



Annual Report

FISCAL YEAR 2023

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Underground Railroad was the first national social justice movement. It united individuals under the common cause of freedom. Every individual had a role to play in this journey to freedom. Every person still has a role to play.

Over the past year we hosted exhibitions, lectures, concerts and celebrations rooted in education and advocacy. We leveraged the power of art to stir emotions and move people to action. We used music to bring heritage and culture to life. We engaged in dialogue that challenged our preconceptions and complacency. We opened our doors to the community and supported thousands in their personal journeys toward inclusion and equity.

This past year, we lost giants in our ongoing journey toward inclusive freedom and social justice – Bill Russell and Harry Belafonte. But we gained 76,000 new conductors in this journey; individuals who will continue our progress in the giant strides of the ancestors before us.

As we continue to rebound from the global COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted economies and industries, including the museum industry, we experimented with new ways to deliver programs, new tools to reach audiences, new partnerships to expand our content expertise and new revenue streams to ensure our organization is strong. We ended the fiscal year with momentum in key areas, growing our Membership, increasing our retail operations and scaling up our DEI initiative. As we look to the next fiscal year, we do so with a growth mindset – professionally, personally, fiscally and communally.

I'm proud of what our organization has accomplished over the past year and emboldened by the years ahead. In a moment where hate feels empowered, where fear drives policy and where division grows, our mission is needed more than ever. We are continuing to meet this moment, pushing back on hate with compassion, combatting fear with education and uniting our global community in equity.

Thank you for your generous support of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and your passionate pursuit of inclusive freedom and social justice for all. Together, we are the light in the darkness, guiding others to freedom. Together, we are the humanity that transcends our differences. Together, we are the generation who will lead us closer to justice.

