1. Introduction

“Museums play a critical role in sharing history and providing context and meaning to this history... Our [Indigenous] history has not always been accurately told in this country. Indigenous perspectives on the creation of Canada have typically been underrepresented while authentic presentation of the histories of Indigenous peoples themselves is generally absent. While there is much good work underway, I think the biggest challenge for museums moving forward will be to authentically represent Indigenous voices inside museum spaces. This demands close partnerships with Indigenous peoples and the space for them to share their own stories in the way they feel most appropriate.”
Ry Moran, Director of the National Research Centre for the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, University of Manitoba\(^1\).

Responsible exhibition and interpretation of Indigenous collections should focus on these key outcomes:

- To promote reconciliation the decolonisation even if this presents uncomfortable truths for the local dominant (settler) communities.
- To present historical events from different points of view using authentic Indigenous primary sources.
- To show visitors the impact decisions made by settler colonial administrators have had on Indigenous communities.

For further information please see MAS’ Standards for Saskatchewan Museums (2016) and Section 6 of this document.

2. Exhibition Planning

The first step for museums is to reach out to local Indigenous communities to build long-term relationships so that the communities are included as collaborators and equal project partners in every step. Relationships between museums and local Indigenous communities should be approached with a view to building long term, on-going exchanges that will re-focus and re-evaluate museum protocols, procedures, and content overall to ensure Indigenous perspectives are not only included, but given (at minimum) equal weight as others. Community members must be involved in every step, from conception to completion.

Collaborative partnerships, based on mutual respect, are essential and non-negotiable foundations for any project involving Indigenous content, and should also be considered for projects without Indigenous content. Reaching out to the local Indigenous communities to work together, and to open communication pathways to share knowledge, is a key step in ‘Reconciliation’ and demonstrates your museum is accommodating both the protocols specified in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] and the calls to action laid out by the Truth & Reconciliation Commission [TRC] – Refer to MAS’ Tip sheet The Importance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] and the Truth & Reconciliation Commission [TRC] for more information.

**Tip:** Consider inviting cultural leaders of local Indigenous communities to sit on your board or be involved in your governing authority to establish a long-term relationship through sharing authority. Having a close association with a community member will help to open new doors for other relationships with community members.

### 2.1 Content Development / Research

- It is essential and non-negotiable to partner with relevant Indigenous communities when you are planning an exhibit that includes objects or content relevant to their culture.

- Reach out to the community/ies (See Section 5) and explain the intention of your exhibit.

- Recognize that partners from within the community are essential from the outset. Community partners are needed to provide guidance and support for developing the exhibit content. These partners can act as local champions for your exhibit, help to gather feedback and to promote the exhibit development locally.

- Use a range of resources to develop content. This could include contemporary internet resources written by Indigenous people, social media postings and recent publications. Be aware that internet content needs to be carefully evaluated.

- Use community partners to facilitate focus groups and interviews with Elders and other community members to generate original, authentic content.

- Write text drafts collaboratively, and from the point of view of the relevant Indigenous communities.

- Include Indigenous perspectives and world views on all exhibit content, not just exhibits that include Indigenous artifacts.

- Consider ways of using social media and the internet as a communication method for your project. Be aware not all community members have access to the internet and be sure other methods of communication are available in Indigenous languages.

### 2.2 Object Selection for Exhibit & Interpretation

- Museum collections can be supplemented with short-term object loans from individuals and ‘use’ can be demonstrated with photographs from Indigenous community members. Use community social networks, including social media platforms, to call for contemporary content including videos, audio recordings, photographs and objects that will compliment the exhibit themes.
Develop relationships that can assist with object loans and the inclusion of contemporary media to demonstrate exhibit themes.

Consider using contemporary examples of historic objects from museum collections to demonstrate continuity in cultural practice and traditions.

Consider commissioning artists / artisans to create contemporary versions (See Section 5-Note 1) and / or replicas that can be used as interactive displays in the exhibit.

Avoid “dress up” interactives.

