

Meeting of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission January 26, 2021 Associate Director's Report

NCAAHC Digital Engagement

Communication Goals

- Promote and increase awareness of NCAAHC and its work throughout the state
- To build a network of connectivity between artists, scholars, community members, heritage practitioners and families to create a collaborative spirit and shared values.
- To grow African American cultural work in NC
- Audiences include the general public, individuals/local heritage practitioners, artists & creatives, state-wide partners, regional partners, national partners/institutions, and the media. Our audiences are varied and broad, with different needs. It will take time for us to be strategic and continue to build while keeping each in mind.

Current Communication Channels

- Website - The AAHC website remains a popular tool for constituents. For example: in October 2020 alone, the website saw 5,127 page views, of which 4,053 were unique. In that same month, the most highly visited web pages were "Upcoming Events" (586 visits), "The Green Book Project" (572 visits), and the homepage (448 visits). Most web users are in Raleigh, followed by Charlotte, then Durham. 27.8% of users fall within the 25-34 age range, followed by 20.9% in the 45-54 range, and 20.0% in the 55-64 range. Most users are being directed to the site from Google, followed by the NC Department of Natural & Cultural Resources page, then Facebook.
- Social media –
 - *Facebook* - As of December 2020, the Facebook page garnered 103 likes with an average of 84 views; 1,500 constituents were reached by posts, and 170 constituents were engaged by posts within a 28-day period.
 - *YouTube* – This page primarily exists as a platform to allow the embedding of videos on our website. Though the page currently has 11 followers, the 11 videos posted have received 434 individual video views since its creation in November 2020.
 - *Twitter* – This page was created specifically in alignment with the NC Green Book Project. It currently has 48 followers.
 - *Email via Mail Chimp* – bi-weekly newsletter + practitioner newsletter (promotes upcoming events, news, resources, and features member/staff/heritage/arts highlights)
 - The newsletter is shared with 1,728 subscribers. It has an average open rate of 17.9% and an average click rate of 4.6, and a 0% average unsubscribe rate—all above-average metrics for a digital communications piece.

- *Press releases* – traditional news media (including the black press – created a black press list including traditional publications, online, bloggers, influencers, etc.), local, national, museum/industry)

Awareness-Building Strategies

1. Identifying content/information to promote to external audiences
2. Creating an Editorial Calendar
 - Developing an editorial calendar – currently in progress. Includes recurring (“evergreen”) and one-time events, press releases, website, and event information
3. Updating our website – *in progress*
 - By June 2021, finish overhauling and updating content – ensuring it is engaging, inviting, and streamlined for users to navigate
 - Created an updated technical assistance request form
 - Updating our existing list/map identifying partners/institutions across NC
 - By July 2021, creating a digital space for artists and creatives to connect with resources and opportunities
 - Ensuring all other components are updated with current information
4. Creation and implementation of a comprehensive social media strategy
 - The strategy serves as a statement of intent, outlining our goals and objectives for using social media and our desired outcomes.
 - Strategy & goals:
 - Uplift and promote African American art, history, and culture from North Carolina by:
 - Featuring weekly posts related to NC African American art, history or culture
 - Sharing African American heritage news relevant to NC
 - Sharing profiles/features of African American cultural leaders and/or moving stories/images/quotes related to African American heritage
 - Engage virtually with AAHC constituents by:
 - Optimizing messaging functions on social media platforms
 - Engaging in community groups geared toward heritage practitioners (ie. AAAM, SEMC, NCMC, and EMP focused groups)
 - Executing at least four promotional campaigns through the end of the fiscal year (so far we have featured Green Books, CARES, My NC programming, NC Civil Rights Trail, and more)
 - Sharing audio/video clips from the Green Book project
 - Share resources and information related to African American heritage preservation by:
 - Promoting AAHC events, events across NC related to African American art, history, and culture
 - Sharing educator resources from our programs/initiatives

- Sharing professional development opportunities related to African American heritage preservation
- Clarify and promote the work of AAHC
 - Created a list of institutions, practitioners, and influencers to like and follow
 - An “About Us” campaign during the first two months of platforms, featuring at least one post per week
- Identify advantages of each platform and plan accordingly
 - Facebook
 - Marketing programs and partnerships
 - Identifying communities that we want to focus on and create related groups (i.e.. Arts/creatives, FBTP, etc.)
 - Historical/cultural profiles and stories
 - Instagram
 - Use to spotlight other agencies and organizations, begin “Insta-takeovers”
 - Most useful platform to reshare content – the algorithm supports this

NC Civil Rights Trail

Overview – What is it?

