



Freedom's  
Way NATIONAL  
HERITAGE AREA

## Freedom's Way National Heritage Area 2026 Partnership Grant Program Guidelines

Designed to provide strategic investments in the natural, cultural, and historical resources that enhance the region's sense of place, the Partnership Grant Program serves as a catalyst for new, creative programs and projects within the 45 communities that comprise the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area.

Freedom's Way offers reimbursable, matching grants in support of the goals and objectives outlined in its [Management Plan](#). These include:

- inspire generations of lifelong learners through innovative educational and interpretive initiatives that connect stories – past and present – to residents and visitors,
- foster a culture of stewardship to preserve the Heritage Area's natural, historical, and cultural resources as a legacy for future generations,
- promote sustainable communities that reinforce the Heritage Area's character and sense of place,
- engage and collaborate with organizations, interests, and individuals to create a shared regional vision as a living link across landscapes, history, and time.

A total of \$75,000 has been allocated for the 2026 funding cycle. **Grants will be awarded on a rolling basis beginning October 1, 2025 through April 15, 2026.**

Projects are expected to be completed and final reports submitted **within eight (8) weeks following the anticipated project completion date** put forth in the grant proposal, or by September 1st, 2026—whichever comes first. Written requests for extensions due to extenuating circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Grantees will be acknowledged in Heritage Area collateral and on social media platforms.

### **Please note:**

Freedom's Way Partnership Grants are **REIMBURSABLE**, meaning grantees must first pay for expenditures themselves and then submit for reimbursement using the required documentation to be submitted with the final report **upon completion of the project**.

Freedom's Way Partnership Grants are, at a minimum, **2:1 MATCHING** grants, meaning grantees must submit documentation with the final report demonstrating they have contributed **at least twice** the amount of the grant award to the project. Matching funds

may be cash, in-kind goods and services (volunteer and/or professional), or any combination of the two.

## **Funding Priorities & Opportunities:**

The Partnership Grant Program prioritizes programs and projects that:

- Serve as a catalyst for interpretive sites within the region to develop new, creative projects and programs that showcase lesser-known stories and collections in their care,
- Facilitate meaningful interpretive experiences that engage new and diverse audiences and support an inclusive and comprehensive narrative of the region's history,
- Cultivate a shared stewardship agenda for the Heritage Area through initiatives and programs that interpret, enhance, and preserve the natural and cultural resources of the region for current and future generations,
- Support research, documentation and preliminary interpretation of stories that will lay the foundation for future programs and projects, and/or
- Enhance collective memory, memorialization, civic and social engagement and discourse.

In 2026, every effort will be made to provide funding for projects to organizations and communities through the Heritage Area that have not participated in the Partnership Grant Program in the past.

It is suggested that proposals align with one of the following categories. If you have a question about a proposal's eligibility, please reach out to us.

### **Storytelling**

\$1,000 - \$3,500

Projects that document, interpret and share the stories of the region with an emphasis on those who have been excluded from the historical narrative.

Inclusive Storytelling grants support research, documentation, and interpretation of these stories as well as the creation of interpretive products, such as waysides, web content, videos and exhibits, oral histories, podcasts, blogs, and the development of programs that share these stories with the community.

Examples include:

- Monument in Enslaved Persons Section of Arlington's Old Burying Ground: Arlington Historical Society
- Marker Honoring Harriet Wilson: Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire
- On Belonging in Outdoor Spaces: A speaker series on access, inclusion, and connection in nature: Farrington Nature Linc

## **Education, Interpretation & Curation**

\$1,000 - \$3,500

Projects that increase awareness and understanding of the region's heritage by engaging residents and visitors through experiences.

Education, Interpretation & Curation grants support projects such as walking tours, exhibitions, workshops, guidebooks, oral histories, and the development of online navigation, mobile apps, and other tools that help people interpret and share the history and stories of the Heritage Area. Classroom or community projects that promote students' understanding and appreciation of the Heritage Area's natural, historical, or cultural resources are encouraged.

Examples include:

- Mass Central Railroad Mileage Marker Plaque: Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust
- Youth Programming at 2024 Symposium: Nashua International Sculpture Symposium
- Rediscover Mapledale

## **Community Planning & Resource Conservation**

\$1,000 - \$3,500

Projects that plan for and/or promote historic preservation or natural resource and agricultural conservation to preserve or enhance the historical structures, landscapes, and cultural resources of the Heritage Area.

