

2026 Grant Guidance

ABOUT THE GRANTS

- **2026 Information for Grants.**

Grants will be awarded competitively and will range between \$1000 and \$100,000. Funds can be used for preservation and restoration of buildings associated with the Underground Railroad (UGRR), for interpretation, and for additional historical research related to previous Network to Freedom listings. Grant applications will also be considered for projects that seek to designate new Network to Freedom historic sites.

- **Special Emphasis Areas** – This grant round there are no special emphasis areas and no bonus points will be awarded.

- **Important Dates**

- April 27, 2026 - Application Period Opens
- June 30, 2026, 11:59 PM EST – Application period closes.
- July and August 2026 – Program Review of Grant Applications
- September 2026 - Grants awarded and agreements finalized.
- January 31, 2028– Mandatory Grant Project Completion Date.

- **Who Can Submit Grant Proposals**

Sites, programs, and facilities previously listed on the Network to Freedom may propose projects for these grants. Grants may be awarded to Private and non-profit organizations, as well as state, tribal, and local governments. Federal agencies cannot receive these grants, but partner organizations can receive a grant for federally owned property with the written consent of the managing agency. A letter of consent from the property owner must be included for all grants.

Grants will also be awarded to research and write applications to list new sites in the Network to Freedom. A letter of consent for including the property in the Network to Freedom must accompany the grant proposal.

Please note that eligible proposals from religious properties listed in the Network to Freedom are restricted to research projects, preservation projects or NTF signs only. These projects must have a specific connection to Underground Railroad history, rather than religious history.

Proposals submitted under this program are requests for consideration for a grant, and not a promise for funding. No work covered in this proposal is to begin until the applicant has been notified in writing that funds have been awarded and has accepted in writing the terms and conditions of the grant. The owner of the site, program or facility applying must provide written consent. The target date for announcing awards is September 2026, but please allow some flexibility.

Projects **MUST** be completed by January 31, 2028.

Grants will be administered in accordance with all applicable Federal and state laws, regulations, policies, requirements and guidelines, including OMB Circular A-102 and A-110 (as applicable), Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, non-discrimination on the basis of handicap (Sec. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), and equal employment opportunity and labor law requirements of Federal grants.

- **What is Funded**

Congress authorized the creation of the NTF within the National Park Service to research, interpret, and preserve sites and resources associated with the Underground Railroad. As part of the national network program, the NPS supports projects that achieve the goals of preservation, interpretation, and education of Underground Railroad history. Specifically, the projects should support or enhance the Underground Railroad associations for which site, program, or facility was listed in the NTF. Examples of grant projects that support these objectives and are eligible for consideration include but are not necessarily limited to:

- Markers or signs identifying the site as being in the NTF
- Interpretive markers, brochures, exhibits, websites, videos;
- Historical research in support of interpretation or publications;
- Oral history and documenting oral traditions;
- Educational curricula, lesson plans, and teacher workshops;
- Cultural Resource surveys, including archeological survey;
- Preservation and restoration of historic buildings, structures, landscapes;
- Projects to enhance physical accessibility of sites and programs (including installation of ramps or lifts)
- National Register of Historic Places or National Historic Landmark documentation and nominations;
- Workshops and public educational programs;
- Technical assistance in associated site and/or landscape identification; and
- Preservation and stabilization of cultural artifacts, collections, and documents;
- Research and writing for applications to list new sites in the Network to Freedom.

- **What is NOT Funded**

The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program does NOT fund:

- Projects already started or currently underway;
- Purchase (in fee simple or interest) of historic sites, buildings, structures, objects, or cultural artifacts;
- Operational funds or administrative salaries;
- Equipment purchase;
- New construction (in contrast to repair of existing features), with the limited exception of new construction required to create access for the disabled to historic resources;
- Religious properties listed in the Network to Freedom are restricted to preservation projects or NTF signs only. These projects must have a specific connection to Underground Railroad history, rather than religious history;

