



# LOOKING FOR LINCOLN<sup>®</sup>

Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area

## INTERPRETATION PLAN



**WHAT  
LINCOLN STORY  
WILL YOU TELL?**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Interpretation Committee was tasked with updating the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive plan. The plan is intended for Looking for Lincoln working groups to develop and market a consistent high quality interpretive message throughout the National Heritage Area.

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## **YEAR OF PLAN COMPLETION**

2022

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 **ENTERING**  
**Abraham Lincoln**  
**Natl Heritage Area**



# PART ONE

## INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY, & RESOURCES

### PURPOSE

The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is a partnership of organizations and individuals dedicated to enhancing the communities and landscapes of central Illinois through recognition and support of their significant natural, cultural, and historical legacies. This nationally significant landscape and network of sites explores the social, cultural, economic, and political complexities of the antebellum period of our nation's history. The national heritage area provides opportunities for visitors to explore the "Land of Lincoln," discovering the communities, events, and people that shaped Lincoln's life and aided his transformation into a great statesman.

The purpose of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive plan is to assist and guide Looking for Lincoln Communities as they enhance and develop the stories of Lincoln's life and times. Part one of the interpretive plan outlines the framework for telling stories in the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. Part two serves as a step-by-step guide for communities to create effective interpretation of their national, cultural, and historical resources. Part three provides the basic steps for marketing the stories and experiences available in the communities. It is the communities' unique stories that drive heritage tourism, economic development, and foster a strong community identity.

### *Our Important Mission:*

*The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is a partnership of organizations and individuals dedicated to enhancing the communities and landscapes of central Illinois through recognition and support of their significant natural, cultural, and historical legacies.*

## DESIRED INTERPRETIVE EXPERIENCE

After experiencing the heritage area's interpretive presentation, participants will come away with a clear understanding of key themes and ideas, presented through a variety of local stories. The following ideas represent the desired interpretive experience for all visitors and residents:

- Learn about the details of Lincoln's early life and times.
- Create interest in answering the question, 'Who was Lincoln the man?'
- Relate events in Lincoln's life to the authentic places where they happened.
- Relate experiences in Lincoln's life to the national context and the historical development of central Illinois.
- Learn the story of the historical development of central Illinois by experiencing and understanding its landscape.
- Understand the nationally significant issues that were under debate, their complexities, and their local implications.
- Relate the nationally significant story and its impacts on the lives of local individuals to nationally significant stories today and their impacts on the lives of modern Americans.

Through interpretation, promote interest in community revitalization and enhancement and in preserving and rehabilitating historic buildings and landscapes.

Be encouraged to learn more by seeking out other sources of information on their stories and by exploring other places within the heritage area.



## METHODOLOGY

The quality of the interpretive presentation in the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is of utmost importance. The following guidelines for interpretation inform our decision-making in creating a successful, complementary, interpretation across the entire heritage area.

**Authenticity of Place:** We tell each story where it happened in a tangible, real place. Wherever possible, we use authentic physical features such as communities, buildings, landscapes, and other resources – to tell the stories. In this way, we will offer, unique, interesting, and revealing stories throughout the heritage area, encouraging exploration.

**Accuracy:** Our stories are well-researched and accurate. If the stories are based upon legend, lore, or oral tradition, we clearly state so.

**Quality:** Each interpretive installation meets the highest standards of quality in terms of location, design, orientation to resource, storytelling, physical installation, accessibility, and visitor experience. Our use of existing Looking for Lincoln exhibit types, guidelines, and review processes helps in maintaining standards, and each site owner/manager maintains their own visitor experiences and services.

**Context:** While individual stories may be unique, they connect to the heritage area themes. The stories illustrate the themes and connect to the bigger picture in ways that make them immediate and understandable.

**Significance and Meaning:** Interpretation goes beyond conveying a story's facts – drawing connections, significance, and meaning to audiences. In developing interpretive content, we examine each story for its significance, for a key message to be conveyed by the story or exhibit. We communicate this significance or message to audiences in ways that connect to their life experiences.

**Connections:** Where applicable, we connect local stories to the stories of other communities and sites within the heritage area as part of the communication of context, significance, and meaning. We encourage visitors to visit other places to learn about other aspects of related themes and stories.

**Experiential Learning:** People learn and remember things better when they physically do them. We emphasize communication that is visual and tied to real things and authentic places and features over the reading of waysides and text. Walking the route Lincoln walked provides visitors with various sensory experiences – the sights, the distances, the sense of horizon, even the sound of a stream's running water.

**Variety of Experiences:** We provide a variety of interpretive approaches to satisfy the interests and capabilities of different age groups, temperaments, and orientations. Options offer varying levels of activity, timeframes, and levels of required concentration. We provide alternative ways to experience interpretation for individuals with physical limitations or disabilities.

**Opportunities to Explore:** We present themes and stories in ways that encourage audiences to explore other communities and sites by drawing interpretive connections, inserting tempting leads, and providing the information and tools needed to spark and follow through on interests. In communities and at sites, we encourage audiences to explore the landscape physically by inviting them to move around from place to place.

**Depth of Information:** Primary interpretive content is succinct and well written, emphasizing key messages, context, and connections. However, we develop information and guidance for exploring subjects in greater detail to encourage those who are interested to explore subjects to whatever level of detail they wish.

**Points of View:** We present stories from multiple perspectives in their thematic and historical context to help audiences appreciate how different people from diverse groups and political persuasions see things differently. Audiences draw their conclusions from each story.

**Shared Human Experience:** We provide interpretation in ways that help audiences relate it to experiences in their lives. Using the authentic stories of real people in their words in the actual places where events occurred is encouraged wherever possible. The expression of universal concepts such as love, loss, uncertainty, and success to which everyone can relate in their lives helps forge a personal connection to a story.

**Acknowledge the Unpleasant:** Our stories are accurate and our interpretation conveys authentic experiences. Information and perspectives may well be at variance with contemporary sensibilities, but is presented accurately nonetheless. Honest, complicated, and sometimes unpleasant stories are a time tested way to touch audiences deeply and affect people's lives.

**Opportunities to Engage and Support:** We make audiences aware of the heritage area's mission and programs and offer them the opportunity to engage in activities and initiatives, both local and regional. In particular, audiences in this heritage area are likely to appreciate opportunities to support community enhancement, interpretive sites, historic preservation, and natural resource conservation. With families and schoolchildren being among major audiences, programs and events that are designed to engage young people will be emphasized.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area (ALNHA) is a 43 county area in central Illinois in which the story of the life and times of Abraham Lincoln is told. The ALNHA was created by legislation signed by the President on May 10, 2008. The legislation designates the Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition, a nonprofit 501c3 corporation, as the coordinating entity for the ALNHA.

The Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition works collaboratively with local, state, and national partners across the ALNHA to: tell the stories of Abraham Lincoln's life and times, promote heritage tourism by providing high quality experiences for visitors, and foster economic development in communities.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area generates \$258.6 million in economic impact, supports 3,234 jobs, and generates \$25.5 million in tax revenue.

*(Based on the Tripp Umbach 2017 Economic Impact Study of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area)*



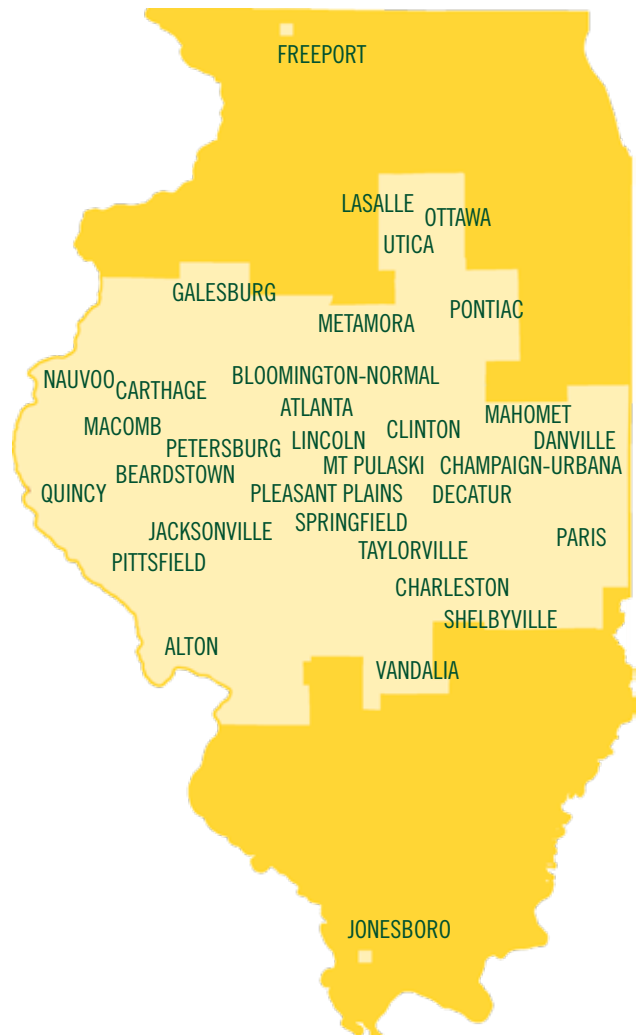




## LOOKING FOR LINCOLN COMMUNITIES

The following is a list of Looking for Lincoln Communities as of September 2021.

