



## PRESS RELEASE

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### CONTACT:

Local Contexts, Stephany RunningHawk Johnson, Executive Director, [info@localcontexts.org](mailto:info@localcontexts.org)

For immediate release:

### **Consent, Disclose, Return: The Future of Indigenous Collections Held in US Institutions**

New rules have entered into effect affirming what Indigenous Peoples have always known: they continue to hold sovereign rights to their lands, knowledges, and cultural heritage.

The American Museum of Natural History announced today that it will be closing its Eastern Woodlands and Great Plains Halls to visitors and covering other displays of objects taken from Indigenous communities. Similarly, the Field Museum and Cleveland Museum of Art have also covered or removed displays of belongings from Indigenous communities in the last week.

The new rules that have just come into effect in the United States require federal agencies and museums receiving federal funding to obtain consent from lineal descendants and/or affiliated Native American Tribes or Native Hawaiian Organizations for Native American sacred objects, objects of cultural patrimony, funerary objects, and/or human remains to be on view. The regulations are an update to the “duty of care” requirement of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a 1990 law enacted by Congress that is intended to protect and return human remains and other culturally significant items to Indigenous communities in the U.S.

The new regulations accelerate the need for institutions that hold these collections to respectfully and ethically work with Indigenous communities. This includes properly disclosing these collections to communities to aid in necessary and over-due consultation. Local Contexts provides tools for institutions to do this crucial work.

Institutions can use the Local Contexts Disclosure, Engagement, and Collections Care Notices to identify Indigenous rights and interests in collections and reinforce relationship building and consent with Indigenous communities into the future. Notices also work to educate the public



about the important work of repatriation and ongoing Indigenous rights and relationships that persist within future collections and data.

Indigenous communities can use the Local Contexts Traditional Knowledge and Biocultural Labels to assert control, authority and consent over how collections are managed, displayed, accessed, and used in the future. The Labels add clear community authority for belongings taken and now stewarded outside of the community and support ongoing Indigenous sovereignty over knowledge and heritage

From Local Contexts Founding Executive Director Stephany RunningHawk Johnson (Oglala Lakota): "Indigenous communities have always maintained relationships with their cultural heritage items – even ones that are held in collections outside of their control. Local Contexts is exactly what institutions need right now. Part of the Local Contexts mission is to create effective and recognized pathways for implementing and maintaining Indigenous rights. This includes facilitating ethical relationships that will enable collaboration with stewards of Indigenous collections. We look forward to working with institutions to meet their obligations to Indigenous Peoples."

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**About Local Contexts:** The primary objectives of Local Contexts are to enhance and legitimize locally based decision-making and Indigenous governance frameworks for determining ownership, access, and culturally appropriate conditions for sharing historical, contemporary, and future collections of cultural heritage and Indigenous data. The Local Contexts Hub began development in 2019 as a way to enable the customization of Labels and the application of Notices directly to Indigenous data and collections. The Hub works in tandem with already existing information/collections management systems and tools. The Hub generates Labels and Notices (with permanent identifiers) so these can be added to already existing catalog and collections management systems. Local Contexts has co-created short films including "[Awasəwehlawálatina wikəwamok | They Returned Home](#)" with the Penobscot Nation, focused on the groundbreaking work undertaken by the Penobscot Nation to restore Penobscot cultural authority within institutions in Maine and beyond. For more information, please visit <https://localcontexts.org/>.