

Chapter 4 • Community Engagement	2
4.1 Planning Guidance for Community Engagement	2
4.1.1 Guidance from the Vision and Mission Statements	2
4.1.2 Guidance from Goals and the Preferred Alternative	3
4.2 Concept and Approach for Community Engagement	4
4.3 Communication: Creating a Public Presence	5
4.4 Educational Programming for Residents	6
4.4.1 Arts and Cultural Programs	7
4.4.2 Outdoor Recreation	8
4.4.3 Community Events	10
4.5 Community Involvement in Research	11
4.5.1 Creating a Repository for Research	11
4.5.2 Recording Community Traditions and Memories	13
4.6 Programs for Youth	15
4.6.1 Educational Programming for School Children	16
4.6.2 Other Youth Outreach	18
4.7 Organizing and Managing for Community Engagement	23

Chapter 4 • Community Engagement

This chapter reviews ways for the Commission and heritage area partners to engage communities and residents and cultivate lasting public understanding and support in pursuit of the heritage area’s mission, goals, and vision.

Interpretation and efforts to cultivate tourism for the entirety of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, as described in the preceding two chapters, are what is “new” about a heritage area as a community planning and development exercise. Both interpretive and tourism planners for heritage area strategies and programs consider many possible audiences – drawn from both the visiting public and the residents of the heritage area and surrounding regions.

This chapter addresses some of the same activities identified in other chapters, focusing on residents. It offers still more ideas with residents in mind as the primary audience, particularly with regard to educational approaches and programming for youth.

Engaging individuals and leaders, neighborhoods and communities, and organizations and institutions of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is critical. The Commission must offer ways for residents to build their appreciation for the heritage area’s resources, stories, and opportunities. That appreciation is critical in building support for community investment in preservation, interpretation, and development to support long term improvements. Moreover, residents themselves possess stories, affect the sense of hospitality that visitors experience, and can volunteer for the many activities that will need personal investments of time. Deep community engagement, therefore, can enrich the heritage area in many important ways.

4.1 Planning Guidance for Community Engagement

The *Environmental Assessment for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area* outlines the initial planning process that guides this management plan. Chapter 1 of the Environmental Assessment, Purpose and Need, includes the vision, mission, and goals developed for the heritage area – a combination sometimes called the “foundation for planning.” The following sections provide selections pertinent to this chapter.

4.1.1 Guidance from the Vision and Mission Statements

In part, the heritage area’s vision states that it will enable “growth of a sustainable regional economy and the conservation of its natural and cultural resources in **ways that benefit and unite its people and places**. Its natural splendor and meaningful heritage are shared with millions of delighted visitors and **celebrated by its residents** so that its **environment and communities are thriving**” (emphasis added).

The mission statement for the National Heritage Area also provides guidance for this chapter, calling for:

- The enhancement of public appreciation for the heritage area’s communities, resources, and landscapes;
- Working through a network of partners to make improvements that benefit residents and visitors alike; and
- Valuing such principles as “authenticity, cultural diversity, high-quality design, energy efficiency, regional and cross-border leadership, open communication, and transparent operations.”

4.1.2 Guidance from Goals and the Preferred Alternative

Early in the planning process, the Commission identified nine goals for the heritage area. Alternative approaches through which the Commission and partners could achieve those goals were then explored, and a Preferred Alternative was selected (see sidebars). These goals help to structure this chapter:

- **Engaging our Young People** – Provide interactive and engaging opportunities for children, teenagers, and young adults that motivate them to develop knowledge and understanding of the community's important stories; learn useful skills and trades; and become the region's next generation of leaders.
- **Interpretation and Education** – Assure the creation of a high quality educational and interpretive program, providing partners with a framework and opportunities to inform and inspire a wide range of audiences and nurture public appreciation for the diverse communities, cultures, resources and environments in the Niagara region.
- **Outdoor Recreation** – Identify and support outdoor activities and programs; eco-tourism opportunities; and recreational access and facilities that enhance heritage area resources and amenities.

*****SIDEBAR: Conceptual Approach from the Preferred Alternative: Engaging our Young People

- Work with partners on interactive and engaging opportunities for children, teenagers, and young adults that use local history and historic sites to meet state curriculum requirements.
- Create a Junior Rangers Program encouraging children to visit and engage with sites.
- Provide internships for local college students.
- Enable youth organizations to use the region's history and resources for their objectives.
- Encourage local youth leadership organizations.
- Provide an expansive local history program for local school children that instills a sense of appreciation and pride for the community and environment in which they live;
- Create an Ambassadors Program to engage local young people in presenting their communities to visitors.
- Create seasonal employment opportunities for young adults to work with interpretive programs and businesses.
- Maintain an awareness of regional scholastic, research and conservation projects to identify ways for students to address heritage area goals.
- Partner with local trades organizations to teach young adults the skills necessary to create a restoration economy in the region.
- Participate with the Student Conservation Association in establishing a program for environmental and outdoor recreation enhancements.

*****END SIDEBAR

*****SIDEBAR: Conceptual Approach from the Preferred Alternative: Interpretation and Education

- Collaborate with partners in developing an interpretive framework and plan and in networking attractions, to reach a wide range of audiences and nurture public appreciation for the region's communities, cultures, resources, and environments.
- Support partners in implementing their sites' portions of the interpretive plan, beginning with a core program, with other experiences phased in over time.

- Assist local partners in establishing and supporting a central database of materials, publications and artifacts related to interpretive subjects and encourage scholarly research.

*****END SIDEBAR

*******SIDEBAR: Conceptual Approach from the Preferred Alternative: Outdoor Recreation**

- Provide technical assistance, grants, and organizational capabilities to relate recreational programming directly to the heritage area's interpretive themes.
- Promote a rich array of outdoor recreation opportunities that facilitate interaction with and learning in the natural world, including such activities as boating, fishing, birding, camping, and guided educational hiking tours.

*****END SIDEBAR

4.2 Concept and Approach for Community Engagement

The driving concept for this chapter is this: The involvement and appreciation of individuals and leaders, neighborhoods and communities, and organizations and institutions is critical to this heritage area's success over the long term. [Use also as CALLOUT]

Fortunately, just about everything the heritage area might accomplish has a community engagement dimension. This chapter is designed to bring that dimension out, to encourage all with a stake in the success of the heritage area to take advantage of as many opportunities to build community engagement as possible. The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will seek to stimulate the creation of a rich and diverse program of community engagement through five strategies:

- (1) Creating **visible programs and a public presence** so that residents come to view the heritage area as a regular element of community life.
- (2) Encouraging well-designed, coordinated **educational programs for residents, students, and visitors**. While much of this overlaps with the interpretive programs described in Chapter 2, there are elements that may especially appeal to local audiences, including **community-based arts and cultural programs** and **outdoor recreation** – with activities in both of these including **community events**, from public lectures to festivals.
- (3) Encouraging **community research**, to record the detailed oral traditions that provide texture and life to community history and build community knowledge and pride. This activity should be supported by a well-provided-for central resource for archiving and accessing documentary and material collections, oral history, and research.
- (4) Creating a **rich array of ways to reach and serve the youth of this region**, encouraging them to gain knowledge and direct experience of heritage development and tourism in much the same way that youth education curricula now include environmental education. In terms of investing in the civic future of the heritage area for long term dividends, this particular element may be one of the best ways to spend the heritage area's resources – and there are many possibilities for such programming. This goes well beyond any ambition for youth education about the region's history and environment, although these provide a foundation for such programming. Engaging young people in leadership development and creating a deep understanding of community functions, needs, and priorities is a good investment in lasting leadership for heritage area and its communities.
- (5) To aid partners in coordinating and expanding their programs in all of these ways, the Commission expects to **become a central, "first response" provider of technical assistance**,

clearinghouse information, and other kinds of support for public and school-based education. Both visitors and residents will benefit from such activities, but the focus will be on residents.

