

A HOME FOR BRAVE IDEAS



PRESIDENT
LINCOLN'S COTTAGE

Strategic Plan: Investing in Our Future 2018-2022

*“This is a spiritual
experience like none I’ve ever had.”*



THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

President Lincoln’s Cottage is a home for brave ideas. This inspiring location in Washington, D.C. is where Abraham Lincoln crafted the Emancipation Proclamation and made crucial decisions about the Civil War. Today, the site offers an intimate, never-before-seen view of Abraham Lincoln’s presidency and private life through authentic experiences that inspire action. President Lincoln’s values of humility, justice, and freedom live on through every interaction at the Cottage.

As we reflect on our past and present, we are taking this opportunity to chart the next five years with an eye toward harnessing the power of President Abraham Lincoln’s sanctuary as a force for good in the world.

When President Lincoln’s Cottage opened to the public in 2008, we immediately established a reputation as a unique and innovative model for historic sites. Yet few could have predicted what we would become in only a decade. In the past year, President Lincoln’s Cottage became an independent 501(c)3 organization, gaining momentum and recognition for our efforts, including:

- Presidential Award for Excellence in Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking
- American Alliance of Museums Award for Innovation in Education
- Best Museum Off the Mall
- 50 Best Places to Work in Washington, D.C.

The foresight and vision of our board, staff, and supporters have allowed us to repeatedly achieve our goals and exceed expectations. As a direct result of our successes, we are faced with higher-stakes opportunities and bigger expectations for our impact, which in turn places greater demands on our operation.

This document serves as a guide to our board, staff, and supporters so we can best steward the future of this brave place together.

*“The Cottage shows the humanity
and responsibility we all have to fight
for justice.”*



OUR PROCESS

President Lincoln's Cottage launched the Strategic Planning Task Force in mid-2016 to evaluate which concepts have the greatest mission and vision alignment, the greatest impact, and the best return on investment. It also evaluated what we as an organization can uniquely provide for the local community, the nation, and the world. After in-depth conversations with stakeholders including staff, board members, major donors, and key partners, and extensive workshops, the Task Force made difficult and necessary decisions about which strategies should be priorities over fiscal years 2018-2022. The Board of Directors formally adopted the Strategic Plan on May 18, 2017.

President Lincoln's Cottage's five-year Strategic Plan is divided into four tenets, three strategic streams, and three foundational streams:

- Tenets are beliefs we uphold throughout all aspects of our work.
- Strategic streams are activities we choose to prioritize to achieve our mission and vision in the most direct, unique, effective way possible. These streams play on the inherent tensions embodied in our organization and history of President Lincoln's Cottage, such as the reality that our work is both timeless and urgent.
- Foundational streams are either activities required by ethical and legal obligation, or what we choose to prioritize to ensure we have the resources and talent to do our best work. If we don't invest in these areas, we can do nothing else.

VISION

Plant the seeds of Lincoln's brave ideas around the world so that all people, everywhere, can be free.

MISSION

Reveal the true Lincoln and continue the fight for freedom.



*“This place reminded me of my
responsibility as a citizen and keeper
of my nation.”*



TENETS

1. We live our mission. Lincoln's character guides the choices we make. It gives us the ability to determine what was and is right, as well as the moral courage to fight for freedom and justice.
2. We emphasize the value of understanding history in all we do.
3. We promote and engage in conscious reflection, which is necessary for effective action.
4. We strive to serve as many people as possible, but care most about the depth of our impact.

STRATEGIC STREAM 1

BUILD ON THE COTTAGE'S AUTHENTIC ROLE AS A PLACE OF REFLECTION & PILGRIMAGE

Empower through personal growth and self-reflection

In the decade since President Lincoln's Cottage opened to the public, there have been dramatic shifts in our audience served, surrounding neighborhoods, and available and accessible technology. At the same time, our track record of success to date has resulted in the public having extremely high expectations for the visitor experience. Redesigning and rethinking the spaces and assets we steward will enable us to better serve the public as a place of education, a space for reflection, and a beacon of hope.

- Maximize opportunities for the public to reflect on the historical context of President Lincoln's ideas as well as current issues
 - Redesign the exhibits and public gathering spaces of the Robert H. Smith Visitor Education Center to be responsive to current scholarship and events
- Leverage groundbreaking studies and scholarship at the Cottage to deepen the experiential and long-term impact for visitors
 - Restore key features that enhance the immersive visitor experience at the site
 - Create opportunities for visitors to leave behind a physical mark
- Seek opportunities to harness the power this place had on Lincoln's own ability to lead our nation through a time of great crisis
 - Investigate and pursue appropriate opportunities to save landscapes and structures adjacent to the National Monument that support our ability to serve the public
 - Provide thoughtful programming and greater community access to structures, landscapes, and vistas to offer a welcome retreat in times of national turmoil
- Capitalize on the abundance, beauty, and specific history of our physical space to expand opportunities for earned and contributed income



STRATEGIC STREAM 2

INVEST IN REACH AND IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Empower through innovation and knowledge

The demand of visitors and organizations who came, had a transformative experience, and seek to stay engaged with President Lincoln's Cottage is exceeding our current capabilities. They want more and we have more to offer, but we need the platforms and capacity to deliver.

