from the co-curation of and participation in the Festival. This exchange would also build on recent work done in cooperation with UNESCO's International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (ICHCAP). Together, CFCH and the cohort will explore how the principles of shared stewardship can help institutions and communities worldwide improve the handling of collections in their care, as well as the relationship of cultural heritage to climate, migration, policy, and wellness.

The [National Museum of the American Indian \(NMAI\)](#) is dedicated to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere through partnerships with Native peoples and their allies. The museum promotes equity and justice for Native and Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere through education, inspiration, and empowerment. As stewards of one of the world's most expansive collections of Native cultural heritage from the entire Western Hemisphere, the museum is unwaveringly committed to bringing Native and Indigenous knowledge to all aspects of museum work, including exhibition, programming, conservation, collections management, and repatriation.

NMAI is excited to serve as host for participants from Peru and Chile. Both Peru and Chile have extensive networks of community museums that center care of collections in Indigenous cultural heritage practices. NMAI seeks to connect with these networks to facilitate communication and collaboration leading to more responsible, equitable and inclusive collections care and stewardship of cultural belongings at the NMAI and community museums. These types of two-way collaborations will elevate individual relationships to intentional institutional partnerships, particularly with community-based museums, leading to more sustainable practices.

Through this exchange, NMAI will provide technical assistance and professional development opportunities to cultural heritage practitioners from Peru and Chile who work in community museums with significant Indigenous collections and established collaborative relationships with Indigenous communities. This exchange will focus on the principles of shared stewardship, pressing issues for community museums regarding cultural heritage protection, and prioritizing Indigenous knowledge and values in the care and stewardship of collections. Dialogue will increase understanding of cultural heritage laws, provenance, cultural context and protocols, and how these intersect with museum practices of documentation, conservation, and collections care and stewardship.

Participants

Applicants must be from Cameroon, Nigeria, New Zealand, Vietnam, Chile, or Peru and will be paired with relevant Smithsonian units (NMAfA, CFCH, NMAI) as described above.

Eligibility – Applicants should have all the following to be considered for selection:

- Ability to participate in all phases of the program, including ability to travel to the United States from **7-18 October 2024** (for participants from Nigeria, Cameroon, Vietnam, and New Zealand) or the spring of 2025 (dates to be determined for participants from Chile and Peru).

- A valid passport at the time of application or the ability to obtain a passport in advance of international travel.
- Access to reliable internet for the duration of the program for participating in regular online meetings organized by the Smithsonian Institution.
- Ability to participate in occasional virtual meetings outside of the hours of 09:00 – 17:00 to connect with the cohort and program organizers.
- Must self-identify as a cultural heritage steward or practitioner from Cameroon, Nigeria, New Zealand, Vietnam, Chile, or Peru.
- Proficiency in spoken English is suggested, but not required.

Learn More

Interested applicants may watch recordings of information sessions held on March 19 and 20 at the links below:

- **19 March 2024**
<https://smithsonian.zoom.us/rec/play/lwvFZQcRZC-kYG4TT7amDG8wutsEH3hM9-em03TPzPeWtSXBwBBaxDoQITj9d0sJu7-HEryqTXAbBuMS.zZnHbcAwc8udv63->
 Passcode: sG#^4Y6n
- **20 March 2024**
EN :
<https://smithsonian.zoom.us/rec/play/mlI0wK60v46g2p51uSUI0tKpelFhUXB3XjCzfpChzdKtws7dXX5J42CRajrkt6aVTw07rHtC0G3lwRaG.9gO4qhAabxPSmHfj>
 Passcode: WhqXx4Z@
FR :
https://smithsonian.zoom.us/rec/play/vhxfRuhwBzWr7h0gjPJWNcfSvhQ_fa-Ku2-LvhhbBGNPV9WXC0JWJdET9xZ53r-jFosNeo8WgrKDEEsi.4KjnudsD6X7Ud7ql
 Passcode: WhqXx4Z@
ES :
https://smithsonian.zoom.us/rec/play/W7rCeFNMW_mZluUSG1i9agljhbgBnNTcbHn5MdTRcQ_1G-zFilcSLQwm9bwCkWOJK-SaefjbviLdXX.tw0Pese6rmsWfw9r
 Passcode: WhqXx4Z@
- Presentation Slides (in English)
https://global.si.edu/sites/default/files/Information%20Session%20Slides_Cultural%20Heritage%20Forward.pdf

How to Apply

Interested individuals should submit the below, each as a separate Microsoft Word document (four documents in total), in English, Spanish, or French, to Global@si.edu with the subject line “Cultural Heritage Forward Program Application” and the name of the Smithsonian unit host to which you are applying to work (as defined in the Participants section above **no later than 11:59 pm ET on 10 April, 2024**):

- 1) **A statement of purpose (no more than one (1) page, 12-point font, single spaced)** explaining your current role, and how this exchange will inform or enhance your work in your community and/or museum’s mission. Please include a brief mention about how you personally wish to or can contribute to this particular exchange.
- 2) **Resume, CV, or list of relevant work experience.** Please feel free to include up to three press clippings as part of this and/or up to two video or sound clip links.

- 3) **Letter of support** (letter can speak to applicant's creative process(es), engagement with community, and ability to collaborate). Letters may be provided from a colleague or professional familiar with your work or your supervisor.
- 4) **Answers to the following questions (no more than one (1) page total, 12-point font, single spaced)**
 - a. How do you envision the future of inclusive museum practice and cultural heritage management work at your museum or in your community in the next few years?
 - b. How do you plan to contribute to the aims of the Smithsonian Institution host unit (NMAI, NMAfA, CFCH) with which you will work?
 - c. What impact do you think inclusive museum practices will have on the field of cultural heritage management in the coming years?

Applicants must submit all requested materials listed above by the deadline to be eligible for selection. Applicants will be evaluated based on suitability for the program and materials provided. Final applicants may be invited to participate in a virtual interview. Due to the volume of applications, it is likely that only finalists will be contacted.