Who We Are

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center celebrates the legacy of perseverance, courage and multicultural cooperation embodied in the dramatic saga of the Underground Railroad in the years leading up to the American Civil War.

Of equal importance, the Freedom Center uses exhibits and programs to educate the public about the historic and continuing struggle to establish universal freedom in both the United States and around the world. Our Internet portal is www.freedomcenter.org.

Our Mission

“We reveal stories about freedom’s heroes, from the era of the Underground Railroad to contemporary times, challenging and inspiring everyone to take courageous steps for freedom today.”
Highlights

- Attendance since Grand Opening surpasses 750,000 visitors from all 50 states and more than 40 nations.

- 170,000 students come to the Freedom Center as part of tours from more than 700 local and regional school districts. In May 2008 alone, more than 14,000 students visited, including all 5th grade pupils from Columbus, Ohio’s public schools.

- Satisfaction is very high (98%) among those who have attended, according to independent research. Nine out of ten visitors are likely to recommend a visit to family and friends.

- In partnership with video distributor SAFARI Montage, the Freedom Center launches a digital media e-learning program targeting students and teachers nationwide in grades 7-12. A successful pilot of the project is underway in the 500,000-student Chicago Public Schools.

- The Skirball Foundation provides $1,500,000 over three years in support of the Freedom Center’s initiative on contemporary slavery and human trafficking. The changing exhibit space on the third floor becomes the Jack H. Skirball Gallery.

- The National Endowment for the Humanities awards the Freedom Center a first-time “We the People” Challenge Grant in the amount of $650,000 for the creation of an endowment to enhance our ongoing humanities-related education activities.

“For all of its historical focus, the (Freedom Center) is not living in the past. Exhibits seek to expand the definition of slavery and freedom by looking at contemporary issues such as racism and illiteracy. It makes for a poignant and inspiring experience.”

— Laura DeMarco, Cleveland.com
To Our Friends and Supporters

We are pleased to offer this report on the progress made by the National Underground railroad Freedom Center in its initial four years of operation.

The underlying theme of each of our museum exhibits is the unconquerable desire of people to live in freedom. We portray this quest through the dramatic narrative of the history of slavery in the United States, especially in the drama of the Underground railroad in antebellum America, in which enslaved men, women and children escaped the shackles of slavery. Our purpose is to motivate contemporary audiences to take up the cause of freedom and combat modern forms of slavery and “unfreedoms.”

As we have found, there is a genuine desire of individuals today to make a difference in the world around them. Guests tell us that their Freedom Center experience often ignites a strong sense of commitment to be a positive force for good.

We believe this reaction shows that the Freedom Center is the right museum and learning center for today’s audiences. We intend to continue tapping into this spirit of selflessness and inspiring people to action in creating a more humane, just and civil world.

Strategic Planning

The Freedom Center is a journey in progress. The first four years of operation presented many opportunities to strengthen the visitor experience and develop our position as an important institution in the local community, the region and the nation.

In early fall 2007, the Freedom Center began a strategic planning process involving senior-level staff and the Board of Directors, who met together to complete a three-year “roadmap” of management priorities with strategic objectives updated every six months. The initial six months plan, outlined here, presents goals and action steps that are specific, measurable and ambitious, befitting an organization that is transitioning from its initial start-up phase of development into a fully functioning (and increasingly successful) education and cultural center.
The Visit Experience
The Freedom Center features five permanent exhibitions, as well as the intensely moving Slave Pen, works of art like the incomparable Rag-A-Non, and our popular films such as the Oprah Winfrey-narrated “Brothers of the Borderland.”

The Jack H. Skirball Gallery gives us the ability to present temporary exhibitions. Our first exhibition in this space commemorated the sacrifices of fire fighters in the World Trade Center attack. To begin our fifth year, we are presenting: “Lincoln: The Constitution and the Civil War.”

Speakers & Special Guests
The Freedom Center is an ideal venue for presentations by authors, historians and motivational speakers.

For the 2008 Theodore M. Berry Lecture Series, we once again featured a Pulitzer Prize winning author, Dr. Doris Kearns Goodwin, who spoke to a sold out audience at Memorial Hall.

