
Cemetery Mapping for Indigenous and Enslaved Peoples' Remains



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**RESEARCH &
DEVELOPMENT**

Cemetery Mapping for Indigenous and Enslaved Peoples' Remains

FINAL REPORT

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16. Abstract This research is vital to acknowledging, protecting and preserving the burial sites of indigenous and enslaved peoples as well as other cultural and historically significant communities. Understanding the location of and mapping these sites allows the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to plan and design projects that mitigate or eliminate impacts to these important cultural resources. This project was designed to allow NCDOT to engage with local communities associated with burial sites in advance of project development and avoid burial site impacts. A reduction of unanticipated burial sites not only serves to protect these sites; it also saves the NCDOT from lengthy and costly delays associated with discovering a burial site during construction. Additionally, the community engagement model employed can support NCDOT and other state agencies in strengthening community relations. The project team developed a community engagement methodology to allow community members to participate in the identification of unmapped burial sites and inform NCDOT of the historical and cultural significance of sites. Using a county-level study area, this project provides a proof of concept and a community participation roadmap for engaging communities around the state to map previously unmapped cemetery and burial sites, with a focus on indigenous and enslaved peoples and culturally historic community cemeteries.			
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AI USAGE STATEMENT

The research team used AI/LLM to support the organization of literature review documentation and support structuring the initial summarization and screening of literature. The research team also used AI to generate some of the community engagement conceptual flowchart visuals in the appendices. All AI/LLM usage was in a support role and was overseen, reviewed and edited by the research team. The final writing and analysis were conducted by members of the research team.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research is vital to acknowledging, protecting and preserving the burial sites of indigenous and enslaved peoples as well as other cultural and historically significant communities. Understanding the location of and mapping these sites allows the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to plan and design projects that mitigate or eliminate impacts to these important cultural resources. This project was designed to allow NCDOT to engage with local communities associated with burial sites in advance of project development and avoid burial site impacts. A reduction of unanticipated burial sites not only serves to protect these sites, but it also saves the NCDOT from lengthy and costly delays associated with discovering a burial site during construction. Additionally, the community engagement model employed can support NCDOT and other state agencies in strengthening community relations.

The project team developed a community engagement methodology to allow community members to participate in the identification of unmapped burial sites and inform NCDOT of the historical and cultural significance of sites. Using a county-level study area, this project provides a proof of concept and a community participation roadmap for engaging communities around the state to map previously unmapped cemetery and burial sites, with a focus on indigenous and enslaved peoples and culturally historic community cemeteries.

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Chapter 1. Background

Acknowledging, preserving and protecting cemeteries and burial sites is an important but complex function of transportation infrastructure and land use development. Identifying cemetery and burial sites is often difficult in the transportation project planning and development process, especially the unmarked or unmapped burials of indigenous and enslaved peoples. These burial sites deserve respect, dignity and protection. Avoiding, preserving and mitigating the impact of transportation infrastructure construction can be difficult because these burial sites are often unknown to planners, roadway designers and right-of-way engineers. Additionally, known cemeteries often lack data that identify their cultural significance, such as identifying a cemetery as an indigenous community or historic African American community cemetery.

Currently, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) archaeology unit has a GIS layer that identifies over 23,000 cemeteries and burial sites state-wide. This impressive dataset has been culled from US Geological Survey quadrangle maps, available local parcel data and disparate project level surveys. However, this dataset does not include more localized information on burial sites, lacks field verification for most entries, and does not indicate the cultural association and/or historic significance of cemeteries. The North Carolina Office of State Archaeology (OSA) recently digitized cemetery site reports completed since the 1970's. Many of those sites have not been captured in a geospatial dataset due to paper-based site documentation that have dated descriptions that make it difficult to locate, such as addresses along roads that no longer exist or relational locations with local homes or landmarks that no longer exist. Those sites are added to the OSA mapping data set as they are digitized.

This research developed a community-informed data collection process, established a typology of cultural significance co-developed with community stakeholders, deployed a field verification process, and created a process for NCDOT to work with local communities to expand and maintain the cemetery mapping dataset. The research team ensured community participation and stakeholder feedback were central elements of the research and that the work was conducted with respect and dignity for all cemeteries, burial sites, and their associated communities.

The research team worked with NCDOT to select a county level project study area to develop processes and methods that could be replicated in other counties. After reviewing a short list of potential counties to serve as a single county study area, the research team selected Edgecombe County, where the project team had existing networks. Edgecombe County expressed interest in identifying, preserving and developing cultural interpretation and preservation, as well as having already engaged in cemetery preservation as a part of the NC Chamber of Commerce supported Uplift NC program. Furthermore, there was concern in the archaeology community that cemeteries and culturally significant sites in Edgecombe County were highly vulnerable to storm events and flooding leading to a more urgent need to document those sites.

1.1 Research Objective and Scope

The research objective of this project was to acknowledge and map undocumented burial sites and mitigate impacts to these sites with a specific emphasis on the burial sites of indigenous and enslaved peoples, as well as cemeteries with cultural significance such as historic African American cemeteries and post-contact indigenous cemeteries. The research developed a community engagement process; data collection and field verification method; and process

improvements for documenting cemetery and burial sites. While the research team explored any reported unmarked burial, the research focused on enslaved peoples' burial sites, post-contact indigenous burial sites and historic African American cemeteries, as those sites are more likely to be unmarked and undocumented.

1.2 Research Approach

The research approach utilized a multi-disciplinary, community-informed methodology designed to bridge gaps in burial site documentation, site preservation, community engagement processes, and transportation infrastructure impact mitigation to burial sites. The research was designed to foster community understanding and support for identifying unmarked burial sites by utilizing a co-created community engagement process. This framework required a community-driven data collection process, which moved beyond traditional agency-led outreach toward a model of shared stewardship that values lived experience as legitimate expertise.

The methodology was refined through a single-county case study in Edgecombe County, which served as a proof of concept for identifying previously unmapped burial sites. This case study utilized diverse engagement techniques, including participatory mapping to leverage local geographic knowledge, oral history collection to document ancestral connections, and technology transfer to build tribal and community capacity for geospatial analysis. The research approach integrated technical field verification to confirm potential burial locations while fostering community trust through hands-on experience and community demonstration workshops. The research synthesized these community-informed insights to propose process improvements for embedding more equitable and accurate burial documentation into agency project planning and development lifecycles.

1.3 Report Organization

This report is structured to provide a comprehensive framework for acknowledging, protecting, and preserving the burial sites of indigenous and enslaved individuals. The first chapter presents the foundational background, outlining the research objectives and the need for a comprehensive framework to mitigate or eliminate impacts to these vital cultural resources during transportation project planning. The second chapter offers an examination of the legal and agency landscape, specifically analyzing North Carolina General Statute Chapters 65 and 70 as they relate to marked and unmarked burials. This chapter includes a gap analysis of current statutory interpretations and details the existing NCDOT agency processes for burial identification, mitigation, and the management of GIS datasets.

The next two chapters highlight the project's community-informed methodologies, as Chapter 3 presents the Edgecombe County Case Study. The case study serves as a proof of concept for community-driven engagement strategies such as participatory mapping, oral histories, and community workshops. Chapter 4 situates these efforts within the broader context of community engagement literature and recent federal and state guidance, proposing a participation continuum for future NCDOT work that evolves from standard public involvement to a shared stewardship model. Finally, Chapter 5 provides technical insights into burial characteristics, offering a comparative guide to assist in the field verification and differentiation of historic White, African American, and Native American burial sites. The appendices include supporting materials to assist practitioners and community stakeholders. The three cemetery site appendices presented

are: Appendix A is an annotated literature review; Appendix B is a reference guide for cemetery and burial site identification; and Appendix C presents the burial and cemetery characteristics. The two community engagement appendices presented are: Appendix D presents the community engagement summary; and Appendix E presents the continuum between public involvement and community engagement, including considerations for NCDOT's community engagement work.

Chapter 2. Process Mapping Current Burial Identification and State Laws Regarding Marked and Unmarked Burials

2.1 Overview of North Carolina General Statute Chapter 65: Cemeteries

The North Carolina General Statute Chapter 65 (GS 65) establishes a comprehensive legal framework for the operation, maintenance, and regulation of cemeteries within the state. Central to this statute is the North Carolina Cemetery Act, which governs the business practices of cemetery companies and management organizations by requiring mandatory licensing and oversight by the North Carolina Cemetery Commission. The chapter also provides for specialized burial sites, including state veterans' cemeteries with specific eligibility and cost provisions, as well as designated areas for county home residents.

More relevant to the project focus, the statute provides a framework for granting descendants rights of access to private property for visitation. Descendants may enter private or public property to visit or restore a grave; however, land on private property requires the consent of the property owner. If the landowner refuses consent, descendants may petition the court for an order allowing access during daylight hours. The statute also outlines procedures for managing abandoned and neglected cemeteries and defining the legal requirements for the removal and reinterment of burials.

2.1.1 Rights of Access to Cemeteries and Burials on Private Land

GS 65 establishes that descendants, their designees, or other persons with a 'special personal interest' are permitted to enter public or private property to discover, restore, or maintain a grave or abandoned public cemetery with the landowner's consent. If a landowner refuses consent, the interested party may initiate a special proceeding by petitioning the clerk of superior court. The clerk will issue an order for entry if: (1) there are reasonable grounds to believe the grave exists on the property, (2) the petitioner has a legitimate historical, genealogical, or governmental interest, and (3) the entry will not unreasonably interfere with the landowner's use of the property. Such orders may specify the specific dates, daylight hours, and routes the descendants must use to access the burial site.

Interviews with stakeholders emphasized the importance of documenting burial sites and family cemeteries so that there is a record of burials on a property. Stakeholders suggested documentation should include details such as surnames present, historic range of birth and death dates, and whether the burial site included unmarked burials or marked burials of unidentified individuals. If a family were to sell family property with a burial site, all parties of the sale would be aware of any family cemeteries and future access issues can be mitigated. This also serves a way to maximize legal protections and more accurate next of kin notifications associated with the burial.

Documentation, such as a record of cemeteries, burials on family land, and relocated burials, are collected and stored by the county board of commissioners, who are tasked with maintaining a list of all public and abandoned cemeteries in rural areas outside of incorporated municipalities. However, GS 65 requires burial records and burial relocations to be recorded with the State Property Office and Secretary of State as well. Stakeholders noted the need for centralizing and standardizing information about burial sites across agencies and levels of government.

2.1.2 Disinterment and Relocation of Burials

GS 65 also describes the processes for government relocations of burial sites. When necessary for government functions, such as the development of transportation infrastructure, the state may disinter and relocate graves. The following procedures are required based on GS 65:

Notice of Burial Relocation: The party relocating burials must provide 30 days written notice to the known next of kin and publish a notice in a local newspaper once a week for four consecutive weeks. If there is no known next of kin, the only notification requirement is to publish a notice in the local newspaper for four weeks.

Oversight of Relocation: A licensed funeral director must supervise the disinterment and relocation of human remains to ensure compliance with state laws and regulations. According to GS65, the relocation must occur in sunlight hours and has been giving the moniker the ‘Sun up, Sundown’ rule. Practitioners interpret the statute meaning as disinterment and reinterment must occur during daylight hours of the same day (i.e. no overnight storage of human remains or working with artificial light sources after sunset).

Documentation with the County: A certificate of removal must be filed with the register of deeds in both the county of origin and the county of reinterment. The statute also indicates that burial relocations must be submitted to the state and maintained by the Secretary of State’s office.

While this lays out the legal requirements for relocation, it should be noted that state agencies can go beyond the required notification process of four weeks in a newspaper. Agencies could seek input for the local community or do research to try to identify potential identity by looking at past property owners or historic churches that once resided in the area (see the Gap Analysis section).

2.2 Overview of North Carolina General Statute Chapter 70: Indian Antiquities, Archaeological Resources and Unmarked Human Skeletal Remains Protection

The North Carolina General Statute Chapter 70 (GS 70) establishes a legal framework for the preservation of ‘Indian antiquities’, archaeological resources, and unmarked human skeletal remains. The statute distinguishes between public and private lands and requires any burials or artifacts excavated or discovered on public lands to be reported and preserved. Under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, archaeological investigations on state property require specific permits and all recovered resources and associated data should be curated by the State of North Carolina. For private land, the state encourages private owners to preserve mounds or burial sites and to seek professional archaeological supervision for any excavations.

The statute lays out a set of criteria and definitions regarding what constitutes an unmarked burial, archeological burial, and collection restrictions for state highways. GS 70 also mandates the processes for work cessation, landowner coordination, unmarked burial identification, and notification for next of kin.

2.2.1 Unmarked Human Burial and Human Skeletal Remains Protection Act

A central provision of GS 70 is the protection of unmarked human burials, as it provides a legal framework for the discovery of unmarked human skeletal remains. The process includes legal requirements for notification and a specific process to confirm no criminal activity has occurred and to ensure respectful treatment of human remains. The following steps outline the prescribed process outlined in GS 70 to identify and protect human remains:

Immediate Notification: Any person who discovers or has reason to believe that unmarked human burials or human skeletal remains are being disturbed or exposed must immediately notify local law enforcement and the county medical examiner.

Cessation of Activities: If the remains are encountered during construction or agricultural work, all disturbance must cease immediately. Work cannot resume until authorized by either the county medical examiner or the State Archaeologist.

Jurisdictional Determination: The county medical examiner is responsible for determining, as soon as possible, whether the remains are subject to a death investigation under G.S. 130A-383.

Transition to State Archaeologist: If the medical examiner determines the remains are not part of a death investigation, they notify the Chief Medical Examiner, who then alerts the State Archaeologist. At this point, the State Archaeologist takes charge of the remains.

Landowner Coordination: The State Archaeologist has a 48-hour window to coordinate with the landowner regarding the protection or removal of the remains. Once this period expires, the State Archaeologist loses authority over the remains and cannot prohibit the resumption of construction or agriculture without the landowner's express permission.

Consultation and Disposition: At this point in the process, the requirements vary based on if the burial is determined to be Native American remains or non-native remains.

Native American Remains: If the remains are identified as Native American, the State Archaeologist must notify the Executive Director of the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs, who will then consult with the appropriate tribal communities regarding treatment and final disposition of the remains.

Non-Native Remains: For remains that are not identified as Native American, the State Archaeologist must publish a notice in a local newspaper for four consecutive weeks to locate the next of kin. If next of kin are identified, they consult on the disposition; if none are found, the remains are permanently curated by the state.

2.2.2 Provisions Regarding Highway Rights-of-Way

Highway rights-of-way (ROW) are excluded from the definition of 'state lands' in GS 70. However, this exclusion does not negate the requirements of GS 70, concerning the discovery of unmarked human remains. Notification and work cessation are still mandatory regardless of the location, including within highway ROW.

According to stakeholder interviews, the exclusion of right-of-way in the statute originates from the so-called ‘Boy Scout rule,’ which allows Boy Scouts to surface collect artifacts on state property. However, looking for artifacts along a highway ROW would be dangerous and thus it was excluded from the statute definition of state property.

