

Hon. Denise W. Merrill
Chair

Jason R. Mancini, Ph.D.
Vice Chair

Membership

Nicolas Angeli
Connecticut's Old State House –
Youth Leader

Stephen Armstrong
Connecticut State Department of
Education*

Anthony Champalimaud
Member of the Public

Kathryn D'Amato
Office of the Governor*

Melvette Hill
Commission on Women, Children,
Seniors, Equity & Opportunity*

Andrew Horowitz, Ph.D.
Connecticut State Historian

Michael Johnson
Mashantucket Pequot Tribal
Nation*

Robert Kret
Connecticut Museum of Culture
and History

Catherine Labadia
State Historic Preservation Office

Margaret Khan
Connecticut Library Association

Merle McGee
Member of the Public

Deborah Schander, MLIS, JD
Connecticut State Librarian

Elizabeth Shapiro
Department of Economic and
Community Development*

Jonathan Slifka
Department of Aging and Disability
Services

Joe Smith
Mohegan Tribe*

Hon. Stephanie Thomas
Secretary of the State

Maisa Tisdale
Mary and Eliza Freeman Center for
History and Community

Sally Whipple
Connecticut Democracy Center

Amrys O. Williams, Ph.D.
Connecticut League of Museums

**designee*

January 31, 2025

To the Honorable Governor Ned Lamont and Members of the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Executive Order No. 22-2, signed on July 1, 2022, the chair and vice-chair planned for and convened the membership of Connecticut's Semiquincentennial Commission. Four commission meetings were held in 2024, as well as numerous subcommittee meetings.

Commission Members

Chair, Hon. Denise W. Merrill, Member of the Public

Vice-Chair, Jason R. Mancini, Ph.D., CT Humanities

Nicolas Angeli, Connecticut Democracy Center – Youth Leader

Stephen Armstrong, Connecticut State Department of Education
(designee)

Anthony Champalimaud, Troutbeck – Member of the Public

Andrew Horowitz, Ph.D., Connecticut State Historian

Michael Johnson, Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (designee)

Robert Kret, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History (CMCH)

Catherine Labadia, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) (designee)

Margaret Khan, Connecticut Library Association (CLA)

Merle McGee, Everyday Democracy – Member of the Public

Deborah Schander, MLIS, JD, Connecticut State Librarian

Elizabeth Shapiro, Department of Economic & Community Development
(DECD) (designee)

Jonathan Slifka, Department of Aging and Disability Services

Joe Smith, Mohegan Tribe (designee)

Hon. Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of the State

Maisa Tisdale, Mary and Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community

Sally Whipple, Connecticut Democracy Center

Amrys O. Williams, Ph.D., Connecticut League of Museums (CLM)

Kathryn D'Amato, Governor of the State of Connecticut (designee)

Melvette Hill, The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity &
Opportunity (CWCSEO)

America 250 | CT Action Plan

Goal 1

Uncover and share stories that represent all the people of Connecticut, past and present.

Action Step 1: Promote the commission, its themes, and resources around the state.

2024 Updates

Benchmark 1: Participate in at least 6 festivals and fairs around the state

Benchmark 2: Conduct interviews and participate in conversations in local media outlets

Benchmark 3: Have organizations use commission website to promote local events

Progress: Commission members and CT Humanities staff participated in five festivals and two parades throughout the state to raise awareness of the 250th and connect with the public. At all festivals, the question was posed: "In one word, how do you wish to feel after the 250th?" A total of 78 responses were collected. (See appendix A)

In 2024, media coverage included a feature with Commissioner Andy Horowitz in *Connecticut Magazine* discussing the legacy of the bicentennial and coverage of a visit with the Norwich 250th committee and representatives of the Mohegan Tribe in *The Day*. In addition, the commission substantially increased the use of social media to 5 posts per week.

A community events calendar and submission process for organizations was created and published on the commission's website. Thirty-two events were featured on the community calendar in 2024. With the expansion of the affiliate program and network of municipal committees, it is expected that this number will grow in 2025.

