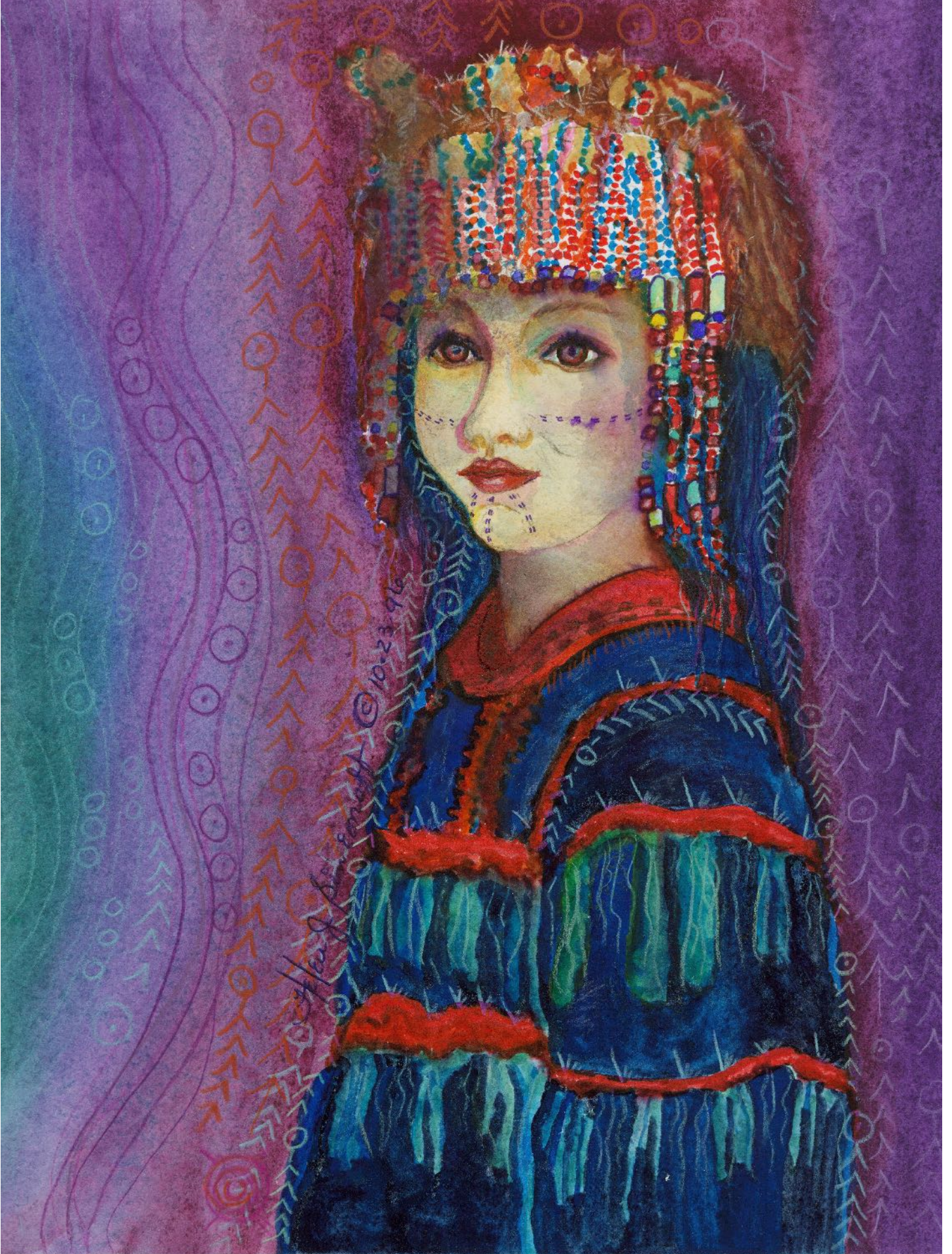


NACAQ

How to Make an Alutiq Beaded Headdress

Developed with assistance from
Kayla McDermott





Nacaq—Headdress

(pronunciation: nah-CHAHK)

Nacat were among the elaborate clothing worn at Alutiiq winter festivals. Participants in these events displayed their prosperity and honored the spirit world by wearing beautifully crafted garments. The materials and decorative elements used in these garments reflected their wearer's age, gender, and social position. Wealthy Alutiiq people wore elegantly decorated parkas of valuable sea otter, fox, or ground squirrel pelts. Nacat, jewelry, and tattoos added to the appearance of prestige conveyed by rich materials. The less affluent wore simple clothing of common materials like bird skins. Whatever your status, your clothes provided a link to the spiritual world. Every animal skin imparted the qualities of the animal to its wearer. Alutiiq people kept their garments clean, well repaired, and nicely decorated to show respect for the creatures that supported human life.

