



Abraham Lincoln  
National Heritage Area  
**Interpretation Plan**



***What Lincoln  
story will  
you tell?***

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# Table of Contents

<b>Part I: Introduction, Methodology, and Resources</b>	5
Purpose	5
Mission Statement	6
Methodology	6
Existing Conditions	9
Visitation in Springfield	9
Visitation in National Heritage Area	9
Existing Wayside Interpretive tools	9
National Heritage Area Resources	10
Looking for Lincoln Community Designation Program	10
Looking for Lincoln Communities	11
Federal, State, & Nonprofit Partners	11
ALNHA: Interpretive Initiatives	11
Looking for Lincoln Wayside Exhibits	11
Looking for Lincoln in Illinois Book Series	12
Itineraries	12
National Association of Interpretation Certified Interpretive Guide Program	13
Questing	13
Speakers Bureau	14
Interpretive Themes, Sub-Themes, and Statements	14
 <b>PART II: Community Interpretive Development</b>	 18
Introduction	18
Steps in Creating your Interpretation Strategy	19
Step 1: Defining Significance	19
Step 2: Developing Stories	19
Step 3: Considering an Audience	19
Step 4: Choosing Media	19
Step 5: Evaluating the Strategy	19
Before You Get Started	19
Step One: Defining Significance	20
What Makes Your Resource Worth Visiting?	20
What is Significant about Your Resource?	22
Linking Your Resource to the Big Picture	24
“Why?” Exercise: Creating Context for a Resource	24
Connecting Your Resource to the ALNHA	
Interpretive Themes	26
Step Two: Developing Stories	27
Creating Local Themes	27
Developing Local Themes	27
Writing Theme Statements	29



Step Three: Considering an Audience. . . . .	31
What do Visitors want from a Heritage Experience? . . . . .	31
Meeting Visitor Expectations. . . . .	32
How Are You Doing So Far? . . . . .	32
Step Four: Choosing the Media . . . . .	33
Types of Interpretive Media . . . . .	34
Printed Materials . . . . .	34
Waysides and Banners . . . . .	34
Electronic Media . . . . .	34
Personal Interpretation . . . . .	34
Text Panels/Interpretive Exhibits . . . . .	34
Web-Based Interpretation . . . . .	35
Visitor Self-Guided Walking Tours . . . . .	35
Other Interpretive Methods. . . . .	36
Things to Consider When Choosing Interpretive Media . . . . .	36
Budget. . . . .	36
Volunteer or Staff Involvement . . . . .	36
Technology . . . . .	36
Type of Story You are Telling. . . . .	37
Accessibility. . . . .	37
Maintenance . . . . .	37
Sustainability. . . . .	37
Understanding Capacity and Interpretive Media . . . . .	37
Step Five: Evaluating the Strategy. . . . .	38
What is the Outcome? . . . . .	38
What Do Visitors Think? . . . . .	38
Observation. . . . .	39
Interviews . . . . .	39
Focus Groups . . . . .	39
Questionnaires . . . . .	40
Conclusion. . . . .	41

<b>Part III: Marketing Tools and Campaigns . . . . .</b>	<b>42</b>
Effective Marketing Requires Planning. . . . .	45
ALNHA Marketing Program . . . . .	48
ALNHA Discovery Corridors . . . . .	48
Looking for Lincoln Signature Events . . . . .	49

<b>Appendix . . . . .</b>	<b>50</b>
Illinois Regional Tourism Offices and Convention & Visitors Bureaus in the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. . . . .	50

# Part I: Introduction, Methodology, and Resources

## Purpose

The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is a partnership of organizations and individuals dedicated to enhancing the communities and landscapes of central Illinois through recognition and support of their significant natural, cultural, and historical legacies. This nationally significant landscape and network of sites explores the social, cultural, economic, and political complexities of the antebellum period of our nation's history. The national heritage area provides opportunities for visitors to explore the "Land of Lincoln," discovering the communities, events, and people that shaped Lincoln's life and aided his transformation into a great statesman.

The purpose of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive plan is to assist and guide Looking for Lincoln Communities as they enhance and develop the stories of Lincoln's life and times. Part one of the interpretive plan outlines the framework for telling stories in the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. Part two serves as a step-by-step guide for communities to create effective interpretation of their national, cultural, and historical resources. Part three provides the basic steps for marketing the stories and experiences available in the communities. It is the communities' unique stories that drive heritage tourism, economic development, and foster a strong community identity.



*Courtesy of Looking for Lincoln*

## *Desired Interpretive Experience*

After experiencing the heritage area's interpretive presentation, participants will come away with a clear understanding of key themes and ideas, presented through a variety of local stories. The following ideas represent the desired interpretive experience for all visitors and residents:

- Learn about the details of Lincoln's early life and times.
- Create interest in answering the question, "Who was Lincoln the man?"
- Relate events in Lincoln's life to the authentic places where they happened.
- Relate experiences in Lincoln's life to the national context and the historical development of central Illinois.
- Learn the story of the historical development of central Illinois by experiencing and understanding its landscape.



- Understand the nationally significant issues that were under debate, their complexities, and their local implications.
- Relate the nationally significant story and its impacts on the lives of local individuals to nationally significant stories today and their impacts on the lives of modern Americans.

Through interpretation, promote interest in community revitalization and enhancement and in preserving and rehabilitating historic buildings and landscapes.

Be encouraged to learn more by seeking out other sources of information on their stories and by exploring other places within the heritage area.

### ***Mission Statement***

The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is a partnership of organizations and individuals dedicated to enhancing the communities and landscapes of central Illinois through recognition and support of their significant natural, cultural, and historical legacies.

*Courtesy of csdubya media*



### ***Methodology***

The quality of the interpretive presentation in the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is of utmost importance. The following guidelines for interpretation inform our decision-making in creating a successful, complementary, interpretation across the entire heritage area.

**Authenticity of Place:** We tell each story where it happened in a tangible, real place. Wherever possible, we use authentic physical features such as communities, buildings, landscapes, and other resources – to tell the stories. In this way we will offer, unique, interesting, and revealing stories throughout the heritage area, encouraging exploration.

**Accuracy:** Our stories are well-researched and accurate. If the stories are based upon legend, lore, or oral tradition, we clearly state so.

**Quality:** Each interpretive installation meets the highest standards of quality in terms of location, design, orientation to resource, storytelling, physical installation, accessibility, and visitor experience. Our use of existing LFL exhibit types, guidelines, and review processes helps in maintaining standards, and each site owner/manager maintains their own visitor experiences and services.

**Context:** While individual stories may be unique, they connect to the heritage area themes. The stories illustrate the themes and connect to the bigger picture in ways that make them immediate and understandable.

**Significance and Meaning:** Interpretation goes beyond conveying a story's facts – drawing connections, significance, and meaning to audiences. In developing interpretive content, we examine each story for its significance, for a key message to be conveyed by the story or exhibit. We communicate this significance or message to audiences in ways that connect to their life experiences.

**Connections:** Where applicable, we connect local stories to the stories of other communities and sites within the heritage area as part of the communication of context, significance, and meaning. We encourage visitors to visit other places to learn about other aspects of related themes and stories.

**Experiential Learning:** People learn and remember things better when they physically do them. We emphasize communication that is visual and tied to real things and authentic places and features over the reading of waysides and text. Walking the route Lincoln walked provides visitors with various sensory experiences – the sights, the distances, the sense of horizon, even the sound of a stream's running water.

**Variety of Experiences:** We provide a variety of interpretive approaches to satisfy the interests and capabilities of different age groups, temperaments, and orientations. Options offer varying levels of activity, timeframes, and levels of required concentration. We provide alternative ways to experience interpretation for individuals with physical limitations or disabilities.

**Opportunities to Explore:** We present themes and stories in ways that encourage audiences to explore other communities and sites by drawing interpretive connections, inserting tempting leads, and providing the information and tools needed to spark and follow through on interests. In communities and at sites, we encourage audiences to explore the landscape physically by inviting them to move around from place to place.

**Depth of Information:** Primary interpretive content is succinct and well written, emphasizing key messages, context, and connections. However, we develop information and guidance for exploring subjects in greater detail to encourage those who are interested to explore subjects to whatever level of detail they wish.

**Points of View:** We present stories from multiple perspectives in their thematic and historical context to help audiences appreciate how different people from diverse groups and political persuasions see things differently. Audiences draw their conclusions from each story.

**Shared Human Experience:** We provide interpretation in ways that help audiences relate it to experiences in their lives. Using the authentic stories of real people in their words in the actual places where events occurred is encouraged wherever possible. The expression of universal concepts such as love, loss, uncertainty, and success to which everyone can relate in their lives helps forge a personal connection to a story.

**Acknowledge the Unpleasant:** Our stories are accurate and our interpretation conveys authentic experiences. Information and perspectives may well be at variance with contemporary sensibilities, but is presented accurately nonetheless. Honest, complicated, and sometimes unpleasant stories are a time tested way to touch audiences deeply and affect people's lives.