2.3 Gap Analysis in Clarity and Interpretations of GS 65 and GS 70

The research team reviewed GS 65 and GS 70 with a focus on provisions that addressed human skeletal remains, burial relocations, and unmarked burials. Combining a close reading of the two state statutes and state agency stakeholder interviews, the research team identified three areas that lack clarity of definition and have gaps in the statutes’ implementation. Stakeholders noted that the statutes as written do not do enough to treat the individuals interred in burial sites as people with the respect they deserve.

2.3.1 Definition of ‘Marked’ Burials and ‘Identity’

GS 65 applies to graves that are ‘marked’ and a known identity exists for the remains. GS 70 applies to “unmarked human burials,” defined as interments lacking grave markers or historical documentation of identity. A central conflict exists because ‘identity’ is not legally defined and the term ‘marked’ lacks specificity. This lack of specificity has led to multiple interpretations of what constitutes marked and known identity of burials. The NCDOT Right of Way Unit considers any burial site with at least one headstone as ‘marked’ and does not require the specific identity of a burial to be known. The NCDOT approach interprets identity to be known if a family name or a more abstract cultural identity (such as 18th-century tenant farmers) can be established.

The Office of State Archaeology (OSA) defines ‘marked’ more strictly, requiring a known burial location and confirmed identity. OSA prefers identity to include basic vital statistics such as age, sex, and community affiliation. For the OSA, a presumed grave marker must be contextually connected to an evidenced interment in order to be considered “marked.” A burial site may include both “marked” and “unmarked” burials, especially when considered that many historic cemeteries are amalgamations of multiple family plot burials. Similarly, for the OSA, burial locations may be identified without the presence of a marker (e.g. via geophysical testing), but these buried human remains can rarely be identified except by abstract cultural identity. The OSA interpretation is that if a specific name and identity cannot be established, the remains should not be reinterred, and GS 70 should apply. OSA has concerns that a rush to reinterment will result in misidentification of remains, loss of archaeological data, and the potential to ignore community preferences surrounding burial and reinternment.

Some stakeholders noted the importance of distinguishing the cemetery as a site (with its associated artifacts), individual burials, and individuals as human remains. They suggested that any burial site that is “historic” should automatically be considered an archaeological site even if it has internments that are marked with identifying information. Currently, neither GS 65 nor GS 70 has a definition of “historic.” GS 70, however, defines an “archaeological resource” as “any material remains of past human life or activities which are at least 50 years old, and which are of archaeological interest...[including]...graves or human skeletal materials.” This “50-year rule” is generally standard professional practice in Cultural Resource Management.

The consequences of these definitions are serious; the archaeological excavation of a site with complete documentation, versus timely removal of graves by backhoe under funerary director supervision. Several stakeholders suggested a hybrid model would be an improvement where, for example, funeral directors supervise the timely removal of graves with clear identifying information (i.e. surname, first name, birth and/or death date) and the OSA supervises removal of all other graves and subsequent research, community engagement, and curation or reburial.

2.3.2 Public Notification and Outreach Requirement

The current notification process requires placing a public notification in a local paper once a week for at least four weeks. With the reduction of community newspapers and reduced circulation, the publication of notice in a local newspaper has become a less visible option for informing community members. This approach is not the best means to seek out potential descendants and ensure next of kin has an opportunity to provide necessary input in burial relocation. As written, stakeholders stated that GS 65 and 70 do not adequately address the concerns and rights of descendent communities, and “due diligence” of developers, archaeologists, funeral directors and others involved in identifying and preserving burial sites as noted in the statutes includes very little community outreach. There is little to no specific guidance of the process or principles of community notification, outreach, and engagement.

A preferred approach would be updated language in the statute that recognizes the current technology and culture of how people consume local news. Additionally, a more direct form of community engagement, such as directly contacting local churches, historical societies, or community centers, could better support next of kin notifications.

2.3.3 Record Keeping of Relocations

GS 65 requires burial records and burial relocations to be recorded with several potential agencies within local and state government, including State Property Office, Secretary of State, and County Register of Deeds. This can lead to confusion over who is maintaining which records and inconsistencies in recordkeeping processes. A preferred approach would be a single entity or database that is accessible by all relevant parties.

Under GS 65, funeral directors are required to document the burial site. In practice, stakeholders suggested funeral directors rarely create maps (and even more rarely create annotated, to-scale maps) of either the original or new burial sites. Funeral directors also were noted to rarely document vital statistics and information from graves (e.g. names). The stakeholders suggest funeral directors should be held to a higher standard under GS 65, and undergo more thorough training and/or certification to be able to participate in GS 65 activities

2.4 NCDOT Agency Process for Burials and Cemeteries

NCDOT manages burial mitigation and relocation through either the Archeology Group in the Environmental Analysis Unit or the Right-of-Way Unit depending on the project stage and the type of burial encountered. The process has three different phases: (1) the initial assessment to avoid and mitigate impact such as projects going through known burials; (2) relocation of burials prior to construction when necessary; and (3) unknown burial discoveries during construction.

1. Preliminary Assessment and Mitigation Planning

Burial checks are performed by the Archaeology group during the NEPA process as staff work to ensure projects comply with federal and state historic and environmental preservation requirements, such as Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Briefly, section 106 and 110 of NHPA require federal agencies to take into account any adverse effects of their sponsored undertakings and projects on historic and archaeological resources (including projects that utilize federal funds and/or permits) via a process that includes survey of areas of potential effects, assessment of resources for significance and potential eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, and resolution of affects through avoidance, mitigation, or removal (for further details, visit www.achp.gov).

The Archaeology group identifies Section 106 requirements during the preliminary assessment and planning phases. If cemeteries are identified, efforts are made to avoid the site by exploring design changes. When some level of impact is unavoidable, NCDOT works to mitigate those impacts. To conduct their desktop assessment, the NCDOT Archaeology group uses a GIS dataset built from USGS quad maps, historical parcel data, and aerial photo reviews. OSA maintains site files, professional reports, and cemetery layers used by NCDOT for planning. The NCDOT GIS dataset and the OSA site file are coordinated to ensure a comprehensive data set. As projects progress to construction, NCDOT contracts with cultural resource management consultants to conduct systematic archeological surveys to document and verify that there are not unexpected burial sites or other archaeological sites.

2. Burial Relocation Process for GS 65 Marked Burials

During the projects where burials cannot be avoided, the burials are relocated in advance of the project. The relocation process for burials that are assessed to be ‘marked’ burials with an established identity led by the NCDOT ROW Unit. If the ROW Unit assesses the remains constitute a marked burial due to a headstone or family name, then the relocation follows the GS 65 protocol. This includes publishing a public notification in the newspaper for four consecutive weeks and contracting a qualified funeral director to oversee the relocation process. Rather than conducting an archaeological excavation, the process involves having a licensed funeral director oversee the disinterment of burials by backhoe excavation and the reinternment at a selected cemetery.

Recent examples, such as the I-540 associated burial relocation in Garner, NC, have allowed NCDOT Archaeology to conduct a hybrid approach to burial relocations. This approach allows NCDOT archaeologists to observe and photograph artifacts, such as coffin hardware and grave decorations. However, due to the sunrise-sunset interpretation of GS 65 burial relocations, the relocation crews often move quickly to disinter and reinter the remains. This means that anything captured by the archaeology staff must be done quickly and without the normal rigor of an archeological investigation to document provenience. These types of hybrid approaches have been instituted in situations where there is a gap between what NCDOT ROW interprets as a marked burial and what OSA interprets as a marked burial. This allows some archaeological documentation and an opportunity to better establish identity.

3. Burial Relocation Process for GS 70 Unmarked and Unexpected Burial Discoveries

If unmarked remains are found during construction of a project, NCDOT calls local law enforcement to ensure it is not a crime scene and coordinates with the State Coroner's Office. The NCDOT Archaeology group consults with OSA to make the determination if a site falls under GS 65 or GS 70. The OSA serves as the regulatory consultant and manager for burials deemed archaeological under GS 70. The NCDOT Archaeology Unit is typically only brought in for GS 70 cases at the specific request of OSA.

Due to the unexpected nature of the discovery and the need to protect the remains, advance notice of the relocation is not required (as is required in GS 65). Public notification is still required for four consecutive weeks, similar to GS 65. However, for unexpected burials that notification can occur during the relocation process or after the remains are handled due to the time constraints of relocating unexpected burials that have been exposed during construction. There is a disposition hierarchy under GS 70 that outlines how the remains are handled. The family, or next of kin, claims are honored first. If no next of kin is found or is undeterminable, tribal claims are then honored next. If no identity is established and no verifiable claims are made, the remains are then curated by the state.

2.5 GIS Data Set of Burials and Cemeteries

To supplement existing burial records, the NCDOT Archaeology group has been expanding their burial GIS dataset. Over the past ten years, the NCDOT archaeology group has developed an initiative to consolidate previously disparate or inaccessible records into a unified planning tool. The methodology involved reviewing historical cemetery locations from USGS quad maps, historical maps, and online cemetery datasets and then confirmed potential sites with aerial imagery. Ultimately, over 2,200 new unique burial points have been captured. The database also integrated currently available property records to flag relevant cemetery indicators within the parcel data.

The resulting overarching cemetery layer is currently a joint management effort between the NCDOT Archaeology Unit and OSA. This framework synthesizes specialized archaeological data, including official site forms, professional reports, and citizen-reported locations, under uniform data standards to ensure inter-agency consistency.

This GIS dataset serves as a key source for early screenings for Section 106 compliance and the NEPA process. By facilitating early cultural resource reviews within broad study areas, staff can identify cemeteries and NRHP eligible sites prior to final project design. Integrated into the NCDOT ATLAS system, an agency-wide geospatial database, the dataset allows NCDOT to identify and mitigate project designs and make necessary adjustments to avoid known burials where possible and prepare for potentially necessary relocations in advance.

Several challenges impact the data collection efforts for this geospatial dataset, specifically data reliability and local government data collection continuity. Notable issues include a discrepancy between historical and contemporary parcel data delineations and site descriptions. Older documents often have descriptors that no longer exist (such as trees, gravel roads, outbuildings) or the names of roads and properties have changed. Additionally, a procedural gap exists in the

mapping of relocations by municipalities. Documentation quality remains inconsistent at the county level, with many jurisdictions relying on fragmented records or static file formats rather than centralized GIS solutions. There is also no formal mechanism to update the state's archaeological database once remains are moved under GS 65 or GS 70, so those relocations are not always reported and documented in a way that can be incorporated into the GIS layer.

Chapter 3. Edgecombe County Case Study

3.1 Case Study Overview

Edgecombe County, North Carolina, served as the study area for research on community engagement strategies for collaboration to identify unmapped cemeteries and burial sites. The county offered a unique setting because it was suspected to contain unmapped cemeteries and burial sites for enslaved persons and members of local indigenous tribes. NC State University researchers worked with North Carolina Research and Engagement Group (NCREG) in pre-engagement activities which were essential for building community awareness and establishing a level of trust between researchers and community stakeholders. Direct engagement with community stakeholders involved the use of participatory mapping and oral history documentation techniques. Additionally, a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) demonstration in a local cemetery gave stakeholders hands-on experience with the technical components of investigating potential burial sites. The demonstration day also provided opportunities for researchers and community members to discuss local burial history and exchange ideas on burial mapping identification and preservation efforts.

The results of these engagement actions included the identification of multiple sites for potential archeological investigation (to confirm the possible location of burials) as well as technology transfer activities building community capacity to conduct their own preliminary geospatial investigations. Lessons learned included the value of the pre-engagement process to identify and respond to community needs in the context of identifying burial sites. Diverse community needs resulted in diverse strategies, particularly when working with the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe. Trust between researchers and community stakeholders was enhanced by responding to community needs identified in pre-engagement meetings, as well as regular communication of research findings throughout the study. Future efforts may include additional technology transfers that translate technical information associated with mapping burial sites into readily understood formats for lay audiences.

Edgecombe County was selected due to a high probability of containing unmapped burial sites with enslaved or indigenous remains. The county was home to numerous plantations with enslaved labor. Furthermore, Princeville, the first town founded by free African Americans in the United States, is located in the county. The Town of Princeville includes several burial sites, including those that contain people who were born enslaved before the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. The county is part of the traditional land claims of several indigenous groups as well, including the Tuscarora Nation and the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe.

The county was also selected because of pre-existing and established relationships between the researchers and community stakeholders. FreedomOrg, a Princeville-based non-profit, served as the primary community stakeholder group. Dr. Marvin Richardson, Vice-Chief of the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe, served as the primary liaison for indigenous community collaboration. These relationships were critical to project coordination, hosting project events, and having a consistent stakeholder group for project feedback.

3.1.1 Princeville, North Carolina

Princeville is considered the first town founded by free African Americans in the United States. Founded as Freedom Hill in 1865 on the banks of the Tar River, the town emerged from a settlement of formerly enslaved African Americans seeking refuge through proximity to a Union Camp located in nearby Tarboro. There are a series of cemeteries, including Wilson Cemetery, with both marked and suspected unmarked burials dating back to before The Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, potentially including burials of the enslaved.

3.1.2 Haliwa-Saponi Tribe

The cultural heart of the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe is in adjacent Halifax County. However, the tribe's traditional lands extended into Edgecombe County. Through consultation with Dr. Marvin Richardson, Town Creek Townships (areas just west of present-day Tarboro) were identified as potential burial site locations. "Red Men's Field", referenced in historic North Carolina maps, was identified as a location for further archival research.

3.2 Pre-Engagement

NCREG led and facilitated a series of community engagement events to initiate the process, which included multiple community conversations, including targeted meetings in Princeville and with Haliwa-Saponi tribal leaders. These meetings discussed the details and proposed outcomes of the project and provided a forum for community members to share their perspectives and expectations of the study. The research team also had conversations with the Tuscarora Nation and invited representatives to public meetings. The Tuscarora Nation opted to be updated on the project rather than a full collaborative partnership.

As part of the pre-engagement, the project team held parallel community conversation efforts with Princeville residents in Edgecombe County and Haliwa-Saponi Tribal community at their tribal headquarters in Hollister, followed by continued engagement through Princeville Homecoming, the Haliwa-Saponi Winter Pow Wow, and the Edgecombe County community kickoff meeting in Rocky Mount. These engagements revealed that cemetery mapping is not merely a technical or archaeological exercise. It is a question of trust, power, data stewardship, and whether the communities most connected to these places will retain custody over their own histories.

The need to improve levels of trust between the researchers and the community was a major finding from pre-engagement. Stakeholders mentioned a lack of understanding of available resources to document unmapped burial sites and a lack of clarity of relevant policies and agencies to contact if a site is uncovered. In the case of the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe, concerns were raised about the risks of burial sites being looted and desecrated as well as the need to increase their tribal capacity to conduct community-led archeological work.

3.2.1 Princeville Community Conversations Results

In Princeville, residents made clear that the project was not simply about cemeteries. It was about whether the first town in the United States chartered by formerly enslaved people would retain custody of its own history. Participants connected burial sites to family rituals, flood

trauma, displacement after Hurricanes Floyd and Matthew, and a century-long tradition of descendants monitoring and caring for graves. Their skepticism was not abstract. Residents distinguished being informed after decisions are made from having shared power in determining what happens with remains, maps, records, and public interpretation. They also named a legal asymmetry: North Carolina law provides clearer, more formal protections for Native American remains than for African American remains, leaving communities like Princeville to build a consent and stewardship framework from scratch.

