

250th ANNIVERSARY PROGRAM HANDBOOK



YOUR GUIDE TO PLANNING
for the U.S. Semiquincentennial



The American Association for State and Local History is a national professional association dedicated to helping the history community thrive. For the better part of a century, AASLH has provided leadership and resources to its members, who preserve and interpret history to make the past more meaningful to all people.



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The **250th Anniversary Program Handbook** was prepared in collaboration with history and museum professionals from across the field.

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Contents

Preparing for the Semiquincentennial	4
A Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity	6
Let’s Begin! A Pre-Program Checklist	8
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Programming Ideas	9
K–12 and Youth Programs	9
Communities Doing History	14
Expanded Tour Offerings	16
Reimagining Exhibitions	18
Social and Digital Media	20
Civic Engagement	21
History-Themed Gatherings	22
<hr/>	
Doing History for Everyone	10
Recommendations for Collaboration	12

PREPARING FOR THE Semiquincentennial

The year 2026 marks the 250th anniversary, or Semiquincentennial, of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, marking the formal founding of the United States. This anniversary is an opportunity for history organizations of all sizes, missions, and locations—including yours!—to help audiences explore and learn from our shared American history. Through your efforts to commemorate the Semiquincentennial, you can demonstrate how history remains relevant to people’s lives today. This anniversary offers a chance for history organizations to build stronger connections with the people in our communities. Through an approach to history that tells everyone’s stories, history organizations can help individuals and communities learn from the past and make progress toward a better future. By offering relevant, creative, and sustainable programs and services during the Semiquincentennial, history museums, historical societies, and other organizations can demonstrate their value to communities across the nation, generating support for history that can last for generations.

This handbook offers simple, sustainable ideas to inspire your planning for the Semiquincentennial.

Developing plans for a commemoration of this scale, however, can seem daunting. To help history organizations prepare, AASLH is proud to offer this **250th Anniversary Program Handbook**. It offers dozens of simple, specific, and sustainable ideas that can serve as inspiration for organizations and sites of all kinds as they create plans to mark the Semiquincentennial. The handbook combines concrete program ideas with guidance on what makes this anniversary different, how to

THE FIVE THEMES

- Unfinished Revolutions
- Power of Place
- We the People
- American Experiment
- Doing History

connect these ideas to the national commemoration effort, and how to carry out these programs in a way that most effectively connects with the people in your community, wherever that may be. You can scale up or scale down each of the program ideas that follow to fit the budget, capacity, and context of your specific organization, as well as the interests and needs of the audiences you serve or would like to reach out to in 2026.

As you consider how your organization might observe the 250th, remember you do not necessarily have to create something new! Instead, you can think about how you might maximize the reach of existing collections, assets, programs, partnerships, and other resources by connecting them to the national commemoration effort. You can also consider how you can use this occasion to advance work that was already in the planning stages. It might be useful, for example, to draw on the five themes in AASLH’s ***Making History at 250: The Field Guide for the Semiquincentennial*** to find new ways to frame your programs. Reframing existing materials with these themes not only helps to keep costs down, but it can also help you connect your content more directly to the anniversary.

We encourage you to use this handbook to join us in working to activate the transformative potential this anniversary can have on our field, on the nation, and most importantly, at your own organization and in your community. By commemorating the 250th anniversary, your organization can contribute to a more widely shared understanding of American history.

A Once-in-a-Generation OPPORTUNITY

You might still be asking yourself, “Why should we participate in this anniversary? Why should we put the effort into doing something new?” As we explore in the ***Making History at 250 Field Guide***, this anniversary offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reintroduce history to our communities across the country and to build a stronger foundation of shared historical understanding. Below, you’ll find additional ways the 250th presents unique possibilities for history organizations.

Tell everyone’s story

The 250th is a chance for history organizations to renew our efforts to share the full, complicated histories of our communities and our nation. Making sure the history we share reflects the stories of all the members of our community doesn’t just help make our organizations more inviting to the people we serve; it helps us offer more accurate, more complete history. The anniversary is also a chance for history organizations to learn from the communities they serve, listening to their voices, experiences, and perspectives to do better historical work. By re-evaluating old ways of doing things and expanding the stories we tell—and the way that we tell them—we can deepen the public’s appreciation for history, especially local history, and help everyone in our audiences see themselves and others as part of this country’s story.