2025 Plans

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Participate, or facilitate the participation of a local committee or affiliate organization, in at least 10 festivals and fairs around the state

Benchmark 2: Conduct interviews and participate in conversations in local media outlets

Benchmark 3: Have organizations use the commission website to promote local events

Action Step 2: Build on and share the resource library for CT history, featuring the four themes that the commission has established for CT's commemoration.

2024 Updates

Benchmark 1: Add to list of books and online resources on CT250.org website, particularly focusing on teacher resources

Benchmark 2: Share resource recommendations with all CT libraries and community liaisons

Progress: The CT250.org website continues to be built out, with both a general resources page and specific pages for local committees, affiliates, and educators. In addition to resources curated from other organizations and state or national commissions, the America 250 | CT Commission created a resource-at-a-glance handout for educators and a guide for organizations to utilize to ensure Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access principles are considered in event and program planning. Resources are being shared regularly with community liaisons and partners via email blasts and in virtual meetings.

2025 Plans

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Add to list of books and online resources on CT250.org website, particularly focusing on teacher resources

Benchmark 2: Share resource recommendations with CT libraries, community liaisons, youth leaders, and educators

Goal 2

Create a community-based structure that will be used for commission work moving forward.

Action Step 1: Identify an America 250 | CT liaison in each town and city.

2024 Updates

Benchmark 1: Identify 169 liaisons across the state, working with Councils of Government as able

Benchmark 2: Share liaison contact information with the public via website

Progress: As of December 31, 2024, 59 municipalities have identified a liaison. All confirmed contacts are listed on the commission's website and depicted on an interactive map of the state. The commission is in discussions with several additional municipalities that have not yet identified a specific contact, but are working towards doing so.

Additional outreach to municipal governments is planned for 2025 to continue building this list of contacts, including print mailings, e-mails, and individual phone outreach.

In addition to engaging with municipal governments, the commission has established an affiliate program and is currently building a network of organizations that are approved to use commission branding on programming and events. As of December 31, 2024, 80 affiliate organizations have been approved, including museums, historical societies, civics organizations, community groups, libraries, arts

organizations, town committees, and marketing firms. Branding guidelines for affiliate organizations were developed and published on the commission's website.

2025 Plans

Schedule: January 1 – June 30, 2025

Benchmark 1: Identify 169 liaisons across the state, working with Councils of Government as able

Benchmark 2: Engage municipalities in signing on to a recommitment to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence on or around July 4, 2025

Action Step 2: Continue to build and amplify a network of affiliate organizations and engage them in increasing public awareness of the 250th and planning programming aligned with the commission's four themes.

2025 Plans

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Solicit additional affiliate applications on a monthly basis through regular commission newsletters and word of mouth

Benchmark 2: Identify organizations in underrepresented communities and fields and conduct direct outreach

Benchmark 3: List at least 60 events on commission calendar in 2025

Action Step 3: Encourage collaboration and inclusion in each municipality with participation from elected officials, community leaders, libraries, schools, community centers, local museums, and historic sites.

2024 Updates

Benchmark 1: Have conveners (Connecticut League of History Organizations, Connecticut Humanities, Connecticut Library Association, Designated Regional Service Organizations, etc.) encourage collaboration and meetings between organizations

Benchmark 2: Engage Tribal leaders, members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, church leaders, and other community leaders in underrepresented groups

Benchmark 3: Encourage commission members to participate in these events, showing commission support for local organizations and events

Progress: In coordination with Chair Denise Merrill, Vice Chair Jason Mancini, commissioners local to each area, and CT Humanities staff, the commission has hosted convenings of a wide range of organizations in Hartford & Bridgeport, as well as similar convenings on a smaller scale in Norwich and Lebanon. Invitees to these convenings included elected officials (both local and state), local community leaders, representatives of local libraries, schools, and community centers, local museums and historic sites, Tribal representatives, and youth leaders. Additional convenings are planned for 2025.

