

## “Big Ideas” Funding Proposal One-Time Non-Base Investment Proposal: Step 2

*(Please limit the proposal narrative and attachments to 10 pages)*

Proposal Name: Archeological Collections Compliance Project

1. Provide a description of the project being proposed. (5 points)

### *Background*

The Department of Anthropology at Minnesota State University, Mankato, has been serving as a regional repository for archeological collections since the late 1960s and we currently curate approximately 750,000 objects relating to the last 10,000 years of human occupation in this area. We are the largest such repository in the MnSCU system and the fifth largest in the state, housing collections from more than 220 archeological sites. These collections thus represent the single largest archive of information relating to most of the region's human history. As a public institution we are governed by state and federal statutes (see Mn. Statutes Chapter 138 and 36 CFR 79, respectively) regarding the proper practice of archeological collections management. We are currently significantly out of compliance with regard to our responsibilities under these statutes. Funds are sought to rectify this.

### *Problem Statement*

Archeology is the only source of information we have for more than 99% of human history. In this discipline we analyze the products of past human activities (artifacts) to infer behavior, social structure, diet, etc., in an effort to understand the unwritten human past. The meaning of any particular artifact depends entirely on us knowing exactly what its function was, what it is made of, where it came from, and what its spatial and temporal relationships are to all other artifacts (called its provenience). Given that archeological sites are a finite and exceptionally fragile resource, when artifacts are excavated from a site it is critical that they be handled and analyzed carefully in order to gain and preserve the information they contain. This is the origin of the federal and state statutes that govern archeological practice in the field, lab, and repository. In brief, the statutory language referenced above requires us to do several things, including having a complete and accurate catalogue of the items we curate, maintaining adequate physical conditions to assure preservation and guard against loss of data, and making the collections available for public interpretation and academic research. We are in violation of all of these requirements in the following ways:

- 1) **Our electronic and paper catalogues are incomplete and outdated.** Far less than half of the artifacts have been entered into an electronic file system, and the vast majority of electronic and paper entries are missing even the most basic information. Indeed, the original electronic catalogue was developed in the 1970s and was never updated, so it is completely useless from a curatorial or analytic perspective. This leaves us unable to produce any kind of catalogue at all – that is, we do not know and cannot say what we have.
- 2) **Our primary documentation of the origins of the collections (accession files) is incomplete.** We often do not know the basic details of a collection – why it is here, when it was brought here, where it is from, who owns it, what it contains, etc. The (retired) faculty who made the collections started their practices before most federal or state statutes were clear on proper practice, and when the regulations changed they never corrected their existing records, nor did they update their practices.
- 3) **The existing catalogues are unacceptably inaccurate.** Several small-scale studies (approximately 5,000 artifacts) have determined that some collections contain up to 60% of non-artifactual materials, and ALL collections have cataloguing error rates exceeding 25% - that is, more than a quarter of the artifacts are misidentified as to what they are and/or what they are made out of. This means that what little we do “know” and have reported to the state is wrong.
- 4) **The current storage methods are inadequate.** Currently, all of the artifacts (including pieces of stone tools, pottery, animal bone, and plant remains) are stored admixed in single, plastic bags. This has led to extensive damage to fragile and irreplaceable objects as they rub together. Further, in most cases those bags are stored so that the collections from three or more sites are in a single box. If bags rupture (as they do when sharp objects are inside them) the artifacts from different sites can become mixed together.

- 5) **We have at least 25 uncatalogued, large (1000+ objects) collections.** Clearly, we cannot be in possession of uncatalogued collections since that violates statute, but it also places us in a very poor light with respect to other curatorial institutions and violates the ethics of the discipline.
- 6) **We have collections from at least 35 sites that have not been reported to the state.** This is a major problem. The state is responsible for managing archeological sites and they cannot do so unless they know where the sites are and what they mean. When a state institution (us) fails to inform another state institution (the Office of the State Archaeologist) of the existence of sites, we fail in our obligations and we expose the sites to risk of loss or destruction.
- 7) **Clear title was never established for any of these collections.** We currently cannot demonstrate that we are the legitimate holders of any of the collections in our possession. The Minnesota Museum Property Act of 2004 (Mn Statutes Chapter 213) provides a simple procedure for acquiring clear title and we must do this.
- 8) **We have several collections that are supposed to be housed in other states/facilities.** In the last decade several governmental units have established curatorial institutions of their own and they have requested repatriation of collections proper to their authority. We are in possession of such collections and need to turn them over, but they are tied to the foregoing problems so we cannot comply at this time.
- 9) **Because we do not have a complete or accurate catalogue, we cannot make the collections available for interpretation or research.** This is a clear violation of the most basic requirements of federal and state statutes, but it also is a fundamental violation of our role as a public institution. We curate the history of our constituency and when our poor practices alienate their history from them, we are committing a grievous wrong.

