Making United States African Art Collections Accessible and Visible Subcommittee (MUSAA)

Report to the Steering Committee of the ACASA-sponsored *Collaboration, Collections, and Restitution Best Practices for United States Museums Holding African Objects Working Group*

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PREFACE

This report from the "Making United States African Art Collections Accessible and Visible" subcommittee (MUSAA) to the ACASA CCRBP Steering Committee provides the following:

- An overview of of the subcommittee's work to date
- A description of our vision for a digital resource that would function as an aggregator to enhance the visibility and accessibility of African objects in U.S. museum collections, and create opportunities for input from Africa-based individuals and institutions
- Consideration of accessibility for the digital resource, including approaches to facilitating input and dialogue between users and museums, ethical computing, open access, and creative commons licenses
- Recommendations for a sustainability plan for the digital resource, including its technology, funding, budget, and staffing
- Recommendations for a piloting strategy and institutional opting-in processes for the resource
- Appendices
    - MUSAA subcommittee notes and documentation
    - Recommendations for additional materials to make available through the resource

INTRODUCTION

The Making United States African Art Collections Accessible and Visible subcommittee (MUSAA) was convened by the Collaboration, Collections, and Restitution Best Practices for United States Museums Holding African Objects Working Group (CCRBP) in 2022 under the leadership of co-chairs Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Candace M. Keller. The MUSAA's charge in its first term (2022-24) was to make a recommendation for a digital resource to consolidate and enhance the visibility and accessibility of African objects in U.S. museum collections by focusing on the needs of African institutions and communities. The envisioned resource would:

1. Aggregate information from U.S. museums that have collections of African objects, including how to contact appropriate personnel and where to find information about these institutional collections.
2. Connect users to U.S. museum databases and facilitate input and dialogue between users and museums.
3. Provide some searchability across collection databases/data sets through basic cataloging terms (keywords).
4. Make transparent recommended practices for U.S. museums, including those without an Africanist on staff.
5. Employ ethical computing standards focused on African contexts, particularly in regard to modes of technology and bandwidth.

MUSAA's charge stemmed from recognition that the stewardship of African objects within U.S. museums requires that collection information be visible, transparent, and accessible, and that institutions be held accountable, especially to "interested parties"– which 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 whose roles could be as claimants, collaborators, advisors, and more. To this end, collecting institutions have an obligation to make information about objects in their care public, including basic identification, visual documentation of objects when appropriate, provenance sources, institutional contact, and information about image licensing. This step was identified by the MUSAA subcommittee as urgent for museums to undertake, and an imperative step to participating in any digital resource. Disseminating information about minimum standards for transparency about African art collections and advocating for museums to take action on meeting these standards is deemed by MUSAA as a pressing responsibility of CCRBP, and an area in which the backing of ACASA can be especially effective.

Impetus for MUSAA's work was informed by the recommendations of Africa-based participants in four Listening Sessions undertaken by CCRBP in 2021. MUSAA's 2023 conversations with Africa-based colleagues, in English and French, revealed a clear need for resources to make it easier to find what African objects are in U.S. museum collections, what is known about those objects, where they are located, and who to contact about them.

Additional discussions with advisors to U.S. institutions without an Africanist on staff indicated a desire for clear guidelines regarding recommended practices for public transparency about collections that could be shared with museum leadership. MUSAA identified the following barriers to the accessibility of collection information that museums are responsible for addressing:

- Collections are inconsistently visible through online databases.
- Collection databases are often incomplete: they might not include all information available in the museum's archives or references to relevant outside sources.
- It is often difficult to find specific contact information for individuals who are responsible for the stewardship of African objects at an institution in order to solicit information about their collections.
- Institutional online databases that do exist are organized independently of one another, requiring anyone interested in objects of a particular type or from a particular region to locate and search in multiple databases.
- Collection databases are generally closed systems to which those of the aforementioned interested parties cannot actively contribute.
- Online databases are not equally accessible to all audiences due to inconsistent bandwidth capacities and access to modes of technology.

