AMERICA 250

PROGRAMMING MANUAL

Making History Together

OKLAHOMA Department of Libraries

The Big Picture: Why 250?

In 2026, the United States is celebrating a landmark milestone—250 years since the nation's founding. America250 is the nationwide initiative commemorating this historic anniversary on July 4, 2026. This milestone invites all Americans to honor our shared history, reflect on our democratic values, and engage actively in shaping the future of our nation.

The anniversary is more than a celebration; it is an opportunity to inspire civic participation, cultivate a deeper love of country, and encourage communities to connect their local stories to the broader national narrative. By reflecting on the past, engaging with the present, and envisioning the future, we can create programs that strengthen both local identity and national connection.

YOUR CALL TO ACTION

This manual is designed to inspire your creativity, not prescribe exact programs. Consider these ideas as a starting point to develop initiatives that reflect your community while connecting to the larger story of America.

Examine Your Community: Every impactful program begins at the local level. Identify the stories that are missing, the voices that need to be heard, and the elements that make your town unique. Design each program to authentically represent your community's character and priorities.

Bridge National Conversations Locally: America250 provides a chance to connect local experiences with national themes. Consider how historical milestones, democratic principles, or contemporary civic issues resonate in your community. Develop programs that encourage reflection, discussion, and meaningful action, linking local engagement to the larger story of the United States.

Engage Local Partners: Collaboration amplifies impact. Beyond suggested partners, reach out to local individuals and organizations who can contribute expertise, resources, or creative energy. A local artist might guide a youth project to preserve community memory, or a retired teacher could facilitate oral history interviews. Invite community members to actively participate and co-create programs that celebrate both local and national heritage.

How to Use This Manual

This manual is grounded in one guiding principle: every great program begins with a clear plan. Each program included here follows a simple framework to help you design meaningful, memorable, and locally grounded initiatives with a national connection.

Each section includes:

- **The Idea:** A clear description of the program, such as a Community Time Capsule or Oral History Project, serving as the central concept.

- **The Guide:** A step-by-step guide for implementing the program.

- **Tips and Suggestions:** Practical advice for adapting the program to your audience.

- **Resources:** A curated collection of partners, materials, and links is provided in the Appendix for further support.

AMERICA 250

REFLECTING OUR AMERICAN STORY

Programs

- **Community Time Capsule**

- **Historic Photo Memory Match**

- **Community Members Road Show and Artifact Sharing**

- **Our American Story: Oral Histories**

- **My Family Book**

COMMUNITY TIME CAPSULE

This program invites community members of all ages to contribute personal letters and reflections to a time capsule, capturing local and national life, memories, dreams, and hopes for the future. Libraries can offer this as a community capsule or help customers create their own take-home family capsules.

Guide

Introduction: Explain the time capsule concept of historical preservation and its purpose.

Create: Facilitate dedicated stations for each age group to write personal letters or create collages through a compilation of cut pictures from magazines or journals. Encourage creativity and a supportive, private atmosphere.

Collect/Package:

Take Home Time Capsule: Community members are assisted in packaging their own items to take home for family storage.

Community Time Capsule: Items are collected and placed in a sturdy, labeled container for the library's central capsule. Designate a staff position for maintenance and keep thorough record keeping of the location and future opening date.

Writing Prompts Tailored by Age:

Children: What are your dreams? What do you love about the library?

Teens: Share advice or goals you want achieve with your future self.

Adults: What moment in America's past inspires you? What are your hopes for the next 250 years?

Materials Needed:

- Large, labeled container (for community time capsule)
- Stickers or decorative materials
- Pens, crayons, markers
- Magazines and journals
- Letter paper
- Envelopes
- Scissors

Potential Partners:

- Civic organizations such as Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution
- Historical societies or museums
- Newspapers or media
- Stationery stores
- Youth organizations
- Writing clubs
- Schools

HISTORIC PHOTO MATCH

This program engages participants by introducing important people, places, and moments in local and national history through a classic matching game format. It builds image recognition, memory, and curiosity about U.S. history, with simple historical facts shared upon every match.

Guide

Preparation: Collect and print pairs of historic photos (events, monuments, figures) from local and national archives to create the cards.

Set Up and Play: Shuffle cards face down in a grid. Participants take turns flipping two cards, aiming to find a match.

Fact Sharing and Winning: When a match is found, the player keeps the pair, and a staff member shares a simple fact about the photo's significance. The player (or team) with the most pairs wins.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Use simple, iconic images.

Teens: Use a larger set of more challenging or lesser-known photos. Incorporate a timed or speed round challenge.

Adults: Use challenging photos tied to specific local archives or dates. Transform into a "Fact Match" game where one card is a photo and the match is a printed description or date.

Materials Needed:

- Sets of sturdy printed/photo cards (paired images), ideally laminated for durability
- Fact sheets or brief captions for each photo

Potential Partners:

- Local historical societies (for photo sourcing and facts)
- School history clubs
- Public Library's local archives department

COMMUNITY MEMBERS ROAD SHOW AND ARTIFACT SHARING

This program encourages connection among personal items, photographs, or created artifacts meaningful to customers with American history and heritage. The central activity involves participants documenting and sharing the significance and story behind their item, while images of the items can be preserved in a digital archive or exhibit.

