Stenton House is participating in a grant through the Pew Foundation. In accordance with this, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) facilitated the first round of focus groups with community members from Germantown, Pennsylvania. The community discussion included, but was not limited to, the following focus areas: what people think they know about Dinah and the context surrounding Dinah, what a memorial might look like, and what emotions a memorial should evoke. The following summary provides key insights from the discussions that align with the needs of the grant; detailed community notes (after the names of participants were removed) have been given to the lead contact at Stenton House.

Key Insights (with seven representative quotes from the discussions as support):

1. An overarching goal of this project, for the community, is to show the value of the neighborhood and a black woman from their neighborhood; and, that they belong at Stenton too.

   - “There was a black woman of significance and there was a value in where we live in this neighborhood…. We had someone. Someone to be proud of…. We did have a black person in the community who did things. If she didn’t save Stenton, would we all still be here?”

   - “If people in the community, the African American community, recognized that we had a part here and in the community, then it would give us some pride. It would start here with Dinah.”

   - “These places were ours; it was ours, but we didn’t own it. That has always been the way with African Americans - ours, but we don’t own it.”

   - “Why did she choose to stay here?”

   - “…Really, they just learned to work around men. Just like women always have. We do that today. Women use whatever foolishness that is going on to their advantage; that’s the way women have always survived. That’s how people who seem to be powerless have always survived. That’s why we tell High John the Conquerer stories.”

   - “I would like to see what it looks like. Sometimes when you bring something back, it restores faith in the neighborhood…. Restoration is due; we get tired of hearing what was. Restoring to what is, is so important.”
- “We want little girls to know - we live in a neighborhood that is kind of depressed…. We always have choices - to make our homes wonderful, to take care of the people we care about. She had pride of work. How often do we see pride of work anymore?”

2. Community members, relatively speaking, do not know a lot about Dinah, Stenton, or slavery during the colonial era. There are A LOT of questions that might possibly be answered during the process of this project.

- “There are people in this community who have no idea about Dinah and have never been to Stenton.”

- “How did she build community? How did she keep her strength and faith?”

- “What was society like then?”

- “Family? Her as an individual? How did she live her life? Did she have kids? Descendants?”

- “Is there anything written about where she really came from? Did she come from West Africa? Or Haiti?”

- “Can we do research to know what was over by the burial space?”

- “People are starting to become aware of Stenton Mansion. I was just thinking about how many children don’t know why this building is here. That this building has a historical past and our historical past.”

3. Community members are somewhat skeptical of what will come out of the project.

- “We’ve been trying to tell Dinah’s story. I know the neighbors are interested and I hope they come talk to you.”

- “50/50 that people in the neighborhood will come be part of the process.”

- “I think one of the most important points is how to get the community to be interested in her story. I didn’t know and I am over the black history department at my church…. Even teaching black history at a mega church, there is a large sense of apathy.”

- “I’ve been here for 50+ years. I don’t see a lot that I can relate to [at Stenton]. Dinah is the only attachment that I have to the past that we were significant in this community. I get upset sometimes. We need something to make us proud. So much has been taken from us and we have given up so much ourselves…. We don’t know who we are…. Had she not made the decision she made, we wouldn’t be sitting here today. There wouldn’t be a park. Dinah plays a significant part - she may not
have been the secretary to William Penn, but she did something that is still here today. She was important. She is important."

- “To them [community elders and others], slavery means depression and downtrodden. There have always been working people."

- “A lot of the older people [and younger people] have a certain shame. They don’t have pride in being black and being from this community. They just want it in the past - ‘Don’t nobody want to hear that stuff.’ They internalize it and see it as their fault.”

- “We just want to see her coming back to life in some kind of way. Coming back to life from back then. They made the way, they made the future for today. They paved the way and you have to look at it together.”

4. Community members, at this point, have a variety of ideas about what the memorial could look like?

- “Symbols make sense too. What things around her could talk about her?” - - - “A quilt. And, there are a lot of reasons why. One, because it was women’s work. Stitching is one of the only ways that women had a voice in the community. Because quilts are made up of all the facets and it winds up being a whole piece from so many others - that with Dinah too, all of her pieces…..” - - - “To me, that’s why I think of her as a quilt - all of the things that made her up. All of the things that she was told as a child. All of the secrets that she heard and kept. And, I think that the reason why a quilt is fitting for any woman is because women are multi-faceted. I have never met a woman who is one-dimensional, especially women who have made a difference.”

