BACKGROUND


In February 2022, the SAA Native American Archives Section asked the Council to take action that “(1) expresses support for archivists in both repatriating and receiving returned archival materials and (2) outlines specific actions SAA will take to support this work.”

This action supports the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, especially article 11:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

It also supports the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, especially article 1:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
RECOMMENDATION(S)

THAT the SAA Council adopt the support statement for archival repatriation.

SUPPORT STATEMENT

Cultural heritage patrimony belongs with its people. The needs for cultural resilience, for cultural knowledge, and for cultural spirituality are best met when a cultural heritage collection resides with the people(s) with whom it is related. As Sheree Bonaparte notes “We belong to the ‘property;’ it doesn’t belong to us. We (my people-Onkwehonwe) belong to our land, our medicines, our communities, our philosophies, and our way of life. All these elements endure over time; we come and go.” Cultural heritage patrimony, including archival materials, is not just information to be owned and used by individuals. It is central to a culture’s vibrance through time.

SAA supports the repatriation of all cultural heritage collections to their originating source community(s), regardless of the circumstances of its acquisition, if desired by the community(s). Communities have the right to make their own decisions about the arrangement of, description of, access to, and preservation of their cultural patrimony without the permission or intervention of institutional archives.

The SAA Council also humbly acknowledges its lack of expertise in addressing the Native American Archives Section’s (NAAS) request. Consequently, subject to SAA Constitution and Bylaws section VII, SAA has created the Archival Repatriation Committee. This committee will be responsible for coordinating efforts across SAA to develop and disseminate guidance and training about archival repatriation, serve as a point of contact for people with questions about archival repatriation, work on cooperative repatriation work with organizations with similar goals, engage in reparative and reciprocal actions that lead to better community and institutional relationships, and make recommendations to the SAA Council for necessary actions to meet these goals.

Support Statement: The adoption of this support statement allows SAA to provide guidance and support to archivists involved in repatriating or receiving repatriated archives.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: The adoption of this support statement responds to Goal 3, Strategies 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 of the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.

Fiscal Impact: The estimated staff time associated with this activity is 1 staff member @ 20 hours.