IMPACT REPORT

August 2026

August 2026 Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Impact. USA250-OC has fostered civic pride, strengthened community connections, and ensured Orange County's voice as part of the national celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the United States - through educational, informational, and inspirational programs, uniting Americans All under the shared conviction that "it still matters."

Purpose. USA250-OC was created to ensure Orange County's thirty-four cities would meaningfully participate in the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence—the nation's fifth such commemoration since 1776. USA250-OC was established with a generous lead gift from Charlie Zhang, additional donor support, and an administrative partnership with Concordia University Irvine. Operating with a lean budget and powered by volunteers, the organization has delivered measurable results, sparking county-wide engagement and civic pride.

Key Achievements.

- **Digital Reach** of over **200,200 website visits**, including **33,689 daily visitors** between July 2025 and July 2026
- Communications by weekly e-blasts to every mayor, city manager, city councilmember, and chamber of commerce in the County's thirty-four cities, and more than **1,300 individual subscribers**. Social media presence extended across Facebook, X, and Instagram.
- **OC Register** donated ads reaching **187,200 subscribers** each week for five weeks
- **Endorsements** include **bi-partisan support** from the Orange County Board of Supervisors, the Orange County Department of Education, and major business, educational, municipal, and arts organizations.
- **Leadership Engagement** with two-thirds of Orange County's mayors, numerous civic leaders, and community-based organizations, in addition to providing many presentations
- **Educational Programs** - Led partnership efforts to create numerous educational programs, including two aired nationally and multiple times on **C-SPAN**; a forum on civic education; two patriotic concerts; a patriot song-writing contest for high school students; a ceremonial public reading of the Declaration of Independence, hosting the British Deputy Consul General, and more.

Case for Support. Continued investment allows USA250-OC to expand programming, deepen educational outreach, and sustain the momentum of education and civic pride through and beyond 2026.

BACKGROUND AND MISSION As the United States approached the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the United States, USA250-OC learned that the California Senate Appropriations Committee had rejected proposed bills to create a commission to celebrate the 250th. After contacting America 250, the national Commission, and learning the name had been copyrighted, we chose to create a county-wide effort to celebrate this once-in-a-lifetime historic milestone while promoting America 250 initiatives as well as our own.

Securing the name USA250-OC, we developed an action plan with goals focused on reaching out to the 3.2 million residents of Orange County, its 34 cities, and county government through communication and partnerships. Continuing our relationship with the national commission, we participated in monthly America 250 Zoom calls with representatives of State and Territory Commissions.

Focusing primarily on our nation's founding, civic literacy, and civility in public discourse, USA250-OC's theme is "**America is the perfect idea; the United States of America is a work in progress."** Its mission statement is "to engage the citizens and residents of Orange County in commemorating and celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the United States."

We accomplish this by:

- **Exploring** the history and fundamental principles underlying our constitutional government
- **Advancing** the historical ideals and aspirations embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights
- **Inspiring** the American spirit through recognition of our shared heritage, common rights and responsibilities, and respect for each other
- **Equipping** our citizens and residents to engage in the civic life of their community without regard to ethnicity, national origin, religion, or political affiliation
- **Reflecting** on the origin of Orange County, its history as an important part of the history of California, and its contributions to the development of the United States
- **Celebrating** with our friends, families, local governments, and organizations to listen to and learn from our history and each other to make a lasting impact for generations to come

INITIAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ENDORSEMENTS

To assess community support for USA250-OC, we assembled a group of Orange County leaders at the Pacific Club in September 2024. We shared our mission and requested their input and recommendations. The response was overwhelmingly positive as few were aware of the approaching 250th anniversary. The event included an inspirational address by Lt. Col. USMC (Ret.) Dan Tarbutton, former pilot of Marine One under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

In the fall of 2024 and early months of 2025, endorsements were secured from influential community leaders and organizations, including but not limited to the following:

- **Don Wagner** – Chairman, OC Board of Supervisors - USA250-OC Honorary Chairman
- **Doug Chaffee** – OC Supervisor - USA250-OC Honorary Co-chair
- **Katrina Foley** – OC Supervisor - USA250-OC Honorary Co-chair
- **Janet Nguyen** – OC Supervisor - USA250-OC Honorary Co-chair
- **Vicente Sarmiento** – OC Supervisor - USA250-OC Honorary Co-chair
- **Don Barnes** – OC Sheriff
- **Shari Friedenrich** – OC Treasurer
- **Dr. Stefan Bean** – OC Superintendent of Education
- **The Orange County Business Council**
- **Arts Orange County**
- **Association of California Cities-OC**
- **Orange County Music and Dance**
- **Orange County Board of Education**
- **Richard Nixon Foundation**

County of Orange
USA250-OC

COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS

Initial Communications During the first months of operation, USA250-OC made presentations to the Orange County Board of Supervisors and the Orange County Board of Education, and held private meetings with the mayors, city managers and staff of two-thirds of the thirty-four cities in Orange County. USA250-OC was invited to appear before city councils, school boards, water district boards, and other entities.

USA250-OC offered local governments and non-profits the opportunity to "personalize" the USA250-OC logo by substituting their names in place of Orange County. This was done on multiple occasions, at no cost to the organizations. Among those using the USA250-OC were the cities of Orange, Villa Park, Anaheim, and the Yorba Linda Water District. One city made the decision to plant a Liberty Tree based on recommendations by USA250-OC. USA250-OC was invited to attend the Yorba Linda planting ceremony as well as other municipal America 250 events.

USA250-OC Website USA250-OC's website (https://www.usa250-oc.com) is designed to provide easy access to dozens of sources about the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, the years of disunity after independence was achieved, and the Constitution that brought them together to form "a more perfect union." Visitors to the website find links to online courses; videos;

online exhibits; original letters, diaries, meeting notes and pamphlets of the founding era; activities for kids and families; resources for teachers and parents; historical places in and around Orange County to visit, such as Independence Hall at Knott's Berry Farm, Anaheim's Muzeo, and the Green Dragon Tavern and Museum in Carlsbad; more than fifty original 250 Seconds essays; quizzes; news and events, and more.

The USA250-OC website is available in five languages – Chinese, English, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Website analytics July 2025 through July 2026 include:

- Total visits: **202,250**
- Unique daily visitors: **33,689**
- Content delivered: **169.8 GB**
- Busiest day on record: **July 24, 2026 (1,635 visits)**
- Average visits per day, July 2025: 236 → July 2026: **795**

Summary conclusions:

- Traffic more than tripled over the year leading into the July 4, 2026, celebration.
- Ten consecutive months of growth from September 2025 to June 2026, saw a steady build in community attention through the run-up to America's 250th.
- Independence Day week ran more than 1,000 visits per day.
- Interest continues after July 4th and is still running at 3x the prior year, including the single biggest day on record on July 24.

250 Seconds **250 Seconds** is a growing collection of more than fifty original essays crafted to educate, inspire, and spark curiosity about American history. Each piece highlights a little-known person, moment, or idea—and each is designed to be read in roughly 250 seconds (four minutes and ten seconds), making them ideal for brief but meaningful reflection.

Organizations across Orange County and beyond—city councils, businesses, civic groups, classrooms, and community boards—were encouraged to set aside those few minutes to share an uplifting historical story, revisit a constitutional principle, or illuminate the enduring power of our nation's founding documents. The essays are not copyrighted and may be freely used, adapted, or shared by anyone.

The collection features titles that invite discovery and delight: **"The Ideas of 1776 Still Matter," "Rebellions at the Centennial: How Suffragists Forced a Nation to Listen," "The Octogenarian Who Charged Into History,"** and **"A Buried Museum: The Time Capsule of 1795."** New essays continue to be added, expanding a library meant to enrich civic life one brief, powerful moment at a time.

Orange County Register. The Orange County Register donated five quarter-page ads valued at $35,000, reaching 187,200 subscribers on five separate occasions support USA250-OC events.