3.2.2 Haliwa-Saponi Community Conversation Results

The Haliwa-Saponi engagement operated from the language of sovereignty. Tribal leaders emphasized that the tribe must be at the table from the beginning and engaged as a sovereign nation, not as a stakeholder added after project design. They requested an MOU governing consent, data ownership, artifact stewardship, treatment of encountered remains, terminology, and pre-publication review. Tribal members also pushed the project beyond documentation toward community capacity: ArcGIS and Field Maps training, deed research against tribal family names, AI-assisted review of fragmented historic records, and youth participation in preservation work. The Tribe was eager to see community impact and knowledge transfer as result of projects.

3.2.3 Comparing the Community Conversations

Although Princeville and the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe brought distinct histories and legal positions, five shared themes emerged. First, cemeteries are family, not data; they are living extensions of ancestors, descendants, memory, and obligation. Second, communities must be brought in earlier, before routes, scopes, or research designs are functionally set. Third, data ownership is central: maps, oral histories, records, and documentation must return to communities in usable forms that support grants, preservation, teaching, and intergenerational stewardship. Fourth, skepticism coexisted with good faith; both communities were willing to engage if early signals of accountability were credible. Fifth, standard notification practices do not reach rural elders or dispersed descendants. Churches, libraries, senior centers, fire departments, restaurants, homecomings, powwows, flyers, and local ambassadors are not supplemental channels — they are the information infrastructure of these communities.

The differences are equally important. The Haliwa-Saponi Tribe entered the process with the standing of a sovereign nation, a Vice Chief, tribal council, existing state relationships, and recognizable legal frameworks, even if those frameworks required stronger implementation. Princeville entered with deep civic capacity but thinner formal infrastructure: Freedom Org, churches, libraries, families, descendants, and local leaders who were often asked to do state-facing work without compensation. The threats also differ. Princeville faced environmental and infrastructural risk — floods, road projects, displaced remains, and cultural landscape erasure. Haliwa-Saponi burial sites faced those risks alongside predatory threats, including grave robbing and trafficking in artifacts and human remains. These differences required tailored mitigation rather than one uniform engagement model.

3.2.4 Attempting Rocky Mount Community Conversations

The Rocky Mount experience clarified a structural challenge in the project's own engagement model. NCREG sought to work with OIC of Rocky Mount as a convening partner, but the

request placed substantial responsibility on a local organization under compressed timelines: stakeholder lists, venue hosting, trainee recruitment, contractor review, and participant coordination. OIC's President, Reuben C. Blackwell IV, responded that the organization could assist and support, but could not "lift this all the way" without time, clarity, and resources. His response revealed three operational lessons: the ask was too large for the timeline; a written scope and expectations document should have preceded recruitment; and the convening labor was unfunded. The point is not to assign fault, but to name a transferable lesson: when state-funded projects rely on local organizations to mobilize trust, that labor must be scoped, scheduled, and compensated.

3.3 Engagement

The context and pre-engagement directly informed engagement strategies for working with community stakeholders to identify potential unmapped burial sites. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the identities of participants were kept confidential, and their input was stored securely on an external hard drive.

The strategies included:

Participatory mapping was selected due to its effectiveness with lay audiences and low barriers to access and use. In participatory mapping, drawings with landmarks and streets are presented at large scale. Participants were invited to mark the maps with sticky notes, markers, and other analog elements. A facilitator helped participants navigate maps and provided geographic context. A limitation of the process is the awareness of the information to be mapped by stakeholders, as well as their ability to recall geographic locations.

Oral Histories were selected due to its effectiveness with lay audiences and low barriers to access and use. The selected oral history collection format recorded participant responses to three questions: 1) Are you aware of any enslaved African American burial sites? 2) If so, where are they? And 3) Are you willing to share your contact information for any follow up information? Facilitators used digital recorders. Written transcripts were developed from the recordings.

Technology Transfer was selected due to Dr. Richardson's request to support capacity building in the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe through technical training in geospatial analysis. Dr. Richardson was loaned a computer with ArcGIS. A research assistant prepared a series of videos with self-guided lessons in the use of ArcGIS. Office hours were established to assist Dr. Richardson with completing lessons.

Demonstration was selected due to community stakeholder requests for an opportunity to observe burial ground identification techniques in the field. Researchers partnered with a community-engaged geospatial mapping firm to demonstrate use of Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) in Wilson Cemetery in Princeville, North Carolina.

3.4 Results

Participatory mapping: Researchers attempted to use participatory mapping at three community events; a Princeville pre-engagement event, the Haliwa-Saponi Winter Powwow, and the Princeville Homecoming Festival. However, the mapping method was only used successfully at the Princeville Homecoming Festival. Researchers hosted a booth at the festival and provided the materials, such as maps and voice recorders, and NC State researchers to facilitate. Participatory mapping and oral history documentation occurred at the same booth. 39 people visited the booth, resulting in 6 potential burial sites identified for further investigation by researchers.

Oral Histories: Researchers attempted to use oral histories at three community events; a Princeville pre-engagement event, the Haliwa-Saponi Winter Powwow, and the Princeville Homecoming Festival. However, the oral history method was only used successfully at the Princeville Homecoming Festival. Researchers hosted a booth at the festival and provided the materials and facilitators. Oral history documentation and participatory mapping occurred at the same booth. 39 people visited the booth and 16 agreed to have their oral histories recorded for further investigation by researchers.

Technology transfer: Researchers completed four ArcGIS introductory lessons and held six meetings with Dr. Richardson to support capacity building. Meetings also included future requests for additional archival research on “Redmen’s Field”, and deed searches for land in that area using traditional Haliwa-Saponi names as search terms.

Demonstration: Researchers and consultants hosted a workshop in Wilson Cemetery. 14 community stakeholders attended including residents, city officials, and members of non-profit and faith-based organizations. GPR was demonstrated in an area with marked graves to reveal the patterns expected for describing an underground void (a potential burial). GPR was demonstrated in an area that was recently cleared of vegetation and unmarked stakeholders reviewed patterns. The demonstration resulted in the identification of four potential unmarked burial sites.

3.5 Discussion

The results of these engagement actions included the identification of multiple sites for potential archeological investigation (to confirm the possible location of burials) as well as technology transfer activities building community capacity to conduct their own preliminary geospatial investigations. Key takeaways included the value of the pre-engagement process to identify and respond to community needs in the context of identifying burial sites.

Work with African American stakeholders, especially with FreedomOrg, was effective in part due to pre-existing relationships with that group and the overlap between the goals of this project and ongoing community interests. Several researchers, including Professor Boone and Dr. Brock worked previously on research projects in Edgecombe County and in Princeville. The trust built in those efforts carried forward into this project. Additionally, protecting and raising community awareness of cemeteries and burial sites in Princeville and Edgecombe County were already existing community values. At issue was establishing trust in working with NCDOT as a state agency, and the potential to impact community engagement strategies.

The pre-engagement strategies outlined in this report were effective. But they also worked within

the context of some supportive pre-existing relationships, as well as some pre-existing community alignment with the goal of community participation in identifying unmapped burial sites.

Alternatively, the lack of success in the use of similar strategies with the Haliwa Saponi tribe could be due to a number of factors. The research team and the tribe lacked trust built from pre-existing relationships. The research team may have overestimated the appeal of engagement strategies of mapping and oral history documentation without sufficient work done to build trust with tribal stakeholders. The research team may have prematurely narrowed its community engagement strategies based on input from a small group of stakeholders. Dr. Marvin Richardson, the Vice-Chief of the tribe, was identified by the tribe as the tribal point of contact with the research team. He communicated a preference for building tribal capacity through research assistance on archival study (deeds, historic maps, etc.) and technology transfer via GIS training. The research team heeded his requests and interpreted them.

Diverse community needs resulted in diverse strategies, particularly when working with the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe. To improve future outcomes, more diligence is required in co-creating proposed engagement methods with stakeholders instead of assuming similar approaches will work across groups. Trust between researchers and community stakeholders can be enhanced by responding to community needs identified in pre-engagement meetings, as well as regular communication of research findings throughout the study. Future efforts may include additional technology transfer that translates technical information associated with mapping burial sites into readily understood formats for lay audiences.

Chapter 4. Community Engagement

4.1 Community Engagement Literature

This literature review examines community engagement as a collaborative, relational, and power-sensitive process rather than a narrow act of participation or outreach. The reviewed scholarship emphasizes reciprocity, shared decision-making, capacity building, and the importance of structures that enable communities to influence public priorities and outcomes. These themes are then connected to recent guidance from the U.S. Department of Transportation and the North Carolina Department of Transportation, both of which stress early involvement, equity, accountability, and more meaningful opportunities for historically underrepresented communities to shape transportation decisions. Together, the literature and policy guidance suggest that authentic community engagement should be evaluated not only by participation levels, but also by the degree of shared power and substantive community influence in decision-making.

Community engagement has evolved in the literature from a narrow emphasis on participation to a broader understanding of engagement as a relational, developmental, and power-sensitive process. Foundational scholars frame engagement as rooted in fairness, justice, empowerment, participation, and self-determination (Alinsky, 1962; Freire, 1970; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). In this tradition, engagement is not simply the act of informing communities or securing attendance at meetings; rather, it is a collaborative process through which communities and institutions work together to address issues affecting collective well-being. The widely cited definition in *Principles of Community Engagement* describes engagement as working collaboratively with and through groups of people connected by geography, shared interest, or common circumstance to address matters that affect their well-being (McCloskey et al., 2011). This definition remains influential because it emphasizes process, collaboration, and action rather than one-way outreach.

Other scholars extend this understanding by arguing that engagement should be viewed as a continuum. Adler and Goggin (2005) distinguish between private acts of support and more public, collective forms of civic action, while Eliasoph (1998) describes “zones of engagement” that range from family and peer settings to civic and political arenas. Taken together, this literature suggests that engagement is dynamic and layered, requiring individuals and groups to move across social spaces, relationships, and levels of public action. From this perspective, community engagement is best understood not as a single event but as an ongoing process that links personal connection, civic participation, and collective problem solving.

A second major theme in the literature is that meaningful engagement depends on reciprocity, mutual benefit, and shared influence in decision-making. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2006) defines community engagement as collaboration between institutions and communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. This formulation is especially important because it moves engagement away from extractive or organization-centered models and toward reciprocal relationships in which community knowledge is treated as legitimate and essential.

Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) similarly argue for a shift from conventional civic engagement to democratic engagement, emphasizing inclusiveness, participation, reciprocity, shared tasks, and equal respect for the knowledge and experiences that all partners bring. In this view, engagement is closely tied to participatory democracy because communities should not only be consulted, but positioned to influence agendas, shape processes, and affect outcomes (McBride et al., 2003). The literature also makes clear, however, that such engagement requires readiness and capacity on both sides. Stanley (2003) identifies broad benefits of community engagement across agenda setting, design, implementation, ethics, and community outcomes, while also noting the demands of time, resources, and skill development. Hatcher et al. (2008) and McCloskey et al. (2011) further emphasize that relationship building, leadership development, capacity building, empowerment, and coalition building are essential to sustained engagement.

Research on readiness further shows that communities and institutions vary in their preparedness to move from inaction to active participation and that leadership, social ties, collective efficacy, and hope for change all shape engagement outcomes (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Foster-Fishman et al., 2009). Overall, the literature indicates that effective community engagement requires more than access; it requires structures, practices, and cultures that support trust, shared learning, and meaningful power sharing. Toms and Toms (2014, 2021) further propose that community engagement is a multifaceted process that operates across multiple levels and layers and is best understood as a framework that works both inside-out and outside-in.

4.2 Recent Agency Emphasis on Community Engagement and Shared Power

Recent transportation guidance reinforces and operationalizes long-standing themes in the community engagement literature, particularly inclusion, early involvement, accountability, and shared influence. USDOT's *Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making* defines meaningful public involvement as a process that proactively seeks full representation from the community, considers public feedback, and incorporates that feedback into projects, programs, and plans (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2022). Importantly, USDOT identifies common barriers, including one-size-fits-all outreach and a lack of accountability for acting on community input, signaling a shift from procedural compliance toward more substantive engagement.

USDOT's 2023 Equity Action Plan further frames this work through the "Power of Community" and "Proactive Intervention, Planning and Capacity Building" pillars, underscoring that equity requires communities to help shape the transportation decisions that affect them (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2023). Similarly, NCDOT's Statewide Public Involvement Plan states that public involvement should address the needs of community members and stakeholders while incorporating public feedback into decision-making (North Carolina Department of Transportation, 2022). NCDOT's more recent goals go further by emphasizing full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities, earlier identification of environmental justice stakeholders, tailored outreach, measurable accountability, and improved transparency in agency decision-making (North Carolina Department of Transportation, 2024). Across these federal and state documents, the core message is consistent: effective engagement begins early, must be designed to reach historically underrepresented communities, should create opportunities for communities to shape rather

than merely react to transportation decisions, and requires agencies to build internal capacity for transparency, responsiveness, and shared power. In this way, recent NCDOT and USDOT guidance aligns closely with the broader literature’s argument that authentic community engagement should be evaluated not only by participation rates, but also by the extent to which communities can influence priorities, processes, and outcomes.

4.3 Public Involvement and Community Engagement: A Continuum for NCDOT’s Future Work

Across North Carolina, transportation decisions shape daily life: how people move, how communities grow, and how history is honored or erased. For decades, public involvement has served as the formal mechanism through which residents learn about transportation projects and offer feedback. Yet as communities evolve, expectations for participation evolve with them. People want more than to be noticed; they want a voice. They want more than consultation; they want collaboration. They want to see themselves—culturally, historically, and civically—reflected in the decisions that affect their futures.

This shift marks a broader national movement. USDOT’s recent *Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement* reframes engagement as shared stewardship, emphasizing equity, early involvement, and the lived expertise of communities. NCDOT’s own Public Involvement framework provides a strong procedural foundation, but the agency’s future lies in weaving that foundation with deeper, relational forms of engagement.

It describes the continuum from public involvement to community engagement, identifies points of connection and disconnect, and outlines pathways for NCDOT’s future work, especially in communities whose histories, burial grounds, and cultural landscapes require care, respect, and partnership

4.3.1 Understanding the Continuum

Public involvement and community engagement are often discussed as separate practices, but they are better understood as points along a continuum of participation. At one end, public involvement ensures transparency, compliance, and procedural fairness. At the other end, community engagement cultivates shared ownership, cultural resonance, and long-term partnership.

These approaches are not opposites. They are currents in the same river, one providing structure, the other providing life. The movement between them reflects how transportation agencies mature from informing the public to collaborating with communities.

4.3.2 The Continuum at a Glance

- Informing → Consulting → Collaborating → Partnering
- Procedural → Relational
- Compliance driven → Equity driven

- Agency led → Community led

The continuum is dynamic. Agencies may move back and forth depending on project phase, community needs, or historical context. What matters is intentionality: recognizing when procedural outreach is sufficient and when deeper engagement is necessary to build trust, honor heritage, and ensure equitable outcomes.