**Opportunities to Engage and Support:** We make audiences aware of the heritage area's mission and programs and offer them the opportunity to engage in activities and initiatives, both local and regional. In particular, audiences in this heritage area are likely to appreciate opportunities to support community enhancement, interpretive sites, historic preservation, and natural resource conservation. With families and schoolchildren being among major audiences, programs and events that are designed to engage young people will be emphasized.



## Existing Conditions

The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area (ALNHA) is a 42 county area in central Illinois in which the story of the life and times of Abraham Lincoln is told. The ALNHA was created by legislation signed by the President on May 10, 2008. The legislation designates the Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition, a nonprofit 501c3 corporation, as the coordinating entity for the ALNHA.

The Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition works collaboratively with local, state, and national partners across the ALNHA to: tell the stories of Abraham Lincoln's life and times, promote heritage tourism by providing high quality experiences for visitors, and foster economic development in communities.

### *Visitation in Springfield*

An average of 195,000 visitors travel to Springfield historic sites annually; sustaining over 3,000 jobs and \$25 million dollars in state and local tax revenue in Sangamon county.

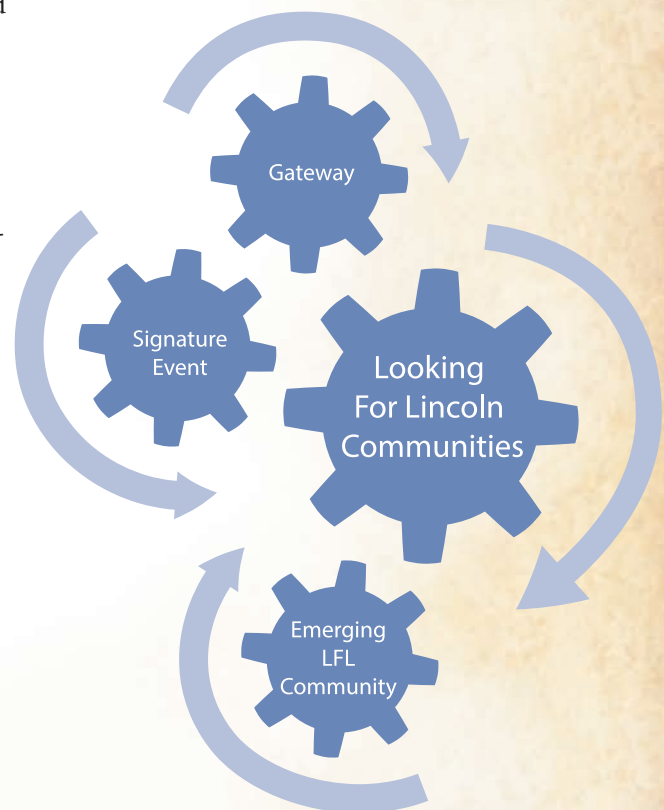
### *Visitation in National Heritage Area*

Tourism in the National Heritage Area accounts for 10 percent of tourism for the state of Illinois. Domestic travel and tourism sustains 25,000 jobs within the National Heritage Area and generates over \$200 million dollars in state and local tax revenue.

### *Existing Wayside Interpretive Tools*

Since 2007, Looking for Lincoln has been working with community partners to create interpretive exhibits. The successful partnership program develops high-quality exhibits that connect local stories to regional and national themes. The quality of existing exhibits has established a clear standard for the future.

Looking for Lincoln has developed a manual illustrating a menu of exhibit types that are available for use by partners. The full manual includes design standards for outdoor interpretive signs, outdoor identification markers, wayside panels, indoor interpretive elements, and highway signs. Eligible stories in partner communities authentically interpret an aspect of Lincoln's life in central Illinois.



## National Heritage Area Resources

### *Looking for Lincoln Community Designation Program*

The vitality of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area (ALNHA) is dependent on communities and events that contribute to the ALNHA's mission, goals, and guiding principles. The Looking for Lincoln community designation program provides a system to recognize communities and events that support the ALNHA mission, goals, further the understanding of the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, and contribute to the broad experience of the national heritage area.

### *Looking for Lincoln Community*

- Designated by the ALNHA steering council,
- Within the boundaries of the ALNHA
- Authenticated story that fits within the ALNHA interpretive themes
- Actively tells that story

### *Emerging Looking for Lincoln Community*

- Working towards becoming a designated LFL Community
- Within the boundaries of the ALNHA
- LFLHC staff will work with each emerging LFL community guiding them through the process of becoming a LFL Community.

### *Gateway Community*

- Designated by the ALNHA steering council
- Staffed entry point into the ALNHA
- Orients visitors to the stories of the ALNHA
- Located at or adjacent to a Lincoln site.

### *Looking for Lincoln Signature Event*

- Designated by the ALNHA steering council
- A Lincoln-centric event that fits within the ALNHA interpretive themes
- Provides excellent visitor services

- Marketable event
- Embodies the LFL brand
- Occurs on an annual basis, unless commemorative

### *Looking for Lincoln Communities*

The following is a list of Looking for Lincoln Communities as of January 2014.

Alton	Jacksonville	Pike County
Beardstown	Lincoln	Quincy
Champaign-Urbana	Mahomet	Shelby County
Coles County	McLean County	Springfield
Decatur	Metamora	Taylorville
DeWitt County	Mt. Pulaski	Vandalia
Galesburg	Petersburg	Vermillion County
Hancock County	Pleasant Plains	

### *Federal, State, & Nonprofit Partners*

The Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition works collaboratively with its federal, state and nonprofit partners to provide Looking for Lincoln Communities the tools they need to develop: educational and interpretative programs and projects, heritage tourism, and foster economic development in the community

## **ALNHA: Interpretive Initiatives**

### *Looking for Lincoln Wayside Exhibits*

Since 2007, Looking for Lincoln has been working with communities to create interpretive exhibits throughout the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. The program includes a design process and guidelines for identifying stories, researching interpretive content, and implementing high-quality exhibits that connect local stories to regional and national themes. The quality of existing exhibits has established a clear standard for the future.

Looking for Lincoln has developed a manual illustrating a menu of exhibit types that are available for use by partners. The full manual, available through the Looking for Lincoln office, includes design standards for outdoor interpretive signs, outdoor identifications signs, indoor interpretive elements, wayfinding signs, and highway signs. As defined in the manual, an eligible Looking for Lincoln site, exhibit, building, or event must authentically and directly interpret an aspect of



*Courtesy of Looking for Lincoln*



the community's Lincoln story based on one or more of the following categories. Eligible stories thus authentically interpret an aspect of Lincoln that is based on one or more of the following categories:

- Physical structures associated with the Lincoln era and Lincoln story;
- Significant events associating Lincoln with the community;
- Phases of Lincoln's career in Illinois;
- People associated with Lincoln who resided in the community; or
- Oral traditions and folk tales about Lincoln and the community.

Assurances for achievement of the expected quality include:

- Authenticity of story – the story must meet standards of historical evidence;
- Authenticity of location- the site must have a direct connection to the Lincoln story told; and
- Authenticity of design-illustrations of Lincoln and the physical context used in an exhibit must be historically accurate.

### *Looking for Lincoln in Illinois Book Series*

Looking for Lincoln will develop a book series entitled Looking for Lincoln in Illinois that tells the stories of Lincoln's life and times to a broad audience. The book series will promote various communities within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area and generate interest among readers to visit the National Heritage Area. Examples of books include: Lincoln's Springfield, Lincoln in Mormon Country and a book about Lincoln and the 8th Judicial Circuit.

### *Itineraries*

Looking for Lincoln will develop trip itineraries for individual travelers, tour operators, and school groups within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. These itineraries follow interpretive themes or geographic boundaries. By developing itineraries with built in meal options and sleeping accommodations in addition to attractions, Looking for Lincoln contributes to the success of the community's heritage tourism operations. It is important to include all meal and sleeping accommodations that have the capacity to service target itinerary audiences.

## *National Association of Interpretation Certified Interpretive Guide Program*

Looking for Lincoln will encourage individuals and representatives from Lincoln sites within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area to participate in the National Association of Interpretation Certified Interpretive Guide program. “The Certified Interpretive Guide program is designed for anyone who delivers interpretive programs to the public. It combines both the theoretical foundations of the profession with practical skills in delivering quality interpretive programming to visitors.



This 32-hour course includes:

- history, definition, and principles of interpretation
- making your programs purposeful, enjoyable, relevant, organized, and thematic
- using tangible objects to connect audiences to intangible ideas and universal concepts in interpretive programs
- presentation and communication skills
- certification requirements (50-question literature review; program outline; 10-minute presentation)
- all materials, workbook, and CIG course textbook”

[Information taken from the National Association of Interpretation website]

By increasing the quality of interpretation within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area we can better tell the stories of Lincoln’s life and times. For more information about the National Association of Interpretation visit:  
<http://www.interpnet.com/>.

## *Questing*

Looking for Lincoln will develop a questing program to interpret the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. Questing is a place-based recreational and educational program popular in the Northeast and Ohio area that encourages visitors to explore their community and region. Participants follow maps, clues, and rhyming riddles seeking treasure boxes hidden in natural and cultural locations. The Looking for Lincoln will facilitate development of questing in Looking for Lincoln communities as another method of telling the story of Lincoln’s life and times.

