

From Stealing to Healing:

Repatriation and B.C. First Nations

FACT SHEET

This fact sheet presents an overview of the report *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*, which documents the state of the repatriation of First Nations Ancestors and Belongings in B.C. and highlights the urgent need for funding to support this work.

Defining Repatriation

Repatriation refers to the return of Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings to their ancestral communities. Repatriation is a meaningful way to acknowledge and reconcile the unjust treatment of Indigenous Peoples and is an important step in healing the harms of colonization.*

Locating B.C. First Nations' Stolen Ancestors and Belongings

B.C. First Nations have worked for generations to secure the return of their Ancestors and Belongings from global colonial institutions. In recent years, momentum and resources to support this work have grown, and increased awareness has led to a better understanding of how much was taken. Research carried out for this report identified more than 2,500 Ancestors and nearly 100,000 Belongings held in 229 global institutions. The actual number of holdings is likely much higher.

Photo credit: Nika Collison, 2019, courtesy of the Haida Gwaii Museum

Types of Work Involved in Repatriation

B.C. First Nations have undertaken a wide range of repatriation activities to return Ancestors and Belongings to their home communities. This work generally includes the following phases, with community engagement taking place throughout:

1. **Planning:** strategic planning, training, research, interviews and inventory work, database creation, establishing policies and protocols, and building relationships with institutions.
2. **Preparing:** research and inventory work, traveling, negotiating agreements with holding institutions, preparing infrastructure and community spaces.
3. **Repatriation:** provenance confirmation, travel and repatriation transport, welcoming home ceremonies, Ancestor reburial, and storage and display.
4. **Caretaking:** managing community cultural spaces, education initiatives, collections management, infrastructure management, capacity building and knowledge transfer.

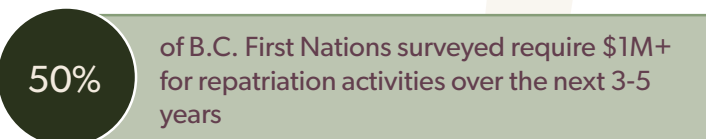
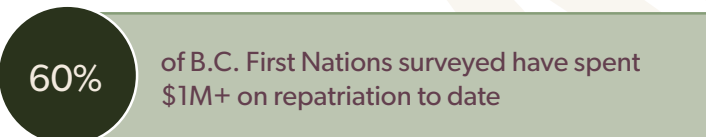
*The term repatriation is used throughout the *From Stealing to Healing* report, unless rematriation is used by the community referred to. Rematriation describes and honours the return of Ancestors and Belongings with an ancestral connection to matrilineal societies.

Barriers to Successful Repatriation

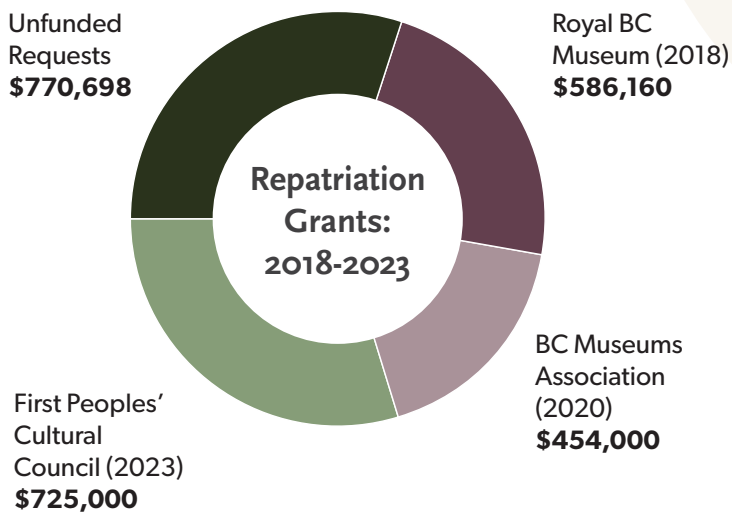
B.C. First Nations and colonial institutions face some shared challenges as their repatriation work is often multi-layered, highly complex and includes navigating systems entrenched in colonialism and racism. Common challenges include:

Time and capacity	Financial challenges
Provenance research	Competing claims

The State of Repatriation Funding



Repatriation in Canada is severely underfunded. For decades, B.C. First Nations have funded this work through piecemeal grants and heavy reliance on volunteer labour. In 2016, the Province of B.C. announced the first dedicated repatriation grant in Canada administered through the Royal B.C. Museum. It was followed by two more repatriation grants: one through the B.C. Museums Association and the other through FPCC. While this funding was a welcome shift, the funding awarded did not keep pace with community requests.



Why Support and Fund Repatriation?

Repatriation should be understood not only as a cost, but also as a positive contribution to the economies, social life and health of B.C. First Nations, greater B.C. and Canada. Support for repatriation:

- ▶ **Fulfills a moral and ethical imperative**
Repatriation affirms B.C. First Nations' rights as stewards of their heritage. It encourages knowledge exchange, and cultivates empathy, friendship and anti-racism.
- ▶ **Restores and fosters social relationships**
Repatriation offers healthy and respectful ways for B.C. First Nations and greater B.C. to peacefully co-exist. Internationally, it builds relationships that foster collaboration through partnerships, exchanges and cultural diplomacy.
- ▶ **Supports community wellness and economic growth**
Repatriation drives community development through cultural revitalization programming and supports a skilled workforce by providing career opportunities in engineering, construction, arts administration, IT and more.
- ▶ **Supports B.C. and Canada's economic growth**
Repatriation generates opportunities for cultural and heritage tourism by investing in local economies. Returned Belongings increase opportunities for First Nations museums and cultural centres, contributing to a strong cultural sector and market.

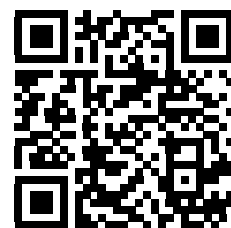
Repatriation Resources

Collison, Jisgang Nika, Sdahl K'awaas Lucy Bell and Lou-Ann Neel. (2019). "Indigenous Repatriation Handbook." Royal British Columbia Museum.

The First Peoples' Cultural Council. (2025). "From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations."

The First Peoples' Cultural Council. (2025). "Repatriation Cost Analysis."

Read Full Report



Art by Lou-ann Neel, Kwakwaka'wakw Artist.