- Build on existing education opportunities for K-12 students, higher education, and lifelong learners to extend and enhance impact
 - Grow and support our award-winning Students Opposing Slavery program at the college level
 - Create virtual components of core programs, such as the Lincoln Ideas Forum and Cottage Conversations
 - Collaborate with educators and education networks to confirm and strengthen ties to existing curricula and standards
- Leverage position as conveners to create new learning opportunities
 - Facilitate conversations with partners and key stakeholders on shared and timely issues
 - Host workshops on ground-breaking methods crucial to our work to share new discoveries
- Strengthen engagement with a growing number of national and international constituents through intentional and efficient use of scalable online platforms
- Cultivate new relationships with major players in the education funding field, including government and foundation grantmakers, to ensure the scalable growth of all education programs



STRATEGIC STREAM 3

NURTURE BRAVE IDEAS TO INSPIRE ACTION

Empower to action

President Lincoln's Cottage is uniquely positioned to serve as a convener for individuals and organizations seeking to debate contemporary questions of national unity, justice, democracy, leadership, and power. This use of the site has become an increasingly important component of our work. We must harness the power of this place to create opportunities for debate, impact, and action in keeping with our values and purpose.

- Create signature opportunities for debate, deeper-level engagement, and impact
 - Host summits in which influencers and experts come together on big issues or ideas, resulting in published conclusions and/or calls to action
- Cultivate a panel of experts and artists to support and inform our ongoing development of thought-provoking perspectives on the past, present, and future
- Investigate the concept of a "Freedom Center"
 - Explore concept of virtual platform first, focusing on Lincoln's unfinished work and continued fight for freedom
- Tap into a network of foundations focused on social entrepreneurship to build the capacity of President Lincoln's Cottage to nurture brave ideas on a national scale

"The exhibit changed me.

I am substantively different as a result."



FOUNDATIONAL STREAM 1

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY



Building a foundation for the future

President Lincoln's Cottage is poised for tremendous growth in excellence and impact over the course of this plan. However, without dedicated resources and energy, that growth curve can quickly turn into a cliff. As game-changers in the museum field, we find that traditional sources of funding and metrics fail to support and illustrate the depth and duration of our impact on students and other visitors, which requires us to seek new funding outlets and create new metrics.

- Broaden and diversify major donor and foundation contributions to the Cottage
- Develop a corporate giving program and outreach plan
- Strengthen and invest in earned income streams
- Monitor and improve efficiency in generating income
- Deliver measurable returns on investments to internal and external stakeholders
- Develop new metrics to evaluate and demonstrate unique impact

“It’s a hidden treasure. I experienced an appreciation of our nation in one of the most inspiring but trying times in a way that no other place in DC can do.”

FOUNDATIONAL STREAM 2

OPERATIONAL INTEGRITY

Our license to operate

The founding of President Lincoln's Cottage at the Soldiers' Home, as a National Monument in 2000 and as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2016, was a collaborative process resulting from tripartite agreements between the entity representing the Cottage organization, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home. We are required by these agreements to maintain the property and, by extension, the organization's financial and operational health at all times.

- Establish and adhere to clear ethical standards
- Promote transparency across our work
- Evaluate and regularly update financial and operational controls
- Practice exemplary preservation and conservation
- Exercise care in how operations affect key stakeholders

“Especially during this time of unease and uncertainty of the future, these reflections are of the utmost importance.”



FOUNDATIONAL STREAM 3

PEOPLE & CULTURE



Living our mission

People are at the heart of President Lincoln's Cottage's work. Our investment in the stories of the people who lived and worked here during Lincoln's time is inherently bound up in our investment in the capacity and abilities of the people who live and work here today. We have a track record of delivering on exceptionally ambitious goals, and need to continually invest in our people to realize our mission.

- Live the mission and vision operationally
- Develop a strong, supportive, and inclusive workplace culture
- Regularly evaluate board and staff performance
- Develop board and staff pipelines
- Recognize expertise and provide for professional growth
- Analyze and enhance staff capacity and expertise
- Provide top level resources to the team

“I love bringing people here. Stimulates great discussion and I always learn something new.”



LET'S BUILD THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Learn More at www.lincolncottage.org

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