- |                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Alton</b>              | <b>Jonesboro</b>       |
| <b>Atlanta</b>            | <b>LaSalle County</b>  |
| <b>Beardstown</b>         | <b>Lincoln</b>         |
| <b>Bloomington-Normal</b> | <b>Macomb</b>          |
| <b>Champaign County</b>   | <b>Mt. Pulaski</b>     |
| <b>Coles County</b>       | <b>Petersburg</b>      |
| <b>Danville</b>           | <b>Pleasant Plains</b> |
| <b>Decatur</b>            | <b>Pittsfield</b>      |
| <b>DeWitt County</b>      | <b>Pontiac</b>         |
| <b>Edgar County</b>       | <b>Quincy</b>          |
| <b>Freeport</b>           | <b>Shelby County</b>   |
| <b>Galesburg</b>          | <b>Springfield</b>     |
| <b>Hancock County</b>     | <b>Taylorville</b>     |
| <b>Jacksonville</b>       | <b>Vandalia</b>        |



## FEDERAL, STATE, & NONPROFIT PARTNERS

The Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition works collaboratively with its federal, state and nonprofit partners to provide Looking for Lincoln Communities the tools they need to develop: educational and interpretative programs and projects, heritage tourism, and foster economic development in the community.

## ALNHA: INTERPRETIVE INITIATIVES



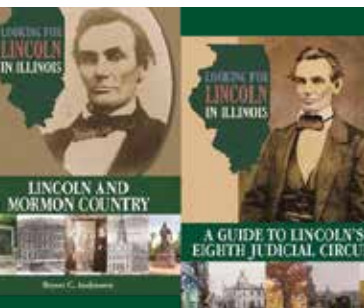
### Bring a Lincoln to Your Community Program

Looking for Lincoln is pleased to provide an opportunity to help offset the cost of bringing an Abraham Lincoln interpreter to your event to help promote the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. Each designated Looking for Lincoln Community is eligible to apply for funds once a year to bring a Lincoln interpreter to their event.



### Looking for Lincoln Wayside Exhibits

Since 2007, Looking for Lincoln has been working with communities to create interpretive exhibits throughout the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. The program includes a design process and guidelines for identifying stories, researching interpretive content, and implementing high-quality exhibits that connect local stories to regional and national themes. The quality of existing exhibits has established a clear standard for the future.



### Looking for Lincoln in Illinois Book Series

Looking for Lincoln has developed a book series entitled Looking for Lincoln in Illinois that tells the stories of Lincoln's life and times to a broad audience. The book series will promote various communities within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area and generate interest among readers to visit the National Heritage Area. The current books in the Looking for Lincoln in Illinois series include: Lincoln's Springfield, Lincoln and Mormon Country, A Guide to Lincoln's Eighth Judicial Circuit and Historic Houses of Lincoln's Illinois.



### Looking for Lincoln Conversations

Looking for Lincoln Conversations is a series of live, virtual programs featuring a variety of history topics surrounding the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. This monthly series includes a presenter or presenters and a facilitated questions and answer time with the virtual audience. The series broadcasts live on the Looking for Lincoln's Facebook page and YouTube Channel. The recordings are archived on the Looking for Lincoln YouTube Channel.



### Looking for Lincoln Stories

Looking for Lincoln Stories uses images and narration to tell stories connected to Lincoln's life and times. The stories must connect to the ALNHA Interpretive Themes. The stories will be high quality productions with a similar look and feel. Using the same style graphics and font will have a consistent intro and outro and will include a tagline directing viewers to the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area.



### Traveling Exhibits

Looking for Lincoln will develop traveling exhibits to promote the interpretive themes of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. The exhibits will be available for use by Looking for Lincoln Communities.

## INTERPRETIVE OPPORTUNITIES

### AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS NETWORK

The African American Civil Rights Network Act of 2017 authorizes the National Park Service to coordinate and facilitate Federal and non-Federal activities to commemorate, honor and interpret “...the history of the African American Civil Rights movement; the significance of the civil rights movement as a crucial element in the evolution of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and the relevance of the African American Civil Rights movement in fostering the spirit of social justice and national reconciliation. “

The African American Civil Rights Network encompasses properties, facilities, and interpretive programs, all of which present a comprehensive narrative of the people, places, and events associated with African American Civil Rights movement in the United States. Some of these sites may be familiar, while others shed light on a lesser known figure or event consequential to the movement from local, regional, and national perspectives.

### NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INTERPRETATION CERTIFIED INTERPRETIVE GUIDE PROGRAM

Looking for Lincoln will encourage individuals and representatives from Lincoln sites within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area to participate in the National Association of Interpretation Certified Interpretive Guide program. The Certified Interpretive Guide program is designed for anyone who delivers interpretive programs to the public. It combines both the theoretical foundations of the profession with practical skills in delivering quality interpretive programming to visitors.



This 32-hour course includes:

- history, definition, and principles of interpretation
- making your programs purposeful, enjoyable, relevant, organized, and thematic
- using tangible objects to connect audiences to intangible ideas and universal concepts in interpretive programs
- presentation and communication skills
- certification requirements (50-question literature review; program outline; 10-minute presentation)
- all materials, workbook, and CIG course textbook

*Information taken from the National Association of Interpretation website*

By increasing the quality of interpretation within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area, we can better tell the stories of Lincoln’s life and times. For more information about the National Association of Interpretation visit: <https://www.interpnet.com/>.

## NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO FREEDOM

In 1998, legislation titled the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act of 1998 was passed, creating the Network to Freedom program. Its mission, through collaboration with local, state and federal entities, as well as individuals and organizations, is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the Network to Freedom helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression.

The program is a catalyst for innovation, partnerships, and scholarship that connects and shares the diverse legacy of the Underground Railroad across boundaries and generations. The program consists of sites, locations with a verifiable connection to the Underground Railroad; programs, with educational and interpretive programs that pertain to the Underground Railroad; and facilities, either research, educational or interpretive centers.



# INTERPRETIVE THEMES, SUB-THEMES, AND STATEMENTS

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Communities throughout Illinois that have a Lincoln connection to share with the world emphasize the overarching themes: “Lincoln the Man,” “Critical Issues in Telling the Story of Lincoln’s America,” “Illinois’ Influence on Lincoln,” and “Lincoln’s Legacy.”

### 1 | LINCOLN THE MAN

Abraham Lincoln arrived in Illinois poor and with little formal education, but left three decades later as a prominent attorney and president-elect of the nation. His early years were full of successes and setbacks as Lincoln tried his hand at many occupations while he continued a program of self-education. Initially a political novice, Lincoln learned quickly, interacting with the leading political minds in the state. Though he began his political career as a strict party-line Whig devoted to improving the infrastructure and economy of Illinois, he evolved into a Republican devoted to stopping the expansion of slavery on the national level. In Illinois, Lincoln developed into a statesman. An appreciation of Lincoln the Man serves as the backdrop for understanding Lincoln the President.

#### 1a Lincoln the Pioneer

Lincoln’s family immigrated to Illinois when he was 21, joining many other individuals and families in search of fresh opportunities. Here, Lincoln grew to manhood. He began as a rugged farmhand and occasional flat boatman. At New Salem, Lincoln climbed the rungs of an occupational ladder that included work as a miller, store clerk, militia captain, merchant, postmaster, surveyor, legislator, and finally, lawyer—each new job carrying him into a higher, more exclusive economic social level. When he left New Salem in 1837 at age twenty-eight, he had acquired enough social and intellectual prowess to successfully compete in Illinois’ increasingly sophisticated commercial and political world.

#### 1b Lincoln the Husband, Father and Community Member

Abraham Lincoln met and married his wife Mary Todd in Springfield and fathered four children. He lived in Springfield for nearly a quarter of a century and helped shape this thriving community on the frontier. Lincoln was an active member of his community.

#### 1c Lincoln the Politician

Lincoln’s political career began at age 23 with an unsuccessful run for the state legislature. Two years later, he was successfully elected to the Illinois House of Representatives for the first of four consecutive terms. In 1846, he was elected as a representative to the United States Congress serving only one term. His unsuccessful bid for the Senate in 1858 against Stephen Douglas brought him national attention and two years later he was elected to the nation’s highest office. A gifted speaker, quick in debate, and an eloquent writer, Lincoln traveled extensively throughout the state, Midwest, and northeast to stump for candidates and defend key party issues.

#### 1d Lincoln the Lawyer

Lincoln was a full-time lawyer in Illinois for a quarter century. Like nearly all of his contemporaries, his legal practice was extremely diverse—he handled cases at nearly every level of the court system and represented clients in civil and criminal cases involving such issues as debt, divorce, murder, and slander.

#### 1e Lincoln the President

Abraham Lincoln was elected the 16th President of the United States in November 1860. As the nation unraveled, president-elect Lincoln remained in Springfield meeting and corresponding

with party leaders, office seekers, and members of the media. Just six weeks after his inauguration, the Civil War began. For the next four years, Lincoln guided the nation through Civil War. Illinois' involvement in the Civil War and the political climate in Lincoln's adopted home state serve as the backdrop for examining Lincoln the President.

## **2 | CRITICAL ISSUES IN TELLING THE STORY OF LINCOLN'S AMERICA**

The most complex issue at the heart of Lincoln's America was slavery. The Declaration of Independence espoused that all men are created equal yet slavery persisted. The Civil War was fought over the issue of slavery. Even today, the issues of equality and race still define the challenges facing our nation.

