

Native American Handicrafts Retail Sales-Buy American Collaboration

TEAMs Video Conference

12:00 PM to 2:00 PM ET, March 26, 2021

Purpose:

Bring NPS Commercial Services, DOI Indian Arts and Craft Board, NPS concessioners, and cooperating association representatives together to share challenges, lessons learned, and resources currently available to support the purchase and sale of American Indian and Alaska Native (Indian) arts and craftwork in NPS concession and cooperating association run retail stores park service wide.

Meeting Notes:

Indian Arts and Crafts Act/New Made in America Executive Order

- Indian arts and craftwork represent an important opportunity to generate revenue for national parks, and their sale is incentivized through the exemption of Indian art and craftwork revenues from franchise fees. There are two separate vehicles for selling Indian art and craftwork: through concession contracts and cooperating association agreements (which includes the sale of educational materials and interpretive materials in parks).
- For visitors to have an authentic experience and understand Indian culture, it is important that the types of Indian art and craftwork they can purchase have authenticity of place and construction.
- The Indian Arts and Crafts (IAC) Act prohibits the misrepresentation of Indian art and craftwork. In order for an artisan to portray themselves as authentic under the IAC, they must either be an enrolled member of a tribe (federally- or state-recognized) or a lineal descendent of an enrolled member that has been granted formal Indian artisan certification to sell in writing (typically under tribal letterhead). Tribes have the sovereignty to grant this certification, but they are not required to do so.
- The purchase and sale of Indian art and craftwork falls squarely within President Biden's recent executive order (EO 14005) which emphasizes buying American. It remains to be seen how the rollout of policies under this EO will affect parks and the sale of Indian art and craftwork. Additional guidance will be provided to concessioners and the stakeholders in this meeting as it becomes available.

Sourcing Challenges

- Authenticity to local tribes should be the starting point for sourcing Indian art and craftwork, but it is possible to branch out to broader tribes if hyper-local sourcing is a challenge.
- Ideally, parks should deal directly with tribal artisans and eliminate the middleman to the greatest extent possible when sourcing Indian art and craftwork. However, some parks are finding they have a serious capacity challenge in terms of staff required to fulfill this ideal. In order to buy directly, they need to train buyers to discern the quality and authenticity of products, and to facilitate challenging discussions when a product does not meet the quality standard a park wants to uphold.
- Some parks that are constrained on the skillset and experience of their buyers rely on traders who have longstanding relationships with tribes, know the families well, and have an understanding of quality and authenticity.
- A conversation needs to be had around the strategy for developing talent in understanding authenticity, quality, and cultural representation required for vetting and buying directly. The sustainability of this art form is in jeopardy.
- Parks and concessioners should be open to creative strategies for working directly with tribes, such as bringing Indian artisans to the park and even creating a dedicated space for them. Sales managers can get to know the artisans they use as demonstrators throughout the years, cultivating longstanding working relationships. Shop employees are also encouraged to make those connections, and even to go directly to the reservations.
- The IAC Board is happy to serve as a resource for connecting parks and concessioners with Indian artisans. They offer brochures and information in hard copy as well as virtually. The list of tribes for sourcing provided on the IAC Board website can be used to establish new connections and bolster park offerings of Indian art and craftwork. Indian groups can also help parks with sourcing.

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- Many artisans are getting creative with strategies for modernizing the traditional elements of their native craft, which creates a dispute on whether hand-painting or modifying manufactured goods would still be considered authentic. However, it is important to try to work with tribal artisans regarding this issue instead of discarding them wholesale.
- COVID-19 has presented challenges for tribal artisans sourcing raw materials for production. For example, weavers have had significant difficulty sourcing wool in 2020 and 2021.
- Many tribes have a significant role in choosing the Indian art and craftwork vendors/products offered in parks. The process of vetting Indian art and craftwork suppliers with tribes can present challenges, particularly the decision of whose product is worthy for sale in a park.
- One strategy for bridging potential artisans and tribal leaders would be sponsoring workshops to develop the skills of artisans that would be from a specific tribe (e.g. carving, weaving, and jewelry making). Clifford Murphy, National Endowment for the Arts Director of Folk and Traditional Arts, may have funding ideas if NPS does not have the funding available.
- Some tribes lack centralized policies/procedures for selling Indian art and craftwork, which can make sourcing them challenging. Training to help educate tribes on how to sell to concessioners could be beneficial, as well as encouraging centralized payment methods (such as cooperatives) to manage the transactions for an entire tribe (instead of individual transactions per each artisan).

Promotion/Outreach/Communication

- Some of the Indian art and craftwork being sold in parks lack a cultural context communicating to the public that these objects are reflective of a vibrant, extant culture. Silos can also form between concessioners and cooperating associations.
- Greater cooperation is needed to demonstrate the relationship between what is being sold, the artisan that is providing the products, and the communities they are part of/representing. This connection can be demonstrated through labeling and displays to convey messaging in gift shops (without necessarily stepping over the line of performing interpretive services). Artisans can be showcased on where they are from, their tribal association, and what they are trying to accomplish with their work. Providing this context also strengthens the connection between the memories of a visitor and the Indian art and craftwork being offered.
- Training in Indian art and craftwork procurement for Superintendents could be valuable, as their support and engagement would help strengthen the relationship between parks and tribes and bolster Indian art and craftwork offerings in parks.

Collaboration among Concessioners

- The intent of this meeting was to create an opportunity for collaboration among stakeholders who do not otherwise typically communicate. NPS may plan to facilitate additional Quarterly Best Practices/Update Meetings (beginning with virtual sessions).
- We should consider including artisans in future meetings to get their perspective on best practices.