### *Speakers Bureau*

Looking for Lincoln will develop a speaker's bureau program to promote the stories of Lincoln's life and times to a broader audience. The program will help underwrite the cost of bringing high-quality speakers to communities throughout the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area.

## Interpretive Themes, Sub-Themes, and Statements

### **The Life and Times of Abraham Lincoln**

Communities throughout Illinois that have a Lincoln connection to share with the world emphasize three themes: "Lincoln the Man," "Illinois' Influence on Lincoln," and "Lincoln's Legacy."

Lincoln did not become a prominent politician overnight. He worked steadily to make something of his life, endured adversity, and overcame obstacles. By highlighting Lincoln the laborer, surveyor, postmaster, lawyer, politician, husband, father, and friend, Illinois communities have stories to share that fundamentally define who

Lincoln was as a man. Similarly, the physical environment, as well as the social and cultural landscape of antebellum Illinois and its people, helped mold Lincoln into the greatest statesman of his era. Finally, a key aspect to understanding the life and times of Abraham Lincoln involves tracing the tremendous impact he has had on the world.

**1) Lincoln the Man:** Abraham Lincoln arrived in Illinois poor and with little formal education, but left three decades later as a prominent attorney and president-elect of the nation. His early years were full of successes and setbacks as Lincoln tried his hand at many occupations as he



*Courtesy of csdubya media*

continued a program of self-education. Initially a political novice, Lincoln learned quickly, interacting with the leading political minds in the state. Though he began his political career as a strict party-line Whig devoted to improving the infrastructure and economy of Illinois, he evolved into a Republican devoted to stopping the expansion of slavery on the national level. In Illinois, Lincoln developed into a statesman. An appreciation of Lincoln the Man serves as the backdrop for understanding Lincoln the President.



**1a) Lincoln the Pioneer:** Lincoln's family immigrated to Illinois when he was 21, joining many other individuals and families in search of fresh opportunities. Here, Lincoln grew to manhood. He began as a rugged farmhand and occasional flat boatman. At New Salem, Lincoln climbed the rungs of an occupational ladder that included work as a miller, store clerk, militia captain, merchant, postmaster, surveyor, legislator, and finally, lawyer—each new job carrying him into a higher, more exclusive socio-economic level. When he left New Salem in 1837 at age twenty-eight, he had acquired enough social and intellectual prowess to successfully compete in Illinois's increasingly sophisticated commercial and political world.

**1b) Lincoln the Politician:** Lincoln's political career began at age 23 with an unsuccessful run for the state legislature. Two years later, he was successfully elected to the Illinois House of Representatives for the first of four consecutive terms. In 1846, he was elected as a representative to the United States Congress and fourteen years later, he was elected to the nation's highest office. A gifted speaker, quick in debate, and an eloquent writer, Lincoln traveled extensively throughout the state, Midwest, and northeast to stump for candidates and defend key party issues.

**1c) Lincoln the Lawyer:** Though he had less than six months of formal education, Lincoln was a full-time lawyer in Illinois for a quarter century. Like nearly all of his contemporaries, his legal practice was extremely diverse—he handled cases at nearly every level of the court system and represented clients in civil and criminal cases involving such issues as debt, divorce, murder, and slander.

**1d) Lincoln the President:** The story of Lincoln's presidency began in Illinois with Lincoln's electoral victory. Immediately, seven states left the Union. As the nation unraveled, president-elect Lincoln remained in Springfield meeting and corresponding with party leaders, office seekers, and members of the media. Just six weeks after his inauguration, the Civil War began. For the next four years, Lincoln guided the nation through Civil War. Illinois' involvement in the Civil War and the political climate in Lincoln's adopted home state serve as the backdrop for examining Lincoln the President.

**2) Illinois' Influence on Lincoln:** Illinois was the western frontier when Lincoln's family arrived from Indiana. During the next three decades Lincoln lived in Illinois, the region evolved from a mix of subsistence farms to a thriving agrarian economy with pockets of industry. Equally important are the national events and issues that impacted the state and the evolution of the social, political, and physical landscape of antebellum Illinois. The tension in Illinois surrounding the issue of slavery uniquely prepared Lincoln to deal with the issue as President.

**2a) The Land of Opportunity:** In the 1830s, Illinois was the nation's western frontier. The region's settlement over the next thirty years saw an evolution from a mix of subsistence farms to an organized rectangular fabric of neat farmsteads and an established market economy. Towns developed with a vibrant, upwardly mobile society seeking middle class respectability. Opportunities for advancement abounded as both the region and Lincoln matured.

**2b) Lincoln and Springfield:** Springfield was the center of Lincoln's world for a quarter century. When he arrived, the statehouse had not yet been built and the town had a population of less than two thousand. The unpaved streets were dusty or muddy by turns, while cows, chickens, and pigs wandered the streets at will. However, the town matured. The population steadily increased, social and cultural institutions sprang from the prairie, and ambitious individuals helped cultivate a vibrant political atmosphere. In law offices and courtrooms, as well as in storefronts and legislative chambers, Lincoln honed his skills of persuasion and perfected the art of politics. By the time Lincoln left in February 1861, Springfield's population had increased five-fold. Lincoln and Springfield matured side-by-side and both went on to play significant roles in the Civil War.

**2c) The People:** Illinois was settled by immigrants seeking new western lands and fresh opportunities. As a result of the mix of northern, southern, and foreign immigrants in Illinois, the social and political landscape reflected the diverse viewpoints of its residents. Against this backdrop Lincoln interacted with clients, colleagues, friends, and family who influenced his thinking and development.

**2d) Social and Political Landscape of Illinois and the Nation:** The social and political environment of Illinois and the nation shaped Lincoln. Whether discussing the key issues of the day, such as internal improvements, popular sovereignty, abolition, and immigration or wrestling with the impact of national events like the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Dred Scott Case, these issues and events collectively formed Lincoln's ideology.

**2e) Underground Railroad in Illinois:** The Underground Railroad crisscrossed the state of Illinois and served as a conduit for slaves to escape bondage. This illegal and controversial activity was part of the landscape of Illinois in which Lincoln lived and worked.

**3) Lincoln's Legacy:** Few individuals in American history have left such an indelible mark on the world. The major issues that Lincoln's generation confronted—the balance of power between the federal government and individual states, civil liberties during wartime, issues regarding race and equality, etc.—continue to define the challenges facing the nation today.



The life and times of Abraham Lincoln—the story of a boy born in absolute poverty who went on to guide the nation through its most tragic hour—continues to bring hope and inspiration to millions around the globe.

**3a) Lincoln's Imprint on America:** Lincoln's Presidency left its mark on Illinois and the nation. His legacy is more complex than his most celebrated acts of preserving the Union or ending American Slavery. As President, he created the Department of Agriculture, supported construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, signed the Morrill Land Grant Act, and Homestead Act.

**3b) Myth & Memory, Lincoln Remembered:** Abraham Lincoln is one of America's most beloved Presidents. A larger-than-life persona the "real" Lincoln is often replaced by the legend and lore.

**3c) Lincoln & America's continuing struggle with Equality, Race Relations, National Unity and the Capacity for Democratic Government:** Equality and race relations were at the heart of the moral, economic, and social turmoil caused by slavery in Lincoln's America. Democratic government failed to compromise and chose war over peace. Americans today, challenged anew with sustaining a workable political, social, and cultural consensus, have much to learn from the attitudes and actions of the Civil War generation.

*Courtesy of csdubya media*





## PART II: Community Interpretive Development

### Introduction

This manual is a step-by-step guide for community partners within the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area to create effective interpretation of their natural, cultural, and historical resources.

#### Interpretation:

A way of telling stories and addressing why that story matters.

#### Interpretation:

A mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource.

(National Association for Interpretation)

**Interpretation** is a way of telling stories and why those stories matter. Interpretation connects visitors with what they are experiencing. It does not just teach what something is, but what it means.

When telling a story about a resource in your community, and what it means to the life of Abraham Lincoln, you are “interpreting” that resource. By making a connection



Courtesy of Looking for Lincoln

for visitors between things and ideas, you are providing that visitor with a unique experience packed with meaning, ideas, values, and emotions which reflects enthusiasm for your resource. Interpretation can create memorable and meaningful experiences, and inspire your visitors to learn more.

Effective interpretation takes planning and effort to create. If done correctly, you will not only help visitors understand your resource,

but you will also do a better job of managing it. In the process, you can help the community meet its goals for resource conservation, economic development, and heritage tourism.

The interpretive strategies outlined in this manual are applicable to any kind of **resource** from museums and historic sites to bed and breakfasts, restaurants, or community events. Even if interpretation is not the main focus of your organization or business, you can still tell authentic stories that resonate with visitors, clients, or customers.

**Resource:** Any natural, historic, or cultural asset found in the community—a site, service, historical event, or landscape that has a role in the important story being told.

## Steps in Creating your Interpretation Strategy

Part two describes a five-step process for creating successful interpretation. Each of the proceeding sections are dedicated to one of these steps and are numbered in the same order as their respective steps.

