



Museums Alaska - Collections Management Fund 2022

Alaska State Museum

Application

Primary Contact:

Phone:

Email:

Narrative

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Describe your project, the need, and benefit to your institution and community. Answers should be concise, and include detailed numbers where appropriate (for example, number of collections to be cataloged, or estimated length of time to catalog an item).

Please carefully review the current guidelines.

TIP: Click on the question mark next to each question to see guiding questions.

Please provide a short summary of your project.

(250 character limit)

The project funds collaborative expertise and resources to establish and execute the most up-to-date gut conservation treatments and exhibition techniques in the museum field while providing a model of inclusive collections care practice.

What is the problem you are solving?

(1000 character limit)



The problems addressed are species identification, conservation treatment, and museum exhibition mounting techniques for gut. The project aims to maximize dialogue and learning opportunities about preservation, access, and interpretation of gut collections for all stakeholders in the exhibit development process: artists, cultural experts, and museum specialists. Gut (internal organ membrane) is a physically and conceptually rich material, abundant in Alaskan museum collections but rare in contemporary artistic practice and almost never seen in today's art market. Conservators have not yet settled on a standard protocols to care for objects made of gut because the material behaves so differently than leather and is poorly understood. In addition to the challenges of reshaping, mending tears, and mounting for display, gut objects are frequently misidentified and unattributed in museum collections. These factors work against preservation, access, and understanding of these objects.

Describe the steps of your project and who will be involved.

(5000 character limit)



Summer 2022: Refinement of the final object list in conjunction with a previously funded June visit from Sonya Kelliher-Combs (see attached CV). An earlier visit identified three main object types: gut parkas (up to half of the 26 parkas in the collection will be on exhibit), flat gut items (including wall pockets, windows, and drums. Approximately 40 items), and vessels such as containers and floats (30-40 items). Collaborative discussion of the exhibit design will include ASM curator of exhibits Jackie Manning and exhibit designer Aaron Elmore. Early mounting solutions, particularly for a sample gut parka in the conservation research collection, will take place to



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help identify the ideal mount making materials and determine if the final appearance is acceptable to guest curator Sonya Kelliher-Combs. Conservation cleaning, re-shaping, and repair of object will begin. Sampling of gut for proteomic analysis by Dan Kirby will begin Kirby (see attached letter of support, CV, and sampling protocols). Online resources will be re-launched. Consultations with cultural experts about treatment protocols will begin. Experts we may initially approach include Coral Chernoff (Alutiiq/Sugpiaq/Tutchone), Elaine Kingeekuk (St. Lawrence Island Yupik), Mary Tunuchuk (Yup'ik), Darlene Ulak (Yup'ik), Martina John (Yup'ik), Arlene Waghiyi (St. Lawrence Island Yupik), Lisa Unwin (Cup'ik), Helen Dick (Dena'ina Athabascan), and Selina Alexander (Koyukon Athabascan). These are experts already known to the museum community in Alaska, but this list is missing experts from Unangan and Inupiaq communities, and we anticipate hearing about experts we have not yet met.

Fall 2022: Conservation intern Meghan Abercrombie will arrive and be integrated into the collaboration (see attached CV). Sonya Kelliher-Combs will visit again with funding from this grant application to help finalize treatment and exhibition decisions and learn about the proteomic project. More supplies will be purchased as the best options for treatment and display techniques come into focus. Abercrombie will travel to Fairbanks in September while Ellen is there for another project (PACO live burn) to introduce Museum of the North senior collections manager Angela Linn to the project and sample from their collection (see letter of support). Images and updates to online resources.

Winter 22-23: Ongoing treatments and mount making. Conservation intern Meghan Abercrombie will sample gut from the Anchorage Museum collection with deputy director of collections and conservation Monica Shah (see letter of support) during her internship there.

Spring 2023: Results of proteomic analysis expected from Dan Kirby. Second of two funded visits from Sonya Kelliher-Combs, this one in connection to her solo exhibition opening First Friday, March 3, 2023. Her presence on site will allow an in-person decision-making opportunity to ensure the gut exhibit and interpretation is in harmony with her solo show. Her visits will also afford opportunities to learn conservation approaches that may benefit her own artistic practice. Exhibition installation will take place in April 2023, but the grant project of this request is intended to be complete when the collections are ready at the end of March.

