



# Indian Arts Research Center **GUIDELINES FOR COLLABORATION**

Building successful collaborations between  
Indigenous communities, museums, and  
other collecting institutions.



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**School for Advanced Research**

CONTACT: MEREDITH SCHWEITZER

PHONE: (505) 954-7223

E-MAIL: [SCHWEITZER@SARSF.ORG](mailto:SCHWEITZER@SARSF.ORG)

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*The foundation of the work is trust.*

— Elysia Poon, IARC director



# School for Advanced Research Guidelines Are Leading National Trend in Collaborative Museum Work

**SANTA FE, NM**

**The School for Advanced Research** (SAR) is pleased to announce the publication of the Guidelines for Collaboration, theoretical and practical guides to building successful collaborations between Indigenous communities, museums, and other collecting institutions. The Guidelines are the product of several years of critical discourse between over sixty Native and non-Native museum professionals, cultural leaders, artists, and scholars experienced in collaborative work in various institutions in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. Available only in limited release until now, the Guidelines are already being used by internationally recognized institutions including Chicago's Field Museum and University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA) in collaboration with the Getty Conservation Institute. To see the Guidelines and case studies or to download the resource, visit: **[guidelinesforcollaboration.info](http://guidelinesforcollaboration.info)**.

**Today, museum stewardship of Native American collections is undergoing profound changes.** As museums leave exclusionary practices behind and open their doors to the communities from which their collections originate, new models of collaborative work between Native and non-Native museum professionals, artists, cultural leaders, and scholars are emerging. Museums are already seeing how collaboration offers exciting opportunities for mutual learning. The benefits to museums and communities are clear, but both sides may be unsure about how proceed and have expressed the need for a resource guide.



**Organized in two parts, the Guidelines offer principles and practical considerations for (1) museums working with Native American communities (Guidelines for Museums) and (2) Native American communities working with museums (Guidelines for Communities).** A primary goal of the Guidelines for Museums is to help museums and communities build positive relationships. “The foundation of the work,” says Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) director Elysia Poon, “is trust. This is really the core to successful collaborations.” As museums open their collections to community members, the Guidelines for Museums help museum staff responsibly administer that access. The Guidelines facilitators also saw that Indigenous community members expressed interest in working with museums but were often at a loss as to how to approach institutions and navigate collections and curatorial systems. Development of a set of guiding principles thus became a priority. These two documents provide complementary perspectives and are helping to steer the development of exhibitions, the direction of collections care, and the path of education and programming in museums and other cultural institutions.

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**The initiative began in 2012**, when consultant and conservator Landis Smith approached then IARC director Cynthia Chavez Lamar with an idea for a seminar to take stock of the current state of collaborative conservation in museums, along with a proposal to develop a resource to help guide the collaborative process. After decades of working with various museums in Washington DC and Santa Fe to carry out collaborative conservation methodologies, Smith had observed that the notion of collaboration varied greatly. Many conservators expressed eagerness to work in this manner but felt unprepared to do so. The proposed project was well aligned with Cynthia Chavez Lamar’s extensive experience in collaborative museum work and initiatives like SAR’s Collections Review process. These factors served as starting points for developing a platform that would be continued by subsequent IARC directors Brian Vallo and Elysia Poon.

**The Collections Review process, unique at the time to SAR, began in 2009,** when representatives from the Pueblo of Zuni, including Jim Enote, then director of the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center and current CEO of the Colorado Plateau Foundation, first gathered around a table in SAR's IARC. Laid out before them were examples of pottery from the IARC collection. Working over the course of several days, participants guided IARC staff in determining the correct and appropriate information for IARC's records. Meanwhile, staff worked with A:shiwi A:wan staff to ensure that the IARC met the Zuni community's desire to have this newly-documented information reside within the A:shiwi A:wan records and available to community members. This process, repeated over the course of six years, documented approximately 1,100 historic works from Zuni within the IARC collection.

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— Michael F. Brown,  
SAR president

**Although the Guidelines are geared toward working with Native American communities and collections staff, they can be broadly applied to a range of communities whose cultural materials are held by museums.** “It is our hope,” Smith notes, “that museums and cultural institutions will consider the Guidelines in the work that each department does. From collections care to docent training, there are concepts in the Guidelines that can improve the working relationships across all aspects of museum work.” With the completion of the Guidelines, the IARC is now developing appropriate projects with a variety of institutions and Indigenous communities. It also offers consulting support to organizations and communities that express interest in utilizing the resource.

**The Guidelines project was sponsored by the IARC at SAR.** Additional support was provided by the **Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI)**. “SAR takes pride in having played a leading role in this ground-breaking project,” says Michael F. Brown, SAR's president. “The work pioneered by the IARC exemplifies our mission of furthering collaborative, equitable research with Indigenous peoples and other traditional communities worldwide.”



While over sixty tribal and non-tribal museum professionals participated in the development of the Guidelines, the following museum professionals formed the core working group:

**Landis Smith** (Guidelines co-facilitator), Collaborative Conservation Programs consultant, IARC, SAR; projects conservator, Museums of New Mexico Conservation.

**Brian Vallo** (Acoma Pueblo, Guidelines co-facilitator), former IARC director, SAR.

**Cynthia Chavez Lamar** (San Felipe Pueblo/Tewa Hopi, Guidelines co-facilitator), assistant director of collections, Smithsonian's NMAI; former IARC director, SAR.

**Jim Enote** (Zuni Pueblo), former director, A:shiwi A:san Museum and Heritage Center; CEO, Colorado Plateau Foundation.

**Martina Dawley** (Navajo/Walapai), assistant curator of Native American relations, Arizona State Museum.

**Marian Kaminitz**, director of conservation, NMAI.

**Kelly McHugh**, objects conservator, NMAI.

**Nancy Odegaard**, head of preservation, Arizona State Museum.

**Ellen Pearlstein**, professor/conservator, Interdepartment Program in the Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials, UCLA.

For interview requests and high-resolution images, please contact Meredith Schweitzer at **[schweitzer@sarsf.org](mailto:schweitzer@sarsf.org)** or 505-954-7223. For consultation on incorporating the Guidelines into your institution's practices or into your community's initiatives, visit:

**[guidelinesforcollaboration.info](http://guidelinesforcollaboration.info)** or contact **[Guidelines@sarsf.org](mailto:Guidelines@sarsf.org)**.

**About the School for Advanced Research (SAR):** Founded in 1907, the School for Advanced Research is one of North America's preeminent independent institutes for the study of anthropology, related social sciences, and humanities. SAR is home to the Indian Arts Research Center, one of the nation's most important Southwest Native American art research collections. Through prestigious scholar residency and artist fellowship programs, public programs, and SAR Press, SAR advances intellectual inquiry in order to better understand humankind in an increasingly global and interconnected world. Additional information on the work of our resident scholars and Native American artists is available on SAR's website, **[sarweb.org](http://sarweb.org)**; Facebook, **[facebook.com/schoolforadvancedresearch.org](https://facebook.com/schoolforadvancedresearch.org)**; Twitter, **[@schadvresearch](https://twitter.com/schadvresearch)**; and Instagram, **[@schoolforadvancedresearch](https://instagram.com/schoolforadvancedresearch)**.



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