### 2.3 Exhibiting sacred, ceremonial and sensitive objects

As outlined in Appendix B in the MAS Standards for Saskatchewan Museums (2016) museums should have a key list of objects in their collections that are considered sacred, sensitive or ceremonial by Indigenous communities.

As defined by John Moses (2015):

“Sacred objects are objects of Indigenous material culture that are deemed holy or sacrosanct by virtue of their ritual or ceremonial associations. Depending upon the group in question, these can include a range of objects connected with drumming, dancing, smoking rituals, vision questing, fasting or traditional healing and sweat lodge rites. Within the originating Indigenous culture, access to objects of this sort is frequently restricted upon the basis of age, sex, achievement or prior initiation.”

Lists of ceremonial, sacred or sensitive objects should be shared with the relevant Indigenous communities to gather information relating to the responsible overall care and management of these collections.

Permission should be sought from the relevant Indigenous community for any use of these objects.

Accept that it may not be considered appropriate to display these collections (including photographs).

Advice should be sought on the appropriate method for displaying these objects. For example, some ceremonial pipes should never be displayed or stored with the stem attached to the bowl because this ‘charges’ or ‘calls’ the spirit.

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- Ceremonial, sacred or sensitive objects might include: pipes, pipe bags, eagle feathers, eagle or hawk feather fans, bone whistles, drums, human remains, any objects from burials or graves, rattles, offerings, medicine bundles, ceremonial clothing, ceremonial bundles, moccasins with beaded vamps and/or uppers, umbilical cord packages, Sun Dance accessories or remnants from the ceremony, tobacco or medical parcels, items with applied red ochre, hunting trophies, wampum belts, masks, False Face Masks, symbols and signs on rock (petroglyphs, pictographs), ceremonial rocks, rock effigies or rock formations, sweetgrass, decorated tipis, backrest banners, staffs, headdresses, as well as any “…objects associated with traditional healing and sweat lodge rites, fasting or feasting, smudging, seasonal agricultural, fishing or hunting rites, drumming, smoking, medicine and medicine bundle ceremonies, vision questing, and rites and ceremonies associated with puberty, birth, death and naming.” See Appendix B in MAS’ Standards for Saskatchewan Museums (2016) for further details.

- Ceremonial, sacred or sensitive objects from international Indigenous communities should be treated with the same respect as objects from local Indigenous communities. Efforts should be made to contact relevant authorities for advice on the care, handling and display of these objects.

2.4 Handling & Mount Requirements for Exhibit

The best resource for exhibition treatments for collections is the source community, if known, or the closest known community if only general provenance has been recorded.

- Consult with contemporary Indigenous communities, especially artists / artisans, to discuss the best methods for handling.

- Consult with the relevant or appropriate community members of the Indigenous communities. Under the direction of Elders or knowledge keepers or cultural experts, work with artists/artisans to develop the best methods for mounting and conservation treatments.

- If available, Conservators should plan treatments under the supervision of artists / artisans, to understand the materials and techniques used in the creation of the objects.

- Placement of the objects and object groupings should be done under the supervision of the relevant Indigenous community, ideally with an Elder or other cultural expert advising on best practice to ensure authenticity of the final arrangement.

- Contemporary objects should be included as necessary to complete object groupings. These contemporary objects should be identified as contemporary. For example, an object grouping of a ceremonial outfit might not include the types of accessories typically carried. Consider commissioning an artist to create contemporary examples of objects.

A view of the RSM Ethnology Collection storage facility. Photo courtesy of the RSM Ethnology Collection. Photo by Michelle Brownridge

3 Ibid.
2.5 Text and Label Requirements

The language used in the exhibit should include contemporary terminology (see Definitions on MAS’ Tip Sheet The Importance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] to Museums) and present Indigenous communities in an unbiased, current way.

- Use the relevant Indigenous language(s) to refer to objects, materials and techniques. Indigenous languages present their own culture using their own concepts and world-views which are essential for accurate transmission of knowledge through objects.

- When translating from Indigenous languages into English retain the wording and way of speaking so the authenticity of the Indigenous voice is retained, rather than edited into grammatically perfect English.

