

Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area

Civic Engagement Plan DRAFT

“Civic engagement is a continuous, dynamic conversation with the public on many levels that reinforces public commitment to the preservation of heritage resources, both cultural and natural, and strengthens public understanding of the full meaning and contemporary relevance of these resources.”

— Director's Order 75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement, 2003¹

¹ source: National Park Service, Conservation Study Institute
<http://www.nps.gov/archive/mabi/csi/engagement/communityEngagement.htm>

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SECTION ONE:

Scope of Civic Engagement in the Management Plan

This civic engagement plan extends through all three phases of the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA) General Management Plan project and offers tools for continuing efforts in the years to come. The goal of civic engagement is to foster public participation and awareness through the involvement of broad audiences from all interested counties and audiences.

During the Management Plan process through early 2009, civic engagement will include public input on key documents such as the Foundation Statement – including vision, mission, values, goals and objectives; the Statement of National Significance, and the themes; and Best Practices. In addition, public input for the work of the larger planning project on topics such as Resource Management, Heritage Development, and Interpretation/Education will be sought.

Outreach tools may include the following: electronic updates on the planning process in a "Management Plan" section of the FFNHA website, web-based surveys using Survey Monkey, a regional media relations plan (including targeted outlets and press release subjects and dates), direct mail, participatory tours, and resident participation in work sessions and meetings through all three phases.

We will emphasize the monthly FFNHA public meetings and follow-up conversations on the website, with phone interviews, conference calls, video conferencing, and "WebEx" teleconference meetings as additional ways to secure input from stakeholders across the region. This layered input will allow for public reflection, rather than forcing rushed decisions at meetings, which may be difficult for some to attend. Written and verbal comments can be added at the end of documents to show process, express minority views, and document participation in a transparent way.

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Introduction to Newcomers

FFNHA encourages the participation of new people in Phases 2 and 3. However, the team understands that incoming participants may not necessarily have prior knowledge of FFNHA or the extensive work that has been done by FFNHA stakeholders to date. Strategies to bring incoming participants up to date will include the following:

- An "Introduction to the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area" kit will be mailed or emailed to newcomers when they register for a Partnership Meeting, handed out to new participants at each public meeting, and mailed or emailed to others upon request. Each document in this introductory kit will direct readers to the FFNHA website for more in-depth information. This kit will be updated monthly or as needed. The kit could include the following kinds of information:
 - Welcome letter from Judge Tacha, Chair of the FFNHA Board of Trustees encouraging new participants to review the full kit
 - General description and definition of the National Heritage Area program
 - Highlights of/Key Points from FFNHA Enabling Legislation
 - Press release announcing designation of FFNHA as a National Heritage Area
 - FFNHA vision, mission, goals and values statement
 - General description of FFNHA (organization, funding, administration, programs)
 - Chronology or timeline of FFNHA's development (key activities from past decade)
 - Current FFNHA Activities (tour program, visitor readiness database, other?)
 - Timetable of the Management Plan process and summary of its goals
 - Map of FFNHA region identifying all participating counties
 - Instructions on how to get involved (i. e., committees and meetings)
- Dedicated area or section on the FFNHA website for newcomers (though we cannot assume all people have internet access)
- Newcomers' orientation: 15 minutes prior to start of Partnership Team meeting, conducted by Judy Billings (or Steering Committee member) as needed
- Follow-up by Steering Committee member (by phone, e-mail) to answer any questions, provide additional information, and encourage future participation by first-time FFNHA meeting participants

Roles and Responsibilities:

Management Team:

- Assist with editing the *Introductory Kit* materials

FFNHA:

- Draft materials for inclusion in the *Introductory Kit*

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- Create “Newcomers” section on FFNHA website
- Post *Introductory Kit* in “Newcomers” section of FFNHA website
- Bring hard copies of the Introductory Kit to FFNHA meetings to distribute to newcomers as needed.
- Mail copies of the *Introductory Kit* to newcomers who do not have internet access
- Provide “Introduction to FFNHA” presentation at monthly meetings as needed
- Coordinate follow-up by Steering Committee members after FFNHA newcomers’ orientation

Building the Foundation with Consistent News & Information

A committed group of citizens attend the monthly FFNHA Partnership Team meetings. As the meetings are held a specific time and day each month, some stakeholders may be unable to attend. To keep people informed and engaged in the planning process, FFNHA should initiate a monthly recap report or newsletter to discuss the prior month’s activities and events and to post upcoming news, especially those that require action.

This monthly report will be two pages (or a single sheet back and front) and distributed electronically to the entire stakeholder list (partnership team, steering committee, board of directors.) In addition, it will be sent to regional media, state agencies and organizations (historic preservation, humanities, parks/recreation, arts, tourism, economic development), area chambers of commerce and libraries so they may share with their constituents electronically or in hard-copy form.

In addition, e-blast messages will be sent to the FFNHA Partnership Team when specific or immediate stakeholder action is required. For example, announcing that a new electronic survey has been posted, or announcing that a new draft document is ready for review on the website.

The home page of the “Management Plan” section of the FFNHA website will include links to documents that are currently in the public review process. The page will include detailed instructions to allow stakeholders to comment online, via fax, via mail, or via a listserv set up as part of the management planning process.