Women's nacat were typically made from hundreds of glass beads strung on sinew. Strands of small beads were tied into a tight-fitting cap with many dangling lengths attached to the sides and the back. These attachments often featured larger, heavier beads that swayed, glittered, and jingled as the wearer moved. In Prince William Sound, the daughters of Alutiiq chiefs wore nacat of beads and dentalium shells that extended far down their bodies, sometimes reaching their heels. Beaded nacat were often accompanied by matching earrings, chokers, necklaces, and belts. Teenage girls and young women wore these lavish ornaments to symbolize their passage into adulthood and availability for marriage.

TERMS

Nacaq (singular) – one headdress

Nacak (dual) – two headdresses

Nacat (plural) – three or more headdresses

The Nacaq Project

How can I make a headdress? Do you have instructions? Is there a class I can take? The Alutiiq Museum hears these questions often. Beading is popular across the Alutiiq world and many people want to make the iconic nacaq, the elaborate beaded cap worn by women for celebrations. The nacaq is the most beloved piece of Alutiiq beadwork, but it is also the most complicated. It takes thousands of beads and hours of careful counting, sewing, and knotting to create this garment.

To preserve and share the nacaq, the Alutiiq Museum partnered with artist Kayla McDermott. Kayla is an experienced beader and talented instructor.

In 2022, we filmed her making a nacaq and created video tutorials to take viewers through the entire manufacturing process. We also collaborated on this matching instruction booklet. Together the videos and written directions illustrate how to create a nacaq from start to finish. Now anyone can build a nacaq with the right supplies and a bit of patience.

Find a digital copy of these instructions and our video tutorials on the beading page of the Alutiiq Museum's website, at www.alutiiqmuseum.org.



Kayla McDermott beading a nacaq in the Alutiiq Museum, 2022.



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A four-part video series accompanies these instructions and can be found on the beading page of the museum's website alutiiqmuseum.org.

Supplies and Suppliers

FROM SHIPWRECK BEADS:
<https://www.shipwreckbeads.com>

Size 6 seed beads (72 strands of 180 beads)

Accent beads (500 beads)

John James three-piece leather needle set (F1281-L)

Nymo beading thread, size F, (50TN112-B) 1049 yards

FROM MOSCOW HIDE AND FUR:
<https://www.hideandfur.com/>

Brain-tanned deer hide (8"x24")

