

AMERICA 250

CONNECTICUT

America 250 | CT Commission Meeting
Wednesday, October 15, 2025 at 10:00 AM
Community Room
Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library, Old Lyme, CT
Minutes

Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aa5orUS8QsU>

Attendees

Commissioners

Denise Merrill (Chair) (In Person)
Jason Mancini (Vice Chair) (In Person)
Amrys Williams (In Person)
Andy Horowitz (Virtual)
Arienne Orozco (In Person)
Deborah Schander (In Person)
Tom Scanlon (Virtual)
Margaret Khan (In Person)
Steve Armstrong (In Person)
Liz Shapiro (In Person)
Sally Whipple (In Person)
Catherine Labadia (Virtual)
Jonathan Slifka (Virtual)
Merle McGee (Virtual)
Rob Kret (Virtual)
Melvette Hill (Virtual)
Anthony Champalimaud (Virtual)
Nicholas Angeli (Virtual)

Staff

Cyndi Tolosa (In Person)
Rachel Gonzalez (In Person)
Michael Werner (In Person)
Scott Wands (In Person)

Consultant

Emma Wiley (Virtual)

Members of the Public

Katie Huffman (In Person)

The meeting started at 10:03 a.m.

Welcome

Chair Denise Merrill opened the meeting with a welcome and brief overview of the agenda.

Approval of Minutes from [July 16, 2025 Meeting](#) [Attachment A]

Motion: Deborah Schander

Second: Steve Armstrong

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes (15), No (-), Abstain (1) [2 commissioners joined the meeting after this vote]

National/Regional Update

This section begins at 1:30 in the recording.

Vice Chair Jason Mancini provided an update on the national America250 convening of state and territory commissions in Washington, D.C., in July, which he attended with Rachel Gonzalez. The convening was hosted by the national commission and White House Task Force 250. He noted that a national calendar of events is forthcoming, and that states and territories also shared their plans. While in D.C., J. Mancini was able to meet with Doug Bergum, Secretary of the Interior, to encourage allocation of some of the \$150M earmarked for the 250th to state and territory commissions. R. Gonzalez added an overview of national initiatives that will be coming to Connecticut at a yet-to-be-determined date, including Our American Story, visits to K-12 schools, the Patriot Games and quiz bowl for high school students. Cyndi Tolosa added that the Great American Road Trip will be in Connecticut next May. J. Mancini added that many of the national sponsors are giving in-kind contributions to the America250 commission. C. Tolosa shared that Walmart will also be offering sponsorship funds to projects related to Our American Story and revolutionary anniversary programming.

J. Mancini asked Scott Wands, CT Humanities staff, to provide a brief update from the American Association for State and Local History conference in September. He shared that conversation points included funding challenges and concerns of the ability of states to participate in some initiatives.

C. Tolosa added a reminder that America's Field Trip, a national essay writing contest for students, just launched and Connecticut students can be encouraged to participate.

C. Tolosa shared an update on the northeast regional group convening in early 2026. The planning group is open to visiting Connecticut, and staff is working with the local committees in Ridgefield and New Haven to provide some options for March or April of 2026.

Funding Update

This section begins at 12:40 in the recording.

D. Merrill opened the funding update by sharing that the state's funding remained level for this year at \$100k, and there likely will not be an opportunity for additional funding prior to July 4 unless a special session is called. She noted that she sees opportunities for sponsorships and is hopeful that some initiatives will be funded by corporate and other sources.

J. Mancini reiterated that CT Humanities' federal funding was terminated in April and that the National Endowment for the Humanities has also been significantly impacted. He encouraged commissioners to view the current [sponsorship packet](#) [Attachment B] and think about connections they may have with potential funders for some of these projects.

Recaps and Upcoming Plans

This section begins at 18:51 in the recording.

C. Tolosa introduced Emma Wiley, who has been working on a statewide exhibit centered on the themes of the commission that will be offered out on loan to organizations around the state in 2026. E. Wiley provided a brief overview of her work so far. This presentation is available [here](#). C. Tolosa shared that this project will be ready to travel in early 2026.

