

United States 250th Anniversary

How is the history community preparing for the 250th anniversary?



Wheat fields near Dodge City, Kansas, 1974.
Credit: Charles O'Rear/National Archives



Revolution 250 event in Boston, Massachusetts.
Credit: Jim Collins Photography/Revolution 250



Ancestral Puebloan dwellings at Cliff Palace, Mesa Verde National Park.
Credit: Boyd Norton/National Archives DOCUMERICA Project

With the help of our U.S. 250th Anniversary Task Force, conversations with partners across the field, and a survey of history organizations in every U.S. state and territory, AASLH has gathered the latest information about the current status of 250th anniversary planning and are pleased to share it with you in the pages that follow.

In 2016, AASLH began convening partners to help us consider the impact of the 250th anniversary on our organization, the field, and the nation. Since that time, this organizing effort has grown and evolved to meet the changing needs of the history community.

Over the past two years, AASLH has worked with our task force and others to develop five goals to help align the work of the field, refining them through listening sessions held at various meetings and conferences. These five key areas—inclusive histories, relevance, funding for history organizations, history education, and collections—can help align the work of history organizations at the national, state, and local level as they prepare for the 250th. This summer, working groups will convene to help articulate ideas, outcomes, and action plans for each of these goal areas.

Moving forward, AASLH will continue to convene stakeholders in preparation for the semiquincentennial. Building upon existing relationships and forging new connections, AASLH will facilitate coordination and collaboration among major partners as we all prepare for the 250th.

Learn more at aaslh.org/250th.

National Planning

U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission & American Battlefield Trust

Over the past year the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission began preparing an overall program for commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States. Even before its first official meeting in Philadelphia in November 2018, the Commission sought to gain perspective by reviewing the work of federal bicentennial planners and the experience of more recent congressional commemorative commissions. Since then, the Commission has been working to establish effective governance so that it can make plans and decisions, lead and empower its staff, and support the participation of stakeholders and partners. The Commission held a strategic planning retreat in Washington, D.C., in March 2019, as part of an ongoing effort to set expectations for both itself and the commemoration as a whole that will culminate with the submission of a statutorily-mandated report to the President in early FY 2020. Securing resources is a challenge for any start-up, and so far the Commission has secured donations and pledges of more than \$1 million dollars in private donations and received a welcome FY 2019 federal appropriation of \$500,000. Finally, the Commission has begun to build relationships with stakeholders and partners through coordination with various federal agencies, outreach to state officials, and most recently in conjunction with its June 2019 meeting in Philadelphia, engaging the first group of stakeholders to provide feedback on its emerging strategic plan.

Befitting a commemorative initiative, historians and history organizations have interacted frequently with the Commission and its Secretariat staff. Historians such as Allen Guelzo, Libby O'Connell, and Richard Josey have spoken at Commission gatherings. History organizations have been well-represented on the guest lists of receptions and dinners held in conjunction with Commission meetings. Representatives from national, state, and local history organizations have begun participating the Commission's strategic planning process. The Commission has also benefited from the insights and ongoing work of the AASLH 250th Task Force described elsewhere in this report. History will play a prominent role in "America 250." The Commission looks forward to its continued collaboration with stakeholders like AASLH and the creative contributions to America 250 that will no doubt arise from the history community across the nation and the world.

Made by U.S.

History Made by U.S., including the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, is a new national movement spearheaded by leading U.S. history organizations who have come together to offer transformational, civic-focused engagements leading up to the Nation's 250th Anniversary in 2026 – and beyond. History Made by U.S. will empower young Americans to know and act on the promise of the founders and to write the next chapter of our democracy. By 2026, they envision a trusted network of history, civic and cultural organizations nationwide collaborating onsite and online to encourage a movement of informed participation in our democracy.

USA250

USA250 was instrumental in assisting in the drafting of federal legislation that created the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission, helping to expand awareness of the importance of 2026 across many sectors and areas of the country. They have shifted focus to the second part of their mission, to promote Philadelphia as the leading destination for national and international visitors in 2026, along with creating lasting legacies for the city and region's residents. They are working with city and state stakeholders to move this vision forward.



Shell Gasoline Sign, Walton, New York.
Credit: John Margolies/Library of Congress



Alabama

Formal planning not yet initiated. Alabama Department of Archives and History and the Alabama Historical Commission will be key points of contact for 250th planning in the state.

