

Family History is America's Story

AN AMERICA250 TOOLKIT
FOR GENEALOGY AND
FAMILY HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS



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INTRODUCTION: HISTORY MEETS OPPORTUNITY

What is America250?

The Second Continental Congress voted to adopt the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776, and nearly 250 years later people and organizations are preparing to celebrate the anniversary of that event and the ideals promoted in our nation's pursuit of a more perfect union. Interest in the country's history and the number of activities to commemorate its founding are growing every day with many efforts culminating on 4 July 2026 for the United States Semiquincentennial, also referred to as America250. For many, this time sparks a new or renewed curiosity about family history. It's something not experienced since the Bicentennial in 1976, the year Alex Haley's novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* was published, or at all since millions of Americans have been born in the last fifty years.



Why America250 Matters - This is Our Moment

America250 is a historic moment and the National Genealogical Society (NGS) invites individuals and organizations, especially those who are NGS members, to step into an important role. The genealogy and family history community is uniquely positioned to make history personal and meaningful for anyone exploring the nation's past. Family history tells the country's story, and that offers every person in the United States a way to more deeply understand themselves and others, or perhaps discover their family's part in the nation's story for the first time.

The American Association for State and Local History states that America250 is "a once-in-a-generation opportunity to connect people to the past." The connections are for all. Much emphasis will rightly be placed on the thirteen colonies and Revolutionary War, but the family stories woven into the fabric of America are not limited to those with roots through those places or that time. Family historians and genealogists are keepers and guardians of our past, seekers of complete and accurate history who can share research and stories that showcase the full tapestry of American experiences. In doing so, they can make valuable contributions to this national celebration that inspire more people to begin or restart their genealogy journey, cultivate belonging and community, and inform civic conversations.

How to Use the Toolkit

If you have not begun to prepare for America250, NGS encourages our organization members to use this toolkit as a starting point. Or, use it as a way to generate additional ideas to expand your organization's plans. This is not an exhaustive list of every organization, resource, and activity. Rather, the tips, suggestions, links, and information included are intended to point organizations to practical, easy ways to do outreach, engage a wide range of people, and work with partners to grow the genealogy and family history community.

America250 gives your organization an opportunity to invite everyone to explore their past and their connection to the nation's history. NGS is excited to support your efforts to open the doors, virtually or in person, and share all that you offer with more people. This is the time to highlight the resources, education, or expertise that can only be found with your organization and the toolkit can help equip you to do that.

Together, we can provide a rich and inclusive understanding of American history and its relevance today that will generate a passion for family history for generations to come. ★



ORGANIZATIONS FOR RESOURCES, INFORMATION, AND PARTNERSHIPS

The handful of organizations listed below have key information and resources and could possibly become a valuable partner for America250. NGS hopes that as you check out the links provided and dive into options, you will find this toolkit a good place to begin. Many more organizations are becoming involved in America250, so you may uncover more resources and partners as you move forward with your planning.

The US Semiquincentennial Commission **america250.org**

Established by Congress in 2016, the United States Semiquincentennial Commission guides planning for the observance of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence of the United States. America250.org is the nonprofit supporting organization and official website for the US Semiquincentennial Commission.

America250 Initiatives **america250.org/get-involved**

Several initiatives are already taking place and more are planned for launch by 4 July 2026. Genealogy organizations and family historians may be most interested in America's Invitation, a way for individuals to submit their stories through the website. Our American Story calls for nominations of unsung heroes or people who have made an impact in our lives for possible inclusion in a storytelling project with the Library of Congress. Both offer a chance to highlight the importance of researching and preserving family history. Also of note is the America Gives initiative, which encourages service. One featured partner project is the National DAR Day of Service.

State and Territory Commissions **america250.org/our-partners/state-and-territory-commissions**

State and Territory Commissions have been established for all fifty states plus territories to coordinate activities at a regional and local level. Programs and events will vary across the country to showcase the unique history of a particular place. By connecting with the commission for your state or territory,

you may be able to ensure genealogy activities are included in their plans if your organization is in a specific location.

American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) **aaslh.org/programs/250th**

Next to the official commission, AASLH is the leading organization for America250 resources thanks to grant funding for this purpose.

Organizations in the genealogy and family history community can find guides, ideas, and links to additional tools and resources with AASLH. Two free downloadable items to get are:

- **Making History at 250: The Field Guide** for the Semiquincentennial that offers five themes—Unfinished Revolutions, Power of Place, We the People, American Experiment, and Doing History—with prompts to help organizations generate content and activities for a commemoration effort; and
- **250th Anniversary Program Handbook** that provides a number of specific ideas and examples for programs, events, and partner collaborations. The suggestions are intentionally practical and low-cost so that organizations of all types and sizes can easily find ways to use them.