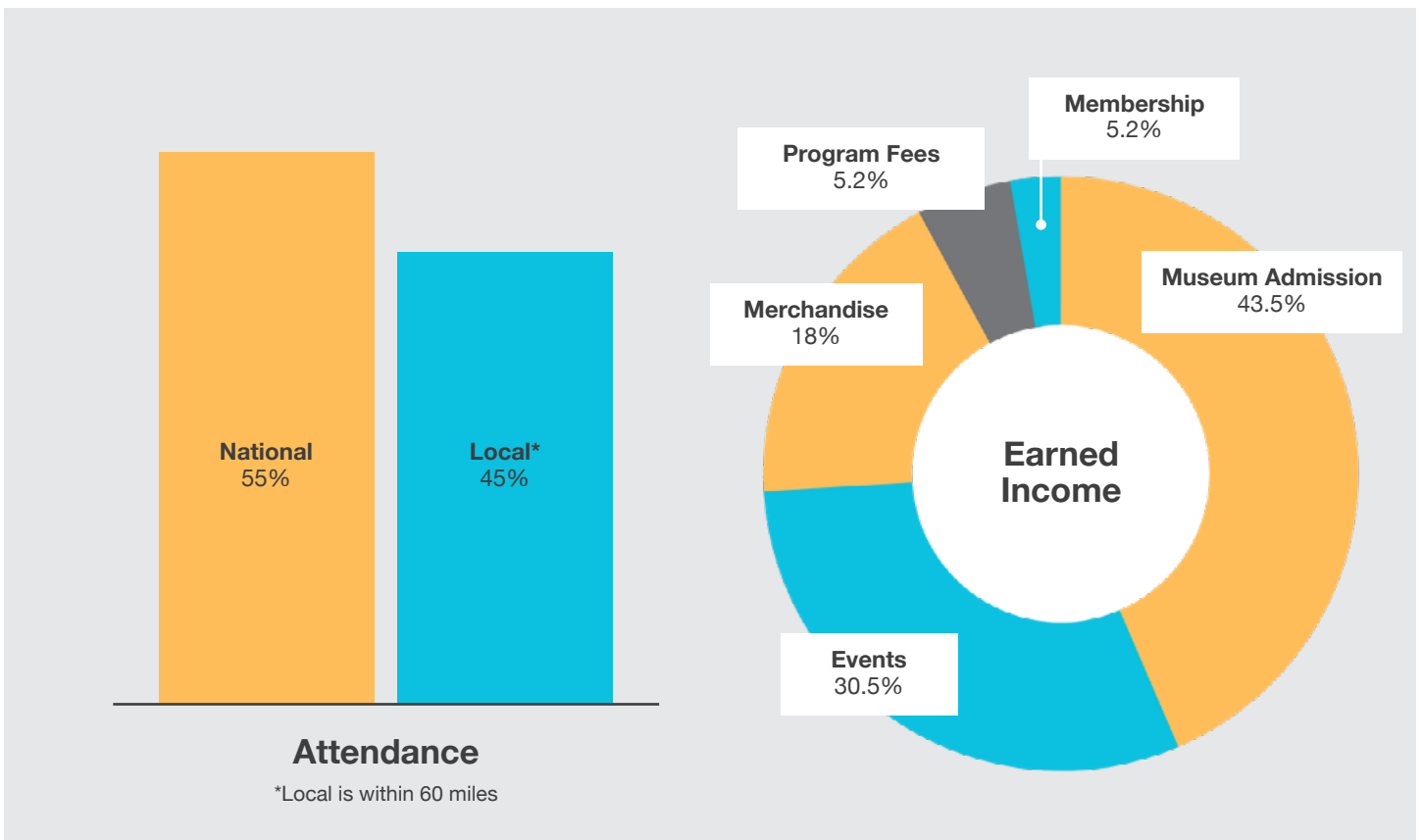
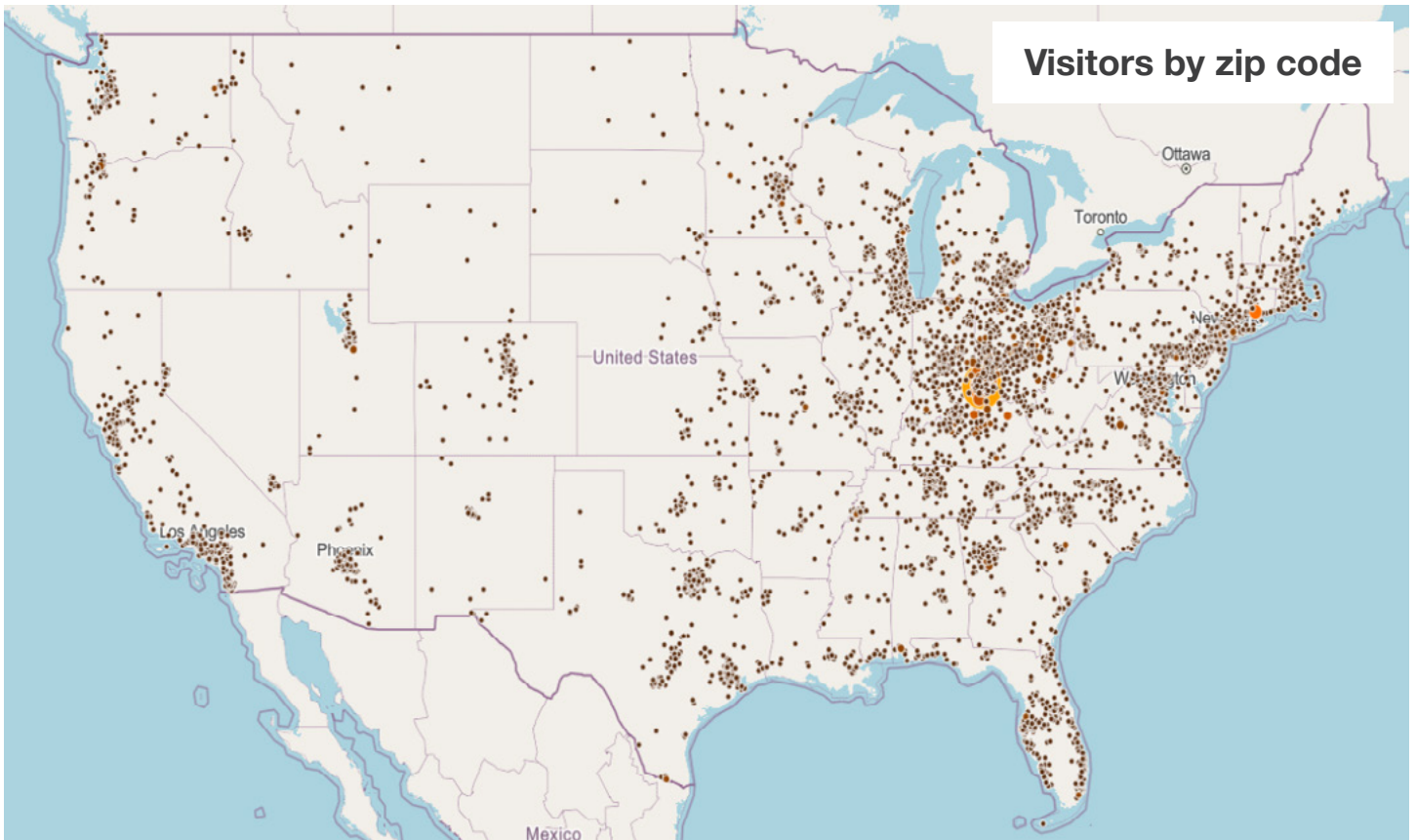
Our journey continues.