- Projects designed to raise funds
 - Projects that do not have a direct connection to the Underground Railroad values described in the Network to Freedom application. For example, a project to preserve a building in which an exhibit is housed, if the building is not connected to the Underground Railroad history;
 - Food or refreshments of any sort;
 - Recurring annual programs, events, or workshops (beyond the first).
- **Requirements for Funded Projects**
 1. Grant-assisted preservation work must acknowledge NPS grant assistance throughout the duration of the project. Include the cost of installing a Project Sign in the requested project budget because one must be erected at the site.
 2. For non-construction projects, NPS grant assistance must be acknowledged on any products resulting from the grant. Text for this acknowledgement will be in the grant agreement.
 3. All grant project work requires monitoring and approval by NTF staff. For interpretive products, markers, websites, etc. NTF staff must approve content and design in the draft stages. Invoices for payment must be approved by NTF staff before submission to ASALH for payment.
 4. Grant recipients must ensure that projects are carried out in a timely and professional manner. Grant funds not expended will expire and be “re-captured” by the federal government.
 - **Requirements for Funded Preservation / Restoration Projects**
 1. Depending upon the nature of the project, National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Compliance may be required to avoid adverse effects on historic properties. Your regional manager will help you through this process.
 2. Preservation/restoration projects funded under this program constitute “undertakings” as defined by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 USC 470). Accordingly, for properties listed in, or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, grant recipients must work with your regional manager to complete the consultation process with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation prior to the undertaking the project. The consultation process aims to ensure that proposed work will not cause any adverse effect to the historic features of any National Register listed or eligible property.
 3. Preservation and Restoration of Historic Properties must be consistent with the Secretary of Interiors Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties. These Standards can be found online at <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards.htm> or by contacting the NPS Network to Freedom regional program manager.
 - **Funding Levels and Match**

The maximum grant award for fiscal year 2026 is \$100,000 for the Federal share. The minimum grant award will be \$1000. Cost-share matching with non-federal funds is encouraged and documentation of those matches should be included in your grant application. Matching funds are NOT required for NTF grants.

- **Selection Process**

A committee of reviewers, including NPS Network to Freedom regional program managers, other NPS staff, and reviewers selected by ASALH will rank applications to make funding recommendations. Proposals are rated on a 100-point scale. The weight for each section of the application is indicated below. Each reviewer will rank the projects independently. All scores will be totaled in aggregate and ranked accordingly.

- **Acknowledgement of NPS Funding**

For Construction Projects- a project sign must be erected at the site of the grant-assisted repair work during the duration of the project to acknowledge NPS grant assistance. For non-construction projects- NPS grant assistance must be acknowledged on any products resulting from the grant. Language for the acknowledgement will be in the final signed grant agreement.

- **Proposal Submission**

Proposals must be submitted electronically through the internet portal at www.asalh.org/. If you are unable to submit the application electronically, please contact network_to_freedom@nps.gov or call **(856) 873-0270**. **To avoid glitches with internet or portal connectivity, submit proposals ahead of the deadline** if you can. Incomplete application and applications received after the deadline of June 30, 2026 at 11:59 pm EDT will not be considered. Additional materials sent separately from a proposal will not be considered part of the proposal and will not be included in the evaluation.

- **Checklist for Complete Proposal**

- One electronic application, submitted through the portal;
- An Owner Concurrence Form signed and dated by the owner of record;
- A signed and dated Applicant Certification Form;
- For preservation projects, minimum of four (4) digital photographs which illustrate the property in general with details of the area proposed for preservation.
- For proposals to develop applications to list new sites on the Network to Freedom, include the resume of the proposed author of the application, as well as references to source material which verify a site's connection to Underground Railroad History. .
- Detailed budget;

- **Tips for Successful Applications**

In order to ensure that your proposal receives the best consideration possible, here are some suggestions from our office that you may find useful in preparing your application.

- Proofread your application.
- The project must be related to the reason why the site, program or facility is listed in the Network to Freedom. For example, if the listing is for an interpretive program, the grant project must be related to enhancing the interpretive program.
- Help the reviewers understand why the project is important or what the need is. Remember that application reviewers may not be familiar with your proposed project, so you will need describe the historic resource and your project so that they can understand why it is important.

- Clearly state what it is you want to accomplish with grant funding – a reviewer should be able to read your application and know what you are proposing.
- There must be a connection between the proposed budget and the project; every budget item should be discussed in the narrative section(s) of the application so that reviewers can understand why items are necessary.
- Make sure the grant amount requested on the first page of the application matches the grant amount indicated in the budget section.
- Check your math in the budget section to make sure that all the budget detail amounts add up to the budget summary.
- Include an itemized budget covering all of the expected costs related to the project.
- The budget justification should include all cost elements of the proposed budget and how the figures were derived.
- Be realistic with a proposal's timeline. Not all projects can be completed within the project's 15-month grant period.
- Submit ahead your proposal before the deadline if you can, to avoid internet submission issues that would have your application miss the deadline
- Proposals for projects without owner consent will not be considered. If the owner is the grant applicant, a separate consent is not required.
- Use Section 8 to attach relevant supporting documents to your proposal, including photographs, consultant budget estimates, professional resumes, portfolio samples, and project planning documents, among other possibilities.