Alaska

Formal planning not yet initiated. State history leaders emphasized the importance of the commemoration engaging the history of Alaska Natives and their present-day communities, as well as the history of the West and of U.S. entry into the Pacific.

Arizona

Formal planning not yet initiated. Arizona emphasized the need for the commemoration to have a scope that includes all of American history, including the history of pre-colonial migration.

Arkansas

Formal planning not yet initiated; the Arkansas state historian has been designated the state's principal point of contact for 250th anniversary planning matters.

California

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Colorado

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Connecticut

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Delaware

250th planning for Delaware is being led by the Delaware Heritage Commission. The Commission has formed a semiquincentennial committee, membership of which is still being shaped.

Florida

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Georgia

The Georgia Historical Society plans to provide programming exploring the meaning of American identity at 250 years. They are preparing to launch the effort in 2021, five years in advance of the anniversary.

Hawaii

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Idaho

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Illinois

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Indiana

Formal planning not yet initiated.

State Initiatives



Jazz Musician Dizzy Gillespie, New York City, 1947. Credit: William P. Gottlieb/Library of Congress

Iowa

Informal discussions have begun but no formal planning is currently underway.

Kansas

Formal planning not yet initiated. State leaders expressed the need to include the entire country in commemoration efforts, as well as to emphasize inclusive stories about American history.

Kentucky

Formal planning not yet initiated, but there are preliminary plans to include several statewide heritage and tourism organizations in the commemoration.

Louisiana

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Maine

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Maryland

Informal conversations have begun, with discussion about approaches that embrace diverse communities.

Massachusetts

Fifty-six Organizations have joined "Revolution 250" (a consortium led by Massachusetts Historical Society) to raise awareness around the commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution. Revolution 250 hosted major events in 2015 and 2018 and the state is currently planning for the 250th anniversary of the Boston Massacre (March 2020). Legislation has been filed for the creation of a state commission. Changes in the eighth grade curriculum have been made to include a civics module focused on the connection between the protests leading to the American Revolution and the Bill of Rights.

Michigan

Formal planning not yet initiated; state leaders have emphasized that regional partnerships will be useful for advancing shared goals.

Minnesota

Formal planning not yet initiated; state leaders have suggested that Native American history will likely be a point of focus.

Mississippi

Formal planning not yet initiated.

State Initiatives

Missouri

Formal planning not yet initiated; state leaders have emphasized the need for an inclusive commemoration built upon collaboration with history, humanities, and arts organizations.

Montana

Formal planning not yet initiated; like other western states, Montana has expressed the importance of Native American history to the commemoration.

Nebraska

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Nevada

Conversations about future exhibitions and programming have begun within the Nevada Division of Museums and History.

New Hampshire

Formal planning not yet initiated.

New Jersey

New Jersey passed legislation in June 2018 charging the New Jersey Historical Commission (NJHC) with preparing for the Semiquincentennial and calling for a \$500,000 annual appropriation for ten years. NJHC selected Crossroads of the American Revolution as their non-profit partner in October 2018. The NJHC hired a public historian to develop history programming for the anniversary, and Crossroads selected consultants to undertake a comprehensive capital needs assessment of the more than 140 sites in the state that have connections to the Revolution. The NJHC is also undertaking a comprehensive survey of K-12 history education in the state.

New Mexico

Informal conversations have begun between state agencies and external stakeholders. State leaders have emphasized importance of a broad temporal and geographic scope for the commemoration.