### **2a Equality and Race**

Equality and race were at the heart of the moral, economic, and social turmoil caused by slavery in Lincoln's America. The inability of democratic government and the political culture of the time to mediate between conflicting moral visions was at the heart of the Civil War. The Civil War was fought over the issue of slavery.

### **2b The Meaning of The Declaration of Independence**

Political, social, and cultural tensions in the pre-Civil War United States engendered a bitter conflict over the meaning of the Declaration of Independence and its assertion that, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

### **2c Underground Railroad in Illinois**

The Underground Railroad crisscrossed the state of Illinois and served as a conduit for the enslaved to escape bondage from surrounding slave states. Illinois residents who supported and assisted the enslaved along their journey to freedom were breaking the law and could be fined or imprisoned. The Underground Railroad network in Illinois was part of the landscape of Illinois in which Lincoln lived and worked.

### **2d Illinois and the Civil War**

Illinois residents' experiences during the Civil War reflected the tensions between political and social views that had existed leading up to the war. Central Illinois contributed a significant number of men and material to the war effort. At the same time, there were a significant number of Copperheads who opposed the Civil War. By war's end, and with the assassination of Lincoln, a majority of the population was firmly rooted in the northern cause.

## **3 | ILLINOIS' INFLUENCE ON LINCOLN**

Illinois was the western frontier when Lincoln's family arrived from Indiana. During the next three decades Lincoln lived in Illinois, the region evolved from a rudimentary mix of subsistence farms to a thriving agrarian economy with pockets of industry. Equally important are the national events and issues that impacted the state and the evolution of the social, political, and physical landscape of antebellum Illinois. The tension in Illinois surrounding the issue of slavery uniquely prepared Lincoln to deal with the issue as President.

### **3a The Land of Opportunity**

In the 1830s, Illinois was the nation's western frontier. The region's settlement over the next thirty years saw an evolution from a rude mix of subsistence farms wary of the open prairie landscape to an organized rectangular fabric of neat farmsteads and an established

market economy. Towns developed with a vibrant, upwardly mobile society seeking middle class respectability. Opportunities for advancement abounded as both the region and Lincoln matured. This expansion also displaced the Native Americans who called Illinois home.

### **3b The People**

Illinois was settled by people seeking new western lands and fresh opportunities. As a result of the mix of northern, southern, and foreign immigrants in Illinois, the social and political landscape reflected the diverse viewpoints of its residents. This settlement created tension and conflict between Native American tribes who had called the land of Illinois home for thousands of years and the settlers ultimately resulting in the displacement of various Native American tribes. Against this backdrop, Lincoln interacted with clients, colleagues, friends, and family who influenced his thinking and development.

### **3c Social and Political Landscape of Illinois and the Nation**

The social and political environment of Illinois and the nation shaped Lincoln. Whether discussing the key issues of the day, such as internal improvements, popular sovereignty, abolition and immigration or wrestling with the impact of national events like the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Dred Scott Case, these issues and events collectively formed Lincoln's ideology.

## **4 | LINCOLN'S LEGACY**

Few individuals in American history have left such an indelible mark on the world. The major issues that Lincoln's generation confronted—the balance of power between the federal government and individual states, civil liberties during wartime, issues regarding race and equality, etc.—continue to define the challenges facing the nation today. The life and times of Abraham Lincoln—the story of a boy born in a log cabin who went on to guide the nation through its most tragic hour—continues to bring hope and inspiration to millions around the globe.

### **4a Lincoln's Imprint on America**

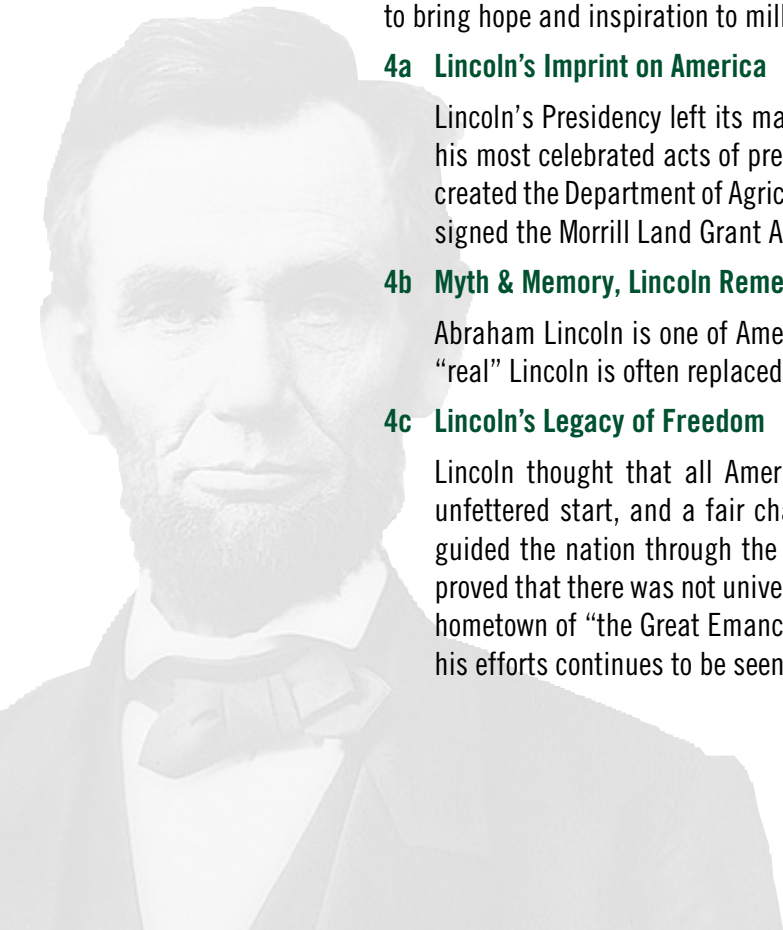
Lincoln's Presidency left its mark on Illinois and the nation. His legacy is more complex than his most celebrated acts of preserving the Union or ending American Slavery. As President, he created the Department of Agriculture, supported construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, signed the Morrill Land Grant Act, and Homestead Act.

### **4b Myth & Memory, Lincoln Remembered**

Abraham Lincoln is one of America's most beloved Presidents. A larger-than-life persona, the "real" Lincoln is often replaced by the legend and lore.

### **4c Lincoln's Legacy of Freedom**

Lincoln thought that all Americans should have the same freedoms, or as he put it, "an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life." That vision sustained Lincoln as he guided the nation through the Civil War that ended slavery. The 1908 Springfield Race Riot proved that there was not universal agreement with Lincoln, but the tragedy of that event in the hometown of "the Great Emancipator," inspired the establishment of the NAACP. The legacy of his efforts continues to be seen throughout the generations.



WILL MANUFACTURE  
TO ORDER REVOLVING  
RIFLES AND PISTOLS

JONATHAN BROW  
**GUNSM.**  
BLACKSMITH & F

ROOMS







# PART TWO

## COMMUNITY INTERPRETIVE DEVELOPMENT

### INTRODUCTION

This manual is a step-by-step guide for community partners within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area to create effective interpretation of their natural, cultural, and historical resources.

Interpretation is a way of telling stories and why those stories matter. Interpretation connects visitors with what they are experiencing. It does not just teach what something is, but what it means.

When telling a story about a resource in your community, and what it means to the life of Abraham Lincoln, you are “interpreting” that resource. By making a connection for visitors between things and ideas, you are providing that visitor with a unique experience packed with meaning, ideas, values, and emotions which reflects enthusiasm for your resource. Interpretation can create memorable and meaningful experiences, and inspire your visitors to learn more. Effective interpretation takes planning and effort to create. If done correctly, you will not only help visitors understand your resource, but you will also do a better job of managing it. In the process, you can help the community meet its goals for resource conservation, economic development, and heritage tourism.

The interpretive strategies outlined in this manual are applicable to any kind of resource from museums and historic sites to bed and breakfasts, restaurants, or community events. Even if interpretation is not the main focus of your organization or business, you can still tell authentic stories that resonate with visitors, clients, or customers.

### INTERPRETATION

A way of telling stories and addressing why that story matters.



### INTERPRETATION

*from the National Association for Interpretation*

A mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource.

### RESOURCE

Any natural, historic, or cultural asset found in the community — a site, service, historical event, or landscape that has a role in the important story being told.

# STEPS IN CREATING YOUR INTERPRETATION STRATEGY

Part two describes a five-step process for creating successful interpretation. **Each of the proceeding sections are dedicated to one of these steps and are numbered in the same order as their respective steps.**

STEP  
1

## DEFINING SIGNIFICANCE

Why should people visit your resource? What makes it significant?

STEP  
2

## DEVELOPING STORIES

What stories will help explain the significance of the resource?

STEP  
3

## CONSIDERING AN AUDIENCE

Who is the audience for the interpretation?

Will visitors understand and appreciate what you are telling them?

STEP  
4

## CHOOSING MEDIA

What tools will be used to communicate the message?

STEP  
5

## EVALUATING THE STRATEGY

How can you measure how effective the interpretive programs are?

## BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

*If you want your interpretation to be truly effective, don't work alone!*

Build a team of stakeholders early in the planning process. Involving stakeholders in interpretive planning will encourage local “buy-in” and create champions within the community for the project.

