



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF PRESERVATION AND ACCESS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the NEH Division of Preservation and Access application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/program/cultural-and-community-resilience> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Preservation and Access staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Cultural and Community Resilience in Gullah/Geechee Nation

Institution: Regents of the University of Minnesota

Project Director: Kate Derickson

Grant Program: Cultural and Community Resilience

Cultural and Community Resilience in Gullah/Geechee Nation

1. Project goals

The Gullah/Geechee people have demonstrated an astonishing degree of resilience throughout their 400-year history. Violently taken from their homes and families during the transatlantic slave trade and enslaved for generations on plantations in inhumane circumstances, they retained more Africanism than any other group (Goodwine 1998, Pollitzer 1999, Campell 2008, Cross 2008), developed a shared language (Turner 1949) and culture, and adapted to life under brutal repression by teaching themselves to a range of skills that proved vital to their capacity to thrive during and after the Civil War and emancipation (Giltner 2008). Many were able to purchase the very land on which they were enslaved, and participated in the so-called “Port Royal Experiment,” demonstrating that formerly enslaved people could thrive when given access to resources. As a community, they spread out across the Southeastern United States, retaining their language, their spirituality, traditional hunting and fishing practices, and artistic practices. Their culture contributed to their resilience during the backlash to Reconstruction, during the violence of the Jim Crow period, and through waves of white, sunbelt in-migration to the islands and shoreline that they called home. Throughout those periods of upheaval, Gullah/Geechee people maintained a deep connection to the landscape. Queen Quet, Chieftess and Head of State of Gullah/Geechee Nation often remarks that for Gullah/Geechee people “the land is our family and the waterway is our bloodline.”

Today, the changing climate poses a crucial threat to the landscape and environment that has been such an important source of their resilience. Sea level rise, increased flooding, and rising heat all threaten the natural communities of the American Southeast, with significant implications for Gullah/Geechee livelihoods. Changing ecosystems and associated state-led enforcement and management practices are making it harder for Gullah/Geechee people to farm, hunt, and fish. At the same time, the proliferation of development that brings gated communities and impervious surfaces means that the growing number and intensity of rain events will increase flooding in Gullah/Geechee communities.

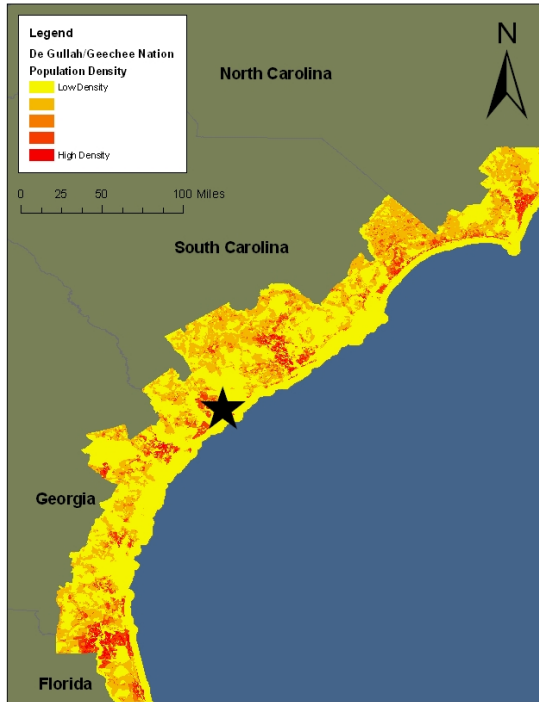
The continuation of Gullah/Geechee culture in a changing climate requires investment in and support for the knowledge brokers and culture keepers in the community. Community leaders like Queen Quet and Glenda Simmons-Jenkins, two of the partners in this project, work daily to collect, curate, cultivate and share the knowledge and cultural practices of their community. Funding is sought to support their work to collect oral histories of community elders and organize and curate them in the Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan Archive, the only archive of Gullah/Geechee history and culture curated and held by Gullah/Geechee people.

Rising seas and changing landscapes will result in the erosion of traditional landmarks and shorelines that mark areas of cultural significance in the shared memories of community members. Collecting and codifying that knowledge will remain a critical component of Gullah/Geechee resilience in so far as it will strengthen their shared understanding of their history and amplify their own contribution to the landscape and region. Moreover, as development intensifies, new flood plains and rising seas threaten to submerge historic Gullah/Geechee burial grounds. Funding is sought to continue to collect knowledge from the Gullah/Geechee community in Nassau County, Florida and on St. Helena Island, SC about the location of these burial grounds.

