

**Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for  
Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government**

**EQUITY ACTION PLAN**

**Submitted by  
Smithsonian Institution<sup>1</sup>  
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<sup>1</sup> The Smithsonian Institution is not an agency or establishment in the Executive Branch. See Dong v. Smithsonian, 125 F.3d 877 (D.C. Cir. 1997). Therefore, it is not subject to Executive Orders. However, the Smithsonian is pleased to submit this report to demonstrate its commitment to the spirit and intent of Executive Order 13985, which strongly aligns with the Institution's mission and values.

## **I. Executive Summary**

### **Overview of the Smithsonian's Mission and its Intersection with Equity**

The Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum, education, and research complex. The Institution was founded in 1846 with funds from the British scientist James Smithson according to his wishes "under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge." Today, it includes 11 museums and galleries on the National Mall; eight additional museums in Washington, D.C., and New York City; the National Zoo; and two new museums, which have just been established. Eight research centers specialize in areas of inquiry spanning the globe and the farthest reaches of the universe, and three cultural centers are building bridges of mutual respect among American and world cultures. Smithsonian education programs connect with diverse audiences, including under-resourced communities and underserved individuals, to enrich programs, curriculum, and exhibitions. Dozens of centralized mission-enabling units provide the tools, resources, and services that support our public-facing operations. Our community includes more than 6,000 employees, 5,000 on-site volunteers, 31,000 digital volunteers, 280,000 members, millions of students and lifelong learners, a network of more than 200 affiliated museums and cultural centers, and approximately 30 million visitors in a typical year.

Throughout its history, the Smithsonian has helped our nation look to the future while understanding our past. We conduct cutting-edge research, catalyze conversations around critical contemporary issues, prepare people of all ages for tomorrow, and bring context and meaning to difficult chapters of our history. As the steward of our nation's heritage, the Smithsonian embraces the imperative to represent and interpret the experience of every American fairly and equally. The Institution is very aware of the changing demographics of our nation and the challenges we face in advancing equity and opportunity.

Cultural organizations are among the most trusted institutions in our nation, places people turn to seek reliable information and perspectives. They can be spaces for finding common ground and beginning difficult conversations. For the Smithsonian to remain a trusted source, the public must see themselves in our exhibitions, research, programming, and workforce. To that end, the Smithsonian is embedding diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) in everything we do. We are working to make our museums, labs, offices, and boardrooms reflect the nation. We are building collections that tell today's stories to future generations. We are also implementing our first institution-wide effort to explicitly address racism and racial equity, *Our Shared Future: Reckoning with our Racial Past*. Through interdisciplinary scholarship, creative partnerships, robust dialogue, and comprehensive engagement, we will contribute to a more equitable future.

## **II. SUMMARY OF EARLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The Secretary has established a Head Diversity Officer (HDO) position to lead DEAI programs and activities, including the numerous efforts already underway across the Institution. The HDO, who will report to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, will conceptualize and execute an institutional DEAI strategy and will unify, coordinate, or integrate existing programs across organizational units. They will also lead implementation of the Institution's strategic initiatives focused on equity and inclusion that the Smithsonian seeks to disseminate through its external programs and scholarship.

In the spirit of One Smithsonian, the Secretary's strategic focus areas are organized under one theme: Our Shared Future. As a nation, and as an Institution, we are all accountable for encouraging mutual learning, and for creating a future that we all can share. Our external equity efforts are an integral part of Our Shared Future, which will seek to unify, coordinate, and integrate existing programs across organizational units. Strategic initiatives adopted in August include specific examples that incorporate a strong equity thread:

- Address the historical roots and contemporary impacts of race and racism in the United States and globally through interdisciplinary scholarship, creative partnerships, dialogue, education, and engagement.
- Accelerate the work of the American Women's History Initiative to amplify and disseminate the historical record of the accomplishments of American women through increased digital programming, drawing upon the Smithsonian's diverse collections and expertise.
- Work closely with communities from which Smithsonian collections originate and those they serve to evaluate the collections themselves, the narratives that surround them, and their future preservation and impact.
- Understand how the Smithsonian can best serve communities often overlooked in the national conversation and explore current, relevant issues in rural America and provide resources and tools to build resilience.
- Design and build two new museums utilizing innovative and agile practices, from construction and resourcing to the curation and dissemination of content.
- Advance the concept of a virtual museum through a series of innovative, digitally-driven pilots and activities.
- Develop a strategy to increase audience-centered, data-driven decision making.
- Build out and refine online and digital capabilities to drive and retain traffic, capture visitor data, and explore the adoption of a customer relationship management (CRM) system.