Embracing different viewpoints can reveal new perspectives; generate alternative ideas, and encourage transparency throughout the entire planning and implementation process. It is also important to get input from a variety of potential visitors. Do not forget to consider people with different needs and perspectives, especially if they are a part of the target audience.

## STAKEHOLDERS

**Individuals within the community who have a vested interest in the success of the project.**

- Owners or managers of nearby heritage resources
- Municipal officials
- Educators
- Representatives from community groups
- Board members or staff
- People affiliated with the history of the resource
- Investors/funding sources
- Members of minority groups
- Neighbors



## STEP 1

### DEFINING SIGNIFICANCE

The process of creating interpretation always begins with this, sometimes complex question:

- **Why would visitors want to experience my resource in the first place?**
- **What makes it relevant for them?**
- **How does my resource help others understand the life and times of Abraham Lincoln?**

Maybe it is what happened there, or the people who were associated with it. Maybe it is an important part of local culture or lore. Even if the resource is a typical or common example of something, such as a common courthouse, it could be a significant piece of a larger puzzle.

Interpretation describes the significance of places, events, people, and things. To understand the significance, ask yourself why people should care about your resource. This question may have one or many answers because the resource could be significant for more than one reason.

### WHAT MAKES YOUR RESOURCE WORTH VISITING?

#### Could it be the people?

Many resources are associated with people who are perceived to be important, famous, or wealthy. While the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is directly focused on telling the story of Lincoln's life and times, this formula can be used to incorporate many types of stories or people within the community's interpretation. Even if Lincoln himself never visited the resource, it may be significant because of the people who lived or worked there—whether or not they were famous or wealthy.

Over the last several decades, professional historians have spent significant time talking about under-served groups that have often been overlooked in the past, such as women, minorities, immigrants, working people, servants, and enslaved populations. When you ask yourself what might be significant about your resource do not forget to consider what these groups may have contributed to its significance.

#### Could it be the Scenery?

Landscapes and manicured gardens please and attract the eyes of visitors. Scenery, per say, does not need to be beautiful and perfect to tell significant stories. Think of a rustic Illinois frontier town that is dusty and dirty with simple frontier structures. Think of an unbroken prairie or forest that Lincoln would have recognized, the neglected historic cemetery, or the final remnants of slave quarters from the dark past of the United States. Visitors can interact with pieces of the landscape Lincoln recognized. Each of these scenes plays valuable roles in interpretation—providing a 'reality-check' about history, reminding us not to romanticize or "Disneyfy" our understanding of the past.

## Could it be Architecture?

Stained glass windows, frontier log cabins, Greek or Roman revival courthouses, Italianate storefronts, and Federal style homes are all unique and beautiful forms of architecture found across the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. However, it is important to include the most humble farm house, historic barns, rural country stores, historic rail stations, and historic business centers that contribute to local heritage.

## Could it be an Important Event or Trend?

Not every resource can boast “Lincoln Slept Here,” be the site of Lincoln’s Debates, or a stop on the Lincoln funeral train. Your resource may not be directly linked to any event recorded in history books, but it has almost certainly been influenced by an event or trend on the regional or national level. What impact might that event or trend have had on local populations?

For example, when looking to Lincoln’s lifetime, consider the impact of the abolition movement, immigration, and western settlement. Also consider the social and political tensions with neighboring states, communities, or families at the dawn of the American Civil War.

Remember, nothing happens in a vacuum. Even if the resource seems unimportant by comparison to one that is earlier, larger, or better known; it still contributes to the significance of your community and to the nation as a whole. When connecting the resource to larger events or stories, you are helping people understand why it is important to understand the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. It becomes more than walls or inanimate objects—it becomes an example of an event or trend that had regional or national significance.



## WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT ABOUT YOUR RESOURCE?

Using the four criteria [People, Scenery, Architecture, Event], consider some of the things that make your resource interesting and significant. Remember, many resources may only exist in one or may transcend multiple criteria. Try not to get caught up on labels—resources may have parts or aspects of different stories which are all significant.

**Why would visitors want to experience my resource in the first place?  
What makes it relevant for them?**

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**How does my resource help others understand the life and times of Abraham Lincoln?**

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**PEOPLE:** Is your resource important because of the people that lived or worked there?  
Did they play a significant role in the community, state, or in Lincoln's life?  
Or are the people associated with your resource representative of thousands of men,  
women, immigrants or others whom moved to Illinois for a new life?

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**SCENERY:** Is your resource significant because of its scenery?  
Does the landscape allow visitors to visualize what Lincoln saw and experienced?

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**ARCHITECTURE:** Is your resource significant because of its architecture?  
Does the architecture of the resource contribute to the local heritage of the community?

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**EVENT OR TREND:** Is your resource significant because of an event that took place?  
Was the resource impacted by an event or trend on the regional or national level?

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## LINKING YOUR RESOURCE TO THE BIG PICTURE

Now that you have thought about some of the things that make the resource interesting and significant, it is time to “connect the dots” for visitors. In other words, find some common threads that link your resource to the bigger story. When telling visitors how the resource relates to something bigger, they will understand why it is significant.

To help visitors make sense of the resource and what it means, link it to larger trends and events through interpretive themes, which provides context to your unique story. Looking for Lincoln has defined a series of interpretive themes that you should use as guidelines when developing the community’s interpretive programming.

One way to develop a context and select the interpretive themes that best fit your story is to ask a series of “why?” questions. Asking a series of “why?” questions can help link a simple fact to a much larger chain of events. By making that link, you are helping explain why your resource is significant—and help show a tangible connection between the resource and the larger interpretive themes.

## “WHY?” EXERCISE: CREATING CONTEXT FOR A RESOURCE

### EXAMPLE ONE: Here is a “Lincoln Slept Here” example

- Fact** In my community, we have a home that Lincoln would visit each time he was in town.
- “Why?”** This home belonged to one of Lincoln’s friends. Each time Lincoln was in town, he would visit the home owner, who would offer him a room to rest for the evening.
- “Why?”** Lincoln was in town frequently because he was a lawyer so he would travel to various communities in order to work cases at local courthouses.
- “Why?”** Lincoln traveled the 8th Judicial Circuit. Throughout his life, county seats would host both judges and lawyers who would travel to hear and present local cases.
- Conclusion** This resource in my community would fit the “The Life and Times of Abraham Lincoln: 1) Lincoln the Man 1d) Lincoln the Lawyer” Interpretive Themes established by Looking for Lincoln.

## EXAMPLE TWO: Let's try a harder one

**Fact** In my community, we have a story that in the 1864, Union soldiers clashed with Copperhead Democrats.

**“Why?”** The riot began when soldiers humiliated a local judge.

**“Why?”** The local judge, C. H. Constable, was humiliated because he allowed four Union deserters to go free. This humiliation outraged local democrats.

**“Why?”** Copperheads were antiwar Democrats—opposed to the American Civil War and Republican policies of the time. In response to the humiliation of the local judge and the sizeable presence of union soldiers in town, the Copperhead Democrats began a riot. By the end of the affair, 9 people were killed and fifteen Copperhead Democrats were arrested.

**“Why?”** The terms Copperheads and Butternuts were used to describe ‘Peace Democrats’ who opposed both the American Civil War and Lincoln’s presidency. Antiwar riots and unrest was sporadic across the north as public opinion was wavering after 3 years of conflict. President Lincoln exercised his war powers and suspended Habeas Corpus for those Democrats arrested. They were held for seven months.

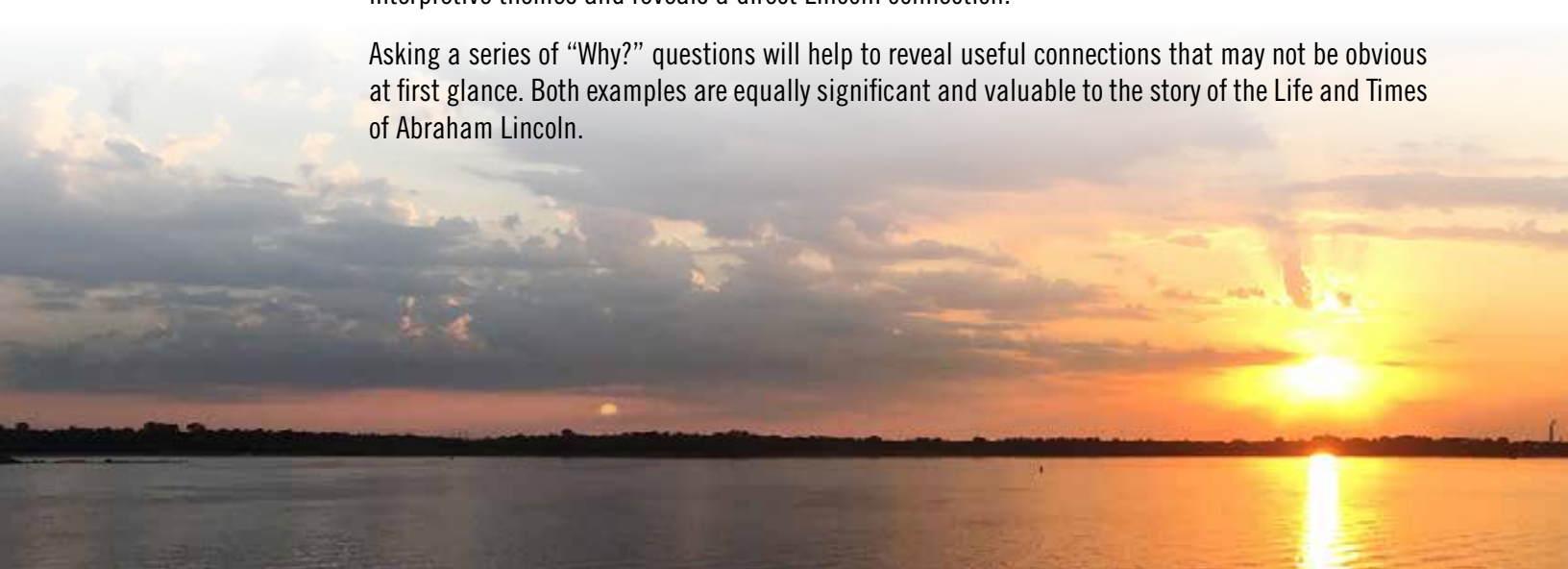
**Conclusion** This resource in my community would fit the “The Life and Times of Abraham Lincoln: 1) Lincoln the Man: 1e) Lincoln the President; 3) Illinois’ Influence on Lincoln: 3c) Social and Political Landscape of Illinois and the Nation; and 4) Lincoln’s Legacy: 4b) Myth and Memory, Lincoln Remembered” Interpretive Themes established by Looking for Lincoln.