4.3.3 Public Involvement: The Foundation

Public involvement is the formal starting point for transportation participation. It is rooted in federal and state requirements that ensure residents are informed and have opportunities to comment on proposed projects. NCDOT's Public Involvement framework outlines three core goals:

1. Inform and consult residents affected by transportation decisions.
2. Gather feedback through public meetings, surveys, comment periods, and digital portals.
3. Document concerns for inclusion in decision making.

This approach is essential for fairness and transparency. It ensures that every project, regardless of location or complexity, meets baseline standards for public notice and input.

Yet public involvement often functions as a one-way exchange. The agency speaks; the public responds. While this satisfies procedural requirements, it does not always build the relationships necessary for long term trust, especially in communities with histories of exclusion, displacement, or cultural erasure.

Public involvement is the foundation, but it is not the ceiling.

4.3.4 Community Engagement: The Evolution

Community engagement represents the next stage in the continuum. It expands beyond informing and consulting to emphasize collaboration, cultural understanding, and shared decision making. USDOT's guidance frames this approach as shared stewardship, where communities are not simply respondents but co designers.

Key Features of Community Engagement:

- Early involvement before project design begins.
- Cultural and historical awareness, especially for Indigenous, African American, and other marginalized communities.
- Collaborative decision making that values lived experience as expertise.
- Equity and Justice⁴⁰ principles guiding investment, accountability, and benefit distribution.
- Long term relationship building, not just project specific outreach.

Community engagement transforms outreach into partnership. It acknowledges that communities hold knowledge about land, history, mobility, and identity that cannot be captured through surveys alone. It also recognizes that trust is not built through meetings; it is built through presence, listening, and shared action.

4.3.5 The Ebb and Flow: How the Approaches Interact

The relationship between public involvement and community engagement is characterized as a cyclical, iterative, and mutually reinforcing process rather than a linear progression. Throughout each phase of a transportation project, opportunities exist to advance along this continuum, allowing for a transition from procedural informing to a deeper understanding of community priorities. During the initiation phase, the focus shifts from merely announcing projects to listening to community histories, while the planning phase evolves from data collection to the co-creation of design options. As projects move into implementation, agency-led outreach transitions toward shared leadership and empowered local partnerships. Finally, the evaluation phase integrates traditional procedural metrics with relational assessments of trust and cultural impact, ensuring that engagement remains a sustained practice rather than a solitary event.

Despite their operational differences, public involvement and community engagement are anchored by several fundamental points of connection that ensure institutional integrity and relational trust. Both frameworks share the core purpose of incorporating public voices into transportation decision-making, grounded in the values of transparency, clarity, and accountability. While both approaches utilize public input to shape project outcomes, community engagement seeks to integrate this feedback earlier and more comprehensively. Furthermore, both models increasingly apply an equity lens to address historical exclusions and systemic inequities, creating a bridge between procedural requirements and meaningful community collaboration.

These shared values create a natural bridge between the two approaches.

4.3.6 Points of Disconnect

Understanding the disconnects helps identify where NCDOT can strengthen its practices:

Timing: Public involvement often begins after design; engagement begins before.

Depth: Involvement gathers opinions; engagement builds relationships.

Cultural Sensitivity: Traditional outreach may overlook heritage, burial sites, or community identity.

Metrics: Involvement measures attendance; engagement measures trust, empowerment, and cultural impact.

These gaps are not failures; they are opportunities for growth.

4.3.7 Pathways for Future NCDOT Work

To move confidently along the continuum, NCDOT can adopt several forward-looking strategies:

- 1. Adopt Pre Engagement Practices:** Begin outreach before formal meetings. Co design engagement methods with communities, especially those with histories of displacement or cultural harm.
- 2. Integrate Cultural Contexts:** Recognize burial grounds, ancestral lands, and local histories as planning assets, not obstacles. Use cultural mapping, oral histories, and community led storytelling.
- 3. Expand Metrics Beyond Compliance:** Track relational indicators such as trust, collaboration, and perceived respect alongside attendance and comment counts.
- 4. Build Local Capacity:** Train community liaisons, youth ambassadors, and neighborhood leaders to sustain engagement beyond the life of a single project.
- 5. Visualize Engagement:** Use infographics, story maps, and accessible visuals to show how community input shapes decisions. Make the process visible, not just the outcomes.

These pathways align with both federal expectations and community aspirations.

4.4 Community Engagement Findings from this Project

The strongest lesson is that community trust cannot be improvised at the moment a project needs participation. NCDOT sponsorship did not automatically confer credibility in Princeville or Rocky Mount. Access was made possible through existing relationships, local civic infrastructure, and trusted conveners who already carried legitimacy in their communities. NCDOT's Public Involvement unit is nationally recognized for project-specific outreach, but this work demonstrates the need for continuous, regionally embedded relationship-building capacity. Staff or contracted partners positioned at the division or regional level should maintain trust before, between, and after individual projects, strengthening NCDOT's long-term credibility in rural communities.

Three recommendations for NCDOT emerged from community engagement and community feedback associated with this project:

1. Treat formal partnership instruments as the baseline, not the ceiling. For tribal partners, execute MOUs before substantive project work begins, with explicit provisions for consent, data access, terminology, and pre-publication review. For African American communities such as Princeville, create a parallel Community Partnership Agreement that confers comparable procedural rights even where no statute requires them. For operational partners such as OIC, Freedom Org, and tribal offices, use subcontracts or stipends that pay for convening labor.

2. Redesign notification for rural conditions. When the affected resource is a cultural landscape rather than a single parcel, notification should be measured in miles, not feet. Outreach should fund print materials, trusted messengers, local ambassadors, churches, libraries, fire departments, senior centers, powwows, homecomings, and other places where community knowledge spreads.
3. Fund local capacity as a project requirement. If the goal is a replicable, community-led heritage model, then the hosts of that model must be paid. Community ambassadors, elder transportation, oral-history coordination, meeting hosting, data review, and local documentation support should be budgeted as core deliverables, not treated as volunteer contributions.

These engagements offered NCDOT and the project team a rare opportunity; the chance to hear rural African American and Indigenous communities explaining, in their own words, what state engagement looks like when it works, and what it looks like when it falls short. The cemetery project will succeed not only by identifying locations on a map, but by demonstrating that sensitive knowledge can be handed to a state agency and university, protected with care, returned in a useful form, and translated into changed practice.

Qualitative knowledge must carry operational weight. Stories about family rituals, displaced remains, unmarked sites, and ancestral cemeteries in the woods are not merely anecdotal; they are evidence that should shape planning, avoidance, mitigation, and preservation decisions. Accountability must also be visible. Communities asked to see their input reflected in standard operating procedures, data-sharing practices, and future project design. The most credible signal NCDOT can send to the next rural community is proof that the last community changed how the agency operates.

4.4.1 Conclusion

Public involvement and community engagement are not competing philosophies, they are complementary currents that, when aligned, create a stronger, more equitable transportation system. Public involvement provides the structure; community engagement provides the depth. Together, they transform transportation planning from a technical exercise into a shared civic journey.

For NCDOT, the future lies in balancing both: maintaining procedural integrity while deepening relational trust. When these approaches flow together, transportation decisions honor history, amplify community voice, and build enduring partnerships across North Carolina.

Chapter 5. Burial Characteristics and Site Verification Process

5.1 Overview of Burials

Cemeteries serve as powerful historical records, offering insight into cultural values, religious beliefs, social hierarchies, and community structures. In the United States, the historical development of cemeteries for White and African American communities reflects broader patterns of racial segregation, inequality, and cultural expression. This document explores the major differences between historic White and African American cemeteries, focusing on factors such as access, landscape design, memorialization practices, and preservation efforts. The document also briefly describes historic Native American burial sites, that are rarely formally organized and have little scholarly documentation.

There is not one or two characteristics that signify the presence of a historic African American cemetery. Rather, characteristics such as those described below must be considered together, and within historical and cultural contexts. The presence of a nearby antebellum plantation where enslaved people lived, a historic Rosenwald School, an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, or a historic African American neighborhood identified through census or historic directories may be as significant to the identification of an African American cemetery as the presence of field stones, vernacular landscaping, glass bottle grave decoration, or intentional yucca plantings. The cooccurrence of these characteristics and context clues is the best strategy for differentiating historic African American and Native American cemeteries and burial sites from their historic white neighbors.

5.2 Comparing Historic White Cemeteries and African American Cemeteries

5.2.1 Origins and Accessibility

White Cemeteries:

Historically, large white cemeteries were often well-funded, publicly maintained, and centrally located. Many were established by churches, municipalities, or private companies, and some evolved into formalized garden cemeteries with planned landscapes and plots available for purchase. In more rural areas, families linked by kinship often shared a communal burial site, sometimes demarcated with chain or post fencing. Access to these cemeteries was often limited to direct relatives.

African American Cemeteries:

African American cemeteries often emerged from necessity during the American period of enslaving African American people, and during segregation. Enslaved individuals were typically buried in unmarked or minimally marked graves, often on plantation grounds or marginal land. Some of these were demarcated with intentional plantings or posts. Following emancipation, Black communities created their own burial grounds, frequently on land purchased collectively or donated by sympathetic parties. Access to prime cemetery land was typically denied, leading to sites in rural, flood-prone, or otherwise undesirable areas. In the American south, Black communities were not allowed to bury their dead alongside their White neighbors.

5.2.2 Landscape and Layout

White Cemeteries:

By the 19th century, many White cemeteries embraced the “rural” or “garden” cemetery movement. These cemeteries featured manicured lawns, elaborate paths, family plots, and statuary. Aesthetic considerations and landscape architecture played a major role. In these cemeteries, graves are typically aligned in long rows with every individual facing the same direction.

African American Cemeteries:

African American cemeteries were usually more utilitarian and vernacular in layout. While these cemeteries showed signs of care and reverence, they often lacked formal landscaping (due to choice or limited resources) and were, thus, thought to be “unkempt” by others. Graves might be placed irregularly, and families marked burials with natural materials like wooden crosses, rocks, or even plants, reflecting African burial traditions. Graves might also be placed in family plots.

5.2.3 Grave Markers and Symbolism

White Cemeteries:

Gravestones in white cemeteries were often made of durable stone like marble or granite and featured ornate carvings, inscriptions, and religious iconography. Family wealth was often reflected in monument size and detail. Many historic White gravestones were purchased through catalogs or at a local dry goods store or mason.

African American Cemeteries:

Gravestones in black cemeteries varied significantly. Where resources allowed, professionally crafted stones were used, but many graves were marked with handmade or ephemeral materials by local craftsmen. Symbolism on gravestones also varied, with Bible verses, fraternal organization icons (e.g. Masons, Oddfellows), and natural materials (e.g. oak leaves) frequently present. African American burial customs also often incorporated folk traditions, including the placement of personal objects on graves or symbolic items like glass bottles, shells, marbles, tobacco, or broken crockery.

5.2.4 Religious and Cultural Practices

White Cemeteries:

White burial practices typically reflected mainstream Christian denominations and European funerary traditions. Services, attire, and grave symbolism adhered to widely recognized norms.

African American Cemeteries:

Burial practices in African American cemeteries often blended Christian, African American, and African spiritual traditions. Homegoing ceremonies, communal singing, and the incorporation of ancestral veneration were common. Some practices, such as grave mounding or leaving offerings, trace back to West African customs. Intentional plantings (e.g. of yucca) were a tradition that also differed from historic White cemeteries, which were more typically manicured grass.

5.2.5 Maintenance and Preservation

White Cemeteries:

Historic White cemeteries have generally benefited from more consistent upkeep, legal protection, and integration into historical preservation programs. Many are now maintained by cities, churches, or perpetual care funds.

African American Cemeteries:

Black cemeteries have faced chronic neglect, vandalism, and erasure. Because many lacked legal incorporation or perpetual care funds, they were often left off of historic maps and surveys and are often in poor condition today. Grassroots efforts by descendants and community activists have been crucial to their preservation and recognition.

5.2.6 Recognition and Documentation

White Cemeteries:

These cemeteries are more likely to be documented in official records, maps, and genealogical databases. Their histories are often well-preserved and included in heritage tourism.

African American Cemeteries:

Many historic African American burial grounds remain undocumented or misidentified. Some have been lost to development. Recent movements, including community-driven acknowledgement and preservation, federal initiatives, and archaeological research, are working to recover and preserve these sites and share information about their cultural significance.

5.3 Native American Burial Site Characteristics

1. Earthen Burial Mounds

Large pyramidal, conical, or platform-shaped mounds constructed of soil and clay to cover and honor burials, e.g., Adena, Hopewell, Mississippian cultures. Often astronomically aligned with solstices, emphasizing ritual significance.

2. Effigy Mounds

Earthworks shaped like animals or symbolic forms, such as bears, birds, or serpents, serving both as interment sites and expressions of cosmology.

3. Stone Box Graves

Burials encased in stone-slab “coffins,” commonly found in Mississippian-era sites in the Southeastern and Midwestern U.S. These often contain grave goods like pottery, shell ornaments, or tools. In the historical period, these burials often included trade beads.

4. Flexible & Bundled Inhumations

Smaller burials featuring tightly flexed, bundled, or seated interments, sometimes within shell middens, frequently accompanied by grave goods such as stone tools and beads.

5. Rich Grave Goods

Offerings commonly included pottery vessels, projectile points, shell and bone ornaments,

copper items, and ceremonial artifacts, indicative of the deceased's social status, spiritual beliefs, or trade connections.

5.4 Conclusion

Historic White and African American cemeteries in the United States reflect the deep racial divides that shaped life and death in American society. While both serve as sacred spaces of remembrance, the disparities in their condition, recognition, and visibility speak volumes about the unequal histories of the communities they represent. Understanding and preserving African American cemeteries is vital to honoring the legacy of those who endured systemic injustice and contributed to the nation's rich cultural fabric.

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Toms, F., & Toms, K. (2021). Community engagement as an inside-out and outside-in process. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 14(2), 1–12.

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Appendix A. Archaeology Annotated Literature Review

African American and Indigenous Historic Cemeteries – A Curated Bibliography

Scholarship and media coverage regarding historic African American cemeteries, burial sites, and mortuary practices is diverse and broad-reaching, ranging from academic scholarly pursuits to historic preservation, civil and human rights discussions, legal queries, and community development efforts. The scholarship and media coverage has also exponentially increased in the past 20 years, as increasing numbers and types of individuals, communities, and institutions have been made aware of the threats to these sites and their importance to myriad people.

There are noted lacunae in scholarship and media coverage regarding historic Indigenous cemeteries, burial sites, and mortuary practices. Archaeologists and Indigenous communities have published extensive information regarding pre-Columbian Indigenous burial sites, but historic sites remain understudied.

