

The Management of Culturally Sensitive Collections of the Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution Policy and Procedure Guidelines

As part of its on-going commitment to the ethical management of culturally sensitive objects in its collections, the Department of Anthropology has a policy of entering into discussion with culturally affiliated individuals or communities regarding the identification, storage, and treatment of sensitive objects.

The following is an outline of the procedure for requesting a change in the care of objects and the guidelines for evaluating, implementing and recording such a request.

Submitting a Request

Any concerned culturally affiliated individual or community may make requests or suggestions for a change in the storage or treatment of objects.

- Requests for changes in storage and care will be documented by the Department of Anthropology staff person to whom the initial request was made.
- Requests should identify the object(s) or group of objects in question, (by catalog number, when possible), the requestor's name, title, address, telephone number, relationship to the object, date the request was made, a detailed description of the recommended change, and the rationale for the change.
- Requests should be forwarded to the Collections Manager for review and recording.

Evaluating a Request

Requests will be evaluated by the Department of Anthropology in terms of the cultural concerns, the appropriateness of the complexity of the requested change, and the feasibility of implementing the change.

- The designated Curator will review the request.
- If the Curator feels the request appropriate, the Collections Manager and the Conservator will determine if the request can be implemented without compromising the safety and preservation of the objects in question or any other collections which could be impacted by the change.

Implementing a Request

Once it has been determined that a change of treatment is appropriate, the Collections Management unit will develop a plan and schedule for implementing the change in consultation with department curators and conservators.

- The Collections Manager will assign responsibility for ensuring that the request is executed to a member of the Collections Management staff.
- Collections Management staff will record the change in the Collections Care Database. Instructions for proper storage, orientation, handling and access will be recorded with the object to ensure on-going compliance.
- The requestor will be notified that the change has been implemented.