Chapter 7, Management and Implementation, offers guidance in general for partnering, and for a communications plan where much of the work described in this chapter can be blended (section 7.5). A key objective for this plan is to identify as many opportunities as possible for the Commission and heritage area partners to encourage community engagement, particularly in creating a public presence for the heritage area. No program should go without this analysis.

In general, many of the ideas in this chapter “piggy-back” on ideas outlined in other chapters, with the exception of education and youth outreach.

ACTION: Incorporate five community engagement objectives into an overall communications plan: (1) a public presence for residents; (2) community education and outreach through arts and cultural programs and outdoor recreation; (3) community participation in research; (4) youth involvement and leadership development; and (5) outreach to schools.

4.3 Communication: Creating a Public Presence

Heritage area identity and branding has already been addressed by preceding chapters on interpretation and heritage tourism (Chapters 2 and 3). Adopting a standard graphic identity will reinforce this public presence over time; as this is used and becomes familiar in everything from the digital world to paper publications to wayfinding signage, residents will come to associate this visual and physical presence with the heritage area as a whole.

Identity, however, is only a part of branding – the sauce, so to speak. When it comes to serving the local public, the main dish is creating visible programs with a level of quality that attracts repeat audiences among residents. It should mean something special to a resident when he or she learns that the Commission is a sponsor or producer of an event or program, or that a given attraction or organization is a “partner” in the heritage area.

High-quality programming that creates a long-term, recognizable “brand” for heritage-area offerings is described in Chapter 2, Niagara’s Interpretive Presentation. The next section specifically addresses opportunities in adult education, while sections beyond that address specific topics that may prove helpful in identifying effective programs to pursue.

Marketing to the “home audience” of residents is an important part of creating visible programs. Large and enthusiastic audiences help to spread the word that activities related to the heritage area are worth attending and supporting. Even the most innovative and well-conceived programs are not worth doing if the intended audience fails to materialize. This includes everything from aiding partners in doing the best job possible to reach its audiences for given programs or activities, to promoting the heritage area’s website to make sure that the public understands how to access and use it.

Actions for improving the heritage area’s website for interpretation in general are offered in Chapter 2. In addition, the website is a convenient means of supporting partners’ marketing to residential audiences by linking to partners’ sites and featuring upcoming events and programs. Therefore, that website should be specifically marketed to residents; while marketing dollars are limited (as discussed in Chapter 3, Niagara’s Visitor Experience), those available should be apportioned to apprising residents of its availability and ease of use, in order to support partners’ marketing.

ACTION: Support partners in creating high-quality local history presentations and events designed specifically for residents.

ACTION: Address partners' needs for marketing support to reach local audiences for their programs.

ACTION: Use the heritage area's website to promote partners' websites and feature partners' upcoming events and programs.

ACTION: Market the heritage area's website to residents in order to support partners' marketing.

4.4 Educational Programming for Residents

Chapter 2, Niagara's Interpretive Presentation, addresses collaboration with partners to develop an interpretive framework and plan and to network attractions, to reach a wide range of audiences and nurture public appreciation for the region's communities, cultures, resources, and environments. Core audiences for interpretive programming include residents. The guiding principles for interpretation expressed in Chapter 2 are equally important to the concept of education.

The challenge in creating interpretive and educational programs for residential audiences is keeping these programs fresh and appealing to repeat participants. Too often, residents do not engage with interpretive attractions until friends and family come to visit, assuming that what is on offer is static and not relevant to their interests. Successful interpretive sites work hard to understand the needs and interests of their local audiences and respond with appropriate seasonal and experiential variations on their themes, exhibits, and programmed activities.

The range of possibilities is too wide to describe in detail in this plan, and investigation of audience interest is rather more a marketing challenge than a needs assessment. Still, an investigation of local interest and priorities could be part of a more general approach to understanding local needs. To understand appropriate possibilities that the heritage area should encourage, a first step would be to assemble a working group through the Interpretive Committee comprising leaders of local organizations experienced in adult heritage education to investigate what has worked in the region and to study effective programs elsewhere. The American Association for State and Local History is a good resource, with an Interpreters & Educators Affinity Group for ongoing dialogue and activities to share good practices (<http://www.aaslh.org/educators&Interpreters.htm>). Results from the working group should be:

- One or two good projects or practices chosen for emphasis in the first year following the group's work – through training, program development, or grant support;
- A description of the range of needs to be addressed over time; and
- A series of steps or strategies in the form of a brief, short-range strategic plan – as little as on one or two pages – to help shape the first one or two years of an adult education initiative led by heritage area partners.

The remainder of this section suggests three programming areas for focus that have adult-education dimensions and which local audiences are likely to appreciate: community-based arts and cultural programs, outdoor recreation, and community events. Each of these topics should be the basis for an element of the short-range strategic plan.

ACTION: Work with heritage area attractions on effective, collaborative research into the needs and interests of local audiences.

ACTION: Establish a working group or subcommittee of the Interpretive Committee to focus on adult education programming and create a short-range strategic plan that includes (but is not limited to) a focus on arts and cultural programs, outdoor recreation, and community events.

ACTION: Support innovative educational programs focusing on audiences of adult residents. Consider Road Scholar (formerly Elder Hostel) and offering continuing education classes related to the history and culture of the region, working with local colleges and universities and the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center.

4.4.1 Arts and Cultural Programs

Arts and cultural programs are not only interesting to local audiences in their own right, but they have an important community economic development dimension. Partners for heritage area efforts to address arts and cultural programming in order to stimulate community engagement would include the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center in Niagara Falls, the Lewiston Council on the Arts, the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County, and the New York State Council on the Arts, a major potential funder. The Western New York Artists Network™ can point the way to individual artists and businesses.