The AASLH page on America250 has a tab for Planning Resources that provides links to articles, webinars, books, and other items that may be instructive and valuable to many organizations. A mix of free and low-cost items are available covering

- 250th Themes and Conceptual Guidance,
- General Semiquincentennial Guidance, and
- Resources for Strengthening Your Programs and Institution including Exhibits and Programs,

Collaboration and Partnerships, Planning and Evaluation, Advocacy and Fundraising, and Social Media and Marketing.

National Initiative Tracker

250initiatives.aaslh.org

AASLH created the National Initiative Tracker as a way for people and institutions to find out what is happening at a national level for the Semiquincentennial. Genealogy and family history organizations should submit any of their events or projects that are national in scope through the form linked on the tracker page.

250 Con

aaslh.org/annualconference/250-con

AASLH hosted 250 Con, a virtual event, on 27–28 February 2025. The recording bundle is available for purchase for a small fee. For those interested, this might build enthusiasm as you watch the keynote conversation featuring the leaders of the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the Smithsonian Institution and discover other organizations and possible partners through each session.

National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) dar.org/outreach/america-250

DAR is a founding and program partner for the US Semiquincentennial Commission. Honorary President General Lynn Forney Young serves on the Commission. The National Society and DAR chapters are eager to celebrate what has been years in the making for their organization, and projects and events include:

- **American Revolution Experience**, an online and traveling exhibition produced in collaboration with the American Battlefield Trust.
- **America 250 Markers**, a project to place markers in honor of men and women who were Revolutionary War patriots and contributed to American independence.
- **Pathway of the Patriots**, an initiative planting 250 trees in memory of 250 patriots who are featured in an online resource.
- **Spain and the Birth of American Democracy**:

A History Symposium, a free event held 19–20 September 2025 in Washington DC with the Queen Sofía Spanish Institute and the Fundación Ramón Areces.

National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) america250sar.org

SAR is a supporting partner of the US Semiquincentennial Commission. It has set up a website with a resource library for SAR chapters and others interested in the materials. Navigate through the various sections, especially the SAR and Educational tabs, for collections of:

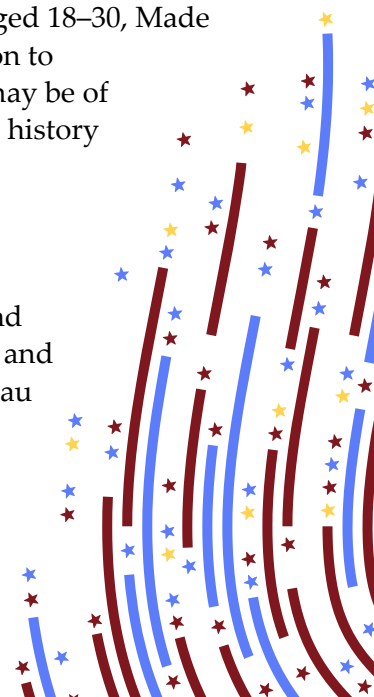
- Historical information and videos,
- Lesson plans and educational videos for schools,
- Resources for scouting and youth outreach, and
- Links to other useful websites, and more.

SAR is the local host society of the NGS 2025 Family History Conference with its headquarters and library in Louisville, Kentucky. If you attend the conference, you may want to set aside time for in-person research and interaction with staff which may be beneficial for anyone planning America250 activities. Find general SAR information at sar.org.

Made By Us historymadebyus.org

Made By Us seeks to engage and empower young adults to participate in history, connect with the nation's story, and shape the future. With programs targeted to Gen Z and anyone aged 18–30, Made By Us enables the next generation to learn and lead. Two initiatives may be of interest to genealogy and family history organizations.

- **Youth250 Toolkit** with ideas for building intergenerational relationships and programs and designing successful activities and events, and the Youth250 Bureau of 100 young people trained and ready to contribute their voice and perspective, youth



engagement strategies, and insights for America250 planning. Learn more at historymadebyus.org/youth250.

- **Partner Hub** offering a Research and Resource Library with links to tip sheets, reports, and more plus official opportunities for organizations to work with Made By Us and other partners. Explore the [partnership options](#).

