UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy

CRAFTING MEANINGFUL INDIGENOUS PARTICIPATION

STAGING HERITAGE: POLICY LESSONS FROM GLOBAL CULTURAL EVENTS FOR THE 2028 LOS ANGELES OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

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OVERVIEW

This report examines how mega-events and their associated cultural programs have addressed Indigenous participation, representation, knowledge, and cultural authority. It considers five events: Los Angeles 1984, Vancouver 2010, London 2012, Qatar 2022, and Paris 2024. Indigenous peoples' political status, histories, rights, and relationships to land differ across these contexts, which places important limits on direct comparison.

- LA84 provides limited evidence of Indigenous representation. Its broadly multicultural cultural program did not establish a clearly documented role for Southern California's tribal nations. The case therefore offers a local caution for LA28 and shows how Indigenous peoples can remain peripheral within a program that celebrates cultural diversity.
- Vancouver 2010 offers the report's most developed precedent for the formal participation of Indigenous nations in a mega-event. Through the Four Host First Nations partnership, Indigenous nations participated in governance, planning, cultural representation, economic activity, and legacy-building. The case shows how participation can encompass institutional authority, sustained resources, and relationships that continue beyond the event.
- Qatar 2022 provides a distinct institutional example of community collaboration, oral history, first-person testimony, living heritage, and place-based interpretation. These practices illuminate questions about who interprets culture, whose voices carry authority, and how cultural knowledge is shared with international audiences. Although Qatar's national and institutional context differs substantially from the sovereign and jurisdictional circumstances of tribal nations in Southern California, its museum practices offer relevant lessons for Indigenous representation and cultural participation at LA28.
- London 2012 and Paris 2024 contribute more focused lessons. London demonstrates approaches to community co-curation, participatory cultural production, and the reinterpretation of museum collections. Paris 2024 raises questions about Polynesian representation, language, place, and cultural authority through the surfing competition in Tahiti. It also illustrates the complexities of Indigenous participation in a mega-event organized across metropolitan France and its overseas territories.

Across the cases, the analysis considers cultural visibility, interpretive participation, institutional influence, material opportunity, and continuity. For museums and cultural institutions preparing for LA28, the central questions concern who shapes the cultural offer, how knowledge is interpreted and shared, how resources and benefits are distributed, and what relationships and institutional changes continue after the Games.

Any meaningful approach to LA28 will need to reflect the histories, rights, territorial relationships, and priorities of Southern California's tribal nations and wider Indigenous communities. The cases presented here offer relevant precedents and practical methods whose value depends on careful adaptation to the Los Angeles context.

DEFINING KEY TERMS

The terminology surrounding Indigenous participation varies across peoples, countries, and political systems. No universal definition of "Indigenous peoples" has been adopted within the United Nations system. Self-identification, historical continuity, relationships to land, and recognition by the community are widely used considerations (United Nations, 2007; United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, n.d.). Throughout this report, terminology should be understood in relation to the identities, legal status, and preferences of the peoples and nations concerned.

- **Indigenous peoples**

Peoples who identify as Indigenous and maintain distinct historical, cultural, political, or territorial relationships that precede or have developed outside dominant state structures. Indigenous peoples have rights to self-determination, culture, language, traditional knowledge, and relationships with their lands and territories. The term encompasses peoples whose histories and legal relationships with states differ substantially (United Nations, 2007).

- **Tribal nations**

Indigenous political entities in the United States with their own identities, governments, citizenship or membership structures, and relationships to territory. Federally recognized tribes retain inherent powers of self-government and maintain government-to-government relationships with the United States. Other Indigenous peoples and communities may maintain longstanding political, cultural, and territorial identities without federal recognition (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.).

- **Indigenous communities**

A broad term that may include members of tribal nations, Indigenous peoples without federal recognition, urban Indigenous populations, and Indigenous people living beyond their ancestral territories. Its use should preserve distinctions in political status and should not obscure the governmental authority of tribal nations.

- **Cultural representation**

The presentation of Indigenous peoples, histories, languages, knowledge, objects, and cultural practices to public audiences. The term draws attention to authorship, attribution, interpretive control, and the conditions under which cultural knowledge may be shared.

- **Cultural participation**

Direct involvement in shaping, producing, delivering, or evaluating cultural activity. Participation may encompass artistic contributions, consultation, interpretation, curatorial work, programming, decision-making, and governance.

- **Cultural authority**

The recognized ability to determine how cultural knowledge, histories, languages, objects, images, and practices are interpreted, attributed, recorded, circulated, or withheld. Cultural authority may be held by individuals, families, knowledge-holders, communities, governments, or other designated bodies. Indigenous protocols may establish specific conditions governing access to and reuse of cultural knowledge (United Nations, 2007; Local Contexts, n.d.).

- **Shared authority**

An institutional arrangement through which Indigenous partners exercise meaningful decision-making power over relevant aspects of a project. This may include cooperative planning, approval rights, interpretive control, authority over documentation and reuse, participation in evaluation, and clear structures for continuing accountability (School for Advanced Research, 2023).

