



**2019 Underground Railroad Training: Bridging the Past to the Present
Niagara Falls, New York
Call for Presentations**

The National Park Service, National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom (NTF) Program, the Underground Railroad Consortium of New York State, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center, and Association for the Study of African American Life and History will host an Underground Railroad Training event in Niagara Falls, New York, September 11-14, 2019.

The theme for this training is “Crossings: Bridging the Authentic Underground Railroad Past to the Present. The Underground Railroad can be viewed as a migration story of enslaved people who self-liberated and claimed their freedom. Niagara Falls is an internationally-known destination known for the natural phenomenon of one of the greatest waterfalls in the world. Lesser known, but equally as powerful, are the stories of the Underground Railroad in Niagara Falls and throughout New York State. Some of the most significant crossing points for persons escaping slavery in the South were in New York State along the border with Canada. Efforts to abolish the institution of slavery generated significant pro- and anti-slavery activities that played out in the courts, in the New York State legislature, in the halls of Congress, and on the streets and in the homes in our communities. This significant part of the Empire State’s history, and this history’s relevance with today, impact the historic, cultural, educational, and economic capacity of the state as well as the nation.

Geographical boundaries are not the only crossings of the Underground Railroad. Freedom seekers, in their acts of self-liberation, not only traversed the physical landscape to new destinations, they also conquered the mental landscape of their enslaved status to a life in freedom. Today, we are bridging the authentic history of the Underground Railroad past to the present. The work of descendants, community researchers, historians, and others are elevating the story from the mythical, unknown past to a documented history of a grass roots resistance movement. Through this exploration of our collective heritage, we aim to move society from racism to inclusion and tolerance. All of these aspects of “crossings” will be explored in this training.

Through keynote speakers, case study and best practice presentations, and small group discussions, the training will

- Distinguish new trends in historiography of American slavery and the Underground Railroad in the context of

- self-agency and the quest for freedom exhibited by freedom seekers
- diverse peoples engaged in the work of liberation and assistance
- Reframe the context of the Underground Railroad in terms of
 - Resistance and rebellion movements
 - International perspectives on UGRR activity.
 - A part of the American Civil War,
- Develop strategies to cultivate the next generation of stewards engaged in freedom dialogue, learning tolerance, and heritage preservation
- Identify successful ways to facilitate and/or generate discussions and direct dialogue about the history of racism and racial cooperation
- Transfer knowledge between historians, preservation professionals and educators through inclusiveness of diverse of American communities and perspectives in the past and present context of UGRR history
- Explore the meaning of freedom and justice today

The format for the training will be two days of workshops with four different tracks, each a half day in length. The tracks are:

Day 1: The Past

History—What is the latest scholarship and interpretation of the Underground Railroad; transnationalism, the UGRR in international context, in the Atlantic World

- How is new scholarship on the UGRR different from the traditional narrative?
- What strategies can help integrate new research into existing interpretive materials?
- What techniques can reduce barriers to learning new and sometimes uncomfortable history and intellectually engage visitors?

Authenticity—Protecting the Authenticity of the Underground Railroad: Truth Combats Fiction

- How can we evaluate whether claims of UGRR association are valid?
- What makes good evidence or bad evidence to evaluate UGRR associations?
- What are some productive or creative strategies to document UGRR sites or stories?
- What are some strategies for overcoming the reluctance to embrace research outcomes and abandon “myths”?

Day 2: Present and Future

Community-Driven Economic Development—Actualizing Heritage Tourism Potential and community-driven approaches to Provide Sustainability to Sites and their Communities

- What assets and obstacles have you encountered in developing heritage tourism?
- How have you engaged stakeholders and the local business community?
- What is the economic impact of your site(s) in your community or region?
- How does your operation impact local residents?

Relevance, Legacy and Community Engagement--What is the Significance of 19th Century Underground Railroad History to the 21st Century; Learning Underground Railroad History and

Making the Community Owners of that History; Using Underground Railroad History to Empower the Community

- What aspect of UGRR history resonate with 21st century citizens?
- How can we turn 19th century inspiration into 21st century action?
- What creative projects or activities have you used to engage new audiences?

Structure for each half-day track:

Instruction/Keynote Lectures (45 minutes)

The general format plan is to commence the theme with a keynote lecture that provides information, inspiration, involvement, tools and ignition.

The topics will be introduced through this presentation or lecture by an expert in that field.

Best Practices/Case Studies (60 minutes) 60 min, 2-3 presenters, 15-20 minutes

The topic will be further explored through sessions with 2-3 case study presentations of best practices or case studies, with 15 minutes for discussion.

Small Group Discussion/Workshops (60 minutes)

The theme and best practices are then discussed in 4-7 (depending on number of registrants) small groups to create a repertoire of actions upon returning home. Facilitators will moderate the discussion to allow all to participate and to keep the conversation productive. These discussions will give participants an opportunity to discuss their particular situation and how they might apply the methodologies presented. They can also raise challenges and issues that they are working through and get input from the group. At the end of each small group discussion participants will be asked to write one objective to implement “back home.”