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13. Archaeological Research Articles

Brooks, C. (2011). ‘Enclosing their immortal souls’: a survey of two African American cemeteries in Georgetown, SC. *Southeastern Archaeology*, 30(1), 176–186.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/sea.2011.30.1.013>

- A study of above-ground artifacts and features at enslaved and historic African American cemeteries in South Carolina

Carson Powell, L., & Dockall, H. D. (1995). Folk narratives and archaeology: An African-American cemetery in Texas. *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 22(3), 349–353.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/009346995791974189>

- A case study of the Albert J. Phillips Memorial Cemetery (Galveston County, TX), highlighting how oral traditions and folklore informed archaeological relocation and site interpretation

Ewen, C., Nicholas Schacht, R., and E. Bailey. (2025). “A Tale of Three Cemeteries: The Challenge of Commemorating the Past,” pp. 217-230 in *Combating Oppression with New Commemorations*, edited by Christopher C. Fennell. Routledge, Oxon.

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003471868-13/tale-three-cemeteries-charles-ewen-ryan-nicholas-schacht-eric-bailey>

Garman, J. (1994). Viewing the color line through the material culture of death. *Historical Archaeology*, 28(3), 74–93. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF03374191>

- Examines funerary artifacts for social symbolism and segregation via gravestones

Gundaker, G. (2001). At home on the other side: African American burials as commemorative landscapes. In J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (Ed.), *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design* (pp. 25–54). Dumbarton Oaks.

Mack, Mark E., and Michael L. Blakey. (2004). The New York African Burial Ground Project: Past Biases, Current Dilemmas, and Future Research Opportunities. *Historical Archaeology* 38.1: 10–17. DOI: [10.1007/BF03376629](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03376629)

- Mack and Blakey discuss their findings at New York’s African Burial Ground, and discuss the difficulty of conducting archaeology on a site that is historically fraught and has important political repercussions

Masur, Laura, Raquel E. Fleskes, Theodore G. Schurr, David Brown, Thane Harpole, Paige Pollard, Lindsay Alukonis, Timothy Horsley, Stephanie Jacobe, and Craig Lukezic (2026). “Let Perpetual Light Shine upon Them”: Forgetting and Remembering Segregated Catholic Cemeteries. *American Antiquity* (91): 40-63. <https://doi.org/10.1017/aaq.2025.10103>

Rainville, Lynn (2009). Protecting Our Shared Heritage in African-American Cemeteries. *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 34(2):196-206. <https://doi.org/10.1179/009346909791071005>

- Uses cemetery data to explore demographic and sociocultural patterns in rural Black communities

Saunders, P. (2015). Analysis of an African Burial Ground in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica. *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*, 4(2), 143–171. <https://doi.org/10.1179/2161944115Z.000000000026>

- Though outside the U.S., offers relevant surface-survey archaeology of African-heritage burials, integrating oral traditions, plant usage, and mortuary spatial patterns

Spera, S. A., Franklin, M. S., Smith, R. K., & Zizzamia, E. A. (2022). Recovering a Black cemetery: Automated mapping of hidden gravesites using an sUAV and GIS in East End Cemetery, Richmond, VA. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 26(4), 1110–1131. [SpringerLink](#)

- Utilized drone-based aerial imagery, GIS, and community partnerships to identify thousands of unmarked graves, offering a model for non-invasive cemetery documentation

Tashjian, A., & Tashjian, D. (2005). The Afro-American section of Newport, Rhode Island's Common Burying Ground. In R. Meyer (Ed.), *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture* (pp. 163–196). Utah State University Press.

Wadsworth, W.T.D., Bank, CG., Patton, K. et al. Forgotten Souls of the Dawn Settlement: A Multicomponent Geophysical Survey of Unmarked Graves at the British American Institute Cemetery. *Historical Archaeology* 54, 624–646 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41636-020-00251-7>

Yanner, K., & Ybarrola, S. (2003). "He didn't have no cross": Tombs and Graves as Racial Boundary Tactics on a Louisiana Barrier Island. *The Oral History Review*, 30(2), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ohr.2003.30.2.1>

14. Osteology & Bioarchaeological Analysis

Barrett, Autumn R., and Blakey, Michael L. (2011) "Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in Colonial New York." In *Social Bioarchaeology*, edited by Agarwal, Sabrina C. and Glencross, Bonnie A., pp. 212–251. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, UK. [Google Scholar](#)

Blakey, M. (1992–2003). *New York African Burial Ground Project*.

- Excavated and analyzed ~400 remains from 17th–18th-century Manhattan burial ground, final reburial in 2003. Set a standard for descendant-engaged archaeological practice

Davidson, J. M., & Mainfort, R. C. Jr. (2012). Hidden Differences beneath a Surface Equality: Mortuary Variability in Two Late Nineteenth-Century Cemeteries in Crawford County, Arkansas. *Southeastern Archaeology* 31(2), 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1179/sea.2011.30.2.001>

- Compares segregated cemeteries' burial practices and material culture

Fleskes, Raquel E., Ofunniyin, Ade A., Gilmore, Joanna K., Poplin, Eric, Abel, Suzanne M., Bueschgen, Wolf D., Juarez, Chelsey, et al. (2021). Ancestry, Health, and Lived Experiences of Enslaved Africans in 18th Century Charleston: An Osteobiographical Analysis. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 175(1):3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.24149>

Harney, Eadoin, Steven Micheletti, et al. (2023). The Genetic Legacy of African Americans from Catoctin Furnace. *Science* 381(6657). <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.ade4995>

Norment, A. R., Pye, J. W., Broehm, C. J., & Boyd, D. K. (2016). *Bioarchaeological Investigations of Nineteenth-Century African American Burials at the Pioneer Cemetery (41BO202), Brazoria, Texas*. Index of Texas Archaeology.

- Excavated and reinterred 14 unmarked graves (1880s–1900s), examined coffin hardware, osteological health indicators, and cultural burial traits.

15. Heritage Preservation, Landscapes & Technology

Blanks, J., Abuabara, A., Roberts, A. & Semien, J. (2021). Preservation at the intersections: disproportionate multihazard risk and vulnerability in Louisiana's historic African American cemeteries. *Environmental Justice* Feb. 1-13.

- Highlights environmental risk and vulnerability affecting these burial grounds

Getty Conservation Institute & FPN. (2021). *How African American Cemeteries Are Lost, Found, and Protected*. Getty News.

- Documents Florida Public Archaeology Network's use of Arches software to track 500+ cemeteries and develop core preservation practices [Getty](#).

Gundaker, G. (2001). At home on the other side: African American burials as commemorative landscapes. In J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (Ed.), *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design* (pp. 25–54). Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

Jones, A., and C. Colwell. (2025). “Undoing African American Human Remains,” pp. 153-171 in *Undoing Things: How Objects, Bodies and Worlds Come Apart*, edited by Gavin Lucas and Shannon Lee Dawdy. Routledge: London.

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Ngozi, Queenchiku (2024). Visual narrative research: African American cemeteries in Alachua County, Florida. *Museum Anthropology*, 47(2), 75–85.

- Presents a qualitative, visual-anthropology study highlighting undocumented burial sites in Florida [SpringerLink](#).

The Public Historian (2025). Special Issue: Cemeteries, Graveyards, and Massacre Sites.

Rainville, Lynn (2025). A National African American Cemetery Database Starts in Your Backyard. *The Public Historian* 47(4): 183-209. <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2025.47.4.183>

Sholts, S. B. (2025). “To Honor and Remember”: An Ethical Awakening to African American Remains in Museums. *American Journal of Biological Anthropology* 186(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.24943>

16. Public Engagement & Ethical Frameworks

Cowan-Ricks, C. (1992). *Cemetery Hill Archaeological Project*, Clemson University.

- Pioneering work at Fort Hill Plantation graves of enslaved laborers; used grid test pits and GPR along with archival interviews, laying groundwork for descendant-engaged archaeology [Clemson University](#).

Gilmore JK., Ofunniyin AA., Oubré LO., Fleskes RE., Schurr TG. (2024). “The Dead Have Been Awakened...”: Activist Community-Engaged Archaeology in Charleston, SC. *American Antiquity* 89 (2), April 2024, pp. 165 – 184. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/aaq.2023.105>

- Presents a community-centered archaeological project involving the discovery, analysis, reburial, and memorialization of 36 African-descent individuals, guided by descendant-led processes [Taylor & Francis Online](#).

Gundaker, G. (2001). “At home on the other side: African American burials as commemorative landscapes.” In *Places of Commemoration* (pp. 25–54). Dumbarton Oaks.

- Explores cemeteries as identity-building landscapes [ResearchGate](#).

Krüger-Kahloula, A. (1989). “Tributes in stone and lapidary lapses: commemorating black people in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America.” *Markers*, 6, 32–100.
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/957085/pdf>

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Nolting, T.M., Kadi, R.B., Bannis, N. (2025). Teaching Antiracism through African American Burial Grounds: A Local Historic Cemetery Experience. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23733799251398838>

Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Office (2022). *Community Archaeology at Midland Cemetery*.

- Workshop report detailing collaboration between academics and descendants in uncovering African American history [PA Historic Preservation](#).

Tashjian, A. & Tashjian, D. (2005). “The Afro-American section of Newport, Rhode Island’s Common Burying Ground.” In *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture* (pp. 163–196). Utah State University Press. <https://www.uplopen.com/chapters/12149/files/e5df1208-47ee-4ace-bdbe-a1fe497a14c0.pdf>

17. Reference Compilations, Toolkits, and Additional Supportive Resources

NC Office of State Archaeology: Cemetery Program – Offers technical assistance and inventories for historic cemeteries. <https://archaeology.ncdcr.gov/programs/cemeteries>

Black Cemetery Network Site Directory

A national database featuring hundreds of documented historic Black cemeteries—including many in Southern states—and often links to more localized resources [Black Cemetery Network](#).

North Carolina African American Cemeteries Network – A statewide hub for preservation initiatives and advocacy [NCAACN](#).

African American Cemeteries (Family Search):

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/African_American_Cemeteries

Historical Marker Database (HMdb.org)

Provides a directory of historical markers, some of which relate to cemeteries and burial sites. Users can search for specific cemeteries and unmarked grave sites. <https://www.hmdb.org>

Cemetery Preservation Network

Provides resources and guides on preserving historical cemeteries, including strategies for locating and documenting unmarked graves. <https://www.cemeterypreservationnetwork.org>

The National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Trust offers information on preserving historic cemeteries, with tips on finding and recording unmarked graves. <https://savingplaces.org>

Chicora Foundation. (n.d.). *Grave Matters: The Preservation of African-American Cemeteries*. Technical guidebook addressing cemetery disaster planning, documentation, and preservation techniques Chicora.org.

Black Cemetery Scholars Collective – OSU Research Guide (n.d.). [OSU](https://osu.edu).

Preservation Pennsylvania. (2024). *African American Cemetery Stewardship Program (PAHG & PA)*.

Grants and technical support provided to 13 PA cemeteries; included GPR surveys, mapping, signage, and grassroots stewardship initiatives [Preservation Pennsylvania](https://preservation-pennsylvania.org).

ESRI Blog (Sullivan, K.). (2023). *The Quest to Find and Preserve Lost Black Cemeteries*. Describes the integration of drone/GPR mapping with GIS to reveal thousands of lost gravesites [ESRI](https://esri.com).

Mount Peace Cemetery Association – Symbolism in African American Cemetery Art

- **Website:** <https://www.mtpeacecemeteryassociation.org/>
- **Highlights:** This resource explores the rich symbolism found in African American cemetery art, including motifs like the three-linked chain (representing the Independent Order of Odd Fellows), the Square and Compass with the "G" (indicating Freemasonry), and the use of seashells and vessels to symbolize water and the afterlife.
- **Visuals:** The site features images of headstones adorned with these symbols, offering insights into the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the community. [Mt Peace Cemetery](https://www.mtpeacecemeteryassociation.org/)

Southern Art – African American Grave Decoration

- **Website:** southernart.ua.edu
- **Highlights:** This exhibition discusses the tradition of grave decoration among African Americans, focusing on the use of grave goods like face jugs, seashells, and personal items placed on graves to honor and protect the spirit.

- **Visuals:** The site includes photographs of decorated graves, showcasing the artistic expressions and cultural practices associated with African American burial traditions. southernart.ua.edu

Brian Palmer Photography – Historic African American Cemeteries

- **Website:** <https://www.brianpalmer.photos/>
- **Highlights:** Photographer Brian Palmer documents the state of historic African American cemeteries, focusing on restoration efforts and the challenges faced in preserving these sites.
- **Visuals:** The site features a photo essay with images of grave markers, including those of notable individuals, and the conditions of cemeteries like East End and Evergreen in Richmond, VA. [BRIAN PALMER](#)

Architectural Digest – God's Little Acre Restoration

- **Highlights:** This article covers the restoration of God's Little Acre in Newport, Rhode Island, the largest intact Colonial-era African burial ground in the U.S., home to around 200 elaborately carved headstones from the 18th century.
- **Visuals:** The site provides images of the headstones and the restoration process, highlighting the intricate carvings and historical significance of the site. [Architectural Digest](#)

National Geographic – Historic Black Cemeteries at Risk

- **Highlights:** This article discusses the challenges faced by historic Black cemeteries, including neglect and threats of development, and the efforts to preserve these sacred sites.
- **Visuals:** The site includes photographs of cemeteries like East End, showcasing the condition of grave markers and the importance of preservation efforts. [AP News](#)

Turner, Christine, dir. [Homegoings](#). Produced by Peralta Pictures Inc., American Documentary POV and the Diverse Voices Project, and Independent Television Service. San Francisco: Independent Television Service, 2013.

This documentary follows Harlem, New York, funeral director Isiah Owens, of Owens Funeral Homes, as he moves through the process of burial preparation. Owens gives a rich oral history of African American funeral homes, documenting differences between North and South, and explaining changes in death culture through the twentieth century.

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. (2022). *Senate Report 117-244: African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program* (S. 3667).
— Recommends establishing a National Park Service-administered preservation program for African American burial grounds [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov).

18. Theses & Dissertations

Khan, Ayesha. (2022). *Finding Lost Voices: An Archaeological Study of Historic African American Burial Sites in North Georgia* [Master's thesis]. Georgia State University.

- Surveyed three cemeteries using GPR and probing, combined archival research and oral histories to produce GIS maps and site documentation [Georgia State University ScholarWorks](#)

Johnson, T. V. (2024). *Buried history: Exploring the bonds between African Americans and their cemeteries* (Undergraduate thesis). The College of Wooster. [Open Works](#)

McDougal, S. (2023). *Equity for the ancestors: African American cemeteries in southern urban spaces and the National Register of Historic Places* (Doctoral dissertation). Middle Tennessee State University. [JEWLScholar](#)

Ott, R. (2022). *Ground Penetrating Radar and Public Archaeology at Eastonville Memorial Gardens Cemetery* [M.A. thesis, University of Central Florida].

- Located 13 unmarked graves; emphasized community engagement and commemoration in African American cemetery contexts [UCF](#).

Waters, Juliana C. (2022). *Black Cemeteries Matter: The Erasure of Historic Black Cemeteries in Polk County, Florida*. M.A. thesis, University of South Florida.

- Examines how development erased many Black burial sites in Polk County and outlines documentation strategies [USF](#).