## REFLECTION

In Example One, the process quickly takes the community from their ‘fact’ to its connection to the larger National Heritage Area interpretive themes.

In Example Two, there may be no physical resource other than a story. Lincoln did not witness the event but the national political and social trends impacted the community directly. The process takes the community from their ‘fact’ to its connection to several of the National Heritage Area interpretive themes and reveals a direct Lincoln connection.

Asking a series of “Why?” questions will help to reveal useful connections that may not be obvious at first glance. Both examples are equally significant and valuable to the story of the Life and Times of Abraham Lincoln.



# CONNECTING YOUR RESOURCE TO THE ALNHA INTERPRETIVE THEMES?

Now that you have identified why your resource is significant, use the “Why?” exercise to help you select which Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive theme(s) best fit your resource and its significance.

**Fact** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion: Identify the ALNHA Interpretive theme(s) that best fit this resource.**

## Lincoln the Man

- Lincoln the Pioneer     Lincoln the Husband, Father and Community Member  
 Lincoln the Politician     Lincoln the Lawyer     Lincoln the President

## Critical Issues in Telling the Story of Lincoln’s America

- Equality and Race     The Meaning of the Declaration of Independence  
 Underground Railroad in Illinois     Illinois and the Civil War

## Illinois’ Influence on Lincoln

- The Land of Opportunity  
 The People  
 Social and Political Landscape of Illinois and the Nation

## Lincoln’s Legacy

- Lincoln’s Imprint on America  
 Myth and Memory, Lincoln Remembered  
 Lincoln’s Legacy of Freedom

Worksheet





# STEP 2

## DEVELOPING STORIES

Storytelling is a powerful tool for conveying and sharing ideas, beliefs, values, and traditions. Stories are so effective at explaining the meaning of things; they are at the heart of interpretation. No matter how simplistic your resource might seem, it has a variety of stories to tell. Your challenge, and the challenge of all interpretation, is to develop stories so that people will be able to connect them in meaningful, relevant ways.

### CREATING LOCAL THEMES

Once you have identified the significance of the resource and the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive theme(s) it fits in, you should begin grouping the various stories into the identified themes.

Themes create the foundation for storytelling to increase the visitors' understanding and appreciation of community resources. Additionally, themes create a platform for the stories to work together to send visitors a carefully coordinated and crafted message about the resource. Well-crafted messages will get people to think critically about complex events and issues and what it means to us today.

*When developing themes, be diligent to ensure that they emphasize the significance about your resource, without repeating the same story everyone else is telling.*

Additionally, local themes should complement and fit with the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area themes as defined previously.



## DEVELOPING LOCAL THEMES

For each resource, use the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive themes as a core foundation of your interpretive planning. You may wish to broaden or further expand the stories told by developing new complimentary local themes specific to the resource.

1. Make a list of the most important stories and sort them into logical groups. What stories seem to fit together? Continue rearranging the various stories until a good fit is found for each. The resulting groups of stories are the beginning of a set of local themes.
2. Many of the stories will feature tangible elements—things that people can see, touch, or experience. List those tangibles for each story that has them.
3. What do your stories mean? Identify the significance (from Step 1) for each of the stories. What kind of meanings, values, or ideas does each grouping represent? Many stories will have several meanings or significance.
4. Once the stories and significance are identified, start looking for broad concepts or the “big ideas” that might link the stories in each group. Those big ideas will form the heart of each theme. When stories suggest more than one big idea, try to prioritize them. Which big ideas will be most effective at conveying the stories’ significance?
5. Take each big idea, and use it to draft theme statements. Each theme statement should be grounded in the significance of the resource. It should link tangible elements of the resource to its intangible meanings. While it should be broad enough to support a wide range of stories, you should still be able to state it in a single or a few sentences.

**Themes act like road maps for the visitor’s journey through your interpretive presentation. When visitors reach the destination (the end of the presentation) they should be able understand and recount the theme.**



## WRITING THEME STATEMENTS

**General Topic:** I want to tell my audience about...

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**Specific Topic:** My resource relates to that topic by...

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**Theme:** After seeing my presentation, I want my audience to know and remember that...

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What is the common link between these resources?

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**Sub-Themes:** What other connections existed between the resource and theme?

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How do these themes compliment the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Themes?

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Worksheet continued on next page...

Use the answers to the previous questions to state the most clear and direct sentence to identify your theme. Under each theme, craft sub-theme statements to include each of your important resources.

**Theme Statement:**

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Sub-themes:

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**Theme Statement:**

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Sub-themes:

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**Theme Statement:**

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Sub-themes:

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**STEP  
3**

## CONSIDERING AN AUDIENCE

Before implementing interpretation, consider your audience. What kinds of visitor groups might come to your community? Which groups might you want to attract? Potential visitors may include day trippers, vacationers, local residents, children, and people with a particular interest or education in the subject matter.

Each group will be looking for a different type of experience, so they'll be looking for different types of interpretation. Visitors' responses to interpretation depend on their level of education, learning style, language, and cultural traditions—and on more mundane issues like the amount of time that's available to visit heritage resources.

Remember to consider the needs of groups that might be looking for something more than a typical adult visitor would. For example, school groups might be interested in the same stories as the general audience, but they might need an approach that's tailored to their needs. In order to understand the needs and expectations of students and teachers, it may be beneficial to identify specific curriculum learning standards that your interpretive programing may reach. Teachers, who are often required to justify a trip to a resource, might be looking for special programing that meets their state learning standards. Identifying the specific learning standards ahead of the group's arrival shows your diligence to understand the visitor's needs.



*The more you know about visitors and their needs, the more effectively you can communicate with them.*

State curriculum learning standards change often and should be reviewed for each interpretative program every few years.

If learning standards have changed, you may need to revise your interpretive program in order to maintain your school group visitation numbers.

You can find the Illinois Learning Standards online: <https://www.isbe.net/pages/learning-standards.aspx>

## MEETING VISITOR EXPECTATIONS

When visitors experience a heritage resource they are looking for something they value. They are not just visiting to experience the tangible things that your resource has to offer, but to explore their own thoughts and feelings, as well.

Before deciding what to tell visitors, ask yourself what they might expect from the experience. Consider what they might hear about your resource before they arrive. They might have a general idea of what you offer, but they will not be able to connect all the dots. In order to meet visitor expectations, you have to put the pieces together into a message they can understand and appreciate.

Matching visitors to the kind of experience they expect is sometimes a difficult exercise and often requires probing questions by front line visitor service representatives. Such questions should be directed toward a visitor's experience with the resource, their profession, and the region in which they live. Such information may help visitor service representatives better craft an experience based on the information gleaned from the casual and friendly visitor interactions.

If you regularly get visitors who are familiar with the subject matter, consider splitting the interpretation into two "tracks"- one for experienced visitors and another for casual visitors. Instead of assuming that visitors want to see and do everything offered, tell them how they can find what interests them specifically.

## HOW ARE YOU DOING SO FAR?

Up to this point, your work in interpretive development has essentially been an intellectual and theoretical exercise. Now you should be ready [and excited] to take the content you have developed and bring it to life "on the ground." The next steps of this process will guide you through the implementation of your interpretive strategy that has been created.

**The remaining sections of this manual will answer all the following questions:**

- How will you tell your stories?
- How will you know if they are told effectively?
- How do you attract visitors to your community and resource?

### NOTE

Most people will spend less than one hour focusing on your interpretation. Although they might stay longer than that, they will be looking for other activities to capture their attention. In order to attract visitors stay to longer, one approach is to work together with other resources in the area. Instead of competing for visitation, look for ways to complement what visitors will experience elsewhere.



## STEP 4

### CHOOSING THE MEDIA

Once you have decided on the stories to tell, and how to tell them, it is time to consider the best interpretive “media” – the different tools you can use to present interpretation. Interpretive media includes everything from printed brochures to guided tours and digital formats.