Email Communications and E-blasts Since October 2025, USA250-OC continues to send weekly emails to all mayors, city councilmembers, city managers, and chambers of commerce in all thirty-four Orange County cities and more than 1,300 members of the general public. These contain short stories, news, events, activities, America 250 initiatives, and other useful information.

Additionally, customized emails are sent to the mayor, councilmembers and city manager of each individual city, tailored to the interests and unique characteristics of each city. These also include promoting 250th events in various communities throughout Orange County as well as events sponsored or co-sponsored by USA250-OC.

Social Media In October 2025, USA250-OC began communicating through social media on Facebook, X, and Instagram. Topics are related to the email blasts as well as 250 events taking place throughout the County.

USA-250 EVENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

From its inception, USA250-OC's priority has been to encourage others to commemorate and celebrate the 250th in the normal course of their business or work. To this end, USA250-OC took the lead with other organizations to provide creative ideas for 250 program content, ideas, and potential guest speakers for events. Below are descriptions of some of those events.

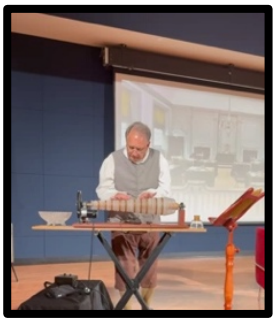
Note: ***A250 Conversations*** and ***A250 Concerts*** are created by USA250-OC in collaboration with the Nixon Foundation and the Richard Nixon Presidential Library which operates under the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). NARA and presidential libraries are official partners of America 250. *A250 Conversations* and *Concerts* are free to the public and attendees receive a discounted price of $17.76 to explore the Library's exhibits, including its America 250 exhibit.

USA250-OC Launch USA250-OC invited the President (later the COO) of the Richard Nixon Foundation to join as USA250-OC Co-chair, based on the major emphasis the Foundation places on civic literacy through its American Civics Campaign. On January 14, 2024, USA250-OC formally launched as a project with a major event in the iconic East Room of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. The event featured Jeffrey Rosen, President and CEO of the National Constitution Center, speaking about his new book Pursuit of Happiness and the importance of civic virtue. The program also included a presentation by "General George Washington" (Dan Shippey), Ambassador Gaddi Vasquez, Chairman of the OC Board of Supervisors Don Wagner, and a panel discussion on civic

virtue and civic literacy. The program was taped and aired multiple times on C-SPAN. It is available at Founding Fathers and Civics.

A250 Concert Series "USA 250: In Performance in the East Room" On March 15, 2026, USA250-OC, the Nixon Foundation, and the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum collaborated with the Concordia Wind Orchestra, the Concordia Choir, and the Laudamus Choir for a patriotic concert in three parts: American Moments; An American Poem, Hymn, and Spiritual; and Patriotic Finale featuring "The Star-Spangled Banner," "My Country, Tis of Thee," and "God Bless America." The concert was open to the public with free admittance and performed to a standing-room only audience.

A250 Conversations "A Conversation with Ben and George" On April 11, 2026, USA250-OC arranged for the first in a series of *A250 Conversations* in collaboration with the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum (National Archives) and the Nixon Foundation. Titled "A Conversation With Ben and George," it featured a 90-minute conversation with Benjamin Franklin (Mark Skousen) and Gen. George Washington (Dan Shippey), moderated by USA250-OC Co-chair Jo Ellen Chatham. Before a packed audience in Theater 37 at the Nixon Library, the two professional historians engaged in a conversation about the relationship between Franklin and Washington and their indispensable contributions to the founding of the United States. The event was free to the public and covered by C-SPAN. It aired sixteen times between July 5 and August 15, prompting emails from viewers around the country. It can be viewed at https://www.c-span.org/program/america-250/a-conversation-with-george-washington-and-ben-franklin/676668



The program included a special appearance by David Mauldin, performing prior to and briefly during the "Ben and George Conversation" on a musical instrument invented by Franklin. Beethoven and Mozart composed music to be played by the instrument, known as the "glass armonica." Among those who learned to play it were Marie Antoinette and Marianne Davies, well-known throughout Europe as a singer and actress.

