

NEW JERSEY
**HISTORIC
TRUST**

**DISCOVER NJ HISTORY LICENSE PLATE FUND
FOR HERITAGE TOURISM**

2026 GRANT GUIDELINES

NEW JERSEY HISTORIC TRUST

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The New Jersey Historic Trust is privileged to be the designated repository for the proceeds derived from the sale of the [**Discover NJ History License Plate**](#). Following the recommendations made by the [Heritage Tourism Task Force](#), the license plate fund is dedicated to fostering the development of heritage tourism destinations.

Heritage Tourism is defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past. It includes historic, cultural, and natural resources. Heritage Tourism is essential to the economic well-being of New Jersey as travelers and residents visit heritage sites and towns to enjoy authentic, valued, and engaging experiences that enhance the image of our state as a desirable destination with a rich history that played a vital role in our nation's growth. By financially supporting a strong heritage tourism infrastructure, we will improve the state's economy through visitor spending and contribute to the stewardship and sustainability of New Jersey's unique historic, cultural, and natural assets.

As the New Jersey Historic Trust continues to deliver programs that restore and enhance New Jersey's treasured historic sites, we also recognize the need to help these sites become more sustainable. These technical assistance grants, though modest, can help non-profit organizations and government agencies to enhance the public's appreciation for New Jersey's past.

Dedicating the proceeds from the **Discover NJ History** License Plate Fund to help sites and communities get ready for visitors will help New Jersey position itself as a world class heritage tourism destination. Thank you for your interest in preserving and promoting New Jersey history. We look forward to working with you.

With regards,

Peter Lindsay
Chair

Glenn Ceponis
Executive Director

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Discover NJ History License Plate Fund for Heritage Tourism

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INTRODUCTION

The New Jersey Historic Trust

Established by statute in 1967 (N.J.S.A. 13:1B et seq.), the Trust is a nonprofit historic preservation organization created to preserve and protect New Jersey's historic resources. A 15-member board of trustees governs the Trust. Twelve members are private citizens appointed by the Governor. Three members serve *ex-officio*, representing the State Treasurer, Department of Environmental Protection/State Historic Preservation Office, and the Department of Community Affairs.

The New Jersey Legislature gave the Trust broad powers to initiate and promote preservation programs and encourage joint preservation efforts by the public and private sectors. These powers include raising and disbursing funds; acquiring, holding, and disposing of personal property; accepting gifts, legacies, and endowments; and holding real property of historic, aesthetic, or cultural significance.

Through its programs and activities, the Trust assists, supports, and safeguards historic structures throughout the state. The Trust established the first statewide historic preservation easement program and a program for the donation of privately-owned properties. Both programs ensure the preservation of historic properties in perpetuity through the use of deed restrictions. The Trust also operates a small grant and loan program to provide emergency financial assistance for a variety of preservation projects and administers the historic preservation license plate program. The Trust supports legislation furthering the cause of preservation and cooperates with other agencies to protect New Jersey's historic resources and enhance the quality of life its citizens enjoy.

The *Discover NJ History* License Plate Fund

The *Discover NJ History* License Plate was authorized by P.L. 1995, c. 368, and amended by P.L. 2006, c. 60 to fund the Heritage Tourism Grants Program. The amendments designated that funds raised from license plate sales were to support the formation of the Heritage Tourism Task Force and creation of a statewide Heritage Tourism Master Plan. Among many other duties, the task force was charged with establishing criteria for grants to be made from the Historic Preservation License Plate Fund. The task force completed its work in July 2010. In accordance with the legislation, approval of any grants is to be made by the New Jersey Historic Trust pursuant to its guidelines. The fund's purpose is to offer grants to eligible applicants to develop and promote visitor ready sites as heritage tourism destinations. Grants may be for technical assistance to promote interpretive, marketing and promotional links among heritage sites; to assess visitor ready potential; to establish performance evaluation systems; and to offer training initiatives, workshops and other activities that may foster the goals and objectives set forth in the plan.

Monies deposited into the fund are held in interest-bearing accounts in public depositories and may be invested or reinvested in such securities as are approved by



the State Treasurer. Interest or other income earned on moneys deposited in the fund, and any moneys which may be appropriated or otherwise become available for the purposes of the fund, shall be credited to and deposited in the fund for use as set forth in P.L. 1995, c. 368 (C. 39:3-27.72 et seq.)

APPLICATION REVIEW AND FUNDING

Eligible Applicants

The following organizations or groups are eligible to apply for grants through this program:

1. Agencies or entities of county government.
2. Agencies or entities of municipal government.
3. Agencies or entities of state government.
4. Nonprofit organizations organized under the New Jersey Nonprofit Corporation Act (N.J.S.A.15A:1-1 et seq.) that qualify for tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue code (26 U.S.C. 501 (c)). Nonprofit applicants must include documentation of their tax-exempt status and registration with the State, and IRS letter.

To document compliance with the New Jersey Charitable Registration and Investigation Act of 1994 (CRI Act), all nonprofit organizations must include a copy of a current registration number issued by the NJ Department of Law and Public Safety, Division of Consumer Affairs, Office of Consumer Protection/Charities Registration, or submit a letter from that agency confirming exemption from the requirements of charitable registration. For more information, contact the NJ Division of Consumer Affairs at (973) 504-6215 or visit <https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/charities>.