A January 2005 report of the Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative entitled, *A Cultural Tourism Strategy: Enriching Culture and Building Tourism in Buffalo Niagara*, emphasizes the importance of focus on the arts and culture (without even mentioning, in that part of the report – the remarkable dollars that are associated with cultural heritage tourism involving the arts):

Cultural, arts, and heritage assets also play an indirect but critically valuable role in the broader economic development strategy of the region. For instance, convention decisions often hinge upon the quality of life and cultural tourism amenities offered by a region. Moreover, people making location-based investments – where to establish or expand a business, relocate for employment, raise a family, vacation or retire – favorably regard regions offering opportunities for cultural enrichment. The arts and culture community in Buffalo Niagara should be recognized as part of the region's basic infrastructure for sustainable economic development and should be invested in accordingly. Clearly the reasons to develop cultural tourism go beyond the ticket and retail sales at cultural venues, hotels, restaurants and elsewhere. The region's extraordinary galleries, museums, theaters and historic sites remain important in and of themselves. They enliven community character, contribute to regional quality of life and signal that the community values excellence and intelligent discourse. It is crucial that we pursue strategies that can expand the opportunities for artistic expressions, historic understanding and reflective experience.

While the above quote focuses on the benefit of the arts to tourism, it acknowledges local benefits of “opportunities for artistic expressions, historic understanding and reflective experience.” The heritage area would do well to take this as a mantra in its focus on the arts and cultural programming for local audiences.

Involvement in the arts can sometimes take the form of figuring out how to express ideas for interpretation through the arts. The *Freedom's Crossing* sculpture on the waterfront in Lewiston is an excellent example of such an approach, and this approach is recommended for several interpretive themes in Chapter 2. It can work particularly well when there are not actual sites remaining to help tell particular stories. The Underground Railroad, for example, which is the subject of *Freedom's Crossing*, everywhere (not simply in this heritage area) is woefully short of structures and even documentary and visual records (photographs, drawings) that can make other historical subjects readily accessible to audiences. The

Castellani Art Museum's standing exhibit on the local Underground Railroad, also called Freedom's Crossing, is another example of collaboration with the arts to achieve excellent interpretation.

The performing arts also present an opportunity for interpretation. Niagara University's theatre arts program, for example, could provide "players" for productions and street theater to bring particular stories to life.

The involvement of the arts community in the heritage area is a high priority for the Commission. Hosts at arts venues such as galleries and artists' studios should be educated about the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area and invited to engage with the Commission and heritage area partners on how to involve the arts, local artists, and the arts-related business community in tours, community events, and other activities related to heritage interpretation. As the arts community seeks to reach audiences, its many participants can spread the word about the heritage area to residents and visitors alike.

ACTION: Involve the arts community in bringing engaging and relevant interpretation to a wide audience.

ACTION: Involve the arts community in engaging residents in heritage area programs and events.

ACTION: Include representatives of the arts community in strategic planning to support community engagement in the heritage area through educational programming.

4.4.2 Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation provides access to the region's many wonderful natural resources, many of which are interpreted now and will be interpreted further according to planning in Chapter 2, Niagara's Interpretive Presentation. It contributes to quality of life by linking communities to the river and the natural world – and through trails especially, by linking communities to one another.

Outdoor recreation in its own right is valuable for its own sake – simply enjoying the outdoors, fresh air, and exercise is not something to be taken for granted, not in an age when much of the American population now experiences an alternative digital life, indoors and onscreen. In fact, environmental educators have a term born from their concern especially about children's access to the outdoors (coined from the federal educational initiative of a similar name for school achievement): No Child Left Indoors. The heritage area can support redoubled efforts to insure that children – indeed, all residents – have ample opportunity and guidance in accessing the outdoors.

A major asset in stimulating more use of the outdoors in this region is, of course, the Niagara River gorge. Beautiful, mysterious, enormous, filled with the awe-inspiring, swirling waters of the Great Lakes forcing its way through the ancient defile – itself a wondrous exposure of a unique geological phenomenon, the Niagara Escarpment – the gorge and the natural area along its edge are powerful attractions for a wide variety of recreational activities.

Recognizing this, the Niagara Falls State Park, the New York Power Authority, the Niagara River Greenway, local jurisdictions, and many others have been working in recent years for much-improved access to the gorge. The region soon will experience many longer and better trail linkages and trailheads thanks to much behind-the-scenes planning, permitting, and design. For example, access from the Niagara Falls Customhouse via a stairway soon to be under construction will create a short-range loop for visitors to Niagara Falls State Park. While major challenges remain in completing a long-dreamed-of "Falls to the Fort" off-road trail, the Commission is committed to supporting these many other partners in working to make this dream a reality.

Ensuring community access to natural resources beyond the gorge in similar ways is also desirable. The Gill Creek Park Educational Nature Trail project in Niagara Falls, sponsored by the Niagara Street Business and Professional Association, is an excellent example of the kind of project that can link communities to the river and their immediate environment through access and environmental interpretation. It will add nearly a mile of trail to an existing 450-foot trail in the seven-acre park, whose improvement has been a long-standing project adopted by the association, and link it to a larger park nearby, Hyde Park. “The introduction of young children to nature through the informed interaction that a nature trail provides ensures that tomorrow’s generation will have a greater appreciation for our environment and an understanding of sound conservation practices,” reads the document submitted February 1, 2011, to the Host Communities Standing Committee for a ruling on the project’s consistency with the Niagara River Greenway Plan. It was awarded a grant by the Greenway Commission in the amount of \$102,280.

Sometimes greater access to the outdoors is a matter of providing better information and guidance to access locations. Since this is an element of improving the visitor’s experience as well as the resident’s, this is something to be emphasized early in implementation of this plan. The Commission can engage and inform the public through maps and brochures, its website, applications for smart phones and other digital media, and the wayfinding approaches described in Chapter 3, Niagara’s Visitor Experience.

While creating greater access to simple outdoor recreation is a worthy objective, many others are involved in this activity. The heritage area must seek to make a difference, to fill a niche within this “ecosystem” of providers. In addition to working with others to insure wider access and better information about that access as it exists and grows, the Commission’s objectives in outdoor recreation are two-fold: to engage residents, and to stimulate greater appreciation for natural resources through interpretation and education.

The Commission will also keep an eye on the long-range impact of these programs in developing the community’s support and leadership for conservation of the natural world. Messages conveyed through outdoor learning programs supported by the heritage area should include promoting awareness and understanding of the effects of preserving the natural world and a clean environment on the long-term economic, social, and physical health of the heritage area and its communities. The Commission and the region have a special opportunity in the Native American traditions and stories related to this special place, where the human relationship to the land and natural resources of the area is cultivated to support a sense of being at one with nature.

As with all other topics here, there is a wide variety of ways to achieve the objectives discussed here. Engaging with partners to assess immediate needs and actions is a critical first step. Environmental and outdoor educators, especially among park professionals who work to engage adult audiences along with children, should be involved in assessment and planning for ways that the heritage area can emphasize outdoor learning opportunities for residents.

ACTION: Support the development of recreational access that affords wide access to the natural resources of the heritage area.

ACTION: [repeated from Chapter 3] Create a detailed map and guide to trails along the Niagara River.