Community Planning grants support the undertaking of studies such as, but not limited to, resource inventories, historic structure reports and assessments, historical landscape reports and assessments, preservation plans, planning and feasibility studies, and visitor surveys and analysis.

Resource Conservation grants support projects that protect, enhance, or provide access to our shared natural, cultural, and historical resources. These projects include implementation of recommendations made in community planning studies and/or reports, such as those identified above, as well as the documentation and preservation of material culture in collections.

Examples include:

- The Creation of an Accessible Outdoor Space for Artistic and Educational Activities: Hudson Cultural Alliance
- Preservation of c. 1769 Rachel Dwight (Gould) Bed Hangings: Lexington Historical Society
- Historic Buildings Survey: Town of Pepperell Historical Commission

## **Historic Preservation**

\$1,000 - \$3,500

Projects that preserve, rehabilitate, or restore historically or culturally significant buildings or sites within the Heritage Area that are either listed on the National Register of Historic Places (individually or as part of a district) or eligible for and actively seeking listing.

Historic Preservation grants support the implementation of historic structure reports, preservation plans, feasibility studies, or other planning documents that encourage the rehabilitation, restoration, or preservation of a structure as well as preservation plans and feasibility for buildings or sites that are listed on, have been determined to be eligible for, or are in the process of seeking eligibility to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

All preservation projects should consult the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, available at <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards.htm>.

Examples include:

- Shirley Meetinghouse Accessibility Project: The Shirley Meeting House
- Town Hall Renovation Project: Town of Mason, NH
- Still River Baptist Church Restoration: Harvard Historical Society

## **Freedom's Way 250**

\$1,000 - \$3,500

As the region approaches the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, awards will be made to programs, projects and events that commemorate this milestone in the nation's history. These include projects that bridge art, history and culture to expand the narrative of what it meant and means to be an "American" and strengthen the region's civic spirit.

Examples include:

- programs and projects that explore the past, present and future history of region through public programming,
- workshops,
- seminars,
- videos,
- podcasts,
- performances,
- art installations, and
- community commemorations

## **Regional Cultural Events**

\$500 - \$1,000

Funding to support regional events of a cultural nature within the Heritage Area that share the stories of and relate to the interpretive themes significant to Freedom's Way. Events may include, but are not limited to, lectures, festivals, performances, art exhibits and reenactments that take place on an annual basis and have a demonstrated regional impact. It is a goal to develop lasting relationships with grantees in this category so that recurring annual support can be anticipated and obligated following successful completion of the prior year's event and final reporting requirements.

Examples include:

- Nashua International Sculpture Symposium
- Friends of Pine Hawk Fall Program Series
- Thoreau Society Annual Gathering

## **Eligibility:**

### **Eligible applicants include:**

- non-profit organizations with current 501(c)3 status

- municipalities and state agencies
- public academic institutions

### **Eligible applicants and projects must:**

- have the legal capacity and authority to incur obligations involved under the grant program or identify a fiscal sponsor that does,
- be located within the geographic boundaries of the 45 communities within the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area,
- be matched, at a minimum, two-to-one by non-federal sources,
- comply with all applicable federal regulations and guidelines (projects are funded with funds received from the National Park Service)
- agree to acknowledge support of the project from Freedom's Way National Heritage Area in all publicity, printed collateral, at events, and online,
- submit a final report and related documentation at the conclusion of the project.

### **The following are not eligible:**

- for-profit enterprises, religious organizations, and private individuals,
- organizational operating costs (including staff salaries or consultants functioning as staff) or to fund ongoing, annual programming,
- **established/annual/core projects and programs.** Expansion of an existing program to serve a new audience and/or explore new content may constitute a new activity and be eligible. Note: The Regional Cultural Events category is exempt from this requirement.
- purchase of an interest in real property,
- capital expenditures,
- religious ceremonies or events advancing or inhibiting a particular religious ideology, alcohol, fundraising, advocacy, or travel.

### **Documenting Matching Funds:**

Because the third-party match generated through our Partnership Grant Program is critical to helping us fulfill the matching requirements imposed by the National Park Service, we request that Grantees submit a complete budget reflecting revenue and expenses for the entire project with the Final Report. This allows us to demonstrate to NPS the extent to which the Heritage Area is able to leverage the allocated federal funding.

While we strongly encourage a minimum match of twice the amount of the grant award, we recognize that the Heritage Area serves a diverse community of partners with varied levels of capacity and resources. Reach out to us should you have concerns about your ability to secure a 2:1 match. .