Woodrow Keown, Jr.
President & COO
National Underground Railroad Freedom Center



ATTENDANCE & FINANCIALS



SIGNATURE PROGRAMS

King Legacy Celebration

On January 16, 2023, the Freedom Center hosted its annual celebration of the life and leadership of Civil Rights icon Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Over 280 guests joined us for a morning of live performances, reflections from our teen docents and a powerful keynote.

Social justice activist, educator and writer Brittany Packnett Cunningham headlined a powerful discussion on the themes of love and justice. As she fired up the audience with a raw perspective on the collision between the current cultural/political climate and social justice, she drove home a message of the everyday steps each of us can do to take transformative action for justice and equity.

Preceding Ms. Cunningham's keynote, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra's Nouveau program, Revolution Dance Theatre and Destiny L delivered rousing music, dance and vocal performances.

After the exclusive King Legacy Celebration morning event, Ms. Cunningham returned for a free Q&A open to the public, sharing her message of love and justice with a broad audience in the Harriet Tubman Theater.

Special thanks to the 2023 King Legacy Celebration presenting sponsor The Kroger Company.

SPEAKFREELY: Juneteenth Evening at the Museum

This year's Juneteenth celebration not only marked the end of slavery, but the 50th anniversary of hip hop as the Freedom Center channeled the energy of an underground speakeasy. Destiny L and her band Chasing Dreams performed a range of original and classic jazz, blues and R&B hits and DJ Guy Wes spun through 50 years of hip hop. Spoken word performances added powerful stories and reflections on freedom.

SPEAKFREELY used the anniversary of the June 19, 1865 emancipation of enslaved people in Galveston, Texas as a springboard to reflect on the legacy of Black joy and celebration.

SPEAKFREELY was generously sponsored by the Western & Southern Financial Group.



A COMMUNITY ANCHOR



National Underground Railroad Freedom Center voted #1 History Museum in the Country!

Voters in USA TODAY's 10Best Readers' Choice awards confirmed what many of us already knew: the Freedom Center is the best history museum in the country! After a four-week nationwide vote, the nationally-accredited Freedom Center beat out 19 museums across the country to win the title of Best History Museum. It was the museum's third consecutive year in contention, but the first win after finishing among the top three in 2021 and 2022.

The national recognition is a testament to the enduring power and relevance of the stories the Freedom Center tells and the passion with which it tells them. The award brings national recognition not only to the museum, but also to its mission and the city of Cincinnati, further establishing it as a tourist destination and a city dedicated to social justice and inclusive freedom.



Fifth Third Community Days provide free admission to over 13,000 guests


Museums have the power to shape and reflect their communities, making organizations like the Freedom Center community anchors and conveners of dialogue. The Freedom Center creates a collective heritage and more complete history that unites us. Access to our museum equips a new generation of freedom seekers and conductors with the education and resources needed to make positive personal and collective impact.

In early 2022, the Freedom Center began a five-year partnership with the Fifth Third Foundation to offer free admission on the fifth and third Sunday each month, plus MLK Day and Juneteenth, expanding access to the museum for the entire community. These Fifth Third Community Days include admission to permanent and special exhibitions, plus curated programming including public art activities, panel discussions, film screenings and more.

Thank you to the Fifth Third Foundation for supporting our mission and expanding our impact across our community.