When planning an interpretation strategy, do not just focus on the written word. Heritage resources have many options for telling their stories. Some of these are “tried and true,” such as wayside panels, brochures, and guided tours. Other options include scheduled events like musical or theatrical performances, lectures, and reenactments. In addition to these traditional methods of interpretation, new technologies are constantly appearing that may help enhance a visitor’s experience.

The best way to tell a story depends on the nature of the resource, the capacity of the entity, and the story being told. You should think like a visitor when selecting your media, while being mindful of your own capacity and community’s limitations.

Let these two viewpoints determine the paths you take in order for the message to resonate with visitors.

Newest forms of interpretation have strong participatory elements at the center of its planning and design. In order to incorporate participatory elements, think about ways your visitors can contribute to the content of your interpretation, making the experience a ‘two way street.’

This ‘two way street’ begins first with the exhibit telling visitors the important information from the resource. Then, in the other lane, the visitors are asked thoughtful questions, to complete tasks, or to contribute experiences. Here, the visitor communicates back to the exhibit, resource, and institution. This type of deliberate exchange can produce lasting connections between a visitor and a resource. Additionally, the visitor leaves the resource feeling engaged after a meaningful visit.

Visitors often appreciate the opportunity to contribute personal experiences that are relevant to the topic at hand. Easy ways to contribute would be in notebooks, index cards, video messages, or leaving posts on your website or social media feeds. However, it is not enough that your visitors share their stories. You need to find a way that other visitors can access and interact with those stories. These types of participatory elements become a changing part of your exhibit.

*Participatory: A strategy designed to engage your audience to not only visit but to interact with and contribute content to your interpretive programs.*

For more information on participatory visitor experiences, the book *The Participatory Museum* and website by Nina Simon is currently the best participatory literature. More info at <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>



## TYPES OF INTERPRETIVE MEDIA

### Printed Materials

Printed materials include well designed handouts, brochures, newsletters, newspapers and magazines, educational books, maps, guides, curricula and teacher guides, and special publications targeted to families and children.

### Waysides and Banners

Wayside exhibits and banners appear in outdoor settings. Wayside exhibits are made of material that is weather resistant. The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area has the Looking for Lincoln wayside exhibit program with specifications on branding, design, and format.

### Electronic Media

Electronic media items are the fastest growing and evolving segment of interpretative media. In today's media saturated society, visitors are more technology driven than ever. These tech-savvy visitor expectations are changing the way museums and communities interpret their resources. Today's visitors are often looking for high levels of interaction with resources and their exhibits.

#### Types of electronic media often used:

- Audiovisual (slide shows, film, video)
- Computer-based interactive stations or kiosks
- Roving interpretation (handheld audio or video units, tours on CD or DVD, radio broadcast)
- Visitor-Controlled (podcasts, cell phone tours, smart phone and tablet applications)

### Personal Interpretation

Personal interpretation includes such activities as guided tours, children's activities, craft demonstrations, storytelling, first-person or living history interpretation (the interpreter impersonates a historical figure), reenactments, and participatory learning. Effective tour guides help visitors connect emotionally with the meanings inherent in a resource. Personal interpretation can come close to achieving the goal of crafting a visitor's experience based on their interests, experiences, and personal expectations.

### Text Panels/Interpretive Exhibits

This type of display can help connect a wide variety of objects to a larger story, and help visitors make sense of them. Panels and exhibit labels can provide a depth of information overlooked by other forms of interpretive media. Commonly found in museums and other indoor interpretive spaces, text panels are the most familiar form of interpretation for visitors. Text panels and exhibit labels frequently need supplemental media in order to create the interactive experience that many visitors expect.



## Web-Based Interpretation

Today, a resource without a website seems almost invisible. Most websites provide information about how to find a resource, and when it is accessible by the public. But websites can be a valuable interpretive tool, as well, when they include the resource's history and stories. You may wish to include lesson plans, references for further study, and downloadable visitor guides.

Websites also offer great opportunities for audience-contributed content. Of course, this means someone will need to monitor the responses for appropriateness. This kind of audience participation has become so common and so popular, that it has become an expectation for visitors to leave web-based comments on websites, social media applications, and even travel advisory sites. Some examples are blogs, wiki sites, social networks like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Foursquare, and travel applications like Trip Advisor.

**The average visitor to a website will spend no more than 10-20 seconds viewing a page. Therefore, your website must load and show its value quickly and efficiently in order to maintain your visitor's interest and increase average visit times.**

Web based interpretation provides the perfect opportunity for institutions and communities to connect with visitors before and after their visit to a resource. This personal connection should help drive return visitors and help create positive word-of-mouth to attract new visitors to a community. However, the site design must be attractive, interactive, and consistently updated with new and correct content.

It is important to understand that websites and web-based interpretation are never “finished”—they require consistent maintenance and improvement in order to be an effective tool.

## Visitor Self-Guided Walking Tours

Visitor walking tours are great interpretive tools for Main Street districts, historic districts, or areas where several resources are within walking distance of each other. When developing walking tours; printed materials and waysides may be supplemented by audio features such as podcasts.

## Other Interpretive Methods

There are countless ways to successfully tell the story of a resource. These listed are not the only creative ways to interpret historical material. It is important to find which media works best with the stories being told. You may find that a mixture of several forms of media is needed to keep visitors engaged. This is expected and encouraged as long as the mixed media are complementary to one another and do not distract or have a negative impact on the themes and messages you want to convey to visitors.



## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING INTERPRETIVE MEDIA

There are many ways to successfully tell a story. The first step is to understand your capacity to deliver successful interpretation. This understanding will strongly influence which methods and media you select. Understanding your capacity should be present thru the entire planning process.

### Budget

“How much money do you have to spend on interpretation?” Set reasonable goals for the short term, and more lofty goals for the future. Start with what you know you can afford, and identify potential funding sources.

### Volunteer or Staff Involvement

If you are considering personal interpretation: “Can you devote the time and effort necessary to make it truly effective?” Do not provide guided tours unless you have thoroughly prepared yourself, staff, volunteers, and your facilities to do it effectively.

Be prepared to provide your staff and volunteers with solid training, supervision, and opportunities to research new material. New research for staff and volunteers is important to keep your interpretation from stagnating!



## CAPACITY

A community's abilities and limitations to create successful interpretation and set attainable and reasonable program goals



## Technology

“Are you, staff, or volunteers reasonably computer/technology literate?” Do not invest in computer-based applications unless you have the skills and resources to keep them in working order.

How familiar with technology are your visitors? Do you want to attract more visitors who are skilled with those kinds of technology? Be careful to keep a focus on the message, rather than the medium. If your stories are not well conceived, researched, and conveyed, the technology will not be worth the investment.

## Type of Story You are Telling

“Are you telling stories that are good candidates for multimedia interpretation?” Could your stories benefit from music, sound effects, recordings, or video? Do they have dramatic storylines that could come to life in this kind of presentation? If you have a lot to say, consider working with a professional to develop a short audio or video presentation.

## Accessibility

When you decide where to locate your interpretation: “Are you keeping visitors’ safety in mind?” Are some features of your resource inaccessible to physically impaired visitors? The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require that visitors be given access to all areas of a property, but it does require you to provide materials that offer an equivalent experience. For example, if you have interpretation on the second floor, but do not have an elevator, consider taking photographs and creating an album that gives less mobile visitors an opportunity to see what it looks like.

## Maintenance

“Do you have the capacity to conduct routine maintenance, cleaning, and periodic updates of your interpretive media?” Proper and timely capital maintenance is vital to the preservation of the resources within the community, and maintains visitor’s safety, and comfort. Additionally, maintenance and updates to the interpretive media ensures that the strategy in place continually meets visitor expectations.