- **Living heritage**

Knowledge, practices, expressions, skills, and cultural relationships that communities recognize as part of their heritage and continue to transmit and recreate. Living heritage evolves through its relationship with people, place, memory, language, and changing social conditions (UNESCO, 2003).

- **Legacy**

The relationships, resources, capacities, cultural materials, governance arrangements, and institutional changes that continue after an event. In this report, legacy includes the long-term effects of participation for Indigenous partners and cultural institutions, together with the ownership and future use of materials created through the event.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This report draws on official reports, organizing committee evaluations, museum and cultural institution materials, existing scholarship on mega-event cultural programming, and a small number of credible news sources where official documentation was unavailable or insufficient. The Qatar case also incorporates interviews with relevant museum professionals. Across the case studies, particular attention is given to representation, authorship, cultural transmission, accessibility, and continuity.

The report uses the language adopted by the peoples, institutions, and sources associated with each case wherever possible. Comparisons are interpreted in light of each case's distinct political, legal, territorial, and cultural context.

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LOS ANGELES 1984 OLYMPIC GAMES

The 1984 Olympic Arts Festival involved museums, galleries, theaters, and community centers across the Los Angeles region, including institutions that served as co-producers of Festival activities. The official report describes goals that included showcasing cultural diversity, providing a cross-cultural forum, and contributing to the city's cultural growth(Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, n.d.). Its regional footprint offers a useful precedent for considering how LA28 cultural programming might connect institutions and communities across Southern California.

An Indigenous-specific museum example documented in the official materials is *Kahurangi: Treasures from New Zealand* at the Pacific Asia Museum. The exhibition brought together historic Māori cultural material, contemporary Māori art, and work by 22 master artists based in New Zealand. It therefore placed Indigenous history and living cultural production within the Festival's international program (Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, n.d.). The available documentation, however, does not establish the extent of Māori participation in curatorial decision-making or governance for this program.

Festival activities were also presented through established Los Angeles cultural institutions. The official report identifies the Craft & Folk Art Museum and Plaza de la Raza as co-producers of major activities. At Plaza de la Raza, the Folklife Festival attracted approximately 50,000 visitors and featured more than 50 Los Angeles artisans working in traditional Mexican arts. At the Craft & Folk Art Museum, the International Festival of Masks and *Masks in Motion* incorporated exhibitions, demonstrations, booths, and a public parade. These examples document the use of different institutional settings and public formats across the region, although they do not establish the degree of local community authority over the wider Festival (Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, n.d.).

The materials available materials reviewed do not identify a sustained partnership with California tribal nations or a locally governed Native American program comparable to the Indigenous governance structures documented in later case studies. This absence is especially significant because the Festival presented Māori cultural heritage and contemporary Māori art within its international offer. The visibility afforded to Indigenous culture from another country was not matched, in the available record, by comparable visibility or decision-making roles for the Indigenous peoples of the host region.

LA84 TAKEAWAYS FOR LA28

Use a regional network to create multiple points of participation. The LA84 Festival included activities across museums, cultural institutions, and public settings in different parts of the Los Angeles region. For LA28, participating museums could work through a similarly distributed network to create multiple points of connection with California tribal nations and wider Indigenous communities.

Define Indigenous roles and resources from the outset. Geographic distribution alone does not determine who shapes the cultural offer. Museums should establish clear roles for Indigenous partners in institutional planning, curatorial development, commissioning, interpretation, program delivery, review, and evaluation. These roles should be supported by dedicated funding and reflected clearly in program documentation.

Represent the historical depth and contemporary expression of Indigenous cultures. *Kahurangi: Treasures from New Zealand* brought historic Māori cultural material into conversation with contemporary Māori art. LA28 programming could similarly include contemporary Indigenous artists, new commissions, performance, design, language, and other forms of cultural expression alongside historical interpretation.

Connect international Indigenous representation with inclusion in the host region. Presenting Indigenous artists and cultures from other countries can broaden the international cultural offer, while museums should also create meaningful opportunities for visibility and participation for the tribal nations and communities whose ancestral lands encompass the host region. For LA28, international exchange and local Indigenous inclusion should form part of the same commitment to an inclusive cultural program.

Office of Senator Dianne Feinstein, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

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The official evaluation describes the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad as a four-year, UK-wide initiative developed "by and for communities." Its open-source approach was intended to encourage cultural organizations and communities across the UK to develop projects connected to the Games. Although the evaluation does not identify Indigenous participation as a distinct category, the Cultural Olympiad provides relevant examples of the structures through which communities could participate in cultural production and interpretation (García and Cox, 2013).

For museums, the most relevant example is Stories of the World, which the evaluation identifies as the largest youth-participation program ever undertaken by museums in the UK. Thousands of young people were recruited to reinterpret museum collections and co-curate exhibitions. The program provides a useful precedent for involving communities in the interpretation of collections, especially where museums hold material acquired through colonial or ethnographic collecting practices (García and Cox, 2013).

