



February 2026

Program in Focus: SRJC Multicultural Museum

Summary

The Santa Rosa Junior College Multicultural Museum is a long-standing institutional asset that advances the District's Mission, Vision, and Values through culturally responsive education, ethical stewardship of collections, and meaningful community engagement.

Behind the Scenes at SRJC's Multicultural Museum

The Multicultural Museum has been an integral part of Santa Rosa Junior College since it was founded in 1939. Constructed through a Works Progress Administration (WPA) grant during the tenure of SRJC's first president, Floyd Bailey, the museum originally housed collections of rocks, minerals, natural history specimens, and Native American objects assembled by founder Jesse Peter in the 1930s.

Over nearly 90 years, the museum has evolved in response to shifting academic priorities, community relationships, and ethical museum practices. In the 1970s, under the leadership of Bill Smith (Bodega Bay Miwok / Dry Creek Pomo), the museum became a Native American Museum. A full remodel and modernization in the late 1970s through early 2000s, led by director Ben Benson, transformed the space into the Multicultural Museum it is today.

Throughout these changes, the museum has remained aligned with SRJC's mission to cultivate a welcoming, antiracist environment grounded in social responsibility, cultural awareness, and exceptional teaching and learning. Today, the Multicultural Museum continues to partner with SRJC departments and community stakeholders to provide equitable access to shared cultural heritage.

While many visitors are familiar with the museum's public exhibits—particularly the internationally recognized Elsie Allen Pomo Basket Collection—much of the museum's work occurs behind the scenes. The collection includes more than 5,000 catalogued records representing over 12,500 individual objects. Ongoing cataloging, preservation, and ethical stewardship of these materials require sustained care and expertise, reflecting SRJC's values of integrity, academic excellence, and responsibility to society.

Student Involvement

Student employees play a critical role in the museum's operations. With only one permanent staff member, students gain hands-on experience assisting with collection care, curatorial research, and exhibit development—opportunities that support SRJC's vision for equitable, transformative, and holistic learning.

Students and volunteers also lead the museum's children's tours, gaining leadership and professional skills through scheduling, coordination, and public-facing educational work. Additional responsibilities include integrated pest monitoring, deep cleaning, and the development of marketing and social media materials. This experiential learning environment reinforces SRJC's commitment to teaching and learning, student success, and workforce preparation.





Academic Partnerships

The Multicultural Museum supports academic quality by serving as a teaching resource across disciplines. Faculty from diverse disciplines including Anthropology, History, and Ethnic Studies provide academic disciplinary expertise to assist in informing, shaping, and enhancing programming for the Museum. Exhibits and media in the museum enhance in-classroom lessons and give students the opportunity to learn in an immersive and inspiring environment.

With more than 4,000 visitors annually, the museum remains a valued campus and community resource, supporting interdisciplinary learning, civic engagement, and student success.

NAGPRA and Tribal Relations

As an institution with significant Native American collections, the Multicultural Museum is committed to maintaining respectful and transparent relationships with tribes nationwide. The museum actively fulfills its obligations under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a federal law enacted in 1990 requiring consultation and repatriation of certain cultural items.

To date, the museum has repatriated three objects to the Santa Ynez Chumash Tribe, and on January 22 of this year, more than 300 items were repatriated to the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. This work requires ongoing dedication and long-term relationship building. The museum actively manages consultation with all 575 federally recognized tribes, as well as numerous non-federally recognized California tribes who hold consultation rights under CalNAGPRA.

These efforts embody SRJC’s values of integrity, restorative justice, cultural competency, and social equity, and reflect the District’s responsibility to ethically steward cultural heritage.

Children’s Outreach

The Multicultural Museum has offered hands-on educational tours for third- and fourth-grade students for decades. Many community members recall visiting the museum as children, highlighting its lasting impact on local education. While the program remains experiential, practices have evolved in consultation with tribes. For example, the museum now uses mass-produced tools rather than ancient artifacts during demonstrations, ensuring cultural respect and ethical engagement.

During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the museum hosted 14 children’s tours, serving an average of 27 students per group—approximately 378 students annually. These visits foster cultural awareness, curiosity, and early connections to higher education. Native American students are encouraged to participate in programming, enriching the experience through representation and lived knowledge.

NAGPRA and The SRJC Museum

You may notice changes to some of our exhibits, including items being removed from public display.

What is NAGPRA?
The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act is a United States federal law enacted on November 16, 1990. The Act is primarily concerned with the identification of “human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony” and the disposition and repatriation of the remains or objects to lineal descendants, Native American tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations.

Who determines what items fall under this law?
It is through consultations with tribes and deference to traditional cultural knowledge that ultimately determines which items fall under the law.

Why does this matter?
SRJC is dedicated to intentional and authentic relationship-building and consultation with Indigenous communities. While SRJC is required by law to achieve full NAGPRA compliance, active engagement and meaningful dialogue with Native American tribes fosters a respectful understanding of the cultural items, assists tribes in their cultural heritage efforts, and promotes collaborative research and public education.





WRITTEN UPDATES



Alignment with Mission, Values, and Strategic Plan

The Multicultural Museum directly advances Santa Rosa Junior College's Mission, Vision, and Values. Through faculty partnerships, the museum supports academic excellence and experiential learning. Through ethical collection stewardship and NAGPRA compliance, it models integrity, restorative justice, and social responsibility.

By providing accessible, inclusive, and culturally responsive programming for students and the broader community, the museum helps cultivate an equitable, welcoming campus climate and contributes meaningfully to SRJC's Strategic Plan.

Contact Information

For additional information about the Santa Rosa Junior College Multicultural Museum, please contact Museum Supervisor / Curator Rachel Minor at rminor@santarosa.edu