ACTION: [repeated from Chapter 3] Encourage completion of a comprehensive hiking and biking trail system along the Niagara River gorge.

ACTION: Include representatives of the environmental education community in strategic planning to support community engagement in the heritage area through outdoor access and learning opportunities.

ACTION: Collaborate on the development of environmental education programs that provide deep experiences of the natural world, for residents, visitors, and students. Encourage participation of the tribal nations in providing access to and interpretation of the natural world.

ACTION: Collaborate on the development of interpretive and educational programs that connect outdoor experiences to an understanding of the effects of preserving the natural world and a clean environment on the long-term economic, social, and physical health of the heritage area and its communities.

4.4.3 Community Events

Events are a large part of community engagement and a community's quality of life, as they offer opportunities for residents to enjoy working with one another on the events and then sharing the fun – in the process building relationships and community capacity to tackle a host of community needs, heritage-related or otherwise. They are also a major means for interpretive attractions and communities to share their stories in fresh and enticing ways. As also mentioned above, events offer activities to the heritage area's residential audience that go beyond the basic offerings enjoyed by the one-time visitor.

What are events? They can be anything from a full-blown street festival complete with street performers, craft and food sales, musical and other acts, to one or more "guest lectures" targeting a smaller audience interested in particular historical topics. Many communities and attractions build an annual calendar around one or more "signature" events, that audiences far and wide come to associate with the sponsoring place and anticipate from year to year.

Events are not easy. Smaller communities may be able to mount only one such event a year, beware of volunteer burnout if they attempt more. It might be said that such places follow the "less is more" principle of not attempting more than community capacity can permit. Larger communities can share the load among more people, but even in larger communities, recruiting volunteers on an annual basis can be a challenge. For some events, the workload year after year falls on the same shoulders – without succession planning for long-term leadership, the workload may ultimately fall by the wayside.

Yet, more is often, well, more. Old Fort Niagara builds entire seasons around special events and educational programs. USA Niagara does the same for its downtown cultural district beside the Niagara Falls State Park. Lewiston's business community has blossomed thanks not only to ArtPark's continuous performances – an advantage few communities enjoy – but also events sponsored by local organizations.

Historic Lewiston, for example, offers an annual tour of historic homes in early December and a commemoration of the Battle of Queenston in mid-October. It routinely schedules fun events for residents – such as a recent showing of the old Cary Grant movie *Arsenic and Old Lace* with a brief presentation beforehand about Lewiston's connection to the story that inspired the movie. (Communities as successful as Lewiston in attracting visitors, however, must also take care that event-based tourism does not overwhelm their residents, a concept addressed in Chapter 3, Niagara's Visitor Experience.)

The heritage area may become involved in, or initiate, region-wide events, encouraging widespread collaboration among partners. An example of one region-wide event is the bi-national Doors Open event, a once-annual event that returns in June of 2012 as a part of the commemoration of the War of 1812 – see <http://www.doorsopenniagara.com/>. This event draws together as many sites as possible to market their

offerings collectively for a specific period of time, offering free or reduced admission to residents and creating special events. This may be a good early opportunity for the Commission to examine collaboration among organizers and participants at close hand and find ways to build longer term relationships with them. The Essex National Heritage Area in Massachusetts and the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Corridor have both helped to lead events similar to this region's Doors Open event.

As with other areas of focus here, there are many examples of successful events in the heritage area, and it is difficult to predict which, if any, the heritage area might support among its partners' offerings. Support for region-wide events and events showcasing the heritage area's interpretive themes are likely to receive priority, but the focus can be adjusted from year to year by the Commission. The strategic plan described in the introduction to section 4.4 is critical in helping to pinpoint how to assist events and temporary programs that are most likely to engage residents and support the heritage area.

In approaching any of the possibilities, the Commission may take the following actions:

ACTION: Support community- and site-based events with assistance in strengthening their connections to the authentic heritage of the region;

ACTION: Establish quality standards and recognition for participating events that meet those standards, for marketing to a visitor audience (described in Chapter 3); and

ACTION: Encourage more and innovative events, coordinating among communities where possible;

ACTION: Assist in marketing events, including encouraging visitors to enjoy events not specifically designed for visitors, who often appreciate the opportunity to experience the local flavor of "homegrown events" and meet residents;

ACTION: Create regional events that will engage residents and visitors – judiciously, and with the help of volunteers, to minimize impacts on the Commission's other duties; and

ACTION: Work with communities on mitigating any negative impacts of large events, observing one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's guiding principles for heritage tourism: "Find the Fit between the Community and Tourism: A good cultural heritage tourism effort makes the destination a better place to live as well as a better place to visit."

4.5 Community Involvement in Research

The heritage area can help to build support for a central repository for archiving and accessing documentary and material collections, oral history, and research. It can also celebrate and encourage audio and video recording of oral histories and develop an active program of training and events. As there is an element of historic preservation involved, this topic is further addressed in the next chapter, Chapter 5, Preservation, Conservation & Stewardship.

4.5.1 Creating a Repository for Research

Research and documentation are critical elements in achieving goals for widespread community engagement. Chapter 2, Niagara's Interpretive Presentation, section 2.2.2, addresses archival research and documentation in detail, because research is important in order to develop well-informed interpretation. It should also be geared, however, toward understanding the community and disseminating the information discovered to residents through products and programs they would most enjoy.

The Niagara Falls Public Library's Local History Department contains a trove of local history primary sources, and the Historical Association of Lewiston began in 2009 to preserve a large collection of papers collected for more than 150 years by the International Order of Odd Fellows. The collection included papers from other societies that closed their lodges, providing valuable genealogical clues as well as serving as primary historical sources.

A needs assessment is a first step in determining how best to support the library and other archival repositories and collections. An assessment can provide the basis for a plan that can be phased in over time, and which can identify a means of creating a regular funding stream for its implementation.

The Niagara County Historical Society, the Town of Porter Historical Society, Old Fort Niagara, and the proposed Niagara Experience Center are among other potential heritage area partners whose interests include insuring that research materials are well housed, catalogued and indexed, and accessible to researchers and the public as appropriate. It may be possible to expand accessibility through the internet; for example, collections of objects and images are now accessible through the National Portal to Historic Collections (see sidebar). An example of a statewide digital collection, Kentucky's, may be seen at <http://www.kyhistory.com:2010/index.php>.

A few communities across the United States have created local archive programs. Butte, Montana, is one such place, having created a public program in 1981 to assemble what is today an enormous collection of manuscripts, documents, and photographs that buttress much historical research there – including recent documentary films. Butte's mines provided the copper made into electrical wiring across the nation from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Like Niagara Falls – whose experience with electricity is also a driver of its equally rich industrial history – it grew as it attracted immigrants of many ethnicities, providing a fascinating mix of community heritage celebrated there through events as well as archival programs. In 2010, the community rehabbed the old fire station in which the archives were housed and built a state-of-the art addition, taking its program to an entirely new level.