Applied to Indigenous inclusion, this approach would require more than inviting community members to respond to an established exhibition. Museums could create defined roles for Indigenous artists, youth, language workers, historians, and cultural authorities in selecting material, developing interpretation, shaping commissions, and determining how cultural knowledge is presented. These arrangements would need to reflect the protocols and forms of authority identified by participating communities.

The relevance of London 2012 therefore lies primarily in its participatory and co-curatorial structures. Indigenous inclusion was not identified as a distinct Cultural Olympiad objective and cannot be evaluated separately from the available data. The case nevertheless offers a useful basis for considering how community authorship, youth participation, and the reinterpretation of museum collections could support Indigenous engagement in LA28 cultural programming (García and Cox, 2013).

LONDON 2012 TAKEAWAYS FOR LA28

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Adapt co-curatorial models to support Indigenous participation. Stories of the World involved young people in reinterpreting museum collections and co-curating exhibitions (García and Cox, 2013). LA28 museums could develop defined roles for Indigenous artists, youth, language workers, historians, and cultural authorities in selecting material, shaping interpretation, and developing exhibitions and programs.

Establish Indigenous inclusion as a distinct objective. The London evaluation documents broad community participation, although it does not identify Indigenous participation as a separate category (García and Cox, 2013). For LA28, museums could establish specific objectives, partnerships, funding commitments, and evaluation measures for Indigenous inclusion from the outset.

Document participation, authority, and outcomes. Museums should identify Indigenous partners and their roles in governance documents, calls for participation, program materials, audience research, and post-event evaluation. Documentation should record the forms of participation created, the authority held by Indigenous partners, and any relationships or programs intended to continue beyond the Games.

QATAR FIFA WORLD CUP 2022

The Qatar case study offers a perspective grounded in cultural continuity, local knowledge, and community memory. During the World Cup period, museums and heritage institutions presented histories, practices, and knowledge systems that have shaped life in Qatar and the wider Gulf region. Qatar's cultural context differs from the Native American and First Nations contexts discussed elsewhere in this report. It nevertheless raises relevant institutional questions about cultural authority, the transmission of knowledge across generations, relationships between communities and place, and the role of museums in supporting cultural continuity.

The National Museum of Qatar is particularly relevant in this regard. Its galleries are organized around the experiences of people living between desert and sea, with significant emphasis on oral histories, environmental knowledge, mobility, memory, and everyday cultural practice. In interviews conducted for this report, museum staff described collaborations through which local communities contributed oral histories and participated in the creation of gallery content. Interviewed staff emphasized the importance of oral history as a means of respecting longstanding intergenerational and ancestral modes of transmitting knowledge.

Several galleries illustrate how these approaches appear within the museum. In "The People of Qatar" gallery, large-format oral histories allow community members to share memories of earlier ways of life, while displays address plant resources, animal tracking, navigation, and seasonal movement. "Life in Al Barr" explores the transmission of knowledge and values through poetry, song, and woven sadu textiles, supported by sound, scent, and family activities (National Museum of Qatar, n.d.). Museum staff interviewed for this report explained that local communities also contributed to the development of content. Their involvement therefore extended beyond appearing in the completed galleries: community knowledge helped shape the interpretation presented within them.

The coastal and pearling galleries echo this place-based approach: "Life on the Coast" presents Al Zubarah as a trading and pearling city shaped by interactions among local communities and traders from Europe and India. "Pearls and Celebrations" connects material culture with seasonal return, ceremony, work, and emotional life (National Museum of Qatar, n.d.). Together, these examples illustrate how museums can combine community knowledge, oral history, and collaborative content development to interpret relationships among cultural practices, memory, and place.

During the World Cup, Qatar Museums promoted museums, heritage sites, parks, and public art as part of the wider visitor experience. Its official guide encouraged fans to visit cultural sites before, after, and between matches, highlighting the newly opened 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum and heritage sites such as Al Zubarah. In its post-event reflection, Qatar Museums reported record visitation across its museums, galleries, heritage sites, and creative spaces (Qatar Museums, 2022a; Qatar Museums, 2022b).

Museum staff interviewed for this report also described preparations intended to make archaeological and heritage sites more accessible to World Cup visitors. They explained that six sites opened in time for the tournament, self-guided interpretive signage was installed, and an approximately 1.9-mile boardwalk was constructed at Al Zubarah. These measures extended the cultural offer beyond museum buildings and created additional opportunities for visitors to encounter Qatar's histories through archaeological sites and cultural landscapes.

Msheireb Museums provide another relevant example of place-based and community-informed interpretation. Located within the regenerated historic commercial center of Doha, the museums use restored heritage houses to explore the experiences of people who lived and worked in the area. Oral histories and first-person testimony connect the houses with personal memories, labor histories, and difficult aspects of the region's past (Msheireb Museums, n.d.).

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- **Mohammed Bin Jassim House** draws on memories of old Msheireb and includes former residents' accounts of neighborhood life.
- **Company House** incorporates first-person accounts from early Qatari petroleum workers, allowing visitors to encounter this history through the experiences of those who participated in it.
- **Bin Jelmood House** addresses slavery in the Indian Ocean world, recognizes the contributions of formerly enslaved people, and connects historical enslavement with contemporary forms of exploitation.