Match can be in the form of cash funds and/or documented in-kind contributions of labor (staff and volunteers) and goods or services that are reasonable and necessary for project fulfillment. It is encouraged, but not required, to have matching cash funds in hand, or firmly committed to at the time of the application.

### **Matching Funds must:**

- be verifiable from your records,
- be necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient completion of the project,
- be applied to the project **AFTER** the date the agreement is signed by the grantee.

### **Matching Funds must not:**

- be included as direct contributions from any other federally assisted program,
- be paid by the federal government under another award,
- include operating costs of the organization or routine repair and facility costs.

Grantees are provided with forms to document matching funds throughout the project upon notification of award.

### **Timeline:**

**September 2025** – Freedom's Way 2026 Partnership Grant Program announced.

**October 1, 2025** – Online application submission form opens. Applications accepted and grants awarded on a rolling basis.

**April 15, 2026** – **Last day to submit applications for consideration in FY2026.**

**September 1, 2026** – **All** projects completed and final reports submitted.

**Fall 2026** – Grantees acknowledged in Freedom's Way social media and collateral, including the annual report.

### **Application Process:**

Prospective applicants are encouraged to contact Freedom's Way to discuss proposed projects prior to preparing and submitting an application.

Applications must be submitted online at: <https://freedomsway.org/grants>.

## Selection Process & Criteria:

Unlike traditional competitive grant programs, it is our intent to work with applicants to develop proposals that meet their needs, build organizational capacity and are transformative, while supporting the goals and objectives of the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area's Management Plan. Proposals will be reviewed on their own merit and the following criteria will be considered.

- **Connectivity to the Goals and Objectives of the National Heritage Area:** Does the program or project advance the mission of the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area?
- **Engaging New Audiences/Telling New Stories:** Is the program or project designed to reach audiences that have not traditionally been engaged in the work of the Heritage Area and share stories that have not been told?
- **Collaboration:** Does the program or project involve volunteers and/or other partners to achieve its deliverables and demonstrate community engagement?
- **Clarity:** Are the project's objectives clearly identified?
- **Readiness:** Can the goals and objectives of the project be realized within a reasonable timeframe? Is the applicant ready to proceed?

## Grant Terms

### Agreement:

Grantees are required to execute an agreement with the Freedom's Way Heritage Association indicating an understanding and acceptance of these guidelines and all applicable federal regulations prior to beginning work on the project.

FY2026 Partnership Grants should be completed by September 1, 2026. A singular project extension may be requested in extenuating circumstances. Requests must be made in writing and will be granted on a case-by-case basis.

### Acknowledgement:

Grantees agree to acknowledge support of the project from Freedom's Way National Heritage Area in all publicity, printed collateral, at events, and online. **Failure to do so may disqualify the grantee from future funding.** Freedom's Way logo files are provided to grantees upon notification of award.

An example of proper acknowledgement is: "This program/program is made possible in part through a Freedom's Way National Heritage Area Partnership Grant."

## **Final Report & Reimbursement:**

Grantees are required to submit a final report, as outlined in the guidelines issued to grantees when notified of the award, upon completion of the project as described in the application. **Freedom's Way will issue a single reimbursement check to the grantee upon receipt and approval of the final report and all required documentation,**

**For complete details, past project descriptions, and application materials, visit [freedomsway.org/grants](https://freedomsway.org/grants)**

**Email [grants@freedomsway.org](mailto:grants@freedomsway.org)  
with questions or to schedule a call.**

## **About Freedom's Way:**

The Freedom's Way National Heritage Area (Freedom's Way) was designated by Congress and the President on March 30, 2009, to preserve the special historic identity of 45 communities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire and to manage, preserve, protect, and interpret their cultural, historic, and natural resources for the educational and inspirational benefit of future generations.

As a partnership endeavor, Freedom's Way serves as facilitator, host, and guide for heritage area-wide presentations, activities, and initiatives that recognize and preserve the unique identity of the region. One of sixty-two National Heritage Areas in the United States, we tell a distinctly American story unique to Freedom's Way and inclusive of the multiple perspectives of those who live and work here.

Communication and collaboration are central to our mission. In 2022, we launched a new brand identity and fully interactive website that serves as an online museum of the Heritage Area. Designed to curate the region, the site includes an accessible and engaging interactive guide, an online archive, and a robust mapping feature. A dedicated mobile app allows users to create custom itineraries and a crowd-sourced community events calendar is integrated within a search function.

To learn more about Freedom's Way, including our programs and story-telling initiatives, visit: <http://www.freedomsway.org/>