The NC African American Heritage Commission continues to think expansively about the potential for African American heritage trails to shape North Carolina’s tourism infrastructure, and to boost local economies.

We worked with the Pomeroy Foundation for 6-8 months before securing funding, were invited to submit a grant proposal, and our proposal was accepted. In fact, our proposal was considered robust and did not go through the traditional process of review. Ultimately, we secured \$65,614 in private funding from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation to create and launch Phase I of the NC Civil Rights Trail in partnership with Visit NC. Phase I of the trail program (2020-2023) will include a digital map of North Carolina civil rights sites; up to 50 physical markers for community-based civil rights sites, with an eye towards Hometown Strong counties; and driving tours and travel itineraries.

- 10 markers in Hometown Strong counties (Anson, Burke, Caswell, Edgecombe, Graham, Halifax, Lenoir, Madison, Pasquotank, Robeson, Swain)
- Types of sites marked: protest, rally and sit-in sites; birthplace, childhood homes and primary residences of civil rights icons; churches and spaces where people organized; spaces and places where civil rights icons visited, stayed and spoke; education institutions; legal/courthouses

Funding

- Covers the fabrication and shipping of 50 markers.

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Applicant Criteria

- Non-profit groups with a 501(c)3 designation, academic institutions and government entities will be eligible to receive a marker.
- Applicants/sites that have secured a State Historical Highway Marker are ineligible.

Application cycles:

Round	Cycle Period	Notification
Round I	August 2020 - January 2021	February 2021
Round II	March - October 2021	November 2021
Round III	February - August 2022	September 2022

Contractor

To assist in the facilitation of this program, the Commission hired contractor Markecia Koulessor as Civil Rights Trail Program Coordinator. Her responsibilities include marketing the program, providing technical assistance to constituents, facilitating the application process, and engaging our advisory committee. Her current contract ends in June 2021. Ideally, we will secure additional funding to renew her contract or bring her on as an employee to manage our various trail programs.

Advisory Committee

Similar to our establishment of the Africa to Carolina Advisory Committee, we felt it important to assemble an experience group of committee members in order to review marker applications. We sought Civil Rights content experts from across the state with diverse backgrounds and representation from HBCUs, public, and private universities as well as those who work in the public history realm. These committee members include:

- Nancy Fields, Museum of the Southeast American Indian, UNC Pembroke
- John Gartrell, John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African American History & Culture, Duke University
- Dr. Willie Griffin, Levine Museum of the New South
- Dr. Blair Kelly, NC State University
- Dr. Leslie McKesson, NC African American Heritage Commission
- Dr. Da'Tarvia Parrish, Livingstone College
- Dr. Keri Petersen, Johnson C. Smith University
- Dr. Melissa Stuckey, Elizabeth City State University
- Dr. William Sturkey, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

- Ansley Wegner, NC Highway Historical Marker Program

On January 19, 2021 we hosted our first meeting with the committee to review the first cycle of applications. We were excited by their enthusiasm. The brought great knowledge and attention to detail for the process. It served as a great dry run to plan for future meetings.

Engaging the public

The trail was initially conceived prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our hopes in establishing it included traveling across the state to engage with various communities. However, our realities made this a challenge. Instead, we engaged virtually through a series of webinars. With the assistance of our contractor, we hosted a three-part series throughout November inviting potential applications to learn about the program, application, and placement processes. This allowed for us to continue communications with applicants and provide them with the resources they needed to have successful applications. Sessions were recorded and made available on our website and YouTube.

- We primarily assisted applicants through email in addition to a few phone calls. Questions focused primarily on the legality of marker placement and the application requirement of partnering with a 501(c)3, academic institution, or a government entity.
- Because the deadline fell within the holiday season, we received feedback from applications that that they simply ran out of time though they remained interested in applying for future rounds.

Hopes for Growth

We hope to receive a more robust set of applications for the future. We are currently assembling a strategy for the upcoming application cycle. This will include leaning on our existing networks to help to spread the word. This will include our Commissioners, Department, and networks of heritage practitioners.

We will also create additional education opportunities for our applicants, tailoring to their needs and challenges. Due to the continuation of the pandemic, this will likely continue to be virtual, but we are hopeful to lean towards a more “workshop” format and allow additional opportunities for individual check-ins.