*******SIDEBAR: New Program Allows Internet Access to History Collections**

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) in partnership with American Heritage Publishing – producer of the venerable *American Heritage* magazine – have announced the debut of an on-line system that allows searches through dozens of historic collections, from small local museums to collections of the Smithsonian, National Parks, and U.S. Navy. In the making since 2007, the program went live in March of 2011.

The program is designed to give museums greater visibility and provide a low-cost way to move collection items to the Internet, including objects. Terry Davis, AASLH president, stated in announcing the debut, "The National Portal is a tremendous milestone in this effort to digitize these collections and make them available online."

The Mariners' Museum of Newport News, Virginia, reports, "We put as much of our collection online as we could and it paid off in increased loan fees, greater visibility (even internationally), and increased image licensing and purchasing." Every institution in the National Portal has an individualized main page that allows users to search the individual museum's collection. In addition, a national search page allows searches across multiple collections. History organizations add their collections at a nominal cost to the National Portal, which has grown rapidly since its debut.

The program is described at <http://www.americanheritage.com/about/portal>.

*****END SIDEBAR

ACTION: Inventory archival collections in the Niagara Falls region and perform a needs assessment, as the basis for a plan.

ACTION: [repeated from CH2] Collaborate with the Niagara Falls Public Library in preparing and implementing a plan to support the library as a central archive and repository for historical information and collections on the Niagara Falls region.

4.5.2 Recording Community Traditions and Memories

Here is a key question to be answered by community research in the course of stimulating community engagement: The people who live in these communities and neighborhoods built them, or have memories of their builders – what are their stories?

The Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University is a key partner in answering this question. With support from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, it leads field research, programming, and presentations based on the region's folklife. As its website states, "Folk arts are creative practices rooted in tradition and a sense of group identity. Because folk arts are created by and for a particular group of people, they reflect the unique history, values, interests, and aesthetics of that group....Our work recognizes the artistic contributions of the region's many diverse peoples; promotes a better appreciation and understanding of cultural differences; calls attention to the cultural resources that give our region its unique character; and helps preserve our region's cultural heritage for future generations" (<http://www.castellaniartmuseum.org/about-folk-arts/>, accessed 2-20-12).

In partnership with Western New York artists and community consultants, the Castellani's folk arts program produces exhibitions, publications, artist demonstrations, and performances that bring folk arts to a wider audience. Ongoing ethnographic research also forms the basis of a permanent archive of regional folk arts documentation.

Oral history also has received attention, although unlike the library with archives (which can include oral histories) and the museum with folk arts, there is no central force to assist in gaining greater attention to desirability of a rich oral history program. Each individual's memory is a library of family and local history.

Bill Bradberry, a Commissioner, chair of the Underground Railroad Heritage Area, and local writer, remarked in a Feb. 7, 2012, column for the *Niagara Gazette*, "The more recent history of black and white immigrants alike is being lost, simply because so many from that generation are passing on without passing along their life experiences. Why are we not sitting down with our elders and writing down their stories, preserving their legacies? A new oral history project is desperately needed to capture those stories, lest they be lost forever. In cities like Niagara Falls, the stories of how our people lived together successfully in highly diverse neighborhoods should be recorded for future historical analysis. Let's not treat our history the same way we have treated so many of our historically important buildings and landmarks, demolishing them and replacing them with emptiness." Bradberry has personally collected the oral histories of more than a hundred African American residents of Niagara Falls, but needs help to make them accessible to researchers and interpreters (<http://niagara-gazette.com/billbradberry/x1704533055/BRADBERRY-Is-Black-History-Month-Still-Relevant> and <http://niagara-gazette.com/features/x565225173/The-end-of-the-stories-Local-historians-look-to-collect-oral-histories>, accessed 2-22-2012).

Other local programs have also focused on specific groups. For example, the Tuscarora undertook oral histories in association with studies during the relicensing of the power generation project, and the Bureau of Jewish Education's Jewish Buffalo Archives Project hopes to work in the Niagara Falls area by 2013. The Uncrowned Community Builders Project of the nonprofit Uncrowned Queens Institute for Research and Education on Women, Inc., supported since 2006 by the University at Buffalo, has collected histories of African American residents and has an extensive digital archive (http://www.buffalo.edu/community/documents/UCCB_Brochure.pdf).

Fortunately, with the internet and such programs as the StoryCorps program, individuals and organizations interested in oral history have more tools. StoryCorps encourages "Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives." Since 2003, the program has collected and archived more than 40,000 interviews from more than 70,000 participants. Each conversation is preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, with millions listening to its broadcasts on its website and on public radio. It will rent recording kits, and through its "Door-to-Door" program will bring portable recording equipment to one location to record up to six 40-minute interviews per day. According to its website, "Organizations across the country have used Door-to-Door sessions to celebrate anniversaries and milestones, add a personal voice to fundraising and marketing materials, and provide the meaningful StoryCorps experience to their community." (<http://storycorps.org/>)

The existence of programs like StoryCorps and the ready accessibility of adequate audio and video equipment makes it all the more likely that individuals and families will undertake such projects. But stewardship of the results can wax and wane; old tapes stay in shoeboxes, never to be seen again as they pass to the next generation, labels fading or crumbling, or they find a final resting place in hot attics, fading themselves. They generally lack transcripts, cataloguing, and indexing that would make them completely useful to researchers. Without proper permission, audio and video tapes cannot be shared with the public through such media as websites, radio shows, and exhibitions.

As with archives, a needs assessment and inventory is a first step, and can be undertaken as a special element of the work of assessing the region's archival needs and potential. Forming a repository for copies of oral histories related to the communities of the National Heritage Area can also be a special section of a plan for addressing these needs. In addition, researchers and ethnographers can assist the heritage area in assessing research needs – what ethnic groups, industries, or other topics are under-represented among the oral history collections discovered?

The heritage area can go beyond assessments and plans more immediately, however. Workshops can of course offer training in techniques for interviewing and recording. They can also offer the best practices and principles of organizations like the Oral History Association (<http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/principles-and-practices/>) and the American Folklife Center (<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/index.html>). This can go a long way in addressing the long term loss of older oral histories, and develop volunteer interest in ferreting out forgotten collections. The volunteers who attend such workshops may also be interested in how archival collections can support their interest in local history, so a training workshop on archival methods may also be of use early in this process.

In addition, the heritage area could work with partners to sponsor "community memory days," asking individuals to visit an "expo" to allow scans and photos of family papers, photos, and objects for preservation in local archives. Experts could offer advice on preserving these items. Other activities for such an event could include displays by local historical associations and sites to recruit members and volunteers, advertise upcoming events, share recent research, or sell publications. Panels of elders could offer memories of the neighborhoods and downtowns and jobs they experienced as they were growing up

and maturing can be popular ways of capturing oral histories in a different medium than the one-on-one interview. Workshops described above can also be a part of an event such as this.

The heritage area itself can act as a “portal” to point researchers to existing collections, serve up oral history recordings, or otherwise support the community’s interest in building up its memories and engaging in local history.