C. Tolosa provided an update on [Give 250 Connecticut](#), coming up October 27-31, 2025. Registration closes on Friday, October 17. This round will be open to municipalities and 501c3 affiliate organizations to raise funds for their 250th projects.

C. Tolosa shared the work that has been happening amongst a large group of organizations in Hartford, planning a 5-day festival July 1-5, 2026. CTH staff plans for the commission to participate in the Hall of Flags ceremony with veterans groups in the morning of July 4, followed by a recommitment to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence with representatives of municipalities, and then an opportunity for municipalities and affiliates to participate in tabling at Bushnell Park in collaboration with Hartford Bonanza. The day will end with fireworks at the park. Liz Shapiro asked what feedback from municipalities has been, as it can be challenging to get towns into Hartford. C. Tolosa shared that most municipalities are open to sending a representative, even if it is not an elected leader.

D. Merrill noted that the proposed [meeting calendar](#) for 2026 has been attached [Attachment B]. There were no questions or concerns from the commission, so the proposed calendar will be adopted.

Subcommittee Updates

This section begins at 35:52 in the recording.

Arienne Orozco shared an update of the work the Governance subcommittee has been engaged in. The annual report to the governor will need to be drafted over the next couple of months; she requested subcommittees provide drafts to R. Gonzalez, based on the content from last year's report, by December 15, 2025. She also provided an update on the [affiliate program](#), which currently has 158 approved organizations with a goal of 250, and thanked Margaret Khan for assisting in spreading the word to libraries, as there was a large influx of libraries for the most recent application deadline. Additional recruitment can be done with [this flyer](#). C. Tolosa added that affiliates have been meeting via Zoom quarterly, which gives organizations an opportunity to connect with one another. Finally, A. Orozco noted that, while the commission is not required to report demographics to the Secretary of the State's office, the subcommittee felt it was important to continue to gather that data, so the demographic poll will be circulated shortly.

Amrys Williams shared that the Community and Organizational Engagement subcommittee has continued to support outreach efforts to towns, with just around [40 municipalities](#) left to designate a contact person. She encouraged commissioners to share any contacts that they know in the remaining towns with Cyndi & Rachel. The [community calendar](#) is continuing to be populated by events around the state. C. Tolosa added that staff is sharing events from the community calendar via social media and other channels approximately 2-3 times per week, and has recently made a bulk-submission option available to local committees and affiliates. A. Williams and C. Tolosa shared the final draft of a [Code of Conduct](#), which will be available for the commission to approve after legal review [Attachment C]. While the commission is not planning for a large-scale conference in 2026, the hope is to have it in place for smaller events and/or for other organizations to use as a template for their own work. Finally, C. Tolosa shared a draft of a [programming survey](#), which affiliates and local committees will be asked to complete in 2026 to report the impact of their 250th programming. This survey will allow staff to report requested information for national reporting, as well as enhance the annual report to the governor. Commissioners were asked to provide any feedback on the programming survey or code of conduct to C. Tolosa and R. Gonzalez by October 31.

Steve Armstrong provided an update on the work that the Education subcommittee has been doing. [Curriculum materials](#) are available, and will be presented at the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies conference on Friday. The subcommittee will now also be offering a recognition program for students and teachers who participate in a [local history project](#) tied to the 250th. Documents have been created and are being circulated to offer suggestions to teachers, local committees, and historical

societies on ways to incorporate this work into what they are already doing with students. S. Armstrong and Bilal Sekou, Co-Chair of the Education subcommittee, are also collaborating on a virtual program centered around the upcoming Ken Burns film The American Revolution. D. Merrill noted that she will be speaking at a meeting of Connecticut superintendents in November, and encouraged commissioners to talk about the 250th in their own communities to help bring this to schools.

Other Business

This section begins at 57:30 in the recording.

