

New Mexico's Semi-Quincentennial Commemoration

Prepared by
The New Mexico Semi-Quincentennial Commission

New Mexico's Opportunity

The 250th anniversary, or semi-quincentennial, of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the United States of America, provides a singular opportunity to connect a national moment to New Mexico's history, encouraging an exploration of the core principles of democracy in today's world. In presenting this report, the New Mexico Semi-quincentennial Commission embraces a spirit of partnership that acknowledges and empowers a diversity of voices. The following concepts and plans are grounded in the idea of building a statewide network of allies to collectively create resources, activities, ceremonies, installations, and events that embrace the opportunity of this moment.

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A Statewide Umbrella for All New Mexicans

In 2026, as a nation, we will mark 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence (Declaration), creating a unique moment to reflect on the establishment of a system of constitutional self-government in the United States (US) and the role of an engaged citizenry. To ensure New Mexicans engage in a meaningful way with this occasion, the New Mexico Semi-quincentennial Commission (Commission) was created by the 56th Legislature of New Mexico's [Senate Bill 106](#). The Commission's charge is to plan, promote, and implement a commemoration of the 250th anniversary.

In undertaking its task, the Commission wishes to serve as a statewide umbrella under which all New Mexicans may contribute to the commemoration. By framing this national moment within the context of the distinctive New Mexico experience, the Commission will collaborate with an array of partners in organizing statewide educational, cultural, and community events for the public that explore the enduring significance of democracy and the nation's founding principles. The Commission will bring together a broad and diverse group to ensure a wide-reaching, inclusive commemoration under a single, uniquely New Mexican brand.

Collaborative Leadership

New Mexico's 250th anniversary commemoration is grounded in shared leadership. The Commission represents key State of New Mexico officials, including honorary Chairperson Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Lt. Governor Howie Morales, Legislative leaders, and various State agency Cabinet Secretaries, working alongside four public members appointed by the Governor. Statewide partners from a range of entities will inform and co-create the commemoration. These collaborative leaders will include educators and educational institutions, local governments, tribal governments, historians, libraries, community organizations, cultural institutions, philanthropy, civic leaders, State agencies, elected officials, advocates, and more. The New Mexico Indian Affairs Department (IAD) will convene a Tribal Subcommittee to ensure the contributions and perspectives of New Mexico's Tribal communities are included. Through broad collaboration, the Commission will develop an inclusive series of events and activities that encourage civic participation and deepen New Mexican's understanding of our state and national history.

A Vision for New Mexico

Our vision is to bring context and color to the founding of the United States by putting it in conversation with New Mexico at the same historic moment in time, promoting an exploration of the Declaration of Independence founding ideas within a contemporary context.

Mission

To plan, promote, and produce activities commemorating the United States of America's 250th Anniversary through a uniquely New Mexican lens.

Objectives

- Expand awareness and understanding of the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the system of constitutional self-government.
- Emphasize the critical role of active citizens in the cause of liberty and self-government and the contributions of the various peoples and cultures, men and women, of those communities.
- Increase knowledge and appreciation of American history and civic engagement by exploring the founding concepts of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.
- To recognize, sustain, and inspire America's dedication to civic education, participation, and discourse.

Themes

As we prepare to commemorate this significant anniversary, the Commission has identified key commemorative themes to guide our exploration of the important and complex issues raised at this moment in time.

Common Ground and Historical Identity: Examining how New Mexico experienced the year 1776 versus what was happening in Philadelphia; how time, place, and diversity shape identity; what it means to be American; and have collective identity within the broader context of American history.

Histories of Independence: Exploring the complex and contrasting concepts of “independence” in New Mexico; diverse histories along with histories of interdependence; and manifold forms of civic engagement.

New Mexico's Contribution: Highlighting the role of everyday New Mexicans in working toward a better nation; how Native and Puebloan, Spanish and Mexican roots add to and extend United States history and culture; and the sacrifices of New Mexicans through military service.

Historical Reflection and Progress: Contemplating where New Mexico and the nation were 250 years ago, where we are today, and the journey taken to get here; and history as a lens to inform our futures.

Activating the Themes

To activate the themes and engage New Mexicans on the 250th anniversary, a combination of educational resources, community-driven programs, and public engagement initiatives will be utilized. The purpose is to deepen understanding and encourage active participation.

Educational resources will offer historical context, helping students and educators explore the philosophical foundations and significance of the Declaration in a personal way. Community-driven programs will complement these resources, including discussions, creative workshops, and events to foster dialogue and exploration of the themes at a highly localized level. Public engagement programs like contests, social media challenges, and web resources will invite New Mexicans to contribute their own reflections on themes, ensuring that commemoration is not just an historical observation but a living, interactive experience that encourages ongoing dialogue.