- Ensure texts present the point of view of Indigenous communities and that historical events are told from their perspective.

- Place the exhibit content in a context that takes the point of view of the Indigenous community into account.

- Texts and labels should be presented in the language(s) of the relevant Indigenous communities.

- Curatorial partners from the relevant Indigenous communities should be contracted to advise on the text and label content.

- Include quotes from Elders and relevant community cultural advisors as the experts on their own culture rather than external points of view from non-Indigenous experts (including non-Indigenous anthropologists).

- Recognise and respect that not all Indigenous knowledge, traditions and beliefs can be shared for consumption by outsiders.

2.6 Quality Assurance & Feedback

Exhibits are complex undertakings that usually have a lengthy planning process. Responsible exhibition of Indigenous material requires additional tasks that should be built in to the exhibit timelines from the beginning, not as an afterthought.

- Be sure to build plenty of time for gathering feedback at each step of the project.
- Include quality assurance checks in the project plans and budget.
- Consider installing a pilot or beta version of the main content within the Indigenous community(s) before any final designs or graphics are produced, even if it is just in poster format.
- Sometimes the best way to get honest feedback is to show something and ask ‘what don’t we have right’.
- Be sure there is a procedure in place so front of house staff (reception, tour guides) can report any errors, omissions or critical feedback to the exhibit team.
3. Exhibit Do’s & Do Not’s

DO:

- (Do) engage from the beginning with the Indigenous communities to determine content for your exhibit (from object selection, themes, and interpretative text).

- (Do) understand that Indigenous communities can be under-resourced and individuals at capacity for agreeing to new commitments. Be generous with time frames and do not equate non-responsiveness with non-interest. Be aware of traditional hunting seasons when community members might be extremely busy with cultural activities.

- (Do) seek advice from the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre.

- (Do) make contact with cultural experts in each Indigenous community represented.

- (Do) seek multiple perspectives from within each community and include the voices of men and women equally.

- (Do) go to communities for meetings.

- (Do) ask for recommendations for translators and include the translators in the text drafting and editing stages to ensure the final draft will translate meaningfully into the Indigenous language. Better still, consider drafting texts in the Indigenous language from the outset and translate the texts into English.

- (Do) make an effort to find out names of people in historic photographs and seek permission of surviving family members to display them.

- (Do) include the local Indigenous perspective on current colonial impacts including themes related to the impact of the Indian Act, residential schools, social issues, housing and environmental issues, loss of language, missing women, over representation in prison, racism.

- (Do) seek opportunities for work placements within your museum for Indigenous community members so there is a long term, consistent relationship – external sources of funding may be available. See References Section 4.5 for Funding Opportunities (Page 8).

- (Do) consult with Indigenous communities to reach an agreement for shared stewardship of collections – be proactive about giving Indigenous communities control over their collections.

- (Do) include details about how Indigenous collections were assembled with honesty especially in the 19th and early 20th century to explain to visitors how the collections were formed.
• (Do) include the perspectives of the Indigenous communities represented alongside the ‘Empire’ or colonial perspective.

• (Do) provide training for front of house and tour guides so Indigenous community visitors can be encouraged to ask about related material, archives and other collections that might relate to them or their families personally.

• (Do) allow Indigenous community members to take photographs of objects or display materials that might have a personal meaning for them. Standard museum practice tends to gear towards seeing visitors as impartial/unattached neutral parties whereas the Indigenous community visitors might see a familial pattern, an object made by a relative or a photograph of an ancestor.

• (Do) provide additional resources, digital copies, and access to collections – offer personalised services for Indigenous visitors and seek to build a relationship with them.

• (Do) allow smudging, feasts, prayers and purification ceremonies when requested, including during exhibition opening and closing events.

• (Do) consider a pop up museum exhibit within Indigenous community spaces to maximise the visitors to your exhibit.

• (Do) include community consultations, project staffing and curatorial contracts in your exhibit planning and in funding applications.

• (Do) include letters of support from local Indigenous communities for grant applications.

• (Do) look at Indigenous language as a further layer of interpretation and narrative that will engage your visitors.

