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Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA)

Collaboration, Collections, and Restitution Best Practices (CCRBP) for United States Museums Holding African Objects

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Table of Contents:

1. <a href="#">Mission and Background</a> .....	1
2. <a href="#">Code of Ethics</a> .....	3
3. <a href="#">Stewardship</a> .....	5
4. <a href="#">Provenance Research</a> .....	8
5. <a href="#">Criteria and Parameters for Determining Priorities</a> .....	13
6. <a href="#">Case Studies with Recommendations</a> .....	15
7. <a href="#">Relevant Law and Policy Precedents</a> .....	20
8. <a href="#">Glossary</a> .....	24

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## **Section 1: Mission and Background**

### Who We Are:

The Art Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) is a sponsored academic and professional organization of the African Studies Association, a global umbrella membership organization devoted to enhancing the exchange of information about Africa. ACASA members consist of scholars, teachers, students, artists, museum specialists, collectors, and all others interested in the arts and culture of Africa and the African Diaspora.

Initiated in 2021, the Collaboration, Collections, and Restitution Best Practices (CCRBP) for United States Museums Holding African Objects Working Group is an ad hoc committee of ACASA. It is composed of over seventy specialists (museum professionals, academics, independent researchers, government officials, and artists) from the United States, Africa, and Europe. Acting as a representative of ACASA, the CCRBP develops resources for museums in the United States with holdings of African arts, material culture, and ancestral remains.

### Our Mission:

The CCRBP works with Africa-based institutions, professionals, and community members and advises museums in the United States on ethical engagement with origin and descendant communities whose objects, artworks, and ancestors are currently represented in their collections.

### Best Practices Goals

Authored by members of the CCRBP between 2022 and 2024, this document recommends best practice guidelines for the ethical stewardship of museum collections originating from the African continent, including recommendations for the ethical return of objects to constituents on the African continent. It emphasizes collaboration and communication with Africa-based peers, descendant communities, and other knowledge-holding constituents in assessing and determining the futures of the collections.

Ratified by ACASA in 2024, this document recommends museums in the United States demonstrate an institutional commitment to 1) transparency regarding collection holdings and information about object histories, 2) working with interested parties on the African continent on collaborations, including returns, within this field-wide framework of accepted practice, 3)

prioritizing research on collection holdings, and 4) disseminating information about African arts collections in accordance with ethical computing standards.

## Section 2: Code of Ethics

ACASA recommends that museums approach the stewardship of African art collections by emphasizing ethical engagement with interested parties, as defined in this section. Interested parties may include artists, patrons, owners, origin and descendant communities, cultural institutions, and governments whose objects and ancestors are currently represented in United States holdings, and their roles could be as claimants, collaborators, advisors, and more. These ethics include, but are not limited to, the fulfillment of any relevant legal responsibilities. Current national and international laws may not require restitution or repatriation, but museums are encouraged to apply the ethics and guidelines in this document to analyze their collections, address return concerns and claims, and generate collaborative resolutions.

ACASA recommends that museums:

1. Approach all aspects of the care and acquisition of African objects in a spirit of collaboration, consultation, transparency, and respect.
2. Proactively seek out relationships with interested parties to cultivate collaborations and invite potential restitution claims.
3. Handle inquiries and restitution claims from interested parties in a timely, equitable, and consistent manner.
4. Maintain confidentiality, discretion, and cultural sensitivity once they have received an inquiry or claim.
5. Make the restitution claims process as welcoming and as easy as possible for potential claimants. The point is to invite collaboration and swiftly respond to claims.
6. Seek ways to shift the balance of power toward African collaborators and claimants. The goal of all collaborations and returns processes is to be transparent, respectful, and ethical. Collaborations with and return claims from cultural institutions and governments require the free, prior, and informed consent of the origin or descendant communities involved.
7. Publish or make public what they know about the objects in their collections, if culturally appropriate, including being transparent about gaps in cultural and art historical knowledge.
8. Work collaboratively to create and share knowledge with origin and descendant communities whose objects and ancestors are currently represented in museum collections in the United States.
9. Invest time, staff labor, and financial support in the stewardship of African objects in their collections. This includes cataloging collections, conducting research, making collections

accessible online, answering queries and claims, providing packing/shipping, staff exchange programming, as well as storage, display and security of objects.

10. Invest funds and staff labor in infrastructure, training, and professional development to support Africa-based museums, cultural heritage professionals, and communities.

11. Approach stewardship of African objects, including acquisitions and restitution work, as active and ongoing.

12. Refrain from acquiring objects without documented provenance that indicates they are both ethically obtained and legally owned by the donor or seller, and previous owners.

### Section 3: Stewardship

At the core of museums' responsibilities as custodians of art and objects created by African peoples, stewardship practices reflect a museum's ethics.

United States-based museums' stewardship of African art should include the following:

1. A collections care plan that guides implementation of the best practices recommended by ACASA.
2. Care that stabilizes objects' condition and/or care that is determined, when possible, in conjunction with representatives from the culture of origin.
3. Culturally appropriate display and storage practices that, when possible, are developed in partnership with people from cultures of origin.
4. Sharing of information about African art collections on the museum's website and through direct correspondence.

#### 1) Collections Care Plan

A museum's collections care plan provides the foundation for its stewardship for all of the objects in its holdings. It should include a section requiring the proactive identification of objects that are priorities for provenance research, collaborative projects, enhanced didactics, and/or restitution/repatriation, as described in Section 5: Criteria and Parameters. The plan should also include clear policies for deaccessioning in order to return based on those criteria.

