

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

December 18, 2025

The Honorable Lonnie G. Bunch III
Secretary, Smithsonian Institution
1000 Jefferson Dr SW
Washington, DC 20560

Subject: Review of Smithsonian Exhibitions and Materials

Dear Secretary Bunch,

In our previous correspondence, we requested that the Smithsonian Institution provide us with certain documentation, including current exhibition descriptions, draft plans for upcoming shows, upcoming programming materials, and internal guidelines used in exhibition development as part of a comprehensive internal review of selected Smithsonian museums and exhibitions. As noted in that letter, dated August 12, 2025, we requested that the original materials be submitted no later than September 11, 2025. In recognition of ongoing staffing transitions at the Smithsonian, we happily extended the time period for response. While we received a partial production of materials from your office on September 18, no other material has been produced by your office to us in the more than 90 days since that September date.

While we appreciate receiving the initial document production, that submission fell far short of what was requested, and the overwhelming majority of requested items remain outstanding. For your reference, attached hereto as **Exhibit A** is an internal memorandum prepared by staff members of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that outlines the partial set of materials received and what we are still requesting.

Current wall texts and didactics, exhibition proposals and budgets, object checklists for upcoming programming, internal governance manuals, and chain-of-command records for content approval are not obscure archival requests. These are the records that every accredited museum is expected to maintain and produce without delay, as they provide the basis for responsible stewardship of significant national collections and for meeting the rigorous transparency standards imposed by federal law, the Smithsonian's own directives, and the professional standards of the museum field.

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) all maintain that having this information readily available is best professional practice. And, indeed, the Smithsonian Charter—codified at 20 U.S.C. § 46—similarly requires that “a fair and accurate record” be made of *all* the Institution’s “proceedings.” This statutory obligation was later carried forward in Smithsonian Directive 501, which eliminated any doubt that the Institution must “create and keep complete and accurate records of its activities; maintain the integrity of those records; and preserve records of enduring evidential or historical value.”

As officials designated by the President pursuant to Executive Order 14253, "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," it is our job to ensure that the Smithsonian is meeting these high standards.

We write this follow up letter with particular urgency and concern that the museums of the Smithsonian Institution be well positioned to play an important role during the historic yearlong celebration of our Nation's 250th birthday that is fast approaching. We wish to be assured that none of the leadership of the Smithsonian museums is confused about the fact that the United States has been among the greatest forces for good in the history of the world. The American people will have no patience for any museum that is diffident about America's founding or otherwise uncomfortable conveying a positive view of American history, one which is justifiably proud of our country's accomplishments and record.

We therefore ask for your personal attention to ensuring the fulfillment of the documents requested in our original letter, which are noted in Exhibit A. We look forward to receiving the complete materials at the earliest possible date but hopefully no later than January 13, 2025. We think it would be helpful for you to establish a chain of custody protocol so that OMB staff can track what materials are uploaded to the Dropbox by which Smithsonian personnel for the purposes of our cataloging and processing various asset types (photos vs videos vs documents, etc.).

As you may know, funds apportioned for the Smithsonian Institution are only available for use in a manner consistent with Executive Order 14253, "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," and the fulfillment of the requests set forth in our August 12, 2025 letter.

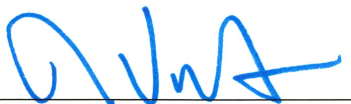
Thank you in advance for your partnership and urgency. We are confident that you share our view that the Smithsonian Institution must lead by example in scholarship, presentation, and accountability. The upcoming 250th anniversary of the founding of our Nation offers a singular opportunity to justify confidence in the operations of America's leading cultural institutions. We are eager to work together to make the Smithsonian's contribution to America's 250th anniversary a triumph.

Sincerely,



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

EXHIBIT A

MEMORANDUM FOR DIRECTORS VOUGHT AND HALEY

FROM: OMB STAFF

SUBJECT: STATUS UPDATE ON SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION DOCUMENT
PRODUCTION PURSUANT TO AUGUST 12, 2025 REQUEST

DATE: DECEMBER 15, 2025

1. You directed this office to monitor and report on the Smithsonian Institution's compliance with the document production request transmitted by the White House on August 12, 2025, and reiterated in subsequent correspondence.
2. To date, the Smithsonian has provided only a limited initial set of materials on September 18, 2025, followed by partial uploads to a shared Dropbox folder. The overwhelming majority of the Phase 1 materials originally due no later than September 10, 2025, remain outstanding.
3. The submitted materials are notably incomplete in several critical respects:
 - a. Current and Upcoming Exhibitions: Folders designated for current and future exhibitions contain no substantive content. No digital files of exhibition wall text, didactic panels, object labels, exhibition catalogs, or approved budgets have been produced for any exhibition currently on view.
 - b. America 250 Programming: Responses consist solely of brief descriptive statements (in several instances a single sentence). No draft concepts, proposed object checklists, interpretive text, speaker lists, event schedules, or supporting planning documents have been provided. For example, the National Museum of American History only stated that their America 250 exhibition will consist of "250 objects from across the national collections," without identifying specific objects under consideration, and there is no mention of objects that will illustrate the impact of the Declaration of Independence throughout American History.
 - c. Future Exhibition Pipeline (2026–2029): No index, proposals, projected schedules, or preliminary budgets for planned exhibitions have been provided.
 - d. Governance and Internal Processes: The "Policy and Governance" submission contains only generic job descriptions. No organizational charts, curatorial manuals, exhibition-approval protocols, or related internal guidance have been included.
 - e. Points of Contact: The Institution has not supplied names, titles, or contact information for designated representatives at the requested museums, impeding direct follow-up.

4. The absence of basic exhibition-related materials—particularly wall text and didactic content currently presented to the visiting public—is difficult to reconcile with standard museum practice and the professional obligations articulated by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD). These organizations uniformly require member institutions to maintain readily accessible documentation of mission, programming, interpretive content, and governance processes. Indeed, the AAMD Standards for Professional Practices states: “The director must have a clear understanding of the museum’s mission, policies, long-range plan, programs, and finances and is responsible for their implementation and *for making accurate information about them publicly available.*”
5. To avoid further delay, we recommend that the Smithsonian be directed to provide, no later than December 30, 2025, a full and organized response containing, at minimum, the following for each museum and unit under its jurisdiction:
 - Comprehensive America 250 programming files (draft concepts, proposed artwork and checklists, descriptive placards, exhibition catalogs, event outlines, and lists of invited speakers and events);
 - Complete digital files of all wall didactics, labels, and education and interpretive materials for exhibitions currently on view and digital presence, together with catalogs and approved budgets, as well as a full list of the staff responsible for creating and approving such materials along with information about their educational and professional backgrounds;
 - A full index of traveling and upcoming exhibitions scheduled for 2026–2029, including proposals, timelines, and preliminary budgets; and an index of the permanent collection;
 - Governance documents, including organizational charts, curatorial and staff manuals, job descriptions, grant-related documentation and documentation of exhibition approval, scheduling, and content-review processes; list of external partnerships; and Surveys and evaluations of visitor experience; and
 - Names, titles, brief professional biographies, current CVs, and direct contact information for designated points of contact at the National Museum of American History, National Museum of Natural History, National Air and Space Museum, National Museum of African American History and Culture, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Museum of African Art, and National Portrait Gallery.