Education Resources

Our approach emphasizes making history both accessible and relevant through a variety of dynamic educational resources. These efforts will include exhibitions, educational materials, and hands-on experiences that connect to the diverse communities and histories of New Mexico.

Exhibitions

Museum and historical site resources are pivotal in bringing the themes to life, offering experiences that make history tangible and accessible to diverse audiences. These resources will be designed to both educate and encourage reflection on the themes. Physical exhibitions are being planned at several museums under the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs (NMDCA). The New Mexico Military Museum (NMMM), overseen by the New Mexico National Guard (NMNG), has a large exhibit area that highlights NMNG's legacy in service to the state and nation. Additionally, traveling exhibition materials will be developed for use by libraries, cultural centers, senior centers, and schools. Museums can also provide a range of educational programs beyond physical exhibitions by engaging in hands-on activities and expert-led discussions. This may include workshops and lectures, guided tours focused on the themes, and informal learning materials and kits. Finally, both NMDCA and NMMM have fully functional theaters that can produce and hold engaging lectures and speaker series. NMMM is uniquely positioned to present lectures focused on service and NMNG's distinguishing support for the state and nation.

Educational Materials

Educational materials will be developed to deepen understanding, spark critical thinking, and engage learners of all ages. The materials will serve as tools for exploring the themes. The humanities played a critical role in shaping the founding documents, with the principles included in the Declaration and Constitution being rooted in the study of political philosophy, literature, and other aspects of a well-rounded understanding of the humanities. Through the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED), a New Mexico 1776 study booklet will be developed for teachers. The creation of this booklet will be deeply informed by experts in Native American, Black, and Hispanic education and NMPED's Humanities Bureau.

Working with educators at middle school to college levels, primary source guides may be created, focusing on helping students analyze the text of the Declaration of Independence and related historical documents. Complementing this, annotated reading guides for the Declaration and other key documents from the American Revolutionary period, including relevant documents from New Mexico history, could be developed to provide historical context, vocabulary explanation, and questions to prompt group discussion. Other potential materials include digital resources, video lessons, infographics and visual learning tools, activity guides, and instructional kits. Educational materials will be designed to align with the New Mexico Social Studies Standards.

The NMNG will continue their longstanding relationship with New Mexico public schools. Servicemembers will utilize their wealth of knowledge and expertise to present and discuss curriculums developed by NMPED and/or higher education institutions to underscore the importance of the semi-quincentennial and emphasize scholastic commemoration.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that receive federal funding are required to present an educational program about the Constitution for its students on Constitution Day every September 17th. The New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) will work with HEIs to encourage a theme for 2026 Constitution Day that highlights and aligns with the semi-quincentennial.

By developing diverse and dynamic education materials, the commemoration will be a rich, multi-faceted learning experience, providing a deeper understanding of the themes and Declaration of Independence, not just as an historical artifact but as a living document that continues to shape modern dialogue.

Participatory Experiences

Hands-on and participatory educational experiences are powerful tools for engaging learners with the themes. These activities foster deeper learning, creativity, and a personal connection to history. Resources will be developed to help local partners plan and implement a variety of experiences. Possible experiences include creating personal “declarations” that reflect issues participants care about, such as human rights, environmental protection, social justice, and political freedom; building time capsules that represent the issues of today as a way of connecting the past, present, and future; history walking tours and hunts through locations of historical significance; art and performance projects; and school and community youth murals.

Scholarly Convenings

Working with institutions of higher education and the Office of the State Historian, scholarly convenings will serve as an essential component in the commemoration. Through roundtable discussions, lectures, symposia, and similar activities, historians, scholars, educators, and local leaders will delve deeply into historical, philosophical, and contemporary views. These convenings will offer a platform for dialogue, exploring overlooked perspectives. The State Historian will utilize the office’s monthly lectures, *Tertulia Historica*, to explore various aspects of New Mexico history in connection to the unfolding of the new United States and New Mexico’s eventual joining the Union in 1912. A small grant program could also be implemented for

scholars at HEIs to engage in statewide events, culminating in a statewide symposium with research and creative projects by scholars and students. Additionally, opportunities for promoting and discussing the Federal-State-Tribal histories will also be explored. By engaging with a range of viewpoints, these convenings can contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the legacy, inspiring further scholarship and public conversation.

Community-Driven Programming

Communities and groups of individuals around the state have unique, distinct, and often complex histories and experiences. The commemoration design must not only foster, but proactively support communities in creating individual programs and events that represent and explore the themes through their own lived experiences. Community-driven programming may reflect on the accomplishments made and challenges faced by new Mexicans and the ways in which the governing ideas of the Declaration were both embraced and contradicted in that community's experiences.