### **III. EQUITY ACTION PLAN**

#### **Our Shared Future: Reckoning with Our Racial Past**

Our Shared Future: Reckoning with Our Racial Past (RWORP) is the first coordinated effort from the Smithsonian to explicitly address the legacies of race inequality. Led by Dr. Deborah Mack, appointed as director in August, it will explore how race has informed all our lives regardless of where we live or our individual race and ethnicity. Through providing multiple perspectives, historical context, and contemporary understandings about the centrality of race in America, RWORP will reckon with the harmful legacy of our racial past. The movement for racial justice is, and always has been, about making a better world for all of us.

Understanding that centuries of bias, prejudice, injustice, and erasures or distortions of our historical narratives have resulted in deep-seated racial inequalities in this country, the content will be organized around six themes: race and wellness; race and wealth; race and place; race beyond the U.S.; race, art, and aesthetics; and race, politics, and ethics. Given the intersections among these topics, a major aim of the initiative will be to help audiences understand the underlying and systemic issues connecting them.

Smithsonian museums and research and cultural centers have done important work in each of these areas, and the initiative team will explore opportunities to share the scholarship, educational resources, and programs with the broader Smithsonian audience, including the Smithsonian Affiliations network and other institutions nationwide. Through strategic partnerships with local, regional, and national organizations, the Smithsonian will amplify the impact of institutions who are established leaders in race and racism work while strengthening other organizations embarking on addressing racial inequality. Underpinning programs and partnerships, the Smithsonian is dedicated to contributing to a measurable shift towards more equality in our Institution as well as across the museum field and cultural sector by sharing resources on creating more inclusive audience experiences, creating transparent internal practices, and ways to address internal racial histories.

Grounding this focused work through programming, partnerships, and processes, Dr. Deborah Mack is leading the initiative to seek out collaborations with organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Science Museum of Minnesota, and the Maxville Interpretive Center. The work by the National Trust for Historic Preservation is well known, but notably the African American Cultural Heritage Fund has supported more than 200 preservation projects nationally. For 15 years, the Science Museum of Minnesota has taken a lead in the conversation around race and racism through their exhibition *RACE: Are We So Different?* that traveled to at least 60 cities across America and has been revised through evaluation and work with small communities. Maxville Interpretive Center is a notable grassroots organization that has promoted awareness of eastern Oregon's multicultural logging industry/timber culture which catalyzed the creation of communities inhabited by African American migrants and Chinese and Japanese immigrants alongside the Indigenous residents and original stewards of the land.

As a steward and mirror of the nation's complex history, the Smithsonian is uniquely positioned to listen to and learn from diverse communities to better collect, interpret, and preserve our shared history and work to create an equitable future. Actively using an iterative process, the initiative will ground the work in evaluation, hold inclusive convenings with established partners, share best practices for internal processes, and ensure the use of effective, clear, and transparent communication. The initiative will uplift the people, communities, and organizations that have been at the vanguard of this work for generations and welcome those who are newer to the active pursuit of racial justice.

Programs presented by Our Shared Future: Reckoning with Our Racial Past during 2021 include:

August 26 - The Our Shared Future: Reckoning with Our Racial Past Forum

The first Our Shared Future: Reckoning with Our Racial Past forum was a virtual program about racial inequities in wellness and wealth in the U.S. From race science to COVID-19, physical and mental health, and challenges to wealth building, we explored how we arrived where we are today and how we can imagine a new way forward together.

September 24 - The Other Slavery: Histories of Indian Bondage from New Spain to the Southwestern United States

The Smithsonian held a virtual symposium that explores the hidden stories of enslaved Indigenous peoples, focusing on the legacy of Spanish colonization in the Americas and Asia and its impact on what is now the southwestern United States. Experts from a range of academic disciplines, including Indigenous studies, anthropology, and history, examined untold stories of coerced labor and peonage and the long-term impact of Indian slavery. This program seeks to give a comprehensive “first voice” to these hushed stories and living legacies.