New York

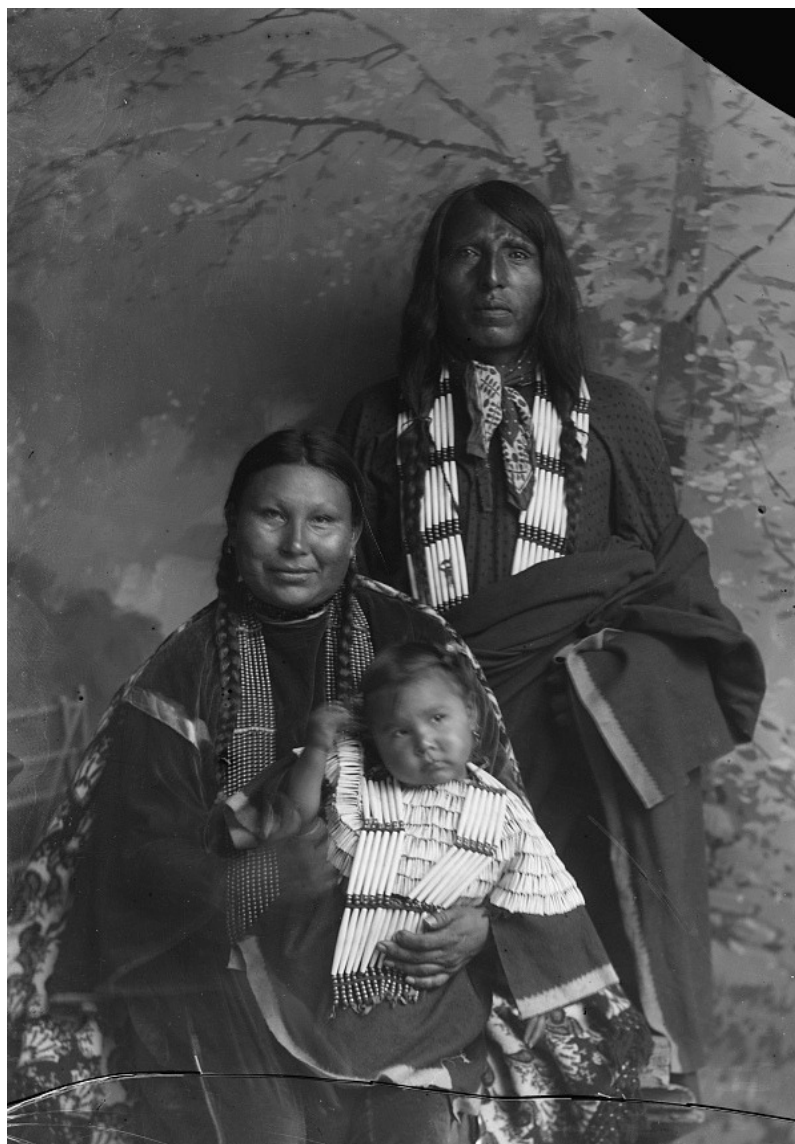
Led by the New York state historian, history stakeholders in New York have begun meeting to discuss the 250th anniversary.

North Carolina

North Carolina has established a statewide planning committee for the 250th and devised an initial list of commemoration activities for the state. Statewide themes are to include "Revolutionary North Carolina" and "When Are We US?"

North Dakota

No response received.



Little Dog with wife and child (ca. 1890s). Credit: C.M. Bell/Library of Congress

Ohio

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Oklahoma

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Oregon

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Pennsylvania

In 2018, the state formed the Pennsylvania Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial. That commission has discussed an ambitious effort to commemorate the anniversary in all counties in the state. They have also expressed the goal to educate all citizens of the Commonwealth about the state and nation's history up to the present, and to offer educational grant opportunities for young people.

Rhode Island

Formal planning not yet initiated.

State Initiatives



Shepherd with his horse and dog on Gravelly Range, Madison County, Montana.
Credit: Lee Russell/Library of Congress

South Carolina

In 2018, South Carolina established the South Carolina American Revolution Sestercentennial Commission, providing the commission the authority to plan and execute the state's observance of the 250th anniversary. The commission brings together representatives from the state's Department of Archives and History and Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, in addition to other appointees.

South Dakota

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Tennessee

In 2019, the state enacted legislation establishing the Tennessee Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial. The commission is to be attached to the state's Department of Tourist Development and will include leaders of the state's historical society, historical commission, state library and archives, and state chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution and Daughters of the American Revolution.

Texas

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Utah

Preparations are being made to establish a state Semiquincentennial Commission.

Vermont

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Virginia

An informal, statewide planning group, RevolutionaryVA250, meets twice a year to collaborate and coordinate efforts. The group has been recognized through resolutions by the state's House of Delegates and State Senate. They are also working with national planning partners and a state tourism organization to conduct audience research.

Washington

The Washington State Historical Society continues as the informal leader of state planning efforts around the 250th anniversary. They have emphasized the need for a historical and geographical scope that extends beyond the Revolutionary Era and the East Coast.

West Virginia

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Wisconsin

Formal planning not yet initiated, but informal conversations have begun.

Wyoming

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Washington, D.C.

No response received.

U.S. Territory Initiatives

American Samoa

Formal planning not yet initiated.

Guam

No response received.

Northern Mariana Islands

Formal planning not yet initiated. The 250th anniversary in 2026 will also be 50th anniversary of the signing of the "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States."

Puerto Rico

Formal planning not yet initiated.

U.S. Virgin Islands

No response received.