Events and Activities

Community-driven events and activities for the public will play a vital role in making the 250th commemoration a truly inclusive and participatory experience. These events, either existing or created for the commemoration, will invite New Mexicans from all walks of life to engage with the themes in ways that resonate with their personal experiences and community. Local programs will take many forms such as outdoor festivals, public readings, art installations, performances, and more. These will foster a sense of collective commemoration and reflection. A key aspect of these community-driven activities is that they encourage local voices to shape narratives, enabling diverse groups to contribute their perspective. By focusing on collaboration and local leadership, these events will make the commemoration a living, breathing experience of civic engagement.

Biographical and Documentary Projects

These projects would offer a compelling and immersive way to explore the lives of individuals who played pivotal roles in the New Mexican experience of 1776, including those whose stories have been marginalized in traditional narratives. These projects could highlight individuals' personal journeys, motivations, and struggles, providing greater understanding of the historical moment. Through such projects the narrative would be further enriched by exploring the far-reaching impacts on both individuals and society at large. These projects would offer nuanced perspectives, allowing audiences to better grasp both historical and contemporary significance.

Community Experiences and Commemorations

Commemorating events through a New Mexico perspective would be a powerful way to connect the state's unique history and cultural diversity within the broader narrative of American independence. New Mexico, with its rich blend of cultures and perspectives, offers an opportunity to frame the commemoration in a way that acknowledges both the achievements and complexities of the past 250 years, especially regarding issues of land, sovereignty, and the rights of marginalized peoples.

Experiences and commemorations that honor the past and present service of New Mexico men and women in the military will be included. The NMNG will help support community events across the state, including color guards, possible 44th Army Band musical support, Senior Leader guest speakers, equipment, and heritage displays showcasing community engagement and the ongoing significance of NMNG's heritage. Working through the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services and NMIAD, community events can also highlight Native American veterans, who are among the highest number of enlisted members per capita amongst other classes in the United States.

Installations and Preservation

Some communities may wish to create installations to serve as reminders of the historical, cultural, and social significance of the Declaration. Such installations might engage the public by offering educational, reflective, and interactive opportunities for future generations. Installations could include historical timelines, plaques and markers, murals, gardens, and public art. Additionally, communities could consider the historic preservation of important landmarks and signage at sites of significance.

Engaging New Mexicans

To effectively engage New Mexicans in the commemoration and its themes, it is essential to tap into the state's rich history, diverse culture, and deep pride. New Mexico's contributions to the nation's story provide a perfect foundation for a creative and inclusive experience. Through traditional and digital platforms, New Mexicans will be encouraged to reflect on the past.

Social Media

Social media platforms will be utilized to showcase the state's historic moments with visual, videos and interactive posts to encourage engagement. Social media campaigns will incentivize further participation, including scheduled activity to encourage New Mexicans sharing photos of historical landmarks, sites, and personal stories related to New Mexico's role in US history.

Storytelling

Online platforms to support the launch of a statewide project will invite New Mexicans to record and share family stories or thoughts about New Mexico's place in American history through video submissions, podcasts, and social media, with an emphasis on multi- and intergenerational perspectives. This could be expanded to include a storytelling challenge with prizes. NMDCA's podcast, *Encounter Culture*, will feature stories and content that furthers this idea.

Challenges and Contests

These activities will provide New Mexicans opportunities to spark creativity, expand their education, and bring their own experiences to the conversation. Possible contests include a student film festival featuring original films about what New Mexico was like in 1776; student art, writing, and poetry contests, perhaps culminating in a publication; friendly competition between HEIs for getting their campus and community engaged in semi-quincentennial events; community service challenges; and more.

Resources

To support the development and implementation of a statewide umbrella commemoration, three critical resources must be deployed.

Branding and Marketing

Branding and an online presence will have a uniquely New Mexican look and feel, capturing the historical significance, cultural diversity, and distinct landscape of New Mexico while ensuring accessibility and engagement for a broad audience. The Marketing Center for Excellence of the New Mexico Tourism Department will lead the branding and marketing efforts. New Mexico's message will be aimed at national and local audiences to grow awareness of New Mexico's history. "One Land, Many Stories" is the proposed theme to capture the history of the state and the nation. It is broad enough to include all. The logo will allow communities to customize it for use at local and municipal levels, encouraging them to promote the semi-quincentennial statewide brand.

A dedicated brand website will be the core of the campaign, with an initial phase that will offer planning information and resources. The second phase will feature announcements leading up to, as well as on, July 4, 2025. The Route 66 Centennial and Breaking Bad Habits websites will be used as models. Partners will be asked to contribute existing images, stories, audio recordings, and videos.