Tools

Scissors

Exacto Knife

Tape Measure

Pen

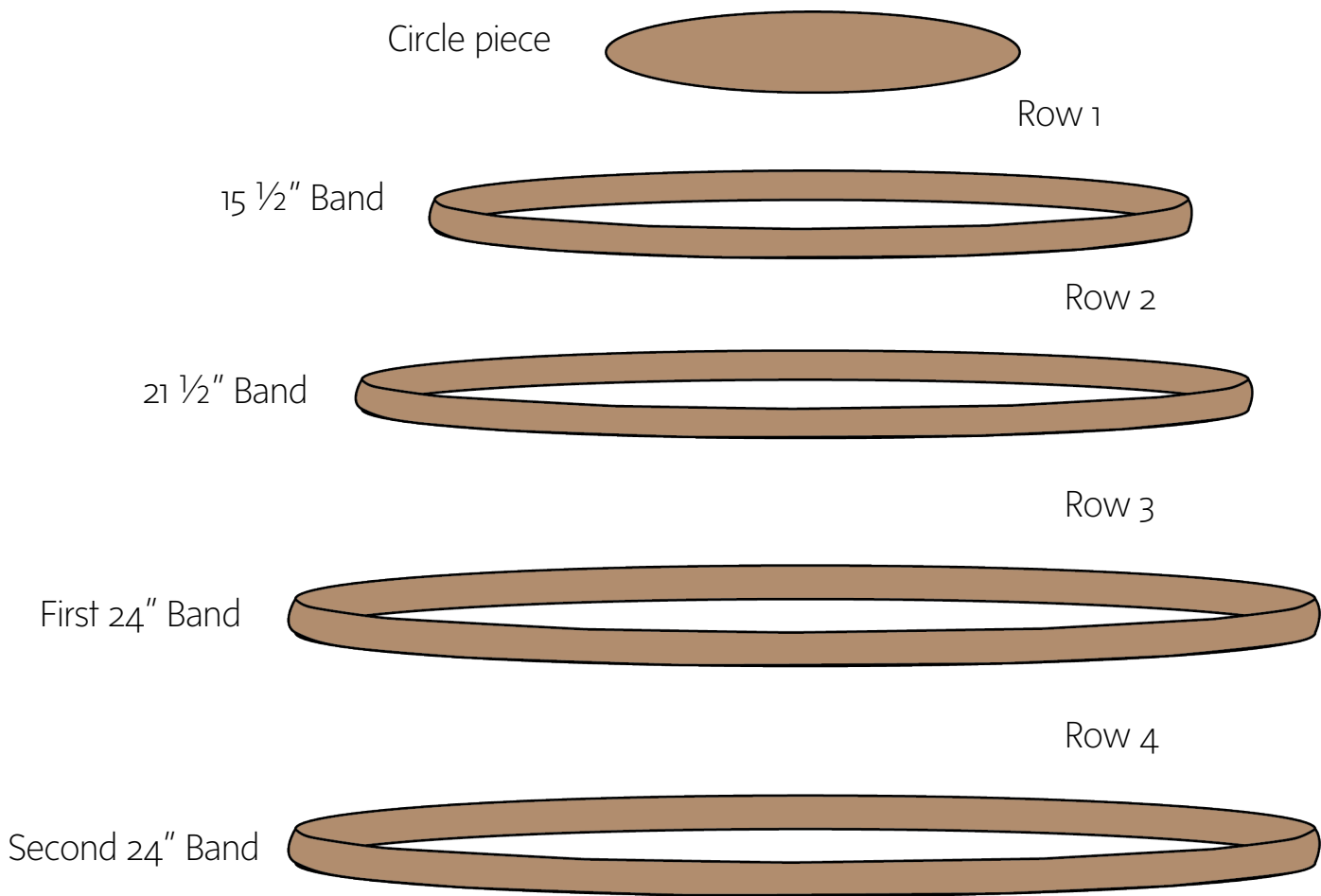
Disposable Lighter (Optional)

Plate or Tray (to hold beads)

Note: Nacag can be made in different lengths and with a variety of bead sizes. However, if you select beads different than those listed here, it will effect the measurements provided in these instructions.

Part 2 – Building the Cap





Note on bead count and cap style options:

Because there are 4 rows in this cap pattern, the bead count will be:

