**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**The Capitol Visitor Center**

**What is the size of the Capitol Visitor Center?**  
The Capitol Visitor Center is 580,000 square feet on three levels. For purposes of comparison, the Capitol itself encompasses 775,000 square feet. The Visitor Center, therefore, is roughly three quarters the size of the historic Capitol. The Visitor Center footprint also encompasses 170,000 square feet of new building space for the House and Senate.

**What is the Capitol Visitor Center's mission?**  
The mission of the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center team is "Working together for Congress to inform, involve and inspire every visitor to the United States Capitol." This statement conveys our goal to provide a welcoming and educational environment for visitors to learn about the unique characteristics of the House, the Senate and the legislative process as well as the history and development of the architecture and art of the U.S. Capitol. The Visitor Center also provides amenities for visitor comfort, safety and security resulting in a seamless, positive visitor experience at the U.S. Capitol.

Through national and international partnerships, outreach to schools across the country, and a vibrant Web presence, the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center experience begins for visitors long before they set foot in the Capitol. Educational materials stimulate discussions of the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in a representative democracy and celebrate the roles that the House and the Senate play in our daily lives.

**When did Congress ceremonially break ground for the Capitol Visitor Center?**  
On June 20, 2000, members of the Capitol Preservation Commission, the guiding board of Congressional leaders who spearheaded the Capitol Visitor Center initiative on behalf of the entire U.S. Congress, ceremonially broke ground to signal the beginning of the project.

**When did construction of the Capitol Visitor Center begin?**  
Actual construction work began in 2002 after a major reassessment of the project following the events of September 11. Excavation of the East Front Plaza began in August 2002. In the fall of 2003, excavation was essentially complete and build-up of the Visitor Center structure began. In July 2008, the Architect of the Capitol's Fire Marshal issued a Certificate of Occupancy allowing for personnel to begin occupying the facility.

**What is the total cost of the Capitol Visitor Center?**  
The overall project cost was $600 million. The duration of construction was approximately six years, from August 2002 through November 2008.

**Was anything of historical significance discovered during excavation?**  
Nothing of a significant historical nature was discovered during excavation. The project architect, RTKL, hired an archaeological consultant to research the history of the grounds and to conduct surveys of Capitol Hill, formerly Jenkin's Hill, prior to the start of construction. The research showed that the Capitol Grounds were occupied to some extent by sub-tribes of the Algonquin Indians during colonial days, but research indicated that most of the tribal activities occurred closer to the Potomac River. Previous excavation work may have removed materials from earlier eras. In 1874, Olmsted called for the removal of 240,000 cubic yards of material from the East Capitol Grounds in order to lay a more fertile bed of soil. Later, in 1958-59, much of the area near the Capitol was excavated during the East Front Extension project, which extended the East Front of the Capitol 32.5 feet.

**What special security features were built into the Capitol Visitor Center?**  
Improving the security of the Congress, the Capitol, and visitors was one of the fundamental goals driving the construction of the Capitol Visitor Center.

The fatal shootings of two U.S. Capitol Police officers in July 1998 and the events of September 11 underscored the degree to which the Capitol and its occupants are at risk. Therefore, Congress directed the Architect of the Capitol to design and construct a visitor center to "provide greater security for all persons working in or visiting the United States Capitol and to provide a more convenient place in which to learn of the work of Congress."

The Visitor Center provides a secure public environment to welcome and manage millions of visitors and to protect the Capitol Building, its occupants, and guests.

**How is the history of enslaved labor in the construction of the Capitol conveyed to visitors?**  
The issue of enslaved labor in the construction of the U.S. Capitol is presented in a number of ways in the Capitol Visitor Center. In the Exhibition Hall, reading rails include text accompanied by images that discuss the contributions of enslaved laborers who cleared grounds, quarried stone, sawed timber, and labored on the Capitol's structure. Reading rails around the plaster model for the Statue of Freedom highlight the contributions of Philip Reid, an enslaved laborer whose talents were instrumental in the casting of the Statue of Freedom.

In addition, the importance of enslaved laborers is discussed in the 13-minute orientation film that is shown to all visitors at the beginning of their tour of the Capitol. Educational information on the role of enslaved labor is also incorporated into the script for guide-led tours and staff-led tours of the Capitol. The topic is also covered in the Emancipation Hall brochure available in the Visitor Center and online.

**Why did you remove statues from the Capitol? Will the statues in Emancipation Hall be rotated back into the Capitol and other statues moved out to the Capitol Visitor Center?**  
The Joint Committee on the Library approved moving 24 statues from various locations in the Capitol to the Visitor Center, which was designed as an extension of the Capitol, not a separate facility. The plan's goal was to make these sculptures more accessible to the visiting public and help alleviate overcrowding.

Overcrowding has been an issue in Statuary Hall since the 1930s, and Congress determined in 1933 that only one statue from each state should be placed in Statuary Hall, and that the others would be given prominent locations in designated areas and corridors of the Capitol. With the addition of the Capitol Visitor Center, it was decided that the statues would be rearranged again in order to further highlight and feature this unique collection, which represents the 50 United States and its citizens.

The statues selected to be moved were those that were most recently donated to the collection, and represent the diversity of our country. There is no plan to rotate the statues in Emancipation Hall or move other statues from the Capitol into the Visitor Center.

**Are there storage facilities at the Visitor Center for the items that are not allowed in the Capitol?**  
There are no storage facilities at the Visitor Center for prohibited items. Items that are allowed in the Visitor Center and the Capitol, but not in the Senate and House Galleries may be stored securely in the Senate and House Gallery Staging Areas.

**Does our national motto, "In God We Trust," appear in the Capitol Visitor Center? What about other religious references?**  
Yes, our national motto does appear in the Capitol Visitor Center in the House Theater exhibit and in Emancipation Hall. References to religion and faith are included in the context of several historic exhibits, and several religious items appear in the displays.

**LINKS**

**For additional information please click on the link of interest below.**

* [U.S. Capitol Map](http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/plan-visit/us-capitol-map)
* [Accessible Routes to the U.S. Capitol](http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/plan-visit/us-capitol-map/accessible-routes-the-us-capitol)
* [Routes from Union Station and Capitol South Metro Stations](http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/plan-visit/us-capitol-map/routes-union-station-and-capitol-south-metro-stations)
* [Click here to download the U.S. Capitol map in PDF format](http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/content/brochure/86/u.s.capitol-map-en.pdf)
* [Click here for a printer friendly version of the U.S. Capitol Visitor Guide.](http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/Assets/uploads/files/brochures/CVC_VisitorGuide_WebPDFs_Lo2.pdf)