

Washington Archaeological Collections Management Project
Project Description
Draft 5/24/05

Summary:

Archaeological research in Washington has produced collections of artifacts and other objects from archaeological excavations covering over 10,000 years of human history in the state. These collections, many from sites that were subsequently destroyed, are irreplaceable resources. For Native Americans, these collections are sacred objects made and used by ancestors; for all of us, these objects can answer questions about human history that may impact our future.

Today we are at serious risk of losing these valuable collections. Although current state and federal laws protect archaeological and other cultural heritage sites, once objects are removed from sites they often lose legal protection. Similarly, although the state tracks the location of cultural heritage sites to manage and protect them, there is no system in place to track and manage the location and status of archaeological collections.

This lack of management oversight means that taxpayers have no way of monitoring the status of collections they often paid for in government-funded excavations. Scientists and Native Americans who wish to use these collections have no way of finding them among the hundreds of public, private and tribal museums, historical societies and other repositories that store them. Collections from sites on private property, which are owned by the property owner, are sometimes discarded or broken up and sold, although there are currently no data documenting which collections this has happened with, or which collections have been donated to repositories.

This project will address these concerns by creating a new statewide database which will list the locations and status of all archaeological collections in Washington. It will also provide personnel to locate those collections, and monitor current and future excavation projects to ensure that resulting collections are cared for using current curation standards, and that they are stored in institutions that will provide appropriate access to all interested citizens. Personnel would also act to mediate and assist in the resolution of current problematic curation issues.

Project Description

1. Archaeological Collections Database

This database will list all collections resulting from past excavations in Washington, and provide details about the current location, accessibility and contact information, a summary of materials in the collection, site information related to the collection and other relevant information useful to future users of that collection.

The database will be stored and maintained by the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) in Olympia. The database will most likely be linked to the archaeological database recently developed and currently in use at DAHP. Electronic

access through DAHP website will allow Native Americans, scientists and other citizens to get useful information about these resources.

2. Collections Tracking System and Management Guidelines

This system will augment the current Archaeological Permit tracking system currently used by DAHP. Current tracking procedures help ensure that permit recipients adhere to permit stipulations and that final reports are produced. We propose to add a component that also tracks compliance with permit regulations regarding collections management and final disposition of collections. This database will also locate and track collections made under the federal Section 106 process. Part of this phase of the project will require the development of statewide guidelines for proper management of collections. As with the current system, DAHP staff would also provide support to applicants to help ensure they comply with curation guidelines and in selecting an appropriate museum or curation facility for long term storage of collections after excavation and analysis is complete.

Public Benefits

This project will bring many benefits to Washington and its citizens. These include:

- Streamlining cultural resource management projects by potentially reducing or eliminating future archaeological excavations (which are both expensive and destructive) by allowing better access to past excavated materials
- Improving accessibility to important cultural resources
- Improving the ability of scientists to conduct research on existing collections
- Improving the protection of irreplaceable objects of cultural heritage (many collected at taxpayer expense), and protecting them for future generations

Budget and Timeline

(this will have to be done in ways that fit potential funder requirements, re. cost share, length of terms, etc.)

1. Archaeological Collections Database

We estimate this can be completed in one year by one full time person (1.0 FTE). Person hired will need relevant background in museum collections and archaeology. DAHP will provide office space and support services, and agrees to maintain database and provide access through their website.

Salary (44,000), benefits (9700), travel (6000), rent/supplies (6000), indirect costs @ 25% (22000), first year only equipment 12000, Total: \$99,700

2. Collections Tracking System

We estimate that this system can be designed and implemented for the first two years by one full time person, most likely the person designated above. This phase would commence once the Collections Database is completed.

2nd year salary, benefits, etc. as above. Total \$87,700

Total for two years: \$187,400