Guide

Create and Gather Items: Make small crafts, photographs, or collect personal items from community members.

Connection: Encourage participants to write and share historical or personal stories connected to their artifact.

Document: With participant permission for preservation, photograph or scan items for documentation and add notes about their significance.

Share: Create a small exhibit in the library or a digital gallery showcasing items and stories.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Create a shoe box diorama displaying historical setting of the item, creating a scroll or map.

Teens, Adults: Paint a historical trading card or blackout poetry.

Blended: Develop a family tree with craft supplies.

Materials Needed:
- Craft supplies
- Notecards
- Camera or scanner
- Audio recorders (optional)
- Sleeves or holders for protection of items (if displaying)

Potential Partners:
- Art centers
- Museums or archives
- Craft stories or hobby groups
- Historical societies
- Community cultural organizations

OUR AMERICAN STORY: ORAL HISTORIES

This program invites individuals to share their personal stories that reflect on their American identity, unique experiences, and community heritage. This is a chance for your voice to become a lasting part of the nation's narrative. The collection of these recorded narratives will create a rich audiovisual archive.

Guide

Schedule: Create a schedule for story recording sessions and invite participants to pre-register or drop in.

Story Development: Provide prompts focused on themes such as identity, service, community involvement, or personal legacy.

Collect/Package: Conduct interviews with trained facilitators in person or virtually, recording stories with participant consent.

Archive: Save recordings locally and submit copies to the national archive, if desired, or share stories at library events or digital exhibits.

Prompt Suggestions Tailored by Age:

Children: Tell me about your favorite place to be in your town or neighborhood.

Teens: If you could create a new club or service project at your school or in your community, what would it be?

Adults: How has a major life change—a new job, a big move, or a new role challenged or affirmed your core identity?

Materials Needed:

- Consent forms for recording and sharing stories
- Quiet interview space or mobile recording studio setup
- Prompt cards or questions

Potential Partners:

- America250 national program ("Our American Story")
- Historical societies or oral history organizations
- Community centers or cultural groups for outreach

MY FAMILY BOOK

This program empowers children to explore their roots and journeys by creating a simple, illustrated "book" about their families or personal histories.

Guide

Discussion: Lead discussion on exploring the importance of family history.

Create: Guide participants in creating a small book with pages for drawings of family members, favorite traditions, or family stories.

Assemble: Assemble and decorate the books, adding a title and cover.

Sharing: Participants can read their books to a small group or add them to a "Community Story Library" shelf.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Provide prompts for each page (e.g., "My family celebrates...," "A favorite memory is...").

Teens, Adults: Invite deeper stories or oral histories by interviewing a relative, writing more detailed accounts.

Teens, Adults: Introduce digital book-creation tools; print and bind finished products.

Teens, Adults: Offer comic or graphic novel formats.

Materials Needed:
- Blank mini-books
- Markers, colored pencils
- Magazines, stickers
- Staples or glue

Potential Partners:
- Family literacy organizations
- Stationery suppliers
- Schools
- Bookstores

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A COLLECTIVE CANVAS

Programs

- **Community Story Quilt**

- **Community Mural and Story Wall**

- **America's Gratitude Garden**

COMMUNITY STORY QUILT: VISUAL NARRATIVE PROJECT

This program combines art and storytelling through the creation of paper or quilt squares representing each community member's unique story. The decorated squares are then brought together to reflect the community's heritage and aspirations, creating a collective time capsule displayed in the library, contributing our local story to the nation's narrative.

Guide

Introduction: Discuss storytelling through art and the significance of quilts in American cultural history, showcasing story quilts from American history.

Story Sharing: Facilitate group discussion as participants reflect and share stories or themes they want to depict.

Design: Encourage individual expression with clear guidance on size and theme as participants sketch and create a quilted or paper square.

Assembly: Combine all squares into one large quilt or display collage.

Presentation: Host a community event unveiling the quilt as a symbol of shared stories.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Use pre-cut, large felt squares or simple fabric pieces. Focus on fabric glue.

Teens: Pair this program with sewing machine basics or instructions on embroidery techniques.

Materials Needed:

- Fabric squares or heavy paper squares
- Fabric markers, paint, or crayons
- Needles and thread
- Glue or tape for collage methods
- Display boards or frames

Potential Partners:

- Art centers or community artists
- Quilting guides or textile museums
- Schools
- Senior centers
- Adult education programs

COMMUNITY MURAL AND STORY WALL

As we commemorate America's 250th anniversary, this program cultivates a monumental, collaborative art project that captures community stories and visions for America's future. This engaging initiative produces a vibrant mural that celebrates local community identity and contributions, creating a shared legacy.

Guide

Introduction and Brainstorm: Facilitate a discussion to select unifying themes (heritage, freedom, future hopes) and specific local content.

Design: Set apart a space where participants can create personal artwork using various materials while being provided with historical prompts and layout assistance to ensure a cohesive final piece.

Digital Map and Display: Photograph the mural, create a simple digital art map to link artwork to artists/themes, and organize a public celebration for the community unveiling.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Use simple, tangible prompts (e.g. "My Favorite Place") and provide materials like coloring sheets and simple paints.

