Italian American Task Force (IATF)

Why Establish a State Heritage Commission?

1. Why does our state need an Italian and Italian American Cultural and Heritage Studies Commission?

Italian and Italian American history is part of the larger American story. Yet important contributions and experiences may receive limited attention in educational materials.

A permanent state commission can help preserve historical knowledge, support educators, encourage cultural understanding, and make reliable resources available to future generations.

Unlike a temporary initiative, a legislatively established commission provides a continuing institutional framework for this work.

2. Don't we already have Italian American organizations doing this work?

Yes, and their contributions are essential.

The commission is not intended to replace existing organizations or diminish their independence. It offers an opportunity to connect their expertise, historical resources, and community relationships through a shared educational purpose.

We are not creating competition. We are creating opportunities for cooperation.

Organizations can continue their individual missions while participating in initiatives that may benefit from broader coordination.

3. Will the commission interfere with our Department of Education or local schools?

That is not the intended role.

The proposed commission would complement existing educational agencies by helping develop and make available historically accurate resources, research, and instructional materials.

The New Jersey Commission's Universality of Italian Heritage curriculum was designed as an infusion model—allowing relevant historical material to be incorporated into existing subjects.

The proposed commission would respect the curriculum and administrative authority of the appropriate educational institutions.

4. Is this an effort to promote a particular interpretation of history?

No. The proposed educational philosophy is grounded in historical evidence, responsible scholarship, and independent inquiry.

Students should examine relevant facts, consider differing perspectives, and develop their own informed conclusions.

The purpose is not to tell students what to think. It is to provide resources that help them learn how to think critically.

5. What has New Jersey actually accomplished?

New Jersey established its Commission in 2002 through state legislation.

Its 2002–2004 Interim Report documents an extensive early program of activity, including:

Development of the Universality of Italian Heritage curriculum project.

Statewide conferences and community outreach.

Partnerships with universities and educators.

Support for educational publications and cultural programming.

Student educational opportunities.

Development of documentary and multimedia projects.

These accomplishments demonstrate that a commission can serve as a working educational and cultural institution rather than simply a ceremonial body.

6. What will this cost taxpayers?

There is no single cost applicable to every state.

The necessary resources will depend upon the commission's legislative structure, administrative support, staffing arrangements, and intended programs.

New Jersey's early report describes activities supported through public and privately sponsored resources.

A prospective organizing committee should develop a realistic operating proposal, identify potential partnerships, and work with state officials to determine appropriate funding and accountability.

A credible proposal must address costs openly rather than promise that a commission can operate without expense.

7. Why should legislators support the initiative?

The proposed commission offers a public educational purpose supported by cultural preservation, institutional cooperation, and community participation.

It can provide a structured means of connecting educational expertise, historical resources, and civic engagement.

Its mission should be nonpartisan, transparent, and focused on public benefit.

For legislators, the central question is not simply whether Italian American heritage deserves recognition, but whether a permanent commission can help make that heritage a meaningful educational resource for the state's residents.

8. What about other cultural organizations that may want their own commissions?

Their objectives deserve consideration and respect.

An Italian and Italian American Cultural and Heritage Studies Commission can cooperate with other cultural initiatives without requiring those organizations to surrender their identities or independent goals.

Partnerships may include educational programs, historical research, cultural exchanges, or shared community projects.

A shared educational purpose need not diminish anyone's cultural identity.

9. How will younger generations benefit?

Younger generations will have greater opportunities to encounter the history of their families, communities, and society through credible educational resources.

The commission can also encourage youth participation, educational projects, historical research, and collaboration with schools and universities.

Its objective is not simply to preserve memories, but to make historical knowledge relevant to future generations.

10. Why use New Jersey as the model?

Because New Jersey provides an established legislative foundation, documented organizational experience, and examples of educational and cultural programming.

Other states need not reproduce every provision of its legislation or every aspect of its administration.

Instead, they can examine what worked, identify challenges, and adapt relevant features to their own circumstances.

New Jersey provides the experience. Each state determines its own path.

11. Who would lead the effort in our state?

A preliminary organizing committee consisting of committed community leaders, educators, cultural representatives, and individuals familiar with government and legislative affairs.

The committee would identify prospective partners, study the New Jersey model, define its objectives, and begin discussions with appropriate public officials.

IATF would serve as a resource, facilitator, and advisor—not as the governing authority for another state's initiative.

12. How do we begin?

Begin with a conversation among interested individuals and organizations.

Identify a small organizing group, establish a shared educational purpose, review the New Jersey model, and explore potential partnerships.

The IATF Commission Blueprint provides a structured approach to developing the initiative, from preliminary organization through legislative planning.

There is no requirement to have every answer before beginning. There must, however, be a willingness to collaborate, examine the evidence, and commit to a sustained public purpose.

Our Invitation

The Italian American Task Force does not ask organizations to abandon what they have built.

We invite them to consider what more might be accomplished together.

New Jersey's experience offers a foundation of legislation, educational development, cultural collaboration, and public service from which other states can learn.

We do not seek to replace what exists. We seek to strengthen it through education, resources, and collaboration.

The commission's identity is Italian and Italian American. Its educational benefits are universal.

This is an IATF advocacy and planning resource. Historical examples are drawn from the New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission's 2002–2004 Interim Report. Proposed structures, partnerships, and

educational principles represent IATF recommendations and should be adapted to each state's requirements.