

1) Administrative Information

- This white paper is in regards to the Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum (SUCCM), a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit, located within the Southern Ute Reservation, at 503 Ouray Dr., Ignacio Colorado.
- The project title: Providing Storage for Personal and Ritual Collections Program. Here at the Museum we have come to refer to this as the Sacred Vault Project.
- The amount awarded, by IMLS, to SUCCM was \$24,895, and the total project cost was \$64,190 with the remaining funds coming from SUCCM.
- The grant start date was October 1, 2012 through September 30-2013.
- The project director is Shirley Cloud-Lane, Executive Director of SUCCM.
- The formal project partner is the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

2) Project Summary

According to George H.J. Abrahams, in his work entitled Tribal Museums in America, “While the practice of storing personal or ritual collections might be frowned upon by non-tribal museums, Tribal museums may be seen as the physical repository of ritual objects that are in current use. The museum may provide the security, protection, care, and respect for ritual objects when not in use. Items can be retrieved by practitioners and, following the ceremony, returned to the care of the museum”.

Initially the project was envisioned to provide a space that tribal members would be able to deposit and retrieve items of personal, ritual, and cultural patrimony without fear of dissociation (separation) of legal ownership of said items; while concomitantly permanently retaining the legal right to retrieve said items whenever the depositing tribal member feels inclined to do so. The sacred vault is a deposit-box style storage for Ute tribal members’ ceremonial/ religious patrimony, and or personal dance regalia. The sacred vault is a storage that was made possible through a grant from the IMLS Sparks grant. The grant was awarded to SUCCM so that we would be able to provide museum quality storage for all tribal members’ ceremonial and religious items and dance regalia without worrying about ownership. Tribal members had notified the Museum board members of the need of this particular style of storage when conceptualizing the new museum that eventually opened in the Spring of 2011, thus the program was inceptioned.

This challenge that we have embarked upon addresses the need of an audience that SUCCM serves. That need is for tribal member to have proper access to an environmentally controlled storage space equitable to those in museums of the highest caliber, that:

- mitigates the possibility of contamination/ destruction via pests through an integrated pest management program
- minimizes the risk of destruction through fire suppression systems, Co2 monitors, smoke alarms
- provides round the clock protection through security alarms, video security, motion detectors, keycard entry + numerical code required to enter the storage (through the executive directors permission)

This type of program is needed in the Native American communities as tribal members are the most economically challenged minority group in the United States, with limited access to museum quality preservation/conservation information, physical sites of storage/access, and complete security. It is common knowledge in Native America that we tribal members often store our most sacred items within our homes, garages, sheds, and attics; thus in an effort to promote the conservation and preservation of Native American cultural patrimony SUCCM has ventured to consult with tribal members on protocol within the storage space, informed through workshops on its need and availability for use, and created a personalized addendum to the collections policy of SUCCM to ensure there will never be a loss of ownership of any item stored within the Sacred Vault.

Other tribes may be able to benefit from this program's outline as there are 566 federally recognized tribes (bia.gov) within the United States and one could deduce, on a low estimate, over a million personal/cultural items whose very existence may be in jeopardy because of the very real threat of environmental hazards, human error, or dissociation.

The storage made available to the Ute membership for cultural patrimony can also be looked at as another type of museum decolonization that Amy Lonetree describes in her work *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. When we make available a space in which tribal members can store their heritage, without fear of loss of legal ownership, within the tribal museum not only are we decolonizing the preconceived notions of museums and their tumultuous past with Indigenous peoples; we are also providing the ability to the individual tribal member to have a safe and viable storage so that they themselves may be able to participate in the "efforts to address the legacies of historical unresolved grief by speaking the hard truths of colonialism and thereby creating spaces for healing and understanding...given that the Native American holocaust, which has spanned centuries, remains unaddressed in both Native and non-Native communities, truth telling is perhaps the most important aspect of a decolonizing aspect of a museum practice of the twenty-first century" (Lonetree, p.5). So, beyond the physical safety that this type of storage provides, it also allows for the tribal member to have a repository, or better yet a last bastion for the tribes' cultural patrimony and furthermore prevents dissociation of the family from the object(s) as is the story with most of Indigenous peoples artifacts. The type of storage SUCCM has made available to the Southern Ute membership has been tailored to counteract the various ways in which tribal items of cultural patrimony, and their members/descendants patrimonial items are at risk for loss; ideally this modality could be utilized by other institutions that serve the various Native American populations in the hopes of preserving items that otherwise may be lost and therefore may never transcend genealogical and temporal boundaries along with the "truth telling", described by Lonetree, that accompanies them.