Made By Us is collaborating with The New York Historical and other organizations on a new website and project at onour250th.org. It offers people an opportunity to post their hopes for America as it turns 250. Additional partners for the project and publicity are sought. To get involved online, host an in-person Wish Wall, or view the Participant Kit, [go to the Google form](#). ★

TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS TO SUPPORT SUCCESS

Organizing events or activities for America250 is crucial, but so is making sure that your organization is ready to reach more people or be in the spotlight. Take a little time to plan thoughtfully and strategically, smooth out your operations, train your volunteers or staff, and get systems and relationships in place that will benefit you now and in the future.

Identify Historical Connections and Your Strengths

For America250, it may be beneficial to identify any specific connection points your organization has to the nation's history. Your focus, specialty, or location could determine some of how you plan events and what you want to highlight about your organization. What historical artifacts or information can only be found within your organization? Know the family stories your organization can tell and share that history.

Regardless of any direct connection, every genealogical organization has the potential to reap the rewards of outreach around family history. Your organization has expertise and resources that could be valuable to anyone exploring their roots. Identify the knowledge within your organization and what you do well, and play to your strengths as you plan for how to help beginners or work with more experienced researchers trying to enhance their skills.

Prepare Volunteers and Staff

Empower the people in your organization to welcome anyone who might engage with you during America250. Set the stage for positive experiences with your organization that make visitors want to come back.

- Define roles and expectations

and train for specific tasks so that all involved know what to do and are confident in their work.

- Go through systems and processes so that participation is simple. Do what you can to remove barriers or frustrations so that visitors and your staff or volunteers enjoy the event or activity from start to end.
- Provide talking points to those who answer phone calls or emails and who might get a higher volume of questions. Designate an official spokesperson for media interviews and prep that individual with talking points.
- Refresh everyone on how to greet people at in-person or virtual events and foster friendly interactions. Be mindful of the different types of people who might show up and how to genuinely make them feel comfortable.
- Recognize that some people may have concerns about safety and security for personal information when getting into aspects of genealogy and family history research. Take steps to allow them to understand how information is stored or used, alleviate fears where possible, etc.
- Talk about how your organization and everyone representing it can be approachable and helpful during activities. Each person plays a part in giving visitors a reason to return and perhaps become involved long-term.

Build and Expand Partnerships

America250 is the perfect time for genealogy and

historical societies, family associations, libraries, archives, museums, municipalities, state and regional government agencies, community and civic organizations, and other institutions to come together and create memorable experiences for people. Finding partners to share resources, ideas, volunteers, and more can make outreach and engagement easier and allow each organization to have a bigger impact than they could manage alone.

Plan Marketing and Outreach

Use [ConferenceKeeper.org](https://www.conferencekeeper.org)

Anyone can list genealogy-related events for free and reach people around the nation through ConferenceKeeper. Paid advertising on the website is also available. NGS member organizations receive a discounted rate for ad purchases and get one free thirty-day sidebar ad. Visit [conferencekeeper.org](https://www.conferencekeeper.org) and email info@conferencekeeper.org for details.

Network and Promote Your Organization

Partnerships often provide ways to have your organization and events promoted through other entities to help get information in front of additional audiences. You can also reach out to other groups and share events that may be of interest to their constituents. Think of any organization where there are logical connections for each of you to cross-promote America250 activities. This could include churches, senior centers, fraternal groups, youth organizations, and others. Have your leadership look for opportunities within their personal networks to connect your organization to other groups. But think outside the box too. Everyone has a family history, so you never know where you might make a connection or find a new partner.

Create or Update a Media Kit

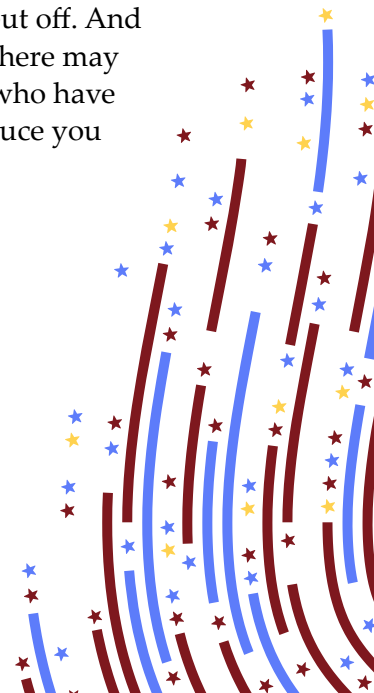
Ensure you're ready to let the world know what you have to offer. Traditional and new media outlets and others highlighting America250 will be looking for content from organizations or people to interview.

Make it simple for them to include you. Develop or update a press kit describing your organization, what you do, and your ties to American history.

