



# Unlearning Racism in a Federal Setting

Elizabeth Cottrell, Ioan Lascu, Michael Ackerson, Janine Andrys, Selina Cole, Cari Corrigan, Gabriela Farfan, George Guice, Matthew Miller, Briana Pobiner, Daniel Rasmussen, Juliana Troch, and Jonathan Tucker  
National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution



## Overview

### Opportunities and challenges of a federal setting:

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.

OPEN

## 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.

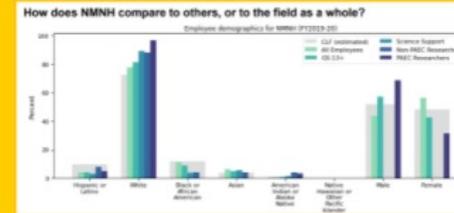
This fall, our URGE pod worked with NMNH leadership to amplify the #BlackInNaturalHistory campaign.



OPEN

## 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

OPEN

## 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].

OPEN

## 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, inequitable access to collections and specimen data?

OPEN

## 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 diversity the applicant pool
- Encouraging regular reviews of hiring rubrics and increased transparency in ...

OPEN