National Civics Bee: California Regionals USA250-OC Co-chair Jo Ellen Chatham was invited to be a judge for the California regional competition of the National Civics Bee. Sponsored by the Yorba Linda Chamber of Commerce Foundation in collaboration with the National Civics Bee and the American Civics Campaign, the regional competition was won by Logan Thielen who went on to take first place in the California competition and will represent California in the nationals. Chatham attended the California finals and invited Logan and his parents, along with Arlo Fravien, 2025 California champion, and his parents to the OC Forum program on civic literacy on June 11. Logan and Arlo's father also participated in the July 8 USA250-OC public reading of the Declaration of Independence.

"***Music at 250: A Transatlantic Celebration of Music, History and Friendship"*** In an unusual but creative collaboration between the World Affairs Council of Orange County, the Pacific Symphony, and USA250-OC, a special pre-concert dinner and discussion were held at the Park Club on May 30. Before adjourning to the concert, "America at 250," conducted by Maestro Alexander Shelly, Shelley joined in a discussion with British Deputy Consul General Nicola Guffogg, composer Peter Boyer, and Pacific Symphony President John Forsyte. Shelly, a celebrated British conductor and new Music Director of the Pacific Symphony, led the discussion about shared British and American history and culture.

"USA250-OC Theme Competition" The Orange County Department of Education, USA250-OC, and Orange County Music and Dance conceived of a contest for high school students to compose a new patriotic song. Students could participate in one or more of six genres, including classical, traditional, country, rap, rock, or jazz. Winners in each genre received cash prizes and a brief coaching session with professional musicians. The grand prize winner was announced at an awards ceremony on June 6 and received a cash prize, a Fender guitar, and showcasing her composition at the Pacific Symphony's annual July 4 concert. All six student winners will also perform their works at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum on October 25.

Orange County Forum "The Power of Civic Literacy" On June 11, USA250-OC collaborated with the Orange County Forum to present a program on the importance of civic literacy. The panel discussion, moderated by USA250-OC's Jo Ellen Chatham, focused on addressing civic literacy as an all-community priority. The panel included Paul Simonds, COO of the Orange County Business Council; Dr. Stefan Bean, OC Superintendent of Public Education; Arlo Fravien, 14-year-old winner of the California National Civics Bee competition; Gaddi Vasquez, former ambassador and Director of the Peace Corps; and Joe Lopez, COO of the Nixon Foundation which counts among its major projects the American Civics Campaign.

A250 Conversations "Forgotten Founders" On June 13, 2026, USA250-OC, in collaboration with the Nixon Foundation and the Richard Nixon Presidential Library, organized a conversation focused on important, but often overlooked founders of the United States. These included John Dickinson, John Jay, Roger Sherman, Gouverneur Morris, and Charles Thomson. Because Benjamin Franklin knew and worked with all of them, he was included in the conversation. Participating were author/professor Bryan Santin, attorney/author Walter Stahr, and historian/author Mark Skousen who is also a direct descendant of Benjamin Franklin. Jo Ellen Chatham, USA250-OC Co-chair, moderated the conversation.

A250 Concert Series "USA250 Concert." On June 30, the Concordia Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Jeff Held, partnered with USA250-OC for a second time with the Nixon Foundation to present a concert highlighting the unique contributions of American composers. Underwritten by Charlie Zhang, founder of Orange County Music and Dance, internationally acclaimed pianist Kong Xiangdong performed Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," while soprano Emily Valenzuela performed songs from "The Music Man," "Oklahoma," and "Porgy and Bess." Held in the iconic East Room of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, the concert was attended by an overflow audience of more than eight hundred thirty enthusiastic music lovers.

USA250-OC Joins in the 122nd Huntington Beach Independence Day Parade. USA250-OC Advisory Leadership Team Chair Dan Hazard took the lead entering USA250 in the 122nd Huntington Beach Independence Day Parade. Attracting 500,000 people, the parade is the largest July 4 parade west of the Mississippi. The USA250-OC truck was driven by Teri Splettstoesser and carried colonial-garbed volunteers who enjoyed chants of "USA! USA! USA!" as the truck rolled by and patriotic music filled the air.