Together, these examples illustrate how institutions can use local testimony, historic places, and community knowledge to interpret both familiar and difficult histories. For LA28 museums, the relevant lesson lies in creating cultural programming that allows communities to contribute to the interpretation of their relationships with place while making those histories accessible to wider audiences.

QATAR 2022 TAKEAWAYS FOR LA28

Develop content collaboratively with communities. Museum staff interviewed for this report described how local communities contributed oral histories, knowledge, and experiences to the National Museum of Qatar's galleries. For LA28, museums could establish collaborative processes through which Indigenous partners help select subjects, generate content, shape interpretation, and determine how their communities and cultural knowledge are presented.

Recognize (and include where possible) community-specific forms of knowledge transmission. The National Museum of Qatar's use of oral history, poetry, song, material culture, and sensory interpretation recognizes multiple ways through which knowledge is shared across generations. LA28 museums should ask Indigenous partners which forms of knowledge and interpretation are appropriate for a particular program. These decisions should also reflect community protocols concerning attribution, access, and the public presentation of cultural knowledge.

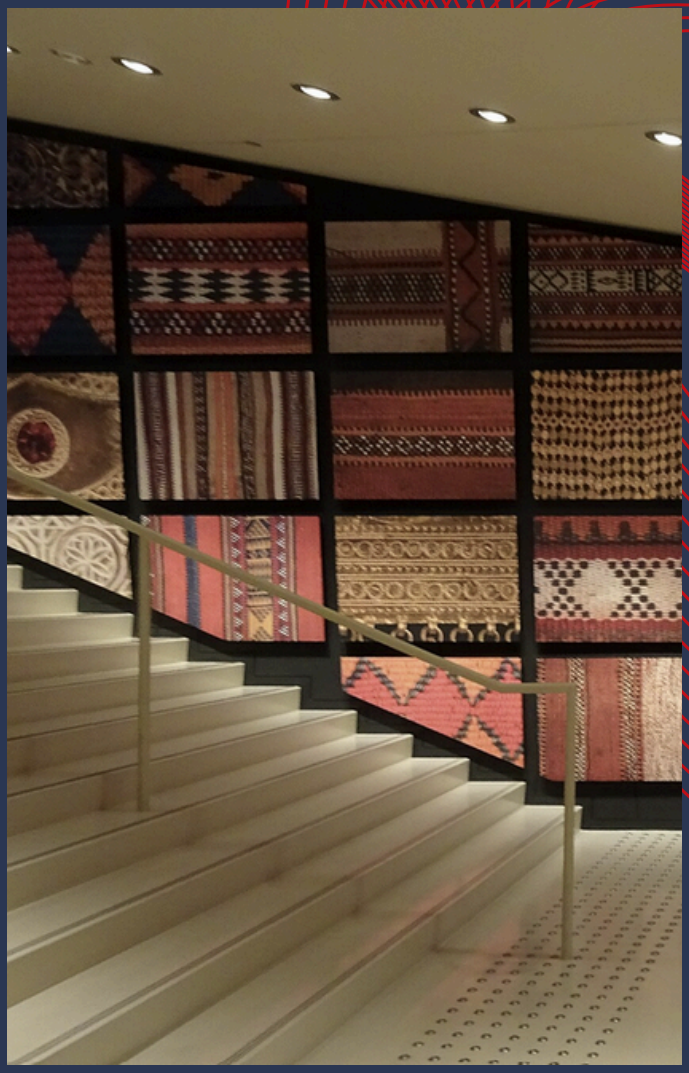
Connect cultural interpretation with place. The National Museum of Qatar, Msheireb Museums, and heritage sites such as Al Zubarah connect histories and cultural practices with the environments and places in which they developed. For LA28, museums could work with tribal nations to interpret the histories and continuing significance of the lands on which cultural programming occurs. This work should extend beyond general land acknowledgments and provide opportunities for tribal nations to determine how those relationships are communicated.

Extend cultural programming beyond museum buildings. During the World Cup, museums, archaeological sites, heritage houses, public art, and cultural landscapes formed part of Qatar's wider visitor offer. LA28 museums could collaborate with Indigenous partners on programs presented across museum spaces, culturally significant places, public sites, and neighborhoods. Any activity connected to ancestral or culturally sensitive places should be developed in accordance with the guidance and protocols of the relevant tribal nations.

Coordinate programming across institutions and locations. Extending cultural programming beyond museum buildings also requires coordination across the places and organizations involved. During the World Cup, museums, heritage houses, archaeological sites, public art, and cultural landscapes contributed different forms of cultural engagement. Qatar Museums connected elements of this wider offer through cultural itineraries and visitor information (Qatar Museums, 2022a; Qatar Museums, 2022b). For LA28, museums could work with tribal nations, Indigenous organizations, cultural institutions, and public agencies to coordinate programming across multiple locations. This could help audiences understand how individual activities relate to a wider Indigenous cultural offer while allowing each participating community to retain authority over its own content.