## Sustainability

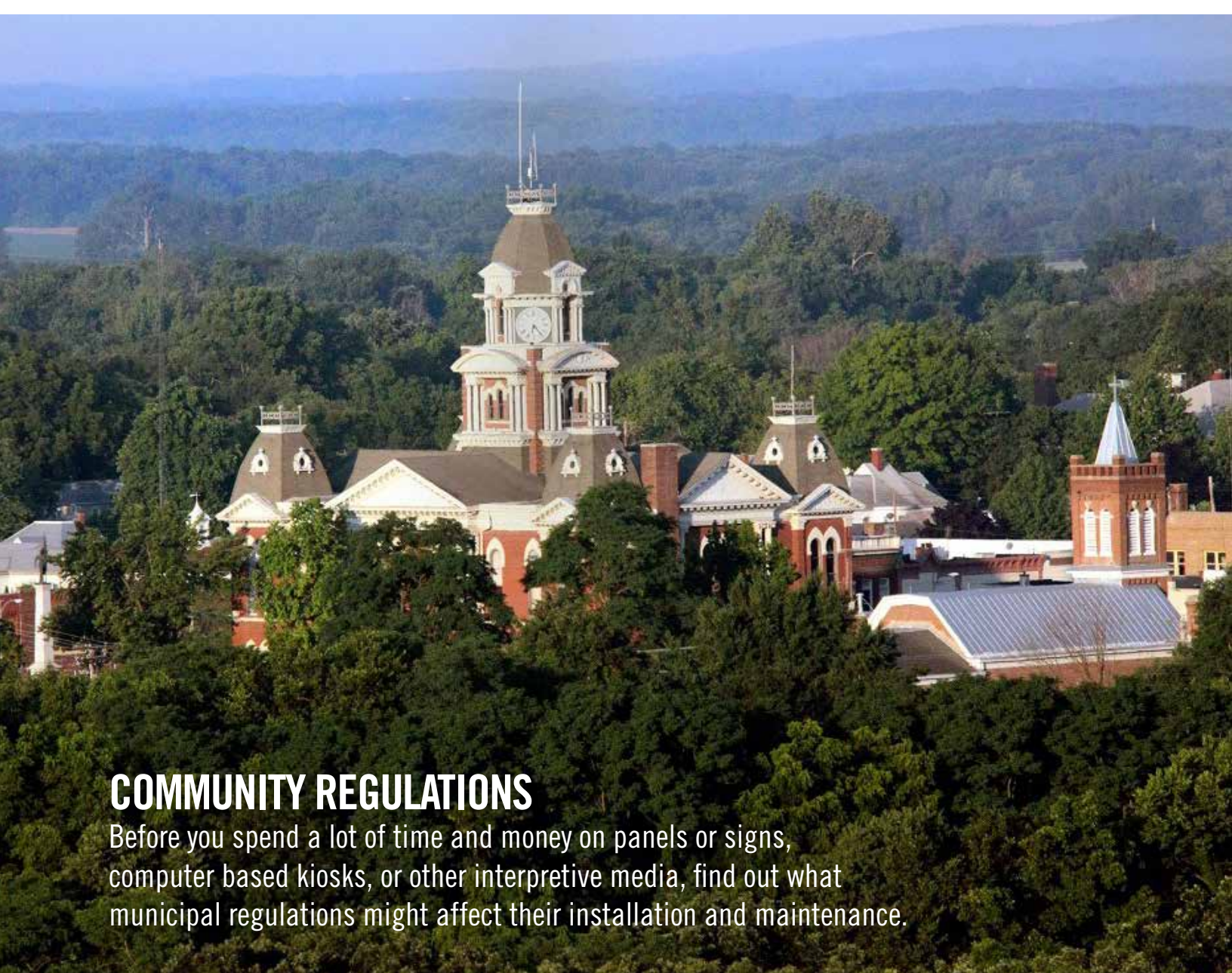
“Are these goals and plans sustainable?” Is there a plan for long term sustainability? It is important that the program or interpretive project not rely on one individual— rather a group or a committee is preferred. In other words, if that individual decides to step down, retire, or move on—can the program or interpretive project continue?

Is the program funding a one-time gift or recurring annual grant? If funding is reduced, can the program scale down and continue operating? Does this interpretive program have public support?

Without plans for long term sustainability, programs and projects are more susceptible to a decline in quality, public support, and capacity to successfully operate.

## Understanding Capacity and Interpretive Media

Answering these, sometime obvious, questions will help identify the institutions and community’s capacity which will, in turn, help target the best interpretive media to compliment the stories you have identified as significant.



## COMMUNITY REGULATIONS

Before you spend a lot of time and money on panels or signs, computer based kiosks, or other interpretive media, find out what municipal regulations might affect their installation and maintenance.



## STEP 5

### EVALUATING THE STRATEGY

Creating interpretation is not a “once and done” exercise—it is a dynamic process that requires an ongoing commitment to maintain visitors’ interest in your resource and in the stories being told. To keep things relevant, your interpretive strategy requires continuous updating with new material, different media and fresh perspectives of the subject matter. How many visitors will keep returning to a museum that never rotates the objects on display, a community walking tour with outdated media and materials, or a guided tour with a script unchanged since the 1980s?

One way to keep interpretation from growing stale is to step back often and ask yourself how effective it really is: “Are you meeting goals for what you want visitors to learn and connect with?” After your interpretation has been in place for a while, set aside some time to consider whether the programs are working as you want them to.

#### What is the Outcome?

Before you can evaluate a program, revisit the goals of the interpretative strategy.

- How does it benefit the visitors?
- Does it matter to them?
- Has it made a difference?
- How are people’s lives better as a result of participating in the program?

By answering these challenging questions for yourself, you are defining goals for your interpretive program. Evaluation pushes you to clarify those goals. Outcomes of the interpretive program will reflect some kind of change in your visitors. Your program’s impact may include learning a skill, changing their understanding of a historical event, or even changing one’s behavior through your program.

*“Are you meeting goals for what you want visitors to learn and connect with?”*

## What Do Visitors Think?

There are two types of information you can gather:

- **Quantitative:** Statistics like the number of visitors, how long they pay attention to your interpretation, and how many of them can tell you why your resource is significant—things that you can count.
- **Qualitative:** The opinions, attitudes, perceptions and feelings of your visitors — the “subjective” things that might be expressed just a little differently by each of your visitors.

You can collect that information in two ways:

- **Indirect-** Observe visitors without their knowledge.
- **Direct-** Use interviews, focus groups, or questionnaires to ask visitors what they think.

## Observation

When observing, try to watch unobtrusively in order to notice what visitors do. “Are they engaged in the program or just going through the motions? How long do they linger?” Dwell time—the amount of time a visitor spends in an exhibit, for example, is an important quantitative measure of success.

Listening to what visitors say can help you find out what they think of your interpretation. It can give you clues to the thoughts and feelings you have inspired—and maybe the misconceptions and misunderstandings that needs to be corrected.

It is important to record your observations. Create a form to list the composition of the group – a lone visitor, family, a group of adults, etc. You may wish to list their gender, race, and approximate age. Look at the clock and time how long the visitor(s) spend with each activity. Record their interactions and what they say.

## Interviews

Surveys are frequently used to evaluate interpretive programs. Just as you would for indirect observation, create a data form so you will be able to capture information in a consistent, systematic way. When forming content for interviews, be sure to ask questions that address the stated goals. Include inquiries on visitor’s expectations and if the program met those expectations. Additionally, see if visitors interviewed are able to identify the significance of the resource.

## Focus Groups

To convene a focus group, bring together eight or twelve people who have similar backgrounds and interests. For example, maybe they are elementary school teachers, senior citizens, or African-American moms. Start a conversation with them that will help you see the resource from their point of view. This will help you understand what they like about it, what they would like to see improved, etc.

The conversations should be recorded so that you may reference it again at a later date. You may also want to write down their most important observations on a flip chart and keep the major

## ONE WAY TO THINK ABOUT PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS IS TO CONSIDER OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES, AND IMPACTS.

**Outputs:** What you/your organizations do. Examples include maps, workshops, curriculum materials, and other media.

**Outcomes:** What a visitor will do as a result of their experience. Outcomes can involve changes in behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values or conditions after participating in a learning activity or experience

**Impacts:** How will the site, community, or resource benefit from successful outcomes? Impacts often embody lasting changes such as improved environmental conditions, community economic development, or changes in the way people think and live.

talking points posted for the duration of the meeting. It is important to pay attention to non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, and the way people express themselves. It is important to ask probing questions, and keep following up to get as much information as possible. However, be careful that you do not do most of the talking—let the focus group participants lead the conversation under your guidance.

## Questionnaires

Create a simple questionnaire that visitors can fill out. This could be a paper questionnaire that visitors complete after they have experienced your program. Or it could be an online questionnaire, which visitors would fill out on their smart phone or computer. Survey websites like [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) are inexpensive, and offer an easy format for you to collect the data.

No matter if the questionnaire is on paper or on the web; give careful thought to the questions asked. Some things to keep in mind:

- Use simple language. Avoid technical terms or words that might not be familiar to the general population.
- Make each question as specific as possible to avoid confusion.
- When drafting each question, imagine how it could be misinterpreted. Look for anything that could be ambiguous.
- Use one question per idea. Use a separate question for each thing you want to know.
- Start with the “easiest” questions (like visitor’s interests and experiences), and move up to more challenging ones (like what they learned or understood about the content of the program).
- Do not make it too long—unless you plan to offer a prize for completing the questionnaire.
- Run the draft questionnaire by others. They will see potential pitfalls and confusing points much more easily than you will.
- Try it out on a few people before committing to the final version. Make sure people can interpret and understand what information you are seeking.
- Make sure the questions aren’t leading.

Each of these evaluation strategies will give insight into what visitors need and expect.

Evaluation strategies are only useful if the information collected is quickly processed and put to use. No matter which strategy you select, it is important to create an evaluation plan that allows you to regularly take an honest look at your programs’ effectiveness.



## CONCLUSION

**Congratulations!** You made it to the end of the five steps. Part I introduced the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area, the purpose of the Heritage Area Interpretive Plan, and the existing conditions of heritage tourism in central Illinois. Part II helped identify stories, significance, how to effectively tell those stories, and finally how to evaluate programing. Part III will help identify marketing strategies, how to develop local marketing campaigns, and show how your story fits within Heritage Area marketing campaigns and interpretive initiatives.

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# PART THREE

## MARKETING TOOLS & SUPPORT

The whole world is competing to get visitors to their community or special event. And, while you may have the best destination or event around, you will not attract visitors if they do not know about you. That is where basic marketing can make the difference in getting visitors to choose your community or event as a heritage destination. Effective marketing happens when the right strategies and partners come together to reach the right audience(s).