Teens: Encourage challenging mediums such as digital art or mosaics.

Adults: Focus on complex themes utilizing historical research or recruiting adults to mentor younger participants.

All Ages: Provide various mediums and materials ranging on ease of use. Allow option to take home pieces to later return for integration in final mural.

Materials Needed:

- Large mural paper or wall space
- Art materials (paints, brushes, markers, colored pencils, collage materials, etc.)
- Protective covering

Potential Partners:

- Local art centers or mural programs
- Community cultural organizations
- Youth clubs or schools

AMERICA'S GRATITUDE GARDEN

This program fosters collective civic affection by inviting participants to write what they appreciate about America—its freedoms, people, opportunities, and values—on paper garden elements that contribute to a large, shared, visual art installation.

Guide

Define and Design: Create a "gratitude garden" wall or tabletop display.

Gather: Set up paper flowers, leaves, butterflies, stones, or other garden elements for participants to write on.

Prompt and Instructions: Provide simple prompts for people to share what they appreciate about America.

Display: Watch as the garden continues to grow over the month becoming a visual celebration of collective civic affection.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Provide sentence starters such as "I love America because…"

Teens: Provide materials for teens to create their own shapes to add to the garden. Add prompts encouraging nuance, such as "what part of America's story gives you hope?"

Adults: Offer deeper reflection prompts such as "what American value matters most to you?"

Materials Needed:

- Bulletin board or pegboard
- Pre-cut flowers, leaves, or stone shapes
- Markers, colored pencils
- Pins or tape for attaching
- A sign or banner saying "America250 Gratitude Garden"
- Optional: real potted plants to frame the display

Potential Partners:

- Garden clubs
- Art teachers
- Extension offices
- Community volunteer groups
- Tourism or park departments
- Historical societies

LITERARY JOURNEYS: READING AND DISCUSSION

Programs

- **250 Years, 250 Stories: Reading Passports**

- **Literary Time Travel Book Discussion**

- **Mapping America's Story**

250 YEARS, 250 STORIES: READING PASSPORTS

This program celebrates the exploration of history and identity through reading. Participants earn passport stamps for reading books across various America250 themes, using incentives and community recognition to track progress and reward reading achievements.

Guide

Design Passport: Create an "America250 Reading Passport" listing categories for participants to explore. Passports can either be on paper or through an online reading platform.

Stamp & Track: Award a stamp or sticker in the passport upon completion of a book from a category. Track progress using a public chart or prize board.

Celebrate: Award prizes or certificates for reaching milestones, and host a final celebration to honor all participants and share favorite stories.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Focus on the passport/stamp incentive for reading volume and diverse categories.

Teens: Add badge levels for difficulty/volume; include challenges for creative responses (essays, art, and video).

Adults: Use a reading log/journal for non-fiction or in-depth historical works; explore in a book discussion group.

Blended: Encourage a family read-aloud or buddy reading for shared credit toward a joint milestone.

Materials Needed:

- Reading Passports
- Custom stamps or stickers
- Tracking charts or leaderboards
- Certificates or small rewards (bookmarks, badges)
- Event supplies like decorations or refreshments

Potential Partners:

- Local businesses
- Schools and parent-teacher associations
- America250 community programs or sponsors

LITERARY TIME TRAVEL BOOK DISCUSSION

This program explores America's heritage through literature. Participants read and discuss curated books representing different American time periods, regions, and perspectives. Each session sparks reflection on broader America250 themes through facilitated discussion and creative response.

Guide

Curate and Schedule: Select books from a varied reading list (eras, regions, perspectives). Schedule monthly or bi-monthly sessions.

Promote and Prepare: Promote each featured book or theme. Prepare discussion guides and invite guest speakers.

Facilitate & Archive: Lead discussions; give participants opportunities for creative responses. Capture feedback and reflections for a community archive.

Tailoring Activities by Age: See Reading Lists & Study Guide section in the appendix for ideas tailored for each age.

Materials Needed:
- Copies of selected books
- Discussion guides with historical context and thoughtful questions
- Audio/video equipment for guest speakers and recordings

Potential Partners:
- Historical societies
- Museums
- Bookstores and publishers supporting America250 titles
- Authors or university American history departments
- Community reading groups
- Adult education centers

MAPPING AMERICA'S STORY

This program fosters historical connection through literacy. Participants will reflect on key stories they read, drawing parallels to America's story. Participants will then create and place illustrated story markers on a visual timeline, building an understanding of historical chronology.

Guide

Set Up Timeline: Display a large timeline mural representing 250 years of American history.

Reading: Participants select a story linked to an era, figures, events, or themes in American history.

Story Markers: Participants create a small marker representing the story's significance and era.

Placement: Participants place their markers on the timeline in the appropriate historical slots.

Tailoring Activities by Age: See Reading Lists & Study Guide section in the appendix for ideas tailored for each age.

Materials Needed:
- Large wall timeline (250 year scale)
- Printed timeline dates and key events
- Paper or note cards for story markers
- Markers, crayons, glue, scissors
- Tape or sticky tack

Potential Partners:
- Historians or history teachers
- Art supply stores
- Community museums

Resource Spotlight: Moments That Made US

This free, customizable panel exhibition from the Oklahoma Historical Society explores ideals at the heart of the Declaration of Independence through the moments in national and regional history that have defined their meaning.