ACTION: Inventory oral history collections in the Niagara Falls region and assess needs, as the basis for a plan for both preservation and spurring more interviews.

ACTION: Develop a web page pointing researchers to available archival and oral history collections.

ACTION: Participate in and support collection of oral histories.

ACTION: Support the identification and upgrading of existing oral histories with transcription/scanning, cataloging, indexing, and permissions.

ACTION: Create training programs and other events to encourage community involvement in researching, archiving, and recording local and oral history

ACTION: Share discoveries in local research with the general public through innovative outreach programs.

*******SIDEBAR: “The Most Diverse City Outside New York”**

Focused on “Tunnel Town,” *The Evolution of an Ethnic Neighborhood that Became United in Diversity in Niagara Falls, NY: The East Side, 1880 – 1930* is a local history book that illustrates the potential of using oral history along with traditional historical research in capturing the history of Niagara Falls. Actually a doctoral thesis self-published in 2000 as a 628-page book by the author, H. William Feder, Ph.D. (<http://oureastside.com/>), one reviewer describes it as “an exhaustively researched narrative into the lives of these early Falls residents.” The book received an accolade from Bruce Jackson, Distinguished Professor of American Culture of the University at Buffalo: “William Feder’s historical and folkloric discussion is so comprehensive and ranging in its detail and primary information that it is an important document in its own right. It is not only a compendium and analysis of a neighborhood and a town and the educational, political, and social systems they engendered and endured, it is an archive. Its strength is in his obvious knowledge of and love for the place, and the wide range of primary documents he has, with such obvious diligence, managed to find and organize: letters, official records, interviews, newspaper articles that are themselves not just sources of information but part of the story he is telling.”

*******END SIDEBAR**

4.6 Programs for Youth

“Reaching and involving the next generation is critical.”

“[To build] community pride – start with the youth.”

When Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commissioners sat down at the beginning of the planning process to envision the heritage area’s future and set goals, their passion for reaching the heritage area’s youth was palpable, as the quotes above illustrate. Moreover, in considering options for the limited funds

available for early actions (projects undertaken before completion of the planning process), the Commission put its dollars where its members' hearts clearly lie, in a youth program modeled after the National Park Service's Junior Ranger program (described further below).

The Junior Ranger program also illustrates a principle the Commission has embraced, to go beyond the schoolhouse door in supporting programs to engage families and youth.

It is a simple (and obvious) ambition to educate the region's students about the region's history and environment. Such a foundation is important and is a part of the existing curriculum, and the Commission expects to support innovation and expansion in such standard school offerings. For example, it has also spent early-action funding to encourage local teachers to take advantage of a recent documentary film recent documentary that featured the heritage area's role in the War of 1812. The Commission provided an educator's curriculum and activity guide at no cost to teachers for the grades where New York State curriculum is applicable (4th, 7th, and 11th) as well as library media specialists.

The Commission's objectives also include a greater challenge, encouraging the region's youth to gain knowledge and direct experience of heritage development and tourism in much the same way that they are now offered lessons in local history and the local environment. Partnerships with the schools are critical to achieve this objective, but it may also take collaboration with civic leaders as well.

In terms of investing in the civic future of the heritage area for long term dividends, the approaches described here may be among best ways to spend the heritage area's resources. Engaging young people in leadership development and creating a deep understanding of community functions, needs, and priorities is a good investment in lasting leadership for the heritage area and its communities. The long-term future of the heritage area's leadership may depend on engaging students and educators, and enlisting the community in an enthusiastic community-wide "curriculum."

Thus, there are two basic ways to reach out to the youth of the heritage area – through the schools, and beyond. The next section starts with the schools, and is followed by a section listing ideas for going beyond them.

4.6.1 Educational Programming for School Children

A change underway now in state learning standards offers a major, one-time-only opportunity for the Commission to participate in local efforts to adjust the curriculum to community needs. New York's Pre-K–12 educational system, along with those of all U.S. states and territories, is in the process of adjusting its existing New York State Learning Standards and core curriculum to conform to a new Common Core State Standards Initiative ("NYS Common Core Standards"). The initiative is led jointly by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with other leading national educational organizations. New York is now developing guidance materials for teachers to implement these new learning standards for all their various student populations and began releasing these in the summer of 2011. (http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/common_core_standards.html and <http://www.corestandards.org/>)

The standards address English/Language Arts and Mathematics, but flow through to all other subjects. This is not your grandmother's curriculum. In addition to serving the state's existing standards for history, social science, and science (environmental education), it is possible for heritage area partners to help schools meet state standards in such areas as "informational reading" (the ability of students to gain and act on critical information and instructions, important as a foundation in vocational training), literacy in social studies and separating fact from fiction, and viewing the world through multiple perspectives and the ideas of different cultures. As teachers shift their instructional methods, they will also be including up-

to-the-minute technologies, such as interactive whiteboards that will permit “virtual field trips” and a much-enriched classroom experience or using Google Earth to teach about, say, the explorations of Christopher Columbus.

Heritage area programs can influence interpretive attractions’ abilities to serve the state curriculum. As one participant in a focus group on educational outreach during the management planning process observed, “Albany [the state department of education] would love seeing the common curriculum surface in non-educational material.”

The heritage area’s role is to serve as a clearinghouse for all parts of this equation – schools, teachers, sites, community organizations, local governments – and provide outreach and training opportunities. The heritage area should build strong connections among all involved and become the first place that educators – school-based or not – will turn to, in order to create innovative programs. These might include a scholastic honors program for high school students or interaction with community-based programs described in the next section.

The heritage area could also work with interpretive attractions and programs to be available for classroom presentations and supplement on-site interpretive staff (both professional and volunteer), who may at times be unable to serve multiple groups visiting at the same time.

The Commission will establish an advisory committee or working group of educators (school-based, site-based, park-based) to:

- (1) Guide program development for services and outreach and establish priorities;
- (2) Provide advice on the heritage area’s interface with the development of NYS Common Core Standards;
- (3) Assist the heritage area in influencing schools’ use of heritage area sites and community programs to meet state standards (and vice versa);
- (4) Help develop school-based programs to help students understand their communities’ civic ambitions for heritage development and tourism and to gain knowledge and direct experience of heritage tourism.

ACTION: Establish an advisory committee or working group to advise the Commission and heritage area partners on curriculum-based education programs and strategies, priorities, and the shaping of programs in general for engaging the region’s young people.

ACTION: Ensure that local students experience an expansive, innovative educational program that instills a sense of appreciation and pride for the community and environment in which they live and offers an integrated view of community history and environmental conditions.

ACTION: Work with local schools to establish a “heritage civics” program encompassing learning about local government, the state parks, tourism, outdoor recreation, and the heritage area.

ACTION: Work with partners on interactive and engaging opportunities for children, teenagers, and young adults that use local history and historic sites to meet state curriculum requirements.

ACTION: Work with partners on interactive and engaging opportunities for children, teenagers, and young adults that use local natural sites to meet state curriculum requirements in science and to foster environmental stewardship.