#### 2) Care and Collaborations

Applying these best practices will affect the stewardship of the many objects that remain in museum collections, in addition to enabling museums to identify objects that may be candidates for return. While in a museum's care, ancestral remains and objects identified by communities as sacred should be treated with specialized protocols, developed in conjunction with representatives of the cultures of origin when possible. If a museum is not able to identify representatives of the culture of origin, ACASA recommends a cautious approach to any conservation interventions or materials research. Museums can share records related to care and conservation with select interested parties. In some cases, an interested party may *not* be interested in pursuing a claim on the ownership of an object or ancestor. In addition to returns, museums can explore many other options that will support the care of the collections and care for peoples whose cultures are represented in museums:

- Training and staff exchanges
- Facilitating long-term loans to museums associated with communities of origin
- Seeking loans from museums on the African continent
- Transferring title of an object, while retaining it on loan until a successful claimant is prepared to receive it
- Support for the commission of new artworks for museum display, collection, or in communities
- Publications
- Inclusion of diverse perspectives in museum records and interpretive materials
- Exhibitions focused on provenance, collecting, and returns

### 3) Knowledge Sharing and Policy Transparency

Collections research is an ongoing process and as new information becomes available, it should be shared openly and transparently. Museums should make policies and procedures for filing claims and making inquiries about African art in their collections easily accessible on their website, such as by providing a downloadable guide as a .pdf and a designated email for all incoming claims. We recommend that the website invite individuals and communities to submit information about objects through a portal accessible to diverse kinds of technology. Museum websites should include a statement informing users that collection records reflect an ongoing endeavor and may include inaccuracies as well as historical derogatory, racist, and/or harmful language.

Below, ACASA recommends the minimum amount of information that a museum shares about African artworks and objects in their publicly available online database, which should be accessible on computers, tablets, and mobile phones. A secure web link should be used to ensure secure access (*https: rather than http*:).

- Basic ID
  - artist
  - title in language of origin
  - descriptive title
  - culture(s)/cultural style
  - nationality
  - date if known
  - materials
  - dimensions
  - credit line
  - accession number
- Photography
  - preferably in color, study photos are acceptable (note: absence of a photograph should not delay posting the basic ID, but inclusion of a photograph is strongly recommended)
  - posting a photograph may not be culturally appropriate for every artwork
- Provenance
  - date it was acquired
  - how it was acquired (donation or purchase) from whom it was acquired
- Designated museum contact
  - clear, easily accessible and up-to-date statement on the website of who to contact at the institution regarding questions and information about the African art collection. This should preferably include a person's name or at least an identified role, email, phone number, and mailing address.
- A link to information about rights and reproduction

If possible, ACASA recommends adding the following:

- Expanded provenance
- Exhibition history
- Publication history

## Section 4: Provenance Research

Provenance research is an important tool for any museum professional seeking to gain greater understanding about the history of an object. Along with connoisseurship studies and scientific analysis of the object, provenance can help determine the veracity of the data on record. Supporting documents may also aid researchers in determining object attributions such as object type, cultural group, and country of origin. The data supporting the chain of ownership for an object may aid in understanding the changing valuation of an object over time, assessing a current valuation for an object, and determining whether it was ethically obtained and legally owned.

Determining who owned an object and how that object came into their possession can be a way to understand larger systemic, political, and market trends, as well as historical events. The records that verify these transfers of ownership frequently underscore how the objects were viewed at that point in time, and this documentation can highlight changing knowledge and attitudes about African arts. Original makers and owners in Africa have frequently been omitted from the documented subsequent transfers by European and North American owners. While it can be speculative, provenance creates the opportunity to incorporate African owners and makers back into the record by acknowledging missing information. Furthermore, attempting to reconstruct the transfers from previous African owners to owners outside of the continent presents researchers with the opportunity to initiate collaborative engagement and share knowledge with origin and descendant communities.

We recommend provenance research be performed on all African objects in a museum's collection, and objects from categories outlined as priorities in Section 5: Criteria and Parameters of this document should take precedence. When a claim is made on an object or an object appears to have been unethically acquired, provenance research should be prioritized before considering next steps for an object. As the basis for understanding the movements of an object over time, provenance research may determine the means by which an object left its original context. By extension, this research can aid in determinations as to whether governments, communities, organizations, and individuals could be claimants to an unethically acquired object.

*Transparency around provenance is imperative, and all provenance data should be made publicly available when possible.*

*How does one do provenance research?*

1. Perform a visual analysis of the object and record materials, techniques, condition, and other information about production that can provide the evidentiary basis for further research steps.
2. Document evidence of interventions such as markings, labels, etc.
3. Review all internal documentation: curatorial, registrar, and conservation files; archival documentation and materials.



4. Seek out external archival sources (exhibition and gallery records, installation photography, ephemera, etc.), especially on any individuals, galleries, and auction sales cited in museum records. When possible, contact associated individuals, galleries, and auction houses.
5. Consult specialists (e.g. contemporary makers, curators, academics, dealers, appraisers, etc.) for input on the potential makers, workshops, and known forgery types.
6. Research applicable patrimony/cultural property laws of countries of origin and transit.
7. Contact origin or descendant communities when applicable.
8. Leave a research trail that includes dead ends and recommendations for future research directions in museum files (digital or hard copy).

*Recommended Format:*

There are many ways to format a provenance line. Fundamental information includes the name of the previous owner accompanied by date of acquisition, type of transfer, and place of transfer. Internal records should have expanded information to include the supporting evidence for these assertions, as well as the types and locations of the individual sources of information. In cases when the provenance information is based on an oral statement, the name of the individual, what information was shared, when, and to whom should also be recorded. For examples of written provenance, see below.

[Example 1 \(MFA Boston\)](https://collections.mfa.org/objects/558340/royal-double-gong?ctx=ca121639-8252-4803-8552-2a2139254eff&idx=4)

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/558340/royal-double-gong?ctx=ca121639-8252-4803-8552-2a2139254eff&idx=4>

Royal double gong  
 Royal Bronze-casting Guild (Igun Eronmwon)  
 Edo, Benin kingdom, Nigeria  
 17th century  
 Robert Owen Lehman Collection; L-G 7.7.2012

Provenance: 17th century, commissioned from the Igun Eronmwon, or royal brass casters guild, by the Oba of Benin; by descent to Oba Ovonramwen (Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, b. about 1857 - d. about 1914; r. 1888 - 1897), Royal Palace, Benin City; 1897, looted from the Royal Palace during the British military occupation of Benin by Dr. Felix Norman Ling Roth (b. 1857 – d. 1921); 1897, given by Roth to his brother, Henry Ling Roth (b. 1855 – d. 1925), Halifax, England; May 11, 1898, sold by Henry Ling Roth for £ 20 to Lt.-General Augustus Henry Pitt-Rivers (b. 1827 - d. 1900), Farnham, England; until the 1960s, kept at the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Farnham, and passed by descent within the family [see note]; 1970s, sold upon the dispersal of the collection. By 2011, Robert Owen Lehman, Rochester, NY; 2012, promised gift of Robert Owen Lehman to the MFA.

