Italian American Task Force (IATF)

Step 3 — Studying and Adapting the New Jersey Model

Purpose

To provide prospective state organizing committees with a documented example of how a permanent Italian and Italian American heritage commission can be established, organized, and sustained through legislation, educational partnerships, cultural collaboration, and community participation.

The New Jersey Italian Heritage Commission offers an established foundation from which other states may learn without duplicating its structure in every detail.

The New Jersey Foundation

New Jersey established its Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission in January 2002 under Public Law 2001, Chapter 343.

The Commission's original mission combined cultural preservation, public education, historical understanding, and the promotion of accurate, non-stereotyped knowledge of Italian and Italian American contributions.

Its early organization included commission officers, educational and community committees, academic advisors, and professional staff.

The Commission demonstrated that cultural heritage could be advanced through an ongoing public educational mission rather than relying exclusively upon commemorative activities.

Understanding the Legislative Model

Prospective organizing committees should examine:

1. Legislative authorization. How the Commission was established under state law and its public responsibilities defined.

2. Institutional structure. How membership, appointments, officers, committees, and administrative responsibilities were organized.

3. Educational relationships. How educators, academic advisors, and educational authorities participated in advancing the mission.

4. Community collaboration. How cultural organizations, community representatives, and volunteers contributed to the Commission's activities.

5. Resources and sustainability. How public and private resources supported programs and how institutional continuity was addressed.

These elements provide a starting point for examining what may be suitable in another state.

Education as the Central Mission

A defining feature of the New Jersey experience is the development of educational initiatives that place Italian and Italian American heritage within the broader historical and cultural experience.

The Commission's Universality of Italian Heritage curriculum project demonstrates the importance of bringing together qualified educators, historians, and curriculum specialists.

For other states, the lesson is not simply to reproduce an existing curriculum. It is to establish the educational relationships and standards necessary to develop reliable instructional resources.

The proposed commission should support educators through resources and collaboration, not seek to replace their professional responsibilities.

Cultural Partnerships and Public Participation

The New Jersey model also illustrates the value of cooperation among cultural organizations, academic institutions, community leaders, and public officials.

An effective commission can provide a common educational purpose while respecting the independence of participating organizations.

The goal is not to consolidate every cultural initiative under one institution. It is to create opportunities for organizations to contribute their knowledge, historical resources, relationships, and experience.

Collaboration should expand opportunities without diminishing the identity of individual partners.

Lessons for Other States

The New Jersey experience suggests several principles worthy of consideration:

Begin with a clear public purpose. The commission must offer benefits beyond the interests of any single organization.

Establish legislative continuity. A permanent institution can preserve knowledge and sustain programs beyond changes in volunteer leadership.

Build educational credibility. Educators, historians, and academic specialists should play meaningful roles in the commission's work.

Respect existing institutions. The commission should strengthen educational and cultural resources rather than duplicate established responsibilities.

Encourage broad participation. Community organizations, younger generations, and cultural partners should have opportunities to contribute.

Plan for sustainability. Administrative responsibilities, available resources, governance, and accountability should be considered from the beginning.

Adapting the Model to Another State

Each prospective organizing committee should examine its own state's legislative procedures, educational administration, cultural institutions, and existing public commissions.

The committee should determine:

1. Which elements of the New Jersey legislation are suitable for adaptation.

2. Which state agencies or educational institutions could become partners.

3. What commission membership and appointment arrangements are appropriate.

4. How educational and cultural responsibilities should be defined.

5. What administrative resources and funding arrangements may be available.

6. What additional legal or legislative requirements apply.

These questions should guide state-specific planning rather than encourage automatic adoption of New Jersey's statutory language.

IATF's Role

The Italian American Task Force will assist participating states by providing access to historical information, organizational experience, educational resources, and examples of commission development.

IATF may facilitate introductions, encourage cooperation, and help organizing committees identify relevant questions and resources.

Each state's leadership, legislators, educational authorities, and appropriate legal advisors will determine the structure and legislative provisions best suited to their circumstances.

Step 3 — Initial Deliverable

A State Commission Adaptation Worksheet documenting:

The organizing state's legislative and educational framework.

Relevant features of the New Jersey model.

Potential educational and cultural partners.

Proposed commission responsibilities and organizational structure.

Matters requiring additional research or legislative guidance.

Preliminary recommendations for advancing the initiative.

The worksheet will provide a foundation for the legislative engagement and proposal-development stages of the Blueprint.

Implementation Guidance

Step 3 should be supported by an organized collection of primary documents, historical reports, educational materials, and practical examples.

The initial reference collection should include the New Jersey founding legislation and the Commission's 2002–2004 Interim Report.

Additional materials concerning governance, educational initiatives, public partnerships, and later achievements should be incorporated as they are verified.

The purpose is to make the New Jersey experience accessible and useful while allowing each participating state to develop its own approach.

This document is an IATF planning resource. Historical references should be verified against original NJIHC records. The recommendations for other states are proposed guidance, not legal requirements or official NJIHC policy.