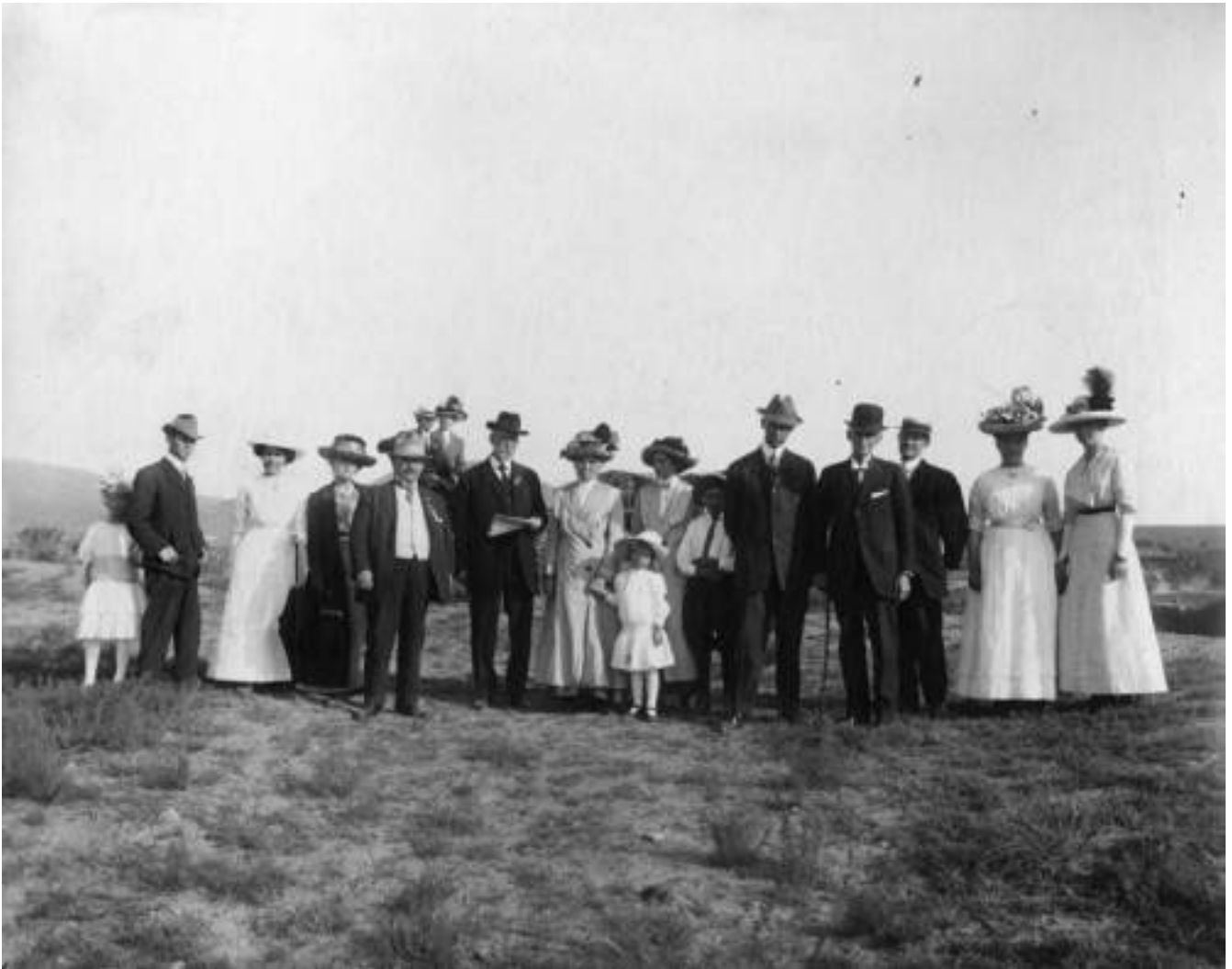
All forms of marketing and messaging, including paid print, radio, digital, social and earned media will be utilized. Strategic press releases will be coordinated across State agencies and partner organizations, utilizing media listening to ensure the messages are being successfully broadcast across media outlets. Social media toolkits and PR guidelines will also be distributed to partners for consistent and effective messaging.

Partnership Grants

A partnership micro-grant program would foster collaboration between New Mexico's communities, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and local and Tribal governments to create meaningful events and projects. The program would support initiatives that explore, celebrate, and reflect on the themes. Grant categories could include Events and Convenings, Education Resources and Activities, Cultural and Historical Exhibits, Public Art and Installations, Community and Collaborative Projects. Depending on funding, grants would range from \$1,000 to \$10,000, based on a competitive application and selection process.

Appropriations

To achieve the vision set forth by the Commission, additional funding appropriations are required. Senate Bill 106 included \$250,000 to fund coordination, administration, per diem for public members, and all other expenses. This amount is not sufficient to implement basic branding and marketing, contract coordination, and the grants program. Through the NMDCA, an additional \$500,000 special appropriation has been submitted and is supported in the FY26 Executive Budget Recommendation.



Aaron B. Craycraft, photographer. Group reading the Declaration of Independence on summit of Fort Marcy, first anniversary of statehood, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1913. Courtesy of the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Negative No. 145847.