To guide its process and to develop a shared understanding of our work across members, the MUSAA subcommittee developed a vision statement. [See Appendix A]

Guided by this vision, the MUSAA subcommittee developed a timeline for achieving the following goals within its three-year term [See Appendix B]:

- Create a document that provides guidance on minimum website standards for U.S. museums with African objects in their collections, including the type of information that a museum should make public online and additional information that can be made public as possible.
- Distribute a survey to African colleagues to gather information about their interest in and needs for a digital resource that would facilitate access to information about African objects in U.S. museum collections.
- Hold listening sessions (in French and English) with Africa-based colleagues, including scholars, institutional staff, and specialists with ties to communities of origin, to gain further insights into their needs and their ideas about what would make a digital resource most useful.
- Hold listening sessions with scholars and institutional staff based in the U.S., including those without an African art specialist on staff, about their needs for making African collections more accessible online.

- Identify and review digital resource models that relate to what we envision for the CCRBP digital resource, and research and write mini-reports on each to share with the subcommittee.
- Invite representatives from three or four of the most relevant models to speak to the subcommittee about their projects during standing MUSAA meetings.
- Develop and submit a report with recommendations for a digital tool to the CCRBP Steering Committee by December 31, 2024.

PROCESS

The MUSAA subcommittee began meeting in June 2022. To facilitate the subcommittee's work, the co-chairs established working groups that met monthly as needed to focus on specific tasks. The full subcommittee met once per month (except in July) to hear reports from the working groups, meet with guests, arrive at consensus for next steps, and review and approve outputs.

After several discussions that revealed varied perspectives, concerns, and priorities among our members, the subcommittee's first tasks were the creation of a subcommittee "Vision Statement" outlining shared priorities and goals (Feb. 2023) and a "Guidance on Minimum Website Standards for United States Art Museums with African Art Collections" document (April 2023). The latter was integrated into the CCRBP Best Practices report (Spring 2024). [See Appendix for these documents].

In May 2023, the subcommittee compiled a mailing list of 144 Africa-based recipients using the ACASA listserv, the spreadsheets developed by the CCRBP Interlocutors Subcommittee, and the mailing list used by the CCRBP for its 2021 Listening Sessions. To this was added the emails of Public Affairs Officers in 20 African countries, obtained with the assistance of Anne Compton, Foreign Affairs Analyst in the Cultural Heritage Center at the U.S. Department of State. The mailing list was used to disseminate a survey entitled "Online Access to African Objects in United States Museums," developed to gather basic information about the needs of Africa-based website users who are researching African objects in U.S. museums. The survey included questions about museum website usage, what kinds of information people are seeking online about African objects in U.S. collections, and interest in participating in a related Listening Session. The Survey was shared on June 12, 2023 and remained open for six weeks; seven responses were received. The results indicate that there is mixed use of U.S. art museum websites and that access to websites is an issue for Africa-based users who seek information about objects, processes, and institutional contacts. Object information of interest included photographs, information about provenance, exhibition, and publication history. Identified priorities are: processes for requesting a loan, repatriation/restitution, image rights and reproductions, and how to provide information about an object in a museum's collection. [See appendices C & D for a summary and full report on the Survey].

Using the existing ACASA mailing list augmented by additional recommendations from colleagues and subcommittee members, in October 2023, we organized Listening Sessions with

Africa-based colleagues who were willing to share their knowledge and experience regarding the following prompts:

- Which websites/online resources do they regularly use?
- Which websites/online resources are most helpful to them in their work and why?
- What makes a website/online resource useful to them and why?

One Listening Session was held in English and two Listening Sessions were held in French (due to a scheduling confusion), with a total of seven French speaking and five English speaking participants. A standard script was devised for the sessions. Important take-aways included the need for a digital resource that would:

- Aggregate information about African objects in U.S. museum collections visible and accessible online.
- Provide opportunities to engage in dialogue and exchange information with museums holding African objects, and to provide knowledge about objects to assure that they are accurately cataloged.
- Feature up-to-date, transparent contact information for these U.S. institutions.
- Include diverse African and global languages.
- Provide images of African objects to consult online.
- Address accessibility concerns by using ethical and minimum computing standards that take into consideration low bandwidth, inconsistent electricity, and the wide use of hand-held devices.

At the same time, an MUSAA working group met with Christa Clarke and Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, who have consulted for U.S. institutions that have African objects in their collections but do not have a dedicated Africanist curator on staff. According to Clarke and Grootaers, the primary need of these institutions is more research on the objects in their care. They are eager to have guidance through public recommendations such as the Minimum Website Standards document and the Steering Committee's Best Practices document. A possible next step for the MUSAA is meeting with representatives from such institutions to learn more about their needs, and potentially connecting them with Africa-based institutions, individuals, and/or communities.

