

STATEMENT OF WORK (SOW)

For

Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns Provenance Research and Coordination

National Museum of African Art

**BACKGROUND**

In April 2022, Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie Bunch issued a Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns policy to address instances where items in Smithsonian collections might have been acquired under ethically problematic circumstances. The Smithsonian recognizes it has collections that it would not have acquired under present-day ethical and professional standards. The new policy outlines the circumstances under which the Smithsonian may implement shared stewardship with communities represented in our collections and consider the return of collections based on ethical considerations. This contract would facilitate the National Museum of African Art's (NMAFA) response to this requirement and would allow the museum to address and respond to Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns inquiries regarding items in NMAFA's collections in a timely manner by coordinating the NMAFA's response to inquiries.

NMAfA is seeking a Provenance Researcher to work collaboratively across departments, including registration, curatorial, and conservation, to ensure the museum's collections are managed ethically and inclusively; the contractor will report to the Head Registrar. The researcher will develop a comprehensive methodology for methodical and inclusive provenance research and create a workplan focused on high-priority objects to prevent future acquisitions with problematic histories.

**Objectives**

Contractor(s) will develop a comprehensive methodology for research and create a prioritized list for reviewing collections' provenance, and processes and procedures to prevent future acquisitions with problematic histories. Work will include researching the circumstances of collections' acquisition through archival and museum records research, oral histories, reviewing relevant literature and providing reports on objects in question.

**Period of Performance**

This one-year contract continues the museum's response to the Smithsonian's mandate as well as its own Collections Management Policy amendment on Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns. In fulfilling this contract, NMAFA will therefore contribute to one of the Smithsonian's top priorities.



### **Scope of Work**

The Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art (NMAFA) Office of the Registrar issues this statement of work for provenance research services for current collections and new acquisitions.

These services will be carried out at the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C. within the period of performance stipulated in this statement of work.

Work for the duration of this contract will closely involve the following NMAFA staff:

- Museum Registrar and staff
- Collections and Archives staff
- Curatorial staff

The contractor shall provide professional, technical, and non-personal services to the National Museum of African Art.

### **TASKS**

The contractor shall perform the following tasks:

The contractor will undertake an in-depth review of museum collections at the National Museum of African Art and develop a research approach for reviewing provenance for the Museum:

- Review and revise the museum's overall provenance standards and create a comprehensive methodology for consistent, inclusive provenance research across the collection.

- Establish clear procedures and protocols for researching current collections and for vetting new acquisitions to avoid acquiring works with problematic histories or legal and ethical issues; Work will initially focus on objects from the Kingdom of Benin, Southeast Nigeria, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

- Develop an "objects of concern" inventory list for the NMAfA collections, including objects that may be spiritual or ritual in nature, originate from archaeological sites, have a colonial-era provenance, or may have left the country of origin during periods of conflict.

- Make use of 1) museum records including, but not limited to, departmental ledger books, accession and loan files, catalogue cards, and the collections database (TMS), 2) SI archival collections, including fieldnotes and correspondence, 3) relevant literature and 4) oral histories and other nontraditional lines of evidence.

- Consult with curatorial and collections staff as needed, may be required to participate in ethical returns consultation meetings and other related meetings as required by Head Registrar. Attend quarterly pan-institutional Provenance Group meetings, providing minutes/notes to NMAfA staff.

- Write concise and well-researched reports summarizing the collections information and the circumstances under which the item(s) entered the museum, including any



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information about the circumstances under which the item(s) were removed from their original cultural context, if known.

- Receive assignments from the Head Registrar, typically via email or team meetings
- Prepare and distribute bi-weekly updates on ongoing projects, timelines and tasks
- Organize and manage correspondence utilizing preferred naming and archiving protocols.
- Build a resource list of colleagues, institutions, and communities in both Africa and in the global north working on provenance research.
- Create and maintain internal document management system using OneDrive and Sharepoint

The majority of the collections are located on the National Mall at the National Museum of African art, but some may be located at the Museum Support Center (MSC) in Suitland, Maryland. Archival resources are located at NMAfA and also potentially at Smithsonian Libraries and Archives facilities in the area of the National Mall. Registration materials are located primarily at the museum.

## **Deliverables**

The contractor shall provide the following deliverables:

- Provide written status reports every two (2) weeks on the progress of work
- Revise provenance standards and provide a comprehensive methodology for provenance research.
- Provide a work plan focused on high-priority objects.
- Provide two resource lists: a network of colleagues, institutions, and communities, and a bibliography of provenance resources.
- A final presentation to staff on project findings and the primary ways the NMAfA collection left the continent.
- For any specific collection objects reviewed for provenance, provide a completed research report

## **Place of Performance**

Work related to this contract may take place in a variety of locations, including the following:



- The Smithsonian Institution Museum Support Center (MSC) in Suitland, Maryland;
- The Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art, building at 950 Independence Ave SW, - Washington, D.C. 20560;
- Other Smithsonian facilities in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

### **Travel**

The contractor is responsible for all contractor transportation to and from the NMAFA, MSC, or other local Washington, D.C., metropolitan assignment sites, including costs related to driving and parking or mass transit. With their Smithsonian credentials, the contractor may make use of the free shuttle service that operates between NMAFA and MSC when required to complete assignments at MSC.

The contractor is also responsible for any re-location costs if the contractor is not local to the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

### **NMAFA-FURNISHED ITEMS**

NMAFA Collections Program and any required museum departments will provide the following for the duration of this contract:

- Access to relevant facilities (MSC, NMAFA, etc.) and collections, whether objects, , archival and/or other collections or information as needed.
- Office space to work

### **Work requirements and considerations**

The workplaces the usual demands involved in an office, lab and collections situation, including long periods of standing or sitting, recurring bending, some use of ladders, reaching and lifting of up to 25 lbs. in handling objects or storage units.

### **Special Material Requirements and Sensitive and Restricted Subjects**

Assignments completed during this contract may involve content that is culturally sensitive or restricted for conservation, security, cultural, research, or legal reasons. This content may include, but not be limited to, any of the following:

- certain cultural objects and knowledge
- materials and activities that are the subject of ongoing and unpublished research;

### **Security Considerations**

The Smithsonian Institution requires background investigations and identification badges, also called credentials, for contractors requiring access to staff-only areas of Smithsonian facilities for periods greater than thirty (30) days. Therefore, working with the Contracting Officer's Technical Representative (COTR) for this contract, the contractor shall apply for a background investigation and SI credential through the Smithsonian Office of Protection Services (OPS) Personnel Security and ID Office (PSIO).



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In addition to a favorable background investigation, the Smithsonian Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) also requires an hour-long Computer Security Awareness Training (CSAT) for contractors who will be issued network accounts. As such, the contractor shall complete the required CSAT after securing a network account.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

The Contracting Officer's Technical Representative (COTR) for this contract is:

Heather Muhler, Head of Administration

National Museum of African Art Smithsonian Institution

[muhlerh@si.edu](mailto:muhlerh@si.edu)

202-633-4602

The Technical Point of Contact (TPC) for this contract is:

Dana Moffett

Head of Collections and Conservation

National Museum of African Art Smithsonian Institution

[Moffettd@si.edu](mailto:Moffettd@si.edu)

202-633-4614