Whitaker, J. L. (2007). *“Hark from the tomb”: The Cultural History and Archaeology of African-American Cemeteries*. M.A. Thesis, Ball State University. [cardinalscholar.bsu.edu](#)

19. Books & Edited Volumes

Akinwumi, O., & Saunders, P. (2014). *Materialities of ritual in the Black Atlantic*. Indiana University Press. <https://iupress.org/9780253013866/materialities-of-ritual-in-the-black-atlantic/>

Berry, Daina R. (2017). *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017.

<https://www.beacon.org/The-Price-for-Their-Pound-of-Flesh-P2137.aspx>

- A comprehensive examination of slaves and the commodification of slaves in life and in death in early United States. Of particular interest is Berry's study of the cadaver trade and the “ghost values” of corpses.

Brown-Gorham, D.-M. M. (2019). Hidden Hallows: Documenting and preserving African American cemeteries in North Carolina. *The Conservation Fund Blog*.

<https://thescholarship.ecu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/63f94e4d-4c6e-4270-9416-34de8bb9b432/content>

Fletcher, K and A. Towle. (2023). *Grave History: Death, Race, and Gender in Southern Cemeteries*. University of Georgia Press.

- An edited collection of interdisciplinary essays analyzing Southern cemeteries in terms of racial, gender, and power dynamics [Muse](#).

Frantel, Nancy C. (2011). *Richmond, Virginia, Lost Souls Restored: African-American Interments as Listed in the Mt. Olivet Cemetery Register, 1875-1908*. Westminster, MD: Heritage Books.

Gall, M. J., & Veit, R. F. (2017). *Archaeologies of African American life in the Upper Mid-Atlantic*. University of Alabama Press.

Galland, C. (2008). *Love Cemetery: Unburying the secret history of slaves*. HarperOne, New York. <https://www.harpercollins.com/products/love-cemetery-china-galland?variant=32206912258082>

Moreman, Christopher M. (2018) *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*. New York: Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Companion-to-Death-and-Dying/Moreman/p/book/9780367581268>

Nichols, Elaine. (1989). *The Last Mile of the Way: African-American Homegoing Traditions, 1890–Present*. Columbia: South Carolina State Museum, 1989.

- Nichols examines African American funeral traditions from the end of the nineteenth century through the twentieth century in South Carolina. She links these traditions with West African cosmology in order to show the ways in which African traditions intersect with European mortuary practices and manifest themselves in contemporary Christianity.

Poirier, David A. and Nicholas F. Bellantoni. (1997). *In Remembrance: Archaeology and Death*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Rankin-Hill, Lesley M. (1997). *A Biohistory of 19th-century Afro-Americans: The Burial Remains of a Philadelphia Cemetery*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Rosenblatt, A. (2024). *Cemetery citizens: Reclaiming the past and working for justice in American burial grounds*. Stanford University Press.

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- Discusses descendant-led approaches, and the call for an African-American Graves Protection network [The New Yorker](#).

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- Focus on volunteer-led preservation in Richmond VA [TIME](#).

21. Preservation Organizations & Toolkits

Historic Black Cemeteries of Georgia – A grassroots informational hub with tools for genealogical research, memorial planning, and ceremonial events for neglected cemeteries across Georgia [Historic Black Cemeteries of Georgia](#).

African American Cemetery Preservation Fund (AACPF) – Dedicated to restoring historic African-American cemeteries in Chattanooga, TN, featuring volunteer efforts, stewardship guidance, and funding info [AACPF](#).

Recovering and Preserving African American Cemeteries – From the *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, this site discusses risks like neglect, offers preservation best practices, and links to the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund [Saving Places](#).

SC Preservation Toolkit – Cemeteries – South Carolina-focused guidance on legal protections, how-to guides (e.g., for historical markers and National Register nominations), resources, and technical assistance for cemetery preservation [scpreservationtoolkit.com](#).

Preservation Society of Charleston – Mapping Charleston’s Black Burial Grounds – A community-led GIS mapping initiative supported by the National Park Service for documenting and protecting at-risk burial grounds across Charleston [Preservation Society of Charleston](#).

Preservation Pennsylvania – African American Cemetery Project – Statewide program offering grants, technical advice, and stewardship toolkits to support African-American cemetery preservation in Pennsylvania [Preservation Pennsylvania](#).

Unearthing Lost Histories...Urban Renewal and Its Impact – Discusses cemeteries destroyed in Alexandria, VA, during urban renewal, with archaeological context and memorialization efforts [mtpeacecemeteryassociation.org](#).

Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery (Alexandria, VA) – Documents rediscovery, archaeological excavation via GPR, and eventual memorialization of a Civil War-era Freedmen’s burial ground.

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23. Notable Historic African-American Cemeteries

South-View Cemetery (Atlanta, GA)

Founded in 1886 by Black entrepreneurs, this 100-acre site is Atlanta’s oldest African-American cemetery. It’s the original resting place of iconic figures like Julian Bond and John Lewis—and briefly, Martin Luther King Jr.

East End Cemetery (Richmond, VA)

Dating back to the 1890s, located in Richmond and Henrico County, it holds around 17,500 burials including educators like Rosa Dixon Bowser and community leaders.

Eden Cemetery (Collingdale, PA)

Established in 1902, Eden is the oldest *existing* Black-owned cemetery in the U.S., spanning 53 acres with nearly 93,000 burials. It's recognized on the National Register of Historic Places.

Gower Cemetery (Edmond, OK)

Founded in 1889 by formerly enslaved couple Ophelia and John Gower, this 1-acre cemetery served indigent Black families and remains a sole remnant of a once-thriving homesteading community. Listed on the National Register in 1991.

Mount Carmel Cemetery (Memphis, TN)

Dating to 1847, this 10-acre rural cemetery holds around 3,400 burials—many of whom were formerly enslaved. Ongoing preservation efforts seek to protect its cultural wealth.

Beulah Cemetery (Vicksburg, MS)

Created in 1884 by a Black fraternal order, Beulah spans 52 acres with over 5,500 graves, including paupers' fields adjacent to Vicksburg National Military Park, listed in 1992.

Flippen Cemetery & Region (Danville, VA)

Preserved by the Southside African American Cemetery Preservation Society. Their website covers Flippen and surrounding historic sites southsideaacps.wixsite.com.

🔗 southsideaacps.wixsite.com/website

Hickory Hill Slave & African American Cemetery (Hanover County, VA)

Managed by the National Park Service, this site provides historical context and visitation info

🔗 nps.gov/places/hickory-hill-slave-and-african-american-cemetery.htm

South Asheville Cemetery (Asheville, NC)

The oldest public African-American cemetery in western North Carolina, it's supported by the South Asheville Cemetery Association, with material hosted on local heritage sites.

🔗 *[Local heritage site associated with Asheville/Battlefields Trust]*

King Cemetery (near Adams Run, SC)

A recognized National Register site, it features documented history and burial practices

🔗 *[National Register listing via S.C. Department of Archives & History]*

Historic African American Cemetery (St. Andrews, SC)

Has detailed records on memorials and interments on Find a Grave

 findagrave.com/cemetery/2345264/

Laurel Grove South Cemetery (Savannah, GA)

Runs through the city of Savannah's official site as a culturally significant African American cemetery.

 savannahga.gov/882/Laurel-Grove-South-Cemetery

Geer Cemetery (Durham, NC)

- **History:** Founded in 1876 and closed in 1939, this 4-acre cemetery holds over 1,500 graves, many of formerly enslaved individuals. It's one of Durham's earliest African-American burial grounds [South Asheville Cemetery Association Wikipedia](#).
- **Recognition:** Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2024 [townofchapelhill.org+5Wikipedia+5Moracit+5](#).
- **Website:** [Friends of Geer Cemetery](#)

Oak Grove-Freedman's Cemetery (Salisbury, NC)

- **History:** A burial site in continuous use since 1770 for African Americans; one of the oldest Free Black cemeteries in NC [historicwilmington.org+5Wikipedia+5The New Yorker+5Wikipedia](#).
- **Recognition:** Preserved as a public memorial in downtown Salisbury.
- **More Info:** See Wikipedia entry for historical context [Wikipedia](#).

Westview Cemetery (Wadesboro, NC)

- **History:** Laid out in 1898 as an African-American burying ground; the first acre is NRHP-listed, part of ~5 acre overall [Moracit+6Wikipedia+6Wikipedia+6](#).
- **Recognition:** Listed on the National Register in 2015 .

Union Cemetery (Greensboro, NC)

- **History:** Established 1882, contains 97 marked gravestones from 1882–1940, closing officially around 1917 [Wikipedia](#).
- **Recognition:** Added to the National Register in 1993 .

Oberlin Cemetery (Raleigh, NC)

- **History:** Founded circa 1873 for Raleigh's free African-American community; holds over 600 burials.
- **More Info:** Search for "Oberlin Cemetery Raleigh NC" for preservation contacts.

Mt. Hope Cemetery (Raleigh, NC)

- **History:** City-owned since 1872 for African-American interments; now spans 34 acres and still welcomes burials
- **Resources:** Audio tours and maps are available via Raleigh's cemetery services
- **Website:** Raleigh City Cemeteries info page

Maides Cemetery & Dark Branch Community Cemetery (Wilmington, NC)

- **History:** Located in Wilmington; Maides Cemetery dates to the late 1800s, and Dark Branch is linked to a historic freedom settlement
WUNC+2historicwilmington.org+2Wikipedia+2.
- **Community Efforts:** Historic Wilmington Foundation conducts clean-up and advocacy.
- **More Info:** Historic Wilmington Foundation site historicwilmington.org.

Historic Native American Cemeteries & Burial Sites in the American South

Ocmulgee National Monument Burial Mounds

- **Location:** Macon, Georgia
- **Tribe/Culture:** Mississippian Culture (ancestral Muscogee Creek)
- **Description:** Complex earthwork mounds built between 900–1100 CE, serving as ceremonial, burial, and residential sites. The Ocmulgee Mounds are sacred and on the National Register of Historic Places.
- **Management:** National Park Service
- **More info:** NPS - Ocmulgee National Monument

Cherokee Burial Grounds and Cemeteries

- **Location:** Western North Carolina, Eastern Tennessee, and surrounding areas
- **Tribe:** Cherokee Nation (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians)
- **Description:** Traditional Cherokee burial grounds, often marked with stone cairns, located on ancestral homelands in the Appalachians. Many sites are on tribal lands with restricted access.
- **More info:** [Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians](#)

Chief Vann House Burial Site

- **Location:** Chatsworth, Georgia
- **Tribe:** Cherokee
- **Description:** Burial site associated with Cherokee leader James Vann near his historic home; includes family graves and ceremonial grounds.
- **More info:** Chief Vann House Historic Site

Hickory Ground (Eufaula, Alabama)

- **Tribe:** Muscogee (Creek) Nation

- **Description:** Historic town and ceremonial site with burial grounds of Creek ancestors, partially preserved with ongoing tribal efforts.
- **More info:** [Muscogee \(Creek\) Nation](#)

24. Transportation Projects Impacting Historic Cemeteries

1. Danville, Virginia – Relocation of African American Graves for Industrial Park

Approximately 275 graves of African American tenant farmers are being relocated from a former tobacco plantation to make way for a \$1.3 billion battery production facility. The relocation has sparked mixed emotions among descendants, balancing the need for development with respect for ancestral remains.

2. Indianapolis, Indiana – Discovery of Historic Rail and Cemeteries During Bridge Construction

During preparations for the Henry Street Bridge project, contractors unearthed granite bricks and remnants of a historic railway on the grounds of the Greenlawn cemeteries, the city's first public cemetery with a section designated for Black residents. Historians are advocating for a full archaeological excavation before construction proceeds.

3. Cave City, Kentucky – Relocation of Graves for Commercial Development

Several gravesites from abandoned cemeteries at the Mid-South Industrial Park are set to be relocated to accommodate a commercial development. The developer is covering the cost of the relocation, though details about the new burial sites remain limited.

4. Sugarcreek Township, Ohio – Controversy Over Relocation of 1800s Graves

Plans to move graves from Huston Cemetery to facilitate a housing development have led to public outcry. Residents and historians are concerned about the potential loss of a historic burial site dating back to the 1800s.

5. Louisville, Kentucky – Relocation of Graves for Road Expansion

Graves from at least two different Louisville family lines, dating back to the 1800s, are being relocated from Greenwood Road to Bethany Memorial Cemetery as part of a road expansion project aimed at improving safety.

6. New Hanover County, North Carolina – Proposed Relocation of Graves for Road Widening

The North Carolina Department of Transportation plans to move graves from the Bella Highsmith and Mt. Ararat AME Church cemeteries to widen a section of Market Street. Local commissioners and residents have expressed concerns about the proposed relocation.

7. North Fort Myers, Florida – Developer Commits to Preserving Historic Cemetery

A developer planning a residential project near the Samville Cemetery has pledged not to disturb the graves, as they are located within an existing powerline easement. Local historians and residents are monitoring the situation to ensure the cemetery's preservation.

8. Bethesda, Maryland – Legal Battle Over African Cemetery Preservation

Activists are fighting to preserve the Moses Macedonia African Cemetery, believed to

contain the remains of enslaved people and descendants, from being paved over for development. The Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition is seeking \$40 million in damages and the return of ancestral remains.

WRTV Indianapolis

DPW: 1,100+ grave shafts discovered during Henry Street Bridge ...

July 9, 2025 — The grave shafts uncovered were found at the site of Greenlawn Cemetery, which was once the only burial ground for Black residents in the city.

Mirror Indy

Greenlawn Cemetery excavation update - Mirror Indy

July 9, 2025 — Human remains discovered during Henry Street bridge work by former Greenlawn Cemetery. January 18, 2024. In "Government". Republish This Story.

City shares update on Henry Street Bridge excavation work | wthr.com

July 9, 2025 — The Department of Public Works gave an update Tuesday about excavation work in the area of Greenlawn Cemetery, which was the first cemetery ...

WCLU Radio

Cemetery relocation, street renaming on Barren court agenda

June 15, 2025 — Also, at the March meeting, he said the graves would be relocated to Cave City's Cemetery “under the direction of a licensed funeral director.” ...

<https://www.wdbj7.com>

Enslaved graves to be relocated from Berry Hill Megasite to Oak Hill ...

June 9, 2025 — (WDBJ) - Hundreds of enslaved African American graves located at the Southern Virginia Megasite at Berry Hill are being moved to another ...

WTHR

More than 650 grave shafts found at Henry Street Bridge site - WTHR

May 5, 2025 — Nearly 700 grave shafts have been found as excavation continues as part of the Henry Street Bridge Project in Indianapolis, Indy DPW announced Tuesday.

WKEF

Cemetery relocation sparks outrage in Sugarcreek Township ...

April 23, 2025 — SUGARCREEK TOWNSHIP, Ohio (WKEF) -- A new development is forcing a small, local cemetery to be moved, leaving a community concerned.

Yahoo

Neighbors 'outraged' after township plans to move graves dating ...

April 23, 2025 — The housing development on Feedwire Road in Sugarcreek Township is set to host 80 lots, but residents are upset at what their trustees decided to do with a ...

Ark Republic

Restraining order and countersuit. Bethesda African Cemetery ...

April 20, 2025 — Maryland group says they are “Fighting for our ancestors!” in years-long battle to stop developers, now sued with charges against the group citing trespassing, ...