To get a better sense of the resources that currently exist online, and what the possibilities are for digital resources, in June and July 2023, MUSAA subcommittee members reviewed and prepared short reports on fifteen cultural heritage digital resources using a customized Google Form to standardize the format and maintain consistency across reports (twelve reports are archived in the Google report document, and three are archived as separate documents). [See Appendix F for the list of digital resources.] Short summaries of the research were presented over the course of two subcommittee meetings in August and September 2023. After discussion, our subcommittee identified four projects, as seemingly most relevant and aligned with our vision for the digital resource, to learn more about through meetings with representatives:

Yale/LUX, Getty Research Portal, Enslaved.org/Matrix, and Digital Benin. We were not able to come to an agreement with representatives from Digital Benin for an informational meeting; however, we did meet with representatives from the other initiatives. These meetings were guided by a standardized set of questions. [see Appendix G for the notes from the meetings.]

The following are brief summaries of the digital resource models:

- Yale/LUX: a database and aggregating tool using software created by the LUX team that manages both metadata and objects. For usability, the tool standardizes data between "partner institutions" (however, at present, only Yale units/collecting institutions are incorporated). This approach is expensive to build and sustain; LUX is working toward a "membership subscription model" for future "partners," as they hope to expand their project to include collections held outside of Yale.

- Getty Research Portal: an aggregator that sorts metadata to connect users to institutional databases that hold and manage the objects of a search. This approach is economical to build and maintain, but, because it doesn't control the objects, the resource can lose connection to objects and information without notice and does not provide images of objects. Users are directed to institutional websites to access these materials.

- Matrix/Enslaved.org: Enslaved.org is a digital aggregating tool and website created by Matrix that manages both metadata and objects. The tool standardizes data between partner institutions for usability. This approach is expensive to build and sustain. To address this, Matrix is developing a lower cost and more sustainable model using a "static site generator" without losing functionality, adhering to ethical computing standards and open access practices. [See Appendix K for an explanation of this process.]

OVERVIEW OF THE RESOURCE

This subcommittee recommends the development of a new open access online resource to increase and simplify access for people and institutions based in Africa to information about African art in U.S. museum collections. The resource would be accessible through the ACASA website, and hosted by an R1 university with extensive experience developing and managing digital humanities resources (such as MSU or Yale). While no single resource can solve all of the challenges of visibility, accessibility, transparency, and accountability that plague these collections, an online resource would be one important tool that would improve the current status quo.

The online resource would aggregate data sets from U.S. institutions that have collections of African objects and direct users to their institutional websites. It would further serve as a digital hub for users based in Africa, facilitating their ability to search across U.S. institutional African art holdings in one centralized online resource and to contact institutions with inquiries, information, or requests. It would also provide guidance to U.S. museums with African objects in their collections, mindful of institutions without an Africanist on staff.

The resource should:

- Aggregate and make searchable all information designated as "Level 1" in the "Guidance on Minimum Website Standards for United States Art Museums with African Art Collections" document, and should strive to include the information designated as "Additional" in the document. [See Appendix for the Website Standards document].

    - Name of Culture Group
    - Name of Artist, if known
    - Country of Origin (also city, town, etc. of origin, if known)
    - Object Type
    - Object Name
    - Material/Media
    - Date
    - Description (context, function, formal elements, etc.)
    - Image/Photo/s
    - Institution in which the object is currently housed (with accurate/updated contact information and link to website)
    - Acquisition Date
    - Provenance information (collection history, dealers, dates, etc.)
    - Conservation work (description, dates, etc.)

- Provide up-to-date contact information for the appropriate institutional personnel on staff:
    - Institutional address
    - Contact person's title, email address, ensuring that the email address is regularly monitored, updated, and accurate

- Direct users where to find information about the institution's African collections:
    - Provide link/s to website page/s

- Provide a means for users to communicate with institutions about works currently under their care, including to correct or share information about objects, and to make inquiries or requests about them. Museums are encouraged to seek and make public different kinds of knowledge about objects under their care, including that provided by origin and descendant communities, cultural institutions, and governments whose objects and ancestors are currently represented in United States holdings

- Provide access to information on recommended practices for U.S. museums holding African objects regarding:

    - Website standards
    - Links to important national and international conventions, laws, and ethical precedents regarding the collection of African objects (past and present)
    - Appropriate terminology and language standards to use in collections metadata and exhibition labels

    - Ethical and minimum computing standards with regard to modes of technology and bandwidth, focused on African contexts
    - Open access/Creative Commons Licenses

- Include an ethics statement to provide a roadmap for its development.