Get audiences doing history

The 250th anniversary can also help build a wider appreciation for history among your audiences by inviting them into the process of “doing” history. By bringing members of your community into the process of historical research and interpretation, organizations can help people better understand that history work is like detective work: it requires us to consult all the available evidence, use different

methods to understand it, and to update our stories as we learn new things. As we approach 2026, history organizations can bring people behind the scenes of the historical process and encourage them to use their critical thinking skills to discover the meaning of documents and objects. These activities can even improve your interpretation, as members of your community who are new to your organization contribute their own objects, stories, and perspectives. Involving community members in the work we do increases their engagement and excitement while deepening their understanding of the sometimes ambiguous and always-evolving nature of history.

Build and strengthen collaborations

People and organizations far outside the history community will engage with the Semiquincentennial. This rare moment of shared focus can be a real asset to history museums and related organizations. It offers an opportunity to build or strengthen relationships with local nonprofits, cultural organizations, or other groups in your community that can last long after the anniversary has ended. This shared moment of national significance can help you reach new audiences, establish new partnerships, and demonstrate your organization’s value to the community.

Invest in the future

The time, money, and other resources you spend preparing for the 250th anniversary don’t disappear in 2026—it’s an investment in the future of your organization. The new programs or services you develop for the Semiquincentennial can serve your audiences and support your mission long after this anniversary ends. The new relationships you form can be the start of long-term partnerships. The work you do now to build a healthier organization will continue to be a source of strength well into the future. As you think about how your organization will participate in the commemoration, think about the impact those actions will have after 2026 as well.

LET'S BEGIN!

A Pre-Program Checklist

The following checklist outlines basic steps for designing audience-centered programs that align with your mission. The complexity of program development can vary widely depending on your resources, timeline, and other factors. Doing the work in phases can make the process more effective no matter how big (or small) your program idea is.

Lay the foundation and set parameters

- Articulate the goals of the program or service.
- Identify the audience(s) you want to reach and their needs.
- Define what success looks like and how you will measure it.
- Identify the constraints that will shape the work (e.g., budget, time, staff, etc.).
- Identify potential partners and other stakeholders.

Brainstorm and plan

- Brainstorm ideas that build on your foundation and fall within the parameters you set. This is a great place to use the program ideas featured in this handbook!
- Evaluate ideas and share them with staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders to determine which are the best options.
- Choose the program or service idea that best fits your mission, parameters, and interests.
- Write a project plan that defines and assigns the necessary roles, responsibilities, and timelines. Who is doing what? When will they do it?

Implement

- Carry out your plan, ensuring that you are staying on schedule and on budget, as well as aligned with your goals.
- Use your and your partners' networks—social media, print, TV/radio, email, etc.—to market the program/service.


Follow-up

- Identify lessons learned from this program to inform future program development. For example:
 - Hold a meeting to talk about what went well and how you might improve the program in the future, including how you may apply lessons learned to other programs or collaborations.
 - Write up the lessons in a short report. Don't forget to include numbers about attendance and budgets.


Programming Ideas

Use the following ideas as inspiration for your Semiquincentennial plans. Feel free to adapt the programs and services to fit your organization's needs and parameters.

Look for these icons throughout this handbook:

 Learn more about this type of program through the accompanying "Program Spotlight."

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT 

 This project may require extra time, expertise, or technical assistance; plan accordingly.

K-12 AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

Introduce younger generations to the idea that history is more than dates and facts—it's about people's lives and why what happened yesterday matters today. Studying history helps younger learners build knowledge and critical thinking skills, enhances civic engagement, establishes stronger links between their curriculum standards and their local history, connects them to their communities, and yields future audiences and donors for your organization.

Girl Scout Programs and Workshops at the Elk Grove Historical Museum & Society

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT 

The **Elk Grove Historical Museum & Society** (IL) offers various programs and workshops throughout the year to help local Girl Scouts earn history-related badges. By connecting the museum's collection, grounds, and other natural and historic resources with the badge programs already provided by the Girl Scouts, the Elk Grove Historical Museum offers a way to help young, local residents become more familiar with the museum and its history while they work toward their own scouting goals. For example, the museum helps scouts use GPS to search for items on the museum campus, learn about Indigenous storytelling, and practice early twentieth-century crafts—all of which count toward existing Girl Scouts badges. This program is a great example of connecting a museum or historical society's expertise and assets with an outside partner organization to create a valuable experience for everyone involved.

