

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

August 12, 2025

The Honorable Lonnie G. Bunch III

Secretary, Smithsonian Institution

1000 Jefferson Dr SW

Washington, DC 20560

Subject: Internal Review of Smithsonian Exhibitions and Materials

Dear Secretary Bunch,

We wish to begin by expressing our appreciation for the brief tour you gave us recently of the National Museum of American History and the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and by acknowledging your work on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution, as well as the Institution's role in shaping public understanding of American history and culture. We are completely aligned with your statement that the Smithsonian is "a welcoming place of knowledge and discovery for all Americans." We are grateful that you and the Board of Regents have expressed your commitment to the non-partisan, educational mission of this great institution.

As we prepare to celebrate the 250th anniversary of our Nation's founding, it is more important than ever that our national museums reflect the unity, progress, and enduring values that define the American story. In this spirit, and in accordance with Executive Order 14253, *Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History*, we will be leading a comprehensive internal review of selected Smithsonian museums and exhibitions. This initiative aims to ensure alignment with the President's directive to celebrate American exceptionalism, remove divisive or partisan narratives, and restore confidence in our shared cultural institutions.

This review is a constructive and collaborative effort — one rooted in respect for the Smithsonian's vital mission and its extraordinary contributions. Our goal is not to interfere with the day-to-day operations of curators or staff, but rather to support a broader vision of excellence that highlights historically accurate, uplifting, and inclusive portrayals of America's heritage.

The review will focus on several key areas:

1. **Public-facing Content:** A review of exhibition text, wall didactics, websites, educational materials, and digital and social media content to assess tone, historical framing, and alignment with American ideals.
2. **Curatorial Process:** A series of interviews with curators and senior staff to better understand the selection process, exhibition approval workflows, and any frameworks currently guiding exhibition content.
3. **Exhibition Planning:** A review of current and future exhibitions, with particular attention to those planned for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

4. **Collection Use:** Evaluation of how existing materials and collections are being used or could be used to highlight American achievement and progress, including whether the Smithsonian can make better use of certain materials by digitizing or conveying to other institutions.
5. **Narrative Standards:** The development of consistent curatorial guidelines that reflect the Smithsonian's original mission.

Initially, our review will focus on the following museums. Additional museums will be reviewed in Phase II.

- National Museum of American History
- National Museum of Natural History
- National Museum of African American History and Culture
- National Museum of the American Indian
- National Air and Space Museum
- Smithsonian American Art Museum
- National Portrait Gallery
- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Materials Request

To initiate this process, we respectfully request that each of the museums listed above designate a primary point of contact and provide the following materials to our team (including for online content):

1. **250th Anniversary Programming**
 - Exhibition plans, draft concepts, and event outlines related to America 250.
 - Supporting materials such as proposed artwork, descriptive placards, exhibition catalogs, event themes, and lists of invited speakers and events.
2. **Current Exhibition Content**
 - Catalog and programs for all current and ongoing exhibitions, including budgets.
 - Digital files of all wall didactics, placards, and gallery labels currently on display.
3. **Traveling and Upcoming Exhibitions**
 - Full index of scheduled traveling exhibitions (2026-2029).
 - Proposals, projected schedules, and preliminary budgets for upcoming exhibitions over the next three years.
4. **Internal Guidelines and Governance**
 - Curatorial and staff manuals, job descriptions, and organizational charts.
 - Documentation outlining the chain of command for exhibition approvals, scheduling, and content review.

- Internal communications or memos pertaining to exhibition or artwork selection and approval processes.
- 5. Index of the Permanent Collection**
 - Access to an inventory of all permanent holdings.
- 6. Educational Materials**
 - Teacher guides, student resources, and supplementary educational content linked to current exhibitions.
- 7. Digital Presence**
 - URLs and descriptions of official museum websites and exhibition-related microsites.
- 8. External Partnerships**
 - A list of active partnerships with outside contributors including artists, historians, nonprofits, and advocacy organizations.
- 9. Grant-Related Documentation**
 - Copies of grant applications and funding agreements tied to past or current exhibitions; particularly those that influence content or presentation.
 - Current artists featured in museum's galleries that received a Smithsonian grant.
- 10. Surveys and other evaluations of visitor experience**
 - Responses to surveys and other forms of evaluating the experience of visitors to the Smithsonian's museums and users of digital content.

Timeline

To ensure clarity and coordination across all parties involved, we have developed the following implementation timeline:

Within 30 days of receipt of this letter, we anticipate:

- Each museum to submit all requested materials outlined in the first four bullet points above, including current exhibition descriptions, draft plans for upcoming shows, America 250 programming materials, and internal guidelines used in exhibition development.
- Review of America 250 exhibition and program planning and connect with curators and staff about their specific proposals.
- A staff liaison from each museum will be designated to serve as the primary point of contact throughout the review process.
- Our team will begin on-site observational visits, conducting walkthroughs of current exhibitions to document themes, visitor experience, and visual messaging.

Within 75 days:

- Museums are asked to submit the remaining requested documentation (items 5 through 10), including promotional literature, grant data, educational materials, and guided tour content.

- Our team will begin scheduling and conducting voluntary interviews with curators and senior staff. These conversations will help us better understand each museum's goals and the broader curatorial vision guiding the institution.
- Each museum should finalize and submit its updated plan to commemorate America's 250th anniversary and ensure coordination with the White House Salute to America 250 Task Force to align messaging and public engagement.

Within 120 days:

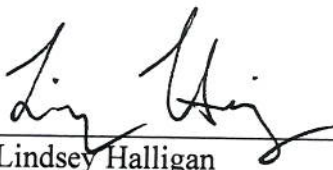
- Museums should begin implementing content corrections where necessary, replacing divisive or ideologically driven language with unifying, historically accurate, and constructive descriptions across placards, wall didactics, digital displays, and other public-facing materials.

If all benchmarks are met on schedule, we anticipate completing our review and preparing a final report for your review in early 2026. This report will include museum-specific assessments, institutional trends, and constructive recommendations for future exhibition strategy.

We view this process as a collaborative and forward-looking opportunity—one that empowers museum staff to embrace a revitalized curatorial vision rooted in the strength, breadth, and achievements of the American story. By focusing on **Americanism**—the people, principles, and progress that define our nation—we can work together to renew the Smithsonian's role as the world's leading museum institution.

We look forward to working alongside you and your team to ensure these iconic institutions remain vibrant, trusted, and inspiring for generations to come.

Very truly yours,



Lindsey Halligan

Special Assistant to the President and Senior Associate Staff Secretary



Vince Haley

Assistant to the President and Director of the Domestic Policy Council



Russell Vought

Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Management and Budget