- Be developed in partnership with individuals and institutions based in Africa and ideally provide a forum for knowledge exchange between Africa-based scholars, students, and other community members and U.S. institutional staff.

- Be piloted and vetted by representatives from diverse communities and institutions based in Africa and the United States, across several iterative phases of development.

Priorities informing the development and stewardship of the project should be:

- Long-term sustainability, stewardship, and management (in terms of technology, staff, and funding) with long-term viability as a fundamental commitment/intent

- Global visibility and accessibility

- A design that uses ethical standards, including:
    - ADA compliance
    - DEI focus
    - Prioritizing dialogue and information exchange
    - Accommodation of diverse technological contexts: bandwidth, mobile devices, etc.
    - FAIR data and open access

ACCESSIBILITY

The MUSAA subcommittee has prioritized the accessibility of the envisioned digital resource according to ethical computing standards and open access practices.

An ethical computing approach requires designing a digital resource that takes into account and attempts to address the digital needs of its users. A recent report from the DiPLO Foundation highlights the high cost of internet connectivity on the African continent as one of the major hurdles to digital accessibility there. The report states that in 2021 82% of Africa's population relied on 3G and 4G networks for internet delivery, with the majority of people accessing the internet on handheld devices. More broadly, access to reliable electricity continues to be a challenge in many African countries, with a correlative impact on internet usage. These realities mean that any digital resource with an African user base must be designed for low bandwidth use on a mobile phone or compact, portable computer.

We encourage the implementation of an open access approach to facilitate the global accessibility of U.S. collections of African objects online. For objects in the public domain, we

recommend the release of metadata and digital reproductions using the Creative Commons license CC0 (current version 1.0) https://creativecommons.org/public-domain/cc0/. Institutions should aim to review their digital content and opt-out of or add restrictions to the CC0 license on a case by case basis, for instance those in which privacy issues and/or sensitive content are a concern, by adding the caveat "unless otherwise stated." We further recommend that institutions follow the global care principles and responsibilities: https://www.gida-global.org/care.

Additional steps toward greater transparency regarding accessibility online:

- Develop a process for users to provide information about collection objects
- Include an open access policy on the institution's website to convey the commitment of the museum to this principle
- Include the Creative Commons open tool CC0 on the reproduction of digital images/content on the institution's website and on the digital collection catalog (always add at least the license with a link to its text on Creative Commons website). To properly include a Creative Commons license, you can use the tool provided on https://chooser-beta.creativecommons.org/
- Include a "how to cite" text for each image on the website
- Identify a staff person who would be responsible for overseeing open access on the institution's website; make their contact information transparent and ensure that it remains current via regular updates
- Use a secure web link (https: rather than http:) to ensure secure access

STEWARDSHIP/OWNERSHIP: HOSTING, DESIGN, & CONTENT MANAGEMENT

We recommend that the new digital resource continue to be a project of ACASA, accessible through ACASA's website and promoted through their networks. The resource should be developed and sustained within a U.S.-based R1 research university with extensive digital humanities experience and capacities, working in open development and accessibility (such as MSU or Yale).

We recommend that ACASA make a statement identifying this work as a priority for the association and the field, and advocating for museums to commit to making their African collections visible and openly accessible online.

We recommend the inclusion of African scholars, students, and museum professionals in this process. We encourage ACASA to support African participation, including by funding travel to the ACASA triennial to participate in in-person meetings about this project.

At this juncture, we believe that a static site generator that builds on wikibase and linked open data, and that is developed with sustainability and ethical computing standards at its

foundation, would likely be the best option for the tool. [See Appendix K provided by Matrix regarding "static website generation."]

The next phase of MUSAA should undertake further research into feasibility and costs of such a resource, as well as continuing to vet other options, including:

- A stand-alone database tool that is designed from scratch (example: Yale/LUX)
- A tool that stores data about objects in museum collections (for instance through Open Science Framework)
- Linked open-access data platform - Wikibase/Wikimedia

It should include sharing this document with advisors in the field of digital humanities resources. (Candace Keller, for instance, could share the document with Jeff Goeke Smith and colleagues at Matrix, and Iolanda Pensa could share the document with Fiona Romeo at the WikiMedia Foundation and Bridgette Vézina at Creative Commons.)