S. Wands provided an update on CT Humanities grants for 250th projects. While there has not been a granting deadline since the July commission meeting, some projects that received grant funds are being implemented.

D. Merrill opened a discussion on possible musical or arts projects tied to the 250th and provided an update on a project to make white oak tree saplings available to towns in 2026 for ceremonial planting.

Public Comment

This section begins at 1:09:30 in the recording.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:15.

Next Meeting: TBD - January 2026

Location TBD (Hartford area)

Attachment A
America 250 | CT Commission Meeting
Wednesday, July 16, 2025 at 10:00 AM
Manchester History Center, Manchester, CT
Minutes

Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6DSnAhyFsk>

Attendees

Commissioners

Denise Merrill (Chair) (In Person)
Jason Mancini (Vice Chair) (In Person)
Amrys Williams (In Person)
Andy Horowitz (In Person)
Arienne Orozco (In Person)
Deborah Schander (In Person)
Tom Scanlon (In Person)
Margaret Khan (In Person)
Nicolas Angeli (In Person)
Steve Armstrong (In Person)
Michael Werner (In Person)
Catherine Labadia (Virtual)
Jonathan Slifka (Virtual)
Maisa Tisdale (Virtual)
Merle McGee (Virtual)
Rob Kret (Virtual)
Sally Whipple (Virtual)

Staff

Cyndi Tolosa (In Person)
Megan Baker (In Person)
Rachel Gonzalez (In Person)
Misa Giroux (Virtual)
Becky Vitkauskas (Virtual)
Mike Kemezis (Virtual)

Members of the Public

Aaron Marcavitch (In Person)
Lee McFadden (In Person)

The meeting started at 10:11 a.m.

Welcome

Chair Denise Merrill opened the meeting with a few words of thanks to the Manchester Historical Society for hosting and brief remarks on Connecticut's commitment to the ideals of the Declaration in its commemoration as July 4, 2026, is quickly approaching.

Approval of Minutes from [April 16, 2025 Meeting](#) [Attachment A]

Motion: Steve Armstrong

Second: Amrys Williams

Discussion: None

Vote: Yes (16), No (-), Abstain (-) [M. Tisdale joined the meeting after this vote was made]

National/Regional Update

This section begins at 3:09 in the recording.

Vice Chair Jason Mancini opened a discussion on the Connecticut commission's relationship with national efforts, noting that with a change in the tone of the federal government's efforts has come some contention. He reiterated that the state's commission and CT Humanities work is non-partisan, and that his hope is for our work to continue to serve as a model for that. Finally, he confirmed that the commission has not set forth any mandates for work that must be done by organizations or towns around the state - rather, that its role has been to offer guidance and encourage groups to plan around the themes of the commission and prioritize access and inclusion to ensure all of Connecticut is represented and reflected in the commemoration. There were no further comments from the commission on this topic.

Cyndi Tolosa provided an update on the work being done by the White House Task Force and the America 250 Commission, which are two separate entities but have been operating closely together in recent months. C. Tolosa & Rachel Gonzalez attend meetings to learn about initiatives and are sharing that information with affiliates and town committees. Upcoming initiatives led by federal entities include:

- State fairs - incorporate elements of America 250 into a state fair - this is being done in cooperation with the Governor's office and state Department of Agriculture
- America 250 national convening in Washington, D.C. - July 28-30, 2025
- America Waves - U.S. flag traveling to military cemeteries in all 50 states & sites overseas. Do not yet have a date for when it will be in Connecticut, but will share details when available.
- The Story of America video series - produced by the White House Task Force in collaboration with Hillsdale College & posted on their website
- Founders Museum at Eisenhower Executive Office Building with a printable version available to organizations which wish to use it
- Links to websites for additional details:
 - [White House Task Force](#)
 - [America 250](#)

C. Tolosa also shared updates on activities that are being coordinated by other state commissions, with a request that commissioners indicate whether they are interested in Connecticut's participation in these activities. These activities include:

