



JUNETEENTH COMMUNITY CONSORTIUM

The Juneteenth Community Consortium is an association of organizations in the Greater Williamsburg Area that are organized with a common goal to educate, commemorate, and celebrate the end of slavery in America

Greater Williamsburg Community Unites to Celebrate Juneteenth

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (May 31, 2022) – As the members of Greater Williamsburg’s [Juneteenth Community Consortium](#) appear one by one in the online meeting, they exchange jokes, hush their dogs, adjust their computer screens and get down to business. Their mission: Coordinate the most inclusive and commemorative Juneteenth celebration the region has ever seen.

The consortium members, who represent more than a dozen organizations and have been meeting regularly since January 2022, pick up right where they left off to coordinate a [full slate of events](#) scheduled across Williamsburg and James City and York counties from June 17-20. This inclusive celebration is composed of events marking Juneteenth – the federal holiday commemorating the date in 1865 when federal forces arrived in Galveston, TX, informing the enslaved people there that they had been freed more than two years prior by Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. The consortium, which is open to all at no cost, was created by local organizations with the goal of coordinating Juneteenth programming designed to educate, commemorate and celebrate the end of slavery in America.

“If something is good for the community it should be good for the entire community and not just one segment,” said Johnette Weaver, life-long Williamsburg resident and member of several of the organizations participating in the consortium including Williamsburg Action and The Village Initiative.

While Juneteenth has been observed in Greater Williamsburg by individual organizations for many years, 2022 is only the second year it has been recognized on a national level since [President Biden signed legislation](#) on June 17, 2021 declaring it the newest federal holiday. As such, there is little precedent for how to commemorate the holiday collectively. The Juneteenth Community Consortium is setting that precedent.

“I am extremely proud of the way that our community has come together to form this group,” said Connie Matthews Harshaw, president of the Let Freedom Ring Foundation and member of First Baptist Church, “At this time in our history, there is no better way to be an example of the change that we want to see than by our coming together to understand the meaning and to celebrate the emancipation of enslaved African Americans.”

Williamsburg's colonial history makes the city's relationship to Juneteenth unique. As the 18th-century capitol of the largest colony in North America, Williamsburg played a pivotal role in creating a nation built upon the institution of slavery. Many members of Williamsburg's present-day Black community can trace their roots back to the enslaved men and women who composed the majority of the city's population at the onset of the American Revolution.

Janice Canaday, a life-long Williamsburg resident and supervisor at The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, can trace her Williamsburg ancestors back to the late 1690s. "Juneteenth to me is so much larger than a celebration of one day in 1865," she said. "It's an opportunity to acknowledge the courage and resilience of the Black community in their ongoing fight for freedom – in 1776, in 1865, and still today in 2022. And it's a platform from which we can begin to have the challenging conversations we need to have to achieve change."

The consortium's success at bringing the region together is unprecedented in Williamsburg's recent history. Organizations comprising the Juneteenth Community Consortium, which include smaller grassroots organizations as well as larger tourism, government, and education institutions, include [the City of Williamsburg](#), [The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation](#), [Coming to the Table - Historic Triangle](#), [Historic Area Religions Together](#), [Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation](#), [League of Women Voters of Williamsburg Area](#), [Let Freedom Ring Foundation](#), [The Village Initiative For Equity in Education](#), [Virginia Arts Festival - Williamsburg Live](#), [Visit Williamsburg](#), [William & Mary](#), [Williamsburg Action](#), and [York-James City-Williamsburg NAACP](#). Events are coordinated by the consortium but planned and hosted by individual organizations and include an art exhibition, motor parade, complimentary programming at The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, an interfaith Sunday service on June 19, and a community-wide celebration at the Triangle – the historic hub of Black businesses in Williamsburg. Details on these events and more can be found at Juneteenth.cc.org/events.

The diverse groups are united by a common belief: Juneteenth is an opportunity to celebrate, yes, but first and foremost it is an opportunity to educate and reflect on the Black experience in America.

"The collaborative concept we have applied to this community celebration has really galvanized the synergy among our organizations and led to an incredible slate of events," said Lawrence Gholson, president of the York-James City-Williamsburg NAACP. "Let's just say: I'd miss my afternoon snack before I'd miss this commemorative and educational experience."

Victoria Cimino, CEO of Visit Williamsburg, said, "Collaborating with prolific community organizations to promote the breadth of events that educate, commemorate, and celebrate the Juneteenth season allowed us to not only give this important holiday the recognition it deserves, but also demonstrate that Williamsburg has a place in amplifying the story of the Black experience."

Months of collaborative meetings yielded a robust [Juneteenth events calendar](#). More significantly, in working together to manage the logistics of the weekend, the group inched toward a less tangible but equally valuable outcome: trust.

"Building trust is not something that happens overnight, but it has to start somewhere," said Jacqueline Bridgeforth Williams, founder and executive director of The Village Initiative. "There are some pretty amazing people in this group. People from so many different organizations with different missions and different audiences who have come together to make a difference in our

community. It's been an honor to be a part of that, to set that example of unity for our community.”

The success of the consortium is just a start. Members hope that the conversations started within this group will extend into the broader community. And thanks to the efforts of the consortium, the groundwork is set.

“We have some challenging work ahead of us, but this consortium proves that there are plenty of people within the community who are ready and willing to do that work,” said Beth Kelly, vice president for education, research and historical interpretation at The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. “Juneteenth is just the beginning.”

About the Juneteenth Community Consortium logo

Designed by Hampton Roads artist Hampton Boyer, the Juneteenth Community Consortium logo is inspired by David Hammons, Frank Stella, and the universally known Afro-American flag. Each square represents 100 years, totaling 400 years since Africans first arrived in America. Within the icon, a rhythm of Red, Black, and Green is generated to convey a focused and continuous motion for the future.

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