The modular exhibit is designed for organizations of all sizes and allows libraries to select panels, incorporate local history, and tailor the display to their space without the cost or logistics of a traveling exhibition. Installation guidance, customization templates, and marketing assets are included.

Access this resource in the Appendix.

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DOCUMENTS AND DEMOCRACY

Programs

- **Documents that Shaped Our Nation: U.S. History Milestones**

- **Civic Exploration**

- **Living Documents: Performance and Storytelling Night**

- **Voices of America**

DOCUMENTS THAT SHAPED OUR NATION: U.S. HISTORY MILESTONES

This program illuminates the connection between foundational documents and major U.S. historical events through a visual, collaborative timeline. Participants build image recognition and historical literacy by placing event cards and discussing the enduring influence of these documents.

Guide

Set Up Timeline: Set up a large horizontal timeline on a wall. Mark key dates for foundational documents (1776, 1787, 1907) and major national or local events (e.g., Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, Oklahoma Statehood).

Event Cards and Placement: Provide "event cards" with simple stories and pictures for participants to collaboratively place on the timeline.

Guided Sessions: Offer brief, guided group discussions to discuss the importance of the foundational documents and how they influenced the placed events.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Focus on image recognition and placement of event cards. Pair with a brief, guided story time.

Teens: Use more complex event cards, of lesser known but significant documents.

Adults: Invite adults to independently research significant documents and add them to the timeline.

Materials Needed:

- Long roll of paper, markers, or string for the timeline
- Laminate or print cards with dates, images, and simple historic captions
- Velcro or magnets for easy placing or moving

Potential Partners:

- Local history museums
- Student clubs or scout groups

CIVIC EXPLORATION

This program simulates democratic and government decision-making processes, enhancing civic literacy across all ages. Participants role-play the distinct roles of local, state, and federal government officials and citizens, moving from learning how a bill becomes a law to actively debating and voting on complex community issues in a mock council or legislature setting.

Guide

Introduction: Briefly explain the three levels of government and the law-making process using visuals.

Scenario and Roles: Assign roles. Present a relevant community issue (e.g., historic preservation, park development).

Simulation and Action: Facilitate a structured mock meeting where participants propose simple bills/amendments, debate positions, and vote using procedural rules.

Debrief and Archive: Discuss the complexity of decision-making and citizen participation.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Focus on local government and simple issues. Use basic role-play games and flowcharts.

Teens: Focus on state/federal legislature. Introduce complex issues; conduct mock council meetings with formal debate procedures.

Adults: Focus on Mock City Council simulations using a real local issue. Discussions emphasize procedural rules and empathy for opposing roles.

Materials Needed:

- Role cards (mayor, president, citizen, reporter, etc.)
- Props like gavel, microphones
- Scenario cards with community issues or decisions
- Meeting agenda and voting ballots (optional)
- Large flowchart explaining the law-making process
- Paper and pencils
- Visual aids
- Whiteboard

Potential Partners:

- Local government officials or civic educators
- Schools or civics and government teachers
- Youth leadership programs or scout groups
- America250 civic engagement initiatives
- Civic education nonprofits

LIVING DOCUMENTS: PERFORMANCE AND STORYTELLING NIGHT

This program animates historical moments by challenging participants to research a foundational document and transform it into a reading, skit, or digital storytelling piece. The project encourages empathy and culminates in a public performance night with audience Q&A.

Guide

Assign and Research: Participants select a key historical document. They research the background and find primary source materials.

Script and Rehearse: Participants create a script or "living letter" from the imagined voice of the document's author or signers. Provide performance coaching during rehearsals.

Perform and Engage: Host a public Performance Night. Conclude each act with a brief audience Q&A discussion to encourage engagement.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Offer story time and "living books" skits, inviting them to act out a reading.

Teens: Focus on in-depth research and full interpretation (skits, monologues). Utilize performance coaches for public speaking confidence.

Adults: Focus on complex, non-traditional documents. Invite historians and archivists to provide research guidance.

Materials Needed:

- Scripts or excerpts (printed or digital)
- Simple costumes or props
- Microphones and audio equipment (if available)
- Stage or reading area

Potential Partners:

- Theater groups
- Schools' drama clubs
- Museums
- National Archives interpreters

VOICES OF AMERICA

This program inspires deep reflection through a participatory, multi-sensory walk-through timeline exhibit, celebrating democratic ideals, showcasing voices and historic moments from 1776 to the present, and encouraging predictions for America's future.

Guide

Design and Set Up: Curate a "living timeline" moving from 1776 to the present using displays, readers-theater excerpts, music clips, and interactive activities. Each decade or era highlights a defining national moment—independence, the Constitution, westward expansion, industrial innovation, cultural revolutions, civil rights, scientific breakthroughs, and local historical connections.

Engagement: Host the walk-through. Staff stations to guide participants through America's timeline.

Future-Focus: Conclude with participants adding their own "future predictions" to extend the timeline beyond 2026.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Use a simple timeline with historical props and dress-up items to encourage play and engagement with the past. Incorporate an interactive stamp booklet for each era.