- Bell-ringing on July 4, 2026 - 13 times at 2:00 p.m. local time or a coordinated time across the country
There was no discussion on this, but general agreement that Connecticut should share this initiative with local committees.
- America's Potluck - July 5, 2026 - encourage communities to host potlucks
Discussion on this initiative included involving the CT Restaurant Association or considering a version of an "Election Cake" as a nod to Connecticut's history.
- Declaration of Independence Reading - July 8, 2026 - A nationwide reading of the Declaration of Independence on the 250th anniversary of the first public reading in 1776

C. Tolosa noted that the commission has partnered in the past with the Beinecke Library for their reading of the Declaration, which includes readings from The 1848 Declaration of Sentiments and "What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July" by Frederick Douglass to develop context, as well as excerpts from *The Life of William Grimes* to connect to Connecticut's own history. Staff is recommending that Connecticut participate in this narrative and encourage other organizations/towns to follow a similar model to allow for a more robust event.

The commission generally agreed that Connecticut should participate in some capacity. Discussion included a recommendation to partner with the Connecticut State Library, as they have an original copy of the Declaration. Andy Horowitz recommended a "Bring Your Own

“Founding Document” model which encourages organizations to participate and select their own documents to include in the event - this type of event could then be converted into an opportunity to spread awareness and encourage reflection around the state.

Arienne Orozco shared updates from a gathering of Northeast Regional 250th planners, held in Newport, RI, in early June. Key takeaways included:

- There is a real desire to work collaboratively between states - if any groups wish to get connected for something specific, Cyndi & Rachel have contact information for the group
- Fundraising has been successful in other states when capitalizing on the nostalgia of the 250th
- The group is looking for a state to host the 2026 gathering - there was discussion on whether Connecticut should explore volunteering to host. Traditionally it has been hosted in early June; in 2026 it may make sense to host earlier in the spring. Costs associated with doing so would include any rental fees for the space used, as well as catering for a lunch. In previous years, other costs have been covered by attendees. Planning would involve coordinating speakers and developing recommendations for activities around the business portion of the gathering, so it is a relatively low lift to organize. Amrys Williams recommended exploring either finding a way to combine events to make a more regional event focused on the 250th (i.e., CT League of Museums, Mass History Alliance) or deconflicting with events that typically take place the same date. Commissioners agreed to explore the possibility of hosting in Connecticut, preferably in early May, to raise visibility.

Funding Update

This section begins at 32:10 in the recording.

D. Merrill began this update by confirming that administrative support for the commission’s work was continued by the Connecticut legislature for FY26.

J. Mancini shared that CT Humanities has been at work in securing corporate and foundation funding, including a grant from Travelers in support of a statewide exhibition that will be loaned out around the state. Additionally, in collaboration with the state Office of Marketing, CTH will be seeking sponsorships for the 250th section of CTVisit.com and for the planned 250th tourism trail.

Rob Kret shared that he has continued to work with the American Association for State and Local History to advocate for funding for the 250th in the federal legislature. At this time, \$150M has been allocated to the 250th and will be administered by the Department of the Interior. AASLH and others are advocating for a portion of these funds to be distributed to state commissions.

C. Tolosa shared that Give 250 Connecticut raised approximately \$22k on behalf of the 12 municipalities who chose to participate. This will serve as a trial run for a second giving event later in the fall that CTH staff hopes to open up to both municipalities and affiliate organizations, with the goal of continuing to support these groups and building on media attention. D. Merrill noted that the commission & staff will need to continue to build on existing relationships to ensure that the word of this and other events is spread widely. This giving event was most successful in municipalities that got engaged and competitive with one another, particularly in West Hartford and Portland. There were also three sponsors (Water’s Edge Resort & Spa, Mystic Aquarium, and Connecticut Airport Authority) which funded four prizes - a Grand Prize (Portland), Runner Up (West Hartford), Most Unique Donors (Kent), 250th Gift (Stonington). For the fall event, CTH staff hopes to have additional sponsorships, both to increase competition and raise more funds for municipalities and organizations, as well as to help defray administrative costs - particularly for the giving day software.