October 27 - From ‘Our Divided Nation’ to ‘Our Shared Future:’ Museums and the Advancement of Equity and Understanding

The launch of the Smithsonian’s Our Shared Future: Reckoning with Our Racial Past initiative and the creation of two new museums by Congress, the Smithsonian American Women’s History Museum and the National Museum of the American Latino, present unique moments to explore how museums can help foster courageous new will and promote opportunities for all. The Smithsonian held a virtual discussion exploring how museums and cultural institutions can serve as an engine for social justice and the changes needed to end racial and economic inequality.

### **New Museums**

In December 2020, legislation was signed establishing the National Museum of the American Latino (NMAL) and the Smithsonian American Women’s History Museum (SAWHM). Both museums will advance our ever-evolving understanding of our nation. They will celebrate well-known chapters of our history and bring to light stories that are unsung, unknown, or forgotten. NMAL and SAWHM will serve all Americans, but it is paramount that we reach and listen to those constituencies represented in each museum, American Latinos and American women, as they take shape.

The Smithsonian has been building the intellectual capacity for this work through two pan-institutional endeavors. Since 1997, the Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC) has collaborated with museums to expand scholarly research, public programs, digital content, and collections related to Latino American history and culture. Its funding has allowed the Smithsonian to hire 20 professionals, particularly curators, archivists, and curatorial assistants, in Latino history, art, and culture. In 2018, the American Women’s History Initiative (AWHI), was launched to amplify the stories of women who shaped America. AWHI has developed exhibitions, programs, educational material, and digital content; funded nine curatorial positions; and published a book, *Smithsonian American Women*.

The SAWHM and the NMAL have established their respective inaugural advisory boards. The council and board of trustees advise the Board of Regents and makes recommendations on the planning, design, and construction of the museum; helps with private fundraising; and helps with acquisition and maintenance of the collections. Both advisory boards will be important bridges to audiences, connecting communities to the Smithsonian and guiding our outreach. The goal has been to cultivate dynamic boards that include racially and ethnically diverse members from a range of political, professional, academic, cultural, and social backgrounds

The interim directors for these two new museums are in the process of determining the new museums’ relationships to the pan-institutional efforts of SLC and the AWHI. The new museums will be dedicated spaces with their own visions, but the Smithsonian’s engagement with American Latinos and American

women will extend beyond them. Art, history and culture, and natural science museums and research centers will draw on their strengths and continue to present relevant content, conduct related scholarship, and include members of these constituencies in research initiatives. The new museums also will explore new ways to leverage technology in order to reach individuals who might not have the means or capability to visit the museums in-person. Serving American Latinos and American women through a coordinated, pan-institutional approach can provide greater reach, richer engagement opportunities for all, and more complex and nuanced storytelling.

### **Asian Pacific American Center**

For nearly 200 years, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) have helped build the U.S. Today, they are the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the country at an estimated 24 million and counting. Understanding the transnational nature of the immigration/migration of people and ideas between Asia Pacific and North America that does not always follow the boundaries of nationality, the interpretation of AAPI has been broadened to also include intersections, narratives, concepts, and individuals that connect America to Asia and the Pacific. By its very nature, the AAPI stories are multi-faceted and diverse: nearly three-quarters of AAPIs come from nineteen different countries with over a 100 different languages and dialects spoken. While some have called the U.S. home for multiple generations, nearly 60% of AAPIs were born outside of the country. The stories and experiences of these individuals and communities are highly underrepresented in museums, especially at a national level.

Founded in 1997, APAC began as a mission critical initiative to weave the AAPI histories, art, and culture through the Smithsonian's vast collections, research, exhibitions, and programs. APAC aspires to make these diverse stories further known on a national scale through programs and resources that enable the public to explore salient topics and themes including immigration, community, racism and xenophobia, and intersectionality.

APAC's long-term goal is to ensure that the American story is infused with the voices of AAPIs. To combat the labeling of non-white Americans as "perpetual foreigners," APAC aims to bring national recognition to AAPIs within American history, art, and culture and change how these subjects are exhibited, collected, and taught. The Center is currently a "Museum without Walls," referring both to its focus of moving beyond physical museum walls to provide programs and resources online and in communities across the country, as well as to its desire to break down impediments that traditionally keep communities of color from visiting museums. Over the past 24 years, APAC has produced temporary and traveling exhibitions, educational resources for K-12 students, global digital initiatives, and large-scale public programs such as *Culture Labs*, a new programmatic model of how museums can bring artists and cultural practitioners together with community members and visitors to explore contemporary topics.