Additional questions about stewardship of this project that need to be addressed in the next phase include:

Structure

- What will the managerial structure be? Will there be an advisory or editorial board? Will this be within or adjacent to the ACASA Board?
- Who will be responsible for designing, managing, maintaining, and expanding the resource/aggregator, vetting and ingesting new materials, ensuring that it functions long-term, etc.? (These may be phased and undertaken by different individuals, teams, and institutions, particularly over time.)
- What process will be used for collecting data?
- Who will input the data into the aggregator?

Technology

- What technology/software will be used?
    - Static site generator
    - Wikibase/Wikimedia
    - Linked open data/interoperability
    - A combination of these
- What ontology/ies will be used?
- What vocabularies/metadata fields will be included?

- What open access/Creative Commons Licenses can be used, given international laws (particularly in Europe)? Are there areas in which project priorities/values conflict? If so, how will decisions be made and communicated to users transparently?

- What languages will the resource be available in? Will this be a phased process? If so, what language/s will be prioritized in phase 1, based on what criteria/justification?
    - What tools will be used in the service of language accessibility?
    - How will this value be incorporated and planned for from the beginning? (structure, design plans, ontology, and vocabularies, etc.)

Processes and Guidelines

- How will the information be solicited from institutions and shared by them?

- What will the policies/processes be for updating institutional information as new objects are acquired and new information comes to light? Who will be responsible for providing this information and for making these updates, at what intervals of time?

- Who will be the initial project partners (technology teams, institutional partners, content experts, etc.)? Who will be included in the initial pilot/launch? How will these partners be identified and selected? Based on what parameters and criteria?

- How will it be piloted and launched?

- How will the project be phased? (i.e., Will it focus on specific users in phases? Will it focus on different institutional collections in phases? Etc.)

Sustainability, Funding, & Budget Plan

- What will the funding model be for:
    - Its initial development (phased)?
    - Expansion/growth over time?
    - Maintenance, updates, corrections as new information becomes available?

- Potential funders (incomplete; in alphabetical order):

    - Bertelsmann Stiftung (social change)
    - DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation)
    - Ford Foundation
    - Getty Foundation
    - MacArthur FoundationFundacion Karisma (Colombia)
    - Mellon Foundation
    - National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
    - The National Science Foundation (NSF)
    - Omidyar Network
    - Open Society Foundations (OSI)
    - Robert Bosch Stiftung (global issues)
    - Skoll FoundationOpen Technology Fund OTF https://www.opentech.fund/
    - Stiftung Mercator https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/en/

- TrustKnight Foundation
- Wikimedia
- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- The World Wide Web FoundationWelcome

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PILOTING STRATEGY AND INSTITUTIONAL OPTING-IN PROCESS

Representatives from the three digital resource models that we spoke with suggested that a **Pilot Strategy** is an important step in creating a digital aggregator.

- Yale/LUX piloted their product in three phases. An Alpha phase focused on basic functionality; two Beta phases, each 6 months apart, focused on minimum searchability and then on more advanced search functions. Guiding questions were:
    1. Does it work at all?
    2. Do the basics work?
    3. Does the whole system function in a way that makes it a usable product?

- Getty Research Portal recommended a pilot with 5 to 10 "data sources" that can provide a representation of complexity.

- Matrix/Enslaved.org preferred an approach that included partners (U.S. institutions with African objects) and "user groups" of experts (Africa-based scholars, educators, students, museum personnel, etc.) who can test their work and provide analysis. These "user groups" can be expanded over time to incorporate and prioritize the needs of specific audiences as the project develops (such as U.S.-based scholars, educators, museum personnel, etc.). They used a phased, soft launch approach in which fixes can be made to the tool based on feedback before the project goes "live."

This committee recommends a pilot phase that includes partnership with U.S. museums of different scales and with differing qualities of online data regarding their collections of African objects. The initial institutional partner group should include museums with large African collections and extensive collection information already online (such as the Art Institute of Chicago, Stanley Museum of Art, and the UCLA Fowler Museum); museums with small African collections that are still building out their online presence (such as the Dayton Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Toledo Art Museum, and the Eskenazi Museum at Indiana University); museums with a collection of African objects but without a full-time Africanist curator (such as the Barnes Foundation).