• (Do) include Indigenous curators.

• (Do) attend local job fairs within the Indigenous communities to encourage the youth to think about museum careers.

• (Do) follow local Indigenous Facebook and social media groups.

• (Do) use online resources from Indigenous sources.

• (Do) consider free Massive Open Online Courses [MOOCs] about Indigenous topics as staff development opportunities (See Section 5-Note 2).
DON’T:

- (Don’t) use only black & white photographs of Indigenous communities if colour photographs are available. Using black & white photos, especially to demonstrate sensitive subjects like residential schools, gives visitors the impression this took place in the distant past. When black & white photographs are used, consider using contemporary photographs to demonstrate the subject in modern times.

- (Don’t) use language or points of views that present Indigenous communities as ‘ahistorical’ (lacking historical context or perspective).

- (Don’t) invite token collaboration from Indigenous communities at the end of a project.

- (Don’t) separate artwork / objects from Indigenous communities into ‘Indigenous’ sections, integration throughout an exhibit demonstrates equality of representation with other content.

- (Don’t) exhibit objects or artwork that demonstrate ‘cultural appropriation’.

- (Don’t) see anthropology or ethnology perspectives as of higher value or authenticity to Indigenous communities themselves.

- (Don’t) assume all members of Indigenous communities hold the same knowledge and opinions.

- (Don’t) expect Indigenous communities to come to you.

- (Don’t) display Indigenous objects without including object names and texts in the local indigenous language(s).

- (Don’t) consider the Indigenous community only as ‘advisors’ or engage only on a superficial level.

- (Don’t) include information that conflicts with the Indigenous world view or their origin beliefs. For example, western archaeology believes North America was populated during the glacial period via the Bering Strait, despite evidence existing for human presence before this period. Indigenous communities believe they were present from time immemorial. Western points of view should never be presented as ‘fact’ over other points of view.
4. Moving Forward: Exhibit Ideas, Funding, Programming and Collections Development

Some ideas and opportunities for exhibits that build on contemporary Indigenous issues include:

4.1 Exhibits relating to Residential Schools & Reconciliation

To understand more about the impact of residential schools on contemporary Indigenous communities. See, for example:

- The Witness Blanket – a travelling art installation made from relics from Residential Schools
- Where are the Children?; 100 Years of Loss; We were So Far Away (the Inuit experience of residential schools); The Forgotten Métis (the Métis experience of residential schools) – travelling exhibit about residential schools coordinated by the Foundation of Hope

4.2 Exhibits relating to Missing and Murdered Women

Missing and murdered women is an important issue for contemporary Indigenous communities. See, for example:

- The Red Dress Project – an art installation of red dresses hung in trees
- Walking with our Sisters – an art installation of hundreds of moccasin vamps

4.3 Programming Ideas and Events

- The Blanket Exercise – a participatory program for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to foster understanding of the colonization experience for Indigenous people. **must have an Indigenous facilitator**
- Book a table at the local pow wow to display museum information and have activities for children.
- Arts and crafts workshops led by Indigenous facilitators (artists / artisans) to help bring different museum audiences together.
- Commemorate Orange Shirt Day – September 30th – wear an orange shirt to remember residential schools and to promote reconciliation.
4.4 Contemporary Collecting for Exhibits

It is important to undertake contemporary collections development today to produce meaningful exhibits in the future.

• Reach out to your local Friendship Centre to enquire about purchasing contemporary arts and crafts.

• Once partnerships in local communities are established, seek collections relating to important movements like Idle No More and other local or regional events and organisations.

• Facebook and other social media are platforms for many voices to be heard. Join groups or like pages that will give you a wide array of points of view from Indigenous community members.

4.5 Funding and Ideas for Exhibit Partnerships with Indigenous Communities

There are many funding opportunities available for partnerships with Indigenous communities. (See References Section 4).

• Including statements of interest and curator’s resumes as part of the supporting documents will enhance your grant application.