The Asian Pacific American Initiatives Pool was created in 2016 to support Smithsonian units' research, exhibitions, educational programs, collections, digital and media projects, and partnerships with local and regional cultural organizations. Since 2016, the Pool has provided funding to more than 50 programs and projects and has increased the Asian Pacific American presence in the Smithsonian's presentation of and research into the American Experience. In FY2018, the Pool supported the first curator dedicated to Asian Pacific American History at NMAH. With additional funding provided in FY2020, the pool is now able to support more projects and employ two curatorial assistants, one at the NMAH and the other in the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

APAC believes in a collaborative stakeholder engagement process centered on community members, educators, scholars, artists, content and cultural experts, other AAPI organizations, and audiences, who assist in providing high-quality programs, exhibitions, and content on the APA experience. The Center utilizes the following framework to measure progress and determine if activities are successful community collaborations that improve awareness of resources and support the adoption and understanding of the APA experience across audiences.

In collaboration with stakeholders and partners, APAC supports the adoption and use of its content and resources. By recognizing and removing the barriers to greater adoption, APAC aims to increase use of its resources inside and outside the classroom. How APAC measures adoption and use varies depending on the project but includes: student work and user-generated materials based upon content, adoption of content across school systems or communities, and inclusion in mainstream venues or platforms. APAC sees wider adoption and use, especially onto mainstream platforms or across systems, as the best indicator of success when it comes to ensuring that the voices of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are represented within the American Story over the long term.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these principles were put into practice. For Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in xenophobia, discrimination, and harassment directed at individuals and communities across the country. APAC recognizes that this type of “othering” divides communities by dehumanizing groups of people when anxiety is manipulated and misdirected to place blame in a time of crisis.

Working with educators, artists, community organizations, and other museums and centers, APAC is focused on combating this type of xenophobia through digital projects and resources that address not only the targeting of people of Asian descent due to COVID-19, but also the xenophobia that continues to plague the U.S. during times of national crisis. During the 2020 Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, APAC coordinated the creation of a resource page to address the public need for resources and information pertaining to anti-Asian racism, AAPI social movement building, and teacher/educator materials. The Standing Together Against Hate resource page (<https://smithsonianapa.org/stand/>) collected over 260 Smithsonian-wide resources from over thirty museums and centers.

### **Repatriation**

Repatriation activities at the Smithsonian are governed by the 1989 National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAIA) and its 1996 amending legislation. Since that time the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), and the National Museum of the American Indian, have diligently worked to repatriate more than 6,000 Native American human remains; 250,000 funerary objects; and 1,400 sacred objects and/or objects of cultural patrimony. Both museums now have provisions in their respective policies for items that fall outside of the legislative requirements, such as culturally unaffiliated human remains and international repatriation requests.

In response to evolving views and current social change, NMNH is now also focusing on the status of African American human remains in its collections. The presence of African American human remains raises many complex questions, discussions and decisions with respect to colonialism, one that the NMNH and the Smithsonian as an Institution is working to change.

## **Smithsonian Education for the Nation and Serving Rural, Non-Urban Communities**

Education underpins everything the Smithsonian does, and the development of a national PreK-12 education strategy is taking place now. The Institution's overarching vision is to build and enrich a national culture of learning by engaging with educational systems across the country. The Smithsonian will work together with PreK-12 classrooms to support an evidence-based approach to providing services and resources that supports a well-rounded education, cultivates creativity and imagination, and ignites a passion and appreciation for lifelong learning. The Smithsonian's close partnerships in the Washington, D.C. region will allow the Institution to refine its efforts before reaching out to national audiences. As with other audience-centered initiatives, we will work to define who we are trying to reach to understand their needs and what impact is sought. Research, data, and evidence will be needed to inform our approach and assess what progress is made.

The Smithsonian is also exploring the creation of a Rural Initiative, which would expand programming and resources into non-urban areas across America. One in five people in the U.S. or 60 million people live in rural areas. While 52% of cultural organizations in the U.S. are in small towns and rural areas, 82% of rural cultural organizations have annual budgets under \$25,000 often limiting the type of cultural, educational, and enrichment programming that is available in the community. Working with rural leaders to identify specific needs, the Smithsonian is committed to expanding programming and resources in rural America. As the Smithsonian develops this initiative, we seek to understand how we can learn from communities whose stories are often not included in the nation's and our own narratives and how these communities might connect with, contribute to, and use the Smithsonian's content and resources.