Make a distributed cultural offer easy to navigate. Qatar Museums' official guides encouraged visitors to explore museums and cultural sites before, after, and between matches. Museum staff interviewed for this report also described investments in self-guided interpretation and visitor infrastructure at archaeological and heritage sites. For LA28, coordinated maps, digital platforms, visitor guides, signage, and wayfinding could help visitors and residents locate Indigenous cultural programming across the region. These materials should be developed with participating communities and provide accurate information about the people, places, and cultural contexts represented.

Plan interpretation for audiences with different levels of familiarity. Multilingual interpretation, self-guided experiences, visitor information, and accessible site infrastructure helped introduce Qatar's cultural sites to large and diverse audiences. LA28 museums should consider how language access, cultural context, navigation, and visitor orientation may affect engagement with Indigenous programming. Introductory interpretation can make programs more approachable, while community guidance should determine how cultural knowledge is explained and whether particular information is appropriate for public presentation.



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PARIS OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES 2024

The Paris 2024 Cultural Olympiad extended cultural programming across metropolitan France and its overseas territories. One of its four principal goals was to engage territories throughout France and overseas. The program included 2,596 labeled projects, with activities taking place in nine of France's thirteen overseas territories. The Ministry of Culture also introduced a dedicated call for projects that funded 20 initiatives in overseas territories, while a special edition of Nuit Blanche encouraged collaboration between participating territories (García, 2024). These measures provide an example of how targeted funding and delivery mechanisms can broaden the geographic reach of a mega-event cultural program.

The official evaluation discusses territorial participation without identifying Indigenous inclusion as a separate category. Geographic reach alone therefore cannot establish the extent of Indigenous participation or cultural authority within the Cultural Olympiad. French Polynesia nevertheless provides a relevant case for examining how an Olympic event intersected with Polynesian culture, language, and relationships with place.

These intersections were particularly visible in Tahiti, where the Olympic surfing competition took place. The local opening celebration included Polynesian songs, outrigger canoes, ceremonial objects, performers, and community activities. Athletes also poured sand from their home beaches into a shared vessel, connecting the ceremony with place, ocean heritage, and the participating nations represented at the competition (Reuters, 2024). The available documents point to the visibility of Polynesian cultural practices within the event, although it does not fully establish how local communities participated in its planning or decision-making.

The reopening of Te Fare Iamanaha–Musée de Tahiti et des Îles in 2023 added an important museum dimension to this cultural landscape. The museum presents itself as a place of cultural transmission and reconnection. Its interpretation addresses Polynesian cosmology, oral traditions, navigation, ritual practices, fishing, tapa, tattooing, dance, and music. It also recognizes the distinct identities of French Polynesia's five archipelagos while locating them within wider relationships across the Polynesian region. This framing allows visitors to encounter both the historical depth and contemporary expression of Polynesian cultures (Te Fare Iamanaha, n.d.).

The museum also offers practical examples of cultural and linguistic interpretation for visitors. Guided tours, school programs, audio guides, and interpretation in Tahitian support different forms of engagement. Its virtual exhibition, Hōrue: Waves of Yesterday and Today, connects surfing and ocean knowledge with cultural history. In the context of the Olympic surfing competition, this approach illustrates how a museum can help audiences understand the relationships among sport, environment, place, and Indigenous knowledge (Te Fare Iamanaha, n.d.).

PARIS 2024 TAKEAWAYS FOR LA28

Create dedicated pathways and resources for Indigenous participation. Paris 2024 used targeted calls for projects and funding to extend Cultural Olympiad programming into France's overseas territories (García, 2024). Although these mechanisms were organized around territorial participation and did not specifically establish Indigenous authority, they provide a useful structural precedent. For LA28, museums and cultural organizers could develop dedicated grants, commissions, partnerships, and programming opportunities with California tribal nations and wider Indigenous communities. These mechanisms should be developed collaboratively and supported by clearly defined resources, roles, and decision-making processes.

Develop place-based programming with the communities connected to each location. The opening celebration for the Tahiti surfing competition incorporated Polynesian songs, outrigger canoes, ceremonial objects, performers, and references to ocean heritage (Reuters, 2024). The available documentation establishes the visibility of Polynesian cultural practices, although it does not fully explain how local communities participated in planning the event. For LA28, museums and cultural organizers should work with the relevant tribal nations when developing programs connected to particular lands, waterways, neighborhoods, or cultural landscapes. Community guidance should shape the subjects addressed, the forms of participation created, and the ways relationships with place are communicated.

Connect event programming with sustained cultural interpretation. Te Fare Iamanaha offered visitors opportunities to understand the cultural histories surrounding the Tahiti venue through Polynesian perspectives on navigation, ocean knowledge, oral tradition, language, art, and cultural practice. Its Tahitian-language interpretation, educational activities, and Hōrue: Waves of Yesterday and Today exhibition connected surfing with wider histories and relationships to the ocean (Te Fare Iamanaha, n.d.). For LA28, museums could similarly help audiences understand the cultural contexts of particular sports, venues, and host locations through programming developed with Indigenous communities.