Two other speakers, Saidiya Hartman and Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., attracted huge crowds to the Freedom Center. Dr. Michael Dyson and Given Kachepa addressed historical and contemporary slavery, respectively, at a presentation in February that attracted more than 600 attendees.

Build and Maintain the Numbers and Diversity of The Audience

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES  •  By December 31, 2008:
● Visitors to the center, including event attendance, will surpass 161,000.
● At least 85% of students and teachers will say their student tours were a “positive or very positive” experience.

ACTIONS  •  By December 31, 2008
● Develop a featured speaker approach with corporate sponsorship to attract people who will come to NURFC wanting to hear or see national and international presenters.
● Develop a strategic approach to managing the experience of attendees from entry to exit. Implement a visitor data management system to analyze key current visitor attitudes and identify new audience opportunities.
● Develop and present to the Board a three-year plan of blockbuster programs and exhibits to attract large numbers of current and new audiences to the Center.
As part of the Lincoln exhibit, three noted scholars will present lectures later in 2008: Eric Foner, author of “Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction”; Lerone Bennett, Jr., author of “Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln’s White Dream”; and Roger Billings, author of “Lincoln, Debtor-Creditor Lawyer.”

Community Engagement

Since opening, the Freedom Center has served the community as a venue for dialogue and discussion of relevant issues. Each month, a Community Forum presents topics related to contemporary freedom struggles. A panel of facilitators encourages small group discussions of timely and relevant issues. In September, for example, three local media representatives discussed the impact of race in the 2008 Presidential election.

Dialogue also is disseminated worldwide via our weekly online Freedom Radio broadcasts hosted by Carl Westmoreland, as well as in presentations to local community organizations through our Speaker’s Bureau.

Our Community Engagement team also manages the innovative UBS Freedom Scholars program, which provides financial literacy training and leadership development to local high school students. The 10-month program receives funding from UBS Financial Services, and is supported by program partners SmartMoney.

Strategic Plan — continued

- Develop and begin implementation of a plan to communicate the mission and vision of the Freedom Center, beginning with the internal audience and extending to external audiences (e.g., business cards, online strategy, board education, email, Web).
- Develop and present to the Board for approval an overall Marketing and Communication Plan that is focused on cultural competency and diversity for the Freedom Center.
- Begin to change public perception to foster greater understanding and support for public funding.
Community Services, Cincinnati Youth Collaborative, University of Cincinnati’s Office of Community Engagement, and the Joy Outdoor Education Center. In its first year, 75 students received mentoring from more than 125 volunteer advisers from throughout the community.

Private Events

The Freedom Center also is proving to be an attractive venue for private events. Both the NAACP and the National Baptist Convention U.S.A. held their national conventions in Cincinnati in 2008 in part due to the availability of the Freedom Center for convention-related tours. Local corporations and organizations, including General Electric, Procter & Gamble, The Kroger Co., and Children’s Hospital, are frequent renters of Freedom Center space.

The Freedom Center’s choice location overlooking the Ohio River, and the beautiful views from our Grand Hall, are generating increased rentals from individuals who want unique special occasions. In 2007-2008, we hosted 16 wedding receptions and three nuptial ceremonies.

E-Learning

We are pursuing promising opportunities to disseminate our content across a variety of media platforms. A major initiative in this area is providing educational videos to classrooms nationally. Our brand, “Underground Railroad Digital Media,” offers video-based content in

Become Valuable Source of Awareness, Connectivity and Action for Contemporary Slavery and Human Rights

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES · By December 31, 2008

- Raise awareness on a national level of human trafficking and the role of the Freedom Center in that issue as measured by an increase of 10% in unique visits (trafficking site) on the website.

ACTIONS · By December 31, 2008

- Discuss focus and identify strategies to address slavery today and “unfreedoms” at the Freedom Center and present to the Board for discussion.
- Develop a public relations Plan for the May 2009 Leadership Retreat on Contemporary Slavery.
- Develop and present to the Board a plan to augment Freedom Center exhibits/programs with contemporary slavery content, with particular focus on local and national issues.
American history, global issues, civics and social studies. The videos will be marketed through SAFARI Montage, a K-12 video-on-demand and digital media management solution provider.