Note: The collection of the privately-owned Pitt-Rivers museum passed by descent through Augustus Henry Pitt-Rivers's son Alexander Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers to his grandson, Captain

George Pitt-Rivers (1890-1966) and his common law wife, Stella Howson-Clive (Pitt-Rivers). The museum closed in the 1960s and the collection was sold.

#### [Example 2 \(Yale University Art Gallery\)](#)

<https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/84390>

Oliphant

Sapi, Guinea Coast, Sierra Leone

Late 15th - mid 17th century

Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933, Collection; 2006.51.192

Provenance: Sotheby Parke Bernet, London, June 21, 1979; Charles B. Benenson Collection, Greenwich, Conn, 1979–2004; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.

#### [Example 3 \(Fowler Museum\)](#)

<https://argus.fowler.ucla.edu/final/Portal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cc5e9047566541aa83bd1dce05eb6fda>

Attributed to the family of Sokan Akinyoke (Ikoto Quarter, Abeokuta, Nigeria)

Ère Egúngún, Gèlèdè, or Oro Society helmet mask

19th–20th century; collected before 1911

Yoruba style, Nigeria

Wood, pigment, laundry bluing, metal screw

Gift of the Wellcome Trust; X65.8237

Provenance: probably made by Family of Sokan Akinyoke at unknown date; unidentified owner(s); likely removed from Abeokuta by George C. Denton ca. 1900; sold at Stevens' Auction Rooms Ltd. sale (lot 45) to Henry S. Wellcome on November 28, 1911; transferred to UCLA in 1965

#### [Example 4 \(Cleveland Museum of Art\)](#)

<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/2004.85>

Staff of Office

Central Africa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luba

Early to mid-1800s

Wood and iron

John L. Severance Fund; 2004.85

Provenance: Property of Chief Msidi (c.1830-1891) from an unknown date to 1888, given to British missionary Frederick Stanley Arnot (1858-1914) in 1888, 1888-1914 owned by Frederick Stanley Arnot (1858-1914) and transferred by descent to his son Dr. Arthur B. Arnot, 1914-1987 in the collection of Dr. Arthur B. Arnot, November 10th, 1987 auctioned at Sotheby's in Important Tribal Art sale as lot #79 to Philippe and Hélène Leloup for George Feher, 1987-1990s in the collection of Geroge Feher, 1990s-1996 acquired by Morris Pinto, 1996-2004 collection of Philippe and Hélène Leloup, 2004 donated to Marie Victoire Koch, 2004 sold to the Cleveland Museum of Art

### [Example 5 \(Fowler Museum\)](#)

<https://argus.fowler.ucla.edu/final/Portal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0d375ed47e1f45958f990cceedf74eff>

Unidentified artist

Throne

Early 20th century; collected before 1919

Kedjom Ketinguh style, Cameroon

Wood

Gift of the Wellcome Trust; X65.1624

Provenance: unidentified maker; unidentified owner(s); possibly left Cameroon in 1908; collector(s) unrecorded; sold at Stevens' Auction Rooms Ltd. January 21, 1919 (Lot 368) to unknown buyer; unknown date of acquisition by Henry S. Wellcome; unknown date of transfer to the British Museum; unknown date of transfer back to Wellcome Collection; transferred to UCLA in 1965

### [Example 6 \(New Orleans Museum of Art\)](#)

[https://www.nola.com/entertainment\\_life/chief-voania-of-mubas-noma-work-aimed-at-western-audiences/article\\_090d7388-da3c-11ee-8f60-73dc26d55a94.html](https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/chief-voania-of-mubas-noma-work-aimed-at-western-audiences/article_090d7388-da3c-11ee-8f60-73dc26d55a94.html)

Chief Voania of Muba (Congolese, d. 1928), Muba (Lower Congo), western present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo, Woyo peoples

*Vessel Surmounted by a Couple*

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century (before 1928)

Ceramic

Museum purchase, Robert P. Gordy fund, 2023.34

Provenance: Created circa 1910s-early 1920s; Likely sold at a market in Banana (30 miles southwest of Muba), DRC by his nephew and apprentice, Dumu Dioko to an unknown purchaser, circa 1910s-1920s (before 1928); The Laure-Marie and Daniel P. Biebuyck collection, Newton, Massachusetts (dates unknown); Native American & Tribal Art Bonhams Skinner, Boston, Massachusetts (June 1, 2023, lot 29).

### **Online Guides to Provenance Research:**

International Foundation for Art Research (reviewed and approved by AAM)

*Provenance Guide*

[https://www.ifar.org/Provenance\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.ifar.org/Provenance_Guide.pdf)

Art Institute of Chicago

*Researching the Provenance of a Work of Art*

<https://www.artic.edu/library/discover-our-collections/research-guides/researching-the-provenance-of-a-work-of-art>

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
*Provenance Research*  
<https://www.mfa.org/collections/provenance>

Philadelphia Museum of Art  
*Provenance Research*  
<https://philamuseum.org/collection/provenance-research>

Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art  
*Provenance at the Eskenazi Museum of Art*  
<https://artmuseum.indiana.edu/collections-online/provenance/index.php>

Yale University Library  
*Collecting and Provenance Research: Methodology*  
<https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=296149&p=1973820>

*Further research:* For institutions looking to initiate the return of unethically procured objects when a claim has not been made, provenance research can provide museum professionals with a starting point. Some groups of looted objects from Africa are regularly noted as such in their provenance histories, as is seen with many works taken in the 1897 siege on Benin, the 1874 looting of the Asante palace in Kumasi, or the 1868 Battle of Maqdala in Ethiopia. In each of these examples, many sales after the initial theft clearly indicate that the objects were taken during the act of looting. Other types of candidates for return may have less well-documented histories of unethical procurement. As an example, objects with provenance that indicate they were removed from Nigeria in the late 1960s and early 1970s could be candidates for further research as this may signal that they were removed from the region during the Biafran War. Cases such as this warrant further research and could provide a museum with a clear opportunity to engage a descendent community in the research. It is quite rare that provenance research can ever truly answer all questions about the history of ownership of an object, but the process can provide ample opportunity for increased knowledge and engagement.