#### *Problem resolution*

The project proposed here solves the above stated problems by: 1) conducting a complete recataloguing of the entire collection, 2) compiling accurate accession files, 3) establishing clear title to the collections following the provisions of the Minnesota Museum Property Act, 3) regularizing and formalizing curatorial methods that meet all federal and state requirements, and preparing a formal Laboratory Manual to assure future adherence, and 4) divesting of unauthorized collections. Completing these four tasks requires significant investment and will generate significant benefits, as detailed below.

#### 2. Describe how the project will drive positive transformational change. (5 points)

Positive transformational change will be achieved in three primary ways: creating a strong base of knowledge, honoring Native history, and serving as an example for other institutions. As it currently exists, this major archive of human history is little more than a bunch of boxes of stuff sitting on shelves. These materials are the sole remaining testament to nearly 10,000 years of human life in southern Minnesota and we currently can say virtually nothing about any of it with the collections in their current state. The precontact history of southern Minnesota is very poorly known in part because of situations like this, where research was never carried to completion. Funding this project will help the collections gain meaning and give us the ability to tell important stories and engage our constituency.

There is also a symbolic note to this: starting this project in 2012 will help demonstrate the University's commitment to honoring Native American heritage in the year of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the hanging of 38 Dakota in Mankato. While this project is not tied specifically to commemorating the events associated with that terrible period, it is important to acknowledge that when Native communities hear the name "Mankato", they think first of the hangings. As an institution we have been working hard to transcend that image in our interactions with descendants, and honoring their history with a significant investment that will give us the ability to finally start telling their long story would be a very positive, transformational step.

Finally, completing this project will also demonstrate our commitment to our statutory obligations and serve as a banner for other institutions to see. Sadly, we are not alone in the problem of having unanalyzed collections although we are one of the largest sufferers – probably the second largest in the state behind the Minnesota Historical Society itself. Other colleges and universities as well as various public and private institutions have similar problems as we do, and in many cases they have no clear idea of how to solve them. Through this process we can become an example for others in how to tackle major issues like this and we can serve as a guiding force in helping them.

3. Explain how the project addresses student recruitment, retention, persistence, and/or completion or one or more of the 12 Challenges. (10 points)

This project will significantly enhance the noted student issues and relates directly to five of the 12 Challenges (2, 3, 5, 9, and 10). Right now, it is almost impossible to undertake any meaningful and intensive research on the materials, and yet they represent a significant opportunity to more fully engage existing students and attract new students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This project would make their educational experience here far more engaging and successful for them in many ways. Once completed, the collections project will provide many years of great opportunities for undergraduate and graduate research projects.

Budget limitations in the College of Graduate Studies and Research and the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences have left the Department of Anthropology with virtually no ability to offer student support for our graduate or undergraduate students. This situation has made it very difficult to recruit excellent new graduate students, and every year we lose several potential enrollments in the graduate program for this reason. Being able to at least offer research-related employment in the archeology lab would be a very positive step.

All of this goes to Challenge 2. It specifically helps increase enrollment, retention, and completion by providing a proximate mechanism (funding) and an ultimate mechanism (useful research collections), and directly and fully involving students in research. Currently, students working with the collections have to spend far more time on simple organizational tasks than they should. This project would alleviate that problem and allow students to complete their projects in a more timely manner. As well, it helps with debt load by providing a work opportunity that is directly relevant to a student's studies.

Another way in which this project addresses a Challenge (3) is that it makes available a level of training in artifact identification and analysis that will be unmatched in the state. The Department of Anthropology has extensive reference collections of stone raw materials, pottery types, and plant and animal remains that students use to identify archeological specimens. Beyond the fact that this is some of the most directly engaged learning that there is, students will receive exceptionally broad training – more broad than even offered at the University of Minnesota. This further enables them to compete successfully in the tight job market. It should be noted that this also directly addresses several parts of Challenge 10 by vertically integrating graduate students with undergraduate students in highly focussed, collaborative learning accomplished during the research process with intensive guidance and interaction with faculty. Challenge 10 is also met through this because once the collections are in order, specific analysis projects can then be proposed for funding through the state's Legacy program, enhancing our grant and contract potential, and providing a way to move forward with student funding past the initial investment through the proposed project.