Applicants may, and are encouraged to, apply for grants that impact and/or promote linkages between multiple historic resources. In addition to traditional historical organizations, eligible nonprofits may also include destination marketing organizations, tourism bureaus, chambers of commerce, etc.

Application Instructions

Applications must be submitted online. If you are not able to submit a digital application, please contact the New Jersey Historic Trust staff. A Microsoft Word version of the application may be allowed as an accommodation. If so, four hard copies (one original and three copies with attachments) of the completed grant application with supporting documents must be received by the grant deadline. No handwritten applications will be accepted.

Be as specific and complete as possible and answer the questions in the space provided. If a question does not apply, fill in "N/A" and briefly explain why. Read and follow all instructions



closely. The online application provides additional instructions for some questions by hovering over the  icon.

The Trust will accept completed applications with all supporting documents at any time throughout the year. Due to the limited amount of money available in the fund, the Trust strongly recommends that potential applicants contact the office (609) 984-0473 in advance to determine the availability of funding.

Applications and any attachments and/or supporting materials will not be returned. The Trust reserves the right to retain and publish visual materials submitted with any application, such as photographs, digital images, plans, etc.

Supporting Documents

To facilitate a thorough review, the Trust strongly recommends that any supporting documents are uploaded to the online application or provided through a web link. *This is the preferred method.* You may also submit documents via a USB drive.

Applications for signage, should include text and/or design samples, if applicable. If applying for updates to a new or existing website, demonstrate why the new website is needed, how it will reach new audiences, and/or benefit heritage tourism.

Application Due Dates and Schedule for Review

Applications to the *Discover NJ History* License Plate Fund for heritage tourism initiatives will be accepted at any time throughout the fiscal year, July 1 – June 30, until the annual allocation has been exhausted. The Board of Trustees of the New Jersey Historic Trust will award the grant request during a regularly scheduled quarterly meeting. Applicants will be notified in writing of the decision on their request.

Applications must be received by the following dates to be considered at the subsequent board meeting: **February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1.** Applications received after these dates will roll into the next round. Board meetings typically occur in March, June, September, and December, but are subject to change. Visit <https://www.nj.gov/dca/njht/about/meetings-minutes/> for the current schedule.

Review of Applications

Once submitted to the Trust, applications will be reviewed for eligibility and completeness. Applicants are encouraged to consult with staff about any aspect of the application that requires clarification. Trust staff may visit the site(s) during the application review period.

Grant applicants must provide the Trust with all supporting materials and documentation requested in the application form, or the application will be ineligible for review.

Each application will be reviewed and evaluated by a committee comprised of three individuals: one Trustee, one Trust staff member, and one private individual whose expertise



is specifically relevant to the application request. This committee recommends worthy applications to the Board of Trustees, which makes the Trust's final decision on grant awards. Applications are evaluated for the following: the *need* for the proposed initiative; the *clarity* of the proposal and expected outcomes; the *ability* of the applicant to complete the initiative within a specified timeframe; the cultural and economic *benefits* of the project; and the *need for Trust assistance* in the project (see "Criteria for Review" below).

Criteria for Review

The following criteria are used to evaluate and rank applications for heritage tourism initiatives through the license plate fund:

1. Impact to New Jersey heritage sites

- a. **Impact.** Proposals must identify the properties that will be impacted or enhanced by the project and are listed in the New Jersey Register of Historic Places, are contributing resources to a historic district, or have been determined eligible for listing by the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office. For questions about listing or eligibility please contact the State Historic Preservation Office at (609) 984-0176. Heritage Tourism initiatives may also incorporate heritage trails, scenic byways and/or themed linkages as well as historic districts as destinations.
- b. **Degree** to which the proposal will enhance/benefit historic resources.

2. Project Concept and Team

- a. **Quality of project.** Clarity, thoroughness, appropriateness, and applicability of the proposed project.
- b. **Proposed consultant(s).** The credentials and experience of project team or consultants are considered in relation to the proposed scope of work. Consultants should demonstrate that they meet or exceed accepted professional qualifications in their respective fields.
- c. **Budget and schedule.** These must be realistic and feasible based on the project proposed for funding and allow sufficient time for the review of work products if applicable. The grant project must be completed within twelve months of the execution of the grant agreement.

3. Organization Ability

- a. **Applicant.** The organizational, administrative, and fiscal ability of the applicant to carry out the proposed work.
- b. **Long-term sustainability.** The degree to which the applicant will build upon this proposal and continue to foster heritage tourism.
- c. **Heritage Tourism plan.** The degree to which the applicant has addressed the development of heritage tourism within an existing strategic plan or tourism exercise.