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VANCOUVER 2010 WINTER OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

The Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games established an important precedent for formal Indigenous participation in Olympic planning. The Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations—collectively known as the Four Host First Nations—entered into formal agreements concerning Games held on their traditional and shared traditional territories. These agreements recognized the Four Host First Nations as partners and provided them with formal roles in Games-related decision-making. This structure distinguished Indigenous participation from a broader commitment to cultural diversity by connecting representation with recognized political authority (VANOC, 2011).

The Four Host First Nations worked collectively with the Vancouver Organizing Committee across areas including planning, ceremonies, cultural programming, economic development, and visitor engagement. This formal partnership did not mean that every Indigenous nation in Canada held the same role: the governance structure specifically recognized the four nations on whose territories Games activities occurred. At the same time, wider initiatives created opportunities for Indigenous peoples from across Canada to participate in cultural, artistic, and youth programming (VANOC, 2011).

Indigenous cultures were highly visible during the Games. Leaders of the Four Host First Nations welcomed the world during the opening ceremony in their own languages, and more than 300 Indigenous performers from across Canada participated in ceremony and performance activities. The Four Host First Nations Pavilion hosted more than 50 public events and provided a space for Indigenous artists, performers, businesses, and community leaders to engage directly with visitors (Indigenous Tourism BC, 2020; Sidsworth, 2010).

Participation also included opportunities for artists and businesses. The Aboriginal Artisan Village and Business Showcase enabled Indigenous artists to demonstrate, interpret, and sell their work directly to visitors. VANOC and its government partners also commissioned approximately 90 Indigenous artworks for venues, public spaces, and infrastructure. These initiatives extended Indigenous participation into commissioning, interpretation, and economic activity, although the available sources do not establish how opportunities or benefits were distributed among participating communities (Indigenous Tourism BC, 2020; Sidsworth, 2010).

The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre provides an important example of enduring Indigenous cultural infrastructure associated with the Games period. Opened in Whistler in 2008, the center was created jointly by the Squamish and Lil'wat Nations and became a prominent cultural destination during Vancouver 2010. It continues to operate as an Indigenous-led institution supporting cultural education, tourism, employment, and the sharing of Squamish and Lil'wat knowledge. Its continuing work illustrates how major-event investment and visibility can contribute to an institution whose purpose and governance extend beyond the event itself (Indigenous Tourism BC, 2020).

Indigenous participation also extended into the broader Cultural Olympiad. Cultural projects provided space for contemporary Indigenous music, theater, film, and storytelling, allowing Indigenous artists to address present-day experiences alongside histories and cultural traditions. These activities broadened Indigenous representation beyond ceremonial visibility and provided additional opportunities for artists to shape how Indigenous experiences were presented during the Games (Indigenous Tourism BC, 2020).

Youth participation formed another significant component of the Vancouver approach. More than 300 Indigenous youth from across Canada participated in the Vancouver 2010 Indigenous Youth Gathering. The program included leadership development, cultural exchange, education, and preparation for participation in the opening ceremonies (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2010). It demonstrates how a mega-event can create opportunities for Indigenous youth to build relationships, develop skills, and participate in cultural production. The available evidence, however, provides limited information about the program's longer-term effects on participants.

Vancouver's approach also generated substantial criticism. Indigenous activists and scholars emphasized the contradiction between the Games' extensive use of Indigenous imagery and unresolved questions concerning land rights, sovereignty, housing, poverty, and colonialism. The slogan "No Olympics on Stolen Native Land" drew attention to the political conditions that remained outside the Games' official narrative of partnership and inclusion (O'Bonsawin, 2010).

Scholars have also questioned whether highly visible Indigenous representation sometimes created the appearance of reconciliation without addressing underlying structural inequalities. Indigenous participation was not uniform across communities, and the formal authority held by the Four Host First Nations should not be interpreted as representing the experiences or positions of all Indigenous peoples in Canada (Baloy, 2016; Boykoff, 2016).

The Vancouver case therefore demonstrates both the possibilities and the limits of Indigenous participation within a mega-event. Formal partnership, paid opportunities, cultural infrastructure, artistic visibility, and youth programming were meaningful developments. At the same time, cultural inclusion did not resolve wider questions of sovereignty, territorial authority, or material inequality. For LA28, cultural institutions should evaluate Indigenous inclusion through both the opportunities created within programming and the political and material conditions surrounding it.

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VANCOUVER 2010 TAKEAWAYS FOR LA28

Create formal and sustained roles for tribal participation. Vancouver 2010 formally recognized the Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations as partners in Games held on their traditional and shared traditional territories. Their representatives participated in planning, budgeting, and Games-time programming (VANOC, 2011). Southern California's legal and institutional context differs, and the Vancouver structure cannot be transferred directly to LA28. Museums and cultural organizers could nevertheless establish early and sustained consultation with the tribal nations and communities connected to host locations. Where welcomed by participating communities, written agreements, advisory bodies, designated representatives, paid consulting roles, and jointly developed review processes could clarify how their knowledge, priorities, and guidance will inform cultural programming.