"Sharing the Spirit of America: A Public Reading of the Declaration of Independence" On July 8, under the leadership of Orange County Supervisor and USA250-OC Honorary Chairman Don Wagner, USA250-OC partnered with the Nixon Foundation and others to stage a public reading of the Declaration of Independence as part of the national "Sharing the Spirit of America" campaign. Initiated by the Hawaii America 250 Commission, readings were to take place 250 years to the day when the Declaration was first read to the public in 1776. Thirty-six readers read portions of the Declaration, beginning with Supervisor Wagner and Congresswoman Young Kim. Representing a cross-section of Orange Countians, the program included a colonial color guard provided by the Sons of the American Revolution, readings about events leading up to the Declaration, and brief statements about jubilee events in 1826, 1876, 1926, and 1976. The program closed with operatic soprano Robin Follman leading the audience in "God Bless America. The program is available on YouTube.

A250 Conversation "Revolutionary Principles of the Constitution"
Honoring the historical need to move from revolution and independence to the need to govern, USA250-OC organized a conversation with Andrew Guilford, retired Federal District Judge; Barry McDonald, law professor at Pepperdine University; and Austen Parrish, Dean of the University of California Irvine Law School. Moderated by Jo Ellen Chatham, the conversation addressed the principles of the Constitution as ratified in 1788 and current calls for radical changes to our founding document.

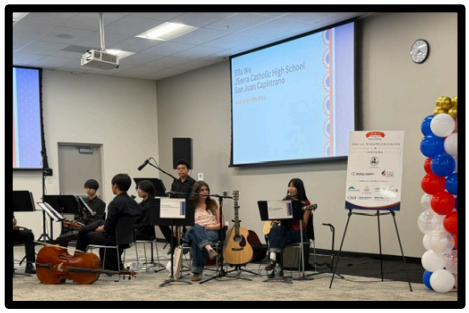
A250 Concert Series. "Remember the Ladies: A One-Woman Journey Through the American Revolution" This original production is a 60-minute tribute to women of the American Revolution and an intimate look at the Revolution through women's perspectives, seamlessly blending the roles of a wife, mother, poet, and patriot. Written and performed by internationally acclaimed operatic soprano Robin Follman, the August 23 performance in Theater 37 at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum was the premier of a program slated to go nationwide and available for others to perform in their own communities. "Remember the Ladies" focused primarily on the lives and experiences of Abigail Adams, Martha Washington, Mercy Otis Warren, and Philis Wheatley. Inspired by the work of USA250-OC, Ms. Follman has immersed herself in creating this unique mix of music and history. The event was performed to a packed audience as many were turned away due to lack of space.

A250 Conversations "Proclaiming Liberty: Why 1776 Still Matters" Two eminent historians participated in a riveting conversation about the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and why they are still relevant today. They explored the origins and foundations of the concepts of the equality of all men/women, unalienable rights and their meaning, and government based on the consent of the governed as well as their meaning and application through history. Edward Larson, Pulitzer-prize-winning author and chaired professor of history and law at Pepperdine University, and Timothy Sandefur, author and vice president for legal affairs at the Goldwater Institute, joined USA250-OC's Jo Ellen Chatham on September 19, 2026, at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum.

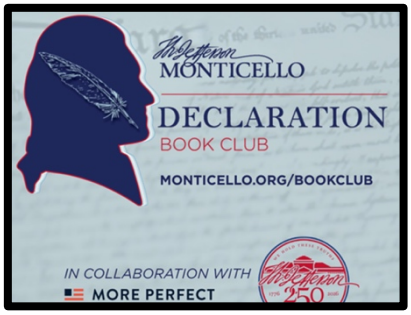
FUTURE SCHEDULED EVENTS

OC Black Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner On October 1, 2026, the Black Chamber of Commerce of Orange County will partner with USA250-OC for its annual banquet to celebrate the Chamber's members and recent achievements as well as accomplishments of African Americans throughout history. Recognized as one of the County's most uplifting and inspiring annual events, it hosts business and community leaders from the broadest spectrum of ethnicities and cultures.