3) The process:

The allocation of the award and cost sharing

The financial award was distributed through several positions and was offset through cost sharing of those positions by the museum.

Eight thousand dollars was allocated to salaries from the grant and twenty seven thousand was cost share from the museum towards salaries. The total amount for salaries and wages was thirty five thousand and

one hundred dollars. The jobs that were allocated to were: executive director, collections manager, assistant director, and museum technician.

Fringe benefits were allocated at a rate of 45% of the \$35,100 salary base for a figure of three thousand and six dollars from grant funds, and twelve thousand one hundred and ninety five dollars from cost sharing.

Consultant fees were allocated, four thousand and twenty dollars from grant funds (Attorney, tribal artist, and CPA).

Two thousand four hundred and seventy five dollars was used from grant funds for travel for two to the ATALM conference in Albuquerque, NM. Five hundred dollars was used from grant funds for registration fees for the ATALM conference as well.

Six thousand five hundred dollars was used from grant funds for supplies and materials (artist supplies and museum quality storage cabinets).

The total amount used from the grant was twenty four thousand eight hundred forty five dollars. The amount of cost sharing by the museum was thirty nine thousand two hundred ninety five dollars.

Outreach and promotion:

The outreach team concluded three workshops in which information about the Sacred Vault was provided and tribal members were asked to give input as to the proper cultural protocol within the Sacred Vault. Flyers were mailed to individual tribal members, in and out of state, two to three weeks prior to a workshop. Workshops also had refreshments (cookies, tea, coffee, and water) in an effort to entice participation in the workshops, but participation was minimal. Those who did attend had thoughtful and meaningful concerns that were addressed. The predominate concern from tribal members was for proper tribal protocol to be followed while in the vault and while handling items from the vault. Advertisements were also placed in the tribal newspaper as to the vaults availability for the membership.

Organizational changes

There were several changes in staff that has occurred since the award was given to SUCCM, and for every change there were the appropriate form sent in that acknowledged those changes for IMLS and defined who was taking over those positions. The change in staff has never detracted from the ideology of the Sacred Vault, much like the mission statement of any employer the Sacred Vaults mission is not confined by those individuals who work on it; it is part of a larger purpose to provide access to those who do not/may not ever have the opportunity to store cultural heritage in such a manner.

4) Project Results:

Lessons learned:

Although I have come on later in the project, I believe that one of the lessons learned is that money and advertising thrown at any project does not always equal participation of the intended audience, regardless of the quality of the storage facility. Commonplace advertising, such as mailers/newspapers/social media has little effect as to the participants who may be interested in such a storage facility (Native American centered). I also believe that through the oral tradition are we able to effectively reach our intended audience (tribal members), as most rural populations don't have access to the internet. Talking with tribal members has seemed to elicit more response and dialogue about the Sacred Vault.

The results I had expected where that tribal members would be jockeying for space within the museum and debating the validity of other Utes (Northern Ute of Utah, Ute Mountain Ute of Colorado) utilizing the space. The unanticipated results we got were: lower than expected interest, and other Ute people interested in that particular type of storage. Not to mention that there seems to be that underlying wariness of Native Americans to any type of Museum Tribal or Non. Maybe the apprehension that tribal members feel towards tribal museums is the notion that there are non-tribal people in the highest positions of tribal museums with authority tantamount to any Native American within the organization. I think that the take away here is that not all methods of advertisement work efficiently within the reservation boundaries, or outside if it; the tribal membership needs to be approached on the personal level to build that trust of the individual within the organization before they would ever even consider entrusting an institution with a piece of cultural patrimony that has immeasurable intrinsic value to the person and the people from which they emanate. The last hindsight thought would have been to research the population that is to be served, ask them how they would like to be informed, on a person to person basis or mass communication, or even a mixture of the two.