## **Internships**

Attracting a diverse applicant pool is a priority for internship programs across the Smithsonian. The strategies that are employed to recruit diverse applicants are as varied as the museums, research centers, and departments of the Smithsonian itself, though they fall into three categories: outreach, networking, and internship development.

Colleges and universities are an obvious source of potential applicants for internship programs, and a large portion of intern recruitment involves outreach to academic institutions. Many Smithsonian units intentionally form strong connections and strategic partnerships with faculty and career center staff at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges, and Community Colleges. Pre-Covid, intern coordinators would prioritize in-person visits to schools with a high percentage of BIPOC students and strong ethnic studies programs.

With Covid travel restrictions in place, many Smithsonian units are turning to virtual outreach methods. One popular virtual recruitment platform is Handshake. Using this app, units can target recruitment to the same categories of institutions mentioned above, such as HBCUs. For example, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) uses Handshake to reach students at Tribal Colleges and Universities, along with the top 50 schools for Native American student enrollment. Handshake is free for students to use and provides an equitable and accessible way for students to connect with potential employers and vice versa.

Robust networks are key to intern recruitment. The traditional method of staffing a booth at a conference, whether in-person or virtual, remains a reliable source of diverse applicants, particularly



from conferences of organizations that serve historically excluded groups. Many intern coordinators cultivate strong relationships with nonprofits in target communities and fields. The Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) recruits heavily through their relationship with the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS). But networks closer to home can be leveraged as well: Smithsonian Libraries and Archives (SLA) relies on connections that members of their unit's DEAI committee have already forged, while Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC)'s dynamic intern alumni group is a rich resource for potential applicants.

For many Smithsonian units, the work of attracting a diverse applicant pool begins well before it is time to recruit, by removing barriers to participation when developing internships. The Cooper Hewitt Design Museum is very intentional in identifying required qualifications for internships, prioritizing demonstrated excitement, curiosity, and willingness to learn over more "traditional" museum experience. The National Museum of American History (NMAH) will include language like "Demonstrated interest in [community] history, through lived, academic, and/or professional experience" to help interns know that their lived experience as part of their specific communities is valued as part of their qualifications for a particular internship. NMAH has also found that projects focused on the histories or issues of specific communities attract applicants from those communities. One of the simplest ways to ensure equity and accessibility in internships is to provide a livable stipend and advertise it clearly in promotion materials. Many units include a statement directly in their internship description about their commitment to equity. They also are intentional about making the application process simple and transparent, offering access services for interviews and allowing for multiple formats in place of a required essay.

### **Smithsonian procurement and contracting opportunities**

The Smithsonian spends \$400 - \$600 million dollars annually in Federal and non-federal (Trust) procurement funds to meet mission-related needs. The utilization of diverse contractors and vendors is an Institution priority. Smithsonian units identify opportunities for equity and inclusion in their budget allocations by prioritizing small business participation goals and helping reduce barriers for historically underutilized small businesses. The Office of Contracting and Personal Property Management and Office of Equal Employment and Supplier Diversity lead the work throughout the Institution of identifying qualified contractors and vendors. Developing inclusive procurement strategies that eliminate barriers and increase opportunities for participation of underserved communities is crucial to Smithsonian efforts for achieving greater diversity in contracts and business relationships. It also engenders increased pride by diverse members of the small business community in their support of the Smithsonian mission. By collaborating with diverse large and small businesses, the Smithsonian ensures that we create programs, design exhibits, build museums, and deliver services that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

## **IV. FUTURE WORK**

The Smithsonian Institution appreciates the opportunity to share its work with the Office of Management and Budget and the White House Domestic Policy Council. We share the Administration's commitment to exploring the ways we can address inequities in how underserved audiences access and benefit from our programs and to exploring how we can address these inequities in our country and the world more broadly. A number of the Institution's strategic initiatives will advance this commitment

over the coming years. Moving forward, we will continue to identify and create the scholarship, content, and resources needed to tackle these challenges, and we will engage our stakeholders in their design.