

Arts and Cultural Heritage Organizations (ACHO) Outreach Committee

Call to Artists & Cultural Heritage Organizations

Below is information about a statewide commemoration to be held throughout Vermont in 2026. It's a 'call to action' that is especially relevant to creative Vermonters and those who examine the past and present, or who work to change our culture for the benefit of the future. Vermonters have a deeply reflective perspective and a willingness to share; we understand that the future takes the shape we give it, and this labor should be grounded in knowledge of the past and the wisdom that comes from it. The upcoming years-long statewide event is a blank canvas for Vermonters to demonstrate the very best of our diverse thoughts, passions, and our commitment to ever-improving the civic landscape of our Green Mountains.

The National Semiquincentennial...

In 2016 congress established the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission (America250) to lead a commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the country with the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The anniversary is July 4, 2026 and the official Semiquincentennial event continues to 2027. The commemoration is ultimately meant to happen at the national, state, and local levels. It's the '250th,' or 'Semiquin' in short.

The Semiquincentennial in Vermont...

Through an Executive Order, Governor Scott established the Vermont 250th Anniversary Commission in 2020. It acknowledges some of the roles Vermont played when the country sought independence from Britain, mentioning the Green Mountain Boys at Fort Ticonderoga; the Battle of Hubbardton; the Battle of Bennington and on through the 1777 campaign and the founding of the state. The 2026 Semiquincentennial commemoration will provide bountiful opportunities for examining this past from many perspectives.

Governor Scott created the Commission, “to deepen the knowledge and understanding of this formative period of American history and how it has shaped and continues to shape who we are as a people, a state and a nation.” The shared national and local vision for the 250th also includes themes that invite Vermonters to look at our present and our future, through a lens that is informed by the revolutionary spirit and the resulting democratic experiment that emerged with the founding of the country.

One of these themes is *Unity*. The national Semiquincentennial vision says, “Coming together as a nation recognizes the power of our diverse stories while never losing sight of our common bonds as Americans. This unity is reflected in our democratic institutions, voluntary associations, and collaborative enterprises. Ideally, we act in concert to promote the common good even as we exercise our individual rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness while honoring the freedom of others to do the same. How will Americans join in expressions of unity that respect individual liberty?” This theme encourages Vermonters to engage with some of the most challenging issues of our time, examining and responding to them from within a system of governance and a set of ever-evolving values that were put in motion 250 years ago.

The vision statement also invites examination of the theme of *Engagement*: “Government of, by, and for the people enables Americans to invigorate the civil dialogue that perpetually reshapes our nation. We have the right — and responsibility — to take part in the ongoing American experiment. Civic engagement takes many forms. How will Americans get involved in their communities and continue to shape our nation?” Vermont’s creatives are stewards of our culture and the changemakers who push it in vibrant directions, pointing to new ideas and visions for succeeding as a cohort of many united rural communities in a deeply freedom-loving state. This Semiquincentennial theme is a dare to all of us to think hard, then work hard to carry forward the duty we inherited from our country’s founders. It’s on us — on you — to formulate the shining civic dialogue that hasn’t yet emerged.

These themes come together with the universal goal, “By educating Americans, we will contribute to a better understanding of who we are, where we came from and where we’re headed. By engaging them, we’ll help citizens continue to shape our nation. And by uniting them, we’ll recognize the power of our diverse stories without losing sight of our common bonds.” The American Association for State and Local History tells us — historians, creatives, and all — that “the anniversary presents an opportunity for a profound civic renewal. It is a chance for all Americans to think about their responsibility to their fellow community members, from the local to the international, and for each of us to consider how we are fulfilling our ongoing civic

responsibilities. This occasion should generate a wider appreciation for history's relevance to contemporary challenges and inspire Americans to take well-informed, good-faith steps to improve our communities, states, and nation. How can Americans use the Semiquincentennial to improve our society, strengthen our democracy, and change the world?" Vermont's creatives and cultural heritage organizations are especially prepared to respond thoughtfully... and with incandescence.

What's next, 2023-2026?

We're looking now at the beginning of a formal statewide effort to examine why we participated in a revolution, and how our worldview and values have been sustained or changed over time. The official national commemoration period began in 2020. We can — as a creative community in Vermont — take a deeper dive into the human experience relating to the founding of the country and explore how it's an experiment that continues to the present. America250 describes its goal to "honor our first 250 years and inspire Americans to imagine our next 250," and in Vermont, creatives should be naturally deeply engaged with this idea. The Semiquincentennial is an exquisitely rare once-in-a-generation, multidimensional opportunity for excavating American history and searching Vermont's past and present society for the tinder to ignite expression.

The Semiquincentennial opens the door to ask ourselves questions — as individuals and communities. We can examine the revolutions we're still a part of, and how equity and a better democracy is being pursued today (and how those in power respond to this positive force). Liberty and equality are still goals we haven't fully achieved yet; opinions and perspectives have changed through history. What direction are these perspectives heading? How do America's founding documents serve us as tools in changemaking today — how do we wield our status as Americans to make our country or world an even better place? How do we confront challenges to changemaking, as our ancestors had to? As an artist, your voice is the current that will carry us toward these answers!

The Vermont 250th Anniversary Commission encourages everyone to join the state's commemoration, from individuals to organizations and government. Your participation via the arts or public programming has an important place during this national period of reflection, commemoration, and action. Programs can be considered for formal endorsement by the Vermont 250th Commission, too, with [this form].

As 250th Commissioners who have been given a responsibility to serve creative, cultural heritage, and nonprofit sectors, you should know that we welcome you and your personal vision to the Vermont 250th. Your art and public programming is important to it; and your voice; your willingness to examine the present in the context of the past, as a platform from which to launch Vermont's future. From this point forward, each individual, organization, regional authority, etc. should be aware that the 250th is meant to provide a universal opportunity for creative and cultural heritage exploration of the founding of the country and our continuing changemaking spirit.

Sincerely,

Members of the Vermont 250th Anniversary Commission Arts and Cultural Heritage Organizations (ACHO) Outreach Committee:

Eileen Corcoran, Vermont Historical Society

Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup, Vermont Humanities

Tom Hughes, Historian

James Lockridge, Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership; Big Heavy World, Committee Chair, jim@bigheavyworld.com

Melody Machin, Elnu Abenaki Band

Find a roster of all Vermont 250th Anniversary Commissioners [here](#).

Sources for further exploration:

[U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission](#), established by congress,
<https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ196/PLAW-114publ196.pdf>

Vermont's 250th Commission Executive Order,
<https://governor.vermont.gov/sites/scott/files/documents/EO%20Creation%20of%20the%20250th%20Commission.FINAL%20kp.pdf>

[America250 Letter to the President](#)