- “It would look like Dinah. I am trying to picture her outfit and attire. It would show her and her wit and her intellect, crafting out a plan. It would show how she was able to come up with something. Her courage. It would not show fear. She did not let adversity or death stop her from saving something that was dear to her.”

- “I like the idea of bronze because I like symmetry and parallel. So, having it in the same material might be nice. I don’t know about incorporating the existing plaque into it because I know some of the language is very dated. But, a lot of what we’ve done at Stenton is acknowledge and continue what the people before us have done.” - - - “Language is how you make a gesture - not just how you talk.” - - - “I think they need to incorporate the plaque into the memorial. I am sure that there weren’t very many women of color who were memorialized then - or now.”

- “I wouldn’t want it just to be a mural because murals have a tendency to disappear over time. We have a plaque already. Maybe a design of a woman who is deep in thought…. And, something that is humble. Something to say that she is here. Perhaps in a chair looking at the mansion and gazing. In her old age…. Something strong.” - - - “I don’t see a painting. I want her to be Bold. Unmovable. Courageous.”
- “I see a sculpture that’s taller with a hand reaching out. Is she reaching for the future - maybe not reaching, but her hand extended. Maybe pointing.”

- “It would be a pillar first. Similar to the Logan Memorial. Because I believe that for who she was, what she did, and what she came through, she should be lifted up. And, in granite, because granite symbolizes strength. And, her story could be engraved on the memorial.” - - - “A pillar. A shape in itself that means something. It doesn’t have to be a person’s form.”

- “Not a statue because we don’t know what she looks like. Don’t pretend.” - - - “Yes! Just make it so that you know what she did. If you don’t know what she looks like then it [her face] wasn’t important - what she did was important.” - - - “This was fine, but I want to see a real statue. Or, at least a face to make her seem real to the people.”

5. Community members, at this point, also have a variety of ideas about what emotions the memorial could evoke.

- “Yes, courage. And, a soul. We dehumanize people. She was great and strong.”

- “A protector.”

- “Feel like I feel. Proud. Happy. No anger. I can’t feel anger for something I wasn’t a part of because it wasn’t done to me. I want to feel proud. What she did and others, the fight that you had we will keep it going on.”

- “Pride. A little anger too, only because we will realize how much talent in our community was used not in benefit of our people, but to benefit other people.”

- “I want to show there was a lot of humanity.”

- “I don’t want her to be someone she’s not. Don’t add on nonsense…. I just want something nice. Something that people can hold their heads up a little higher about it.”

- “And, I want something that people come to see. I think of the Vietnam Memorial. Something that people are drawn to. Then we can tell the story, but meh ave to draw them in first.”

6. The community wants the memorial to be a lesson to the present and the future.

- “I want people to know her…. That she had a family…. I don’t want to just get caught up in one moment.”

- “That she was a good woman and that she was empathetic. People don’t have a lot of empathy anymore and those traits need to be brought out. Our children don’t learn or see that anymore.”
- “She knew who she was and why she was. That’s important. I think even now a lot of us don’t know that we are a person for our times.”

- “She needs to be strong. Even with the point everyone knows, it doesn’t show her to be weak. It shows her trying to help someone - in our community, we don’t see a lot of representation of people trying to help. We don’t see a lot of women represented either.”

- “For me, the thing that stands out is that she could be SEEN as a woman of color. I think that will gravitate people’s attention.”

- “I want them [girls] to come away knowing that, as women, we need to do a better job in support of Dinah. Everyone has a Dinah in their family, their community, their church, their sorority. Sometimes those people are ostracized because they are taking a stand…. let’s embrace it and understand why people are fighting and what they want to be done.” - - - “Something that would show to young women, in particular, what they could be.”

- “If we can encourage people to learn and encourage people to reach, that’s the important part. Don’t get stuck in the moment…. We must learn about the past to understand the present to get better at the future. We can’t get caught up in slavery; we contributed a lot.”