The goal of this project is to develop, maintain and ensure the preservation of the nation’s only archive of Gullah/Geechee history and culture curated by Gullah/Geechee people. This project has 4 objectives to ensure the continued collection of oral history, local knowledge and material

artifacts in a way that protects them from a changing climate: 1) continue to collect oral histories and material artifacts from Gullah/Geechee people; 2) digitize the collection; 3) create traveling and online materials that provide global education on Gullah/Geechee culture; 4) document sacred sites to map them for cultural asset protection.

De Gullah/Geechee Nation



www.officialgullahgeechee.info

Figure 1 Map of Gullah/Geechee Nation

Gullah/Geechee people are descendants of freed and escaped enslaved Africans brought to the Southeastern US from Africa, targeted by slave traders for their knowledge of tidal rice cultivation and other agricultural practices. They were enslaved on indigo, Sea Island cotton and Carolina Gold rice plantations throughout the region. Once free, they established communities throughout the southeast and today there are many communities of Gullah/Geechee people along the Southeastern coast. St. Helena Island, off the coast of Beaufort County, South Carolina, is a cultural epicenter for Gullah/Geechee people today, but there are notable communities throughout the coast, including in Nassau County, Florida. Queen Quet, Chieftess and Head of State of Gullah/Geechee Nation and the leader of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition is the founder and lead curator of the Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan Archive. She, along with many others

from various Gullah/Geechee led organizations, has collected and curated items in this archive for over two decades.

Throughout the culture's history, white-led organizations have worked to marginalize the community and tell their story. From the founding of the Penn School during the Civil War to contemporary efforts to pave over sacred burial grounds, Gullah/Geechees have not been able to rely on white-led organizations to preserve their culture or interpret historical artifacts correctly. Gullah/Geechee led organizations, like the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition based on St. Helena and the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Committee of Northeastern Florida and the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Community Trust based in Nassau County have played a crucial role in ensuring the correct interpretation of Gullah/Geechee history, collecting and curating archives and burial grounds, and shaping policy in the fields of urban planning, historic preservation, archeology, geography, history, parks and recreation, climate adaptation and resilience, conservation and environmental justice. The archive and its curation is an important source of expertise, community building, and more generally, provides the opportunity to meaningfully shape public understandings of Gullah/Geechee culture and history.

Until relatively recently, it was common for Gullah and Geechee to be used as derogatory terms. The Penn Center, a museum and cultural interpretive site that evolved from a Civil War era Quaker-founded missionary school for recently freed slaves in the region avoided the term and encouraged its students not to speak the Gullah language. Teachers in the public schools also ridiculed students for speaking Gullah. The rural subsistence livelihoods of Gullah/Geechees and their African customs and language seemed “backward” in the context of narratives like “racial progress,” and the obsession with modernization, industrialization and urbanization that characterized the middle of the 20th century. This perception led many Gullah/Geechees to become adept at “code switching” or presenting as “assimilated” in environments that demanded it while speaking Gullah and practicing traditions and livelihood strategies on their family compounds. It also made many disassociate with the identity, language, culture and label “Gullah/Geechee.”

Strategies for resisting cultural erasure and displacement of Gullah/Geechee have included petitioning the United Nations, the US government, and local state governments for various forms of legal protections with varying degrees of success, including the creation of a Gullah/Geechee National Heritage Area which is called the “Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor” by the United States Congress. Their ability to launch such challenges and argue for such protections hinges in part on their ability to mobilize their history and narrative of cultural cohesion. The ability to do so is challenged by what postcolonial scholars, historians and philosophers have come to recognize as the complicity of archives – in both their concrete and expansive definitions – in the process of governing, state-making, and, by association, erasure and misrecognition of indigenous, enslaved, and racialized communities (Falzetti 2014, Rivard 2014, Roy 2011, Stoler 2002, Spivak 1998).