ACTION: Establish a scholastic honors program that encourages high school students to undertake special projects in research, interpretation, conservation, the arts, local government, and other subjects.

ACTION: Identify specific needs for teacher training (workshops, webinars, continuing education classes, etc.) to enable teachers to utilize heritage area sites effectively for student education; encourage sites to work collaboratively to meet these needs.

ACTION: Recruit a volunteer corps of educators to act as special traveling docents for school groups, representing a collaborative group of interpretive attractions, to be available for classroom presentations and supplement on-site interpretive staff (both professional and volunteer).

*******SIDEBAR: Old Fort Niagara’s School Programs**

Old Fort Niagara offers a variety of programs that can be customized to teachers’ lesson plans. In addition to the programs it offers for school field trips and in the classroom, it offers to collaborate with teachers to customize distance learning programs. For its part in the National Heritage Area’s new Junior Ranger program, has highlighted an existing experience called "Blue Coats along the Niagara."

School Visits

- "Join the Kings Army" – no specific age, guided tour and living history
- "Work and Play in 1779" – no specific age, guided tour, living history, games
- "A Day & Night in the Fort" – for seventh graders and scouting groups (age 8-12)
- "Rivals for Empire" – for elementary to middle school students, two to three hours in May and June
- Guided tours – no specific age, two hours, \$5/student
- Overnight visit for fourth graders

Programs for Classrooms

- "A Soldier's Life" – half or full day, in-class visit by staff member dressed in military uniform of one of the fort's historic garrisons, educational programs
- "Gold Laced Coat" – half or full day, in-class visit by a staff member dressed as a uniformed officer, uses Helen Fuller Orton's novel "Gold Laced Coat" to teach students about the life of French soldiers and civilians in the fort

*******END SIDEBAR**

4.6.2 Other Youth Outreach

The Commission and heritage area partners are perhaps more free than the schools themselves in considering how to organize the community and their programs to engage children in learning and experiences related to the National Heritage Area’s themes, goals, and leadership needs.

An early “flagship” program for the Commission is the Junior Ranger program (see sidebar). This is seen as a kind of entry-level program for engaging children individually, not through schools, although schools can also use the program. In choosing it as an early action, the Commission considered several advantages. First, that it offers the advantage of being beneficial for both visiting and resident children and their families. Moreover, it has focused the participating sites on considering their role in assisting the heritage area and within a network of sites all interpreting heritage area resources, priming their thoughts and ambitions for the next round of collaboration. And finally, because visiting families are likely to

enjoy the program, it offers an immediate way to begin encouraging the circulation of visitors throughout the heritage area that is a key objective for the heritage tourism aspect of this plan.

The Junior Ranger program applies to children ages 7 to 12. For local children and their families, the Commission regards the Junior Ranger program as the first rung on a ladder of other potential programs that will engage these children at additional age intervals all the way through college-age levels and beyond. These might include the following ideas, sketched here for later development.

******* SIDEBAR: The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area's Junior Ranger Program**

Junior Ranger programs have existed in many National Parks for years. Typically, they are geared to school-aged children, but people of ages have enjoyed participating in the program. The Junior Ranger program allows school-age children the flexibility to interact within a park or heritage area at their own convenience. Participants can choose what sites they wish to see and what activities they wish to complete, based on personal interest, age, and availability. Participants completing a set number of activities can receive a specially designed Junior Ranger badge to signify their accomplishment.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area's Junior Ranger program is designed to encourage children ages 7 to 12 to discover the heritage area's history, culture, heritage and natural resources. A guidebook helps participants find thematically related sites in the National Heritage Area and nearby, where they will learn specific knowledge pertaining to the area's themes (see Chapter 2, Niagara's Interpretive Presentation) and then complete a corresponding activity. Once they have completed the required number of activities from among the choices provided, they submit their activity guide to an official and receive a Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Junior Ranger Badge.

Beginning in the summer of 2012, visitors and residents will be able to obtain the guidebook from area hotels, tourism bureaus, and partnering sites or download it from the heritage area's website. Longer term, to maintain pace with current technological trends, the program may be made available through a digital application available for web-browsers and smart phones. The use of web-based technology would allow greater participation by the National Heritage Area's many international visitors who could easily configure the program into their native language.

The Junior Ranger program is also available to schools. It provides an ideal framework for area school districts to begin to develop curriculum that will meet the New York State Core Standards as they correlate to Social Studies, English/Language Arts, and Science. Through field trips and "virtual visits," students would be able to understand the role played by this region in the fabric of United States History and World History. Students could be introduced to environmental stewardship, geology, and many other facets of the Earth Science curriculum.

The Junior Ranger program offers young people who reside in the heritage area and nearby the opportunity to learn by "beginning in their backyard." As the heritage area's official description concludes, "Optimistically, the possible benefits of this approach would instill in youth a foundation of stewardship, civic pride, cultural understanding, and appreciation of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area that would last a lifetime."

*******END SIDEBAR**

Junior Ambassadors

A Junior Ambassadors program could be designed for the next age group to overlap with the Junior Ranger program, for ages 8 to 14. It would be tied to the Ambassadors program described in Chapter 3, Niagara's Visitor Experience (itself a major tool for community engagement). Fully realized, the Ambassadors program could evolve from simple workshops and hospitality training opportunities for volunteers into a community of networked volunteers that embraces a social component as well as a learning component. Recognition, special benefits at sites, and other activities could stimulate participation and cohesion. At the point that this fully realized version of an Ambassadors program becomes viable, the best approach in designing a Junior Ambassadors program or curriculum may be to recruit the Ambassadors themselves to assist those experienced in offering other kinds of youth programs. The schools should also be involved, perhaps through the Future Business Leaders of America program (see sidebar) or other programs already designed to bring community leaders in contact with students.

*******SIDEBAR: Future Business Leaders of America**

The Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) is an organization that may have great potential for assisting the heritage area in aiding students in understanding community functions and goals for tourism. Many schools across the country support student participation in FBLA by supporting teacher-advisors, classroom time, and field trips. Programs are available for middle school, high school, and college groups. Much of its work is organized around encouraging students to compete, both individually and as groups, at levels from regional to national. The key will be to connect to elements of the program involving service learning and community-based school projects. (<http://www.fbla.org/>)

The organization's goals are to:

- Develop competent, aggressive business leadership;
- Strengthen the confidence of students in themselves and their work;
- Create more interest in and understanding of American business enterprise;
- Encourage members in the development of individual projects that contribute to the improvement of home, business, and community;
- Develop character, prepare for useful citizenship, and foster patriotism;
- Encourage and practice efficient money management;
- Encourage scholarship and promote school loyalty;
- Assist students in the establishment of occupational goals; and
- Facilitate the transition from school to work.