The potential audience for our e-learning activities is enormous and numbers in the millions of students (grades k-12), teachers and school districts nationwide. Our pilot project with Chicago Public Schools, for example, is reaching 500,000 students.

The Underground Railroad Digital Media project is being underwritten, in part, through the generous support of Ariel Capital Management, LLC, the Ford Foundation, and the General Mills Foundation.

Tourism Development

The Freedom Center in 2008-2009 is entering its second year operating a statewide tourism plan centered on Ohio’s extensive Underground Railroad history. The program, called “Passages to Freedom,” enables travelers to plan trips to historic sites throughout the state. These sites are linked to a website, www.passagetofreedomohio.com, where, already, more than 1,300 visitors have accessed site itineraries to plan historic site visits. The program received funding from the State of Ohio’s Division of Travel & Tourism and the American Express Foundation.

Strategic Plan — continued
Extend Delivery of the Freedom Center’s Mission and Vision Beyond the Center

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES • By December 31, 2008
- Freedom Center distance learning programs will be in use by five school districts.
- Unique visits on our website, www.freedomcenter.org, will increase by 11%.
- The Freedom Center website will be ranked as the leading domestic site on the Internet for Underground Railroad-related information, as measured by Google Search rankings.
- Seven new community groups are visited per month by the Freedom Center’s Speakers Bureau

ACTIONS • By December 31, 2008
- Expand the Speakers Bureau to include at least 10 youths to carry our mission and vision to younger audiences.

“The Freedom Center focuses on doing the right thing and it is a valuable lesson for kids. Sometimes you need to take a stand.”

—Elizabeth Smith, Indianapolis, Indiana

2008 Progress Report
Partnership for Human Freedom

The Partnership for Human Freedom is the Freedom Center’s program to educate and raise public awareness of contemporary slavery and human rights issues. In February, Kathleen Davis, Director of Contemporary Slavery Programs, attended a United Nations conference on human trafficking in Vienna, Austria. The Partnership also joined with other organizations in Ohio to provide training for more than 2,600 law enforcement, judicial, social service and emergency care providers on how to recognize the warning signs of slavery.

Friends of the Freedom Center Committee

In January, 2008, a group of 16 friends in Cincinnati joined hands in an all-volunteer effort to promote the positive influence of the Freedom Center on a regional and national level. The friends quickly organized into a formal committee, with dues, bylaws and a detailed plan of action to increase participation in the Friends of Freedom Annual Campaign. Each member also pledged personal financial support.

Freedom Center on the Road

Freedom Center CEO Donald Murphy and Board Co-Chair John Pepper are spearheading a series of top level receptions in major cities across the nation. These meetings serve two purposes: raising awareness of Freedom Center programs and cultivating potential donors.

- Develop for the Board a fully funded plan to expand distance learning programs nationally, with an expected target audience of at least 8,000,000 students.
- Develop a plan for a curriculum module for contemporary slavery to be adopted by schools throughout the nation.

Develop and Deliver a Long-Term Financial Plan to Sustain and Expand the Freedom Center’s Mission and Vision

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES • By December 31, 2008

- Earned income will increase to $1.7 M
- Public funding will increase to $2.2 M (local, state, federal)
- Private giving will increase to $1.1 M (individuals, foundations, corporations)
- Major Gifts $1.7 M
- Grand total revenue will be $6.7 M
- Other gifts/Funds (anonymous, city/county) $0.500 M
donors. In 2008, receptions were held in Chicago, Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, Washington and Boston.

Board Oversight and Involvement

Strategic oversight and development is the responsibility of the 42-member Board of Directors, consisting of local and national leaders in business, community affairs, education and non-profit governance, under the leadership of Presiding Chairman Rev. Damon Lynch, Jr.

In addition to the engagement of the Board in the strategic planning process, several members have hosted receptions in major cities to broaden our exposure among potential contributors.

