



Soil Collection Project

General Guidelines

Thank you for your interest in EJI's Soil Collection Project, as part of our Community Remembrance Project (CRP). We hope our general guidelines will provide a clear framework for the considerations and steps involved in participating in collecting soil to memorialize African American victims of racial terror lynching.

OVERVIEW

EJI has documented over 4,400 African American victims of racial terror lynching in at least twenty states across America between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 to 1950 (To view by map, visit: <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/explore>). To create greater awareness and understanding about racial terror lynchings, and to begin a necessary conversation that advances truth and reconciliation, EJI is working with communities to commemorate and recognize the traumatic era of lynching by collecting soil from lynching sites. This soil collection project is intended to bring community members closer to the legacy of lynching and to contribute to the effort to build a lasting and more visible memory of our history of racial injustice.

In 2015-2016, EJI held four community events in which volunteers attended a program in our office before traveling to lynching sites throughout the state of Alabama to collect soil. Those jars of collected soil were then returned and became part of an exhibit in our

office symbolizing the more than 360 documented lynchings in the state. That exhibit remains and a photograph is below.



Today, we have a similar exhibit with soil collected from around the nation in our new cultural space, the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, featuring nearly 280 soil collections on display.



These exhibits have proved incredibly impactful to those who have witnessed them in person, and community partners who have completed soil collections continually express the deep meaning and emotional impact of those experiences.

AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOIL COLLECTIONS

We are currently encouraging potential community partners to consider **Community Soil Collection Ceremony Events** and/or the creation of **Local Soil Collection Exhibits**. These opportunities will require building a supportive coalition to engage in local community organizing and raising awareness about the event to reach other community members who may have interest in the effort of remembrance, truth, and reconciliation concerning our national and local legacies of racial and economic injustice. Local ceremony events and/or exhibits should be planned with public education and engagement in mind. Potential partners with interest in both or either of these options should complete our brief **Soil Collection Community Engagement Proposal**. We will have a limited number of individual, non-community based soil collections available depending on need.

Community-based soil collection events or exhibits also lend themselves to longer-term strategies to engage truth and reconciliation at the local level. Potential community partners with interests in a long-term, incremental process in their community may also be interested in additional steps after the soil collection, such as:

- Advancing to a **Historical Marker Project** for their community
- Bringing community partners and stakeholders to **visit the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration** and **the National Memorial for Peace and Justice** in Montgomery, Alabama
- Sustaining engagement post-historical marker dedication to potentially partner with EJI for the **Memorial Monument Placement Initiative**

It is not necessary for community partners to commit to engaging a long-term strategy outlined above or engaging the steps in the exact order outlined above. Our hope is that community members interested in this process will work to plan engagement that is relevant to the needs and capacity of their individual communities.

BASIC OUTLINE OF SOIL COLLECTION PROJECT PROCESS

As part of the Community Remembrance Project, the soil collection project's basic process includes the following steps and components:

1. **Complete our Community Remembrance Soil Collection Interest Form**, available here: <https://goo.gl/forms/K1RkTWMxYab71AXo2>
2. Based on your interests expressed in our form, **EJI staff will connect with you** about available opportunities and share with you our **Soil Collection Community Engagement Proposal** based on your interests.
 - **Please Note:** We generally do not provide information about specific lynching victims until we have confirmed a soil collection volunteer opportunity is available.

3. Proposals should be submitted at your earliest convenience. EJI staff will review the proposal and follow up with further questions or a proposal decision.
4. Once a soil collection opportunity has been confirmed, volunteers will receive the following information as it becomes available from EJI:
 - The **Narrative Memo** that will include (1) a narrative summary of the lynching based on surviving documentation (newspaper articles, historical scholarship, etc.), (2) a contextual discussion about the history of racial terror lynching, and (3) a **description of the lynching location** where we recommend collecting soil.
 - Our **Soil Collection Logistical Guide**
5. After reviewing these materials, EJI staff will mail the soil collection jar(s) to the mailing address provided to us **within a week** of your anticipated or planned soil collection date.
6. Unless otherwise arranged, **volunteers will ship their collected soil back to EJI** by their anticipated return date.

We welcome suggestions, records and documents, and any other input from community members who have researched one or more local lynchings and have thoughts about potential sites for collecting the soil.

DETERMINING SOIL COLLECTION SITES

EJI's soil collection project works to identify meaningful locations associated with each lynching, and the specificity with which we can identify a location is directly dependent on the amount of detail contained in surviving reports; in some cases we know the precise courthouse or jail where the lynching occurred, while in others we know much less – for example, that an individual was killed wooded area within a named rural community. We are very careful not to overstate the preciseness of our knowledge of a lynching's location, and we do not believe that exact specificity is necessary to have a worthwhile and meaningful soil collection. The main goal is to create a moment of reflection and connection, in a site near and related to the location of the lynching, as a kind of memorial most lynching victims never received. Many volunteers have expressed that they were deeply impacted by the opportunity to intimately engage with the personal story of one lynching victim, and that did not require knowing that they were standing in the exact location where the lynching was committed.

BUILDING A CRP COALITION

For community-based soil collection projects, we seek to partner with **developing community coalitions**, which should seek to include diverse individuals representing the local community, local organizations and institutions, and/or government actors, to help with building local awareness and community engagement. Local CRP coalitions should have the following features to be recognized as good candidates for partnership for a community-based soil collection project:

- **At least 3 members**, either as individuals (not coming from the same household organizations) or as representatives of partnering groups in collaboration.
- Demonstrating a commitment to the **intentional inclusion of local African American cultural leaders and institutions** with direct ties to the community in which the soil collection will occur.

In building a supportive CRP coalition, it is valuable to consider stakeholder interest and expertise. Reaching out for supportive community partners may involve:

- Identifying stakeholders who can help raise local awareness of the upcoming soil collection event and/or local exhibit
- Identifying stakeholders who can help secure interest and permissions of a local space to house a local exhibit of the soil collection jar(s) and plan educational programming for the exhibit
- Identifying stakeholders who can plan, attend, and/or present/perform at a soil collection ceremony that would feature a time of reflection in memorializing the victim(s) of racial terror lynching and features of public education for participants to engage in more depth the history of racial terrorism in America.

Community members have varying levels of education about lynching and varying levels of comfort discussing lynching generally or in the manner that EJI is committed to discussing it. It is helpful to have conversations about the project's vision and potential ceremony or exhibit considerations and requirements with potential community partners initially, so that everyone involved has a shared agenda. We believe that it is also important for groups seeking to engage this project to **prioritize both the involvement and leadership of African American community members**. This effort asks us to confront historical trauma that is both universal and also very specific to the experiences of African American communities. To ensure that the project remains rooted within this cultural context, we encourage those involved in this effort to reflect on the living members of their community who might have an authentic connection to experiences of racial violence and explore ways of ensuring their voices are represented in a substantive fashion.

FURTHER QUESTIONS AND INFORMATION

If you have further questions or concerns, please reach out to your EJI contact person by email or email us at contact_us@eji.org. Our office can also be reached by phone at 334-269-1803. Thank you for considering this experience for your community.