We should bear in mind that participant museums in a pilot phase will act as models for institutions when the digital aggregator is made public. Having participants that represent different realities, including collection size, amount of staffing and resources, and state of online cataloguing, will be important to attracting broad participation. Likewise, the aggregator will provide a critical touchpoint for Africanist curators and scholars who are often an isolated voice

advocating for resources to bolster research on African collections and collaborations from within United States institutions.

Opting-in should be free of cost to the partner institution. (The project will need to solicit funding to provide support to partner institutions for this work.) It should be available to museums who are at different points in their work to make collections accessible online; however, it should be made clear that participants must be able to make available information designated as "Level 1" in the CCRBP Minimum Website Standards document. Museums should be provided with clear information about the basic formatting to which they must comply in order to be a contributor (The Getty Research Portal provides this list of guidelines for contributors, for example). Opting-in should come with the expectation that participants be active members of a community of users, including by responding to inquiries and information shared by Africa-based users of the aggregator.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the MUSAA subcommittee suggests the following next steps towards a digital aggregator:

- Convene a new iteration of the MUSAA committee, to begin work in Jan. 2025
- Determine who from MUSAA wishes to continue this work and send out a call for committee participants
- Create a clear path for communication between MUSAA and the ACASA board
- Develop a timeline for the committee's work (the committee will continue using Working Groups organization model to accomplish specific tasks within a delineated timeframe)
- Share this report with several outside advisors
- Address the prompts on pages 10-12 in this document regarding the project's structure; technology; processes and guidelines; and sustainability, funding, and budget plan
- Identify an R1 university collaborator with extensive experience and expertise working on digital humanities projects
- Identify and solicit 3-5 diverse partner institutions (U.S. museums with African objects in their collections) to participate in a pilot
- Seek funding for a pilot

APPENDICES

MUSAA Documents

Appendix A: Vision Statement & Goals
Appendix B: Timeline
Appendix C: Survey Form for Africa-Based Colleagues
Appendix D: Summary of Survey
Appendix E: Full Results of Survey
Appendix F: Summary of Listening Sessions with Africa-Based Colleagues (English & French)
Appendix G: List of Digital Resources
Appendix H: Digital Resource Reports
Appendix I: Summary of Meeting with Digital Resource Model - Getty Research Portal
Appendix J: Summary of Meeting with Digital Resource Model - Matrix / Enslaved.org at MSU
Appendix K: Summary of Meeting with Digital Resource Model - LUX at Yale University
Appendix L: "Static Website Generator" document from Matrix at MSU

Recommendations for Additional Resources to Make Available through the Digital Resource

Priority 1

- The website standards guidelines "Guidance on Minimum Website Standards for United States Art Museums with African Art Collections". These guidelines inform U.S. institutions participating in the aggregator or that might participate at a later date on what information is critical to include on their collections websites as responsible stewards of African collections. The document also informs researchers, users of the aggregator, what information they should be able to find for each object.

- The CCRBP Code of Ethics from the Best Practices for United States Museums Holding African Objects document. The code of ethics stresses ethical engagement, collaboration, consultation, transparency, and equity. It is in the spirit of these ethics that the aggregator is being created and it is important for all participants to keep them in mind when creating, using, participating in the aggregator in any way.

- An information request/feedback template for reaching out to museums. To advance the spirit of collaboration and encourage consultation, the digital resource should assist scholars in contacting the appropriate staff at the United States museums holding African collections. The minimum standards include having contact information for an appropriate contact at the museum, but to assist in streamlining any contact, the digital resource should include the recommended information to include when reaching out to a museum. This should include requestor's name, contact information, affiliation, object numbers or other identifying info for works to be discussed, question or comment.

- Opportunities for dialog. In addition to contacting the individual institutions that possess objects, the aggregator website itself should have a forum for conversations where scholars and community members can meet and give each other feedback and guidance.

Priority 2

- Research and educational materials. We agreed that our discussions with African colleagues in listening sessions indicated it would be more effective to envision the proposed aggregator/database as a research tool in the broadest sense. Rather than simply pull up a list of objects and their basic information, the site should also lead to relevant articles, books, projects, exhibitions, classes, etc. The site may also include a list of African Studies resources such as libraries with large relevant collections (eg. Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University and the Boston University African Studies Library) and journals (African Arts https://direct.mit.edu/afar).

- Funding sources. The site should consider providing information on grant opportunities for both institutions and researchers whether these are external funding sources or, ideally, if the aggregator project could include funding opportunities as part of the project.