What are the goals and benefits of the project?

(2000 character limit)

GOAL 1: Conservation treatment to clean, reshape, and repair items made from gut.



BENEFITS: The long-term preservation of the items will be enhanced. Opportunities will be created for a cross-cultural dialogue about appropriate treatments of gut, allowing all parties to expand their understanding of both the material and its cultural significance. Conservation training will take place. The emerging precedent of seeking and compensating cultural experts for updating conservation standards will be strengthened.

GOAL 2: Conservation support of exhibit development for items made of gut.

BENEFITS: Gut objects will be ready for installation in the museum gallery in a way that is both safe for their long-term preservation and fulfill the interpretive and aesthetic vision of curator Sonya Kelliher-Combs. All parties involved (artist, conservators, exhibit staff) will expand their skills in the exhibition of collections made of



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gut.

GOAL 3: Proteomic identification of species for up to 100 samples of marine mammal intestine.

BENEFIT: Correlation of proteomic results with visual features (such as ridges and crosshatching) could result in low-tech species identification of gut. Artists, culture-bearers, academic scholars, and museum professionals could more easily identify the animal used to make a specific item. If the results do not correlate, the study would still correct mistaken assumptions about these visual features. This species identification could contribute to attribution of many unidentified parkas in museum collections. Since museums in Alaska do not have the instrumental capacity for protein analysis, this research helps develop research relationships with outside experts to promote collections care.

How will you evaluate the project?

(1500 character limit)



These are the criteria we will use to evaluate the success of this project in April 2023 if the grant is funded:

1. Two collaboration visits completed by curator Kelliher-Combs.
2. Collaboration visits completed by intern Abercrombie in both Fairbanks and Anchorage to share project progress and secure gut samples for analysis.
3. Abercrombie's Juneau internship completed, including conservation treatments.
4. Preliminary results of proteomic analysis delivered from Dan Kirby. Species ID content ready for inclusion in label text and incorporation into the broader "Alaska Gut Parka Identification Matrix" (draft version to be included with grant evaluation).
5. Conservation treatment protocols for gut identified and discussed with various stakeholders including culture-bearers and co-authors of book chapter. Draft assessment of these protocols will be included in the grant report.
6. All objects selected for gut exhibition ready for installation. Receipts from supplies purchased will be included in the grant report.
7. Online information made public, including collaboration insights, treatment results, mounting strategies, and copious images.

The evaluation information included in the grant report will also include a review in narrative form to evaluate the collaborative aspects of the conservation effort. This will take the format of "Successes", "Challenges", and "Future Improvements"

If this is an emergency situation, please explain why.

(1500 character limit)

Not an emergency

Is there anything else the review committee needs to know about your application?

(1500 character limit)

The installation, public programming, and publication aspects of the collaboration are separate from this stage





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of the project. Due to the grant submission software, Steve Henrikson's name appears in the profile. Apparently, multiple staff names cannot be accommodated in the software format, but Steve writes the Art Acquisition fund grants and must also be kept in the system. Please note that Steve does not have responsibility for this project. Supply purchasing will happen in concert with emerging conservation treatment protocols and exhibition mount design as the best approaches are collaboratively established. Best approaches will integrate the aesthetic and cultural requirements with preservation and care needs. For this reason, the supply list currently lacks precision. Meghan Abercrombie will split her internship between the Alaska State Museum in the fall and the Anchorage Museum in the spring. While more than two dozen conservation students have participated in summer internships in Alaska, this is the first time a conservation graduate student will serve their final academic internship year in Alaska. The overall project cost for the collaboration project is listed at \$46,461 to include the baseline funding intern Abercrombie receives from her program, the funds from the CIRI Foundation that launched the collaboration with curator Kelliher-Combs in 2021, and the 10% indirect costs mentioned on the budget template.

You must click "Save Work" at the bottom of each page.