## Section 5: Criteria and Parameters for Determining Priorities

Museums across the United States have the responsibility to research their holdings of arts from the African continent. The task of identifying types of objects to prioritize for provenance research, collaborative projects, enhanced didactics, and/or return can appear daunting.

ACASA has identified ten categories, in order of prioritization, for targeted inquiry. We acknowledge that these criteria are not exclusive, but are based on categorizations commonly found in museum records in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

1. **All objects for which claims have been made within a specific institution:** There are instances in which institutions will be approached with a claim that an object was unlawfully acquired at some point in its history. These objects should receive immediate attention. In addition to direct requests made to an institution, categories of objects for which there is a general or public call for return should also be considered.
2. **Ancestral remains:** Prioritize ancestral remains and reliquaries for return. Objects formed from the voluntary contribution of body elements like fingernails or hair may not always be considered human remains based on original cultural context.
3. **Looted or acknowledged stolen objects:** If an object is known to be looted or stolen, ACASA recommends that museums identify the rightful owner or heir and initiate restitutive procedures.
4. **Archeological or “Red List” objects:** The objects considered here include illegally excavated archaeological objects, as well as all those identified on the ICOM [Africa](#) and [West Africa](#) Red List.<sup>2</sup> Below is a recap of the objects that are considered most problematic and require protection. Institutions are encouraged to review the Red List documents directly for more information.
5. **Funerary or burial associated objects:** Objects created to house ancestral remains, intended to mark a grave, and/or facilitate communication with the deceased should be considered for return in consultation with descendent communities.
6. **Objects from conflict zones:** The possibility for looting and unethical or coerced trading increases at times of armed conflict and civil war. Museums should be wary of accepting or retaining objects with a provenance that may place them in conflict zones at the time they left the continent, and pay close attention to the date range within which objects likely exited their country of origin.
7. **Missionary collections:** The history of collecting in Africa is marked by a spectrum of missionary collecting that was, at times, unethical. Museums should conduct further research on collections originating from regions or specific missions where missionaries were known to intentionally profit from the removal of arts after conversion, forceful or otherwise.
8. **Economic and political coercion:** Individuals, families, and communities forcibly dispossessed of objects in substantiated coercive situations such as instances when objects were sold to pay unethical taxes (i.e. taxes to coerce forced labor) should be considered for restitution in consultation with descendants or communities of origin. If

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<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive list of types of object acquisition—legal and illegal, ethical and unethical—see section three of AAMD’s 2022 [Guidance on Art from Colonized Areas](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidance%20on%20Art%20from%20Colonized%20Areas%20%281%29.pdf) [https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidance%20on%20Art%20from%20Colonized%20Areas%20%281%29.pdf].

<sup>2</sup> See <https://icom.museum/en/ressource/red-list-of-african-archaeological-objects/> and <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Red-List-West-Africa-English.pdf>

such an object is retained in the collection, and for all objects suspected to have been procured through coercion, we recommend that its presentation (labeling and interpretation) within the museum context acknowledges the realities of this history. Similar to the legal definition of duress, frequently used within the litigation of sales of artworks and other goods by Jewish individuals under Nazi rule, the concept of coercion used here speaks to a broader ethical, rather than legal, obligation for return in the African context.

9. **Environmental destruction or degradation:** Environmental impacts of colonial and post-colonial extractive economies have had profound impacts on African economies and the health and safety of ancestral lands. Cases in which objects were sold due to duress that resulted from environmental factors should be considered for restitution.
10. **Objects from cultural areas for which the institution has a strong local community who can be engaged:** We recommend that museums engage with their local communities, especially members of African immigrant communities and Americans of African ancestry. Projects can include provenance research on objects in the permanent collection (whether on view or in storage), conservation, and special exhibitions and permanent gallery reinstallations.

Some institutions may begin provenance research with their best-known or most-exhibited objects, while others might need to prioritize the objects for which they have no information. Therefore, we acknowledge the following:

- While some of the criteria outlined above should result in return, in most cases institutions should initiate a dialogue with potential claimants about what the appropriate reparative action is, whether consultation, physical restitution, digital restitution, long-term loan, or any other mutually agreed upon outcome.
- Categories listed above are for ease of searching within collections databases and do not always reflect how they are considered within communities.
- There are distinctions between culturally and historically significant objects.
- Some categories explain situations in which there is a legal call for a return, while others are examples of categories requiring further research or engagement with descendants, makers, and other interested parties.
- Many objects will fit multiple categories thus increasing the urgency to review them carefully. As institutions go through their collection, we recommend using qualifiers such as “Likely, Most Likely, Definitely Not” to facilitate prioritization.
- To enhance collaboration, it is essential that objects deemed problematic not be hidden or removed from databases or websites, but rather be made accessible for research and enhanced with better didactics as a first step. Exceptions include ancestral remains and objects intended to be hidden, which should never be shown in a public setting without express permission from the descendent community.

## Section 6: Case Studies with Recommendations

### Introduction

Using categories outlined in Section 5: Criteria and Parameters as priorities for research and identifying potential objects for return or collaboration, this section highlights case studies as potential strategies for assessing collections and generating constructive responses to questions about return or other forms of stewardship. In several of the case studies, more than one category from Section 5: Criteria and Parameters may apply. While they are not all specific to museums in the United States with collections of African art, the examples below highlight cultural heritage and return projects undertaken by art-holding institutions.