Teens/Adults: Integrate QR codes at each station that links to additional resources and information on the highlighted era.

Materials Needed:
- Timeline panels or posters
- Excerpt cards (small readings from documents, speeches, diaries, and letters)
- Audio clips (historic speeches, songs from different eras)
- Sticky notes or index cards for participant contributions
- Clothespins or clips for attaching predictions to the "future wall"
- Optional: costumes and accessories

Potential Partners:
- Theater groups
- Public school and college civics departments
- Humanities councils
- Local government offices
- Cultural heritage organizations
- Veterans' and military groups

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COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Programs

- **Community Heroes Meet and Greet**

- **Community Storytelling Festival**

- **Local History Triva Night**

COMMUNITY HEROES MEET AND GREET

This program connects children with important local figures like firefighters, librarians, community leaders, and artists, offering them a unique, up-close look at the people who make their town special. Through these engaging interactions, kids go on an adventure of discovery, gaining a deeper appreciation and understanding of how the different roles in their community make a difference.

Guide

Set Up: Invite community helpers to the library such as police officers, nurses, local business owners, artists, athletes, city council, mayors, managers, and other department directors, etc.

Stations: Set up stations or booths where each community hero can share their story and answer children's questions.

Passport: Provide a "Passport to Our Community" booklet for children to collect hero autographs or stamps at each station.

Closing: Wrap up with a Q&A session and group photo.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Teens: Participants can design and distribute the passports.

Teens: Host a youth panel on "becoming a hero in your community."

Teens: Encourage participants to interview community members and create podcasts or video interviews to be shared online.

Materials Needed:
- Custom "passport" booklets
- Stickers and stamps
- Name tags
- Tables
- Chairs

Potential Partners:
- Local government
- City departments
- Volunteer organizations
- Youth clubs
- Schools

COMMUNITY STORYTELLING FESTIVAL

This program amplifies participants to create and share original stories, poems, or performances about what America and their community mean to them. The project culminates in an interactive public festival that highlights the community, builds essential communication skills, and preserves local voices for the America250 observance.

Guide

Preparation: Recruit participants and introduce storytelling prompts related to core America250 themes.

Workshops and Rehearsal: Host optional sessions on writing and performance techniques, followed by practice to build confidence.

Festival and Archiving: Host a public storytelling festival where participants perform or display their work. Record or save all submissions for a digital archive.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Use simple, tangible prompts and use props/costumes to encourage oral storytelling.

Teens: Focus on complex original writing and advanced skills (public speaking, feedback) as core performers.

Adults: Contribute complex historical narratives; recruit skilled adults as mentors for performance and writing techniques.

Blended: Encourage families to prepare stories; include dedicated open-mic time at the festival for all ages.

Materials Needed:

- Writing materials
- Audio/video recording devices
- Microphone and sound system (if possible)
- Space for performances and audience seating

Potential Partners:

- Schools and writing clubs
- America250 storytelling initiatives
- Youth arts organizations
- Theater groups

LOCAL HISTORY TRIVIA NIGHT

This program connects participants through an interactive trivia event focused on engaging local history and national America250 facts. The event encourages fun, social learning, builds community engagement around shared history, and includes small prizes.

Guide

Develop Questions: Create a question set featuring varied difficulty levels covering local history, notable Americans, and America250 milestones.

Promote and Host: Promote the event and host it at the library or at a welcoming local venue, facilitating both team sign-ups and walk-in participation.

Execute and Award: Use an online quiz platform or prepare question cards. Highlight America250 historical context between rounds, then award small prizes to winning teams.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Use visual and simplified questions (landmarks, flags) and focus on family participation.

Teens: Use digital platforms (e.g., Kahoot) for competition.

Adults: Focus on nuanced local and national history; encourage research for tie-breakers.

Blended: Include "Family Challenge" rounds with questions requiring knowledge from different eras to ensure collaboration.

Materials Needed:

- Prepared trivia questions and answer sheets or a digital quiz platform
- Audio system or microphone
- Tables and chairs arranged for teams
- Prizes or certificates

Potential Partners:

- Bars or cafes for off-site trivia nights
- Historical societies or America250 organizations for question sourcing
- Community clubs
- Adult education programs

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BUILDING THE FUTURE

Programs

- **Then and Now: Mapping Our Community**

- **Looking Ahead Speaker Series**

- **Future Builders: Community Change Project**

- **Imagine Tomorrow: Design Challenge**

- **Art and Essay Showcase**

THEN AND NOW: MAPPING OUR COMMUNITY

This program ignites community dialogue and civic engagement by hosting collaborative envisioning events focused on the future of the local area, framed by its history. It combines interactive brainstorming and a "Vision Wall" to generate, display, and archive actionable ideas that map the community's journey from its past to its aspirations for the next 50 years.

Guide

Launch and Vision Wall: Install a large, ongoing "Vision Wall." Host a launch event with discussions comparing the community's past to its future.

Brainstorm and Groups: Break into groups to develop ideas into creative expressions or actionable proposals that address current needs based on historical context.

Share and Next Steps: Summarize visions. Encourage participants to submit ideas to local initiatives.

