



## Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground

For Immediate Release:

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# “Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park” Opens Design Ideas Competition

***Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, in partnership with the Design Trust for Public Space, launches Request for Qualifications call due 12/17***

**The Bronx, NY (November 18th, 2025)** – Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park is now accepting submissions to a [Request for Qualifications](#) call, inviting new visions for a memorial design.

Van Cortlandt Park is home to an Enslaved African Burial Ground that has [been identified](#) as the likely burial site of enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples who lived, worked, and died on the Van Cortlandt family plantation, providing its historical prosperity and economic prominence in New York City. While NYC Parks recognized the site officially on Juneteenth 2021 with signage, the space remains largely unmarked.

With generous funding from the Mellon Foundation, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance has partnered with the Design Trust for Public Space and Liminal sp to create a community-informed design for a new memorial that connects Bronx neighbors and visitors to the history of the space, confronts its painful legacy, and invites opportunities for gathering, educating, and healing.

Guided by a [Legacy Council](#) made up of local Bronx organizations, community members, thought leaders, and artists, the collaborative project, [Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park](#), has hosted a series of events throughout this past summer and fall to raise more awareness of the site. In addition to redefining memorial and mourning, the programming also created opportunities to [survey the surrounding community](#), informing a Design Ideas Competition that aligns with the needs of the neighborhood and descendants.

Now, the Reimagining project has launched [a RFQ call](#), seeking architects, artists, and design firms to submit their qualifications to create a proposal for the memorial’s design.

Three winners will be selected and invited to create design materials, as well as compensated with a \$20,000 stipend and opportunities to speak at public events.

“Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground must begin with recognizing painful history and the people whose labor and lives shaped this land,” **Stephanie Ehrlich, Executive Director of Van Cortlandt Park Alliance**. “Van Cortlandt Park Alliance’s role is to make space for dialogue, creativity, healing, and ultimately, for the community’s vision to take shape. We eagerly await the next part of the process.”

“Public spaces are an important venue for memorial and historical reckoning,” said **Matthew Clarke, Executive Director of the Design Trust for Public Space**. “As cultural records are being erased and rewritten across the country, it’s imperative that New York City creates and preserves places of memory. Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park belongs to the past, present, and future.”

“To reimagine is to heal. As a space doula, I believe that envisioning beyond what is seen—beyond loss, beyond the visible landscape—is an act of collective repair,” says **Immanuel Oni, Creative Director of Liminal sp**. “The late Sobonfu Somé stated the future of our world depends greatly on how we tend to our grief. This ideas competition is a way forward in transforming this future into one of beauty, memory, and possibility.”

“The creation of a memorial at the Enslaved African Burial Ground in Van Cortlandt Park will incorporate the community’s vision in order to amplify the legacy of those buried there and provide a space for reflection and healing,” **said NYC Parks Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa**. “We’re grateful for the recent collaborative efforts to raise awareness of the site’s history and look forward to seeing the designs submitted as this project enters its next phase.”

“Standing at the burial ground, I am reminded that those buried here built the infrastructure and economy we rely on today, but their stories have been silenced for centuries,” said **Alice Michelle Augustine, Legacy Council Member and Founding Director of Campus Honors and Scholar Engagement at Lehman College**. “The next phase of this project is a turning point. It signals our community’s commitment to restoring dignity and investing in histories long ignored. I want to know their names. I want to celebrate their lives. And most importantly, I want my students to understand the greatness of those who came before them.”

“As an African American woman, born & raised in the Bronx, and the executive director of a Bronx arts and culture institution, I am truly honored to be a part of the Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground project as it endeavours to frame and preserve the important stories of the enslaved people that held a major role in the development of

one of the Bronx's public treasurers, Van Cortlandt Park," said **Judith Insell, Executive Director of Bronx Arts Ensemble.**

Interested applicants can submit their RFQ [here](#) by December 17th. A [virtual public information session](#) will be held on December 1st, finalists will be notified by mid-February and asked to begin the design process throughout Spring 2026. Follow [@vcpalliance](#) and [@designtrustnyc](#) for updates and upcoming event info or subscribe [for email notifications](#).

### **About Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground**

#### **About Van Cortlandt Park Alliance**

[Van Cortlandt Park Alliance](#) is the sole nonprofit partner working with NYC Parks for Van Cortlandt Park. VCPA's mission is to preserve, support, and promote the ecology, recreation, cultural arts, and history of Van Cortlandt Park. VCPA was formed in 2019 by merging two preexisting nonprofits whose 35 years of combined history lay the foundation for excellence in educational programming, cultural events, advocacy, and restoration projects. VCPA's Enslaved People Project (EPP), in coordination with local nonprofits, the park's community, and NYC Parks, has been working to share untold stories and the unvarnished history of Van Cortlandt Park, once a plantation, through cultural programs and events, ceremonies, classes, virtual walking tours, and new signage.

#### **About Design Trust for Public Space**

The [Design Trust for Public Space](#) is a non-profit organization that unlocks the potential of New York's public spaces. Our unique model catalyzes design ideas into action for a more just and equitable city. As a leader of the public space movement, the Design Trust brings together city agencies, community groups, and private sector experts to develop collaborative projects and new research to improve the well-being of residents and create systemic change throughout the five boroughs. With longtime partner Liminal sp, the Design Trust is working with the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance on the design ideas competition and related project activities. The organization is connecting the important needs of this project with the broader design and community development communities.

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