Distinguish place-based tribal participation from wider Indigenous inclusion. Vancouver's governance structure formally recognized four First Nations with territorial relationships to Games locations, while other initiatives created opportunities for Indigenous peoples from across Canada. For LA28, museums and cultural organizers should distinguish engagement with the tribal nations and communities ancestrally connected to particular host locations from broader opportunities for Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and other Indigenous artists and organizations. The precise form of engagement should reflect each community's legal status, preferences, protocols, and institutional capacity. These forms of participation may complement one another, but they should not be treated as interchangeable.

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CROSS-CASE FINDINGS

Across the five cases, Indigenous participation varied considerably in form, influence, and visibility. LA84 and London 2012 demonstrate the reach of large cultural networks and co-curatorial programs, although Indigenous participation was not consistently identified or evaluated as a distinct objective. Qatar 2022 offers a bounded example of community collaboration, oral knowledge, and place-based interpretation within a different political and cultural context. Paris 2024 illustrates the potential of territorial programming and culturally specific interpretation, alongside limited evidence concerning Indigenous participation in planning. Vancouver 2010 provides the strongest example of formal Indigenous partnership, while also demonstrating the persistence of wider questions concerning sovereignty, land, and structural inequality.

Create structured and sustained forms of participation. Indigenous participation was most substantive where communities and cultural practitioners held identifiable roles in planning, interpretation, programming, or review. For LA28, museums and cultural institutions could develop paid advisory positions, designated representatives, written agreements, review processes, commissions, and continuing partnerships. The appropriate arrangements should reflect the preferences, protocols, legal circumstances, and capacities of participating tribal nations and Indigenous communities.

Distinguish cultural visibility from influence and authority. The presence of Indigenous artists, histories, languages, or cultural practices does not establish how content was selected, interpreted, approved, or resourced. Institutions should document the roles Indigenous participants hold in program development, interpretation, review, resource allocation, and evaluation.

Develop programming through relationships with place. Several cases connected language, oral history, environmental knowledge, artistic practice, memory, and cultural transmission with particular locations. For LA28, engagement with the tribal nations and communities connected to host locations can inform whether and how these relationships are presented. Community protocols should guide attribution, access, culturally sensitive knowledge, and public interpretation.

Connect participation with material opportunity and institutional investment. Cultural inclusion can create commissions, paid roles, procurement opportunities, employment, professional development, youth programs, and institutional partnerships. Planning should identify who receives these opportunities, how resources are distributed, and whether participants consider the resulting benefits meaningful.

Coordinate a distributed and accessible cultural offer. Los Angeles's geographic scale will require coordination among museums, cultural institutions, public spaces, neighborhoods, and host locations. Shared maps, visitor information, transportation guidance, language access, digital platforms, and accessible interpretation could help residents and visitors encounter programming across the region.

Plan for continuity. Programs developed for LA28 could contribute to continuing relationships, archives, collections, educational resources, employment, institutional capacity, or cultural infrastructure. Desired outcomes should be identified with participating communities early enough to influence program design and resource allocation.

Evaluate relationships, resources, and outcomes. Attendance figures and program counts reveal little about participants' influence or the quality of institutional relationships. Evaluation should consider roles in decision-making, compensation, distribution of resources, adherence to community protocols, participant experiences, and what continues after the Games.

Diplomatic Security Service from Washington, D.C., United States of America, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Open Questions and Limitations

This report identifies transferable practices and questions; it does not treat the five cases as directly equivalent or establish a single model for Indigenous participation. Indigenous peoples' political status, histories, and relationships to land differ substantially across the cases. Qatar 2022 is included as a bounded example of community collaboration and place-based interpretation, not as an equivalent Indigenous political context. In Paris 2024, the available evidence establishes territorial inclusion and the visibility of Polynesian cultural practices but does not fully document Indigenous participation in planning or decision-making.

The evidence is also uneven. LA84 and London 2012 document multicultural programming and community participation without evaluating Native American or Indigenous inclusion as a distinct objective. Vancouver 2010 provides stronger evidence of formal partnership, cultural programming, and economic opportunity, but less information about the distribution of benefits or participants' longer-term experiences. The absence of documentation should not be interpreted as proof that other forms of participation did not occur.

More broadly, official evaluations tend to measure programs, artists, visitors, and geographic reach without documenting who shaped the work, controlled its resources, or benefited over time. Cultural visibility therefore cannot by itself establish influence, authority, equitable participation, or lasting institutional change.

Several questions consequently remain open for LA28:

- Which tribal nations and communities wish to participate, and in what forms?
- How should engagement with communities connected to host locations relate to broader opportunities for Indigenous artists and organizations?
- Which advisory, contractual, or collaborative structures are feasible within Southern California's differing legal and recognition contexts?
- How will participants be compensated, and how will funding, commissions, procurement opportunities, and other benefits be distributed?
- Who will determine protocols for attribution, interpretation, culturally sensitive knowledge, and the future use of materials created?
- How will institutions evaluate participants' influence, the quality of relationships, and what continues beyond the Games?

Answering these questions will require direct engagement with Southern California tribal nations and communities, alongside further research with participating museums and cultural institutions. The comparative cases can inform that process, but they cannot determine its outcomes in advance.

