

Unlearning racism in a federal setting

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¹National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution

January 20, 2023

Abstract

The Smithsonian – the world’s largest research, education, and museum complex – was established by the U.S. government as a public trust 175 years ago. Many of the geoscientists working for the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) are federal employees. The federal setting offers both challenges and opportunities to actively combat structural racism, diversify our workplace, and to increase the inclusion, representation, and celebration of BIPOC in the geosciences. Our federal affiliation affords many opportunities. Smithsonian’s widely recognized brand and mission to engage diverse audiences allows our scientists to be highly visible to the public, and representation from underrepresented communities within our ranks has the potential to inspire broader participation in the geosciences. With a large and federally supported repatriation office, NMNH is in a position to lead the decolonization of geological collections and incorporate Indigenous knowledge into our collections information. NMNH fosters strong relationships with some tribal communities that provide us with excellent resources to engage Indigenous and local scientists in our research and field work. We enjoy transparency in many federal policies on hiring, promotion, salaries and benefits, and detailed equal employment opportunity (EEO) training is required for all supervisors. Federal status also presents challenges. Progress toward diversity and equity checks are tracked at the institutional level, but do not inform individual hiring decisions. There is no legal scope for targeted hires, and actions that might increase the “yield” on offers of employment, such as making an additional position for a partner, offering perks in the form of housing, child-care, higher salary, additional benefits, etc. are prohibited by federal regulation. Several future strategies emerged as priorities in our URGE pod. We will work to (1) ensure all interns receive equitable compensation and that we advertise internship availability to underrepresented communities; (2) require applicants to provide a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statement for all geoscience positions; (3) implement EEO and bias training search committee members; and (4) include DEI elements in our annual performance plans.



Overview

Opportunities and challenges of a federal setting.
The Smithsonian, the world's largest museum, education, and research complex, was established by the U.S. government in 1846 and is 175 years old. Many of the government's mission and goals are shared with the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), including its commitment to research, education, and public service.

The federal setting offers both challenges and opportunities to achieve the museum's mission. Research, education, and public service are the core of the museum's mission, and the federal setting provides a unique opportunity to engage with the public and to advance the museum's mission.

Ethical Collections Stewardship

Collections stewardship questions are an ongoing challenge and these are some:

- Who is benefiting from our work and where is being evaluated or harmed?
- Where does work with our collections and practices to engage with our staff?
- Who do we need to engage with and build or repair relationships?
- What does a government's obligation, responsibility, and stewardship mean?
- What are the ethical considerations of collecting, research, and display of human remains?
- How can we ensure the understanding of our collections and how they are used is consistent with the values and interests of the communities that created them?

Critical review of ethical issues and future implications.
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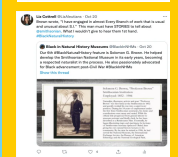


Museum Communications

As one of America's most respected institutions, Smithsonian has enormous potential to connect, educate, and inspire the world. NMNH engages a professional communications staff with whom our USG and our partner regularly NMNH values in the government.

The NMNH staff worked with external stakeholders to amplify the Smithsonian's mission.

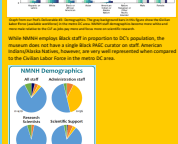
Minerva and Mike joined us today for the Smithsonian's 175th anniversary celebration. They shared their perspective on the Smithsonian's mission and the challenges of a federal setting.



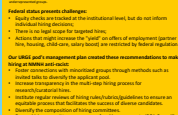
Smithsonian Secretary Promotes New Shared Stewardship Collections Policy at Senate Hearing

Hiring

At NMNH, 80% of our NMNH employees are women.
The Smithsonian is committed to diversity and inclusion. We are proud to have a workforce that is 80% women. This commitment is reflected in our hiring practices and our ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive environment.



Working towards science education equity.
The Smithsonian is committed to science education equity. We are working to ensure that all students have access to high-quality science education, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status.



Shared Stewardship is a best practice and should become standard practice.
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Public Programs

The task of diversity in the U.S. 175th anniversary and the Smithsonian's commitment to diversity and inclusion. We are proud to have a workforce that is 80% women. This commitment is reflected in our hiring practices and our ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive environment.



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NATIONAL
MUSEUM of
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Overview

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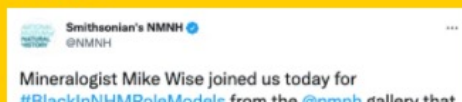
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Museum Communications

As one of America's most trusted brands, Smithsonian has enormous potential to convene, educate, and inspire the world.

NMNH employs a professional communications staff with whom our URGE pod can partner to amplify BIPOC voices in the geosciences.

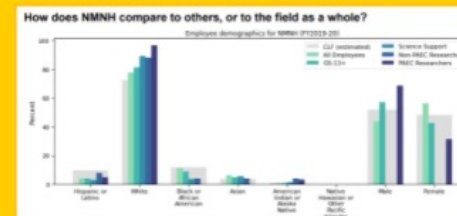
This fall, our URGE pod worked with NMNH leadership to amplify the #BlackInNaturalHistory campaign.



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Hiring

At NMNH, 96% of our PAEC researchers/curators (the equivalent of tenure track faculty at a university) are white.



Graph from our Pod's Deliverable #3: Demographics. The

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Public programs

historical exploitation, exclusion, and misrepresentation of indigenous and minority communities from natural history science and the weaponization of science to justify racial inequity [5, 6]. From an education perspective, informal science education centers must do more than shift students' perceptions of science and who does science. Many experts suggest that natural history museums can't engage diverse communities until they acknowledge their colonial pasts, origins of collections, and redress biased science communication and education practices [7-9].

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Ethical Collections Stewardship

Collections stewardship questions we are asking ourselves and those we serve:

- Who is benefiting from our work and **who is being excluded** or harmed?
- Where do we need to shift our policies and practices to align with our ethics?
- Who do we need to engage with and build or repair relationships?
- Where do we perpetuate privileged, unequitable access to collections and specimen data?

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NEWS & EVENTS



CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY
Smithsonian Secretary Promotes New Shared Stewardship Collections Policy at Senate Hearing

Shared Stewardship is a best practice and should become standard practice

Our current professional best practices strive to treat others how *they* want to be treated. This includes the treatment of cultures, communities, belief systems, heritage, objects, and boundaries. Shared stewardship of our collections sets an expectation where the museum shares authority, expertise, and responsibility for the respectful attribution, documentation, interpretation, and care of a collection item in accordance with the advice of the source community. Doing this well requires engagement and collaboration between museums and Indigenous communities, and trusting relationships could take years to develop.

Future foci of NMNH pod

URGE will pursue strategies that **create a culture of antiracism in geosciences**. By working with senior leadership at NMNH, our pod has chosen to focus on making change in the following areas for 2022:

Hiring and Retention

- Foster connections with minoritized groups through methods such as invited talks and targeted advertising to diversify the applicant pool
- Encouraging regular reviews of hiring rubrics and increased transparency in

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VIDEO SESSION

AUTHOR INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

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