Archive: Document and save all contributions for a digital archive that serves as a "Future History" document.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Blended: Design family-friendly activities with art and discussion prompts at varied complexity.

Blended: Provide take-home materials for families to continue discussions and idea generation.

Materials Needed:

- Large vision wall (map, board, paper roll)
- Art supplies (markers, colored paper, glue, scissors, stickers)
- Collage materials
- Conversation prompts
- Camera for documenting wall contributions

Potential Partners:

- Artists, arts councils or groups
- City planning or local government offices
- Community development and planning agencies
- Community foundations or service clubs
- Schools and youth organizations
- America250 education and engagement partners

LOOKING AHEAD SPEAKER SERIES

This program stimulates critical thinking and civic engagement by hosting guest experts and speakers to encourage community conversations. The series explores cutting-edge topics (such as technology, sustainability, and health) and anticipated local or national trends over the next 25-50 years, connecting to America's future.

Guide

Identify and Invite Speakers: Identify and invite various experts (professors, innovators, public officials) for an event focused on future trends.

Format and Curate: Curate a single-speaker or panel format (20-30 min talks). Collect public questions in advance to personalize the presentations and discussion.

Host and Engage: Host the event, including a live Q&A session. Publicize widely and encourage participants to reflect on local decisions shaping the next 50 years.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Offer an interactive activity station adjacent to the main event.

Teens: Encourage active participation in Q&A.

Adults: Focus on detailed Q&A and networking with speakers.

Materials Needed:

- Projector and screen
- Microphones
- Seating for participants
- Question submission box (physical or digital)

Potential Partners:

- Universities or community colleges
- Science and technology organizations
- Environmental agencies
- Health networks

FUTURE BUILDERS: COMMUNITY CHANGE PROJECT

Inspired by America250's civic engagement goals, this program invites participants to identify local community issues and design actionable plans for positive change. It fosters active citizenship by moving participants from brainstorming needs to creating concrete, presentable proposals for local improvement

Guide

Brainstorm: Facilitate discussion, asking: "What do you love, and what would you like to make better 50 years from now?" Research local challenges and opportunities.

Action Planning: Groups choose a topic (e.g., environment) and propose a realistic, actionable plan to address their chosen issue.

Archive: Document and save all contributions for a digital archive.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Focus on simple, tangible improvements (e.g., What should we do to clean up the river?). Action planning is simplified to identifying steps and helpers.

Teens: Guide research on current community issues. Include planning budgets, timelines, and outreach strategies.

Blended: Provide simplified templates and family discussion guides for home-based brainstorming.

Materials Needed:

- Flip charts, sticky notes, and pens
- "Action Plan" templates
- Poster boards for presentations
- Contact lists for community partners (if organizing real events)

Potential Partners:

- Local government or civic organizations
- America250 and its "America Gives" or "Our American Story" partners
- Service organizations (e.g., Rotary club, youth councils)
- Nonprofits or volunteer groups
- Schools and parent organizations

IMAGINE TOMORROW: DESIGN CHALLENGE

This program envisions the community's future in 2076 by challenging participants to become urban planners and designers. It encourages problem-solving and connection to community growth by producing visual art (drawings/maps), 3D models, and short digital videos that reflect hopes for transportation, technology, and sustainability in the next 50 years.

Guide

Introduction: Discuss the idea of envisioning the town in 50 years, using futuristic design to spark ideas about technology, community life, and innovation.

Creation Challenge: Participants choose between formats like 2D Maps, Illustrations, 3D Models, or short videos.

Presentation and Gallery: Participants write captions or narrate explanations for their work. Host a gallery walk and video screening event for sharing and community discussion.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Have a collection of options to inspire ideas such as creating a new park or library in 2076.

Teens: Have teens design a multi-scene commercial. Have example ideas available to spark inspiration such as eco-friendly school or transportation system.

Adults: Participants can utilize their professional and civic knowledge to develop their future ideas for 2076 and propose resources to achieve it.

Materials Needed:

- Large paper or poster boards
- Colored pencils, markers, crayons
- Presentation boards or digital presentation tools
- Rulers and stencils
- Modeling materials (clay, cardboard, LEGO bricks, etc.)
- Props or craft materials for filming
- Video recording

Potential Partners:

- Artists or art teachers
- Community planners or municipal offices
- Planning or sustainability departments
- Technology or youth innovation clubs
- Media centers or videographers
- Schools with media programs
- Art supply stores

ART AND ESSAY SHOWCASE

This program envisions the future by gathering community members to express their personal and collective hopes for America through original visual art, essays, and poems.

Guide

Introduction and Prompt: Introduce the significance of America250. Discuss the power of envisioning the future and providing broad prompts (e.g., "What do you hope America looks like in 50 years?").

Creation: Participants create visual art or written pieces reflecting hopes for both personal dreams and collective aspirations for the nation.

Display: Display all art pieces in a "Hopes for the Future" gallery.

Tailoring Activities by Age:

Children: Focus on visual art and simple poems or letters.

Teens: Encourage digital art, mixed media, or longer persuasive essays and poems.

Adults: Focus on thought-provoking essays about positive societal change. Pair with programs for community conversations.

Blended: Encourage family "team" entries (e.g., collective artwork or co-written essay).