### *Step 1: Defining Significance*

Why should people visit your resource? What makes it significant?

### *Step 2: Developing Stories*

What stories will help explain the significance of the resource?

### *Step 3: Considering an Audience*

Who is the audience for the interpretation? Will visitors understand and appreciate what you are telling them?

### *Step 4: Choosing Media*

What tools will be used to communicate the message?

### *Step 5: Evaluating the Strategy*

How can you measure how effective the interpretive programs are?

## Before You Get Started

*If you want your interpretation to be truly effective, don't work alone!*

Build a team of **stakeholders** early in the planning process. Involving stakeholders in interpretive planning will encourage local “buy-in” and create champions within the community for the project.

Embracing different viewpoints can reveal new perspectives; generate alternative ideas, and encourage transparency throughout the entire planning and implementation process. It is also important to get input from a variety of potential visitors. Do not forget to consider people with different needs and perspectives, especially if they are a part of the target audience.

### **Stakeholders:**

Individuals within the community who have a vested interest in the success of the project.

- Owners or managers of nearby heritage resources
- Municipal officials
- Educators
- Representatives from community groups
- Board members or staff
- People affiliated with the history of the resource
- Investors/funding sources
- Members of minority groups
- Neighbors

### *Step One: Defining Significance*

The process of creating interpretation always begins with this, sometimes complex question: “Why would visitors want to experience my resource in the first place? What makes it relevant for them? How does my resource help others understand the life and times of Abraham Lincoln?”

Maybe it is what happened there, or the people who were associated with it. Maybe it is an important part of local culture or lore. Even if the resource is a typical or common example of something, such as a common courthouse, it could be a significant piece of a larger puzzle.

Interpretation describes the significance of places, events, people, and things. To understand the significance, ask yourself why people should care about your resource. This question may have one or many answers because the resource could be significant for more than one reason.

#### *What Makes Your Resource Worth Visiting?*

##### **Could it be the people?**

Many resources are associated with people who are perceived to be important, famous, or wealthy. While the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is directly focused on telling the story of Lincoln’s life and times, this formula can be used to incorporate many types of stories or people within the community’s interpretation. Even if Lincoln himself never visited the resource, it may be significant because of

the people who lived or worked there—whether or not they were famous or wealthy.

Over the last several decades, professional historians have spent significant time talking about underserved groups that have often been overlooked in the past, such as women, minorities, immigrants, working people, servants, and enslaved populations. When you ask yourself what might be significant about your resource do not forget to consider what these groups may have contributed to its significance.



*Courtesy of csdubya media*



### Could it be the Scenery?

Landscapes and manicured gardens please and attract the eyes of visitors. Scenery, per say, does not need to be beautiful and perfect to tell significant stories. Think of a rustic Illinois frontier town that is dusty and dirty with simple frontier structures. Think of an unbroken prairie or forest that Lincoln would have recognized the neglected historic cemetery, or the final remnants of slave quarters from the dark past of the United States. Visitors can interact with pieces of the landscape Lincoln recognized. Each of these scenes plays valuable roles in interpretation— providing a ‘reality-check’ about history, reminding us not to romanticize or “Disneyfy” our understanding of the past.



*Courtesy of csdubya media*

### Could it be Architecture?

Stained glass windows, frontier log cabins, Greek or Roman revival courthouses, Italianate storefronts, and Federal style homes are all unique and beautiful forms of architecture found across the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. However, it is important to include the most humble farm house, historic barns, rural country stores, historic rail stations, and historic business centers that contribute to local heritage.

### Could it be an Important Event or Trend?

Not every resource can boast “Lincoln Slept Here,” be the site of Lincoln’s Debates, or a stop on the Lincoln funeral train. Your resource may not be directly linked to any event recorded in history books, but it has almost certainly been influenced by an event or trend on the regional or national level. What impact might that event or trend have had on local populations?

For example, when looking to Lincoln’s lifetime, consider the impact of the abolition movement, immigration, and western settlement. Also consider the social and political tensions with neighboring states, communities, or families at the dawn of the American Civil War.

Remember, nothing happens in a vacuum. Even if the resource seems unimportant by comparison to one that is earlier, larger, or better known; it still contributes to the significance of your community and to the nation as a whole. When connecting the resource to larger events or stories, you are helping people understand why it is important to understand the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. It becomes more than walls or inanimate objects—it becomes an example of an event or trend that had regional or national significance.

# What is Significant about Your Resource?

Using the four criteria [People, Scenery, Architecture, Event], consider some of the things that make your resource interesting and significant. Remember, many resources may only exist in one or may transcend multiple criteria. Try not to get caught up on labels—resources may have parts or aspects of different stories which are all significant.

Why would visitors want to experience my resource in the first place? What makes it relevant for them? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does my resource help others understand the life and times of Abraham Lincoln?" \_\_\_\_\_

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People: Is your resource important because of the people that lived or worked there? Did they play a significant role in the community, state, or in Lincoln's life? Or are the people associated with your resource representative of thousands of men, women, immigrants or others whom moved to Illinois for a new life? \_\_\_\_\_

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## WORKSHEET – CONTINUED

Scenery: Is your resource significant because of its scenery? Does the landscape allow visitors to visualize what Lincoln saw and experienced? \_\_\_\_\_

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Architecture: Is your resource significant because of its architecture? Does the architecture of the resource contribute to the local heritage of the community? \_\_\_\_\_

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Event or Trend: Is your resource significant because of an event that took place? Was the resource impacted by an event or trend on the regional or national level?

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## Linking Your Resource to the Big Picture

Now that you have thought about some of the things that make the resource interesting and significant, it is time to “connect the dots” for visitors. In other words, find some common threads that link your resource to the bigger story. When telling visitors how the resource relates to something bigger, they will understand why it is significant.

To help visitors make sense of the resource and what it means, link it to larger trends and events through interpretive themes, which provides context to your unique story. The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area has defined a series of interpretive themes that you should use as guidelines when developing the community’s interpretive programming.

One way to develop a context and select the interpretive themes that best fit your story is to ask a series of “why?” questions. Asking a series of “why?” questions can help link a simple fact to a much larger chain of events. By making that link, you are helping explain why your resource is significant—and help show a **tangible** connection between the resource and the larger interpretive themes.

### *“Why?” Exercise: Creating Context for a Resource*

#### Example One: Here is a “Lincoln Slept Here” example

**Fact:** In my community, we have a home that Lincoln would visit each time he was in town.

**“Why?”:** This home belonged to one of Lincoln’s friends. Each time Lincoln was in town, he would visit the home owner, who would offer him a room to rest for the evening.

**“Why?”:** Lincoln was in town frequently because he was a lawyer so he would travel to various communities in order to work cases at local courthouses.

**“Why?”:** Lincoln traveled the 8th Judicial Circuit. Throughout his life, county seats would host both judges and lawyers who would travel to hear and present local cases.

**Conclusion:** This resource in my community would fit the “**The Life and Times of Abraham Lincoln: 1) Lincoln the Man 1c) Lincoln the Lawyer**” Interpretive Theme established by the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area.

*Courtesy of Looking for Lincoln*



**Tangible:**  
Perceptible by  
touch, sight,  
feeling, or  
experience.

### Example Two: Let's try a harder one

**Fact:** In my community, we have a story that in the 1864, Union soldiers clashed with Copperhead Democrats.

**“Why?”:** The riot began when soldiers humiliated a local judge.

**“Why?”:** The local judge, C. H. Constable, was humiliated because he allowed four Union deserts to go free. This humiliation outraged local democrats.

**“Why?”:** Copperheads were antiwar Democrats—opposed to the American Civil War and Republican policies of the time. In response to the humiliation of the local judge and the sizeable presence of union soldiers in town, the Copperhead Democrats began a riot. By the end of the affair, 9 people were killed and fifteen Copperhead Democrats were arrested.

**“Why?”:** The terms Copperheads and Butternuts were used to describe ‘Peace Democrats’ who opposed both the American Civil War and Lincoln’s presidency. Antiwar riots and unrest was sporadic across the north as public opinion was wavering after 3 years of conflict. President Lincoln exercised his war powers and suspended Habeas Corpus for those

Democrats arrested. They were held for seven months.

**Conclusion:** This resource in my community would fit the “**The Life and Times of Abraham Lincoln:** 1) **Lincoln the Man:** 1d) **Lincoln the President;** 2) **Illinois’ Influence on Lincoln:** 2d) **Social and Political Landscape of Illinois and the Nation;** and 3) **Lincoln’s Legacy:** 3b) **Myth and**

**Memory, Lincoln Remembered”** Interpretive Themes established by the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area.

### Reflection

In **Example One** the process quickly takes the community from their ‘fact’ to its connection to the larger National Heritage Area interpretive themes.

In **Example Two** there may be no physical resource other than a story. Lincoln did not witness the event but the national political and social trends impacted the community directly. The process takes the community from their ‘fact’ to its connection to several of the National Heritage Area interpretive themes and reveals a direct Lincoln connection.

Asking a series of “Why?” questions will help to reveal useful connections that may not be obvious at first glance. Both examples are equally significant and valuable to the story of the Life and Times of Abraham Lincoln.