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

The case studies identify several dimensions through which museums and cultural institutions can consider Indigenous participation ahead of LA28. The first table summarizes what the comparative cases demonstrate and the implications for institutional planning. The accompanying worksheet provides questions institutions can use to assess their own plans, identify gaps, and record next steps.

Dimension	Recommendations for LA28 institutions	What the case studies demonstrate
Cultural visibility	Consider whose histories, languages, cultural practices, and contemporary experiences are represented, where they appear, and who determines their presentation.	LA84, Paris 2024, and Vancouver 2010 demonstrate how exhibitions, ceremonies, performances, commissions, and public programming can make Indigenous cultures and contemporary artistic practices visible to large audiences. They also show that visibility can occur without clear evidence of influence over planning or interpretation.
Interpretive participation	Involve appropriate knowledge holders, artists, language practitioners, historians, and cultural workers in developing and reviewing interpretation. Establish protocols for attribution, access, culturally sensitive knowledge, and future use.	*Te Fare Iamanaha* illustrates culturally and linguistically grounded interpretation, while London 2012 demonstrates the potential of collaborative museum practice. Qatar's community-informed use of oral knowledge provides a relevant institutional comparison within a distinct political context.
Collaborative program development	Engage interested tribal nations and Indigenous communities before themes, formats, partners, and timelines are finalized. Create opportunities for community-led and contemporary cultural production.	London's co-curatorial programs and Vancouver's Cultural Olympiad, pavilion, and youth initiatives demonstrate forms of participation extending beyond appearance within a completed program.
Structured participation and influence	Develop feasible structures—such as paid advisory roles, written agreements, designated representatives, and review processes—with participating communities. Clarify responsibilities, compensation, and the decisions participants will help shape.	Vancouver provides the clearest example of defined institutional roles, although its formal structure arose from a legal and political context that cannot be transferred directly to Los Angeles. Other cases provide less evidence about who approved content or influenced resources.
Continuity and material benefit	Identify desired benefits with participating communities and resource them early. Consider commissions, procurement, employment, mentorship, continuing partnerships, archives, educational resources, and institutional capacity.	Vancouver connected cultural participation with commissions, economic opportunities, youth engagement, and Indigenous-led cultural infrastructure. Across the cases, longer-term outcomes were documented less consistently than event-time visibility.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING WORKSHEET

Planning area	Questions for your institution	Notes and next steps
Engagement and institutional roles	• Which tribal nations, Indigenous communities, artists, or organizations might wish to participate? • Have potential participants been approached before themes, formats, partners, budgets, and timelines are finalized? • What forms of involvement do participating communities consider appropriate? • Would written agreements, paid advisory roles, designated representatives, or review processes help clarify responsibilities and expectations? • Which decisions will participants be able to shape or review?	
Collections and interpretation	• Who is interpreting Indigenous materials, histories, or cultural practices? • Which knowledge holders, artists, language practitioners, historians, or cultural workers should participate in developing and reviewing interpretation? • Which protocols should govern attribution, access, culturally sensitive knowledge, and public presentation? • Who will determine what may be presented publicly? • How may materials or knowledge created through the project be used in the future?	
Programming and contemporary cultural production	• Are Indigenous participants involved in developing programs as well as appearing in them? • Does the program support contemporary Indigenous artistic, intellectual, or cultural production? • Could participating communities lead events, performances, gatherings, commissions, or educational activities? • Are artists, advisors, and cultural practitioners appropriately compensated?	

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING WORKSHEET

Planning area	Questions for your institution	Notes and next steps
Place and public visibility	• How does the program relate to the histories, cultures, and communities connected to its location? • Could programming extend across galleries, public spaces, neighborhoods, visitor routes, transportation corridors, fan zones, or digital platforms? • How will participating communities help determine where and how their contributions appear? • What language, transportation, disability-access, or digital-access measures are needed?	
Youth participation	• Do participating communities want youth involvement to form part of the program? • Could youth participate as researchers, curators, interpreters, artists, advisors, or program leaders? • Could the work support mentorship, skills development, employment, or future leadership? • What resources would make sustained participation possible?	
Resources and material opportunity	• What funding, commissions, employment, procurement, retail, or professional-development opportunities will be available? • How will participants learn about and access these opportunities? • How will the institution document the distribution of resources and benefits? • Do participating communities consider the proposed opportunities appropriate and valuable?	

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING WORKSHEET

Planning area	Questions for your institution	Notes and next steps
Continuity	• What relationships, programs, resources, or capacities could continue after 2028? • Could temporary projects contribute to archives, collections, educational materials, employment, institutional partnerships, or community-defined infrastructure? • Which longer-term outcomes do participating communities value? • Can those outcomes be incorporated into budgets and agreements before implementation?	
Evaluation	• How will Indigenous participants help define success? • Will evaluation address influence, compensation, distribution of resources, adherence to protocols, participant experiences, and relationship development? • What information should be collected, and who should have access to it? • How will findings be reviewed with participating communities and used after the Games?	

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