Although perhaps somewhat marginal, this project also helps achieve Challenge 5. There are many questions about the collections that can only be answered by the faculty who originally made them. Students can thus learn important things not only about how methods have changed, but about the many different ways that researchers approach their work.

Finally, Challenge 9 talks about a cultural graduation requirement. While the details of this challenge are still unclear, what is absolutely true is that increasing student awareness of the Native American historical diversity of our region, which does include sovereign nations, can be conceived to be a major part of this. By assuring that the collections are in order they can be effectively used as teaching tools in the classroom as well as in efforts to bring this information to a broader light through public outreach.

4. Describe the impact this project will have on students and/or others whom we serve. (10 points)

Many ways in which this project positively impacts students have been described already. They include better access to research materials, more direct and intensive involvement in the research process, expanded and comprehensive training, and funding. An ancillary benefit is that as we complete this process we become a research destination, and those ties not only strengthen our position among other institutions but they also provide important opportunities for our students.

There are also highly beneficial impacts on other communities. Most notably, it is an important and good thing to make this part of their history available to our Native American friends. For a long time archeologists have been viewed negatively by Native communities in part because of exactly this situation: site excavations yield artifacts that simply go on shelves and are never really analyzed. Their meaning and their relationship to the history of Native communities goes unaddressed. Through this project, we can demonstrate that we are different: we are responsible and responsive. Many divisions of the university interact regularly with Native nations and this project has the ability to immensely improve our ability to collaboratively reconstruct an accurate understanding of Native lifeways in the region. For example, last year descendants of Chief Sleepy Eye and representatives of several Dakota communities contacted me to ask about artifacts we have that were ostensibly excavated from their great-great grandfather's village. When they visited I did everything I could to make the materials available for their examination, but I was left embarrassed because what little I could find, I could do little to interpret. They were very gracious and we still built a good working relationship, but it could have started much better.

More broadly speaking, as a public, curatorial institution it is our responsibility to make these data available and comprehensible to the public as part of our shared history. County and regional historical societies and museums are desperate for help in interpreting Native history in the region, and we should be the place they turn to for information and expertise. We cannot serve in that role unless our own house is in order.

5. Identify the "SMART" outcomes for the project (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). (5 points)

The following are the "SMART" outcomes for this project, in order of execution:

- 1) Accession files will be completed and will include documentation of site location, collection and excavation history, and contents of each collection (content lists being generated after cataloguing is complete)
- 2) Basic curatorial and cataloguing procedures following federal and state guidelines will be prepared and documented in a lab manual that will be printed and available for examination and use
- 3) A new cataloguing database prepared in Access® and built to interlace with ArcGIS will be completed, tested, and implemented
- 4) All collections from all curated sites will be catalogued in their basic form, including information on the size, shape, number, composition, condition, and typological classification of every object, and all "diagnostic" artifacts (projectile points [arrowheads], pottery rims, etc.) will be photographed
- 5) New and/or updated site forms will be prepared and filed with the state after each collection is catalogued
- 6) Clear title to all authorized and relevant collections will be established after cataloguing, and copies will be included in accession files
- 7) Unauthorized collections will be returned to requesting agencies or landowners after cataloguing
- 8) Statutory responsibilities will be satisfied by completion of the above tasks and maintained in all future work
- 9) The repository will consequently be certified by the Office of the State Archaeologist and will serve the needs of regional archeological researchers, Native American communities, the public, and consulting firms that require curatorial services

6. Discuss what this project will do for the university that warrants the investment. (5 points)

This project is worth the university's investment for several reasons. First, it is undoubtedly the case that becoming compliant with federal and state statutes is inherently worth the university's resources. The university became a state repository more than 30 years ago and continues to serve in that capacity. Completing this project will demonstrate our commitment to doing correctly what we undertake.

Second, it is important to recognize that being an official repository is more than a commitment to store artifacts – it is a positive statement that the human past is worth preserving and studying. Moreover, because the past that we are preserving is most specifically related to Native American heritage, the university's commitment to supporting this work is a clear indication that it values and supports Native

heritage. Thus, the project improves our relations with Native communities by showing them that the university is engaged with, responsible to, and respectful of humanity.

Third, the project will elevate MSU Mankato to an unrivalled position as the flagship institution in the MnSCU system when it comes to curation and to archeological research. Excelling in the system and putting us on a strong competitive footing in all areas of the university's practice should be a major goal.

7. Describe how the activities generated by this project would be sustained after one-time funding has ended, or if applicable, explain why the project does not need to be sustained. (5 points)

Because the activities described in this project deal with a finite project, no funding to continue them will be required beyond the 3 year completion timeframe. All of the current excavations we do are tied to undergraduate, graduate, and faculty research projects that thus require their timely and satisfactory completion. We have capacity to deal with what we are generating, but not to deal with this huge backlog. Furthermore, establishing standard protocols and formalizing them in a lab manual provides a strong assurance that this problem will not occur in the future.