To this end, the Gullah/Geechee people have curated and maintained the only existing archive of their history, the Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan Archive housed on St. Helena Island and curated by the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition. While other archives certainly contain documentation of the lives of Gullah/Geechee people, there are no other archives exclusively dedicated to Gullah/Geechee artifacts and documentation. Moreover, Gullah/Geechee people are often not identified as such in other archives, labeled or identified as simply “Negroes,” “Blacks” or formerly enslaved people. Thus, the Alkebulan Archive plays a crucial role in the preservation of Gullah/Geechee history and culture as an archival space dedicated solely to capturing and preserving Gullah/Geechee life and promoting its continuity through shared connections to heritage. One critical shared connection is the existence of sacred burial areas that sit along the Intercoastal Waterway near the salt marsh. These sacred areas are now in jeopardy due to the influx of what is deemed “destructionment” by native Gullah/Geechees. The building of gated areas have often led to blocking native Gullah/Geechees from these sacred areas and to the desecration of these areas when they are no longer accessible to the family members. Over time, many of these areas and the names of those buried in them are being lost. This already existing major concern for Gullah/Geechees is only exacerbated by the sea level rise issues and intensification of hurricanes along the coast from Jacksonville, NC to Jacksonville, FL. Thus, now is a crucial time in which efforts are being made to document and protect these sacred grounds and to make the data concerning the family ties accessible to Gullah/Geechee descendants and family members.

Despite the vibrancy of the culture and its contributions to American history and contemporary culture, many people know very little about Gullah/Geechee culture. This is poised to change, as the Reconstruction Era is revisited in popular conversations about American history, as evidenced by the efforts by the National Park Service to create a Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, for example. It is crucial that Gullah/Geechee people contribute to shaping this

conversation and that their experiences, history and culture are amplified through these efforts. Support for this project will contribute to their capacity to shape and contribute to the ongoing efforts to deepen and diversify the nation’s cultural and historical record.

Funding is sought to support a collaboration between the Gullah/Geechee Legacy, Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Community Trust and the University of Minnesota to continue to curate the Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan Archive. This will

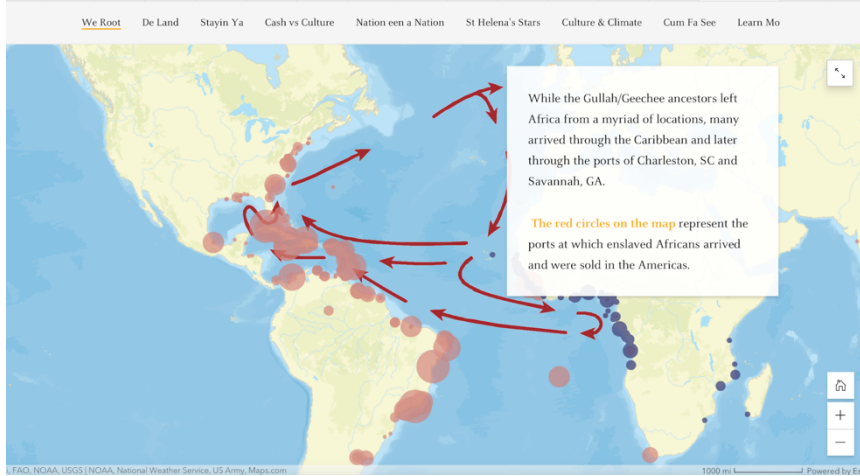


Figure 2: Image from St. Helena Island StoryMap (www.StHelenaGullahGeechee.com)

provide an opportunity to extend an existing project to digitize the Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan archive, funded through a collaboration with the University of Minnesota. Through that initiative, begun in 2015, equipment has been purchased, volunteers trained, and processes established to digitize a range of materials, including:

10,000 printed documents ranging from 1 to 10 pages

in length and cataloged

1500 books to be placed in acid free archival boxes and then cataloged

1000 posters and maps to be placed in acid free archival protective covers and digitally photographed and cataloged

750 analogue video tapes of varying formats-Hi 8, VHS, and DVC to be digitized and cataloged

Materials in the archive include photographs of Gullah/Geechee fishing families and traditions associated with water,

oral history transcripts of Gullah/Geechee interviews, Hi-8 and DVC videos of Gullah/Geechee traditions as practiced over a twenty-year period. These videos were collected during numerous community celebrations, meetings, protests to protect the Gullah/Geechee culture, and gatherings. It also includes news articles, essays, and thesis papers concerning the movement to protect

Gullah/Geechee human rights, environmental resources, and traditions and maps and poster sized images