Looking for Lincoln offers many ways to help their partners get the word out to potential visitors, and encourage those visitors to explore the entire Heritage Area, including:

### PRINT MATERIALS

**Visitors Guide** Looking for Lincoln publishes a Visitors Guide that is distributed throughout the state, and at most major entrances to the Heritage Area. This guide gives a full overview of the Heritage Area, along with maps, directions, and information from all our partner communities.

**Print Ads** When appropriate, Looking for Lincoln purchases print ads in publications that help promote the Heritage Area, and encourage cross-promotion through partner organizations in Illinois.

**Banners and Promo Materials** Looking for Lincoln has materials available to partners, including Visitor Guides, stand-up banners, handouts, and free-standing Flat Lincolns.

### WEB

**Website** One of the most valuable marketing materials in our arsenal is [www.lookingforlincoln.org](http://www.lookingforlincoln.org). This comprehensive website includes all historic site information, community links, maps, calendars of events, news, downloads, and so much more.

**Shared Resources** Looking for Lincoln has numerous online resources for partners, including videos, photos, logos, and more to help in promotional needs..

### SOCIAL MEDIA

**Facebook** Looking for Lincoln has an active and vibrant online community, that shares announcements, history (“This Day in Lincoln History”), live video events, recorded events, shared promotions, and so much more.

**Instagram** A cousin to Facebook, the Looking for Lincoln Instagram account focuses on the photo campaigns created for the organization and partners.

To take advantage of these opportunities, it is important for Looking for Lincoln partners to actively engage with the opportunities of the Heritage Area. This includes sending event announcements, taking advantage of trainings, and participating in area-wide promotions.



## CAMPAIGNS

**Flat Lincoln** Since his inception in 2019, Flat Lincoln has been very popular with children and adults alike! Visitors can obtain a small Flat Lincoln character, and take him along as they explore the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. Full size versions are also available to all partners.

**Flat Lincoln Road Trip** This social media campaign highlights a community or area, where Flat Lincoln and his dog Fido take day trips exploring sites, museums and unique attractions.

**This Day in Lincoln History** This online series of posts is extremely popular, highlighting a significant moment in Lincoln's life on that day.

**Seasonal Promotions** Throughout the year, the Heritage Area will offer seasonal promotions, or goal-oriented promotions. This includes spring break, summer travel, Route 66, and more.

**Partner Collaborations** Looking for Lincoln partners with complimentary organizations to help promote the Heritage Area. This includes organizations like Illinois Route 66, Roadside Pollinator Project, other Heritage Areas, and more.

## VIDEO SERIES

**Filled to the Brim** An online video series highlighting a site or story in the Heritage Area;

**Looking for Lincoln Stories** An online video and podcast series of an historic event or topic;

**Looking for Lincoln Conversations** Online events exploring an historic topic, encouraging viewers to participate through social media.

## EVENTS

Looking for Lincoln creates their own events, and promotes partner events throughout the state to help promote the Heritage Area. Each summer, Looking for Lincoln has a substantial presence at the Illinois State Fair, and is happy to promote partner events through all channels.

## PARTNER AFFILIATIONS

Looking for Lincoln collaborates with other tourism organizations to raise the presence of the Heritage Area throughout the state and country.

## TRAINING SESSIONS

Throughout the year, online and in-person marketing seminars are offered on various topics, including marketing on low budgets, online marketing, marketing best-practices, and more. Many sessions are recorded for later viewing.

## EFFECTIVE MARKETING REQUIRES PLANNING

To make the most effective use of all available marketing resources (funding, free promotions, partnerships, marketing volunteers) – you **MUST** have a plan. It does not have to be extensive or complicated. Follow the step-by-step guide to developing a marketing plan.

### Step I – Benefits

A traveler can go anywhere, do anything. Why should they come to your community/event/attraction? What makes your community/event/attraction unique? What will they experience that they would not experience somewhere else? What are the unique benefits outside of the Lincoln experience that will make this a travel destination they should choose? *Make a list as well thought out and complete as you can.*

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### Step II – Target Audience

Who is your perfect visitor? Is it a Lincoln scholar? Is it a family with school age children? Is it a motor coach group of seniors? Is it couples on a weekend getaway? It may be a combination of many different audiences. *Identify your target audience groups below.*

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Now that you have identified the different target groups, list where these groups might be found. Facebook groups, online blogs, magazines, news programs, schools, web sites, local/area television shows, etc. This will help to determine the best places to promote the community/attraction/event. *Identify where you can reach your target audience below.*

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### Step III – Speaking to Your Audience

Create offers to reach your audience. It may be as simple as visiting your web site to find all the information needed for attending the event. Or, it could be an overnight hotel package that includes tickets to the event. Or, maybe it is a contest with a travel package giveaway that allows you to capture names and e-mails for further dialogue to encourage the consumer to visit you. The possibilities are limitless. Use the space below to create offers to reach your audience. Be realistic about what you can offer your target audience.

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### Step IV – Fulfill Consumer Responses

Once the prospective traveler responds to a promotion, you must be ready to provide them with the important information. If you are directing them to a web site, make sure they can get all of the information they need to plan their visit. If you are promising them a brochure, make sure you have a way to deliver it, whether it is a downloadable version or a printed version to mail them. (Remember – e-mail is cheap and fast.) All the best promotion in the world will fall flat if the visitor receives no response or cannot get the information promised. Think this through and know exactly how you will respond and who will be responsible for making sure it happens. *Use the space below to identify what the prospective visitor will receive if they respond to your promotion.*

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### Step V – Determine Your Action Steps

Based on the available resources, the audience(s) you have determined to reach, and where you intend to promote— you can now create a plan for what steps will be taken, when, and who will execute the steps. *Write your action steps below.*

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Worksheet continued on next page...

# BASIC MARKETING PLAN TEMPLATE

Using the information gathered in steps one to five, create a marketing plan below.

**Program Name:** Name of program or event to be marketed

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**Benefit Message:** Identify the benefit(s) to the potential traveler

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**Target Audience(s):** Identify your target audience below

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**Planned Promotions:** Identify your planned promotions for your program or event. Examples include: advertising, web site(s), travel partner web sites, social media, e-marketing or news media.

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**Action Steps:** Identify the action steps below. Remember to list specific tasks, who will complete the tasks, and when the task should be completed.

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# APPENDIX

## CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAUS IN THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

### **Bloomington-Normal Area CVB**

101 S. Madison Street,  
Bloomington IL 61701  
(309) 665-0033 \ (800) 433-8226  
visitbn.org

### **Charleston Tourism Office**

520 Jackson Ave.  
Charleston, IL 61920  
(217) 348-04230  
charlestontourism.org

### **Danville Area Convention & Visitor Bureau**

100 W Main St #146  
Danville, IL 61832  
(217) 442-2096  
visitdanvillearea.com

### **Decatur Area Convention & Visitor Bureau**

202 East North Street  
Decatur, IL 62523  
(217) 423-7000  
decaturcvb.com

### **Destination Logan County**

101 N Chicago St.  
Lincoln, Illinois 62656  
(217) 732-8687  
destinationlogancountyil.com

### **Galesburg Area Convention & Visitors Bureau**

2163 E Main Street  
Galesburg, IL 61401  
(309) 343-2485  
experiencegalesburg.com

### **Greater Freeport Partnership Visitor Center**

4596 US Hwy 20  
Freeport, IL 61032  
(815) 233-1350  
greaterfreeport.com

### **Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau**

200 Piasa St.  
Alton, IL 62002  
(618) 465-6676  
riversandroutess.com

### **Heritage Corridor CVB Visitors Center**

801 E. US. Highway 6  
Utica, IL 61373  
(815) 667-4356  
heritagecorridorcvb.com

### **Illinois South Tourism**

4387 N Illinois St #200,  
Swansea, IL 62226  
(618) 257-1488  
illinoisouth.org

### **Jacksonville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau**

310 East State Street  
Jacksonville, IL 62650  
(217) 243-5678  
jacksonvilleil.org

### **Lake Shelbyville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau**

315 East Main  
Shelbyville, IL 62565  
(217) 774-2244  
lakeshelbyville.com

### **Macomb Area Convention & Visitor Bureau**

c/o Train Depot  
120 East Calhoun St.  
Macomb, IL 61455  
(309) 833-1315  
visitforgottonia.com

### **Ottawa Visitors Center**

1028 La Salle St.  
Ottawa, IL 61350  
(815) 434-2737  
pickusottawail.com



**Peoria Area Convention & Visitors Bureau**

456 Fulton Street, Suite 300  
Peoria, IL 61602  
(309) 676-0303  
peoria.org

**Visit Champaign County**

17 East Taylor Street  
Champaign, IL 61820  
(217) 351-4133  
visitchampaigncounty.org

**Quincy Area Convention & Visitors Bureau**

532 Gardner Expressway  
Quincy, IL 62301  
(217) 214-3700  
seequincy.com

**Visit Pontiac Illinois**

115 West Howard Street  
Pontiac, IL 61764  
(815) 844-5847  
visitpontiac.org

**Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau**

P.O. Box 378  
Anna, IL 62906  
(618) 833-9928  
southernmostillinois.com

**Visit Springfield**

Springfield Visitor Center  
1 S. Old State Capitol Plaza  
Springfield, IL 62701  
(217) 789-2360  
visitspringfieldillinois.com





For more information visit [www.lookingforlincoln.org](http://www.lookingforlincoln.org)

P.O. Box 5398, Springfield, IL 62705  
(217) 492-8366