• Members of the local Indigenous community might not have conventional museology training or be familiar with the roles within museums as career options, but they will have a wide range of transferable skills and talent that relate to exhibit development. For example: artists, artisans, storytellers, carpenters, culture teachers, tourism officers.

• Include potential curators in the project development for the grant.

• Local Indigenous Youth Councils and / or Chief & Councils may have funding opportunities for work placement jobs that could fund exhibit positions.

• Be creative in project planning to accommodate the needs of partners from Indigenous communities. For example, consider how a partner can contribute remotely from their community rather than requiring full time presence on site.

5. Notes:

Note 1: To clarify the difference between a contemporary example and a replica: a contemporary example is taken to mean a functioning modern example, made with authentic materials and techniques, of high quality, to serve the same purpose or function as a historic object; a replica is made for the purpose of handling or demonstration, rather than for the use of the original (therefore lesser materials or techniques might be used).

Note 2: A great sources for MOOCs about Indigenous topics in Saskatchewan are available through the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre. www.sicc.sk.ca
6. References, Annotated Bibliography & Contacts

Further reading resources for each section are provided here:

**References - Section 1. Introduction**

MAS’ Standards for Saskatchewan Museums (2016): Collections A-5; A-10; A-13; A-35; A-37; A-60; A-61; A-66; A-67; Collections B-20; B-21; B-22, Tip B-67; Collections D-6; Communications A-4; A-5; A-6; A-7; A-42; A-43; A-49; B-6; B-7; B-9; Appendix B.

**References - Section 2. Exhibition Planning**

MAS’ Tip Sheet The Importance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] to Museums

Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre online resources:
[http://www.sicc.sk.ca/elders.html](http://www.sicc.sk.ca/elders.html)
[http://www.sicc.sk.ca/culture.html](http://www.sicc.sk.ca/culture.html)

*This article has many additional potentially useful references in the bibliography*

Guidance from the Royal Saskatchewan Museum:

[https://royalsaskmuseum.ca/rsm/research/aboriginal-studies/repatriation-and-shared-stewardship](https://royalsaskmuseum.ca/rsm/research/aboriginal-studies/repatriation-and-shared-stewardship)

**References - Section 3. Exhibit ‘Dos’ & ‘Dont’s’**

Articles that critique exhibit content from Indigenous perspectives:

[https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visualarts/2017/06/19/at-the-rom-anishinaabe-art-but-whose-power.html](https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visualarts/2017/06/19/at-the-rom-anishinaabe-art-but-whose-power.html)

Free Online Courses [MOOCs]
https://www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada
https://www.edx.org/course/reconciliation-through-indigenous-ubcx-indedu200x-2
https://www.ualberta.ca/courses/indigenous-canada

References - Section 4. Moving Forward

Travelling Exhibits
http://witnessblanket.ca/#!
http://wherearethechildren.ca/en/
http://100yearsofloss.ca/en/
http://weweresofaraway.ca
http://forgotten Métis.ca/en/
http://www.theredressproject.org
http://walkingwithoursisters.ca
http://canadianart.ca/features/kent-monkman-critiques-canada-150/

Events and Activities
http://www.orangeshirtday.org


https://www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/indigenous-rights/blanket-exercise

Funding Opportunities for Indigenous Partnerships
Saskatchewan Resources:
http://www.saskculture.ca/programs/funding-programs/grants/aboriginal-arts-and-cultural-leadership-grant


https://www.spra.sk.ca/funding/aboriginal-funding/

Young Canada Works – Summer Jobs & Internships
http://canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1466191409480

National Indian Brotherhood – distributor of residential schools settlement for projects relating to reconciliation
http://www.nibtrust.ca

Museums Assistance Program [MAP] – Heritage Canada
http://canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1456325095980/1456325164088

* Aboriginal Heritage and the Exhibit Circulation fund
Canada Arts Council
http://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/creating-knowing-sharing
* The revised grant program includes a specific stream for the Arts & Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

Virtual Museum Program
http://vmc.historymuseum.ca/investment-programs/
* Large scale online exhibits but also smaller scale ‘Community Memories’ grants available for institutions with five staff members or less - Indigenous communities cultural departments may be eligible to apply for project funds if the museum has too many staff to be eligible.

