



Forever Free - The 150th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation

Resnicow Schroeder Associates and U.S. National Archives and Foundation for the National Archives, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Events and Observances (Seven or Fewer Days) — Government

The U.S. National Archives sponsored a rare 3-day showing of the Emancipation Proclamation document in Washington DC, to celebrate its 150th anniversary. The public affairs team from Archives partnered with The Foundation for the National Archives & PR firm Resnicow Schroeder Associates, to carry out a plan for multi-tiered outreach that resulted in synchronized efforts with the U.S. Postal Service, Smithsonian Institution, and other agencies, robust media coverage, 400% growth in the social media views, and record-setting attendance for the free 3-day event.

Events and observances (seven or fewer days) includes programs or events scheduled for one to seven consecutive days (not including planning and preparation). Events may include commemorations, observances, openings, celebrations or other special activities, and must occur within a time span of one week. The government subcategory includes all government bureaus, agencies, institutions or departments at the local, state and federal levels, including the armed forces, regulatory bodies, courts, public schools and state universities.

Full Text: **SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS**

The Emancipation Proclamation is the most important document in African-American history. In the wake of Civil War commemorations, and the success of the high-profile Steven Spielberg movie, LINCOLN, the U.S. National Archives saw a need to provide people an opportunity to view the official, signed & sealed Emancipation Proclamation on its 150th anniversary. There would be challenges. The document is very fragile -- it can only be shown in public for a total of 30 hours *per year*. Would people embrace an event? -- it's just pieces of paper. An EP tour in 2011 was canceled due to low attendance predictions. Timing was tough -- the Christmas/New Year's holiday would hamper plans & limit staff/volunteer manning. Winter weather in DC would cut into attendance. Our resources were modest, with a budget of less than \$10,000. Archives decided to press forward, because, regardless of challenges, because it was the right thing to do. Further, if handled well, it could launch a series of such document events, which would help with public investment in our mission

RESEARCH

With the Anniversary as deadline, we began research to delineate our audiences, develop our agenda, and sharpen our tactics.

We identified target audiences:

1. Regional people who could attend our exhibit,
2. The national public who should be exposed to discussion of the Emancipation Proclamation & to the National Archives;
3. Government leaders, who carry the legacy for Civil Rights in America, and who oversee

- the National Archives mission, and
4. National Archives employees, who follow our historical/cultural events, and who could be asked to volunteer to help on this & future exhibits.

We also identified two story-lines for Archives to tell:

- The historical impact of this document: the Proclamation faced stiff opposition, yet became the great antislavery milestone, and
- The Archives efforts to preserve the document: our conservationists are incredible, using both art & science to keep our treasured artifacts preserved for future generations.

Primary research, from a concurrent Communication Audit, yielded best methods for reaching our pre-qualified external audiences (direct email has a 64% favorability, social media postings have 52%, web posting have 49%), and for reaching our employees (similar results).

Secondary research, gave us Archives attendance statistics, comparative size & status for social media, and the general media milieu for Civil War/Lincoln/Emancipation Proclamation topics. These statistics helped us to define goals for success. For Benchmarking, we'd cull lessons from our previous July 4th & Constitution Day events. We'd also search out the history of the EP's showings to the public – 50th and 100th were small. But a 1947 showing was huge, as part of a "Freedom Train" exhibit, seen by some of the last surviving formerly-enslaved people in America. We found 1947 LIFE magazine imagery -- and even a George Gershwin song about the Freedom Train exhibit – and would use them in our own materials.

We set attendance goals, and media-coverage goals. July 4th is annually our busiest day, with attendance of 4,100, while January average hovers at 1,000. We'd shoot for 3,000 attendees per day. Our Facebook following was 28,000, and Twitter following was 12,500; we should try to boost those numbers by 2,000-4,000, respectively, and increase our story readership.

Our historians suggested we design our events around the "Watch Night" tradition -- a midnight vigil kept by the African-American community on the eve of the 1863 Emancipation's signing. Our team also learned that the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, and the NTHP's Lincoln Cottage also planned EP 150th events. For us, these were not rivals -- but good potential partners. We sought other partners from our Foundation for the National Archives (FNA), and from direct outreach to civic leaders, celebrities, and corporate donors. We'd ask for help in ad space, event resources, services, and entertainment.

PLANNING

To BUILD THE EVENT, Archives would book appropriate entertainment -- reenactors (Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, 54th Mass. soldiers), gospel choirs, & performers, all participating gratis.

Our OVERARCHING MEDIA PLAN was:

- We'd first create a broad blanket of national news-media coverage, increasing the EP 150th national discussion, and putting our exhibit on the media calendar. Tough-but-doable, in a media hub like Washington DC.
- Then, we'd target regional sub-audiences – students, churches, New Year's revelers, community leaders, families – via one-on-one media pitches to small local outlets. FNA's PR agency, Resnicow Schroeder, initiated many of these pitches to reporters.