◆ **Essay/speaking contest**

Sponsor an essay writing or public speaking competition for local students. Use one of the **Making History at 250** themes to create a prompt and encourage contestants to use local history to explore it. Partner with your local library and reach out to your school district office to find teachers who might be interested in collaborating with you. Motivate participation by offering all participants free visits to your site and providing a prize or small scholarship for the winner. Participants could also submit their essays or projects to America250's "America's Field Trip" competition.

◆ **After-school, camps, and vacation programs**

Connect with youth in after-school programs, summer camps, or community organizations to help them share their stories. Engage youth in doing community research or have them connect their personal stories and culture to the 250th themes. They could use their research to produce a small online or physical exhibit, social media posts, history-themed artwork, or public presentation that will help you reach new audiences and

put students' talents to use. You can also offer themed summer camps or school vacation day programs, especially by repackaging existing camps or vacation programs to connect with 250th themes.

◆ **Scouting programs** 🌐

Partner with a local scouting group to offer a program that will help them earn a badge or work on a local 250th-related project. Think creatively about how your collection, landscapes, or other resources might be used to create learning opportunities and connect with existing scouting badge programs. Reach out to the scout leaders in the area to find out what topics or activities their group is interested in and how you can offer support.

- SIX YOUTH PROGRAMS:**
- **Essay/speaking contest**
 - **After-school, camps, and vacation programs**
 - **Scouting programs**
 - **History/civics day showcases**
 - **Activity booklets**
 - **Virtual field trips**

DOING HISTORY FOR EVERYONE

History organizations offer unique spaces for the public to encounter our country's whole history. Our work offers people a chance to gain, develop, or enhance their critical thinking skills as they explore the nation's past, present, and future. Taking thoughtful, intentional steps to make sure that everyone in our community sees their history represented at our organization can help us offer interpretations of the past that are more complete and more accurate. Our preparations for the 250th anniversary provide a new opportunity to consider who our organizations have traditionally served, how we can serve new audiences in the future, and how we can have a greater impact on our community.

The following questions can help you to frame your internal conversations in advance of the Semiquincentennial, whether you are developing new programs or adapting existing ones.

Key questions

- Are we providing a variety of perspectives through our programming, collaborations, exhibits, collections, and other content?
- What questions can we ask about our existing collections and programs—or absences within them—to share stories that include a wider range of historical perspectives?

- How can we amplify the voices of community groups who have been left out of our organization's work in the past, and how can we include them in our planning for programs and services?
- How are we providing a welcoming and accessible environment for all audiences? Have we thought about the need for language translations, physically accessible spaces, opportunities to provide programming outside of our traditional venue, or other measures?

In developing programs and services for the Semiquincentennial, we encourage history practitioners to draw on external resources and assistance as they carry out this work. Many states provide tips and training to local history organizations through the state historical society, humanities council, or other statewide field services provider. AASLH's Standards and Excellence Program (STEPS) provides a self-paced workbook to assess whether your approach to interpretation aligns with national standards. AASLH also offers an array of other resources, such as technical leaflets and webinars, to assist you in program planning.

For additional resources to help with this work, visit [AASLH.org/250](https://www.aaslh.org/250).

◆ **History/civics day showcases**

Host the local or state edition of a National History Day or Civics Day showcase to display students' research projects. These showcases provide students with a venue to share and talk about their research on historical or civics topics. Your local school district office, state department of education, or **National History Day** will have information on how to get involved with these types of events.

◆ **Activity booklets** ⓘ

Write a kid-friendly activity book (like the **National Park Service Junior Ranger booklets**) to guide young people through your exhibitions or community. Partner with a local teacher and their students to find out what topics may be of interest. You could even invite the students to co-author the book with you.

◆ **Virtual field trips** ⓘ

Offer a virtual visit on a special 250th theme that connects to your local history to reduce barriers for students who may otherwise not be able to make the trip. A virtual field trip, using Zoom, Google Meet, or similar software, can be as simple as you and a webcam, or as elaborate as a multi-camera, multi-staff member production. Go beyond showing-and-telling, and create opportunities for students to interact with you, each other, and the objects and documents that you share.