The Connecticut League of Museums (formerly the Connecticut League of History Organizations) has encouraged its members to collaborate on 250th-related projects through their annual conference, as well as through workshops held in conjunction with other organizations.

Through the Connecticut Library Association, the commission is encouraging local libraries and librarians to plan programming related to the 250th and to engage with their local committees.

2025 Plans

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Solicit additional affiliate applications on a monthly basis through regular commission newsletters and word of mouth

Benchmark 2: Identify organizations in underrepresented communities and fields and conduct direct outreach

Benchmark 3: List at least 60 events on commission calendar in 2025

Action Step 4: Host sessions to share the America 250 | CT Planning Guide and encourage brainstorming of ideas on how to align with commission themes.

2024 Updates

Benchmark 1: Update planning guide quarterly with new ideas and information

Benchmark 2: Host at least one session quarterly with partner organizations

Progress: In mid-2024, CT Humanities staff began hosting monthly Zoom meetings with municipal committee members. These meetings are used to share planning resources developed by the commission as well as by regional and national groups. In addition, each month a different town committee is featured to encourage collaboration and spark new ideas. Quarterly meetings with affiliate organizations are planned for 2025.

Commissioners and CT Humanities staff have also participated in meetings with partner organizations to encourage planning of events and programs aligned with the themes of the commission, including the State Historical Records Advisory Board, Conservation ConneCTion, and the Connecticut League of Museums.

2025 Plans

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Have conveners (Connecticut League of Museums, Connecticut Humanities, Connecticut Library Association, Designated Regional Service Organizations, etc.) encourage collaboration and meetings between organizations

Benchmark 2: Engage Tribal leaders, members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, church leaders, and other community leaders in underrepresented groups

Benchmark 3: Encourage commission members to participate in these events, showing commission support for local organizations and events

Goal 3

Invite the public to engage with America 250 | CT themes.

Action Step 1: Identify historic events, sites, trails, buildings, and stories relevant to CT History that can be used to boost tourism in the state.

2024 Updates

Benchmark 1: Identify at least one event, site, trail, and building per county that can be used as a starting point for research and activities

Benchmark 2: Share information with the public via website, including a timeline

Benchmark 3: Encourage scholarly research on underrepresented CT stories

Progress: This project has been tabled for completion in 2025.

2025 Plans

Schedule: January 1 – July 31, 2025

Benchmark 1: Identify at least one event, site, trail, and building per county that can be used as a starting point for research and activities

Benchmark 2: Share information with the public via website, including a timeline

Benchmark 3: Encourage scholarly research on underrepresented CT stories

Action Step 2: Using information collected, work with a curatorial team to develop an inclusive exhibition exploring Connecticut's role in the Revolutionary War that can be shared with all municipalities.

2024 Updates

Benchmark 1: Gather a representative curatorial team to ensure multiple perspectives are taken into consideration

Benchmark 2: Conduct research and draft an exhibition script that can be told in three panels that will be fabricated in 2025 for distribution in 2026

Progress: The Office of the State Historian is working to create an exhibit exploring Connecticut history during the Revolutionary War. The exhibit conceives of the entire state as a living museum of the American Revolution, and will be available for municipalities and institutions across the state. It is being produced in collaboration with the Museum of Connecticut History and its curatorial team and advisory board, and will align with the Semiquincentennial exhibit the Museum of Connecticut History is currently developing for its space at the Connecticut State Library, which is planned to open in July 2026.

2025 Plans

Schedule: September 1, 2024 – April 30, 2026

Benchmark 1: With commission affiliates and local committees, identify sites statewide that can help tell the story of Connecticut

Benchmark 2: Create panels to feature at sites to identify them as part of this project and highlight the role of Connecticut in the founding and building of the United States, with fabrication in 2025 for distribution in 2026

Action Step 3: Encourage organizations around the state to engage with public history and civic literacy.