Commissioner Engagement Plan & Resources

This plan serves to offer strategies, resources, and focus areas to move NC African American Heritage Commissioners toward stronger alignment with the mission of the NC African American Heritage Commission.

- Process to develop the plan – series of meetings and questionnaires conducted by Kyma

Goals – set to align with the Strategic Implementation Plan

1. Providing regular communication to Commissioners
2. Connecting Commissioners to various constituent engagement opportunities

- Representing the AAHC at events meetings, speaking engagements, etc. in their respective regions
 - Relevant grassroots heritage work
 - AAHC programs and initiatives
3. Empowering Commissioners to advocate on behalf of the AAHC
 - Offering professional development opportunities to Commissioners
 4. What to expect – based off of YOUR feedback
 - Geography-based constituent engagement
 - Technical assistance opportunities
 - Advocacy opportunities
 - Greater connection to AAHC programs and initiatives
 - New Resources
 - After Action Report
 - Professional Development Form

Initiatives, Programming & Professional Development (see chart in presentation)

Why are some folks listed as leads?

- Have particular areas of interest, history, and experience with particular projects

Constituent Engagement, Technical Assistance, & AAHC Support (see chart in presentation)

Opportunities are not just limited to these areas, opportunities will present themselves to continue to work on behalf of the Commission.

Advocacy (see chart in presentation)

These are a listing of more formalized advocacy opportunities, but this is not all inclusive – advocacy can mean more as your presence in your communities as a Commissioner.

Resources

- Kyma to present on Commissioner Communique, After Action Report and Professional Development Report – Call out why they exist, their use as tools, and to find professional development opportunities for their continued growth.
 - Commissioner Communique –
 - What are their thoughts on the schedule? And feedback? Any changes recommended to make it a stronger resource?
 - A way to feature the work of commissioners
 - Regarding Professional Development, we are setting the expectation that they submit opportunities that they would like to participate in by our July commissioner meeting.

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Immediate Next Steps

1. Each AAHC Commissioner connects to and establishes relationships with 2-3 African American heritage sites, museums, cultural institutions, etc. in their region by June 30, 2021. Each commissioner will be asked to present an update on their activities during July Commissioner meeting.
2. Please submit headshots and biography (no more than 250 words) for website to Adrienne Nirdé by March 31, 2021.
3. After Action Report – Please submit to Kyma Lassiter within two weeks of having attended an event.
4. Professional Development Form –Please submit to Kyma Lassiter no later than July 1, 2021

Africa to Carolina

IMLS Award for MH-245684-OMS-20, “Africa to Carolina: Next Steps in the Journey”. The AAHC received \$90,955 to complete work from 7/1/2020 - 12/31/2022 to implement the next phase of the organization’s Africa to Carolina initiative.

Project Launch: September 2020

Staffing

The grant award provides \$40,000 for a graduate student fellow to lead the bulk of the project work from December 2020-December 2022. The fellow will develop the exhibit and organize content for the web contractor. The grant award provides \$10,000 for a contractor to develop the project website.

Advisory Board

The already established Africa to Carolina Advisory Board will advise on specific pieces of the project, including reviewing exhibit text, the final exhibit, and the project website and promoting the fellowship.

Deliverables:

- Develop one introductory exhibit centering on the relationship between the Transatlantic Slave Trade and North Carolina. The exhibit will consist of 5-6 panels, and cover:
 - Details about the Africa to Carolina Project
 - The Slave Trade in the Colony of North Carolina
 - Details regarding what we know about the Slave Trade at North Carolina disembarkation points
 - Lives and legacies of enslaved African Americans in North Carolina
- One version of the exhibit will be installed at each of the following North Carolina Historic Sites or state institutions: Historic Bath
 - Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson
 - Edenton
 - Somerset Place
 - Tryon Palace

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- Roanoke Island Festival Park
- North Carolina Maritime Museum at Beaufort
- One exhibit feedback tool
- A website to help constituents connect to information that we have. Website will include:
 - Current inventory related to disembarkation in North Carolina
 - One digital guide to existing resources around the Transatlantic Slave Trade for students
 - This website is designed to showcase information and resources that we know and have currently, with the intention of building upon it after the conclusion of the project in alignment with the larger goals of the Africa to Carolina initiative.
- One stakeholder convening at conclusion of project to strategize around next steps for commemorating and physically marking North Carolina disembarkation sites