

Old Songs and New Ones: Creating a Path Forward for Museums to Respect Îethkabe

This is a summary of the research project that I (Amanda Foote) intends to do. It is based on my experience as a museum worker, professional and personal conversations with Îethka, Niitsitapi and other folks over the last ten years, and also interviews that I conducted in the past year.

Guiding Questions

These are the questions I am thinking about. Their job is to guide my thinking, but if I find that other things matter more as I learn, then the questions might shift or change.

- How have museums policies and cultural law in Alberta impacted Treaty 7 peoples' (especially the Îethkabe) access to their cultural belongings?
- How have Treaty 7 people obtained access to and control of their belongings, stored in museums or controlled by the province?
- In what ways might Îethka want their access and control to change?
- What are the best uses and care techniques for Îethka belongings held by museums?
- What supports can museums put in place to support readiness to engage from Indigenous communities?
- What responsibilities do museums have to communities whose belongings they hold?

Six Lodgepoles

How will these questions be answered? Through a process guided by six lodgepoles. These lodgepoles will be part of every aspect of the study and will "hold up" the work of the study.

- Personal Responsibility

As a settler person who is trying to learn from Îethkabi who are experts, I am trying to be as respectful as possible, and to pay attention to what I learn, and to really listen. My family is Îethka, and I do not want to let them down. I

- Knowledge Protections

Most people I spoke to shared concern that knowledge be used correctly, referenced correctly, and attributed correctly. There can be serious consequences for people who misuse knowledge. On the other hand, the western frameworks do not provide adequate protections for Îethka knowledge sharing laws. In order to properly respect the people and knowledge involved in this work I will have to be very careful with knowledge.

- Elders Guidance

Elders are wise Îethka leaders, and they should be treated with care and respect. Their guidance oversees this work. I will work with a small group of Elders, from all three bands, to directly oversee the project, and may also consult with other Elders throughout for different areas of expertise. Elders will be compensated for their knowledge and time.

- Co-Mentorship

It is no use to collect knowledge for collecting sake, or to add value to my own life. In part this is what museums have done, and while museums have some value for Îethka today, there are other ways to hold knowledge. Throughout this project I will work with Îethka young adults, who will join in on processes and projects they choose to participate in. They will learn along with me, as well as learn from me, and I will also learn from them. I have met many young people interested in museum work, and I hope this will be a kind of training for them. They are also experts in Îethka lifeways, and working with them will make the project stronger.

- Ceremony & Protocol

Ceremony and protocol are the legal framework through which permissions are sought and can be granted for all types of relations. Many Îethka I have spoken to have provided specific instruction to me in the value of integrating ceremony into this project, maintaining that it is necessary in order to achieve positive outcomes. I have come to understand that ceremony cannot be divorced from the proper way of conducting oneself, which is also the objective of carrying out protocol. Some elements of protocol within the project may include demonstrating respect for each of the three bands, and offering compensation for knowledge sharing.

- Language

Îethka individuals often express to me the importance of their language to their overall cultural context. Thinking in Îethka is different than thinking in English. As such, it is important that in attempts to learn from Îethka people, the process be grounded in the language that Îethka people use. I am working to learn to understand and use the language. Some elements of language within the project may include finding a vocabulary that makes sense to use in museum contexts, and learning the spirit of the Îethka words not just their translation.

Study Methods

The methods are the ways the lodgepoles will be expressed. They are the outer material of the lodge, the part that people will see, and be able to interact with. Here is a list of some methods that I have heard Îethka community members talk about as useful in their community:

- Elders Advisory Committee

I have asked Duane Mark to assist me, as I've known him for over 10 years and we get along very well. He has made suggestions about other Elders to work with, and helped me contact them. I hope he will continue this work, along side other knowledge keepers. I was thinking this committee would be like a group, but after talking to folks, and after COVID, I am not sure it has to be. It might just be a set of individuals who I work closely with.

I have also asked Adrian Wolfleg to help me understand how Blackfoot folks have engaged with museums. Adrian and I have worked together over the course of 15 years and he was involved in much of the work that happened at Glenbow. He still works there today.

- Mentee Collaboration

I will work with a small team of youth and young adults, who I learn with, and who engage in a process of teaching me, and learning from me as well. I will try to work with folks from all three bands.

- Seeking Objects & Provenance Analysis

We will look for museums beyond the Bow Valley which hold belongings-as-artifacts that originated in the Îethka communities to create a list that will be made available to the community on the website www.iethkamuseumresearch.com. We will also trace history (request provenance records, and speak with community members) for particular belongings-as-artifacts, that are identified as of interest by Îethka people.

- Working with Artifacts

We will work directly with artifacts in museum collections through exercises of deep looking, in order to learn stories and knowledge related to materials, uses, time, ownership, tradition, practices, and design. This work may also involve photography, sketching, and other forms of documentation.