Roles and Responsibilities

FFNHA Management Team:

- Provide articles/information for FFNHA monthly report or newsletter related to progress on the management plan
- Provide meeting agendas, handouts and presentations to FFNHA staff for distribution in advance of the monthly meetings
- Provide meeting minutes to FFNHA staff after each monthly meeting. These minutes, along with the meeting agendas, handouts and presentations will be posted in the “Minutes” section of the FFNHA website by FFNHA staff following each meeting.

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- Alert FFNHA staff when an e-blast message should be sent to the Partnership Team and provide any necessary information for inclusion in the message
- Create and maintain “Management Plan” section of the FFNHA website for the duration of the planning process. In addition to the information about documents available for public review, this section will also include a section on communications documents generated during the management planning process, a searchable database section, and a listserv.

FFNHA Staff:

- Draft and disseminate the monthly report
- Post meeting minutes and agendas (along with other pertinent handouts and/or presentations) for the monthly FFNHA meetings in the “Meetings” section of the FFNHA website.
- Send e-blast messages to the FFNHA Partnership Team as needed.

Outreach to New Constituents

While creating broad awareness of FFNHA amongst the general public in the 41-county region is a long-term goal for FFNHA, outreach to the general public is also an important part of the management planning process. Reaching out to constituent groups will ensure that the feedback for the management plan reflects input from the broadest possible constituency. Strategies to reach out to new constituents within the region include:

- Continue to build the e-mail contact list for the FFNHA Partnership Team by including the following opportunities for potential stakeholders to be added:
 - Including an invitation to be added to this list at the end of all appropriate correspondence
 - Including an invitation to be added to this list at the end of all FFNHA press releases
 - Including an invitation to be added to this list at the end of all e-surveys
- Send press releases to the media on a regular basis to announce meetings, key benchmarks in the planning process and other newsworthy FFNHA events.
- Reach out to members of the FFNHA Partnership Team who represent a larger constituency such as members, visitors, or other personal or business networks. Encourage and empower these FFNHA Partnership Team members to act as ambassadors for FFNHA by reaching out to their own networks or constituents and forwarding FFNHA information to these networks as appropriate.
 - Identify FFNHA Partnership Team members that represent organizations or entities with a newsletter, website or other communications tool that could be used to help create broader

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awareness of FFNHA. Where appropriate, add organizational newsletter contact information to the FFNHA media contact list and sample newsletter articles on the fundamentals.

- Provide “talking points” such as the *Introductory Toolkit* to potential FFNHA ambassadors to encourage outreach efforts
- Encourage members of the FFNHA Partnership Team to invite colleagues or friends to attend FFNHA Partnership Team meetings.

Roles and Responsibilities

FFNHA Management Team:

- Provide management planning information to FFNHA staff in a timely way for outreach efforts, including drafting press releases for the media, drafting questions for electronic surveys and other correspondence related to the management planning process.

FFNHA Staff:

- Approve and/or finalize press releases and disseminate to media in the region.
- Serve as the primary point of contact with the FFNHA Partnership Team and manage the Partnership Team contact list.
- Serve as the primary point of contact with the media.
- Include an invitation to newcomers to be added to the FFNHA mailing list on all appropriate correspondence
- Identify members of the FFNHA Partnership Team that represent organizations or constituencies and encourage these individuals to serve as ambassadors to help spread the word about FFNHA

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SECTION TWO:

Beyond the Management Plan:

Tools for Long-Term Participation and Enrichment of the FFNHA

The Management Planning Consulting Team is charged with creating and helping the local organizing entity establish these mechanisms for ongoing community engagement both now and in the future. Freedom's Frontier is a living idea, not a product fixed in time. Therefore, continuing public involvement, place-based education, and the development of new stories and journeys is essential to sustain heritage area growth over the next decade. The Management Plan process allows three phases for testing, refinement, and documentation of the most effective methods for consistent engagement. The suggested tools to follow provide a starter list that can be considered by FFNHA stakeholders as the civic engagement portion of the management plan is finalized. These ideas are intended to nurture long-term conversation and renewal through ongoing civic engagement.

The British geographer, David Lowenthal, speaks to the long-term, all-inclusive, creative aspect of historic preservation and geography in saying:

"To become a viable goal, conservation ... needs to become more inclusive in three senses: it must care for all locales, not just a select few; it must involve all the people, not just a select few; it must laud all creative acts, not just those that preserve some past. Above all, effective conservation requires not just immediate but sustained action, collaborative effort over many generations."

– David Lowenthal, professor emeritus at University College, London, "Epilogue," *Speaking of the Future*²

SUGGESTED TOOLS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A. INTERNET AND VIDEO OUTREACH

1. FFNHA Information Site (existing)

For public record, media, and promotion

Templates for monthly board reports to be posted to FFNHA website.

2. Participatory Input website

For public opinion, critique and comment, and the posting of recent work for reaction

² source: National Park Service, Conservation Study Institute _
<http://www.nps.gov/archive/mabi/csi/analyze/analyze.htm>

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This site can include areas for the following:

- Web-based surveys
- Place-Based story sharing
- Photo posting
- Public blog forum
- An interactive “Bibliography” that allows stakeholders to comment on available historical resources and submit new resources.