References – General

Colonization in Canada

Decolonizing Museums / Art Galleries
https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/shaping-the-world-through-art-436624603.html
Government and other reports
http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1100100014637

Government and other reports
http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1100100014637

http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1307460755710/1307460872523
http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/8123/1/MQ94770.pdf
http://www.museums.ca/uploaded/web/docs/museum_dcameron.pdf

Facebook Groups
This is a selection of Facebook groups/pages that present a wide range of Indigenous points of view on many issues.

• APTN National News
• Decolonize Myself - a First Nations Perspective
• Abolish the India Act Now
• Idle No More
• Red Rising Magazine
• Adopt and Implement the Declaration
• WIOT Magazine
• Aboriginal and Tribal Nation News
• United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Historical Events
http://thestarphoenix.com/storyline/sask-150-big-bears-quest-to-get-fair-treatment-for-his-people-was-ultimately-betrayed

https://www.facebook.com/fckthe150/posts/1141532912619071:0

Honouring Missing and Murdered Women

The Indian Act

Indigenous approach to archaeology
http://workingitouttogether.com/content/digging-in-two-worlds-a-contemporary-indigenous-approach-to-archaeology/

Indigenous Museums Approach

Interactive Online map showing treaties, groups and languages
https://native-land.ca

National Aboriginal [now Indigenous] Day
https://indigenousmotherhood.wordpress.com/2017/06/21/why-i-dont-celebrate-national-aboriginal-day/

Points of View about Canada from Indigenous People

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/lynn-gehl/indigenous-land-claims-process_b_16368974.html

http://www.canadahistory.ca/Explore/First-Nations,-Inuit-Metis/Rights-and-Reconciliation


Reactions to Canada 150
https://www.facebook.com/CTVNewsChannel/videos/1463646490363344/?hc_ref=NEWSFEED

https://www.facebook.com/macleans/videos/10155299334743950/

https://www.facebook.com/OccupyCanada/photos/a.278568382161752.74506.278550055496918/1553706224647955/?type=3&theater

http://unsettling150.ca/why-unsettle-canada150/
https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-roadblock-to-reconciliation-canadas-origin-sto-
ry-is-false/article29951998/

http://www.nfu.ca/story/nu-endorses-idle-no-more’s-“unsettling-canada-150”-call-action

http://christibelcourt.com/canada-i-can-cite-for-you-150/

http://canadianart.ca/features/kent-monkman-critiques-canada-150/

http://www.intersectionalanalyst.com/intersectional-analyst/150-years-of-colonialism-vio-
lence-and-erasure-in-canada


http://thestarphoenix.com/news/local-news/there-is-nothing-to-celebrate-indigenous-groups-see-
canada-150-as-a-chance-to-educate-public

 nous-rights-speech-50-years-later

http://activehistory.ca/2017/08/150-acts-of-reconciliation-for-the-last-150-days-of-canadas-150/

Repatriation

http://theconversation.com/museums-are-returning-indigenous-human-remains-but-progress-on-re-
patriating-objects-is-slow-67378

Residential Schools
http://aptnnews.ca/2017/06/19/aptn-investigates-indian-residential-schools-settlement-agreement/


https://www.facebook.com/APTNNews/posts/10154891096713772:0

https://tworowtimes.com/opinion/meet-ian-mosby-man-exposed-canadas-experiments-aboriginals/

ee1.3364325

http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-april-4- MMIWG-ottawa-public-forum-1.4053431/

how-senator-murray-sinclair-responds-to-why-don-t-residential-school-survivors-just-get-over-
it-1.4053522
6. References, Annotated Bibliography & Contacts continued...

Research Methodologies
https://helenkara.com/2017/07/04/indigenous-research-methods-a-reading-list/

Rethinking Canada historical icons

Saskatchewan Resources
List of Tribal Councils and First Nations Communities in Saskatchewan
http://www.sicc.sk.ca/first_nations.html

Friendship Centres – Saskatchewan
http://www.afcs.ca