- Include contact information for your group and any experts who have given permission. Links to your website, social media, or blog are also important. (Use short links where possible. There are many free online tools if you need to refer to a lengthy web address and want a short link.)
- Describe your organization and how it benefits people. Share fun, interesting, and necessary facts such as when you were founded, a very brief overview of your history, the types or numbers of people involved in your organization, any unique resources or specializations that might draw people in, etc.
- Anticipate and answer questions, perhaps with an FAQ.
- Provide high-resolution images representative of your organization in action. Include complete and accurate captions and permissions required for proper use and attribution.
- Write an article and give permission for media to use it as they see fit. The easier it is for them to include you, the more likely it is that they will.

Experiment, Engage, and Ask for Help

America250 might be the moment to try out social media ads for the first time or contact a media outlet or podcast you've never worked with before. Maybe a national celebration is a reason to finally reach out to an organization that could be a partner but is outside the normal groups your organization would engage. It's time to get creative with your marketing or do things you've put off. And don't be afraid to ask for help. There may be people in your organization who have the skills you need or can introduce you to someone who does. ★



IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Need inspiration or wondering where to begin? In addition to guides and resources from the organizations listed earlier in this toolkit, there are suggestions below to help you and your organization get started, discover a new possibility, and engage more people. What and how you plan will vary depending on the type of organization you have, your focus or location, etc., but no matter who you are this is a moment to take advantage of and you can make ideas fit your needs and audiences. Don't pass up the chance to get more people interested in family history and offer fun or profound ways to connect them to their past and your organization.

Beginner Classes, Workshops, and Handouts

If America250 sparks an interest in family history for someone, then your organization needs to be prepared to teach them how to research. Offer virtual or in-person classes or workshops to provide guidance to those just getting started on their genealogy journey and host fun activities introducing them to the joy of discovering and preserving history. You might want to have handouts or a tip sheet that can be given out to new people as part of a welcome from your organization and serve as a handy reference for them to use. As you grow an interest in family history, you potentially grow your organization.

If you need educational materials, the NGS partnership with The Family History Guide Association can assist organization members with tools and resources that are ideal for beginners. To learn more, check out [NGS Partnerships](#) or watch the [OrgConnects! video](#).

Free Scanning Events

One great way to get people excited about genealogy is by helping them scan and save images, items, or documents that are significant to them and their family.

It's also the type of event that can be meaningful to volunteers as they help people preserve their history.

Organization members can participate in the Family Matters Community Engagement Program and Outreach Toolkit Loan with NGS and Vivid-Pix to get equipped for scanning events or add to their capacity to host larger events. The Toolkit includes the Vivid-Pix

Memory Station™ and software, education courses, marketing templates, and more. Check out [NGS Partnerships](#) or [download the Family Matters flyer](#).

PBS-Related Watch Parties or Community Events

NGS works with WETA, the PBS affiliate that produces *Finding Your Roots*, to connect our organization members and PBS stations for possible partnerships. There are potential opportunities to host workshops or other activities in a community that engage people around a PBS show and family history. It's a win-win since both the PBS affiliate and genealogy organization want to plan programs that will interest their community. Leading into America250 celebrations in 2026, PBS is promoting the fall 2025 *American Revolution* series by Ken Burns, produced by WETA. To express interest in *American Revolution* programming specifically, [submit the interest form](#).

If your organization wants to connect with WETA and a local PBS affiliate to partner around *Finding Your Roots* or other shows, please email ksmith@ngsgenealogy.org. And even if you don't have a location where partnering with a particular station is an option, your organization could still consider watch parties or other activities to try and reach people watching PBS shows.

Tours or Exhibits

If you are able to host in-person events, think about what you can do for group activities and outings. Walking tours for historical sites, memorials, or cemeteries are opportunities to be out in the community and bring people into family history. Exhibits could connect people to a particular time or place. Or, consider how to make tours or exhibits

available virtually through online videos or galleries.

Youth, Young Adult, or Family Programs

Every organization wants to reach younger people. Developing a love for family history as a child or young adult can be grounding for many individuals. America250 is the ideal time to work on inspiring the next generation of genealogists. Offer programs that are kid- and family-friendly, with small time commitments and fun activities to engage in family history. Or, engage young adults in events that will deepen their understanding of the importance of knowing and preserving your history. This is often an area where partnerships are crucial. From schools to scouting to other groups focused on youth or young adults, build relationships that will enable your organization to effectively reach people of various ages and life stages.

