



*Portsmouth NH  
African Burying Ground*

## **Considerations: Planning a Meaningful Community Memorial**

### **Design/Groundwork**

- Take as much time as necessary at the outset to engage community members and listen to them. Pay special attention to those closest to the concepts (e.g. descendent community) and physically close to the site (e.g., abutters)
- Assess your community's capacity for community engagement; seek advice and support from leaders of past community efforts
- Understand the objections of those who are likely to oppose the project
- Shape inclusive messages that touch heart and mind
- Engage a core local media partner to provide public education related to your messages
- Inspire artists from all domains to help communicate messages—writers, poets, photographers, dancers, musicians, theater artists, crafts persons
- Engage students in meaningful ways in creation

### **Fundraising for a public/municipal project**

- Recognize that fundraising for a public project may not follow the pattern of typical nonprofit fundraising, e.g., there likely is not a “quiet phase”
- Ensure that members of a core fundraising group are a diverse representation of the community
- Include in the core group a combination of “usual” participants and others who are new to fundraising and passionate about the mission
- Find ways for everyone to participate—no matter how small the contribution
- Match opportunities to learn about the mission with fundraising activities; plan fundraising activities that touch heart and mind
- Anchor the fundraising with a substantial municipal contribution
- Determine a “proof of concept” goal that will convince others that achieving the total fundraising goal is possible, e.g., 10 contributors who will pledge \$10,000 each toward a million-dollar goal. Publicize and celebrate those milestones.

## **African Burying Ground Memorial Park, City of Portsmouth, NH**

After the unexpected revealing of a more than 300-year old burying ground for African and African-descended people underneath a City street, the City of Portsmouth, NH closed and transformed the street into an evocative public gathering space to acknowledge its past and to return the site to sacred ground. With original works of outdoor public art at its core the site has become a focal point for telling a more complete story of Portsmouth's history and reflecting on the site's lessons for our current age. The site has stimulated national attention to Portsmouth as a site for African American tourism, calling attention to and uniting other important historic sites.

October 2003	Rediscovery of remains of 13 individuals during construction; burials exhumed and determined to be of African ancestry.
August 2004	City Council appoints committee to determine way to honor those buried.
Sept. 2004-May 2005	Meetings with abutters on conceptual design
April 2005	City Council approves site configuration, street closure
April 2007	City selects project landscape designer
April/May 2007	Public forums to solicit design ideas
June 2008	City completes national search for artist specializing in public art
October 2008	City Council approves design
November 2008	Additional archaeological work, requiring some redesign of site plans
January 2009	Fundraising committee initiated
Sept. 2010	City establishes Trust fund for African Burying Ground memorial
December 2010	City appropriates foundational funding—initial \$100,000
February 2012	First large fundraising-education-arts event (Soweto gospel choir)
April 2013	NH Legislature posthumously frees 14 slaves (234 years after petition)
October 2013	Fundraising reaches half way mark toward \$1.2 million
August 2014	Construction begins; consecration ceremony held onsite
January 2015	Fundraising goal exceeded
May 2015	Completion and opening weekend of African Burying Ground memorial