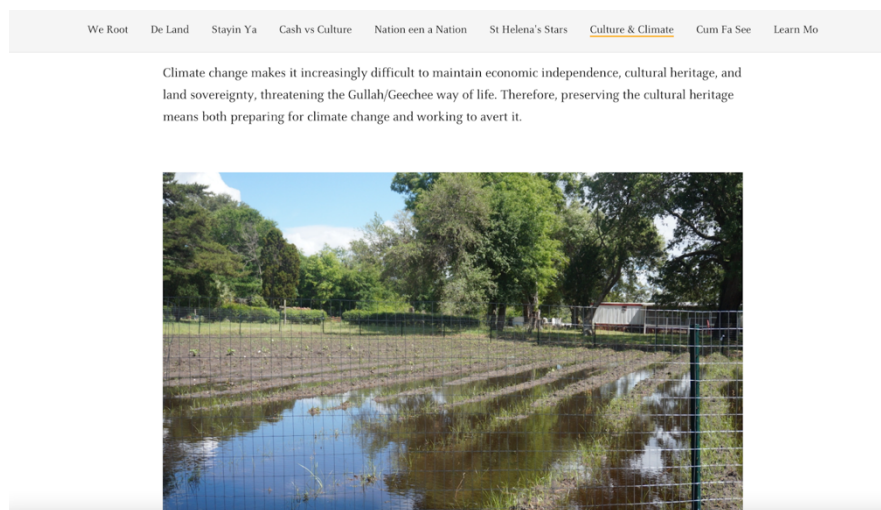


Figure 3 Screenshot of St. Helena Island StoryMap

that relate to Gullah/Geechee sea work traditions and links to the Middle Passage. Finally the archive includes obituaries of Gullah/Geechee people and family reunion documents.



Figure 4 Screenshot of Nassau County StoryMap (z.umn.edu/GullahGeecheeNassauCounty)

To ensure that a changing climate and landscape does not erase the cultural connection and historically memory of the role of Gullah/Geechee people in the region, this project will capture the memories of descendants who lived near waterways in timbering, turpentine and sawmill communities and memories of ancestors buried there through death records, census records and written narratives. These will be digitized and included in the archive, and a public-facing StoryMap will be made in

collaboration with the University of Minnesota to showcase the history and geographies of burial grounds in a culturally appropriate way. They will also be incorporated into other ongoing projects throughout Gullah/Geechee Nation led by Queen Quet, including efforts to provide interpretive signage along green infrastructure such as walking pathways. These efforts will raise the shared understanding of the significance of Gullah/Geechee people and their culture to the fabric of the landscape, which will, in turn, strengthen their capacity to participate in and shape conversations about how the coast will adapt to a changing climate.

2. Program priority Using the Climate and Economic Justice screening tool, we find that the statistics bear out the urgency of this issue in Gullah/Geechee communities. On St. Helena Island, for example, in Beaufort County, South Carolina where the Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan Archive is housed, African Americans make up 72% of the population, the majority of whom identify as Gullah/Geechee. This tract is in the 92nd percentile for expected agricultural loss rate, with significant implications for Gullah/Geechee livelihoods. It is in the 97th percentile for projected flood risk, which poses serious threats to Gullah/Geechee historical sites, property, and artifacts. At the same time, it is in the 89th percentile for the number of low income households.

In Nassau County, Florida, the Black and Gullah/Geechee population is more spread out, making it harder to make statistical inferences about the community. The Callahan community is identified as a disadvantaged area because it is low income, but its population is only 6% Black. The adjacent census tracts for Yulee and Fernandina are not identified as disadvantaged at a tract level, where they are 10% and 4% Black respectively. Drilling further down into the census tract statistics however, we find that the poverty rate is 75% higher for Black Floridians than White, so in places like Nassau County where the Black population represents a low percentage of the population, we cannot interpret that to mean that this specific population isn't high risk. Moreover, research shows that Black communities are more likely to be in low lying and flood prone areas (Frank 2020), so the tract level, especially in rural areas where tracts are large, may not show the variation across populations.