Next steps

Currently there are over 70 items within the Sacred Vault that are available for the membership to access; the latest to be entered into the Sacred Vault process is a pair of Ute men's leggings that, according to provenance, were pawned in 1905 by a particular family and has since been returned to the Ute people. A Ute tribal member whom sought the protection of other museums in the area was troubled to discover that there was no real program in other museums that would offer this type of storage to them. Fortunately for all of us they were directed to SUCCM and our program, the Sacred Vault. The tribal member also expressed the gratitude for such a program as they were afraid for the item in its current storage state and the lack of security therein. Currently there are also requests from a tribal member who wishes to view their family members items within the Sacred Vault, the policy set forth will be adhered to when giving access to materials within the Sacred Vault (see policy below).

The next step for SUCCM will be to carry on the Sacred Vault journey as it is in use currently and dates have been set for research within the vault by tribal members. The process of informing the various Ute membership about the Sacred Vault is continual and ongoing, I would like to emphasize the personal method of disseminating information about the Sacred Vault to Ute tribal members from here on out as it seems to be effective and culturally appropriate for staff of SUCCM.

Recommendations

My advice for the museum field, especially non-tribal museums, is to truly make an effort to understand the populations that are going to be informed and or consulted; research the ways in which they would

like to learn about new ideas and topics. Lest we forget that marketing tactics that work in big cities are not always aligned with the wants and needs of rural populations, let alone tribal populations. The further we get into this project, it seems as though the people would like to be informed on a personal one-to-one basis; which ideally would align with the oral tradition that most Indigenous peoples still use to this day.

The Sacred Vault Policy and Procedure:

This program has established a legal agreement/ contract that spells out in clear language exactly the responsibilities of the museum in storing and protecting cultural heritage material, without transferring ownership, or the typical loan agreement conditions. The following document was a collaborative effort by the education manager, collections, and the contract conservator for SUCCM.

A. Sacred Vault Collection Team

The sacred vault collection team will be comprised of a museum technician (preferably culturally affiliated) the Collections manager, and the Director of SUCCM. Sacred Vault team members will be directly responsible to the director for the ultimate care of the inventory within the Sacred Vault. Sacred Vault team members will work concomitantly to provide adherence to the cultural/ professional guidelines that are followed within the Ute culture as well as museums around the U.S.

B. Care of Deposits

The following policies pertain only to items to be deposited within the sacred vault. SUCCM staff will not be routinely caring for the sacred vault storage inventory. The only time conservation care, visual inspection for pests and or pest monitoring and control, will be enacted upon an item to be deposited in the sacred vault is upon deposit, for pest monitoring and control, and or if the owner requests cleaning. Any item that appears to be contaminated cannot be entered into the sacred vault without SUCCM curatorial approved pest control.

1. The type of cleaning available at SUCCM for sacred vault items will be only a light vacuuming accompanied by a light surface brushing with a very soft bristle brush.
2. If the slightest pest debris is noticed upon visual inspection of items to be deposited, we then would place in a bag for 24 hours, if any new larvae/adults appear then we would freeze the item for 24 hours.

C. Procedures to Enter Items in the Sacred Vault

No item to be entered in to the Sacred Vault will ever become property of the Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum and next of kin should be noted on forms used for the Sacred Vault.

1. A meeting with the Sacred Vault team should be scheduled as to:
 - Establish a friendly, personal relationship
 - Inform potential users about the Sacred Vault and its function as a repository
 - To gather information/ provenance about the item(s) to be entered
 - Gather proper identification
 - Fill out paperwork

2. Upon receipt of item(s), the collections manager and the rest of the sacred vault team will thoroughly document, photograph, and record any item that is to be researched, deposited, and or withdrawn from the sacred vault.
3. Upon requesting to store item(s) tribal members must first bring in the item(s) to be inspected for pests and or molds by 2 members of the sacred vault team.
4. The deposit forms must be filled out with 2 staff members present, and must be signed off by the same 2 staff members to assure accuracy.
5. The record keeping is to include a photograph, condition report and deposit/withdraw form with a tracking number all to be signed by the depositor, Collections Manager, and a witness (2nd staff member).
6. For the sacred vault, the team will be using the Past Perfect logging system to track and identify items.
7. All forms are to be kept in a record keeping system (hard copy and 2 digital copies) that provides proof/confirmation that items in the Sacred Vault belong to said individual.