Courtesy of csdubya media

# Connecting Your Resource to the ALNHA Interpretive Themes

Now that you have identified why your resource is significant, use the “Why?” exercise to help you select which Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive theme(s) best fit your resource and its significance.

Fact: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why?: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why?: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why?: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why?: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion: Identify the ALNHA Interpretive themes that best fit this resource.**

**Lincoln the Man:**

☐ Lincoln the Pioneer

☐ Lincoln the Politician

☐ Lincoln the Lawyer

☐ Lincoln the President

**Illinois’ Influence on Lincoln:**

☐ The Land of Opportunity

☐ Lincoln and Springfield

☐ The People

☐ Underground Railroad in Illinois

☐ Social and Political Landscape of Illinois and the Nation

**Lincoln’s Legacy:**

☐ Lincoln’s Imprint on America

☐ Myth and Memory, Lincoln Remembered

☐ Lincoln and America’s continuing struggle with Equality, Race Relations, National Unity, and the Capacity for Democratic Government



## *Step Two: Developing Stories*

Storytelling is a powerful tool for conveying and sharing ideas, beliefs, values, and traditions. Stories are so effective at explaining the meaning of things; they are at the



*Courtesy of dc media*

heart of interpretation. No matter how simplistic your resource might seem, it has a variety of stories to tell. Your challenge, and the challenge of all interpretation, is to develop stories so that people will be able to connect them in meaningful, relevant ways.

### *Creating Local Themes*

Once you have identified the significance of the resource and the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive theme(s) it fits in, you should begin grouping the various stories into the identified themes.

Themes create the foundation for storytelling to increase the visitors' understanding and appreciation of community resources. Additionally, themes create a platform for the stories to work together to send visitors a carefully coordinated and crafted message about the resource. Well-crafted messages will get people to think critically about complex events and issues and what it means to us today.

### *Developing Local Themes*

For each resource, use the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area interpretive themes as a core foundation of your interpretive planning. You may wish to broaden or further expand the stories told by developing new complimentary local themes specific to the resource.

1. Make a list of the most important stories, and sort them into logical groups. What stories seem to fit together? Continue rearranging the various stories until a good fit is found for each. The resulting groups of stories are the beginning of a set of local themes.
2. Many of the stories will feature tangible elements—things that people can see, touch, or experience. List those tangibles for each story that has them.
3. What do your stories mean? Identify the significance (from Step 1) for each of the stories. What kind of meanings, values, or ideas does each grouping represent? Many stories will have several meanings or significance.

When developing themes, be diligent to ensure that they emphasize the significance about your resource, without repeating the same story everyone else is telling.

Additionally, local themes should complement and fit with the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area themes as defined previously.



4. Once the stories and significance are identified, start looking for broad concepts or the “big ideas” that might link the stories in each group. Those big ideas will form the heart of each theme. When stories suggest more than one big idea, try to prioritize them. Which big ideas will be most effective at conveying the stories’ significance?
5. Take each big idea, and use it to draft theme statements. Each theme statement should be grounded in the significance of the resource. It should link tangible elements of the resource to its intangible meanings. While it should be broad enough to support a wide range of stories, you should still be able to state it in a single or a few sentences.

Themes act like road maps for the visitor’s journey through your interpretive presentation. When visitors reach the destination (the end of the presentation) they should be able understand and recount the theme.

*Courtesy of Looking for Lincoln*



# Writing Theme Statements:

General Topic: I want to tell my audience about... \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Specific Topic: My resource relates to that topic by... \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Theme: After seeing my presentation, I want my audience to know and remember that... \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the common link between these resources? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sub-Themes: What other connections exist between the resource and theme? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How do these themes compliment the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Themes?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## WORKSHEET - CONTINUED

Use the answers to the questions above to state the most clear and direct sentence to identify your theme. Under each theme, craft sub-theme statements to include each of your important resources.

Theme Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sub-themes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Theme Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sub-themes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Theme Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sub-themes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### *Step Three: Considering an Audience*

Before implementing interpretation, consider your audience. What kinds of visitor groups might come to your community? Which groups might you want to attract? Potential visitors may include day trippers, vacationers, local residents, children, and people with a particular interest or education in the subject matter.

Each group will be looking for a different type of experience, so they'll be looking for different types of interpretation. Visitors' responses to interpretation depend on their level of education, learning style, language, and cultural traditions—and on



Courtesy of esdubya media

more mundane issues like the amount of time that's available to visit heritage resources.

Remember to consider the needs of groups that might be looking for something more than a typical adult visitor would. For example, school groups might be interested in the same stories as the general audience, but they might need an approach that's tailored to their needs. In order to understand the needs and expectations

of students and teachers, it may be beneficial to identify specific curriculum learning standards that your interpretive programing may reach. Teachers, who are often required to justify a trip to a resource, might be looking for special programing that meets their state learning standards. Identifying the specific learning standards ahead of the group's arrival shows your diligence to understand the visitor's needs.

The more you know about visitors and their needs, the more effectively you can communicate with them.

#### *What do Visitors want from a Heritage Experience?*

- Friendly, helpful, and accessible staff or volunteers.
- Well-organized, user-friendly information that allows them to quickly and easily learn what opportunities are available to them.
- Interactive experiences that engages them directly in the learning process.
- A wide variety of media that accommodate their personal learning styles.
- Souvenirs of the visit—something to take home.

### **State Curriculum Changes**

State curriculum learning standards change often and should be reviewed for each interpretative program every few years.

If learning standards have changed, you may need to revise your interpretive program in order to maintain your school group visitation numbers.

You can find the Illinois Learning Standards online: [www.isbe.state.il.us/ils](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils)

## Meeting Visitor Expectations

When visitors experience a heritage resource they are looking for something they value. They are not just visiting to experience the tangible things that your resource has to offer, but to explore their own thoughts and feelings, as well.

Most people will spend less than one hour focusing on your interpretation. Although they might stay longer than that, they will be looking for other activities to capture their attention.

In order to attract visitors stay to longer, one approach is to work together with other resources in the area. Instead of competing for visitation, look for ways to complement what visitors will experience elsewhere.

Before deciding what to tell visitors, ask yourself what they might expect from the experience. Consider what they might hear about your resource before they arrive. They might have a general idea of what you offer, but they will not be able to connect all the dots. In order to meet visitor expectations, you have to put the pieces together into a message they can understand and appreciate.



*Courtesy of csdubya media*

service representatives better craft an experience based on the information gleaned from the casual and friendly visitor interactions.

If you regularly get visitors who are familiar with the subject matter, consider splitting the interpretation into two “tracks” - one for experienced visitors and another for casual visitors. Instead of assuming that visitors want to see and do everything offered, tell them how they can find what interests them specifically.

## How Are You Doing So Far?

Up to this point, your work in interpretive development has essentially been an intellectual and theoretical exercise. Now you should be ready [and excited] to take the content you have developed and bring it to life “on the ground.” The next steps of this process will guide you through the implementation of your interpretive strategy that has been created.

The remaining sections of this manual will answer all the following questions: *“How will you tell your stories? How will you know if they are told effectively? How do you attract visitors to your community and resource?”*

Matching visitors to the kind of experience they expect is sometimes a difficult exercise and often requires probing questions by front line visitor service representatives. Such questions should be directed toward a visitor’s experience with the resource, their profession, and the region in which they live. Such information may help visitor



### *Step Four: Choosing the Media*

Once you have decided on the stories to tell, and how to tell them, it is time to consider the best interpretive “media” – the different tools you can use to present interpretation. Interpretive media includes everything from printed brochures to guided tours and digital formats.

When planning an interpretation strategy, do not just focus on the written word. Heritage resources have many options for telling their stories. Some of these are “tried and true,” such as wayside panels, brochures, and guided tours. Other options include scheduled events like musical or theatrical performances, lectures, and reenactments. In addition to these traditional methods of interpretation, new technologies are constantly appearing that may help enhance a visitor’s experience.

The best way to tell a story depends on the nature of the resource, the capacity of the entity, and the story being told. You should think like a visitor when selecting your media, while being mindful of your own capacity and community’s limitations. Let these two viewpoints determine the paths you take in order for the message to resonate with visitors.

Newest forms of interpretation have strong **participatory** elements at the center of its planning and design. In order to incorporate participatory elements, think about ways your visitors can contribute to the content of your interpretation, making the experience a ‘two way street.’

This ‘two way street’ begins first with the exhibit telling visitors the important information from the resource. Then, in the other lane, the visitors are asked thoughtful questions, to complete tasks, or to contribute experiences. Here, the visitor communicates back to the exhibit, resource, and institution. This type of deliberate exchange can produce lasting connections between a visitor and a resource. Additionally, the visitor leaves the resource feeling engaged after a meaningful visit.

Visitors often appreciate the opportunity to contribute personal experiences that are relevant to the topic at hand. Easy ways to contribute would be in notebooks, index cards, video messages, or leaving posts on your website or social media feeds. However, it is not enough that your visitors share their stories. You need to find a way that other visitors can access and interact with those stories. These types of participatory elements become a changing part of your exhibit.

