

AMERICA



UTAH

Community Handbook



250 YEARS IN THE MAKING

A Year of Celebration and Service



Community Handbook

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America250 Utah is a program led by the Utah Department of Cultural & Community Engagement with support from the Governor's office and the Utah State Legislature.



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Planning America's Birthday, With Utah Style

In 2026, Utah will join with other states to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. Utahns will come together to reflect on our nation's past, build community, and look toward the future.

In 2023 Gov. Spencer J. Cox and the Utah Legislature created Utah's America250 Commission with the charge to create opportunities for Utahns to celebrate during the upcoming years. The Utah Commission is committed to honor the signing of the Declaration of Independence, not just as a pivotal moment in American history but through the unique and rich lens of Utah's heritage.

This commission endeavors to spark unity, engagement, and education across Utah, bringing together individuals from all walks of life in a shared journey of historical discovery and reflection. We are dedicated to creating initiatives that resonate deeply with Utahns through the strength of our partnerships and communities to foster a connection to our past that is both enlightening and inspiring.



Preamble of the Declaration of Independence

Continental Congress, Philadelphia, PA; July 4, 1776

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Read America's Founding Documents

Collectively known as the Charters of Freedom, the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights are considered instrumental in the guiding values of the United States.

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs>



Introduction

For nearly 250 years, Americans from all walks of life and every corner of the country have had a hand in shaping our nation's history. From time immemorial, the area now known as Utah was populated by Indigenous people. Today's tribal nations include the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, Skull Valley Band of Goshute, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Navajo Nation. Spain claimed what is now Utah as part of New Spain from 1500 to 1821. In 1776 a group of Spanish Catholic priests, the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition, left Santa Fe hoping to find a route to the California coast as they traveled through parts of Utah.

No two Americans began their journey in the same place. Except for Native Americans, our ancestors came to these lands from elsewhere. For many Utahns, the quest for statehood provides a lens to reflect upon the full sweep of our nation's past and a deeper understanding of integration and the meaning and promise of America.

Americans have more in common than what divides us through our shared history and celebrations. The semiquincentennial is a chance for all Utahns to feel a part of this major milestone in our nation. We can celebrate courage, liberty, and sacrifice, while also reckoning with difficult truths. By fostering a sense of belonging and coming together with our local communities, we can ensure that Utahns of all ages and backgrounds see themselves in American history. Each family's journey resonates with stories of hard work, doing our part, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

This anniversary presents an opportunity for Americans to pause, acknowledge, celebrate, and turn to family and friends to check in. It is a time to think about our responsibility to our fellow community members and for each of us to consider creative and authentic ways to fulfill ongoing actions toward "a more perfect Union."

America's Semiquincentennial



Mission

Utah's America250 commission will honor our nation's past, celebrate our present, and inspire a future that upholds the values that define us as a nation and state.

Vision

Statewide America250 activities and celebrations will generate a wider appreciation of history's relevance to contemporary challenges and inspire Utahns to take steps to improve our communities, state, and nation.

To accomplish our mission, America250 Utah is focused on the following themes:

EDUCATE

Build Understanding

Spark deeper awareness and understanding of the history, values, and democratic processes that shape our nation. Together, these contribute to a better understanding of who we are, where we came from, and where we can go.

ENGAGE

Build Community

Examine Utah's stories and forms of self-expression. Celebrate the unique traditions of people and places throughout the state and develop powerful service-oriented experiences that propel Utahns forward for the next 250 years.

UNITE

Build Bridges

Promote dialogue about our common bonds and themes of the American spirit. Develop forward-looking conversations about individual rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness while honoring the freedom of others to do the same.



Utah's Invitation

The semiquincentennial anniversary of the Declaration of Independence offers us an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come as a country and consider the ongoing work of democracy. America250 Utah will commemorate the anniversary with wide-ranging activities, beginning in 2024 and culminating in 2026, including educational outreach, online resources, and a wide variety of signature programming and events. America250 Utah signature programs will be free and open to the public.