Through programming serving students, you can help young people build knowledge and critical thinking skills, enhance civic engagement, and connect them to their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLABORATION

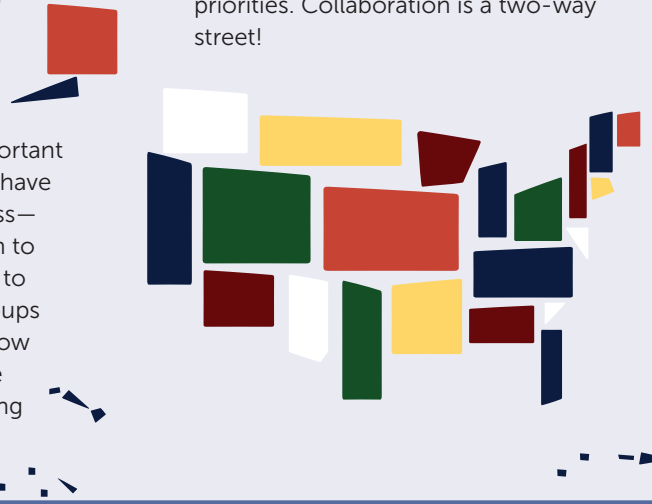
The 250th anniversary presents an opportunity to develop or strengthen collaborations with other organizations or groups in your community. Partnerships offer ways to create more innovative programs, expand your circle of stakeholders, incorporate different perspectives and expertise, and reach new audiences. Not all collaborations look the same, so you will need to approach each collaboration thoughtfully to find out what works for you and your partners.

Tips

- **Bring more voices to your circle**
When telling the stories of people whose history or perspective your organization has not typically included, collaborations with outside groups can be a productive way to gain expertise and insights that your existing staff and volunteers may not possess. In addition to identifying shared goals, it is important that these community members have a voice all throughout the process—from planning to implementation to evaluation. Be sure to truly listen to the unique perspective these groups bring to the conversation and allow their input to meaningfully shape the direction of your programming or interpretation.

- **Identify shared goals**
When approaching a collaboration with local organizations or community groups, begin by building a trusting, reciprocal relationship and identifying a common purpose and priorities. Collaboration is a two-way street!

- **Seek outside help**
Field service offices and other museum service providers offer workshops, training, and other resources that may be helpful for you as you consider how to approach collaborations with outside groups. You may consider finding training for your staff or volunteers to help them better understand systemic barriers and historical divides, respond to cultural differences, and increase awareness of specific cultural traditions.



For additional resources to help with this work, visit [AASLH.org/250](https://aaslh.org/250).

COMMUNITIES DOING HISTORY

Inviting people from across your community to “do” history at your organization and share their stories provides them with a venue to learn from each other, with hopes of fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging an interest in local history.

The Mass Memories Road Show with UMass Boston and Local Partners

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

The **Mass Memories Road Show** is a statewide, event-based participatory archiving program. Led by the University of Massachusetts-Boston in collaboration with community partners, the program documents people, places, and events in Massachusetts history through family photographs and stories. Staff partner with local volunteers to organize events where individuals bring photographs to be scanned into a large digital archive. Contributors describe the photo in their own words and can even share a video to provide the “story behind the photo.” These local events have digitized more than 12,000 photographs and stories since their launch two decades ago. Although this program is large, a simpler, more localized version could provide an excellent opportunity to engage with community members and provide them an opportunity to contribute their story to your organization in a very tangible way.

Memories Road Show

Plan and host a “Memories Road Show” program by inviting community members to bring objects, documents, photographs, and other historical material they find meaningful. Create opportunities for them to discuss the items with the organization’s staff and volunteers and share with fellow community members. You could even document the items for inclusion in an online community history database. Partner with local libraries (they might have scanning or photography equipment) and host these events in various community locations to allow for wider participation.

Open archive program

Hold an **open archive event** to get community members interested in their local history. Display samples from the varied items in your collection or, if you don’t have a collection, you can partner with an organization that does, and then help members of the community analyze one of the items. Allow attendees to interact with and analyze the items whenever possible. The Library of Congress offers **worksheets** for guiding audiences on interacting with a range of primary sources.

Genealogy night

You can also encourage community members to connect with their history using your archive or collections by hosting a special genealogy night. Although many organizations regularly serve genealogists, hosting a special event can be an opportunity for genealogists to gather and take on their work in a more community-oriented setting. Even for residents who recently arrived in your community (and might not be reflected in your collections), you can help them learn how to use online genealogy software and other tools to find their family, wherever they were from. The **National Archives** offers some tips for beginning genealogical research.

