

United States 250th Anniversary

2018 REPORT



In 2026, the United States will commemorate its semiquincentennial anniversary.

Though eight years may seem like a long time, planning has already begun. Where will the history field—and the nation—be in 2026? What kinds of challenges will we be facing? What kinds of opportunities for collaboration, public engagement, and big ideas might the semiquincentennial offer?

These are just a few of the many questions facing AASLH's 250th anniversary task force. With members from leading institutions throughout the United States, the task force (along with a broader advisory committee), is thinking broadly about the challenges and opportunities the 250th anniversary will present to the field and developing plans to prepare for them. The "250th Task Force" will serve as a clearinghouse of information about field-wide efforts, helping connect individuals and institutions around the country. Likewise, we hope to help the history community make the most of the 250th anniversary, providing recommendations and aspirations that can help align the efforts of stakeholders across the public history spectrum.

Have ideas, suggestions, questions, or feedback about the 250th anniversary? Fill out our survey! on.aaslh.org/US250fgs

AASLH 250th Task Force

Sara Cureton (Chair), Director, New Jersey Historical Commission
Jody Blankenship, Executive Director Connecticut Historical Society
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Kevin Cherry, Deputy Secretary, N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
John Dichtl, President & CEO, AASLH
Linnea Grim, Hunter J. Smith Director of Education and Visitor Programs, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello
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Jennifer Kilmer, Executive Director, Washington State Historical Society
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Estevan Rael-Gálvez, Principal, Creative Strategies 360°
Lee White, Executive Director, National Coalition for History Staff
John Marks, Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives, AASLH

GRAND ASPIRATIONS

What can we achieve for the 250th anniversary? With the help of partners around the field, AASLH and the 250th task force have developed grand aspirations for how the semiquincentennial could positively affect public engagement with history. But this is just a start. We hope these broad aspirations will inspire history practitioners—including you!—to suggest some ambitious goals we can shoot for in the lead-up to 2026.



Emphasize history's **relevance** to every American, every day.

Tell an **inclusive story** about the American past.



Increase **funding** for history.

Enhance the public's **engagement** with history **collections**.



Highlight the importance of history **education**.

*Have ideas and feedback about the aspirations? Ideas for exciting new ways we might pursue them? Let us know!
on.aaslh.org/US250fgs*

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES

Around the country, major planning and programming initiatives have already begun. New entities—consortia, commissions, and nonprofits—have emerged, and existing institutions have begun collaborating to prepare for the 250th anniversary. Below is a short summary of some of the most prominent developments.

US Congressional Semiquincentennial Commission

The Commission was authorized by Congress in 2016 and has bi-partisan membership from both houses of Congress and sixteen private citizens appointed by Congressional leadership, in addition to the leaders of several related federal agencies as ex officio members. The commission is tasked with preparing recommendations for the commemoration of 250 years of American history in 2026; it will meet in Philadelphia's Independence Hall in November 2018. The Commission is led by Chairperson Daniel DiLella (Equus Capital Partners) and Executive Director Frank Giordano (Philly POPS).

American Battlefield Trust

In May, the American Battlefield Trust was selected by the Department of the Interior to serve as the national nonprofit partner to the US Semiquincentennial Commission, working in tandem with the Commission to plan and coordinate the commemoration. Primarily known for preserving battlefields of the American Revolution, War of 1812, and Civil War, the Trust is an active proponent of history education. The Trust's commitment to historic preservation and education, along with its record of private-sector fundraising success, will be welcome additions to planning for the Semiquincentennial.

battlefields.org

USA250

USA250 views the USA's 250th anniversary in 2026 as a once-in-generations opportunity to bring the nation together and inspire civic renewal leading into and through 2026. Headquartered in Philadelphia, the nonprofit is researching best practices for major events and historical initiatives. They are developing cross-sector partnerships to advance Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness as the nation enters its next 250 years.

usa250.org.

Revolution 250

Revolution 250, a consortium of more than 45 nonprofit, for-profit and government entities, is already executing commemorative events in the lead up to the War for Independence. Understanding the events that took place in Massachusetts from 1768 to 1775 is crucial to understanding the mindset of 18th-century colonists and their eventual turn to thoughts of independency. This October will feature their first major 250th Anniversary reenactment, "Boston Occupied: An Insolent Parade", with the arrival of British Troops in Boston. Successful programs in the areas of preservation and education have also started.

revolution250.org

Made by US

The "MadeByUS" movement is a new national initiative that will connect citizens across the nation to an unparalleled network of more than 1,000 history, civic, and cultural organizations by 2026. It is supported by a founding group of 21 leading history organizations and led by a six-member steering committee: the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Monticello's Thomas Jefferson Foundation, New-York Historical Society, Senator John Heinz History Center, and Atlanta History Center. This national coalition will learn from and support one another, promote national themes that activate the power of history, support educational curricula, and champion US history and civics education and dialogue as a bedrock for our democracy.

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STATE INITIATIVES

Around the country, organizations at the state level have begun to prepare for the 250th anniversary, AASLH has surveyed the leaders of state history organizations, and some common themes have emerged. States hope for an **inclusive commemoration** that includes all Americans, across the entire country—not just the former thirteen colonies—as well as the required **funding** that is essential to making these initiatives a success.

Massachusetts

Through Revolution 250, Massachusetts has public events planned beginning this fall. Because New England was home to many of the historical developments that preceded the Declaration of Independence, the 250th anniversary there starts a bit earlier than elsewhere in the US.

New Jersey

In New Jersey, the state's Historical Commission has partnered with the American Revolution National Heritage area to begin planning for the 250th. The state has also passed legislation designating the NJ Historical Commission the state's leader for this planning, including an annual appropriation to support the work.

North Carolina

North Carolina's Office of Archives and History has created an internal planning committee, met with superintendents of national parks within the state, and been in contact with several private, nonprofit lineage and patriotic groups about forming an external advisory committee for the state-run commemoration.

Pennsylvania

In 2018, the state of Pennsylvania created a statewide Semiquincentennial Commission, tasked with planning, coordinating, and implementing commemoration activities in and about the state. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in particular is planning exhibits and programs at their state museum and other sites.

South Carolina

South Carolina's General Assembly in 2017 passed legislation creating the South Carolina American Revolution Sestercentennial Commission.

Virginia

In Virginia, several of the state's leading museums and history organizations have begun working collaboratively to plan for the 250th anniversary, developing key themes related to history and making the Revolution relevant today.

Washington

Designated by state law as the leader for statewide commemorations, the Washington State Historical Society is using their experience with recent anniversaries (Lewis and Clark bicentennial, state 125th anniversary, Women's Suffrage centennial) to inform their planning.

Where were we 50 years ago?

At the AASLH Annual Meeting in 1968, then-president Russel W. Fridley discussed the ongoing planning for the Bicentennial of the American Revolution, noting: "history can bring perspective to a society in turmoil....[It] can equate contemporary problems with past fears and can offer a measure of comfort. It can demonstrate that there is no need to despair."