16
DATES IN FY 23

13,927
GUESTS SERVED

 Fifth Third
Foundation

SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS



Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration

April 22 to August 7, 2022

Featuring a collection of contemporary visual art from more than 30 artists, *Marking Time* bore witness to artists experimenting with and reimagining the fundamentals of living under punitive governance. Artists included those who have been incarcerated and those who are working to address the state of repression and erasure that has become the hallmark of the American mass incarceration system.

Artists pushed the possibilities of basic materials to create new visions of justice and healing. The resulting artwork was often laborious, time-consuming and immersive as incarcerated artists managed penal time through their work. Nonincarcerated artists also participated in the exhibition, presenting works that detailed the impact of life under mass surveillance and imprisonment for targeted populations.

During its run, over 9,000 guests experienced the powerful exhibition.

The exhibition was organized by Dr. Nicole R. Fleetwood, James Weldon Johnson Professor of Media, Culture and Communication at NYU.

Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration was generously supported by The Procter & Gamble Company. Major support for the exhibition was provided by the Art for Justice Fund, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development.



'Free as they want to be': Artists Committed to Memory

part of the 2022 FotoFocus Biennial

September 30, 2022 to March 5, 2023

Symbols of the past were shown in a new light through the works of over 20 artists in *'Free as they want to be': Artists Committed to Memory*, part of FotoFocus's 2022 Biennial. Inspired by the words of James Baldwin, the exhibition considered the historic and contemporary role photography and film have played in remembering the legacies of slavery and its aftermath. Artists on the frontlines of events that have shaped our world over the past several years used photography, video, silkscreen, projection and mixed media installations to reflect on the defining moments of our past in the struggle for racial justice and equality.

'Free as they want to be' gave voice to the past, marking defining moments – both triumphs and tragedies – that characterize a people and their experiences in the present while also proposing future possibilities. With beauty and dignity, the exhibition contextualized a history and present of unfreedom in our nation alongside a determination to seize freedom rightfully due its people.

During its run, over 5,500 guests viewed the impactful work of the exhibition.

'Free as they want to be': Artists Committed to Memory was curated by Deborah Willis, Ph.D., Professor and Chair of the Department of Photography & Images at the Tisch School of the Arts, and Cheryl Finley, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Art History at Cornell University.

SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS



Solidarity Now! 1968 Poor People's Campaign

March 30 to June 18, 2023

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s most ambitious dream drew thousands to the National Mall in Washington, DC. It sparked a six-week protest and camp along the edge of the Reflecting Pool and implored leaders to take action on the growing divide in America. It united people across races, ethnicities and regions. It demanded an end to poverty.

Solidarity Now! 1968 Poor People's Campaign showcased the often-overlooked history of the multicultural movement to confront poverty that redefined social justice and activism in America. Using historic photographs, oral histories with campaign participants and organizers and an array of protest signs, political buttons and audio field recordings, the exhibition introduced a new generation to the ongoing unfreedom of poverty and the generations of work to end it. The centerpiece of the exhibition was a 3D map of Resurrection City, the protest site that featured planned spaces for housing, a cultural center, city hall, theater stage and essential services, including facilities for food and dining, sanitation, education, medical care and childcare.

During its run, over 9,000 guests visited the historic exhibition.

Solidarity Now! 1968 Poor People's Campaign was organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. The exhibition was supported nationally by the CVS Health Foundation and locally by the Procter & Gamble Company.



Truth & Healing Artist Showcase

July 14 to September 30, 2023

The Freedom Center once again partnered with ArtsWave to give Black and Brown artists a platform to share their truth and encourage healing. The *Truth & Healing Artist Showcase* featured the work of five artists at the Freedom Center, part of ArtsWave's larger showcase.

The 2023 theme focused on healing, rebirth and reconnection, highlighting the struggles that people of color experience within the Cincinnati region. Among those struggles were the mental challenges that come with cultural and racial divisions and the ongoing inequities Black and Brown people face. Despite those challenges, glimmers of hope shine brightly, allowing us to heal by reminding us what Black and Brown love looks like and the quest for joy in difficult times. Along with the exhibition, the Freedom Center hosted two weekends of film screenings and live performances. The showcase is the Freedom Center's third annual collaboration with ArtsWave through the Black and Brown Artist Program. During its run, over 9,800 guests visited the contemporary justice exhibition.