<https://www.wbko.com>

Proposed cemetery relocation draws interest of area genealogists ...

April 10, 2025 — A little over a month remains for citizens to protest the proposed relocation of a handful of graves in Cave City.

VPM

Decision to move Black graves near Danville draws mixed emotions ...

March 5, 2025 — The remains of hundreds of tenant farmers are being moved from the former Oak Hill tobacco plantation.

U.S. News

Black Graves Are Being Moved to Make Way for an Industrial Park ...

February 28, 2025 — The graves of hundreds of African American tenant farmers and their families are being moved in Virginia to make way for an industrial park.

North Fort Myers Neighbor

North Fort Myers site acquired for preservation via Conservation 20 ...

August 22, 2024 — North Fort Myers site acquired for preservation via Conservation 20/20 buy. Lee County purchases 40-plus riverfront acres. Aug 23, 2024 By ...

thehilltoponline.com

MD Supreme Court hears lawsuit over Black cemetery ... - The Hilltop

March 26, 2024 — MD Supreme Court hears lawsuit over Black cemetery under parking lot. The Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition (BACC) continues its fight to ...

The Guardian

'Black bodies are not for sale': the battle over an African American ...

January 12, 2024 — Activists fight to stop further development on historic Maryland burial site beneath an apartment complex.

WBBH

Historian fights to preserve 1800s cemetery in North Fort Myers

December 7, 2023 — A local historian is using her voice to save a cemetery in North Fort Myers from the 1800s where a proposed development nearby is under review.

WHAS11

Group asks Louisville to take over maintaining cemetery | whas11.com

September 27, 2023 — The metro councilmember for the area, Phillip Baker, and a group of veterans, have asked the city to start maintaining Greenwood.

FOX 4 News Fort Myers WFTX

Fort Myers historical group preserving the past while looking toward ...

July 18, 2022 — Fort Myers residents raise concerns that the site of a new luxury apartment complex could have once been a Native American burial ground.

FOX 4 News Fort Myers WFTX

Still no answers in Native American burial grounds controversy in ...

July 6, 2022 — A North Carolina-based real estate developer still has not responded to questions about possible Native American burial grounds on the site ...

25. Historic and Archaeological Studies on Indigenous Burial Sites

Note: Many of the publications, news media, and references below relate to pre-Columbian (i.e. prehistoric) Native American burials or burial sites in the Eastern Woodlands. Very few studies have been published about historic Native American burial sites, and there appears to have been no systematic survey of such sites in recent years. By contract, archaeologists and historians have investigated pre-Columbian Native American burial sites for over 100 years. In most cases, one cannot directly connect (or presume the existence of) pre-Columbian burial practices with historic Native American communities. This is not to say there are not cultural connections, but that archaeologists and others cannot assume they will find the same burial practices and characteristics in historic populations that were found in pre-Columbian ones.

Though not directly about Indigenous burial practices, the “Best Practices Guide” document linked below, produced in 2023 in consultation between the Joe Biden administration and several Native American nations, is an excellent resource outlining collaborations regarding Tribal and Native Hawaiian sacred sites, such as burial sites.

Arnold, Bettina and Robert Jeske (2014). The Archaeology of Death: Mortuary Archaeology in the United States and Europe 1990–2013. *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* 43:325-346.

- Offers a conceptual framework including Indigenous burial studies, NAGPRA, and emerging ethical considerations Annual Reviews.

Best Practices Guide for Federal Agencies Regarding Tribal and Native Hawaiian Sacred Sites. Working Group of the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Interagency Coordination and Collaboration for the Protection of Indigenous Sacred Sites.

- The guide “identifies best practices for federal agencies in the following areas related to sacred sites: consultation, co-stewardship, accountability, supporting Tribal and Native Hawaiian capacity, access, protection, confidentiality, training, and public outreach. It will assist the Participating Agencies and other federal agencies in improving their policies related to sacred sites and in integrating consideration of sacred sites into each agency’s consultation procedures.”

https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/media_document/sacred_sites_guide_508_2023-1205.pdf

Downs, C., Rogers, J., Collins, L., Doering, T. (2020). Integrated Approach to Investigating Historic Cemeteries, *Remote Sensing*, 12(17), 2690.

- Uses GPR, LiDAR, terrestrial laser scanning, and advanced geophysical methods to locate and interpret unmarked burials and cemetery features.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/rs12172690>

Laluk, N. C. (2021). Changing How Archaeology Is Done in Native American Contexts: An Ndee (Apache) Case Study. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 21(1) 53-73

- Illustrates Indigenous-led approaches in sensitive heritage spaces, including cemeteries and ancestral sites. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469605320945469>

Rubertone, P. (2000). The Historical Archaeology of Native Americans. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29:425-446.

- A summary article that highlights historical archaeology research with aims to help “comprehend the role of place and tradition in Native peoples' lives, but also ...the complexities of identity construction in America after European contact.”

Thompson, V., Garland, C., Butler, R. (2023). The NAGPRA Nexus, Institutional Integrity, and the Evolving Role of Archaeological Laboratories. *Advances in Archaeological Practice*, 11(2) 1-14.

- Examines how institutions implement policies and engage descendant communities in the context of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act [Cambridge University Press](#).

Wadsworth, W. T. D., Supernant, K., & Dersch, A. (2021). Integrating Remote Sensing and Indigenous Archaeology to Locate Unmarked Graves, *Advances in Archaeological Practice* 9(3) 202-214. [doi:10.1017/aap.2021.9](https://doi.org/10.1017/aap.2021.9)

- Describes ground-penetrating radar work in Indigenous contexts and highlights the need for culturally respectful approaches when investigating burial landscapes Cambridge University Press.

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation – Burial Sites Policy

- Federal guidelines outlining respectful treatment of Indigenous burial sites during development under Section 106 reviews ACHP.

National Park Service – Cemetery Preservation Documentation

- A training course offering best practices in surveys, GIS mapping, photography, GPR, and condition assessment for historic cemeteries National Park Service.

Virginia DHR – Cemetery Preservation Program

- Includes documentation databases, guidelines, and mandates for consultation with Virginia Tribes when burial sites are affected DHR Virginia.

National Indian Law Library / NARF – Repatriation Research Guide

- A comprehensive portal for NAGPRA guidance, repatriation processes, legal frameworks, and tribal resources <https://www.narf.org/nill/resources/repatriation.html>

Whistleblower sounds alarm about destruction of tribal sites in North Carolina – AP News

- Highlights threats to Indigenous cemeteries from mismanaged federal land projects in the Southeast AP News.

"The Dark Secrets Buried at Red Cloud Boarding School" – WIRED

- Explores GPR investigation into unmarked graves at the Red Cloud site, showcasing technology-driven documentation. <https://www.wired.com/story/marsha-small-red-cloud-boarding-school/>

The Shawnee Indian Cemetery, Kansas – National Park Service

- One of very few preserved historic cemeteries associated with Native American peoples from the 19th century <https://www.nps.gov/places/shawnee-indian-cemetery.htm>

Appendix B. White and African American Burial Site Differences at a Reference Guide

Key Burial Site Differences at a Glance

Category	Historic White Cemeteries	Historic African American Cemeteries
Origins	Church- or city-established; legal lots	Community-built; often denied formal burial access
Location	Central, desirable areas	Marginal land—rural, flood-prone, forest, or near industrial zones
Gravestones	Marble, granite, detailed inscriptions; purchased locally or mail-order	Wood, fieldstone, homemade or natural materials; often made locally; simple mass-produced markers present, and funeral home metal temporary identifiers
Layout	Formal, symmetrical paths and plots	Informal or organic, with cultural and/or familial clustering; purposeful dense tree canopy
Cultural Practices	Christian European traditions	Mix of Christian, African American, and African customs (e.g., grave art, offerings)
Preservation	Often maintained or city-funded	Sometimes neglected due to erasure of surrounding communities; May be preserved but appear different than manicured White cemeteries; many rediscovered by communities
Traditions & Symbolism	Religious motifs (crosses, angels), Latin inscriptions, family crypts	Grave offerings (bottles, shell, pottery), “homegoing” ceremonies, bible verses, accomplishments

Common Physical and Cultural Characteristics Found in Historic African American Cemeteries

1. Simple, weathered headstones or fieldstones

Typically, modest markers—rounded or rectangular—that may lack ornate carving or inscriptions. These stones are often older and worn, reflecting limited resources and local craftsmanship.

2. African-inspired grave goods & folk decoration

Includes shells, glass bottles, pots, and face jugs placed intentionally on graves—a tradition tracing back to West and Central African rituals intended to honor the deceased, and to guide and protect their spirits.

3. Personalized items

From memory jugs to everyday artifacts (buttons, personal mementos), these grave adornments or grave art create deeply personal connections and reflect vernacular culture and identity.

4. Unmarked graves & communal memorials

Large areas without formal markers. Often, these cemeteries include modern monuments acknowledging those without individual stones, reflecting historical abandon or economic hardship.

5. Vegetation & ecological boundaries

Older burial grounds are frequently overgrown or bordered by trees and shrubs—sometimes used as “bottle trees”—serving both aesthetic and spiritual protective roles.

6. Local artisan crafting traditions

Functional yet expressive carving, such as gravestones made by local African American stonecutters, linking craftsmanship with resilience, storytelling, and cultural continuity.

Appendix C. Contrasts in Memory – Burial Site Characteristics

Contrasts in Memory: Historic White, African American, and Native American Cemeteries in the United States, a White Paper for the North Carolina Department of Transportation

Introduction

Cemeteries serve as powerful historical records, offering insight into cultural values, religious beliefs, social hierarchies, and community structures. In the United States, the historical development of cemeteries for White and African American communities reflects broader patterns of racial segregation, inequality, and cultural expression. This document explores the major differences between historic White and African American cemeteries, focusing on factors such as access, landscape design, memorialization practices, and preservation efforts. The document also briefly describes historic Native American burial sites, which were rarely formally organized and about which there is little scholarly documentation.

There is not one or two characteristics that signify the presence of an historic African American cemetery. Rather, characteristics such as those described below must be considered together, and within historical and cultural contexts. The presence of a nearby antebellum plantation where enslaved people lived, an historic Rosenwald School, an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, or an historic African American neighborhood identified through census or historic directories may be as significant to the identification of an African American cemetery as the presence of field stones, vernacular landscaping, glass bottle grave decoration, or intentional yucca plantings. The cooccurrence of these characteristics and context clues is the best strategy for differentiating historic African American and Native American cemeteries and burial sites from their historic white neighbors.

White Cemeteries Compared to African American Cemeteries

1. Origins and Accessibility

- **White Cemeteries:**

Historically, large White cemeteries were often well-funded, publicly maintained, and centrally located. Many were established by churches, municipalities, or private companies, and some evolved into formalized garden cemeteries with planned landscapes and plots available for purchase. In more rural areas, families linked by kinship often shared a communal burial site, sometimes demarcated with chain or post fencing. Access to these cemeteries was often limited to direct relatives.

- **African American Cemeteries:**

African American cemeteries often emerged from necessity during the American period of enslaving African American people, and during segregation. Enslaved individuals were typically buried in unmarked or minimally marked graves, often on plantation grounds or marginal land. Some of these were demarcated with intentional plantings or posts. Following emancipation, Black communities created their own burial grounds, frequently on land purchased collectively or donated by sympathetic parties. Access to prime cemetery land was typically denied, leading to sites in rural, flood-prone, or otherwise undesirable areas. In the American South, Black communities were not allowed to bury their dead alongside their White neighbors.

2. Landscape and Layout

- **White Cemeteries:**

By the 19th century, many White cemeteries embraced the “rural” or “garden” cemetery movement. These cemeteries featured manicured lawns, elaborate paths, family plots, and statuary. Aesthetic considerations and landscape architecture played a major role. In these cemeteries, graves are typically aligned in long rows with every individual facing the same direction.

- **African American Cemeteries:**

African American cemeteries were usually more utilitarian and vernacular in layout. While these cemeteries showed signs of care and reverence, they often lacked formal landscaping (due to choice or limited resources) and were, thus, thought to be “unkempt” by others. Graves might be placed irregularly, and families marked burials with natural materials like wooden crosses, rocks, or even plants, reflecting African burial traditions. Graves might also be placed in family plots.



Figure 1 White Cemetery in Charleston, SC



Figure 2 Kenilworth Cemetery (Black), Asheville, NC

3. Grave Markers and Symbolism

- **White Cemeteries:**

Gravestones in White cemeteries were often made of durable stone like marble or granite and featured ornate carvings, inscriptions, and religious iconography. Family wealth was often reflected in monument size and detail. Many historic White gravestones were purchased through catalogs or at a local dry goods store or mason.

- **African American Cemeteries:**

Gravestones in Black cemeteries varied significantly. Where resources allowed,

professionally crafted stones were used, but many graves were marked with handmade or ephemeral materials by local craftsmen. Symbology on gravestones also varied, with Bible verses, fraternal organization icons (e.g. Masons, Oddfellows), and natural materials (e.g. oak leaves) frequently present. African American burial customs also often incorporated folk traditions, including the placement of personal objects on graves or symbolic items like glass bottles, shells, marbles, tobacco, or broken crockery.



Figure 3 Graceland Cemetery (White), Tennessee



Figure 4 Cemetery Hill Plantation "Slave" Cemetery, South Carolina

4. Religious and Cultural Practices

- **White Cemeteries:**

White burial practices typically reflected mainstream Christian denominations and European funerary traditions. Services, attire, and grave symbolism adhered to widely recognized norms.

- **African American Cemeteries:**

Burial practices in African American cemeteries often blended Christian, African American, and African spiritual traditions. Homegoing ceremonies, communal singing, and the incorporation of ancestral veneration were common. Some practices, such as grave mounding or leaving offerings, trace back to West African customs. Intentional plantings (e.g. of yucca) were a tradition that also differed from historic White cemeteries, which were more typically manicured grass.



Figure 5 Example of Black Grave Offerings including Bottles and Crockery

5. Maintenance and Preservation

- **White Cemeteries:**

Historic White cemeteries have generally benefited from more consistent upkeep, legal protection, and integration into historical preservation programs. Many are now maintained by cities, churches, or perpetual care funds.

- **African American Cemeteries:**

Black cemeteries have faced chronic neglect, vandalism, and erasure. Because many lacked legal incorporation or perpetual care funds, they were often left off of historic maps and surveys, often in poor condition today. Grassroots efforts by descendants and community activists have been crucial to their preservation and recognition.

6. Recognition and Documentation

- **White Cemeteries:**

These cemeteries are more likely to be documented in official records, maps, and genealogical databases. Their histories are often well-preserved and included in heritage tourism.

- **African American Cemeteries:**

Many historic African American burial grounds remain undocumented or misidentified. Some have been lost to development. Recent movements, including community-driven acknowledgement and preservation, federal initiatives, and archaeological research, are working to recover and preserve these sites and share information about their cultural significance.

Native American Burial Site Characteristics

1. Earthen Burial Mounds

Large pyramidal, conical, or platform-shaped mounds constructed of soil and clay to cover and honor burials—e.g., Adena, Hopewell, Mississippian cultures. Often astronomically aligned with solstices, emphasizing ritual significance.