CT Humanities Update

This section begins at 45:58 in the recording.

J. Mancini provided updates on the current status of federal funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities. While the details are continuing to be worked out in Congress, there are indications that the NEH will have funding available to pass to state humanities councils despite the cuts made by DOGE earlier this year. CT Humanities continues to receive funding from the state, which is being used in part to fund 250th-related humanities projects through its granting program.

Becky Vitkauskas provided an update on recent grant awards for 250th projects. Since the April commission meeting, 3 Quick Grants and 10 Planning & Implementation Grants have been awarded, for a total of \$207,726. Information on these grants is available on the CT250 website [here](#).

Recaps and Upcoming Plans

This section begins at 50:24 in the recording.

R. Gonzalez provided an update on Connecticut's participation in Two Lights for Tomorrow, a national effort to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere. Nationwide, almost every state participated in some capacity. In Connecticut, at least 90 sites participated in illuminating two lights on April 18, 20+ sites hosted community service events on April 19, and 5+ events were held in conjunction with the effort. An image and media gallery are available [here](#).

D. Merrill provided an overview of an initiative to engage municipalities in planting trees for the 250th, similar to an initiative that was completed in 1976 for the bicentennial. Tom Scanlon is leading the working group to plan for this, which includes commissioners and partners at the UConn Extension School and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. He shared that the group met earlier in July and is now working to refine ideas to ensure it remains a low-cost initiative that municipalities can participate in. In addition to a white oak tree planting, the group is considering ways to engage technical schools and/or the CT state sawmill in Portland. D. Merrill added that there is opportunity to engage with schools and town committees as well. In discussion, commissioners added:

- Consider the symbolism of the charter oak tree in hiding an important document or the use of white oak barrels and incorporate a time capsule
- Engage with the Future Farmers of America to expand youth involvement
- Engage technical schools in creating prizes crafted from white oak for the more involved towns
- Connect with Red, White, & Blue Schools

C. Tolosa updated on the development of plans for July 4, 2026, in Hartford. Staff is currently working to draft a schedule for the day and will have more definitive plans in place prior to the October commission meeting. Tentatively, the day will begin with a ceremony in the Hall of Flags hosted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, followed by a ceremony with local committee representatives signing a document recommitting to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence for the state archives. Currently, there are no plans for a parade. Hartford First Night will host Hartford Bonanza at Bushnell Park, and local committees will be invited to host an informational table should they wish to do so. The City of Hartford is working with organizations around the city to ensure museums, cultural centers, etc, are open to the public that day. The evening will culminate with fireworks at Bushnell Park. Additional ideas brought forward for consideration by commissioners included:

- A flyover of the state by C-130s

- A “sail-by” of the state by Barque Eagle
- Workshopping the document that local committees sign - making the language of the recommitment document the point rather than the document itself

In addition to this event in Hartford, there will be a national expo at the National Mall on or around July 4, 2026. Details are sparse at this time; more will be shared as those details become available.

Subcommittee Updates

This section begins at 1:12:00 in the recording.

Arienne Orozco shared an update from the Governance subcommittee, which is managing the affiliate program. Currently there are 120 approved affiliates, with a goal of reaching 250. There are approximately 5-10 applications coming in per month, so additional outreach is needed. J. Mancini recommended outreach to the CTH network. M. Khan is currently working with the Connecticut Library Association to spread the word about the 250th, and will be hosting an informational session later this year.

Amrys Williams shared an update from the Community & Organizational Engagement subcommittee, which is managing outreach to municipalities. Currently, 118 municipalities have shared a contact person. CTH staff is working on draft language for a Code of Conduct for events and will share with the commission soon for feedback. A current list of municipal contacts is available on the CT250 website [here](#). For places that are not yet represented, commissioners are encouraged to reach out to encourage participation - CTH staff can provide language for this purpose.