2024 Updates

Benchmark 1: Host at least one capacity-building workshop around community-centric history practices

Benchmark 2: Partner with the Secretary of the State's office to support civic engagement efforts

Progress: The commission is promoting civic engagement via its social media channels by amplifying messaging from the Secretary of the State's (SOTS) office. The Commission also plans to join the SOTS Civically-Engaged Organization program to stay up to date on messaging and materials.

In addition to work sharing civics messaging from the SOTS, staff and commission members are involved in Red, White & Blue Schools, a recognition program for Connecticut K-12 schools who choose to go above and beyond in their delivery of civics education. In the 2025-26 school year, the program theme will be tied to the 250th and encourage schools, teachers, students, and their families to engage with materials that have been created by the commission, particularly the education subcommittee.

2025 Plans

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Host at least one capacity-building workshop around community-centric history practices

Benchmark 2: Partner with the Secretary of the State's office to support civic engagement efforts

2024 Commission Progress

As outlined in the action plan, in 2024 the Commission worked to increase awareness of the Semiquincentennial amongst the public, municipalities, and organizations statewide. Additionally, it endeavored to create a strong database of resources for Connecticut organizations to draw upon in their work connected to the 250th. Other progress includes:

Coordination with National and Regional Organizations

In 2024, commission members and their representatives participated in the following regional and national convenings:

- > Zoom calls hosted by America250
- > Zoom calls hosted by the American Association for State and Local History
- > A Common Cause for All in Virginia - March 18-20
- > A northeast states gathering in Saratoga - June 4
- > America250 Convening of States & Territories in Washington, D.C. - July 9-11
- > The American Association for State and Local History conference - September 10-14
- > America 250 PA Convening - September 20-22

At the July 17, 2024 meeting, the commission voted to officially partner with the national group, America250.

Outreach and Fundraising

The commission has begun to hold meetings throughout the state to increase accessibility to Connecticut residents beyond the Capitol area. Thus far, commission meetings have been held at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Mashantucket and at the Fairfield Museum & History Center in Fairfield. In 2025, the commission plans to hold meetings in the Hartford area, Litchfield Hills, Northeastern Connecticut, and at a Tribal location.

Commission members have conducted site visits, interviews with media outlets, and participated in planning meetings throughout the state. A representative list includes:

- > A feature in *Connecticut Magazine* with Andy Horowitz looking back on the bicentennial
- > Site visits have taken place at the Old Norwichtown Green, Old Norwichtown Cemetery, Leffingwell House, and Uncas Leap Heritage Area in Norwich, Lebanon Historical Society and Governor Jonathan Trumbull House in Lebanon, and the Museum of Connecticut History and the State Archives at the Connecticut State Library

- > Public outreach via tabling at community festivals, including Hartford Bonanza, the Connecticut Maritime Heritage Festival, Hartford PRIDE, the West Indian Independence Festival, and The Gathering

CT Humanities is the non-profit organization recognized by the State of Connecticut to coordinate and lead the state's initiatives. To ensure the state's efforts are amplified on the local level, Commission Chair Denise Merrill and CT Humanities have conducted additional outreach to all mayors and first selectmen of Connecticut municipalities to encourage the establishment of local committees. In 2024, Chair Denise Merrill, Vice Chair Jason Mancini, and CT Humanities staff presented at the following gatherings around the state:

- > Connecticut Council of Municipalities - Tuesday, January 9, 2024
- > Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments - Friday, January 19, 2024
- > Western Connecticut Council of Governments - Thursday, June 20, 2024
- > South Central Regional Council of Governments - Wednesday, June 26, 2024
- > Northwest Hills Council of Governments - Thursday, July 11, 2024

Additionally, convenings of arts, culture, and tourism organizations, municipal government, and educators have taken place in Hartford and Bridgeport, with future convenings planned for early 2025.