One new Board member, Bishop T.D. Jakes, Sr., Pastor of the Potter’s House in Dallas, Texas, helped launch the Friends of Freedom Annual Campaign by asking his congregation of 30,000 members to support the Freedom Center. That campaign envisions raising $1,000,000 through donations beginning at a mere $20 and reaching upwards of 50,000 contributors.

Strategic Plan — continued

**ACTIONS** • By December 31, 2008

- Complete an assessment of the Center’s long-term funding needs.
- Develop a convincing fundraising “case” for giving. Review 2007 case and update as appropriate.
- Determine a sustainable model and plan and hold at least 2 more Metro CEO Receptions (e.g., Boston, Cleveland, San Jose, Baltimore) for the remainder of 2008 in areas of strategic potential and for raising money.
- Identify and confirm cities willing to participate in Metro CEO Receptions in 2009.
- Achieve our 2008 private support goal of $1.6 M from the Board members.
- Develop and implement a plan to achieve $1.5 million in new annual earned revenue with $750,000 confirmed for 2009.

“That is what friends do: help each other, promote successes, and foster good, healthy relationships.”  
— Helen O’Neal, Friends of the Freedom Center
Strengthen our Organizational Capability

**KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES** • By December 31, 2008

- 60% of employees surveyed rate as excellent teamwork, overall job satisfaction and senior management effectiveness
- Through recruitment and retention, the number of docents and volunteers will be 400 in 2008
- 90% of Board members surveyed, in a Board Assessment Survey, indicate the Board is operating efficiently and members feel fully engaged
- 100% of Board members will make a personal financial contribution
- The Board will develop and/or actively participate in at least two fundraisers

**ACTIONS** By December 31, 2008

- Develop and present to the Board a sustainability plan that will allow the Freedom Center to sustain the high level and broad range of contributions made by the founding chairs and co-chairs.
Financial Review

In 2007, the Freedom Center increased its investments in museum programs by 44% over the prior year as part of our strategic objective to provide fresh new content that is relevant and educational. We believe programming — available both in the museum itself and in distance learning activities — provides an important opportunity to attract new and repeat visits to the museum while also generating increased private support and new and renewing memberships.

From a fundraising perspective, the highlight of the year was the International Freedom Conductor Award ceremony and banquet in June, honoring former Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. The event generated national and international publicity and resulted in more than $700,000 in net income for the Freedom Center.

Overall, in a worsening economy that caused decreased attendance at many museums and cultural institutions nationwide, the Freedom Center held its own. Even though earned revenue declined, paid admissions for 2007 totaled 162,000 — about even with 2006 attendance. At the same time, foundation underwriting support increased by 11%, while government support — primarily as the result of our consistent ability to win competitive education grants — increased to $3.4 million. Total revenue for the year was $12,351,920. Expenses, excluding depreciation and in-kind contributions, totaled $12,144,124. The charts above provide a percentage breakdown of revenues and expenses.
Summary

As this report shows, the Freedom Center is making measurable progress in fulfilling its mission. We operate on a firmer financial footing. Our programs and exhibits generate enthusiastic responses. We have ambitions to enlarge our profile nationally and internationally.

Now, as 2009 approaches, we are even more optimistic that our programs and Mission are increasingly attractive. No matter who wins the 2008 Presidential election, the fact that an African American was one of the candidates helped inspire a broad and searching national dialogue about race relations in contemporary society, as well as historically. This discussion, in turn, caused both the general public and the news media to look to the Freedom Center’s programs and exhibits for background and perspective.

Simultaneously, the approaching bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth created renewed interest in his Presidency – especially his Emancipation Proclamation – and the causes and aftermath of the Civil War. These are subjects that the Freedom Center deals with directly and creatively.

Lastly, there is growing evidence that issues related to modern forms of slavery increasingly capture public attention. Our Partnership for Human Freedom initiative, as well as our distance learning programs, are helping to bring this important issue to students, teachers and others interested in the cause of freedom.

In sum, it could be that the Freedom Center’s time has come. Our subject matter and our programs appear to be aligned with topics that will be in the forefront of the nation’s consciousness about our past struggles with slavery and contemporary efforts to extend freedom.

We fully intend to capitalize upon this interest and in the process, keep the flame of freedom burning brightly.

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