Row 1 is 12 beads long

Row 2 is 12 beads long

Row 3 is 12 beads long

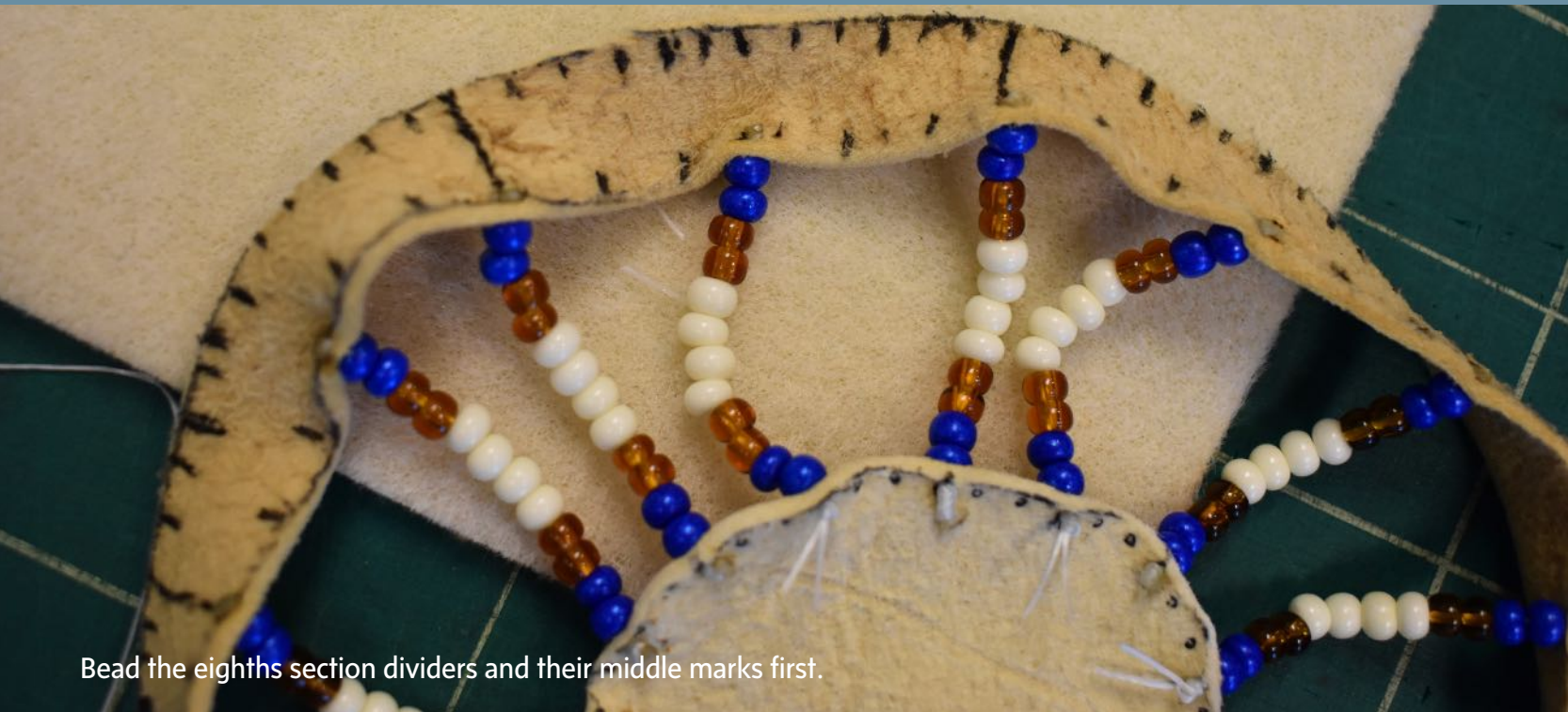
Row 4 is 9 beads long

Some prefer to have a cap with 3 rows instead of 4. If you choose to end your nacaq at the third row, the bead count will be:

Row 1 is 12 beads long

Row 2 is 19 beads long

Row 3 is 19 beads long



Bead the eighths section dividers and their middle marks first.

2.1 Bead row 1, the *kangra*–crown.

The marks made will indicate where to bead the strands. Each band uses the eighths marks as section markers. Bead the section markers first, starting with the seam of the band.

Thread your leather needle and tie a knot.

Start the first strand by going through the marked side of the circle piece.

Add 12 beads. You can create any 12 bead pattern of your choice or even use 12 beads of a solid color.

Connect the 12 bead strand by pushing the needle through the smooth side of the 15.5" leather strip at the seam. Make sure it is the top half of the 15.5" band.