Other outreach efforts that have been overseen by CT Humanities in 2024 and will continue through 2025 include:

- > Manage a calendar and website to raise awareness, build excitement, and encourage civic participation in activities around the semiquincentennial
- > Bring together organizations across Connecticut to celebrate the history of all residents, to be managed through CT Humanities granting programs
- > Collaborate with community-level committees in towns across the state to direct programming from the grassroots level

To date, CT Humanities has secured the following support for America 250 | CT:

- > \$11,326.13 from 5 private donors
- > \$135,000 from 2 private foundations
- > \$8,085.50 from a fundraiser at Mohegan Sun arena

CT Humanities will continue to solicit support from corporations, foundations, and other private donors in 2025.

CT Humanities has made the 250th a funding priority, and as such has awarded grants through the CTH Fund and Good to Great to organizations across the state which are working on projects tied to the themes of the Commission. To date, CT Humanities has awarded 37 grants for a total of \$2,432,774. In addition to granting from its own funds, CT Humanities is encouraging grant-making organizations around the state to prioritize the 250th.

2025 Subcommittee Goals

Community & Organizational Engagement Subcommittee: The Engagement Subcommittee will promote an expansive and inclusive sense of America 250 | CT, identifying ways to engage a broad array of Connecticut residents in the commission's activities. This will require particular attention to finding ways to engage underrepresented groups that may not see themselves in this anniversary. The subcommittee will also encourage community-based activities, identifying community groups that may want to get involved, ensuring they are aware of the anniversary, and encouraging them to be as collaborative and inclusive as possible in their events.

Education Subcommittee: The Education Subcommittee will engage teachers, educators, and administrators in order to gather resources for teaching and studying the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, working to ensure that multiple perspectives are shared to encourage analysis and critical thinking. It will share events with teachers in order to spread the work to students and their families about events that are happening. It will also look for opportunities to allow students to participate in the commemoration.

Governance Subcommittee: The Governance Subcommittee will continue to review affiliate applications and begin to identify where more direct outreach is needed to build an inclusive network of affiliates. The subcommittee will also lead the demographic make-up survey in tandem with the Secretary of the State and manage the annual report to the Governor's office. Governance subcommittee members will continue to offer support and assistance to other subcommittees as needs arise.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Subcommittee: This subcommittee will continue to work with representatives of all other subcommittees to oversee efforts to make the 250th commemoration in Connecticut an inclusive experience for people from different backgrounds.

Marketing & Tourism Subcommittee: In partnership with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development's Office of Marketing, the Marketing & Tourism Subcommittee will encourage and inspire the whole Connecticut tourism industry to create and offer America 250 | CT experiences. In 2025, the subcommittee will revamp the commission's website and advise on the state's marketing plan for 250th activities.

Appendix A: Word Clouds



Created during outreach visits to local committees and sites



Created through public interactions at festivals

Appendix B: 2025 Commission Meeting Dates

Commission

Wednesday, January 15, 2025 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Wednesday, April 16, 2025 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Wednesday, July 16, 2025 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Wednesday, October 15, 2025 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Community & Organizational Engagement Subcommittee

Tuesday, February 11, 2025 – 2:00 to 3:30 PM

Tuesday, May 13, 2025 – 2:00 to 3:30 PM

Tuesday, August 12, 2025 – 2:00 to 3:30 PM

Tuesday, November 11, 2025 – 2:00 to 3:30 PM

Education Subcommittee

Tuesday, January 28, 2025 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, April 29, 2025 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, July 29, 2025 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, October 28, 2025 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Governance Subcommittee

Monday, January 13, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, February 10, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, March 10, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, April 14, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, May 12, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, June 9, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, July 14, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, August 11, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, September 8, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, October 20, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, November 10, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Monday, December 8, 2025 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Subcommittee

TBD

Marketing & Tourism Subcommittee

Thursday, July 10, 2025 – 10:00 to 11:00 AM