These case studies, based on publicly available accounts of their processes and results, underscore that there is no single approach or outcome for institutional collaboration and/or repatriation projects. Museums and other institutions holding African art should follow and, if needed, revise their collection management policies to address return claims and deaccessioning. For culturally sensitive objects in collections and responding to return claims, ACASA recommends reviewing the sections with references to relevant law and best practices for museum collection policies.

ACASA encourages institutions to think creatively and collaboratively with the culturally appropriate individuals and community leaders about their museum's holdings of African art. The examples below suggest working frameworks for possible projects and outcomes, such as: exhibitions, online collection platforms and digital tools, and facsimile reproductions of the original object. Importantly, the return of objects should not necessarily signal the end of the process. Initiating and fostering dialogue, facilitating consultation, and sustaining meaningful relationships with individuals and communities will support an institution's mission to share, learn from, and conserve African cultural heritage.

### Case studies: Ancestral Remains

Ancestral remains in museum collections represent a high priority for return. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) serves as a useful point of reference as an exemplary national policy governing the repatriation of ancestral remains. For examples of the application of NAGPRA, see the [Repatriation Office for the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History](#) and the [Step-by-Step Guide through the Repatriation Process, published by the National Museum of the American Indian](#).<sup>3</sup> Although NAGPRA principally applies to indigenous peoples and groups in the United States, institutions have used its framework to develop collection management policies and repatriation policies of ancestral remains outside of NAGPRA's purview.

- Harvard University's 2022 [Report of the Steering Committee on Human Remains in University Museum Collections](#) offers guidelines for handling the restitution of ancestral/human remains from enslaved African peoples.<sup>4</sup> A committee completed a comprehensive survey of ancestral/human remains at university museums and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://naturalhistory.si.edu/research/anthropology/programs/repatriation-office> and <https://americanindian.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/repatriation/NMAI-Repatriation-Guidelines-2020.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://provost.harvard.edu/files/provost/files/harvard\\_university-\\_human\\_remains\\_report\\_fall\\_2022.pdf?m=1663090982](https://provost.harvard.edu/files/provost/files/harvard_university-_human_remains_report_fall_2022.pdf?m=1663090982)

established a Human Remains Return Committee (HRRC) to consult with appropriate community representatives and lineal descendants. For cases of ancestral/human remains under review by the HRRC, the holding institutions issue a research and teaching moratorium. University institutions work with the HRRC and community representatives to facilitate the return and interment of ancestral/human remains with consideration for the proper memorialization of the person's remains.

- The Field Museum in Chicago developed a [collaborative care and research program for the museum's holdings of ancestral remains](#).<sup>5</sup> Findings from a symposium organized with Native North American communities and First Nations, museum professionals, and scientists helped formulate an addendum to its collection management policy that regulates the care, study, and restitution of ancestral remains. The museum cannot display ancestral remains without the consultation and expressed approval of a descendant group. The museum supports these initiatives with grants, openly fostering information requests, collaborative stewardship of their holdings, and co-curative projects.

### **Case studies: African Arts with Colonial Provenance**

Connections between European colonialism and holdings of African art in museums in the United States are not straightforward. European occupation and colonial administration of Africa between the late 1800s and mid-20th century resulted in the global circulation of African cultural heritage. In November 2022, the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), a governing association for North American art holding institutions, issued its [Guidance on Art from Colonized Areas](#).<sup>6</sup> While the scope of colonial collections is much larger and more complex, objects associated with the military destruction of a religious site or royal compound represent high priorities for collection assessment and possible return. Those from the Benin Kingdom (Nigeria) have been at the focus of return efforts by European and American museums. A number of United States institutions are participating in the [Digital Benin project](#), an online searchable database and research tool developed to catalog museum collections of visual culture looted from Benin in 1897.<sup>7</sup>

- In 2022, the Horniman Museum Board of Trustees in London approved the transfer of ownership and repatriation of 72 copper-alloy and ivory objects looted from the Kingdom of Benin in response to a formal claim initiated by the Nigerian government. Provenance research conducted by the Horniman Museum included consultations with community members. As part of the return, the Horniman Museum negotiated with the Nigerian Commission of Museum and Monuments to secure a loan of objects.
- The Board of Trustees of the Smithsonian Institution, which oversees 21 museums including the National Museum of African Art, ratified an Ethical Returns Policy in 2022. This process was made part of the collection management policy governing all Smithsonian museums and used to implement repatriation of 29 objects originating from the Benin palace. The Smithsonian transferred ownership of the objects to the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). Some objects remain on long-term loan to the Smithsonian as part of an ongoing collaboration with the NCMM and Nigerian government.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://repatriation.fieldmuseum.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidance%20on%20Art%20from%20Colonized%20Areas%20%281%29.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://digitalbenin.org/>



- In conjunction with the repatriation by the Smithsonian, the Rhode Island School of Design Museum deaccessioned and repatriated a copper-alloy altar portrait or *Head of a King (Oba)* in 2022. The altar portrait had been part of the museum’s collection since 1939, originally acquired by a patron from the Knoedler Gallery. After examining the work and conducting provenance research, the museum determined the portrait altar had been looted in 1897. Beginning in 2018, and for multiple years, the museum worked with community partners in Nigeria, the United States, and Europe, including the Benin Dialogue Group, which consisted of museum professionals and representatives of Nigeria’s government, Nigeria’s National Commission for Museums and Monuments, and scholars of local universities. The museum’s action partly was in response to demands by RISD students and community members for the return of cultural heritage from Africa.
- In 2024, the Fowler Museum at UCLA voluntarily returned seven objects to the Manhiya Palace Museum in the Asante Palace, Kumasi, Ghana. Of these seven objects, four had been looted from the Asante palace in 1874 during the Sargrenti War (also known as the Third Anglo-Ashanti War) and three were part of an extortionary indemnity payment required by the Treaty of Fomena during the same year. After provenance research, started in 2019, revealed the unethical removal of these objects from their original context, Fowler staff members engaged a consultant with strong ties to the Asante palace to open conversations with Palace officials regarding a return. This consultant guided the Fowler team through each stage of the return, aiding in all communications between the Fowler and Palace museum staff. As of May 2024, the seven objects are installed in the Manhiya Palace Museum. The Fowler Museum has also entered into a five-year memorandum of understanding, beginning in 2024, with the department of Fine Arts and Curatorial Studies at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and Manhiya Palace Museum to provide training to Ghanaian students interested in museum work.