2. Effigy Mounds

Earthworks shaped like animals or symbolic forms—such as bears, birds, or serpents—serving both as interment sites and expressions of cosmology.

3. Stone Box Graves

Burials encased in stone-slab “coffins,” commonly found in Mississippian-era sites in the Southeastern and Midwestern U.S. These often contain grave goods like pottery, shell ornaments, or tools. In the historical period, these burials often included trade beads.

4. Flexible & Bundled Inhumations

Smaller burials featuring tightly flexed, bundled, or seated interments—sometimes within shell middens—frequently accompanied by grave goods such as stone tools and beads.

5. Rich Grave Goods

Offerings commonly included pottery vessels, projectile points, shell and bone ornaments, copper items, and ceremonial artifacts—indicative of the deceased’s social status, spiritual beliefs, or trade connections.

Conclusion

Historic White and African American cemeteries in the United States reflect the deep racial divides that shaped life—and death—in American society. While both serve as sacred spaces of remembrance, the disparities in their condition, recognition, and visibility speak volumes about the unequal histories of the communities they represent. Understanding and preserving African American cemeteries is vital to honoring the legacy of those who endured systemic injustice and contributed to the nation's rich cultural fabric.

Appendix D. Community Engagement Report

Engagement Report: Observations and Lessons from RP 2025-11

Two-Page Summary for NCDOT Leadership

William Munn, PhD; Ginell Rogers; Forrest Toms | North Carolina Research and Engagement Group

“There is a meaningful difference between engagement and shared power, and rural marginalized communities can tell which one is being offered.”

Purpose and Approach

RP 2025-11: Cemetery Mapping for Indigenous and Enslaved Peoples’ Remains asked how NCDOT, NC State, and research partners can acknowledge, protect, and preserve burial sites tied to Indigenous, enslaved, African American, and other historically significant communities. The project team held parallel community conversation efforts with Princeville residents in Edgecombe County and Haliwa-Saponi Tribal community at their tribal headquarters in Hollister, followed by continued engagement through Princeville Homecoming, the Haliwa-Saponi Winter Pow Wow, and the Edgecombe County community kickoff meeting in Rocky Mount. These engagements revealed that cemetery mapping is not merely a technical or archaeological exercise. It is a question of trust, power, data stewardship, and whether communities most connected to these places will retain custody over their own histories.

Core Observation

The strongest lesson is that community trust cannot be improvised at the moment a project needs participation. NCDOT sponsorship did not automatically confer credibility in Princeville or Rocky Mount. Access was made possible through existing relationships, local civic infrastructure, and trusted conveners who already carried legitimacy in their communities. NCDOT’s Public Involvement unit is nationally recognized for project-specific outreach, but this work demonstrates the need for continuous, regionally embedded relationship-building capacity. Staff or contracted partners positioned at the division or regional level could maintain trust before, between, and after individual projects, strengthening NCDOT’s long-term credibility in rural communities.

What We Heard in Princeville

In Princeville, residents made clear that the project was not simply about cemeteries. It was about whether the first town in the United States chartered by formerly enslaved people would retain custody of its own history. Participants connected burial sites to family ritual, flood trauma, displacement after Hurricanes Floyd and Matthew, and a century-long tradition of descendants monitoring and caring for graves. Their skepticism was not abstract. Residents distinguished being informed after decisions are made from having shared power in determining what happens with remains, maps, records, and public interpretation. They also named a legal asymmetry: North Carolina law provides clearer, more formal protections for Native American remains than for African American remains, leaving communities like Princeville to build a consent and stewardship framework from scratch.

What We Heard from the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe

The Haliwa-Saponi engagement operated from the language of sovereignty. Tribal leaders emphasized that the tribe must be at the table from the beginning and engaged as a sovereign nation, not as a stakeholder added after project design. They requested an MOU governing consent, data ownership, artifact stewardship, treatment of encountered remains, terminology, and pre-publication review. Tribal members also pushed the project beyond documentation toward community capacity: ArcGIS and Field Maps training, deed research against tribal family names, AI-assisted review of fragmented historic records, and youth participation in preservation work. Their message was direct: the work cannot remain in the ivory tower.

Shared Themes Across Both Communities

Although Princeville and the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe brought distinct histories and legal positions, five shared themes emerged. First, cemeteries are family, not data; they are living extensions of ancestors, descendants, memory, and obligation. Second, communities must be brought in earlier, before routes, scopes, or research designs are functionally set. Third, data ownership is central: maps, oral histories, records, and documentation must return to communities in usable forms that support grants, preservation, teaching, and intergenerational stewardship. Fourth, skepticism coexisted with good faith; both communities were willing to engage if early signals of accountability were credible. Fifth, standard notification practices do not reach rural elders or dispersed descendants. Churches, libraries, senior centers, fire departments, restaurants, homecomings, powwows, print flyers, and local ambassadors are not supplemental channels — they are the actual information infrastructure of these communities.

Predictable Differences

The differences are equally important. The Haliwa-Saponi Tribe entered the process with the standing of a sovereign nation, a Vice Chief, tribal council, existing state relationships, and recognizable legal frameworks, even if those frameworks require stronger implementation. Princeville entered with deep civic capacity but thinner formal infrastructure: Freedom Org, churches, libraries, families, descendants, and local leaders who are often asked to do state-facing work without compensation. The threats also differ. Princeville faces environmental and infrastructural risk — floods, road projects, displaced remains, and cultural landscape erasure. Haliwa-Saponi burial sites face those risks alongside predatory threats, including grave robbing and trafficking in artifacts and human remains. These differences require tailored mitigation rather than one uniform engagement model.

Rocky Mount and the Convening Model

The Rocky Mount experience clarified a structural challenge in the project's own engagement model. NCREG sought to work with OIC of Rocky Mount as a convening partner, but the request placed substantial responsibility on a local organization under compressed timelines: stakeholder lists, venue hosting, trainee recruitment, contractor review, and participant coordination. OIC's President, Reuben C. Blackwell IV, responded that the organization could assist and support, but could not "lift this all the way" without time, clarity, and resources. His response revealed three operational lessons: the ask was too large for the timeline; a written scope and expectations document should have preceded recruitment; and the convening labor was unfunded. The point is not to assign fault, but to name a transferable lesson: when state-

funded projects rely on local organizations to mobilize trust, that labor must be scoped, scheduled, and compensated.

Recommendations for NCDOT and NC State

1. Treat formal partnership instruments as the baseline, not the ceiling. For tribal partners, execute MOUs before substantive project work begins, with explicit provisions for consent, data access, terminology, and pre-publication review. For African American communities such as Princeville, create a parallel Community Partnership Agreement that confers comparable procedural rights even where no statute requires them. For operational partners such as OIC, Freedom Org, and tribal offices, use subcontracts or stipends that pay for convening labor.
2. Redesign notification for rural conditions. When the affected resource is a cultural landscape rather than a single parcel, notification should be measured in miles, not feet. Outreach should fund print materials, trusted messengers, local ambassadors, churches, libraries, fire departments, senior centers, powwows, homecomings, and other places where community knowledge actually moves.
3. Fund local capacity as a project requirement. If the goal is a replicable, community-led heritage model, then the hosts of that model must be paid. Community ambassadors, elder transportation, oral-history coordination, meeting hosting, data review, and local documentation support should be budgeted as core deliverables, not treated as volunteer contributions.

Cross-Cutting Lessons

Qualitative knowledge must carry operational weight. Stories about family rituals, displaced remains, unmarked sites, and ancestral cemeteries in the woods are not merely anecdotal; they are evidence that should shape planning, avoidance, mitigation, and preservation decisions. Accountability must also be visible. Communities asked to see their input reflected in standard operating procedures, data-sharing practices, and future project design. The most credible signal NCDOT can send to the next rural community is proof that the last community changed how the agency operates.

Closing Takeaway

These engagements offered NCDOT and NC State a rare gift: rural African American and Indigenous communities explaining, in their own words, what state engagement looks like when it works and what it looks like when it falls short. The cemetery project will succeed not only by identifying locations on a map, but by demonstrating that sensitive knowledge can be handed to a state agency and university, protected with care, returned in useful form, and translated into changed practice. The ancestors are watching. The descendants are ready. The work begins now.

Appendix E. Public Involvement and Community Engagement Continuum

Public Involvement and Community Engagement: A Continuum for NCDOT's Future Work

Prepared for NCDOT | Phase 1 closeout deliverable | Forrest D. Toms, PhD, William Munn, PhD

Introduction

Across North Carolina, transportation decisions shape daily life, how people move, how communities grow, and how histories are honored or erased. For decades, public involvement has served as the formal mechanism through which residents learn about transportation projects and offer feedback. Yet as communities evolve, expectations for participation evolve with them. People want more than notice; they want voice. They want more than consultation; they want collaboration. They want to see themselves—culturally, historically, and civically—reflected in the decisions that affect their futures.

This shift marks a broader national movement. USDOT's recent *Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement* reframes engagement as shared stewardship, emphasizing equity, early involvement, and the lived expertise of communities. NCDOT's own Public Involvement framework provides a strong procedural foundation, but the agency's future lies in weaving that foundation with deeper, relational forms of engagement.

This article presents a unified exploration of that evolution. It describes the continuum from public involvement to community engagement, identifies points of connection and disconnect, and outlines pathways for NCDOT's future work—especially in communities whose histories, burial grounds, and cultural landscapes require care, respect, and partnership.

Understanding the Continuum

Public involvement and community engagement are often discussed as separate practices, but they are better understood as points along a continuum of participation. At one end, public involvement ensures transparency, compliance, and procedural fairness. At the other, community engagement cultivates shared ownership, cultural resonance, and long-term partnership.



These approaches are not opposites. They are currents in the same river—one providing structure, the other providing life. The movement between them reflects how transportation agencies mature from informing the public to collaborating with communities.

The Continuum at a Glance

- **Informing → Consulting → Collaborating → Partnering**
- **Procedural → Relational**
- **Compliance-driven → Equity-driven**
- **Agency-led → Community-led**

The continuum is dynamic. Agencies may move back and forth depending on project phase, community needs, or historical context. What matters is intentionality: recognizing when procedural outreach is sufficient and when deeper engagement is necessary to build trust, honor heritage, and ensure equitable outcomes.

Public Involvement: The Foundation

Public involvement is the formal starting point for transportation participation. It is rooted in federal and state requirements that ensure residents are informed and have opportunities to comment on proposed projects. NCDOT's Public Involvement framework outlines three core goals:

- **Inform and consult** residents affected by transportation decisions.
- **Gather feedback** through public meetings, surveys, comment periods, and digital portals.
- **Document concerns** for inclusion in decision-making.

This approach is essential for fairness and transparency. It ensures that every project—regardless of location or complexity—meets baseline standards for public notice and input.

Yet public involvement often functions as a one-way exchange. The agency speaks; the public responds. While this satisfies procedural requirements, it does not always build the relationships necessary for long-term trust, especially in communities with histories of exclusion, displacement, or cultural erasure.

Public involvement is the foundation—but it is not the ceiling.

Community Engagement: The Evolution

Community engagement represents the next stage in the continuum. It expands beyond informing and consulting to emphasize collaboration, cultural understanding, and shared decision-making. USDOT’s guidance frames this approach as **shared stewardship**, where communities are not simply respondents but co-designers.

Key Features of Community Engagement

- **Early involvement** before project design begins.
- **Cultural and historical awareness**, especially for Indigenous, African American, and other marginalized communities.
- **Collaborative decision-making** that values lived experience as expertise.
- **Equity and Justice⁴⁰ principles** guiding investment, accountability, and benefit distribution.
- **Long-term relationship-building**, not just project-specific outreach.

Community engagement transforms outreach into partnership. It acknowledges that communities hold knowledge—about land, history, mobility, and identity—that cannot be captured through surveys alone. It also recognizes that trust is not built through meetings; it is built through presence, listening, and shared action.

Building Trust Upstream: The Cemetery Project Pre-Engagement Model



The Ebb and Flow: How the Approaches Interact

The relationship between public involvement and community engagement is not linear. It is cyclical, iterative, and mutually reinforcing. Each phase of a transportation project offers opportunities to move along the continuum.

Phase-by-Phase Flow

Phase	Public Involvement Focus	Community Engagement Focus	Flow Between Them
Initiation	Announce project, invite comments	Listen to community stories, priorities, and histories	Move from informing to understanding
Planning	Collect data and feedback	Co-create goals and design options	Shift from consultation to collaboration
Implementation	Report on progress and decisions	Empower local partners to lead outreach	Transition from agency-led to shared leadership
Evaluation	Measure attendance and feedback	Measure trust, empowerment, and cultural impact	Integrate relational metrics with procedural ones

This ebb and flow allow NCDOT to maintain procedural integrity while deepening relational trust. It also ensures that engagement is not a one-time event but a sustained practice.

Points of Connection

Despite their differences, public involvement and community engagement share several important connections:

1. **Shared Purpose**
Both aim to include public voices in transportation decisions.
2. **Transparency**
Each values open communication, clarity, and accountability.
3. **Feedback Integration**
Both use public input to shape project outcomes, though engagement integrates it earlier and more deeply.
4. **Equity Lens**
Increasingly, both frameworks acknowledge the need to address historical exclusion and systemic inequities.

These shared values create a natural bridge between the two approaches.

Points of Disconnect

Understanding the disconnects helps identify where NCDOT can strengthen its practices:

1. **Timing**
Public involvement often begins after design; engagement begins before.
2. **Depth**
Involvement gathers opinions; engagement builds relationships.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity**
Traditional outreach may overlook heritage, burial sites, or community identity.
4. **Metrics**
Involvement measures attendance; engagement measures trust, empowerment, and cultural impact.

These gaps are not failures—they are opportunities for growth.

Pathways for Future NCDOT Work

To move confidently along the continuum, NCDOT can adopt several forward-looking strategies:

1. Adopt Pre-Engagement Practices

Begin outreach before formal meetings. Co-design engagement methods with communities, especially those with histories of displacement or cultural harm.

2. Integrate Cultural Contexts

Recognize burial grounds, ancestral lands, and local histories as planning assets—not obstacles. Use cultural mapping, oral histories, and community-led storytelling.

3. Expand Metrics Beyond Compliance

Track relational indicators such as trust, collaboration, and perceived respect alongside attendance and comment counts.

4. Build Local Capacity

Train community liaisons, youth ambassadors, and neighborhood leaders to sustain engagement beyond the life of a single project.

5. Visualize Engagement

Use infographics, story maps, and accessible visuals to show how community input shapes decisions. Make the process visible, not just the outcomes.

These pathways align with both federal expectations and community aspirations.

Conclusion

Public involvement and community engagement are not competing philosophies—they are complementary currents that, when aligned, create a stronger, more equitable transportation system. Public involvement provides the structure; community engagement provides the depth. Together, they transform transportation planning from a technical exercise into a shared civic journey.

For NCDOT, the future lies in balancing both: maintaining procedural integrity while deepening relational trust. When these approaches flow together, transportation decisions honor history, amplify community voice, and build enduring partnerships across North Carolina.