Steve Armstrong shared an update from the Education subcommittee. Currently, a packet of lesson plans for teaching the 250th in schools is in the final stages of production, with a webinar planned for July 24. The subcommittee also plans to encourage schools to work with local committees and historical societies to complete local research projects. There will also be materials released in partnership with Red, White, and Blue Schools, and a session at the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies conference this fall.

Rob Kret and C. Tolosa shared an update from the Marketing and Tourism subcommittee. Notably, there is a website dedicated to the 250th built out on [CTVisit.com](#) which needs to be populated with content. One item that will be on this website is one or more 250th tourism trails that will be developed in cooperation with the state's marketing and tourism office.

Public Comment

This section begins at 1:29:02 in the recording.

Aaron Marcavitch provided an update on the town of Enfield's plans for the 250th.

The meeting ended at 11:47 a.m.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 15, 2025 at 10 AM, Location TBD

Attachment B
America 250 | CT Commission
2026 Meeting Dates

Commission

Wednesday, January 21, 2026 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, April 15, 2026 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, July 15, 2026 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, October 21, 2026 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, January 20, 2027 - 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Community & Organizational Engagement Subcommittee

Tuesday, February 10, 2026 – TBC
Tuesday, May 12, 2026 – TBC
Tuesday, August 11, 2026 – TBC
Tuesday, November 10, 2026 – TBC

Education Subcommittee

Tuesday, January 27, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM
Tuesday, April 28, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM
Tuesday, July 28, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM
Tuesday, October 27, 2026 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Governance Subcommittee

Wednesday, January 14, 2026 – 10:00 to 10:30 AM
Wednesday, February 11, 2026 – 10:00 to 10:30 AM
Wednesday, March 11, 2026 – 10:00 to 10:30 AM
Wednesday, April 8, 2026 – 10:00 to 10:30 AM
Wednesday, May 13, 2026 – 10:00 to 10:30 AM
Wednesday, June 10, 2026 – 10:00 to 10:30 AM
Wednesday, September 9, 2026 – 10:00 to 10:30 AM
Wednesday, December 9, 2026 – 10:00 to 10:30 AM

Marketing & Tourism Subcommittee

Thursday, June 11, 2026 – 10:00 to 11:00 AM

Attachment C

Meeting & Event Code of Conduct

The America 250 | CT Commission is committed to providing a safe, productive, and welcoming environment at all meetings and events that are hosted solely by the commission or held in collaboration with other organizations, including both virtual and in-person.

The commission encourages healthy and respectful discussion of topics related to its four themes: Tell Inclusive Stories, For the Common Good, Power of Place, and Doing History. Participants are encouraged to share their thoughts and engage in civil discourse, with the understanding that there may be a wide variety of opinions on such topics. All participants are expected to exhibit respectful behavior and use respectful language with one another at all times.

Further, any form of discrimination or harassment at commission events will not be tolerated. Unacceptable behavior includes, but is not limited to, verbal comments, vocalization, actions, and/or gestures related to gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, religion, and/or national origin; inappropriate use of nudity and/or sexual images in public spaces or in presentations; or threatening, cyber-bullying, or stalking any attendee, speaker, volunteer, exhibitor, staff member, service provider, or other meeting guests.

Any person deemed to have participated in unacceptable behavior at a commission event may be asked to cease the behavior immediately by staff, event organizers, or a designated representative of the commission. Individuals who do not comply or who engage in behavior that endangers the physical or emotional well-being of any event attendee may be asked to leave and/or banned from future commission events. In the case of such action, a refund of any fees paid to attend will not be granted.

If you have experienced behavior that has made you feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or endangered, please contact staff or a commission representative. For behavior that must be addressed immediately, please speak with staff in-person, via a private message in a virtual meeting, or call **XXX**. For behavior that should be reported but does not pose an immediate danger, you may contact info@ct250.org. All reports will be handled in confidence.

Attributions:

This Code of Conduct was inspired by others, including that of the American Association for State and Local History and the New England Museum Association.