



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**FAM receives \$250,000 Ford Foundation grant for WINIKO: Reunion research.**

OKLAHOMA CITY (August 10, 2023) – First Americans Museum (FAM) has been awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Ford Foundation. The funds will assist the Curatorial Affairs department’s initiative to create reunions between objects on loan from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and local tribal communities and families.

During the original research development for *WINIKO: Life of an Object, Selections from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian* curatorial team members were able to create reunions for three families in person and connect nine families to their objects. A short film is presented in the gallery that documents the in-person reunions for visitors to witness these beautiful events.

“FAM uniquely creates space for the cultivation of projects drawing from Indigenous philosophies and worldviews within a museum. We are working to challenge the disconnection that exists between museum collections and tribal communities,” said Director of Curatorial Affairs at FAM, heather ahtone. “I hope that we are laying a path for others to follow reconnecting the NMAI collection with our Oklahoma community.”

Since the exhibition’s opening, the Curatorial Affairs department has initiated cooperation with NMAI to revisit the research that was interrupted by the pandemic. The research involves soliciting cooperation with tribal leaders, geneological research, and cultural research. The Reunions have multiple points for success, including reconnecting the objects with their descendant families, the cultural knowledge communities, and tribal communities broadly. Tribes are given the authority to guide the goals for each object. This work has little precedent within museum practices and is being documented for future publication.

According to the Ford Foundation, the grant provides “core support to the First Americans Museum for its repatriation project that works to reunite Native American communities with historic object that are part of their cultural legacy.”

The Curatorial Affairs team began consultations with tribal communities across Oklahoma during the summer of 2023. This research will continue through 2024. Upon completion of the research, FAM will produce a book and feature length film to share the stories the emerge from this work.

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#### About First Americans Museum

FAM's mission is to educate the broader public about the unique cultures, diversity, history and contributions of the 39 Tribal Nations in Oklahoma today. The 175,000-square-foot facility showcases state-of-the-art exhibitions in history, culture and art; live public and education programs; a full-service restaurant presenting unique Native-inspired cuisine; and a museum shop featuring one-of-a-kind hand-made items created by Oklahoma's premier Native American artists.