### **Case studies: African Arts and Post-independence Cultural Heritage**

Museums in the United States steward many African artworks that were removed without legal or ethical oversight *after* a nation-state of origin declared independence. Many of these present distinct challenges for determining accurate cultural attributions and retracing provenance. The immense complexity of Africa, its colonial histories, and post-independence politics can compound the challenges of limited and sometimes false historical documentation for African objects that museums acquired from collectors, donors, dealers, and galleries. For institutions with existing collections or considering new acquisitions of historic African art, ACASA recommends completing detailed physical examination of the object and provenance study, including review of available export/import permits and other documentation (see Section 4: Provenance Research).

- The restitution of the figural statue known as “Afo-A-Kom” or *Mbang* represents one of the earliest successful return cases for African arts in the United States. On view for the exhibition *Royal Art of Cameroon* at Dartmouth, the statue was determined to have been looted from the Laikom palace of the Kom Kingdom in 1966–67. The sculpture was not part of the Hood Museum’s collection but on loan to the exhibition courtesy the New York gallery of Aaron Furman. The Cameroon government officially petitioned Furman to have the statue returned, but he declined to return the statue for financial reasons. A consortium of advocates for its return, which included the Museum of African Art in Washington, DC and the late American collector Lawrence Gussman, raised money to purchase the sculpture from Furman. United States diplomat Warren M. Robbins

oversaw the diplomatic negotiations and returned the sculpture directly to Nsom Nggue, the Fon of the Kom peoples, in Laikom December 1973. The figure is part of the royal treasury of the Kom Kingdom.

- The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFAB) approved the transfer of ownership and repatriation to Mali's Ministry of Culture for two ceramic sculptures reportedly from an archaeological site near Mopti, Mali: [a figure of a ewe](#) and [a kneeling figure](#).<sup>8</sup> This category of sculpture is cited in the International Council of Museums (ICOM) [Red List for archeological and cultural heritage objects from West Africa](#).<sup>9</sup> The MFAB never accessioned the two sculptures, which were part of a 2012 bequest from a private collector. After conducting provenance research, the MFAB proactively contacted the Ministry of Culture in Mali and concluded the two sculptures had been illegally removed according to Mali's Law No. 85-40/AN-RM Concerning the Protection and Promotion of the National Cultural Heritage of 1985. The MFAB continues to list the two ceramic sculptures in the museum's online collection with updated provenance information and descriptions of the action taken to resolve the case.
- The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) houses a collection of Kom art that was assembled by the collector Katherine White from multiple sources. SAM staff contacted the Kom Fon (king) to ask for permission to display pieces from this collection and for guidance on related gallery text. The Fon requested that the Kom artworks be "shown as his ambassadors," and his grandson worked with palace officials to provide SAM staff with appropriate language. The SAM has maintained strong open communication with representatives from the Kom Kingdom and expects to return some of the pieces from this collection to the palace when they have a secure facility ready.
- The Denver Museum of Science and Nature and Indianapolis Museum of Art have worked with the National Museums of Kenya since 2014 to return *vigango* (sing. *kikango*), which are wood funerary sculptures. Mijikenda peoples consider a *kikango* the inalienable embodiment of the deceased. The sale and purchase of *vigango* was not regulated by any legal frameworks, but scholars have demonstrated that the procurement of *vigango* from funerary sites was unethical. The Denver Museum of Science and Nature deaccessioned and returned 30 *vigango* from the museum's holdings in 2020. The Indianapolis Museum of Art deaccessioned and returned 18 *vigango* from the museum's holdings in 2022.
- In 2018, the Brooklyn Museum undertook extensive research on [a 20th-century Yorùbá egúngún costume](#), which had been a gift to the museum in 1998.<sup>10</sup> The provenance chain of the costume before the donor was inconclusive, but collaborative research with external scholars and Nigerian communities revealed that it had been made by members of the Lekewogbe family in Ògbómòṣó, Nigeria. Consultation with the living descendants of the family indicated that the *egúngún* had been taken from a shrine in 1948; its whereabouts until 1998 remain unknown. The museum organized the exhibition [One: Egúngún](#) (2019), which featured the costume and emphasized its history. The family did not petition for the return of the *egúngún*, which remains part of the collection of the Brooklyn Museum. An ifá divination ceremony, in which the curator took part, confirmed that the mask has lost its empowerment and is considered appropriate to be on view and in the museum's collection. Through this ceremony and conversations, both the family and ancestors gave permission and blessings to the exhibition.

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/37147> and <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/23977/kneeling-figure>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Red-List-West-Africa-English.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/159425>

- The University of Michigan Museum of Art's (UMMA) [\*Wish You Were Here: African Art and Repatriation\*](#) (August 2021–December 2022) was a public research and exhibition project that examined 11 African objects held by the museum, including: *minkisi* and *muzidi* (Democratic Republic of Congo), shrine figures (Nigeria), and copper-alloy works attributed to the Benin Kingdom (Nigeria).<sup>11</sup> Occasioned by work on the reinstallation of the permanent collection., the project developed in response to students' questions about African art and the need to pursue provenance research on the museum's African holdings with little funding. Research progress and outcomes on the objects generated by collaborators were part of the public display in the gallery and an online component. As part of the project, researchers at UMMA contacted different stakeholders—museum professionals in associated African countries, Nigeria National Commission for Museum and Monuments, Urhobo historical society, Asele Institute, and other African or Diaspora community organizations, individuals, and artists—with the purpose of transferring authority and decision-making. Researchers concluded that copper-alloy works reportedly associated with the Benin Kingdom were later, post-1930 castings likely intended for export. While the *Wish You Were Here: African Art and Repatriation* project concluded in 2022, UMMA continues to engage and develop relationships with individuals and communities affiliated with works in the museum's collection.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://umma.umich.edu/exhibitions/wish-you-were-here-african-art-and-restitution/>

## Section 7: Relevant Law and Policy Precedents

### Relevant Law

This section does not represent legal advice, and museums will need to consult with their counsel to assure they are following the law. ACASA has compiled this section for museums' reference about the legal and policy precedents that have shaped our recommendations. For the care, study, and stewardship of African objects and ancestors, following the letter of the law is not sufficient. Museums are encouraged to uphold their ethical responsibilities *in addition to* legal requirements.