8. Budget (5 points):

Outline the funding requested using the categories listed below. Please identify any additional or matching funds that may available to support the project. Please note, budget revisions beyond 10% total change from the initial proposal require approval. Budget revisions of more than 20%, constitutes a major change in the project scope and will not be approved.

|   | FY12          | FY 12<br>Matching<br>Funds | FY13          | FY 13<br>Matching<br>Funds | FY14          | FY13<br>Matching<br>Funds |
|---|---------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Personnel</b>  |               |                            |               |                            |               |                           |
| Unclassified Salary (in-load, overload)                     | 10,530        |                            | 10,530        |                            | 10,530        |                           |
| Classified Salary   |               |                            |               |                            |               |                           |
| Fringe <sup>a</sup> (Classified and Unclassified)           | 3,159         |                            | 3,159         |                            | 3,159         |                           |
| Graduate Assistant Salary                                   | 18,000        |                            | 18,000        |                            | 18,000        |                           |
| Graduate Assistant Tuition<br>Reduction/Waiver <sup>b</sup> | 11,716        |                            | 11,716        |                            | 11,716        |                           |
| <b>Non-Salary</b>   |               |                            |               |                            |               |                           |
| Student Help  | 11,136        |                            | 11,136        |                            | 11,136        |                           |
| Purchased Services/Travel Expenses                          | 0             |                            | 0             |                            | 500           |                           |
| Supplies and Materials                                      | 400           |                            | 800           |                            | 800           |                           |
| Building Improvement/Construction<br>Costs                  | 0             |                            | 0             |                            | 0             |                           |
| Equipment   | 2,200         |                            | 0             |                            | 0             |                           |
| <b>Total Budget Requested</b>                               | <b>57,141</b> |                            | <b>55,341</b> |                            | <b>55,841</b> |                           |

<sup>a</sup>Note: All current employees must be paid fringe benefits. Fringe should be estimated based on salary and position classification: Unclassified 30%, Classified 37%, Adjunct 7.65%.

<sup>b</sup>Estimated Tuition Reduction/Waiver for full-year enrollment: Masters \$5,858, Doctoral \$10,000.

9. Identify any special considerations or needs required for this project (e.g. physical space, contractual obligations, IT support, or collaborations with/implications for other units). (5 points)

There are no special considerations or needs. The archeology lab at Trafton North 362A is a recently renovated space (2 years ago) that was designed to specification as a lab and curatorial space. All technology (software) is standard, the university has licenses for it, and faculty and students are proficient in its use. Current lab computers are fully adequate for the project. There are positive implications of this project for the American Indian Studies program in that once the collections are fully catalogued and stabilized they can be used for instructional and interpretive purposes. This potential benefit extends as well to researchers and institutions outside of the university who may want to borrow some materials for exhibit or study.

10. Provide a project timeline outlining key tasks, milestones and dates for completion. (5 points)

| Tasks*                       | Academic Year 2012 - 2013 |                      | Academic Year 2013 - 2014 |                  | Academic Year 2014 - 2015 |                   |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
|                              | Fall                      | Spring               | Fall                      | Spring           | Fall                      | Spring            |
| 1 – Accession Files          | Complete by October       | Update as needed     | Update as needed          | Update as needed | Update as needed          | Final updates     |
| 2 – Lab Manual               | Complete by November      |                      |                           |                  |                           |                   |
| 3 – Database                 | Complete by December      |                      | Enter data as complete    | Continue         | Continue                  | Finish data entry |
| 4 – Cataloguing              |                           | Begin                | Continue                  | Continue         | Complete by December      |                   |
| 5 – Site Forms               | File preliminaries        | Revise as completed  | Continue                  | Continue         | Complete by December      | Final revisions   |
| 6 – Title                    |                           | Acquire as completed | Continue                  | Continue         | Continue                  | Complete by April |
| 7 – Collection Returns       |                           |                      |                           |                  | Begin                     | Complete by April |
| 8 – Compliance Documentation |                           |                      |                           |                  | Begin                     | Complete by April |
| 9 – Lab Certification        |                           |                      |                           |                  | Apply in December         | Complete by May   |

\*Tasks are defined based on SMART outcomes listed under item 5. Completion of each task is considered a milestone or progress benchmark.

Additional activities:

Purchase lab equipment: complete by October, 2012

Purchase lab supplies: done on as-needed basis