7(a) A hard copy will also be provided to the Office of Risk Management of the Southern Ute Tribe, as they have requested, to ensure multiple storage sites of the owner's information, in an effort to guarantee proper documentation of ownership of item(s) deposited within the Sacred Vault.

D. Procedure to Withdraw and Item from the Sacred Vault

To withdraw an item(s) from the sacred vault the procedure will differ slightly from the entry procedure.

1. Proof of identification and paperwork should accompany any request for removal of any item within the Sacred Vault.
2. Corresponding SUCCM paperwork for the item(s) in question should be produced to prevent dissociation of other items within the Sacred Vault.
3. 2 sacred vault staff must be present along with the tribal member depositor.
4. The withdrawn item should be placed on the table, on top of acid free paper, within the sacred vault room.
5. Upon retrieval from the sacred vault storage a *visual* inspection will be made of the item withdrawn without opening or disturbing the piece.
6. Upon staff (while following museum best practices when handling collections) removing from the storage area (cabinets) the withdrawn item(s) will be photographed, condition reported, and the depositor will be allowed to be re-united with *their* property.
7. If the depositor wishes to return their item(s) in the near future they must notify us that they will return.
8. If SUCCM is notified by the owner that they will return the item(s) to the sacred vault for storage, we will then save the box and space allocated for the item as this is a safe deposit box style storage, within SUCCM, for tribal members and their cultural patrimony, ceremonial, and religious items.

E. Standards of Care

All items that are to be deposited, withdrawn, or stored in the sacred vault will be given the same application of Museum Best Practices/ Professional Care that the entire SUCCM collection receives.

1. Museum best practices:
 - a. Ideals from the American Alliance of Museums that should be upheld by every museum striving to maintain excellence in its operations.
2. We will use the appropriate protection for handling items (Nitrile gloves or cotton gloves) in every situation.
3. All items will be stored in acid free wrapping and boxes.
4. The sacred vault has its own monitoring for fire, theft, temperature and humidity, and is equally monitored/maintained to provide the same level of protection as the permanent, temporary galleries, and collections storage spaces.
5. To ensure cultural protocol is followed a panel of elders will be designated to provide consultation to the sacred vault staff on how to properly handle items of cultural significance, should questions arise on handling procedures.
6. Input from the elders and staff will be gathered as to provide the parameters of working with items within the sacred vault.

When it comes to tribal members we know that there are hundreds of families and therefore hundreds of different styles of cultural instructions, and as such *we are not to promulgate our personal cultural standards upon others* utilizing the sacred vault.

1. Sacred vault Staff will not impose personal family protocol upon non-staff depositing /withdrawing their items, but, will follow the guidelines of handling artifacts when interacting with tribal members items and while in the sacred vault.
2. Staff should not be asked to perform any duties within the sacred vault, *especially*, if by gender they are not permitted to work with specific items, regardless of the circumstances.

F. Insurance

The office of risk management has assured us that every piece to be entered into the sacred vault will be covered under the tribes (Southern Ute) umbrella insurance policy, so long as the item(s) have been given a dollar amount associated with the piece that would allow for replacement should the item be lost or damaged. Culturally we know some pieces are considered very sacred, if not priceless, but we cannot insure every item for millions of dollars, therefore tribal members must designate a reasonable amount to their item(s) to be deposited.

1. All items to be insured within the sacred vault will have to be given a dollar amount, before being deposited, as to the value of the item upon deposit, to cover loss and replace the item with something of similar value should any unforeseen circumstances arise.

Sources cited

Abrams, George H.J., Tribal Museums in America.

Nashville, TN. American Association for State and Local History. 2004

Lonetree, Amy. Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums.

Chapel Hill. University of North Carolina Press. 2012.