- 1815 Congress of Vienna (Signed by Austria, France, Great Britain, Portugal, Prussia, Russia, Spain, and Sweden)
- 1863 Lieber Code (General Orders No. 100: Instructions for the Government of the Armies of the United States in the Field)
- 1880 Oxford Manual: The Laws of War on Land (Institute of International Law).
- 1899 Hague Convention of 1899
- 1907 Hague Convention of 1907
- 1934 United States National Stolen Property Act
- 1943 Inter-Allied Declaration against Acts of Dispossession Committed in Territories under Enemy Occupation and Control
- 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention (First Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention)
- 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Cultural Property
- 1975 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- 1983 United States Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act
- 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
- 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects

- 1999 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention (Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention)
- 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
- 2024 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Systematic Processes for Disposition or Repatriation of Native American Human Remains, Funerary Objects, Sacred Objects, and Objects of Cultural Patrimony

For information on some African national laws, consult the appropriate African governmental representatives, the International Foundation for Art Research's [International Cultural Property Ownership and Export Legislation](#) resource, and UNESCO's 1988 [Handbook of National Regulations Concerning the Export of Cultural Property](#).<sup>12</sup> For all bilateral agreements with the United States of America, see the Department of State's list of [Current Agreements and Import Restrictions](#).<sup>13</sup>

### **Policy Precedents**

The present document has been shaped by years of guidance and policies published by professional, scholarly, and governmental organizations since the 1970s. Museum staff in the United States are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the following documents in order to shape the mission, values, and strategies of the institutions where they work.

- 1974 [A Plea for the Return of an Irreplaceable Cultural Heritage to Those who Created it: An Appeal by Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director-General of UNESCO](#) (Published in 1978)  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000046054>
- 1998 [Association of Art Museum Directors Report of the AAMD Task Force on the Spoliation of Art during the Nazi/World War II Era \(1933-1945\)](#)  
<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Report%20on%20the%20Spoliation%20of%20Nazi%20Era%20Art.pdf>
- 2000 [American Alliance of Museums Code of Ethics for Museums](#) (amendment of 1993 document)  
<https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/>

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<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.ifar.org/icpoel.php?region=africa> and <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000119126>

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<https://eca.state.gov/cultural-heritage-center/cultural-property/current-agreements-and-import-restrictions>

- 2002 [Association of Art Museum Directors Art Museums and the International Exchange of Cultural Artifacts](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Cultural%20Property%2010.01.pdf)  
<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Cultural%20Property%2010.01.pdf>
- 2004 [ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums](https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/code-of-ethics/) (first adopted as the ICOM Code of Professional Ethics November 4, 1986; revised and retitled July 6, 2001)  
<https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/code-of-ethics/>
- 2004 [Association of Art Museum Directors Report of the AAMD Task Force on the Acquisition of Archaeological Materials and Ancient Art](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/June%2010%20Final%20Task%20Force%20Report.pdf)  
<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/June%2010%20Final%20Task%20Force%20Report.pdf>
- 2006 [Association of Art Museum Directors Report of the AAMD Subcommittee on Incoming Loans of Archaeological Material and Ancient Art](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidelines%20for%20Incoming%20Loans_FINAL.pdf)  
[https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidelines%20for%20Incoming%20Loans\\_FINAL.pdf](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidelines%20for%20Incoming%20Loans_FINAL.pdf)
- 2006 [Association of Art Museum Directors Report of the AAMD Subcommittee on the Acquisition and Stewardship of Sacred Objects](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Sacred%20Objects%20Guideline%2008.06.pdf)  
<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Sacred%20Objects%20Guideline%2008.06.pdf>
- 2007 [Association of Art Museum Directors Art Museums and the Restitution of Works Stolen by the Nazis](https://aamd.org/standards-and-practices)  
<https://aamd.org/standards-and-practices>
- 2007 [Association of Art Museum Directors Art Museums and the Practice of Deaccessioning](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/PositionPaperDeaccessioning%2011.07.pdf)  
<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/PositionPaperDeaccessioning%2011.07.pdf>
- 2008 [Association of Art Museum Directors New Report on Acquisition of Archaeological Materials and Ancient Art](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/2008ReportAndRelease.pdf)  
<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/2008ReportAndRelease.pdf>
- 2009 [Association of Art Museum Directors College and University Guidelines for Art on Campus](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20University%20Art%20on%20Campus%20Guidelines%2007.09.pdf)  
<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20University%20Art%20on%20Campus%20Guidelines%2007.09.pdf>
- 2013 [Association of Art Museum Directors Guidelines on the Acquisition of Archaeological Material and Ancient Art](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Guidelines%20on%20the%20Acquisition%20of%20Archaeological%20Material%20and%20Ancient%20Art%20revised%202013_0.pdf)  
[https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Guidelines%20on%20the%20Acquisition%20of%20Archaeological%20Material%20and%20Ancient%20Art%20revised%202013\\_0.pdf](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/Guidelines%20on%20the%20Acquisition%20of%20Archaeological%20Material%20and%20Ancient%20Art%20revised%202013_0.pdf)