- Language Lessons

I have been enrolled in private language lessons with various mentors for the past two years, and plan to continue this throughout the project, with the co-mentees. Deepening our knowledge of the language will promote possibilities of deeper learning through protocol, ceremony, and work with Elders, as Îethka ways of life are revealed through the language.

- Document Analysis & Engagement

We will work with documents such as museum policies, FNSCOR, UNDRIP, The TRC and its Calls to Action, the report on First Nations Museum Engagement, research on Treaty 7 from Îethka perspectives, and other documents in which Indigenous people have advocated for their rights related to object culture and intellectual property, or in which their rights to object culture and intellectual property have been described. We will utilize a bibliography of Îethka sources to better understand the ways in which Îethka people have already been written about by their own community members and outsiders.

- Community Engagement

We will spend time with elders and community members. This will involve interpersonal interaction in small groups, or in wider settings. This could include volunteering at community events, being present for activities attended by community members, or assisting individual elders with projects (such as chopping wood, or yardwork).

- Travel & Place Based Learning

We will take groups of Îethkabi to visit heritage sites and museums that contain items that were made by their ancestors, that are managed by Indigenous people, or that are considered to employ best practices in Indigenous relations. I will be trying to find funding for up to four trips or up to 10 people each, to four different sites outside of Alberta, as well as trips to the

Whyte, Glenbow, Buffalo Nations Museum, and Royal Alberta Museum, also for up to 10 people each.

- Confidentiality Processes

There are vetting processes that particular Elders wish to use, and others that different Elders prefer. There are longstanding alliances in the community that make some people more willing to work with others. Negotiating the proper relationships to ensure knowledge is protected will be an ongoing process. This may include working between Elders for verification processes, restriction of co-mentors to particular activities, and seeking out what was described by three Elders as some form of *îethka* copyright protocol.

- Relational Connecting

In respecting *îethka* protocols, I have obligations to family. These should not be considered nepotistic, they are a set of obligations that keep my practices ethical. I have already met a few people in the *îethka* communities who are interested in museums. I will work with these folks first. If they suggest others to work with, then I will work with them too. We may be limited by time, and also funds, because I have to apply for funds to be able to pay for the project. But I will try my best to get funds to pay for anyone who wants to be involved.

- Formal Interviews

In some cases we will conduct formal interviews with individuals who are stakeholders in Indigenous relationships with museums. Interview participants could include *îethka* individuals, museum and heritage site staff volunteers and board members (current and retired), Nitsitapii individuals, private collectors, policy makers (politicians and former politicians), report writers & researchers, and members of other Indigenous communities working through museum engagement (or who operate museums or heritage centers).

Timeline

This research is part of an ongoing process, it began long ago and it continues in new and evolving ways. The next steps are for Amanda to submit a research proposal to the University, to apply for funding, and to apply for ethics approval to the university of Calgary (she hopes to finish this by the end of summer 2022). The activities described above have already begun in some ways, but once funding is in place to fairly compensate the mentees and advisors, the project will continue for approximately two years. In that time, Amanda hopes to be able to have some answers to the questions above. The initial year will be the time for travel and community building activities. The second year will be the time for synthesis and verification of what was learned. The process will then culminate with a report back to community, and the submission of a written dissertation. This conclusion does not foreclose on the possibility of other outcomes and projects to follow, or other forms of publications.

Îethka Research – Accountability Framework

This is a set of expectations that anyone can hold Amanda to at any time.

1. **Informed consent** is an ongoing process in research. It refers to the ongoing relationship between the researcher, and those individuals contributing to the study, and represents the need to be continually alerted to potential ways researchers exert power. In this research, I commit to careful consideration of informed consent given my positionality as a non-Îethka community member. I will update this section as I refine and learn methods to do this. As a start, when describing the benefits and drawbacks of participation in the project I will make explicit the benefits and drawbacks that I (may) experience as a result of this work.
2. **Compensation** for knowledge is an important aspect of Îethka protocol. As such, I will ensure that all research participants, including the advisory council, co-mentors, and other participants are compensated in accordance with Îethka expectations. This implies that I will not proceed with this research without funding in place that will allow me to provide proper compensation.
3. **Presentations & Publications** of this work will not be embarked upon my sole discretion or facilitation. Working with the co-mentors and advisory council we will devise methods for determining under what conditions this work can be presented; in no circumstances will I present this work without a Îethka facilitator.
4. **Authorship** of any publications will be fairly attributed to any contributors who opt into authorship of the work. Co-mentors and/or advisory council members will be listed on any publications of the work to which they contribute, and to which the consent to be named.
5. **Copywrite** for all content shared throughout the research project remains with its creator/owner in the context that makes the most sense to Îethka standards and law. I will update this section as I refine and discern Îethka copywrite practices as they apply to my contributions and those of others.
6. **Profit** from this work, in the unlikely event that there is any, will be distributed to the Îethka individuals or community, in acknowledgement of their conditions. This point will be updated if it becomes likely that any profit streams may be devised.