4. Public Benefit and Distribution



- a. **Impact of project.** Potential to promote other cultural and heritage tourism activity, and the degree to which the proposed project is innovative and reaches new audiences.
- b. **Relationship to other programs or initiatives** that aid, improve, or promote heritage education and tourism.
- c. **Letters of Support.** Demonstrated community support for the proposed project and/or evidence of collaboration among partner organizations.
- d. **Distribution.** Allocation of funds achieves a geographical balance, diversity of audiences served by projects, and diversity of historical or cultural periods.
- e. **Funding Impact.** The ability of this grant to make a difference in the quality of the project.
- f. **Interpretation.** Ability to create and link public history programs and education opportunities between two or more sites and other resources

Grant requests are likely to exceed the funds available. Therefore, not all eligible applicants will receive awards and grant awards may be less than the amounts requested.

HERITAGE TOURISM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

Heritage Tourism Technical Assistance Grants from the *Discover NJ History* License Plate Fund are dedicated to support the fostering, development, and sustainability of heritage tourism as an economic engine for New Jersey. The fund supports activities that help to implement the state's [Heritage Tourism Master Plan](#).

Award Limits

The maximum technical assistance grant request is \$7,500. On an annual basis, total disbursements may not exceed the total of that which was earned by the license plate fund in the previous year. No applicant will be awarded more than \$7,500 in any fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).

Eligible Activities

The New Jersey Historic Trust encourages proposals that seek to develop linkages and partnerships among historic, cultural, and environmental resources. The following activities are eligible:

- Visitor and visitor-readiness assessments
- Initiatives that help to develop and promote visitor-ready sites as heritage tourism destinations
- Creative, attractive, and professionally designed signage to promote linkages among sites and/or enhance wayfinding



- Interpretive planning to develop and enhance linkages between sites
- Websites that are professionally designed, mobile compatible, using the latest technologies
- Marketing plans and studies
- Development of performance evaluation measures
- Training and workshops, including speaker honoraria; and
- Other activities that are consistent with the goals and objectives of the statewide heritage tourism plan.

If an activity other than those listed above is proposed, please consult Trust staff to determine if it is an eligible activity.

Ineligible Activities

The following activities and expenses are not eligible for historic site management grants:

- Acquisition of real or personal property
- Administrative or operational costs of the agency receiving funding
- Costs for large quantity printing of publications or brochures intended for public distribution
- Donated materials and/or donated in-kind services
- Food and/or beverage purchases
- Charges for deficits or overdrafts
- Interest expenses
- Cost of any litigation as a result of an activity supported by this grant whether determined by judicial process, arbitration, negotiation, or otherwise
- Services, materials, or equipment obtained by a local governmental unit or nonprofit organization under any other State program
- Contract cost overruns, not approved, which exceed the allowable amount under contract specifications
- Costs for grant application expenses
- Lobbying
- Architectural plans, reports, studies related to a capital exercise
- Work including physical improvements, alteration, repair, restoration, and/or maintenance
- Work performed for a local government unit which has not been awarded in compliance with the State Contracts Law, N.J.S.A. 52:321 et seq. or the Local Public Contracts Law, N.J.S.A. 40A:111 et seq.
- Costs related to overseeing or managing the proposed exercise
- Costs related to printing or postage
- Planning, refurbishing, or installing permanent or temporary museum exhibits; individual signage may be an eligible activity if tied specifically to public education about the interpretation of the structure or site or if signage provides barrier-free

program access to an historic site or structure; the design and content of any signage must be approved by the NJHT before fabrication; and

- Collections management including:
 - Cataloging an artifact or archival collection
 - Appraising or documenting collections
 - Instituting conservation measures for artifacts; and
 - Furnishing plans.

Requirements for Matching Funds

There are no requirements for matching funds, specifically. However, if the request is for a portion of a larger project, the applicant must provide the total budget for the entire initiative and indicate the source for the remaining funds.

Conditions and Procedures for Receiving Funds

All applicants selected for funding under this program must complete and sign a grant agreement prepared and executed by the New Jersey Historic Trust. The grant agreement describes the scope of work and project schedule that is identified in the proposal. Payment will be made upon completion of the project.

Recipients, or grantees, must also agree to fulfill several other conditions related to the program before grant money is disbursed. These include, but are not limited to:

1. **Financial Accountability.** All money dedicated for the heritage tourism technical assistance grants must be kept separate from other agency or organization funds. Once a grant has been made, funds may not be diverted from eligible to ineligible activities. Any misuse of funds, misrepresentation, or noncompliance will result in termination of the grant agreement and grantee will be required to return the funds. All projects receiving grants may be subject to audit. Grantees must retain all financial records and other documents pertinent to their project for three years after completion of the project. Any unexpended grant funds, or grant funds used for ineligible work, must be returned to the Trust.
2. **Final Report.** At the completion of the project and within eighteen months of execution, grantee shall submit a final report summarizing the results/products/benefits etc. and submit copies of invoices, receipts, and/or pertinent records to document expenditures. Visit <https://www.nj.gov/dca/njht/resources/grantees/> to download and complete the report.
3. **Public Information Materials.** An acknowledgement of grant assistance from the *Discover NJ History License Plate Fund* must be included in all programs, literature, and planning documents (including but not limited to signage, website, newsletters, brochures, and flyers). The acknowledgement is to include the [Discover NJ History License Plate image](#).