Student research projects

Partner with a local teacher or college professor to make your organization’s resources more accessible for student research. Teachers and professors may be interested in projects that connect with a 250th theme or undertaking new research on a story not currently represented in your exhibitions or online resources. Before you begin, consider preparing a list of topics that your resources cover to help focus the research. Contact the social studies curriculum coordinator in your district or the department head at the local college or university to find a partner.

Oral history program

Gather oral histories from your community. You can host a **DIY oral history event to teach** community members how to do interviews, then invite them to record their interviews and submit the recordings. Partner with a local school or college and train students to conduct interviews. Be sure to share **standard practices and techniques** with interviewers. **StoryCorps** offers great resources for getting started with oral histories. Post the recordings and transcripts on your website so everyone can learn from and enjoy them.

National Register of Historic Places training

Offer workshops or webinars on how to submit a house, property, or commercial/civic building for listing on the **National Register of Historic Places**. Connect with the staff of your State Historic Preservation Office, Tribal Historic Preservation Office, or local historic commission for resources and guidance on leading these types of programs. They may also have information on tax incentives and funding opportunities to help community members help steward the built environment.

EXPANDED TOUR OFFERINGS

Providing your audience with in-depth, place-based experiences offers them new ways to explore your collections, content, and community. This is also an opportunity to layer the 250th themes over your existing tours to help audiences gain deeper understandings of your stories.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

“Overcoming Segregation: A Journey Through Coffee County’s Forgotten Stories” with the Coffee County Historical Society and Coffee County Memory Project

In 2023, all-volunteer Coffee County Historical Society (GA) won an AASLH Award of Excellence for their project documenting stories of federally mandated school desegregation in Coffee County, Georgia. Available to anyone with access to the internet, the digital walking tour highlights twenty-one sites around the county crucial to the story of desegregation. Each “stop” features stories from community members, newspaper articles, and photographs to provide detailed histories and memories of the county’s experience with school desegregation. To carry out the project, volunteers from the historical society partnered with the Coffee County Memory Project to collect oral histories. They also received support from the state humanities council and several local universities.

Community-led tours

Collaborate with community historians or culture-bearers—people deeply rooted in the heritage, traditions, and lifeways of your community—to lead walking tours of nearby neighborhoods, heritage areas, or cemeteries. Reach out to local neighborhood associations or cultural groups to connect with the community members most familiar with their stories. Community-led tours are a wonderful way to amplify the expertise of local residents and bring in different perspectives while highlighting the stories of interesting places and people in your community.

Innovative approaches to K–12 tours

Work with local schools (or homeschool organizations) to develop a special tour or other learning experience to showcase your organization’s strengths, connect with the 250th themes, and align with topics students are studying. You could also work with a group of middle school or high school students to have them develop tours of exhibitions or historically/culturally significant places in your community. Connecting your content directly to the curriculum frameworks and what students are learning—and

involving them in the process—will motivate teachers to collaborate, make the material more relevant for students, and help bring young people and their adults through your doors.

Audio tours

Create self-guided audio tours to provide community members and visitors with a way to explore the history all around them. Record a self-guided audio tour that connects an existing exhibition to one of the 250th themes or a walking tour of historically significant places in your community. Upload the audio files to a cloud drive, like Google Drive, and put links to the audio files on a page on your website. Visitors can go to that webpage on their phones and click on the links to hear the audio files.

- For exhibits, place QR codes next to extant text panels so people can easily scan them to access the audio files. For community tours, link to the content through QR codes that you post around town and provide visitors with a map featuring the QR codes for each point of interest. Offer free Wi-Fi and printed copies of the script to increase accessibility.

Walking tours

Many organizations have created innovative walking tours using an app (such as Clio) or other service provider. A walking tour that users can access from their phone enables your organization to connect photographs, documents, and objects with significant places in your community. It also provides a way for residents and visitors alike to better appreciate your city or town’s historic places and properties. Walking tours can even help your organization serve people who might not come to your physical location. You could also consider teaming with the library to provide devices (tablets, etc.) with pre-loaded content that people can check out!

Reminder:

- Learn more about this type of program through the accompanying “Program Spotlight.”
- ⓘ This project may require extra time, expertise, or technical assistance; plan accordingly.

REIMAGINING EXHIBITIONS

Showing off your collection or partnering with an organization to help them display their collection in creative, small-scale 250th-themed exhibitions provides visitors with an opportunity to reexamine objects, documents, and stories in a new context.