While the statistics alone make a compelling case for the urgency of supporting the cultural and community resilience of Gullah/Geechee people, zooming out to the broader dynamics of the region over time results in a more complete picture. For over a hundred years after Emancipation, many Gullah/Geechee people lived on family compounds and land purchased during Reconstruction in relative isolation. The islands and coastal towns they lived in were not especially easy to get to or of interest to white people or outsiders. The advent of mosquito control tactics, air conditioning and bridges has meant that for the last century this region has been a vacation and migration destination for middle-class white people attracted to the region by its natural beauty and climate. Places like Hilton Head Island were once majority Black and are today known as luxury vacation destinations characterized by golf courses and gated communities. On St. Helena Island, just a few miles north of Hilton Head, Gullah/Geechee people are fighting to protect the rural and comparatively undeveloped character of the island by working to keep a “Cultural Protection Overlay District” intact. The overlay limits the type of development allowed on the region and is aimed at staving off development that will increase impervious surface, gate off sacred and culturally relevant sites, and displace Gullah/Geechees through rising taxes. In Florida, policy makers are debating what a changing climate and increased flooding should mean for historic preservation, with some promoting a bill that will eliminate hurdles for tearing down historic structures that are in flood zones. Thus, the rapidly changing climate and associated landscape changes mean that promoting cultural and community resilience in the Gullah/Geechee Nation is an urgent priority.

3. Community participation

On Saint Helena Island and in Nassau County, the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition and the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Committee of Northeast Florida have a long track record of effective and deep community engagement. Queen Quet Marquette L. Goodwine, who will serve as the Saint Helena Island project manager, has been an advocate for Gullah/Geechee people for over 40 years, and is widely recognized as the leader of Gullah/Geechee people. She regularly organizes a series of events that bring out numerous members of the community, including Gullah/Geechee Famlee Days, the Coastal Cultures Conference, Heritage Days, etc. She is also a founding member and secretary of the Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association and the visionary of the Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank. She has been working for over 20 years to develop and curate the Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan Archive. Her deep roots and connections in the community position her well to successfully coordinate and lead this project.

Glenda Simmons Jenkins is a native of Amelia Island, Florida, and began working as a full-time staff reporter for her hometown newspaper in 2004. Her articles about local history and African American achievement throughout Nassau County helped to identify and record under-represented narratives of Gullah/Geechee contributions to the popular tourist destination. As a co-founder of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Committee of Northeast Florida she helped to lead “Worship by the Sea,” Nassau County’s first Gullah/Geechee ancestral tribute and cultural reconnection ceremony. Jenkins has coordinated and moderated environmental focus groups and facilitated workshops to share the cultural perspective and response to sea level rise and other climate impacts. Her most recent work as the executive director of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Community Trust Inc., a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that creates solutions at the intersection of land and culture, involves negotiating protections and access to Gullah/Geechee burial grounds located on private property in her community.

Both will tap into their established networks and experience engaging Gullah/Geechee communities to execute this project. Their connections offer a critical and unique opportunity to do this project. Gullah/Geechee people are often wary of outsiders as a result of their long

history of land dispossession and exploitation. Trusted members of the Gullah/Geechee community with an established track record of working in the interest of the community are essential to effectively being able to collect and document artifacts. Institutions would not be able to do this, so NEH should partner with those who can.

The University of Minnesota has been a long-term partner of both communities. Dr. Kate Derickson has served as a member of the Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank for a decade and has led several collaborations with members of the Gullah/Geechee community that have resulted in collecting and curating new materials, as well as organizing and presenting collected materials in the form of award-winning StoryMaps. In the Fall of 2020, Queen Quet served as the Winton Chair in the Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota, during which time she and Dr. Derickson co-taught a graduate course on engaging communities in academic research. Representative Simmons-Jenkins and other members of the Gullah/Geechee community traveled to Minnesota to participate in a UMN Libraries “Research Sprint” which served as the foundation for the Nassau County StoryMap. Jenkins was involved in every stage of the writing and research, and used her extensive community connections to collect, vet, and edit the project before it was finalized.

This project is thus an opportunity for an established, long term and trusted collaboration to further develop its work in collecting, archiving and displaying materials with and for members of the Gullah/Geechee community to enhance their resilience.