### **Participatory:**

A strategy designed to engage your audience to not only visit but to interact with and contribute content to your interpretive programs.

For more information on participatory visitor experiences, the book *The Participatory Museum* and website [participatory-museum.org](http://participatory-museum.org) by Nina Simon are currently the best participatory literature.

## *Types of Interpretive Media*

### **Printed Materials**

Printed materials include well designed handouts, brochures, newsletters, newspapers and magazines, educational books, maps, guides, curricula and teacher guides, and special publications targeted to families and children.

### **Waysides and Banners**

Wayside exhibits and banners appear in outdoor settings. Wayside exhibits are made of material that is weather resistant. The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area has the Looking for Lincoln wayside exhibit program with specifications on branding, design, and format.

### **Electronic Media**

Electronic media items are the fastest growing and evolving segment of interpretative media. In today's media saturated society, visitors are more technology driven than ever. These tech-savvy visitor expectations are changing the way museums and communities interpret their resources. Today's visitors are often looking for high levels of interaction with resources and their exhibits.

### *Types of electronic media often used:*

- Audiovisual (slide shows, film, video)
- Computer-based interactive stations or kiosks
- Roving interpretation (handheld audio or video units, tours on CD or DVD, radio broadcast)
- Visitor-Controlled (podcasts, cell phone tours, smart phone and tablet applications)

### **Personal Interpretation**

Personal interpretation includes such activities as guided tours, children's activities, craft demonstrations, storytelling, first-person or living history interpretation (the interpreter impersonates a historical figure), reenactments, and participatory learning. Effective tour guides help visitors connect emotionally with the meanings inherent in a resource. Personal interpretation can come close to achieving the goal of crafting a visitor's experience based on their interests, experiences, and personal expectations.

### **Text Panels/Interpretive Exhibits**

This type of display can help connect a wide variety of objects to a larger story, and help visitors make sense of them. Panels and exhibit labels can provide a depth of information overlooked by other forms of interpretive media. Commonly found in

museums and other indoor interpretive spaces, text panels are the most familiar form of interpretation for visitors. Text panels and exhibit labels frequently need supplemental media in order to create the interactive experience that many visitors expect.

### **Web-Based Interpretation**

Today, a resource without a website seems almost invisible. Most websites provide information about how to find a resource, and when it is accessible by the public. But websites can be a valuable interpretive tool, as well, when they include the resource's history and stories. You may wish to include lesson plans, references for further study, and downloadable visitor guides.

Websites also offer great opportunities for audience-contributed content. Of course, this means someone will need to monitor the responses for appropriateness. This kind of audience participation has become so common and so popular, that it has become an expectation for visitors to leave web-based comments on websites, social media applications, and even travel advisory sites. Some examples are blogs, wiki sites, social networks like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Foursquare, and travel applications like Trip Advisor.

Web based interpretation provides the perfect opportunity for institutions and communities to connect with visitors before and after their visit to a resource. This personal connection should help drive return visitors and help create positive word-of-mouth to attract new visitors to a community. However, the site design must be attractive, interactive, and consistently updated with new and correct content.

It is important to understand that web-sites and web-based interpretation are never “finished”—they require consistent maintenance and improvement in order to be an effective tool.

### **Visitor Self-Guided Walking Tours**

Visitor walking tours are great interpretive tools for Main Street districts, historic districts, or areas where several resources are within walking distance of each other. When developing walking tours; printed materials and waysides may be supplemented by audio features such as podcasts.

The average visitor to a website will spend no more than 10-20 seconds viewing a page.

Therefore, your website must load and show its value quickly and efficiently in order to maintain your visitor's interest and increase average visit times.



*Courtesy of Looking for Lincoln*



### Capacity:

A community's abilities and limitations to create successful interpretation and set attainable and reasonable program goals

### Other Interpretive Methods

There are countless ways to successfully tell the story of a resource. These listed are not the only creative ways to interpret historical material. It is important to find which media works best with the stories being told. You may find that a mixture of several forms of media is needed to keep visitors engaged. This is expected and encouraged as long as the mixed media are complementary to one another and do not distract or have a negative impact on the themes and messages you want to convey to visitors.

### Things to Consider When Choosing Interpretive Media

There are many ways to successfully tell a story. The first step is to understand your **capacity** to deliver successful interpretation. This understanding will strongly influence which methods and media you select. **Understanding your capacity should be present thru the entire planning process.**

### Budget

*"How much money do you have to spend on interpretation?"* Set reasonable goals for the short term, and more lofty goals for the future. Start with what you know you can afford, and identify potential funding sources.

### Volunteer or Staff Involvement

If you are considering personal interpretation: *"Can you devote the time and effort necessary to make it truly effective?"* Do not provide guided tours unless you have thoroughly prepared yourself, staff, volunteers, and your facilities to do it effectively.

Be prepared to provide your staff and volunteers with solid training, supervision, and opportunities to research new material. New research for staff and volunteers is important to keep your interpretation from stagnating!

### Technology

*"Are you, staff, or volunteers reasonably computer/technology literate?"* Do not invest in computer-based applications unless you have the skills and resources to keep them in working order.

How familiar with technology are your visitors? Do you want to attract more visitors who are skilled with those kinds of technology? Be careful to keep a focus on the message, rather than the medium. IF your stories are not well conceived, researched, and conveyed, the technology will not be worth the investment.

## Type of Story You are Telling

*“Are you telling stories that are good candidates for multimedia interpretation?”* Could your stories benefit from music, sound effects, recordings, or video? Do they have dramatic storylines that could come to life in this kind of presentation? If you have a lot to say, consider working with a professional to develop a short audio or video presentation.

## Accessibility

When you decide where to locate your interpretation: *“Are you keeping visitors’ safety in mind?”* Are some features of your resource inaccessible to physically impaired visitors? The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require that visitors be given access to all areas of a property, but it does require you to provide materials that offer an equivalent experience. For example, if you have interpretation on the second floor, but do not have an elevator, consider taking photographs and creating an album that gives less mobile visitors an opportunity to see what it looks like.

## Maintenance

*“Do you have the capacity to conduct routine maintenance, cleaning, and periodic updates of your interpretive media?”* Proper and timely capital maintenance is vital to the preservation of the resources within the community, and maintains visitor’s safety, and comfort. Additionally, maintenance and updates to the interpretive media ensures that the strategy in place continually meets visitor expectations.

## Sustainability

*“Are these goals and plans sustainable?”* Is there a plan for long term sustainability? It is important that the program or interpretive project not rely on one individual—rather a group or a committee is preferred. In other words, if that individual decides to step down, retire, or move on—can the program or interpretive project continue?

Is the program funding a one-time gift or recurring annual grant? If funding is reduced, can the program scale down and continue operating? Does this interpretive program have public support?

Without plans for long term sustainability, programs and projects are more susceptible to a decline in quality, public support, and capacity to successfully operate.

## Understanding Capacity and Interpretive Media

Answering these, sometime obvious, questions will help identify the institutions and community’s capacity which will, in turn, help target the best interpretive media to compliment the stories you have identified as significant.

Before you spend a lot of time and money on panels or signs, computer based kiosks, or other interpretive media, find out what municipal regulations might affect their installation and maintenance.

One way to think about program effectiveness is to consider outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

### **Outputs:**

What you/your organizations do. Examples include maps, workshops, curriculum materials, and other media.

### **Outcomes:**

What a visitor will do as a result of their experience. Outcomes can involve changes in behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values or conditions after participating in a learning activity or experience

### **Impacts:**

How will the site, community, or resource benefit from successful outcomes? Impacts often embody lasting changes such as improved environmental conditions, community economic development, or changes in the way people think and live.

## *Step Five: Evaluating the Strategy*

Creating interpretation is not a “once and done” exercise—it is a dynamic process that requires an ongoing commitment to maintain visitors’ interest in your resource and in the stories being told. To keep things relevant, your interpretive strategy requires continuous updating with new material, different media and fresh perspectives of the subject matter. *How many visitors will keep returning to a museum that never rotates the objects on display, a community walking tour with outdated media and materials, or a guided tour with a script unchanged since the 1980s?*

One way to keep interpretation from growing stale is to step back often and ask yourself how effective it really is: “Are you meeting goals for what you want visitors to learn and connect with?” After your interpretation has been in place for a while, set aside some time to consider whether the programs are working as you want them to.

### *What is the Outcome?*

Before you can evaluate a program, revisit the goals of the interpretative strategy.

- How does it benefit the visitors?
- Does it matter to them?
- Has it made a difference?
- How are people’s lives better as a result of participating in the program?

By answering these challenging questions for yourself, you are defining goals for your interpretive program. Evaluation pushes you to clarify those goals. Outcomes of the interpretive program will reflect some kind of change in your visitors. Your program’s impact may include learning a skill, changing their understanding of a historical event, or even changing one’s behavior through your program.

### *What Do Visitors Think?*

There are two types of information you can gather:

- Quantitative: Statistics like the number of visitors, how long they pay attention to your interpretation, and how many of them can tell you why your resource is significant—things that you can count.
- Qualitative: The opinions, attitudes, perceptions and feelings of your visitors—the “subjective” things that might be expressed just a little differently by each of your visitors.