“Little Compton Women’s History Project” at Little Compton Historical Society

To honor the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment in 2020, the Little Compton Historical Society (RI) produced a banner exhibit that featured biographies of women from the town. They solicited participation from community members, who submitted more than 300 biographies. They also researched historical figures unknown to the public. With the help of the local sign shop, the historical society turned 60 of these biographies into vinyl banners that were displayed outdoors during the COVID-19 epidemic. The historical society nailed banners to the building exteriors and removed them before storms. They even created a scavenger hunt to engage young visitors. Little Compton Historical Society made these panels freely available as PDFs for others to use, and they have kept the hundreds of women’s biographies available on their website. The organization is building on the success of the exhibit by planning a similar outdoor banner project for the 250th highlighting the stories of the town’s patriots, including narratives of people of color, women, and children.



Tip: Banners with grommets are easily portable.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Label trail

Create a special “label trail,” a series of temporary labels in an existing exhibition that uses the 250th themes to provide new context for stories and artifacts. Invite a guest curator—artist, historian, community member, or students—to write the labels.

Pop-up exhibit

Use easily transportable panels, banners, or a limited number of artifacts to create a small, temporary exhibit that connects to one of the 250th themes. It can range from an object and printed label in your lobby to a temporary installation somewhere other than your building.

- Partner with a local business (e.g., bank, restaurant, retail store) to mount small exhibits in their windows or interiors. Work with your local Chamber of Commerce to help forge these partnerships. Store fronts may not always be ideal locations for original artifacts, so use duplicate items and copies of photographs and documents to protect original items.
- Increase your organization’s visibility by hosting an exhibit at various locations in your community—library branches, government buildings, schools, and houses of worship.
- If you don’t have the resources to create your own traveling exhibition, consider hosting a traveling exhibition from another organization—like [Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service](#)—and add a small section that connects the topic to your community’s story.

Community-curated exhibit

Work with a community group, by providing resources and guidance, to assemble objects into an exhibit that represent their experiences and perspectives. Help prepare community groups to design their own exhibits by hosting workshops on exhibition development, including research and interpretation. This can also be a great starting point to help identify gaps in your collections and seek out items from communities whose history is not adequately represented at your organization.

Community photo contest exhibit

Conduct a photo contest asking your community members to take pictures of what democracy, freedom, or another 250th theme means to them. Then, host an exhibit either at your site or another site in your community. This is a great opportunity to connect with members of your community who are outside of your traditional audience and bring their ideas and vision into your organization. Be sure to outline rules for the contest—and offer prizes! This can also work as an online exhibit or social media series.

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Sharing your community's stories and collections through social and other digital media outlets helps you get your stories out to the world by reaching a wider audience. Photographs and pithy, engaging pieces of text are essential for attracting engagement.



"Museum Moments" with the Elgin History Museum

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

In 2022, the Elgin History Museum (IL) won an Award of Excellence from AASLH for their "Museum Moments" video project. Through this initiative, the museum produced twenty short-form videos that shared seldom-seen objects, documents, and photographs from their collection, using them to share unique insights in local historical moments. The videos were then shared on YouTube, social media, and local television, as well as inside the museum. Through creative outreach, the project not only allowed the museum to share lesser-known artifacts from their collection, it helped them reach new audiences, forge partnerships, and instill a sense of community pride.

Social media posts

Display objects from your collection or stories about your community that fit with the AASLH *Making History at 250* themes (or other themes you find meaningful) in social media posts. Keep posts brief and engaging—40 words or less. Layer in additional information with links to pages on your website or other documents. You might try hosting a live Instagram or Facebook event with a partner organization or asking students to film short, casual videos. Certain brands of collection software, like PastPerfect, have add-ons that make it easy to share your collections via your website.

Today in history

Take your visitors on a journey through their community's history at different points of the Revolutionary era—or other eras that connect thematically—with a daily "Today in History" post. You might even consider partnering with a local high school history class and having them write a series of posts based on local history topics. This type of project gives students real-world writing experience and the joy of seeing their work published.

Podcasts and videos

Produce a podcast or video series based on local history stories. You could explore a single theme across many eras, deeply investigate a single time period or person, or other thematic approaches to organizing episodes. Work with a local student or youth groups to research, write, and record episodes.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Encourage your community to explore how learning about our history, government, and democratic institutions can inspire greater participation in the community's civic life. History organizations are uniquely poised to help their communities see how civic engagement has affected the course of history—starting before the founding of the United States and continuing to the present day.