- 2018 [Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, \*The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics\* \(Ministère de la Culture, République Française and CNRS-ENS Paris Saclay-Université Paris Nanterre\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20190328181703/http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savo_y_en.pdf)  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20190328181703/http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr\\_savo\\_y\\_en.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20190328181703/http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savo_y_en.pdf)
- 2020 Goethe-Institut, National Museum of Tanzania, and Museum am Rothenbaum, Conference Report: Beyond Collecting: New Ethics for Museums in Transition
- 2020 [AFFORD's Return of the Icons: The Restitution of African Artefacts & Human Remains Project Mapping Report](https://afford-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/RoIPolicyBriefFinal.pdf)  
<https://afford-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/RoIPolicyBriefFinal.pdf>
- 2022 [Molemo Moiloa, \*Reclaiming Restitution: Centering and Contextualizing the African Narrative\* \(Africa No Filter and Open Restitution Africa\)](https://openrestitution.africa/reclaiming-restitution-report/)  
<https://openrestitution.africa/reclaiming-restitution-report/>
- 2022 [ICOM International Committee for University Museums and Collections Guidance for Restitution and Return of Items from University Museums and Collections](http://umac.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/UMAC-Guidance-Restitution-2022.pdf)  
<http://umac.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/UMAC-Guidance-Restitution-2022.pdf>
- 2022 [Association of Art Museum Directors \*Guidance on Art from Colonized Areas\*](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidance%20on%20Art%20from%20Colonized%20Areas%20%281%29.pdf)  
<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Guidance%20on%20Art%20from%20Colonized%20Areas%20%281%29.pdf>

## **Section 8: Glossary**

### **Acquisition**

The process through which the ownership of objects and specimens is transferred to a museum. When focusing specifically on art from colonized areas, AAMD has identified the most common circumstances of these transfers to be: private gift; diplomatic gift; sanctioned armed conflict; unsanctioned armed conflict; theft; forced alienation; treaty; other government authority; partage; bona fide purchase; unknown; and spoliation.

### **Ancestors**

Ancestors refer to the deceased individuals who are believed to exist in the spiritual realm, where they maintain a connection with the living community and influence the lives of their living descendants. The spiritual presence and enduring influence of ancestors within the community are frequently depicted in African art through various mediums such as sculpture, masks, paintings, and textiles. Ancestors can also refer to the kinds/genres of objects and artifacts that represent, contain, or are connected to the spirits of ancestors.

### **Claimant** (see also *Communities of Origin* and *Descendant Communities*)

Any person or community members asserting lineal descent or cultural affiliation to a particular collection of ancestral remains or right of ownership/legal title of funerary objects, sacred objects, or other objects of cultural heritage.

### **Colonialism and Colonial Period**

The military, political, and economic doctrine of a nation asserting authority and administrative control over a foreign territory and its indigenous population. On the continent of Africa, the period of European colonialism began in the 19th century. Although the colonial period officially ended in the 20th century, the political, economic, and social impacts of colonialism are ongoing.

### **Communities of Origin** (see also *Descendant Communities*)

Communities or community members, including their descendants living today, from whom objects originated or to whom objects have been attributed.

### **Cultural Property**

Based on the UNESCO definition, property that, on religious or secular grounds, is designated by interested parties as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art, or science. Within these best practices recommended by ACASA, non-state actors such as cultural groups or kingdoms may also designate objects as cultural property.

### **Cultural Heritage**

According to UNESCO, "cultural heritage includes artifacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible



heritage (movable, immobile and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (IOCH) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artifacts, sites, or monuments.”

**Descendant Communities** (see also *Communities of Origin*)

Communities or community members tracing their ancestry directly through lineal descent and/or a traditional system of family and social relations (i.e. kinship).

**Ethical Computing Standards**

Increasing the accessibility of online information of objects, ancestors, and artworks in museum collections that takes into account the challenges of connectivity, broadband strength, and digital formats used by the majority of individuals on the African continent.

**Intangible Heritage**

As defined by UNESCO, intangible heritage “includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.”

**Material Culture**

The aspects of a culture manifested through things, resources, and built spaces. This includes tools, weapons, utensils, machines, ornaments, art, buildings, monuments, written records, religious images, clothing, and any other object produced or used by humans.

**Museum**

A museum is a not-for-profit institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage (objects or artifacts of cultural, historical, scientific, and/or artistic significance). Museums serve as custodians of cultural heritage, preserving and safeguarding objects and artifacts that represent the diversity and richness of human experience, fostering understanding, appreciation, and dialogue across cultures and communities. This definition follows, to some degree, the approved 2022 ICOM definition of a museum.

**Objects** (see also Ancestors and Material Culture)

Encompasses a wide variety of artworks and expressive forms, including sculpture, painting, textiles, ceramics, metalwork, masks, jewelry, body modification, beadwork, and architecture. Such expressions are intertwined with histories, cultural beliefs, and social practices and are used for a diverse range of purposes. When “African art” is referred to in this document, it includes tangible as well as intangible works of art, objects, and material culture.

**Provenance**

History of ownership or physical possession that includes the means of acquisition (such as purchase, gift, theft), dates of transfer, and the parties involved. This is not to be confused with provenience, which is a term most commonly used in an archaeological context to indicate the location where an object was found.

**Provenance Research**

A process integral to the construction of an accurate provenance for any object. This includes the consultation of corroborating evidence such as purchase invoices, export and import permits, shipping receipts, and other sorts of related ephemera: auction records, historical photographs, exhibition records, newspaper articles, journal entries, etc. Additional information may come from interviews or oral histories, which, in the case of African arts that are frequently lacking in clear written documentation, may prove invaluable in constructing a chain of ownership that reaches back to the African continent.

**Repatriation**

The act or process of returning ancestors or artworks/objects to their country of origin.

**Restitution**

The act or process of giving back or restoring ancestors or artworks/objects stolen or improperly traded to their rightful owner, which may be an individual or group (clan, society, community). Sometimes restitution may include some form of compensation and/or restorative gesture, either agreed to by both parties or ordered by a legal authority.

**Return**

Repatriation, restitution, and return are often used interchangeably in news and media outlets. Return broadly encompasses the terms of “repatriation” and “restitution,” and includes the return of objects, artworks, and ancestors to countries, communities, or national entities. It may also entail other methods of return that include digital sharing or transfer of title.

**Stewardship**

The act of caring for objects in a collection through storage, cataloging, conservation, and research.