

# TAKE ACTION

## How Can I Replicate this project in my community?

The Mapping Charleston's Black Burial Grounds Project is a community-led initiative to identify gravesites in the City of Charleston made possible by \$50,000 in funding from the National Park Service African American Civil Rights Grant Program. This effort is intended to provide an engagement-first template for other communities across the nation to follow in endeavoring to identify, map, and protect African American burials. By referencing the steps below, you can leverage the skills and resources of a dedicated project team to research, document, and share the history and significance of Black burial grounds in your community.

### **STEP 1** Contact your local elected officials and/or municipal government staff and assemble a project team. When assembling a project team for your mapping project, consider the following skills:

#### **Historical Research:**

- Expertise in African American history and genealogy to accurately document burial sites.
- Ability to conduct archival research and analyze historical records.

#### **Geographic Information Systems (GIS):**

- Proficiency in GIS software to create detailed maps and spatial data analysis.
- Knowledge of digital cartography and geospatial data management.

#### **Community Engagement:**

- Strong communication skills to collaborate and build trust with local communities, descendants, and stakeholders.
- Experience in facilitating public meetings and educational outreach.

#### **Conservation and Preservation:**

- Knowledge of African descendant burial practices
- Understanding of best practices in conserving and restoring historic burial sites.
- Ability to develop and implement preservation plans.

#### **Documentation and Recording:**

- Skills in photography, videography, and documentation to record the current state of burial grounds.
- Experience in creating and maintaining detailed spreadsheets of cemetery and burial information as well as digital archives.

#### **Archaeology:**

- Skills in non-invasive archaeological techniques such as ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to locate unmarked graves and help establish the boundary of a burial ground.
- Experience in site documentation and preservation.

#### **Project Management:**

- Ability to coordinate interdisciplinary teams and manage project timelines and budgets.
- Experience in grant writing and fundraising for preservation projects.

#### **Legal Expertise:**

- Understanding of cemetery laws and regulations to navigate legal protections and challenges.
- Skills in advocacy to influence policy changes and secure protections.

## STEP 2 Apply for Funding

Funding sources may include local, state, and federal programs. Many grants require a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization to serve as the applicant.

### **National Park Service (NPS) African American Civil Rights Grant**

The NPS African American Civil Rights Grant Program (AACR) aims to document, interpret, and preserve sites and stories related to the African American struggle for equal rights, starting from the transatlantic slave trade.

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservationfund/african-american-civil-rights.htm>

### **National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund**

The Action Fund National Grant Program supports preservation activities for historic places that represent African American cultural heritage. It focuses on four key areas: Capital Projects, Organizational Capacity Building, Project Planning, and Programming and Interpretation. The program aims to advance the preservation and interpretation of sites, museums, and landscapes significant to African American history.

<https://savingplaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage>

#### **Other resources to find grants:**

- [USGrants.org/business/cemeteries](https://www.usgrants.org/business/cemeteries)
- [HistoricFunding.com](https://www.historicfunding.com)
- [SCGrantmakers.com](https://www.scgrantmakers.com)
- [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)

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## STEP 3 Research is a crucial step in preserving African American heritage

### **Identify Known Burial Grounds**

- Start with existing records and maps to compile the locations of known burial grounds. Local historical societies, libraries, archival institutions, and museums can be valuable resources. Google Earth and County GIS Tax maps are also useful tools for identifying marked burial grounds.
- Reference online databases and archives dedicated to African American history and genealogy.

### **Discover Unknown Burial Grounds**

- Engage with community elders and local historians to gather oral histories and anecdotal evidence of burial sites that may be underrepresented in traditional surveys.

### **Gather Historical Information**

- Collect historical documents, such as deeds, wills, church records, and newspapers, that provide information about burial practices and locations.
- Study the socio-political context of the periods in which the burial grounds were established to understand the significance and challenges faced by the community.



## STEP 4 Document Your Findings

### Create a Burial Ground Database

- Input collected burial ground data into a thorough, digital database that is shareable and searchable, such as Excel. Include data columns for address, X and Y GPS coordinates, parcel number, ownership, date established, condition, and historical information/archival sources.
- Use photography and detailed descriptions to document the current state of each site. When collecting digital content such as photographs and archival records, utilize organizational strategies such as creating a folder for each burial ground, and use a consistent file naming convention that includes sources.

### Community Contributions

- Encourage community members to contribute information, photographs, and personal stories related to the burial grounds.
- Organize workshops and training sessions to teach volunteers how to document and record findings accurately.

## STEP 5 Build the Resource (Map)

- Utilize GIS software (ArcGIS) to create a detailed map of the identified burial grounds included in the burial ground database.
- ArcGIS requires a paid subscription. A non-profit rate is available.
- Training is required to use this resource, and professional assistance may be necessary

## STEP 6 Share the product with your community and local government

### Engage with the Community

- Host public presentations and workshops to share the findings and the map with the community. Use these events to gather feedback and encourage ongoing participation.
- Collaborate with local educational institutions to incorporate the history of the burial grounds into their curricula.
- Publish the map online as a publicly accessible resource to increase transparency and support strengthened protections for burial sites

### Partner with Local Government

- Present the project to local government officials and advocate for the protection and preservation of the identified burial grounds.
- Work with municipal planning and preservation departments to integrate the burial grounds into local heritage and conservation plans.