*****END SIDEBAR

Conservation Corps Activities

Student conservation corps – small groups of older teenagers organized as crews with experienced young leaders, supervised by a central organization that works with sponsoring parks and sites to place the crews to undertake such physical, construction projects as trail-building – are a long-standing activity across the nation that could be enlisted here in the effort to design continuing age-appropriate programs for older students. Both the Western District of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and local departments for parks and recreation are potential regional and local partners for the heritage area in designing youth conservation corps activities. The Student Conservation Association (SCA), JobCorps, and other state and regional programs are sources for such programs (see sidebar on SCA, one example only).

*******SIDEBAR: Student Conservation Association**

A potential national partner in recruiting youth corps for involvement in is the Student Conservation Association, a long-serving national program with a variety of programs centered on the conservation corps concept. The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area offers several advantages in seeking to involve the SCA here: its existing experience with New York State parks (<http://www.thesca.org/newsroom/conservation-corps-puts-200-youth-work-new-york-state-parks>); a National Park Service relationship (SCA has a long-standing relationship with NPS); the potential of a creating a model for other National Heritage Areas in designing programs for the Niagara Falls area, and potentially the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor as well; and an urban, diverse population, much like those the SCA is working to reach in some of its programs.

SCA has two programs: its widely recognized, traditional summertime National Conservation Crews, for ages 15-19, which are fielded to applicant communities across the nation; and Community Programs, which are tailored to serve selected urban areas nationwide. Niagara Falls and Buffalo are not currently among these urban areas; only Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee are served throughout the Great Lakes region and there are none in either New York State or Ohio.

The SCA generally recruits students from around the nation for assignment anywhere its programs are operating. It offers wonderful opportunities for students already motivated to seek out such an experience. As stated on its website, “SCA recruits nationally for all of our positions. We find it very challenging to recruit ‘local’ applicants for positions ‘in their backyard’ because part of the experience an Intern or Crew Member seeks is to work in an area outside of their home state or residence” (<http://thesca.org/partners/administrative-process/partner-faqs#contact>, accessed 2/23/12). Bringing interested youths from around the country to mingle with crews based here could enrich a program designed to focus on resident participants.

There are a few exceptions to SCA’s focus on nationwide recruiting and assignment, however. For its internship program, SCA will work with local partners on signing up intern candidates identified locally. And through its more limited Community Programs, SCA offers year-round opportunities to “engage diverse high school students in major U.S. cities who may lack access to the natural environment and green job opportunities.” The program is not in Niagara and Erie counties; both National Heritage Areas serving this region (Niagara Falls, Erie Canal) and New York’s Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation could combine to persuade SCA to bring a program here. The program offers two variations, the Conservation Leadership Corps (CLC) and Summer Community Crews. As stated on SCA’s website, the CLC invites participants to:

- Volunteer on weekends throughout the school year in the city where you live.
- Build trails, restore river and lakefront environments, and conserve habitats.
- Learn about your environment through field trips, weekend camping excursions, and
- Give back to your community through service projects.
- And, we will encourage you to join an SCA summer [backcountry or “frontcountry”] crew the next summer, to experience the outdoors away from home.

A member of a six- to seven-week summer Community Crew member is asked to:

- Commute each day to and from a central meeting place where you meet with your leader before heading out to work.

- Complete trail maintenance and site restoration projects in national, regional, and state parks.
- Learn about your local environment through field trips led by your Crew Leader.
- Plan and go on a recreational camping trip where you will learn outdoor skills, and visit local parks.
- Community Crews consist of two leaders and six members or two leaders and 10 members. Participants are either compensated for their work or receive credit for community service hours (<http://thesca.org/serve> and <http://thesca.org/serve/community-programs>, accessed 2/23/12).

*******END SIDEBAR**

Other Possibilities for Youth Engagement

There are other models for programs to engage youth for ages 18 and up to meet goals for the heritage area and participants in leadership development, service learning, and community projects. These include internships, seasonal employment, and apprentice programs. The scholastic honors program for high school students mentioned under section 4.6.1 would also provide individual opportunities for engagement.

Besides the Student Conservation Association described above, there are other national and regional leaders in the “national service movement” that can offer advice and highly motivated college graduates, including the well-known AmeriCorps program (<http://www.americorps.gov/>) and City Year, whose participants serve full-time in schools for 10 months working to improve student attendance, behavior and course performance in English and math. City Year’s approach includes a focus on community and school improvements, in which participants “organize and lead activities, celebrations and projects to improve the community and school environment which includes performing physical service such as: painting murals, planting community gardens, renovating schools and refurbishing community centers.” (<http://www.cityyear.org/whatwedo.aspx>).

Local civic-service and business groups, such as Kiwanis, Rotary, and business and professional associations, may be able to offer help for the necessary program development and community outreach, including recruiting adult volunteers. For apprentice programs, local trades organizations or artists’ guilds may be able to offer assistance, particularly if the heritage area chooses to focus on providing experience in the building trades in association with rehabilitating older buildings. In addition, there are four youth organizations that offer extensive programs that could be compatible with the heritage area’s programs to reach out beyond the school system: Girl Scouts of Western New York; the Greater Niagara Frontier Council of the Boy Scouts of America, which reaches more than 20,000 scouting participants and adult volunteers; Niagara Falls Boys and Girls Club; and Niagara County 4-H.

ACTION: Continue the Junior Ranger Program and cultivate it as an anchor for continued collaboration and research and for expanded educational programming.

ACTION: Develop additional ways for individual engagement with the sites and programs of the heritage area, at appropriate age intervals (reaching ages from approximately 6 to 26).

ACTION: Include a “Junior Ambassador” opportunity in cooperation with the regular Ambassador program described in Chapter 3.

ACTION: Seek collaboration or assistance from the Student Conservation Association, the Western District of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the Erie

Canalway National Heritage Corridor in creating programs to serve parks and trails for resident youth.

ACTION: Partner with local trades organizations or artists' guilds in creating training or apprenticeship programs in preservation and conservation trades and skills.

ACTION: Partner with regionally based youth organizations to encourage them to adapt their programs to the needs of heritage area attractions and vice versa.

4.7 Organizing and Managing for Community Engagement

The ambitious programs described in this chapter require adequate staffing, a committee structure to command Commission attention, and community support. Ideally, a staff educator position would be created for the Commission's staff, to help develop, coordinate, and serve programs and recruit partners and community support. Programs contemplated here require great attention to detail and execution; they cannot be taken lightly, for it will take years to fine-tune some of these programs. Community expectations, once stimulated, will be high and enthusiastic and should be met with a deep commitment to community service as well as engagement. Startup could be done on a pilot or limited basis, to test concepts and begin putting the organizational staffing and structure in place, in order to proceed with highest priority activities for community engagement.

For the Commission's organization structure, described above are two committees, (1) a working group or subcommittee of the Interpretive Committee to focus on adult education programming and create a short-range strategic plan that includes (but is not limited to) a focus on arts and cultural programs, outdoor recreation, and community events; and (2) an advisory committee or working group to advise the Commission and heritage area partners on curriculum-based education programs and strategies, priorities, and the shaping of programs in general for engaging the region's young people.