America250 Utah Signature Programs

500 For Our Future

Teaching the next generation about America's history and guiding values will empower our children to lead into the next 250 years of America's story with courage and compassion. Over the next two years, America250 Utah is partnering with Utah Valley University and others to reach 500 K-12 teachers with professional training and resources for civics education.

For educators

"Writings of a Revolution"

Inspired by the Declaration of Independence, this exhibit at the Utah State Capitol will showcase artifacts from the Revolutionary War period. The Declaration of Independence summarized the colonists' motivations to seek independence from Great Britain and is seen as the first formal statement declaring a nation's people to choose their own form of government. A traveling display will also be available for arts and cultural organizations, libraries, and other community buildings.

For students, educators, clubs, and individuals

Walk250 Utah

Utahns and Americans have created paths to explore and survive, from seasonal migrations of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone to pioneer trails, as well as transcontinental railways to shoreline routes. Walk250 Utah commemorates this movement of people through our landscape by challenging every Utahn to walk 250 miles within the calendar year of our nation's 250th anniversary celebration.

For municipalities, counties, businesses, nonprofit organizations, clubs, and individuals

Utah250 Communities

America250 Utah aims to partner with Utah's 250+ municipalities, counties, and Tribal nations to create hundreds of exciting and engaging opportunities to commemorate and celebrate local events and everyday Americans who have shaped our history. Created by the people, for all the people, America250 Utah's toolkits will provide ideas for towns and cities to come alive with programs and events to inspire, showcase arts, culture, and science, and highlight places and public spaces.

For municipalities and counties

250 Service Projects for America250

Leaning into our first-in-the-nation status for volunteerism, America250 Utah will work with UServeUtah, Show Up Utah, youth-led organizations, and other partners to create more than 250 service opportunities across the state. Utahns are passionate about contributing to the greater good, and volunteering also provides tangible benefits to the service givers in making connections with others and their communities.

For municipalities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, clubs, and individuals

Neighborhood Unity Potlucks

Food and music are ways that we can connect across our community tables and bring people together to commemorate, celebrate, and look to the future. What better way to do this than with block parties, neighborhood potlucks, and other community gatherings on Sunday, July 5, 2026.

For families, individuals, civic and social clubs, and communities

Listening to One Another: The Declaration of Independence at 250

Thematic and guided conversations can ensure that the full range of America's voices participate in the 250th commemoration. In partnership with the Federation of State Humanities Councils, the Utah Humanities' Community Conversations program is working on a program to train facilitators to hold community conversations statewide.

For libraries, nonprofit organizations, civic clubs, and individuals

Who Should Get Involved?

America250 Utah encourages all Utahns to join us in celebrating this historical milestone by getting involved in one of our signature programs, creating your own celebration, or re-envisioning an existing program inspired by our themes.

Lead local celebrations and commemorations

America250 Utah is developing toolkits for state agencies and divisions, local municipalities, county governments and youth councils, tribal communities and governments, and our armed services. The far-reaching services provided by local leadership will be critical to making this anniversary a unifying experience for all.

Empower the next generation

If you work with a university, college, school district, or K-12 school, American250 Utah is excited to partner with you to connect, converse, and teach about our founding principles and bring student voices into the celebration.

Connect communities through your organization

Sports arenas, arts and cultural institutions, religious organizations, and libraries contribute to our communities as gathering places. Consider how your organization can host or participate in an America250 Utah program and help us examine the hard truths and accomplishments of our nation's history.



Showcase hard work and innovation

Business leaders and their workforce contribute to the success of the American dream and the power to do good every day. Employee service opportunities or wellness programs can also serve as an opportunity to connect with America250 Utah.

Start a conversation

Formal and informal nonprofits and clubs bind our neighbors, friends, and families together. From book clubs to youth groups, and cooking clubs to sports teams, these groups encourage connection, reflection, and self expression.

