

# More than a Checklist: Decolonizing Historical Narratives in Museum Spaces

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# Situating Ourselves



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# Road Map

- Historical context
- What do we mean by decolonization?
- UNDRIP
- CMA - Moved to Action Report and Small Museum Handbook
- Best practices
- Engagement opportunities



Photo by [Stephen Monroe](#) on [Unsplash](#)

## Context - Museums and Colonialism

- Part of the colonial project
- Removal of Indigenous cultural belongings, ancestral remains, and documentation of culture by museums
- Ethnographic collection of Indigenous culture undertaken because of the false belief that Indigenous Peoples would be eradicated and were vanishing
- Museums need to recognize their active role in colonialism

# Activity - What is Decolonization in Museums?

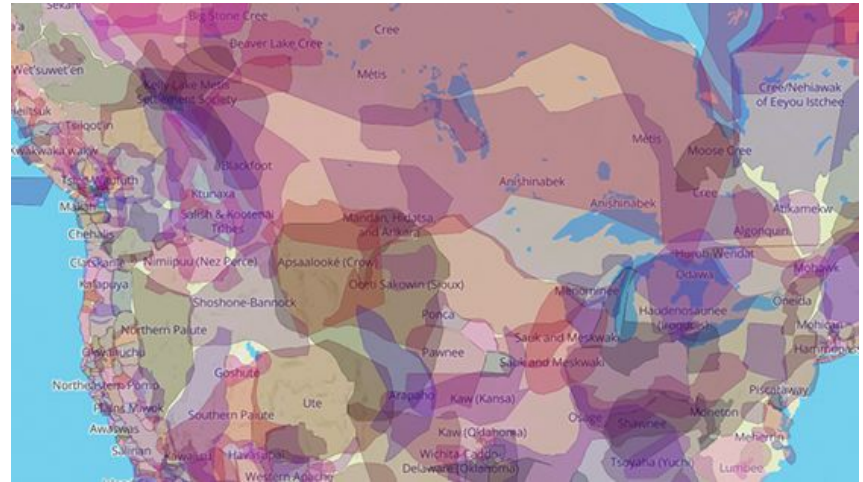
- What does it look like?
- What actions does it involve?
- What examples come to mind?



Image of decolonization definition

# Context - What Do We Mean By Decolonization?

- Indigenous led
- Willingness to listen
- Shifting power
- Commitment to relationship
- Policy and strategic plan changes
- Understanding the museum differently

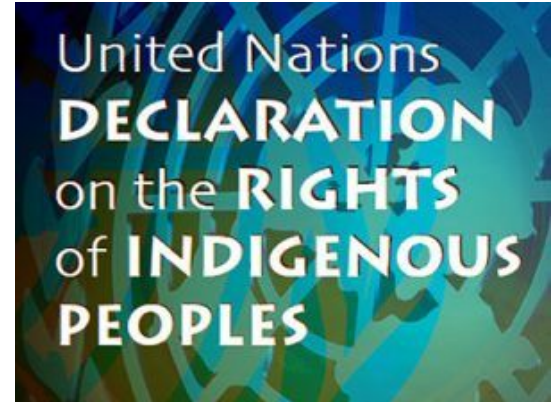


Screenshot of Indigenous territory map from Native-land.ca

# Frameworks - UNDRIP

What is UNDRIP?

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples sets out the rights of Indigenous peoples around the world. It is a human rights instrument intended to define and uphold human rights in international law.



# Frameworks - UNDRIP

The core principles in UNDRIP are:

- The right to self-determination
- The right to be recognized as distinct peoples
- The right to free, prior and informed consent
- The right to be free from discrimination



# Frameworks - UNDRIP

How does this relate to museums?

## Article 11

“Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.”

# Frameworks - UNDRIP

## Article 13

“Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.”

# Frameworks - UNDRIP

## Article 15

“Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.”

# Frameworks - UNDRIP

## Article 31

“Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions....They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.”

# Frameworks - UNDRIP

Doing work through the lens of UNDRIP

- How are you engaging with Indigenous communities?
- How are Indigenous peoples and nations represented in collections, exhibitions, and public programming?
- Have you looked at your policies and practices in relation to UNDRIP?

# Example - Royal BC Museum and Archives

- Indigenous collections and repatriation department
- Redevelopment of gallery spaces
- Redescription and updating language in collections
- Reproduction guidelines



By Michal Klajban,, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.

# The UNDA Action Plan

This year the federal government released the UNDA and accompanying action plan. What does this mean for museums and heritage?

- Shared Priorities 4 & 5
- Cultural and linguistic rights informed by UNDRIP Articles 8, 11, 12, 13, 25, 31  
- Shared Priorities 91-100
- Education, information and media areas informed by UNDRIP Articles 14, 15, 16 - Shared Priorities 105-106
- Additional shared priorities 109-110
- Inuktitut Language Service Priorities

# Example: Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum

- An Inuit Story: The DEW Line
- Permanent exhibition designed starting with the Inuit experience
- First language in panels is Inuktitut, Baffin Island dialect
- Developed in collaboration with the Government of Nunavut
- Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. Enrolment Cardholders can receive free admission to the exhibits.



Image courtesy of the Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum



# Frameworks - Moved to Action Report

What is it?

Moved to Action is the Canadian Museum Association reply to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action number 67. It was developed with guidance from the CMA Reconciliation Council.

# Frameworks - Moved to Action Report

## Sector Recommendations:

- Revision of policies, funding, and legal frameworks
- UNDRIP implementation
- Repatriation

# Frameworks - Moved to Action Report

- Indigenous-directed preservation and care
- OCAP
- Reconsidering collection policies and deaccession guidelines
- Engagement practices that are non-extractive
- Decolonizing museum governance
- This work is everyone's job

# Frameworks - Small Museums Handbook

- Repatriation readiness checklist
- Where to begin where there is only one worksheet
  - Engagement and consultation strategy
- Reassessing your governance
- Operations readiness

## **Activity**

What small, medium, and long-term actions can you or your institution take to move forward decolonization work within museums?

# Best Practices - Relationship Building

- Centering and supporting Indigenous peoples
- Respectful
- Pay people
- Long-term and not grant based



SRSC outreach programming on front lawn of Algoma University.

# Example - Reclaiming Shingwauk Hall Exhibition



Photograph of the Life at Shingwauk Gallery space which discusses daily life at the Shingwauk Residential School from 1873 until its closure in 1970.

# Best Practices - Indigenous Data Sovereignty

- Right of Indigenous people to control data from and about their communities
- CARE principles for Indigenous data governance
- Developing data management plans



## **Activity - What works? What doesn't?**

Discuss in your groups examples of what works or doesn't work in relation to:

- Initial engagement with Indigenous communities
- Paying people for their time
- Advocating for structural change at your workplace

# Questions and Closing Dialogue



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