

May 22, 2020

AASLH 250th Anniversary Planning Summary

Since 2016, the American Association for State and Local History has provided leadership for the history field in advancing preparations for the United States' 250th anniversary. Beginning initially with a small task force of representatives from state and local history institutions, this effort has expanded in recent years. At present, AASLH is advancing several different initiatives in an effort to ensure the nation's 250th anniversary commemoration presents for the public relevant and inclusive stories about the American past, showcases the excellent work being done across the country, and strengthens the field for future generations.

Field-Wide Goals

In collaboration with AASLH members and partners around the field (including the Association of African American Museums (AAAM) and the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums) AASLH has developed several overarching goals we hope will guide the development of 250th commemoration programming. They are:

- **Make history relevant** to every American, every day
- **Tell inclusive stories** about the American past
- **Increase funding** for history
- Enhance the public's **engagement with history collections**
- Strengthen **history education**

Over the past year, AASLH-organized working groups have been collaborating to provide depth and specificity to each of these goal areas, providing vision, action steps, and "moonshot" ideas.

National Coordinating Committee

Beginning in 2019, AASLH organized a coordinating committee to facilitate communication and coordination among national stakeholders as preparations for "America 250" proceed; we are happy to count AASLH as a partner in this effort. The committee includes representatives from major organizations that represent the diversity and dynamism of the history field, from museums and public history institutions, scholarly associations and societies, secondary education associations, and others. Although the national commemoration effort for the 250th anniversary will be largely decentralized, it is AASLH's hope that convening this coordinating committee will enhance collaboration across the field and help advance shared goals to maximize the impact of this anniversary.

At present, this committee meets periodically via video conference to share current projects, gather feedback from colleagues, and help chart future activities. Although the pandemic has disrupted the regular meetings of this group, we anticipate that quarterly video meetings will

resume this summer or fall. In addition, thanks to grant funding from the National Endowment for Humanities (discussed below) we hope to convene an in-person meeting of the coordinating committee in early 2021. AASLH is excited to have ASALH contributing to the coordinating committee and look forward to their continued involvement.

2020 NEH Grant

Earlier this year, AASLH received a grant from NEH to provide leadership and resources to the public history field as it prepares for the 250th anniversary. This 18-month grant will allow us to advance two major projects. First, we have begun work on a comprehensive census of the nation's history organizations. This census will allow us to state confidently the number of historical organizations currently operating in the United States, strengthening advocacy efforts, resource delivery, and other initiatives critical to the 250th.

In addition, the grant will also allow us to develop historical themes to guide the commemoration effort. In partnership with other scholarly associations, we will later this summer convene groups of historians to identify the historical content areas that could align courses, publications, public programs, and other commemoration efforts across the history field. Our hope is that by identifying core themes for the commemoration, we will help ensure that the anniversary prioritizes histories that are representative of the full complexity of the American past, that can strengthen connections between public history and academic history institutions, and that may help focus the synthesis of existing scholarship and the development of new studies. *AASLH would welcome ASALH contribution to this effort.*

Conclusion

AASLH remains committed to working with national, state, and local partners to help ensure the 250th anniversary presents history that is relevant and inclusive. This anniversary offers a unique opportunity to advance our field's collective interests and strengthen our institutions. Just as the Bicentennial in 1976 marked a turning point in the growth of the U.S. public history field, 2026 provides us with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to connect the public with the past.

For additional information about other national and state planning efforts, please visit:

www.aaslh.org/250th.