The Truth & Healing Artist Showcase was funded through ArtsWave's Black and Brown Artist Program, the largest commissioning art program for local artists of color. The program was created to provide financial support and to interpret the themes of our times. Artists collaborated with community members and partners in their projects, so the larger public could participate in the process of healing, including reconnection and rebirth.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS



New Orleans Jazz Concert featuring Ashlin Parker

March 3, 2023

The boisterous notes of New Orleans' opulent Mardi Gras filled the Harriet Tubman Theater. Internationally-renowned and Grammy Award-winning New Orleans-based jazz trumpeter Ashlin Parker partnered with the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music Jazz Orchestra, directed by Dr. Scott Belck, for a concert in celebration of jazz music and African American culture that has defined it. The evening featured all the revelry and flair of Mardi Gras punctuated with the history of jazz and its African American roots.



"Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting"

February 17 to 19, 2023

In 1947, Jackie Robinson made history when he broke Major League Baseball's color barrier. The historic opportunity was the centerpiece of the Cincinnati Black Theatre Company's "Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting," which hosted its premiere performances in the Harriet Tubman Theater during Black History Month. The play imagined a meeting between iconic mid-20th century Black athletes and performers Robinson, Joe Louis and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson with Brooklyn Dodgers owner Branch Rickey. "Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting" was written by Ed Schmidt.



Black History Honors series

February 4, 2023

Stellar TV filmed and premiered its inaugural Black History Honors series at the Freedom Center. The program celebrated the lives and legacies of the Underground Railroad freedom seekers and conductors, showcasing their courage, cooperation and perseverance. The program was aired on Stellar TV in national broadcast syndication in over 200 television markets through the month of February and on Bounce TV. The series featured the Freedom Center's exhibits and some of its staff as actors to bring to life the stories of iconic figures from the era of the Underground Railroad.

POWERFUL PROGRAMMING, PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE



Freedom Film Series

Film presents visceral, vivid expressions of freedom and unfreedom in a way that stirs emotions, invites conversation and moves people to action. Over the past year, the Freedom Center hosted nine films totaling more than 630 minutes that reexamined historic events, revealed untold stories and addressed contemporary issues. From the ancestral labor of love driving Black farmers, to the myth of the American Dream, to the impacts of structural racism in Cincinnati, films and accompanying Q&As brought social justice to the forefront in vivid detail.



Freedom Lecture: From Enslavement to Prosperity

September 16, 2022

Philip Armstrong, executive director of Greenwood Rising Black Wall Street History Center, discussed the legacy of Black resilience from enslavement to prosperity. The program explored the era of the Underground Railroad through the early 20th century and how Black communities played a role in shaping the full American narrative. Despite the realities of racism and violence, these communities—from historic Little Africa to the Greenwood District of Tulsa—persevered.



Honoring Judge Nathaniel R. Jones

November 18, 2022

During a statue unveiling in his honor, family and friends celebrated the life and legacy of Judge Nathaniel R. Jones. Judge Jones was a powerful force for freedom locally and globally. From his early days organizing a boycott of the local segregated roller rink, to ensuring South Africa's first free and fair election after Apartheid, freedom was his life's work. He was General Counsel for the NAACP, judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit and a consultant in the drafting of South Africa's constitution. He was also a supporter of the Freedom Center from its earliest days and was recognized in 2016 with the International Freedom Conductor Award—our highest honor.

LEADING BEYOND THE REGION

2024 HARRIET TUBMAN COMMEMORATIVE COIN PROGRAM



United States coin images from the United States Mint.

Harriet Tubman Commemorative Coin

Harriet Tubman is rightly being enshrined among our nation's pantheon of heroes. HR 1842 was signed into law by President Joe Biden on August 3, 2022, with the intention of minting a series of coins in honor of Harriet Tubman's extraordinary achievements. The law, introduced by Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Jacky Rosen (D-NV) and Representatives Gregroy Meeks (D-NY) and John Katko (R-NY), received bipartisan support in Congress.