Chart your own path

Think about how you might maximize the reach of existing programs, partnerships, and other resources by connecting to our state programs and the national commemoration effort. Submit your idea at america250.utah.gov

Promote Your America250 Utah Programming



We invite and encourage organizations committed to celebrating America's semiquincentennial to register their events with America250 Utah and to share those events through the free, statewide event-sharing service [Now Playing Utah](https://nowplayingutah.com). Signature and officially recognized events of America250 Utah will be promoted on social media, added to our website, and permitted to utilize the America250 Utah Community Event logo. Submit your idea at america250.utah.gov

Collaborate with National Programs

America250 Utah is part of a nationwide-planning effort that includes states, territories, and America250™. America250 is planning a multi-year, national effort to engage, educate, and unite Americans from sea to shining sea through the following tentpole programs:

- **America's Field Trip**, a nationwide scholastic competition designed to engage America's youth.
- **Our American Story**, a nationwide initiative to gather stories from people across the United States of America and create the largest collection of oral histories ahead of the nation's 250th anniversary.
- **America Gives**, focused on reinvigorating a year-round culture of service in the United States through 2026 and beyond.
- **America's Culture**, a national moment to celebrate and uplift American art forms, creative expression, and cultural touchstones.
- **America Innovates**, a nationwide event, featuring a traveling tech expo, that will visit cities around the country over the span of nearly a year.
- **America's Time Capsule**, a national collection of items that will help tell the story of America at 250 and give future generations a tangible connection to this important milestone.
- **America Waves**, a free, small, hand-held flag delivered to any American who requests one.

Learn more about America250 at america250.org/get-involved

Utah's America250 Commission Members

Commission members represent a geographically diverse range of historians, philanthropists, educators, as well as business and community leaders. Their charge is to work with public and private entities to inspire Utahns to imagine our role in the country's next 250 years, while creating once-in-a-lifetime experiences to commemorate America's birthday in 2026.

Mindy Benson | co-chair; president of Southern Utah University

Christine Durham | co-chair; lawyer and former Utah Supreme Court Justice

Ron Fox | co-chair; public historian, author, The Fox Group president

Kathryn Asay | vice president general, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution

Barbara Jones Brown | historian and publisher

Andrea Clarke | co-founder, Labor & Honor Foundation; Community Advocate

David Clark | consultant; former chair, Utah Tech University Board of Trustees; former Utah state representative and House speaker

Sanchaita Datta | president and co-founder, FatPipe Networks

Brandon Fugal | real estate executive and entrepreneur

Alan Hall | founder, former CEO, Marketstar; philanthropist

Steve Handy | marketing consultant; former Utah state representative

Jani Iwamoto | former Utah state senator and former Salt Lake County Council member

Luis Lopez | president, Latinos United Promoting Education and Civic Engagement; former Ogden City Council member

Douglas McGregor | state secretary/treasurer, Utah Sons of the American Revolution

Darren Parry | Tribal leader and author

Kristy Pike | writer and community leader

Byron Russell | marketing consultant and community leader

Don Stirling | business leader

Brian L. Tarbet | chief civil deputy, Office of the Utah Attorney General; retired U.S. Army major general

Kim Wilson | lawyer and community leader

Donna Law | ex-officio; director, Department of Cultural & Community Engagement

Additional Programming Ideas

Additional programming and planning ideas are available at america250.utah.gov. On the site, you will also find ways to promote your event or activity and apply to make your event an official America250 Utah event by using the logo.

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Additional Resources

Stay connected and informed of Utah's efforts to celebrate 250 years at <http://america250.utah.gov>

For additional information about the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission, visit america250.org

For additional resources from the American Association for State and Local History about preparing for the 250th anniversary, visit <https://aaslh.org/programs/250th/>

Acknowledgements

American Association for State and Local History. *Making History at 250: The Field Guide for the Semiquincentennial*. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 2021.

American Association for State and Local History. *250th Anniversary Program Handbook: Your Guide to Planning for the U.S. Semiquincentennial*. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 2024.



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