3. Video Conferencing

The use of video conferencing capabilities through the region can help to foster conversation and reduce travel times. The Lawrence Public Library has access to system called ELMER. Compatible videoconferencing equipment is also available in the following Kansas locations: Johnson County, Topeka, Manhattan, Junction City, Burlington, and Norton (and others farther west) have it as well. Further research is needed and should be pursued immediately to determine Missouri facilities.

Lawrence Public Library 707 Vermont Street Lawrence, KS 66044
www.lawrencepubliclibrary.org

B. FFNHA History Dialogues

For collaborative history and narrative development

Working to build richer historic narratives, we can draw in various audiences to discuss and debate, in a sensitive and respectful way, the various themes that are relevant to FFNHA both past and present.

1. A **Historian Roundtable** (comprised of historians) can be convened periodically to encourage dialogue about various themes. These facilitated conversations can be marketed and enjoyed as a series of public seminars. Discussion highlights can then be shared on various websites including FFNHA, and reported by regional media.
2. An Annual FFNHA “**Share Your Heritage**” **Day** can engage all ages in the celebration and conversation about importance of place-based heritage.
 - An annual contest for local fourth graders to write essays about FFNHA can culminate in broader understanding of the important and personal stories valued by youth

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C. TRADITIONAL MEDIA OUTREACH

With help and guidance from the Tourism & Marketing Committee, FFNHA can develop a regional media relations plan to communicate with and update journalists about FFNHA and its activities.

Specific components include, but are not limited to the following:

- Press release for each public meeting
- Regular updates of master list of regional, state, and targeted national media contacts for all releases
- A modular press kit that can be tailored to specific requests
- Media section and photo gallery on the FFNHA website, to include FAQ, Glossary of Terms, history of FFNHA, fact sheet on region, and other background and reference documents
- Development of a media day or event aimed at introducing members of the media to FFNHA.

Develop internal “stable” of expert sources for quoting on specific subjects

D. COLLABORATIVE WORK PROJECTS

Through the entire management planning process and into the implementation phase, there are opportunities for civic engagement in the actual development of the product. Several types of collaborative work methods (as listed below) can support the fulfillment of these efforts:

1. Participatory Tours

As part of the FFNHA orientation process, representatives from host communities can develop and host “car caravan” or familiarization tours of sites that interpret important FFNHA stories. They could arrange to take consultants, steering committee members and others on an afternoon or full-day tour to share these places. Part of the civic engagement process can include assessment of these sites and work with participants to define criteria about why they are valued.

2. Collaborative Community Mapping

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Without visiting sites, consultants or volunteers can facilitate community-mapping exercises as part of the Heritage Development and Resource Management committee efforts. These are lively sessions wherein groups of 4-8 people draw on maps of the entire FFNHA or a part of it. They can respond to various assignments/questions such as the following:

- Where are the places of great scenic beauty?
- Where are the “historic” sites and how are they historic?
- Where are places that you value for whatever reason? (“sacred places”)
- Where are places that you consider threatened by development?
- Where do you take visiting friends or relatives?
- If you think of this region, where are the logical points of entry?

Responses could be both with graphic symbols and text writing on the map, perhaps with Post-It notes. All responses could be collected and compiled as part of GIS map.

Consensus about valued or historic places may become apparent if the sample size of participants is large enough. If digitized, the results from this process can continue to grow over many years of input. This is also a great exercise for school groups or student field trips.

3. Participatory Photography and Narratives

Billed as either a survey or a photo contest, this exercise could be created as a “Day in the Life of Freedom’s Frontier.” Key to success is hosting the event during the summer on a weekend, and promoting heavily. Participants submit 1-5 photos and their reasons that they chose those people, places or events. These photos, no matter whether submitted by web or as print copies, could be juried by the Civic Engagement Committee. Entries could be submitted to the FFNHA office. This is clearly a volunteer-driven activity, and will require commitment from the Civic Engagement committee.

4. Storytelling

Using a section of the website residents can record their true stories about the land, people and history. The information could also be gathered through an oral history project such as “StoryCorps” (<http://www.storycorps.net/>). This program should be further studied as a possible tool. . Oral histories could be shared via the web and, possibly, through distribution to local radio stations. This is a long-term effort that may have less relevance for the Management Plan phase.

5. Participatory Curriculum Development for Place-Based Education

This exercise can be conducted by focus groups, or, with a committed group, over the Internet. This will be one of the more challenging tools to apply, but it could be a powerful ongoing tool for FFNHA. Certainly, local teachers and amateur historians must be involved.

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Each of these methods can be planned for specific time periods, with defined outcomes to benchmark success. Feedback forms or mechanisms should be prepared to record participants' opinions on how to improve efforts.

E. Applying Tools to the Work Schedule

Working with a master timeline, we can insert these various tools into the meetings of subcommittees, the Partners, steering committee, or to other events. Some of these tools may be used once or twice or, such as the proposed Internet activities, or may be ongoing for many years.