Materials Needed:

- Art paper, canvas, or poster boards
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils, watercolors, glue, collage materials
- Display easels or wall space
- Writing paper, notebooks, pencils, colored pens
- Caption cards
- Video recording

Potential Partners:

- Artists, art teachers, or language arts teachers
- America250 or Youth250 community groups
- Family literacy and writing organizations
- Museums or galleries
- Writers' guilds
- Authors or poets
- Art supply stores

APPENDIX

References and External Resources

This is your one-stop shop for all the online resources mentioned throughout this manual. Use this manual to plan, find partners, and make sure your local program connects with the national America 250 celebration.

We've organized these resources in a simple way to help you find exactly what you're looking for:

- **By Topic:** Resources are grouped in accordance with use.

- **No Duplicates:** Even though some links can help with different topics, we list each resource only once to keep this page clean and easy to scan.

OFFICIAL PORTALS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING	URL
AASLH (American Association for State and Local History) 250th Programs	https://aaslh.org/programs/250th/
America250 Official Homepage	https://america250.org
DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) America 250 Initiatives	https://www.dar.org/outreach/america-250
Global Ties US: America250 Initiatives	https://www.globaltiesus.org/america250/
Heritage Foundation: America250 Resources	https://www.heritage.org/a250
IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services) America250 Partnership	https://www.imls.gov/our-work/partnerships/
National Archives Foundation: Celebrating America 250	https://archivesfoundation.org/stories/celebrating-america-250/
Smithsonian Institution America250 Portal	https://www.si.edu/250
Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) America250 Partnership	https://www.sar.org/sons-of-the-american-revolution-and-america250-announce-historic-partnership-to-honor-americas-250th-anniversary/
White House America250 Initiative	https://www.whitehouse.gov/america250/

STATE AND LOCAL SPOTLIGHTS	URL
Arizona America250 Resource Guide (PDF)	https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2025/07/Arizona%20America%20250%20Resource%20%20Guide%20(4).pdf
Baylor Library: Discover America250	https://library.web.baylor.edu/discover/america-250
Connecticut America250 Planning Guide (PDF)	https://ct250.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/America-250-CT-Planning-Guide.pdf
Connecticut State Library America250 LibGuides	https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/america250
Herriman City, Utah: America250 Initiatives	https://www.herriman.gov/america-250
Historical Society of Pennsylvania: USA250 Portal	https://www.portal.hsp.org/
North Carolina America250 Field Guide	https://www.america250.nc.gov/america250fieldguide/open
Surprise, Arizona: America250 Initiatives	https://surpriseaz.gov/1480/Surprise-America-250
Texas State Library: America250 Main Page & Exhibit Resources	https://www.tsl.texas.gov/america250
Utah America250 Programs	https://america250.utah.gov/programs/

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES	URL
America250 Teacher Resources and Field Trip Guides	https://america250.org/fieldtrip/teacher-resources/
Education World: Founding Documents Unleashed Activities	https://www.educationworld.com/teachers/founding-documents-unleashed-3-activities-sorting-through-americas-history
History Made By Us: Youth 250 Initiative	https://historymadebyus.org/youth250
NPS (National Park Service): Teaching the 250th	https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/twhp_teaching_250.htm
Utah America250 Education Resources	https://america250.utah.gov/education/

HISTORICAL TIMELINES AND RESEARCH	URL
American Experience	https://americanexperience.si.edu/timeline/
Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History	https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/online-exhibitions/timeline-1945-present
History on the Net	https://www.historyonthenet.com/america-history-timeline

Library of Congress	https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/
Reading Rockets: Creating Timelines for Literacy	https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/content-area-literacy/articles/creating-timelines
Smithsonian American Experience Timeline	https://americanexperience.si.edu/timeline/
US General Services Administration	https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/historic-preservation/explore-historic-buildings/explore-by-timeline
Well-Trained Mind Forum: Timeline Creation Tools	https://forums.welltrainedmind.com/topic/618562-what-do-you-use-to-make-a-timeline/

TIME CAPSULE / COMMUNITY STORYTELLING	URL
America250: "Our American Story" Kicks Off on the National Mall	https://america250.org/news/our-american-story-kicks-off-on-the-national-mall-a-journey-begins/
America250: Launch of "Our American Story" Initiative	https://america250.org/news/america250-launches-our-american-story-to-capture-the-nations-collective-voice-ahead-of-the-united-states-250th-anniversary/
Class Pop Magazine: Time Capsule Ideas	https://www.classpop.com/magazine/time-capsule-ideas
Moments That Made US	https://www.okhistory.org/historycenter/museum-resources
PBS NewsHour Classroom: Smithsonian Time Capsule Project	https://www.pbs.org/newshour/classroom/daily-news-lessons/2025/07/the-smithsonian-is-creating-a-time-capsule-of-hopes-and-wishes-for-the-next-50-years
Smithsonian Learning Lab: Make Your Own Time Capsule	https://learninglab.si.edu/news/make-your-own-time-capsule
Texas State Library: Oral History Resources for America250	http://www.tsl.texas.gov/node/70053
Trust & Will: Learning About Time Capsules	https://trustandwill.com/learn/time-capsule/