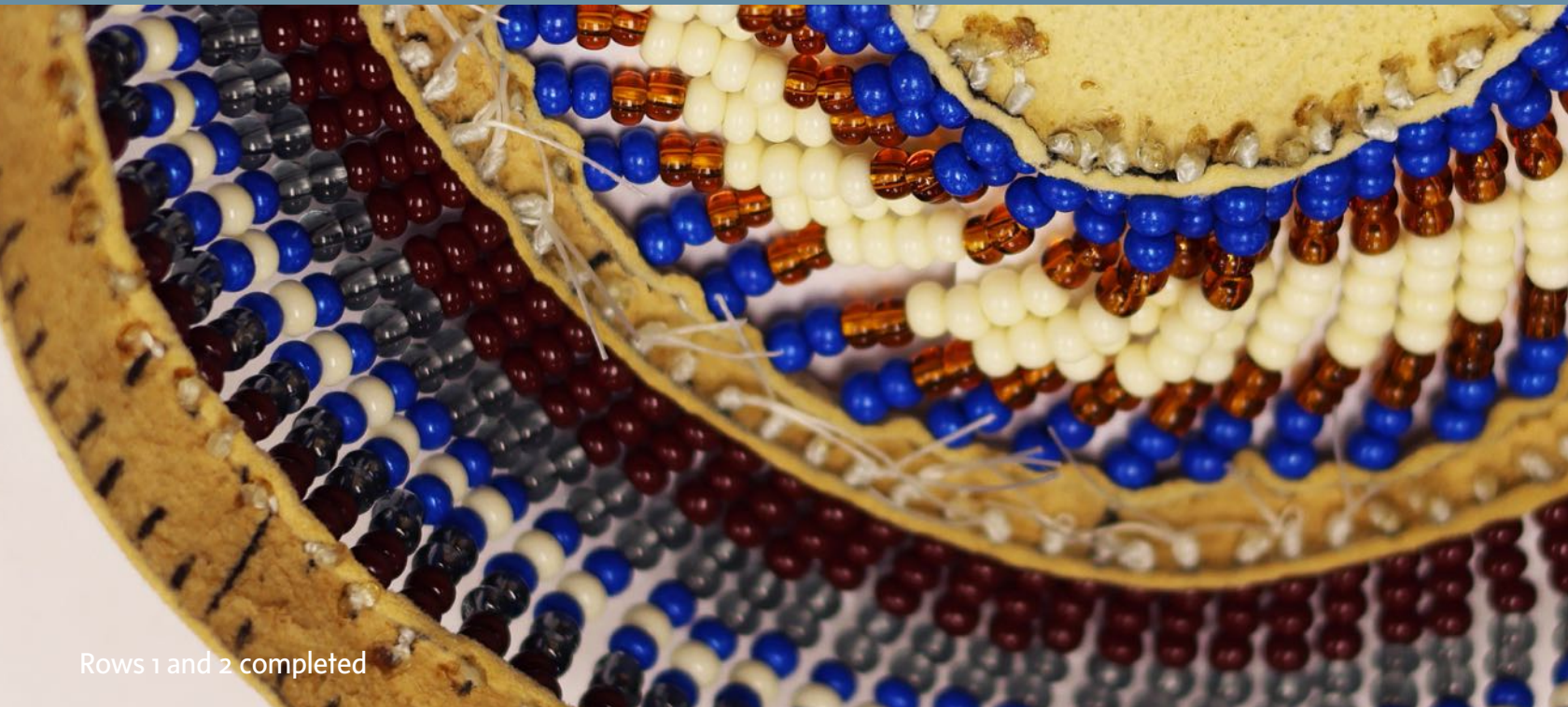
Tie off the strand (see page 9). Make a loop by going halfway under the leather (on the rough side of the band), so the thread does not show through the smooth side. Pull up and go through the loop you created. Make sure the threaded beads are tight and pull the needle and thread through the loop to tie the knot. Cut off excess thread, burn the ends of the thread, and press the melted strands down.

Bead the eighths section markers first. Tie off each strand, cut the thread, and burn the ends.

Once the sections are beaded, bead the center point of each section. Beading in this order, and using the leather markings, helps keep strands even and organized.

Then bead two strands between the remaining spaces. There should be 48 strands total.

Once you have beaded all 48 strands, check to make sure you have burned the ends of the thread after every knot. Then you have finished the first row of the *nacaq*.



2.2 Bead row 2.

Connect the top of the 21.5" band to the bottom of the 15.5" band with strands of 12 beads. There will be a total of 96 strands in row 2.

Bead the eighths sections first. There will be 11 strands between each section.

Always start a new row by connecting at the seams first. The seams should be at the back of the nacaq, and mark the center.

Thread a needle, tie a knot at the end of the strand, and push your needle through the marked side of the 15.5" band at the seam. Add 12 beads. Connect the beaded strand to the top of the 21.5" band at the seam. Tie a knot like you did for the first row, and burn the thread ends.

Continue beading until all 96 strands are strung, tied off, and the thread ends burned.