Oral History or Profiles

How can your organization help document history and make it accessible? Capturing oral history or researching and sharing profiles of people in your organization or community can be a way to draw others in. Whether you connect to Revolutionary War patriots or groups often underrepresented in the country's narrative such as African Americans, Indigenous Peoples, and Native Americans, your organization has the skills and resources to save and share a part of the American story. You are also in a position to give people the tools to do that for their family or community. Connecting individuals with their past and ensuring it is preserved for the future is often powerful or moving.

Another approach is to share stories from people in your organization that highlight meaningful discoveries they've made, why genealogy matters to them, and how it is a piece of the nation's history.

Family History Month

October is Family History Month and a time to celebrate that family history tells America's story. NGS provides organizations with resources on the [NGS Family History Month page](#) that can be used in October or throughout the year. Download the following PDFs and add your organization's logo in the upper right corner. Offer these resources to those just starting to explore family history or people

restarting their genealogy research to make common projects more manageable.

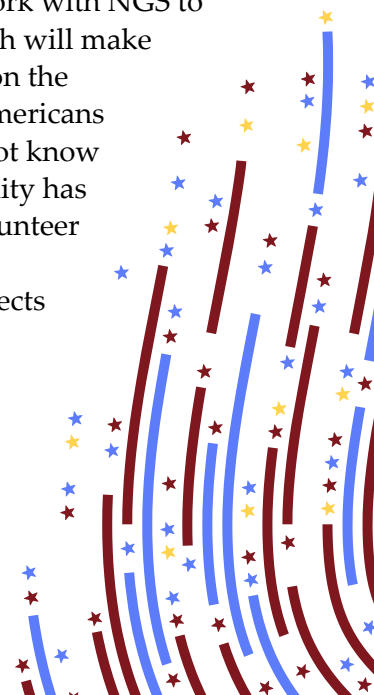
- **Scan and Label Family Photos** - Tips to digitize and preserve visual family history for generations to come.
- **Record and Preserve Family Memories** - Guidance to plan and record interviews and capture meaningful conversations.
- **Write and Share Family Stories** - Prompts to get started and suggestions for telling cherished tales.

Engaging and Crowdsourced Projects

Think of easy things anyone could do to contribute to research or preservation. Is there a way to involve more people in gathering items for an exhibit or to expand the collection at a society, library, archive, or museum? Could you rally a community around sharing family photos that are important to local history? Explore how your organization might bridge the gap between history being in textbooks and becoming personal, and create positive actions for people to participate in a memorable event or experience.

Fundraise for the Veteran Bounty Land Records Project

NGS is working with genealogy organizations nationwide to raise money to preserve, index, and digitize the bounty land warrant applications held by the National Archives. The federal government granted land in lieu of pay to attract enlistments and reward service in the Revolutionary, 1812, Indian, and Mexican-American Wars. NGS launched a \$2.5 million capital campaign to complete the project. Genealogy organizations can work with NGS to raise money for the project which will make some 360,000 records available on the internet, allowing millions of Americans to discover ancestors they did not know existed. The genealogy community has raised funds and committed volunteer hours exceeding \$10 million to accomplish critical national projects like the two million homestead records, the US-Mexican War searchable database, the War of 1812 "Preserve the Pensions" project, and more. For more



information on how to help support the Veteran Bounty Land Records Project, contact NGS.

Get Involved and Get in Front of People

The suggestions here scratch the surface of what might be planned for America250. You may be planning large-scale events or just beginning to gather ideas and have smaller activities in

mind. Regardless, do what you can and know your organization's contributions are valuable. Participating in America250 will elevate family stories in the country's commemoration and ensure that celebrations include diverse perspectives and personal connections, making history more meaningful and family history more accessible to everyone in the United States. ★

WHAT'S NEXT?

Your organization may have ideas, resources, or partnership opportunities not covered in the toolkit. NGS member organizations can have their delegate log in to the FORUM online communities platform to discuss America250 planning with delegates from other organizations. The questions and conversations in the **Organization Delegate community on FORUM** are a fantastic way to collaborate. As you host events, have your delegate share how things went and what worked well so that other organizations can learn from your experiences.

Beyond America250

Ideally, preparing for America250 is not the end of your work. As you plan for 2026, think beyond that as well. The partnerships, relationships, and engagement you cultivate now should carry into the future and become part of your organization's operations and programs. Keep the momentum going, and continue to build the genealogy community. ★



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ngsgenealogy.org
ngs@ngsgenealogy.org
703-525-0050 or 1-800-473-0060

Please Note: All information contained in this toolkit is accurate as of the date of publication. Contact NGS with questions or to bring our attention to information that has changed.

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