The design of the coins was revealed in July 2023, with each coin honoring a different aspect of Ms. Tubman's incredible life. The 50-cent clad coin depicts her as a military leader during the Civil War, when she led the Combahee River Raid that freed over 700 enslaved people; the \$1 silver dollar recognizes Ms. Tubman's role as a conductor

on the Underground Railroad, leading dozens to freedom; and the \$5 gold coin recognizes her as a humanitarian during the final decades of her life.

"Ms. Tubman will soon be indelibly etched into our collective heritage as a triumphant, resilient champion of freedom that reflects the true diversity of those who have contributed so significantly to our nation's democracy," said Freedom Center President & COO Woodrow Keown, Jr.

The coin will be available for purchase in early 2024, with surcharges from the sale of the coins supporting the missions of the Freedom Center and the Harriet Tubman Home in Rochester, NY.

The Freedom Center is grateful for The Procter & Gamble Company's support as lead sponsor of the Freedom Center's sale of the coin and supporting programming.

LEADING BEYOND THE REGION



Ohio HB 340 designates September International Underground Railroad Month

Freedom Center President & COO Woodrow Keown, Jr. joined a delegation in Columbus, Ohio in June 2022 for the signing of Ohio HB 340, which declared September International Underground Railroad Month in Ohio. The bill, co-sponsored by Representatives Adam Bird (R-New Richmond) and Willis Blackshear (D-Dayton), recognizes the ongoing legacy of the Underground Railroad and Ohio's prominent role in the liberation of enslaved people.

The Underground Railroad was the nation's first social justice movement. Towns across the state—from Cincinnati to Sandusky, Ripley to Zanesville, Greenville to Massillon—provided refuge and safe passage to those self-liberating through dark and

dangerous paths, across rapid-flowing rivers and through hostile communities. Conductors in towns and homes along the Ohio River greeted passengers as they took their first steps on free soil. From there, conductors and abolitionists risked their lives to provide shelter to exhausted, freezing families making the long journey north through the state.

Every September will be a reminder that we must all be conductors, carrying on the legacy of those intrepid freedom seekers and conductors on the Underground Railroad. Each International Underground Railroad Month, the Freedom Center will inspire guests to tap our own courage to pursue what's right, to extend a hand to those different from us, to persevere until we are all free.

NEW STAFF, NEW CAPABILITIES



Trudy Gaba, Curator of Social Justice

Trudy leverages her passion for storytelling, particularly the lived experiences of individuals who are speaking from the margins of society, in the development of a new exhibit dedicated to social justice and in the Freedom Center's ongoing mission to pursue inclusive freedom. She brings a master's degree and five years of curatorial experience to the Freedom Center.



Nkemjika Iheukwu, Director, Philanthropy

Nkemjika is passionate about bringing people together from different backgrounds and working toward a shared vision that will improve the quality of life and increase equitable opportunities for everyone. She brings 10 years of community engagement, project management, volunteer coordination and fundraising experience to the Freedom Center.



Andrew Pytlik, Senior Director, Philanthropy

Andrew is committed to using philanthropy to build better communities. He is a veteran of several capital campaigns with local and national nonprofits, including the Cincinnati Parks Foundation, United Way of Greater Cincinnati and Greenpeace USA. He brings over 12 years of nonprofit experience to the Freedom Center.



Ryan Repasky, Director, Guest Experiences, Services & Sales

Ryan believes the guest experience begins the moment you walk in the door. He's focused on cultivating a knowledgeable, guest-first team to deliver exceptional visits every time and is working to enhance the Freedom Center's Membership program. He brings more than 13 years of experience in hospitality and sales to the Freedom Center.



Katie Stockdale, Exhibit Content Developer

Katie knows good storytelling is critical to engage guests with historical narratives. She is using that love of storytelling and passion for social justice in the development of content narratives for the Freedom Center's new and refreshed galleries. She brings a master's degree and five years of curatorial experience to the Freedom Center.



“We will inspire each other to tap into our own courage to pursue what’s right. To extend a hand to those different from us. To persevere until we are all free.”

Mission

To pursue inclusive freedom by promoting social justice for all, building on the principles of the Underground Railroad.

Vision

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center is the preeminent cultural learning center for inclusive freedom – locally, nationally and globally.

THANK YOU TO OUR MAJOR SUPPORTERS

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Our journey continues.



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