For all media interviews -- we'd pair a historian with a conservationist, so audiences would understand the National Archives role in preserving our heritage. Further -- we'd cross-promote other EP/150th-related events around the region – Smithsonian, Library of Congress, Lincoln Cottage – to create 'EP/150th Fever'. In other partnership effort, we learned of a new U.S. Postal Service stamp, honoring the EP/150th -- and we immediately offered to host their 'Stamp Unveiling' ceremony in our Rotunda. We also landed help from the Verizon Foundation, which

boosted our 3-day event budget by another \$20,000.

We'd invite White House & Congressional leaders to the entertainment portions, Watch Night event, and the USPS Stamp Unveiling, so government-leader attendees could gain positive familiarity with the Archives. To help young audiences, we'd produce educational materials -- a coloring book for elementary school kids, an e-Book for high-school students, a hard-bound edition of EP for families. Department of Education would help us distribute them, via their press releases & tweets.

EXECUTION

The National Archives team used a strategic mix of media engagement, social media interaction, inter-agency partnership. We additionally benefitted from distinguished-visitor buy-in. Starting in November, we posted weekly EP/150th Releases – targeted at both press & public – to our 500+ direct-mail distro and to our www.archives.gov site. We boosted each via internal & external via blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, etc. Each release was a 'tent-pole' of information– event updates, links to www.ep150.gov website, links to new Archive stories, video/coloring book/E-Book, high-res imagery, cross-promotion links to Smithsonian, etc. By **14 DEC**, we filled all of our 24 required crowd-management volunteer slots.

Media Day was held on **20 DEC 2012** -- hosted inside the Archives Conservation Lab. Some 45 reporters showed up -- double the expected turnout -- and from all strata (NPR, Wall Street Journal, Black American Web, Going Out Guides, American Heritage). A groundswell of interest was born -- our historian/conservationist teams would participate in some 60 interviews over the next 10 days.

The 3-day Exhibit schedule flowed as follows: **30 DEC** – General visitation 9 am - 5 pm. **31 DEC** – Gospel choirs, film screenings & musical acts during the day, Watch Night ceremony & performances at Midnight. **1 JAN** – Theatrical performance in Rotunda for the first 100 people, with 400 overflow visitors viewing live/simulcast in our theater. Later, USPS Stamp Unveiling in Rotunda.

White House did not show, but Congress did. Rep. Nancy Pelosi was so impressed by the exhibit that she personally urged other Members of Congress to attend our Watch Night. Twenty-nine – from both parties – rang in the Midnight with us. Two days later, Pelosi made her Archives/Watch Night experience the theme of Welcoming Address to the 113th U.S. Congress.

EVALUATION

WE WANTED TO MAXIMIZE LOCAL ATTENDANCE AT THE 3-DAY DOCUMENT SHOWING

Attendance for EP 150th set milestones for the National Archives, despite Christmas/New Year's holiday and cold weather.

Our modest first-day audience of 1,909 people for Sunday 30 December 2012 outpaced every other Sunday in December 2012 by between 10 and 203%. Our attendance for New Year's Eve, 31 Dec 2012, was 4,416 – fully 156% higher than the 2011, and 160% higher than 2010. In fact, it was even HIGHER than the BENCHMARK July 4th, 2012 level of 4,089. Our attendance of 2,851 on New Year's Day, 1 January 2013, more than DOUBLED the two previous New Year's Days' (1,439 in 2011 and 1,280 in 2012). Our target 3-day goal of 9,000 was met, with a total of 9,176 attendees.

WE WANTED TO BOOST NATIONAL DISCUSSION OF EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION, AND OF ARCHIVES

Between 20 DEC and 5 JAN, we earned over 230 mentions of the Emancipation Proclamation 150th Anniversary exhibit at the National Archives. This included approximately 80 original news items -- and over 150 Associated Press pick-ups across the United States. Major news coverage included the *Los Angeles Times*, NBC Nightly News, *The Atlantic*, PBS NewsHour,

Huffington Post, and multiple stories in *Washington Post* & National Public Radio. The National stories employed our key messages on history & heritage conservation, while the local stories brought people inside Archives, to view the document.

WE WANTED TO INCREASE OUR SUPPORT BASE

Twenty-nine Congress members attended our Watch Night event. Our Facebook fans and Twitter followers only increased by about 1,000 each -- but our Blog views QUADRUPLED, jumping from 5,000 average for DEC/JAN to 19,814, including 17,000+ unique views, for the period. Tumblr views ranged from 17-157 Likes per posting. Our e-Book is up to 19,000 now.

WE WANTED TO INSPIRE VOLUNTEERS/EMPLOYEES, AND OPEN WAY FOR MORE EVENTS

Twenty-four specially-trained volunteer billets were filled, and over 200 Archives employees attended the 3-day event. Based on the success, we were asked by the Archivist to build a strategic calendar for other such milestone events in the future.

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Product #: 6BE-1303D01