

Call for Artists

American Bison: Honoring Indigenous Stewardship, Buffalo Soldiers, and Shared Histories

Buffalo Soldiers National Museum

Houston, Texas

Project Overview

The Buffalo Soldiers National Museum (BSNM) invites artists living and working in the Greater Houston area to submit proposals for an original sculptural work interpreting the American bison as a symbol of history, resilience, and interconnected cultural legacies.

The selected artwork will become a featured installation in the museum's permanent gallery, occupying an approximately 12-foot-long × 6-foot-wide × 6-foot-high display space and welcoming visitors into the museum's newly renovated exhibition.

Project Vision

For countless generations, the American bison has held profound cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic significance for Indigenous Nations across North America. The Buffalo Soldiers National Museum recognizes that any interpretation of the buffalo must begin with respect for the Indigenous peoples whose histories, relationships, and stewardship are inseparable from this animal.

The buffalo also carries deep meaning within the museum's own story. It connects to the legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers, whose name has long been associated with the buffalo, while also honoring the vision of Captain Paul J. Matthews, founder of the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum. Today, the buffalo continues to symbolize resilience, strength, and collective memory of the community that has preserved and celebrated the history of Black military service.

Rather than simply replicating the museum's taxidermied American bison, we encourage artists to use the buffalo as a powerful symbol through which multiple histories and perspectives can intersect. Proposed works should thoughtfully acknowledge the enduring relationships between Indigenous peoples and the bison while also exploring its connections to the legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers, conservation, identity, memory, and community. Artists are invited to interpret these interconnected narratives through their own unique creative vision, producing a work that inspires reflection, dialogue, and understanding.

Artistic Approach

Artists may propose works that are:

- Contemporary in style
- Abstract or conceptual

- Representational of a bison
- Created using traditional, mixed-media, sustainable, or innovative materials
- Designed for long-term indoor exhibition

The museum welcomes diverse artistic perspectives while encouraging historical accuracy, cultural respect, and originality. Because the American bison holds deep cultural, spiritual, and historical significance for many Indigenous Nations, artists are strongly encouraged to consult with Indigenous community members, cultural practitioners, or tribal representatives during the development of their proposals. Meaningful collaboration and informed interpretation will help ensure that the artwork respectfully reflects the enduring relationship between Indigenous peoples and the American bison.

Materials and Preservation Guidelines

Due to museum preservation, conservation, and integrated pest management requirements, untreated organic materials are strongly discouraged. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Animal bones
- Hides and untreated leather
- Fur
- Feathers
- Raw wood with bark
- Plant material
- Dried vegetation
- Food products
- Other biodegradable materials that may deteriorate over time or pose a risk to museum collections.

Installation Requirements

The selected artwork must:

- Occupy an approximate footprint of 12 feet long × 6 feet wide × 6 feet high (See attached rendering)
- Be suitable for permanent indoor exhibition
- Be structurally sound and safe for public display
- Meet museum conservation and installation standards
- Be completed and ready for installation by November 15, 2026

Eligibility

This opportunity is open to artists who:

- Are at least 18 years of age

- Have demonstrated experience producing large-scale or exhibition-quality artwork (preferred but not required)

Emerging and established artists are encouraged to apply.

Submission Requirements

Please submit:

- Artist statement (maximum 500 words)
- Biography
- Resume or CV
- Project proposal describing your artistic concept, including sketches, renderings, or other visual representations
- Portfolio featuring 5–10 examples of previous work (examples relevant to this project are highly encouraged)
- Installation requirements and anticipated long-term maintenance considerations
- Optional short video introduction (2–3 minutes) describing yourself and your artistic practice

Selection Criteria

Applications will be reviewed by a selection panel consisting of artists, scholars, Indigenous and community representatives, and Buffalo Soldiers National Museum staff.

Applications will be evaluated based on:

- Artistic excellence and originality
- Thoughtful engagement with the project's themes
- Feasibility of fabrication and installation
- Durability and suitability for museum display
- Overall impact within the museum's gallery space

Timeline

- Call Opens: July 2026
- Submission Deadline: August 15, 2026
- Artist Selected: Late August 2026
- Fabrication Period: Approximately 60 days following contract execution
- Installation Deadline: November 15, 2026

Compensation

The selected artist will receive compensation for the commissioned work. The project budget, fabrication support, installation assistance, and contractual terms will be discussed with finalists during the selection process.

About the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum

Located in Houston, Texas, the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum is dedicated to preserving, interpreting, and sharing the history and legacy of African Americans and Afro Latinos in the United States military from the Revolutionary War through the present day. Through exhibitions, education, and community engagement, the museum connects military history to broader conversations about citizenship, service, leadership, and social change.

For questions please contact:

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