4. Methodology

The Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan Archive is managed and curated by Gullah/Geechee people, led by Queen Quet. The Gullah/Geechee Nation has research protocols in place to determine access to archival materials and has a community-based process for determining how archival materials will be used. Examples of their use include the StoryMaps of Saint Helena Island and numerous research articles, white papers, grant proposals and public facing interpretive signs across Gullah/Geechee Nation. The archive follows standard storage and preservation practices, including safe handling, proper storage of physical materials in archival quality, acid-free boxes. Throughout the collaboration with the University of Minnesota, a number of members of the community have been trained in safe handling and storage practices, as well as in digitization practices. Digital materials are photographed with appropriate lighting and resolution and formatting standards. Metadata is collected and stored, including, where possible, information about creator, date, location and other relevant information in a standardized format. The archive uses third party reference manager software, cloud storage and back up servers to catalog and back up materials. The project aims to further build on existing StoryMaps and ESRI-based software for storing geospatial data. This software allows the project collaborators to create password protected datasets and repositories and publicly available content.

5. Project deliverables

A comprehensive and public-facing StoryMap hosted by the University of Minnesota will be the primary way that materials will be made available to the public. This collaboration has produced a series of award-winning StoryMaps that make use of archival and original data collection to amplify the history and culture of Gullah/Geechee people who are unfamiliar with it and engage Gullah/Geechee people themselves in narrating their own stories. Still images from previous StoryMaps are provided above and the sites themselves can be accessed at SaintHelenaGullahGeechee.com and z.umn.edu/GullahGeecheeNassauCounty. Protocols for accessing materials are established and managed by a committee of Gullah/Geechee people, including representatives to the Gullah/Geechee Nation. These

include a written form the researchers fill out and submit to a panel of Gullah/Geechee community members who evaluate requests and manage access.

6. Work plan

Timeline	Activity	Deliverable and Lead Partner
06/2024 - 08/2024	Convening Gullah/Geechee Nation leaders, Gullah/Geechee cultural heritage, humanities, adaptation and sustainability experts with the Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank to plan the series of community outreach, capacity building and education sessions	Community engagement schedule and plan (Saint Helena [StH] and Nassau County [NC] with feedback from UMN)
09/2024 - 12/2024	Community Gatherings to gather oral histories and identify burial ground locations and histories	5 community gatherings to collect 25 oral histories (StH and NC with feedback and assistance from UMN)
01/25 - 03/25	Transcribe oral histories and digitize collected materials	Transcription of 25 Oral histories (StH) and maps of relevant burial grounds (NC and UMN)
04/25 - 07/25	Community Gatherings for oral histories and protection locations	5 community gatherings to collect 25 oral histories (StH and NC with feedback and assistance from UMN)
04/25 - 07/25	Work on first year report and StoryMap Meet with Sustainability Think Tank to share findings and solicit feedback for year 2	First year report (StH and NC with support from UMN) First StoryMap complete and published online (UMN)
08/25	Gullah/Geechee Famlee Gatherings to honor the ancestors at the sacred sites and place memorial markers listing family names at sacred burial areas	~4 gatherings (StH and NC with support from UMN)
09/25 - 12/25	Community Capacity Trainings in Archiving and Family Documentation	2 events in each location (4 total) led by StH and NC

12/25	Gullah/Geechee Resource Resilience Celebration to unveil and distribute educational materials to Gullah/Geechee citizens and families	2 events in each location (4 total) led by StH and NC
01/26 - 05/26	Asset mapping in collaboration with UMN Geography Department to inform story maps and creation of videos and educational graphics and materials	2 videos (one for each location) and 5 educational graphics (UMN)
06/26-7/26	Gullah/Geechee Famlee Day on historic St. Helena Island to unveil the outcome materials to Gullah/Geechee citizens and receive additional input. Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank processes input from Gullah/Geechees and adds to archive, story map, etc. Finalize story map and educational materials.	2 completed StoryMap accessible to the public (UMN) 1 event (StH with support from NC)

7. Project personnel

Queen Quet, Chiefess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation will be the project manager.

- Queen Quet www.QueenQuet.com
- Dr. Najmah Thomas www.NajmahThomas.com
- Elder Carlie Towne <http://gullahgeecheeangelnetwork.com/bio.htm>
- Representative Glenda Simmons-Jenkins <https://www.linkedin.com/in/glenda-simmons-jenkins-7786225a/>
- Dr. Amir Jamal Toure <https://cah.georgiasouthern.edu/africana/faculty-and-staff/>
- Dr. Kate Derickson of UMN and the Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank will lead the mapping efforts
- A Prince Albert III will assist with community engagement and research

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