"Germans in West Chicago" at the West Chicago City Museum

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

In conjunction with the city's 175th anniversary, the West Chicago City Museum held both in-person and virtual programs exploring the history of nineteenth-century German immigrants to the city. Not only did this program help members of the West Chicago community to learn more about the history of immigration to the city they call home, but it provided engaging opportunities to discuss how the immigrant experience in the city today has changed, and how it has stayed the same. This program offered an excellent way of leveraging a major anniversary to serve community needs and explore the important connections between the past and the present.

Voter registration and polling

Conduct voter registration drives or serve as a polling location. This brings people into your building and can help them make a connection between civics and history. Reach out to your local elections commission and ask about the requirements.

Citizenship ceremonies

Host citizenship ceremonies to help create a bond between new citizens and your community. Provide each new citizen with a family membership to your site or organization as a congratulatory gift. Contact your local Federal Courthouse for details on how to serve as a host site.

Community town hall

Hold a gathering to talk about issues or concerns that have affected your community in the past and present. For example, explore and compare experiences of historical and current immigrant groups, or the history of voting rights in your community, or many other subjects. Team up with local cultural groups or civic organizations for on-the-ground insights. Connect with national civics celebrations and host your events during Civic Learning Week or Made By Us's Civic Season. Be sure to sharpen your facilitation skills or bring in a professional facilitator to moderate the event.

HISTORY-THEMED GATHERINGS

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

“Tavern Talks” with the New Jersey Historical Commission

As part of their leadership of planning for the Semiquincentennial, the New Jersey Historical Commission and its nonprofit partner, Crossroads of the American Revolution, have lead the state’s 250th planning effort, have introduced a “Tavern Talks” program to facilitate conversations about history in the state’s many local breweries. Connecting residents with historical reenactors over a common interest in history (and beer!), the program provides an informal setting for people to discuss the state’s history and its connections to the present. Although this program is both large-scale and ambitious, it could be just as effective as a one-time program bringing local historians and members of the community together to discuss history, guided by a set of questions or common reading.

Game day

Gather the community to play historical, cultural, or historically-themed contemporary games—whether physical games, board games, or games of chance. Look online for examples of historical games or consult with a local cultural group to learn about their traditional pastimes.

Trivia night

Find out where your target audience spends time together, or a place that already hosts a trivia night, and bring the event to them by hosting a history trivia night at a local bar or similar venue. This is a win-win-win program: it brings people to a local business, raises the profile of your organization, and shows participants that learning history can be interactive and fun.

Community scavenger hunts

Create a tour or scavenger hunt in which community members photograph themselves in front of historic places in your area and post them on social media with shared hashtags. Your audience will discover unfamiliar places in their community, and your organization’s name will end up in many people’s feeds.

Creative-in-residence program

Celebrate local creativity by hosting an area artist, songwriter, dancer, poet, or similar practitioner for a creative-in-residence project that engages the community in story-gathering, performance art, or co-curation with one of the 250th themes. It could be as simple as the creative-in-residence taking over the organization’s social media account for a time or as elaborate as an installation or performance.

Story times

Host a toddler or family story time with a book centered on one of the 250th themes. Incorporate objects or images to make the experience more engaging. You can also include a simple craft activity that connects to the story. Work with your local library or parent clubs to identify possible books and to coordinate and market the program.

Book groups

Select a fiction or nonfiction book related to your community’s history or one of the 250th themes and host discussion groups. If you’re unsure about starting your own book groups, try tapping into established book clubs in the area and partner with them to choose a book connected to these themes. Check the publisher’s website to see if they provide discussion group questions for their books. Variations on book groups include:

- o Style it as a “Pints and Pages” event and host the discussion at a local bar or other eating establishment.
- o Make it a community-wide read by selecting a book with a broader appeal that will target multiple age groups. Partner with your local library and host a variety of discussion circles and presentations related to the topic. A community reading program generates excitement about reading and gives people a chance to engage in meaningful conversation about historical topics and their legacies.

Book talks

Hold a book talk and signing with local or national authors who have written about history relevant to your organization or audience. If a nearby university has a press, contact them to see what is in their publication pipeline that might relate to your content or reach out to your library as they might be acquainted with local authors.

Additional Resources

For additional resources to help you in this work,
visit [AASLH.org/250](https://www.aaslh.org/250).



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