



Object-based Program Ideas for the U.S. Semiquincentennial

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The United States Semiquincentennial in 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the approval of the Declaration of Independence by the Second Continental Congress. It is an opportunity for institutions and individuals across the country to explore and to consider the past, present, and future of their communities in the context of this historic event. The U.S. 250th gives us an opportunity to connect online and onsite visitors to the objects in our collections by revising current programs and developing new ones.



Girls Holding Jars of Peaches at the Vigo County Fair (Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society)

The U.S. 250th may inspire people to think about their family heirlooms, preserving them, passing them along to family, and/or donating them to local museums. Offering training about how to care for those objects may help them to be in better condition when they are offered to us. Including information about how to gather the stories connected to the objects will give us better object provenance so that we can make good decisions about accepting or declining the object.

Preserving Local Treasures

Offer a workshop focused on preserving family treasures and local artifacts for the future. Include contemporary items such as digital photos and videos, emails, books, and products such as plastics and toys. Include discussions about gathering the stories associated with the objects.

- **Tip:** Provide a storage box and packet of resources for attendees.
- **Great for:** Teens; Adults
- **Potential Partnerships:** Archivists and conservators; libraries; colleges and universities; science departments
- **Things to consider:** Be prepared to talk to participants about how museums make decisions about accepting and declining object donations as well as how we care for and exhibit objects. Let people know that we can't accept everything and that most objects are not on permanent exhibit.

Creating Digital Content

Develop workshops about taking and preserving digital photos, saving digital communications, social media posts and other born digital content.

- **Tip:** Host digital photography sharing programs for hands-on activities and tips and

tricks learning.

- **Great for:** Teens; Adults; Families
- **Potential Partnerships:** Libraries; genealogy groups; cultural organizations; schools; clubs and service organizations; artists; faith-based organizations
- **Things to consider:** Gather information about technology and storage needs for creating and preserving digital content. Share guidelines for naming files and developing good descriptions so the stories attached to the digital content aren't lost. Add information on resources for content migration.

The U.S. Semiquincentennial also provides us with an opportunity to engage people with objects in our collections. We can develop programs that dig into our community's past and encourage attendees to think about how the past has informed the present.

How Things are Made

Bring in experts to share information about how things are made. Focus on local industry, technology, and innovation. Ask woodcarvers, plasterers, ceramicists, car enthusiasts, farmers, etc. how technology and techniques have changed over time.

- **Tip:** Consider creating "make and take" programs and maker spaces.
- **Great for:** All ages
- **Potential Partnerships:** Local businesses and industries; trade schools; farmers schools, colleges, and universities
- **Things to consider:** There may be objects in your collections or buildings in your community to use for research and as examples. Consider reaching out to individuals and businesses who could provide guidance and research. You may be able to make some unexpected partnerships that could lead to help with your collections research.

Object Petting Zoo

Feature vintage and historic objects that attendants can see and touch. Be sure that the objects in the petting zoo don't come from your permanent museum collections. Consider including musical instruments. Include more recent objects like a rotary dial phone, a road map, a portable cassette or cd player, etc. Discuss how common objects have changed over time and think about some that may not have changed very much. Ask why or why not.

- **Tip:** This could be most successful by featuring functional items such as a vintage lawnmower that attendants could try out and use to make connections with the past.
- **Great for:** All ages; Children
- **Potential Partnerships:** Antique interest organizations; local businesses; activity boards; extension clubs; musical organizations
- **Things to consider:** Be sure to use objects from your education collection (a designated collection of objects that are not part of your permanent collections and that are meant to be used and used up). If you don't have specific objects, then ask for donations that will help build your education collection. Expect that the objects will be damaged and plan for replacement or inexpensive repairs.

One of the best ways to engage people with history is to use objects and their stories to make meaningful connections and demonstrate that objects from the past helped create our present.

Resources

- [The Case for Training Teachers in Object-Based Learning](#) (Smithsonian Education)
- [Teaching History in Museums through Objects](#) (Museums of History NSW)
- [Enhancing Storytelling with Digital Museum Objects](#) (Smithsonian Learning Lab)

Further Resources

- [Collections Advisors](#) (Indiana Historical Society)
- [Timely Tips](#) (Indiana Historical Society)

Collection Trainings

[From Paper to Pixels: Planning a Successful Digitization Project](#)

Aug. 14 (DHPS NY)

[Utilizing the National NAGPRA Program Website and Available Resources](#)

Aug. 15 (National Park Service)

[AASLH History Hour: Preserving Collections](#)

Aug. 26 (AASLH)

[From Awareness to Action: Advocating for Integrated Pest Management in Cultural Spaces](#)

Aug. 27 (Connecting to Collections Care)

Recorded Webinars

- [Indiana Historical Society](#)
- [Texas Historical Commission](#)

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[Local History Services](#)

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