You can collect that information in two ways:

- Indirect- Observe visitors without their knowledge.
- Direct- Use interviews, focus groups, or questionnaires to ask visitors what they think.

### Observation

When observing, try to watch unobtrusively in order to notice what visitors do. *“Are they engaged in the program or just going through the motions? How long do they linger?”* Dwell time—the amount of time a visitor spends in an exhibit, for example, is an important quantitative measure of success.

Listening to what visitors say can help you find out what they think of your interpretation. It can give you clues to the thoughts and feelings you have inspired—and maybe the misconceptions and misunderstandings that needs to be corrected.

It is important to record your observations. Create a form to list the composition of the group – a lone visitor, family, a group of adults, etc. You may wish to list their gender, race, and approximate age. Look at the clock and time how long the visitor(s) spend with each activity. Record their interactions and what they say.

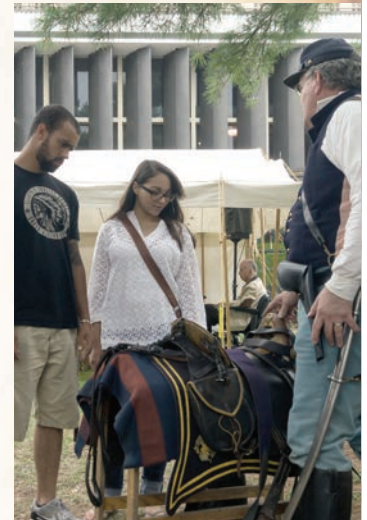
### Interviews

Surveys are frequently used to evaluate interpretive programs. Just as you would for indirect observation, create a data form so you will be able to capture information in a consistent, systematic way. When forming content for interviews, be sure to ask questions that address the stated goals. Include inquiries on visitor’s expectations and if the program met those expectations. Additionally, see if visitors interviewed are able to identify the significance of the resource.

### Focus Groups

To convene a focus group, bring together eight or twelve people who have similar backgrounds and interests. For example, maybe they are elementary school teachers, senior citizens, or African-American moms. Start a conversation with them that will help you see the resource from their point of view. This will help you understand what they like about it, what they would like to see improved, etc.

The conversations should be recorded so that you may reference it again at a later date. You may also want to write down their most important observations on a flip chart and keep the major talking points posted for the duration of the meeting. It is important to pay attention to non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, and the way people express themselves.



*Courtesy of csdubya media*

It is important to ask probing questions, and keep following up to get as much information as possible. However, be careful that you do not do most of the talking—let the focus group participants lead the conversation under your guidance.

### Questionnaires

Create a simple questionnaire that visitors can fill out. This could be a paper questionnaire that visitors complete after they have experienced your program. Or it could be an online questionnaire, which visitors would fill out on their smart phone or computer. Survey websites like [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) are inexpensive, and offer an easy format for you to collect the data.

No matter if the questionnaire is on paper or on the web; give careful thought to the questions asked. Some things to keep in mind:

- Use simple language. Avoid technical terms or words that might not be familiar to the general population.
- Make each question as specific as possible to avoid confusion.
- When drafting each question, imagine how it could be misinterpreted. Look for anything that could be ambiguous.
- Use one question per idea. Use a separate question for each thing you want to know.
- Start with the “easiest” questions (like visitor’s interests and experiences), and move up to more challenging ones (like what they learned or understood about the content of the program).
- Do not make it too long—unless you plan to offer a prize for completing the questionnaire.
- Run the draft questionnaire by others. They will see potential pitfalls and confusing points much more easily than you will.
- Try it out on a few people before committing to the final version. Make sure people can interpret and understand what information you are seeking.
- Make sure the questions aren’t leading.

Each of these evaluation strategies will give insight into what visitors need and expect. **Evaluation strategies are only useful if the information collected is quickly processed and put to use.** No matter which strategy you select, it is important to create an evaluation plan that allows you to regularly take an honest look at your programs’ effectiveness.

## Conclusion

Congratulations! You made it to the end of the five steps. Part I introduced the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area, the purpose of the Heritage Area Interpretative Plan, and the existing conditions of heritage tourism in central Illinois. Part II helped identify stories, significance, how to effectively tell those stories, and finally how to evaluate programing. Part III will help identify marketing strategies, how to develop local marketing campaigns, and show how your story fits within Heritage Area marketing campaigns and interpretive initiatives.



*Courtesy of Looking for Lincoln*



## Part III: Marketing Tools and Campaigns

Travel is the fastest growing industry in the world – and the whole world is competing to get visitors to their community or special event. And, while you may have the best destination or event around, simply put – you will not attract visitors if they do

not know about you. That is where basic marketing can make the difference in getting visitors to choose your community or event as a heritage destination.

Effective marketing happens when the right strategies and partners come together to reach the right audience(s). This can be accomplished whether you are lucky enough to have a big marketing budget or, like most folks, operating on a shoe-string and trying to stretch a small amount of money and all available resources to get the “biggest bang for the buck.” Whatever the situation, there

are some simple suggestions for leveraging resources in and around your community that can have a huge, positive effect on marketing efforts:

1. Contact the local area Convention & Visitors Bureau and Regional Tourism Development Office to identify resources they have available for promoting communities, attractions and events within their area – and how to participate. These may include, but are not limited to: visitor guides, web sites, social media, cooperative advertising programs (that may be at least partially grant funded), grant programs, and press releases. (CVB/Regional Office Listings in the Appendix)
2. If you do not already have an ALNHA Partner Account, contact the ALNHA office to set one up. Partner Accounts allow for 24/7 access to the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area web site – where community partners can update information, add photographs, video and submit press releases. All ALNHA marketing efforts will drive traffic to the web site – so the more complete, up-to-date information you provide the better.
3. Once steps 1 and 2 have been completed– you MUST make it a priority to keep information fresh and up-to-date at all times. Even if you only do the first two – these steps can be key to getting information in front of a large audience. But it is only as good and as effective as the information provided. The promotion offered through ALNHA, CVBs, Regional Tourism Offices and ultimately, the



*Courtesy of csdubya media*

Illinois Office of Tourism, is virtually FREE and worth thousands of dollars in promotional value – as long as you build those necessary partnerships and provide the best information.

4. Contact local/area media outlets and utilize opportunities such as on-air interviews to promote local/area events, community calendars, and short radio spots that provide free promotional opportunities. It is important to note deadlines for submitting information.
5. Local area community colleges and universities may provide marketing classes or students who would be happy to work on special marketing projects. Local educational institutions are perfect marketing partners – you get a promotional program and the student(s) get real world experience in planning and executing a marketing program. This can be set up as a class project or as an individual internship program/project.
6. Form a local/area media consortium. Sometimes local media outlets (TV/Radio/Newspaper) are willing to work together on a promotional program for a not-for-profit organization or program. The consortium will work to put together an affordable marketing plan at a significantly reduced rate. You may be able to find a sponsor to help offset the cost of a successful media consortium.
7. In addition to your main story – the who, what, where and when – are there other stories that might be of interest to the media? **Media outlets are more interested in covering interesting or unique stories—not just an event.** For example, is there a re-enactor participating in your event with actual historical ties to the character they are portraying? Is a local museum the repository for some little known, quirky artifacts that tell a personal story about the people who lived there? Look for the stories that would entice someone to attend your event or visit your attraction to find out more
  - Think about how many times a zoo brings animals into a local news station to promote an event. That institution (the zoo) gets several minutes on-air to show-off their resource (the animals) and plugs their marketing message. These segments catch the audience's attention and media outlets love to host them.



*Courtesy of csdubya media*



8. Take advantage of free promotional opportunities through social media as well as main-stream media to tell the story. In addition to setting up your own social media accounts, make sure to “Like” pages that reach the target audience(s).
9. Take advantage of opportunities to participate in familiarization tours (FAM tours) organized through ALNHA, the IL Office of Tourism, Regional Tourism Office or local/area Convention and Visitors Bureaus. These tours bring key press and tour buyers into the area and allow you to showcase what you have to offer. In addition to providing guide assistance, assist with securing complimentary accommodations, meals, and events tickets as needed based on the itinerary.
10. Are there some local partnership opportunities you might be overlooking? How about the local B&B who are promoting their property via advertising and their web site? Would they consider including tickets to your event in their packages for your event weekend? What about the major corporation in the community 60 miles away? Would they be interested in offering travel packages to your event with a special “employee discount” via their employee e-newsletter?



*Courtesy of csdubya media*



# Effective Marketing Requires Planning

To make the most effective use of all available marketing resources (funding, free promotions, partnerships, marketing volunteers) – you **MUST** have a plan. It does not have to be extensive or complicated. Follow the step-by-step guide to developing a marketing plan.

**Step I – Benefits** –A traveler can go anywhere, do anything. Why should they come to your community/event/attraction? What makes your community/event/attraction unique? What will they experience that they would not experience somewhere else? What are the unique benefits outside of the Lincoln experience that will make this a travel destination they should choose? Make a list as well thought out and complete as you can. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Step II – Target Audience** - Who is your perfect visitor? Is it a Lincoln scholar? Is it a family with school age children? Is it a motor coach group of seniors? Is it couples on a weekend getaway? It may be a combination of many different audiences. Identify your target audience groups below.