ARTS, CULTURE, AND MEDIA	URL
Audacity Audio Editing Software (Free)	https://www.audacityteam.org/
Dallas Cultural Public Art Map (and note on digital art)	https://dallasculture.org/publicartmap/
National Public Housing Museum: Free Toolkits and Podcasts	https://nphm.org/program/free-toolkits-and-podcasts/
NETA (Public Media) Programming Service: Making History 250	https://www.netaonline.org/programming-service/public-media-making-history-250
PBS: America250 Programming Announcement	https://www.pbs.org/about/about-pbs/blogs/news/pbs-america-250-marks-nations-semiquincentennial-with-expansive-programming/

Programming Librarian: 12 Library Programs for Commemorating 250 Years	https://programminglibrarian.org/articles/commemorating-250-years-12-library-programs-explore-local-history-during-united-states
Urban Libraries: How to Start a Library Podcast	https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/how-to-start-a-library-podcast-in-8-simple-steps
Young At Art Museum Virtual Tours	https://youngatartmuseum.org/virtual-tours/
YouTube: Building Community with Murals (Smithsonian Education)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWiHDyWYetY
YouTube: Tips for Designing a Community Mural	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kMfFBY86kc

READING LISTS AND STUDY GUIDES	URL
ALA LibGuides: Starting a Book Discussion Group	https://libguides.ala.org/bookdiscussiongroups/startguide
Bennington Museum: Reading List with Annotations (PDF)	https://benningtonmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/Reading-List-with-annotations-final.pdf
Harvard Ash Center: Summer Reading List for America's 250th (Adult focus)	https://ash.harvard.edu/articles/a-summer-reading-list-for-americas-250th-anniversary/
PBS Books: America250 Reading List	https://www.pbsbooks.org/event/america250-reading-list/
PBS Books: Visions of America Resources	https://www.pbsbooks.org/visions-of-america-resources/
PBS Video: Explore the America250 Reading List (Adult focus)	https://www.pbs.org/video/explore-the-america250-reading-list-a-journey-through-stories-that-shaped-a-nation-this-independence-day-pbs-books-gqriip/
YouTube: America250 Reading List (PBS Books)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCL5cIfkvrA

CIVICS, GOVERNANCE, AND LOCAL LAW	URL
50 by 250 Initiative (Civic Engagement)	https://50by250.org
CivicPlus: The Basics of Ordinance Drafting	https://www.civicplus.com/blog/cs/the-basics-of-ordinance-drafting/
Congressional Management Foundation: Intern Handbook (General Civic Resources)	https://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cmf-congressional-intern-handbook.pdf
MRSC: Roles and Responsibilities of Local Officials	https://mrsc.org/explore-topics/officials/roles/roles-and-responsibilities
MultiState: Local Governments 101	https://www.multistate.us/insider/2025/4/30/local-governments-101-common-structures-and-how-local-laws-are-made

OK Policy: Oklahoma Policy Resources	https://okpolicy.org/resources/
Oklahoma House of Representatives: Idea Becomes a Law (PDF)	https://former.okhouse.gov/Information/CourseOfBills.aspx
Oklahoma Legislature	https://www.oklegislature.gov/
Oklahoma State Election Board	https://oklahoma.gov/elections.html
Oklahoma State University: How an Idea Becomes a Law	https://orc.okstate.edu/how-an-idea-becomes-a-law/
OML: Ordinances and Resolutions FAQ	https://www.oml.org/ordinances-and-resolutions-faq
Sample Ordinance (Hobart Golf Cart Ordinance) (PDF)	https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59bba641cd39c38913f702a0/t/5e1890b27caac3351f525be0/1578668211115/hobart_golf_cart_ORDINANCE_NO.pdf
USA.gov: How Laws Are Made	https://www.usa.gov/how-laws-are-made

STEAM AND INTERACTIVE EVENTS	URL
Leisure Group Travel: America250 Events for 2026	https://leisuregrouptravel.com/america250-events-for-2026/
NISE Net (STEM Network) America250 Resources	https://www.nisenet.org/america250
NISE Net: America250 Workshop	https://www.nisenet.org/America250Workshop
NISE Net: Online Workshop for America250	https://www.nisenet.org/events/online-workshop/America250
Presidents for Kids: 10 Fun Kid-Friendly America250 Events	https://www.presidentsforkids.com/us-presidential-history-blog/10-fun-kid-friendly-events-to-celebrate-americas-250th-anniversary-in-2026
SciStarter: Library America250 Resources	https://pages.scistarter.org/library-america250/

ACTIVITIES ($)	URL
Classical Historian: US History Memory Game ($)	https://www.classicalhistorian.com/store/p247/ushistorygamememory.html
Go Book Fair: Americana Matching Game ($)	https://gobookfair.com/product/americana-matching-game/
Rainbow Resource: History Memory Games ($)	https://www.rainbowresource.com/016903.html
Reagan Foundation: American History Memory Game ($)	https://www.reaganfoundation.org/store/products/american-history-memory-game
Teachers Pay Teachers: History Matching Games ($)	https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/browse?search=history+matching+games
Teachers Pay Teachers: Time Capsule Class Projects ($)	https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/browse?search=time+capsule+class+project