



## Collaborative Efforts

Despite disruptions from COVID-19, plans are progressing for new exhibits. The partnership between Mesa Verde National Park and the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History (CU) to reimagine the Chapin Mesa Museum kicked off in 2019. Since then, we have engaged with tribal communities, archeologists, historians, and natural resource professionals in a robust content development process.

In the summer of 2019, Scarlett Engle (PhD Anthropology Candidate, CU) and Mikayla Costales (MA 2020, Museum and Field Studies, CU) reached out to tribal members to learn how we could collaborate. Based on their advice, we held a large meeting in Albuquerque, NM in January 2020. Tribal members selected representatives to form a Native Interpretation Working Group. That group met regularly over the next two years and continues to provide critical guidance for this project.

Workshops at CU Boulder and Fort Lewis College in February and March 2020 brought together archeologists from universities, the National Park Service, and associated tribes. A smaller team met monthly for the next year to consider archeological content and how to integrate “different ways of knowing” into the new exhibits.



The project kick-off meeting in April 2019 brought together a wide range of stakeholders.

Plans for additional workshops were canceled due to the pandemic. Instead, CU and park staff conducted one-on-one interviews with subject matter experts in history and natural resources.

The content development process culminated in a convening of content teams, exhibit designers, park staff, CU faculty, and students. As we were still unable to meet in person, Melvin Consulting – a native owned facilitation group, led a series of meetings via Zoom. The synergy and shared vision that emerged from these convenings will guide the exhibit design.

EDX, an exhibit design firm with extensive experience working with tribal communities, has begun developing Schematic Design alternatives. They will continue to collaborate with the park, CU, and the Native Interpretation working group throughout the design phase (see chart on side 2 for more details on this process).

## Current Museum Status

The Museum has been closed during the pandemic, but the park is using this opportunity to install new accessible ramps and replace the failing HVAC system.

Some exhibit cases have been removed to make way for the ramps, but plans are in the works for temporary exhibits for when the museum re-opens in late summer or early fall 2022.

Designs for the new exhibits are expected to be completed in 2024 and ready to install by 2025.





Tribal members, park and CU staff gathered in Albuquerque, NM in Jan 2020 to discuss the collaboration and select tribal representatives to provide ongoing guidance for this project.

## The Need for Change

Updating one of the oldest museums in the National Park System is no small undertaking. The exhibits have engaged millions of visitors over the years, but the museum hasn't always felt welcoming to Native people.

While the park has removed displays due to concerns from tribal communities in the past, we want to set a higher standard by recognizing the importance of Indigenous knowledge. Tribal communities want visitors to know that they are still here and connected to their ancestral places.

The original exhibits interpreted the park through the lens of 20th century archeologists. New exhibits will highlight Native perspectives and reflect current thinking in archeology that has changed significantly in the past century.

Other upgrades will include addressing accessibility issues and making sure cases for irreplaceable cultural items meet today's curatorial standards.

*There are still tribes  
that are living and thriving today*  
- Tim Begay (Navajo)

*It's a sacred place*  
- Presley Haskie (Zuni)



The Chapin Mesa Museum was constructed between 1922 and 1925 to display cultural items collected in the park.

## Content Development Team

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For more information visit [nps.gov/meve/museum-renovations.htm](https://nps.gov/meve/museum-renovations.htm)