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Now have identified the different target groups, list where these groups might be found. Facebook groups, online blogs, magazines, news programs, schools, web sites, local/area television shows, etc. This will help to determine the best places to promote the community/attraction/event. Identify where you can reach your target audience below.

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**Step III – Speaking to Your Audience** – Create offers to reach your audience. It may be as simple as – visit our web site to find all the information needed for attending the event. Or, it could be an overnight hotel package that includes tickets to the event. Or, maybe it is a contest with a travel package giveaway that allows you to capture names and e-mails for further dialogue to encourage the consumer to visit you. The possibilities are limitless. Use the space below to create offers to reach your audience. Be realistic about what you can offer your target audience.

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**Step IV – Fulfill Consumer Responses** – Once the prospective traveler responds to a promotion, you must be ready to provide them with the important information. If you are directing them to a web site, make sure they can get all of the information they need to plan their visit. If you are promising them a brochure, make sure you have a way to deliver it – whether it is a downloadable version or a printed version to mail them. (Remember – e-mail is cheap and fast.) All the best promotion in the world will fall flat if the visitor receives no response or cannot get the information promised. Think this through and know exactly how you will respond and who will be responsible for making sure it happens. Use the space below to identify what the prospective visitor will receive if they respond to your promotion. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Step V – Determine Your Action Steps** - Based on the available resources, the audience(s) you have determined to reach, and where you intend to promote— you can now create a plan for what steps will be taken, when, and who will execute the steps. Write your action steps below. \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Basic Marketing Plan Template*

Using the information gathered in steps one to five create a marketing plan below.

**Program Name:** (Name of program or event to be marketed)

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**Benefit Message:** (Identify the benefit (s) to the potential traveler)

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**Target Audience(s):** (Identify the your target audience below)

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**Planned Promotions:** Identify your planned promotions for your program or event. Examples include: advertising, web site(s), travel partner web sites, social media, e-marketing or news media.

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**Action Steps:** (Identify the action steps below. Remember to list specific tasks, who will complete the tasks, and when the task should be completed.)

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## ALNHA Marketing Program

The ALNHA Marketing Program is an integrated promotional program using a variety of media to generate awareness of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area as a vacation destination for leisure travelers. Through the use of social media, traditional media such as print advertising, search engine marketing, public relations outreach, and web site development, Looking for Lincoln will encourage potential visitors to learn more about the National Heritage Area through the LFL website and to consider planning a multi-day visit to the area. Through the website, social media campaigns, and public relations efforts, communities will benefit from promotions of special events and area attractions to encourage overnight stays and patronage of local businesses. By linking the communities of the heritage area and the hundreds of Lincoln stories to be told, visitors will begin to see the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area as a viable choice as their next vacation getaway.



Courtesy of csdubya media

### *ALNHA Discovery Corridors*

The *Discovery Corridors* project is a marketing initiative by the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area to link together sites across central Illinois with common themes that together will tell complete stories. Visitors will be encouraged to select a *Discovery Corridor* that best suits their interest. In theory, any number of interpretive themes can be marketed as a *Discovery Corridor*. The National Heritage Area will have published books affiliated with many of the early *Discovery Corridors*.

One of the first Corridors to be developed will be the 8th Judicial Circuit. In addition to the many courthouses, communities have personal stories about Lincoln's friends and interactions during his travels. While the *Discovery Corridor* will market sites associated with particular stories, it is a perfect opportunity to provide “**Local Links**” to visitors to spend additional time and dollars in the community.

The important difference between ALNHA *Discovery Corridors* and traditional interpretive trails is that the ALNHA Corridors are connected thematically with community stories and not geographically by highways or physical trails. Some future Corridors may have sites in all parts of the National Heritage Area and many sites will be included in several different Corridors. Future *Discovery Corridors* to be developed include the Lincoln in Mormon Country, Underground Railroad, and 1858 Lincoln Douglas Debate. This short list is not intended to be exhaustive, rather a small sample of what is to come.

### **Local Links:**

Local marketing opportunity to provide visitors with connections to local sites.

### *Looking for Lincoln Signature Events*

The vitality of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is dependent on events that contribute to the mission and guiding principles of the ALNHA. The Looking for Lincoln Signature Events program provides a system to recognize and support events that complement the ALNHA mission, further understanding of the story of the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, and contribute to the broad experience of the national heritage area.

A signature event can be defined as a Lincoln centric event that fits within the ALNHA interpretive themes and provides excellent visitor services. It is a marketable event that embodies the national heritage area brand and occurs on an annual basis, unless commemorative. The purpose of the Looking for Lincoln Signature Event is to promote heritage tourism within the National Heritage Area by recognizing outstanding events that are representative of the ALNHA brand. The primary focus of these events is to promote the education and interpretation of the life & times of Abraham Lincoln while providing a high level of visitor services.

The goals of the Looking for Lincoln Signature Event program are:

- Create engaging experiences that connect places and stories throughout the heritage area and promote public awareness of the region's history, culture, and significance. (ALNHA Goal 2)
- Participate in a national dialogue on keeping America's promise by examining national issues associated with the antebellum period and in particular Abraham Lincoln's life and evolving thought. (ALNHA Goal 4)
- Raise public consciousness about the needs and benefits of preserving the historic and cultural legacies of central Illinois. (ALNHA Goal 5)
- Strengthen the ability of sites and resources associated with Abraham Lincoln and his legacy to achieve long-term sustainability. (ALNHA Goal 7)

ALNHA Signature Events are designated by the ALNHA Steering Council.

Looking for Lincoln Communities interested in having an event in their community designated as a ALNHA Signature Event should contact the Looking for Lincoln staff to initiate the designation process.

## Appendix

### Convention & Visitors Bureau in the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Area Served</i>	<i>Contact Information</i>
Abraham Lincoln Tourism Bureau	Logan County	1555 5th Street Lincoln, IL 62656 (217) 732-8687
Alton Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau	Madison, Jersey, and Calhoun Counties	200 Piasa St. Alton, IL 62002 (618) 465-6676
Bloomington-Normal Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	McLean County	3201 Cira Dr #201 Bloomington, IL 61704 (309) 665-0033
Champaign County Convention & Visitors Bureau	Champaign County	108 S Neil St. Champaign, IL 61820 (217) 351-4133
Danville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	Vermilion County	100 West Main Street Suite #146 Danville, IL 61832 (217) 442-2096
Decatur Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	Macon County	202 East North Street Decatur, IL 62523 (217) 423-7455
Freeport/Stephenson County CVB	Community of Freeport	4596 U.S. 20 Freeport, IL 61032 (815) 233-1357
Galesburg Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	Knox County	2163 E Main St Galesburg, IL 61401 (309) 343-2485
Henderson County Economic Development Corp.	Henderson County	P.O. Box 239 Stronghurst, IL 61480 (309) 221-0066



<i>Agency</i>	<i>Area Served</i>	<i>Contact Information</i>
Heritage Corridor Convention & Visitors Bureau	LaSalle	15701 Independence Boulevard Romeoville, IL 60446
Jacksonville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	Morgan County	310 E State St, Jacksonville, IL 62650 (217) 243-5678
Macomb Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	McDonough County	201 South Lafayette, Macomb, IL 61455 (309) 833-1315
Peoria Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	Woodford, Tazewell, Mason, and Fulton Counties	456 Fulton St #300 Peoria, IL 61602 (309) 282-3279
Quincy Convention & Visitors Bureau	Adams, Pike, and Hancock Counties	532 Gardner Expressway Quincy Il 62301 (800) 978-4748
Shelby County Tourism/Lake Shelbyville Area CVB	Shelby County	315 East Main Street Shelbyville, IL 62565 (217) 874-3529
Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau	Communities of Anna/Jonesboro	P.O. Box 378 Anna, Illinois 62906 (618) 833-9928
Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau	Sangamon County	109 Seventh Street Springfield IL 62701 (217) 789-2360
Illinois Regional Tourism Offices in the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area	Chicago & Beyond La Salle County	200 S State St Belvidere, IL 61008 (815) 547-3740
Great Rivers Country	Adams, Brown, Calhoun, Fulton, Greene, Hancock, Henderson, Jersey, Knox, Madison, Mason, McDonough, Peoria, Pike, Schuyler, Tazewell, Warren, Woodford,	581 South Deere Road, Macomb, IL 61455 (309) 837-7460

Agency	Area Served	Contact Information
Land of Lincoln	Cass, Champaign, Christian, Clark, Coles, Cumberland, DeWitt, Douglas, Edgar, Fayette, Lincoln, Logan, Macoupin, McLean, Menard, Montgomery, Morgan, Moultrie, Piatt, Sangamon, Scott, Shelby, and Vermilion Counties	700 E Adams St, Springfield, IL 62701 (217) 525-7980



*Courtesy of csdubya media*

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For more information visit [www.lookingforlincoln.org](http://www.lookingforlincoln.org)

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