A250 Concerts "Songs of Liberty: Orange County Students Perform Original USA 250 Music" Winners of a patriotic song contest for high school students will perform their original compositions at a unique and very special program on October 25, 2026, in Theater 37 at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. Students were encouraged to submit their musical compositions in several genres, including traditional, classical, country, folk, jazz, rap, and rock. The six winners in each category will perform live, on stage. The competition was organized by the Orange County Department of Education in partnership with USA250-OC and Orange County Music and Dance.



The Declaration Book Club In late September and early October 2026, a group of ideologically diverse Orange Countians will gather to engage in a series of three-hour discussions about the Declaration of Independence, using materials organized by a team of historians at Monticello, the home of the Declaration's primary author, Thomas Jefferson. Discussions will be based on original documents provided to each participant and address three topics: 1776 - Making and Sharing the Declaration (including the rough and final drafts of the Declaration: 1826 – The Declaration Reaches Middle Age (letters between Jefferson and John Adams, after Jefferson's death, etc.): and Legacies – What Makes Us Americans (readings by Frederick Douglass, suffragists, Abraham Lincoln and others).



USA250-OC MEMORABILIA

USA250-OC Christmas Ornament. Designed and manufactured by the company that creates Christmas ornaments for the White House Historical Society and other organizations, the USA250-OC Christmas ornament features the USA250-OC logo in three-dimensional form and is sold in a red box with faux velvet lining. Price is $20.00.

USA250-OC Shirts and Hats. USA250-OC shirts are available in white with "Americans All" emblazoned on the front. One design includes the USA250-OC logo under "Americans All." The other design places a smaller USA250-OC logo on the sleeve. All shirts include "Est. 1776" below the neckline on the back of the shirt. USA250-OC hats are white, adjustable and include an embroidered patch on the front of the cap. All products sell for $20.00.

AFTER 2026 – 2027 AND BEYOND

The America 250 celebration has stimulated across the United States a renewed movement to deepen public understanding of our founding, our founding principles, and the complex human history behind them. Civic groups, museums, schools, and national organizations are working to reconnect Americans with the ideas that shaped our republic – liberty, natural rights, self-government, and the ongoing struggle to define and defend them. These efforts are not just about looking back; it's about helping communities see how these early debates, triumphs, and contradictions still echo in today's civic life.

USA250-OC will continue to collaborate with our partners to create stimulating events and conversations while bringing people together around our shared history and our rights and responsibilities as Americans. Our partners have already agreed to make the public reading of the Declaration an annual event and to continue the A250 Conversations and Concerts, although the title of these series may change.

Our mission and goals will remain the same as we strive to make history feel alive, accessible and relevant, whether through live or online exhibits, discussion groups, community activities, quizzes and contests, or other means – all grounded in the belief that a nation better understands itself – and its future – when it knows its beginnings.

USA250-OC TEAM

Working Team

Jo Ellen Chatham – Co-chair
Joe Lopez – Co-chair
Michelle Barto – Creative Director
Scott Carpenter – Director, Public Engagement and Strategic Communications.
Eric Vejar – Digital Directors

Advisory Leadership Team

Dan Hazard, Chairman
Pat Bates
Dr. Stefan Bean
Dennis Cole
Jessica Ferrante
Robin Follman
John Gates
Judge Jim Gray
Carl Heft
Janine Heft
Bijan Kian
Jim Klingler
Chris Lowe
Paul Stover
Virginia Suveiu
Scott Voigts

With Special Appreciation

Charlie and Ling Zhang
Orange County Board of Supervisors
Don Wagner – Chair, 2024/2025
Doug Chaffee – Chair, 2025/2026
Katrina Foley
Janet Nguyen
Vicente Sarmiento
Association of California Cities - Orange County
Arts OC
Concordia University Irvine
David and Molly Pyott Foundation
Ed Laird
National Archives and Records Administration
Richard Nixon Foundation
Orange County Business Council
Orange County Department of Education
Orange County Music and Dance
Orange County Register
America 250