An eighths section of row 3

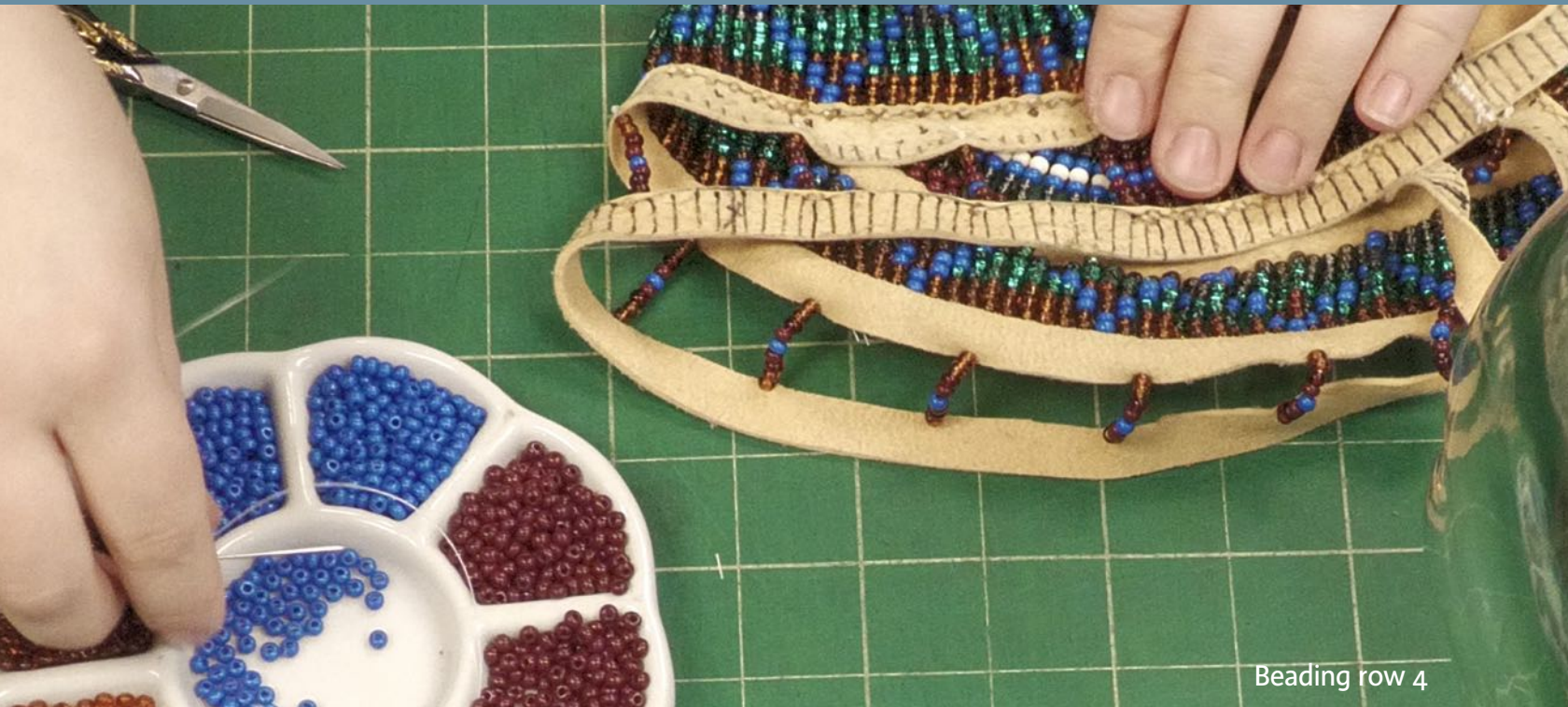
2.3 Bead row 3.

Connect the bottom of the 21.5" band to the top of the first 24" band. **Pay close attention to be sure it is the first 24" band with 128 marks on the top and 144 marks on the bottom, as the second 24" band has a different number of strands!**

For the third row, begin by sewing through the seam at the bottom of the 21.5" band. Bead 12 beads. Sew through the top of the 24" band at the seam, tie a knot, and burn the thread ends.

Bead the eighths sections first, like you did for the other rows, then bead the 15 strands between. There will be 128 beaded strands in this row.

Make sure all knots are secure and the thread ends burned.



2.4 Bead row 4.

Connect the bottom of the first 24" band to the top of the second 24" band.

For the fourth row, begin by sewing through the seam at the bottom of the first 24" band. Bead 9 beads. Sew through the top of the second 24" band at the seam, tie a knot, and burn the thread ends.

Bead the eighths sections first, like you did for the other rows, then bead the 17 strands between. There will be 144 beaded strands total in this final cap row.

Make sure all knots are secure and the thread ends burned.