

Preamble

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM; the Museum) acknowledges the sovereignty, rights, and authority of descendent Indigenous Nations to control and care for their Ancestors. Historical excavation, collecting, and acquisition practices related to Indigenous Ancestors were harmful to communities. The Museum is committed to “chart a new path for how museums in Canada can engage even more meaningfully with Indigenous communities” (ROM Strategic Plan 2019, 11).

Policy & Rationale

Repatriation of Ancestors is an important institutional responsibility. ROM considers all requests for the return of Ancestors and Funerary Belongings in alignment with the rights and standards outlined in Articles 11, 12, and 31 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and consistent with the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s *94 Calls to Action*.

The objective of this policy is to facilitate the return of Ancestors and Funerary Belongings.

Guidelines

The Museum will:

- Consider and respond to all repatriation requests in a respectful and timely manner
- Notify other Nations that may reasonably be believed to have an interest in or legitimate claim to the Belongings in question
- When overlapping claims arise, provide time and information to support Nations in resolving claims through Nation-to-Nation diplomatic exchange, until the Museum is notified that a joint decision has been achieved
- Conduct the process with transparency
- Respect confidentiality unless asked to do otherwise by all Nations party to the process
- Receive consent from the affiliated Nation before pre-planned moving, rehousing, conducting conservation of, conducting any form of research, scientific testing, or analysis—except provenance research—on Ancestors or Funerary Belongings
- Document the repatriation process for archival purposes

Subject to Repatriation

- Ancestors
- Funerary Belongings
- Associated Material Excavated from Burial Sites
- Casts, replicas, and samples taken from Ancestors and Funerary Belongings

Applicability

A formal letter requesting repatriation from a Designated Indigenous Representative to the Director & CEO of the Royal Ontario Museum initiates a repatriation.

This policy pertains to Indigenous Ancestors, Funerary Belongings and Associated Material from Canada and the United States of America, in

	recognition that many Nations' traditional territories straddle this international border. Repatriation requests by Indigenous peoples in other nations will be considered in the context of relevant international law and agreements, including UNDRIP. When an Indigenous Nation proposes an alternative care arrangement, the Museum will seek to collaboratively find a mutually agreeable arrangement.
Approval Levels	The repatriation of Ancestors and funerary belongings in ROM's collection requires the approval of the Board of Trustees. The status of all repatriation requests that have not been the subject of final approval by the Board will be communicated to the Board on a regular basis. A copy of all formal requests regarding the repatriation of Indigenous Ancestors and Funerary Belongings will be sent to the Director & CEO of the Royal Ontario Museum and the Deputy Director, Collections and Research and Chief Innovation Officer (DDCR-CIO). The DDCR-CIO will provide progress reports on the status of requests to the CER Committee of the Board of Trustees.
Explanation of Terms (in alphabetical order)	Ancestor(s): Once living persons with connection to descendent Nations living today. Ancestors may include complete or partial human remains. Associated Material Excavated from Burial Sites: Any material acquired through field collection at burial sites, which could include soil samples, botanical and faunal remains, and other objects found at the site whose affiliation may not yet be defined. Funerary Belongings: offerings or gifts placed with Ancestors at the time of burial. These belongings may have a sacred or ceremonial function and are considered inseparable from the remains of Ancestors. Affiliation: the relationship established to Ancestors through geographic proximity or cultural expression and demonstrated through a preponderance of evidence, including but not limited to: lineal descent and kinship; oral histories and recorded histories; legal and archival documents; archaeological, anthropological, and linguistic research; expert opinion; or other relevant information. Designated Indigenous Representative: The leader of the Nation, or a person entrusted or appointed by the Nation with the responsibility of being the caregiver to the Belongings in question. Indigenous Nation: a distinct community or sovereign group of First Nations, Métis, or Inuit peoples and their political leadership. Leadership may include elected and/or hereditary chiefs, band council, tribal council, or self-governing territorial governments, including subgroups deemed legitimate by the Nation.

Date Approved	January 17, 2002
Amended	March 6, 2008 (<i>housekeeping</i>)
	September 24, 2009 (<i>new language</i>)
	November 15, 2012 (<i>no changes</i>)
	March 26, 2015 (<i>no changes</i>)
	June 25, 2018 (<i>amendments</i>)
	October 15, 2025 (<i>new language</i>)

MONITORING

Adherence to Policy

Board: The Collections, Engagement & Research Committee will periodically review management's adherence to the policy.

Management: The Director & CEO and the Deputy Director, Collections & Research & Chief Innovation Officer will ensure that the Collections, Engagement & Research Committee has all the relevant information for determining adherence.

Policy Review

Method	Internal Report
Responsibility	Collections, Engagement & Research Committee
Minimum Frequency	Every two years
