

MOMENTS THAT MADE US

Our story was never inevitable. We shaped it at every turn.

USER'S GUIDE





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Please note that this project is still in development and information in this User's Guide is subject to change as the team works to finalize the exhibition content and format.



What is *Moments That Made US*?

Moments That Made US is a free, print-on-demand exhibition that explores the ideals at the heart of the Declaration of Independence through moments from our nation's 250 years that have defined their meaning. Developed through a multi-state collaboration using material from an exhibition of the same name created by History Colorado, *Moments that Made US* features a user-friendly format that organizations can adapt, afford, and make their own.

How Does it Work?

The kit includes digital files for 26 ready-to-use exhibit panels. There is one introductory panel, five "thematic" panels, and three "historic moments" panels for each theme. Some additional panels featuring "historic moments" related to your state or region may be available from statewide partners.

Planners have intentionally designed this exhibition to allow organizations to consider their space and audience, and display as many or as few of the provided panels as desired. Templates will also be available for users to add their own local stories and content. Because the digital files will be free to use, printing and mounting are the only out-of-pocket expenses to participating organizations.

Statewide Partners

Thank you to our statewide partners who are committed to helping facilitate this opportunity in their state by helping with distribution of the files and designating a statewide point-of-contact for questions or inquiries from the public. See *the directory at the end of this guide for contact information*.

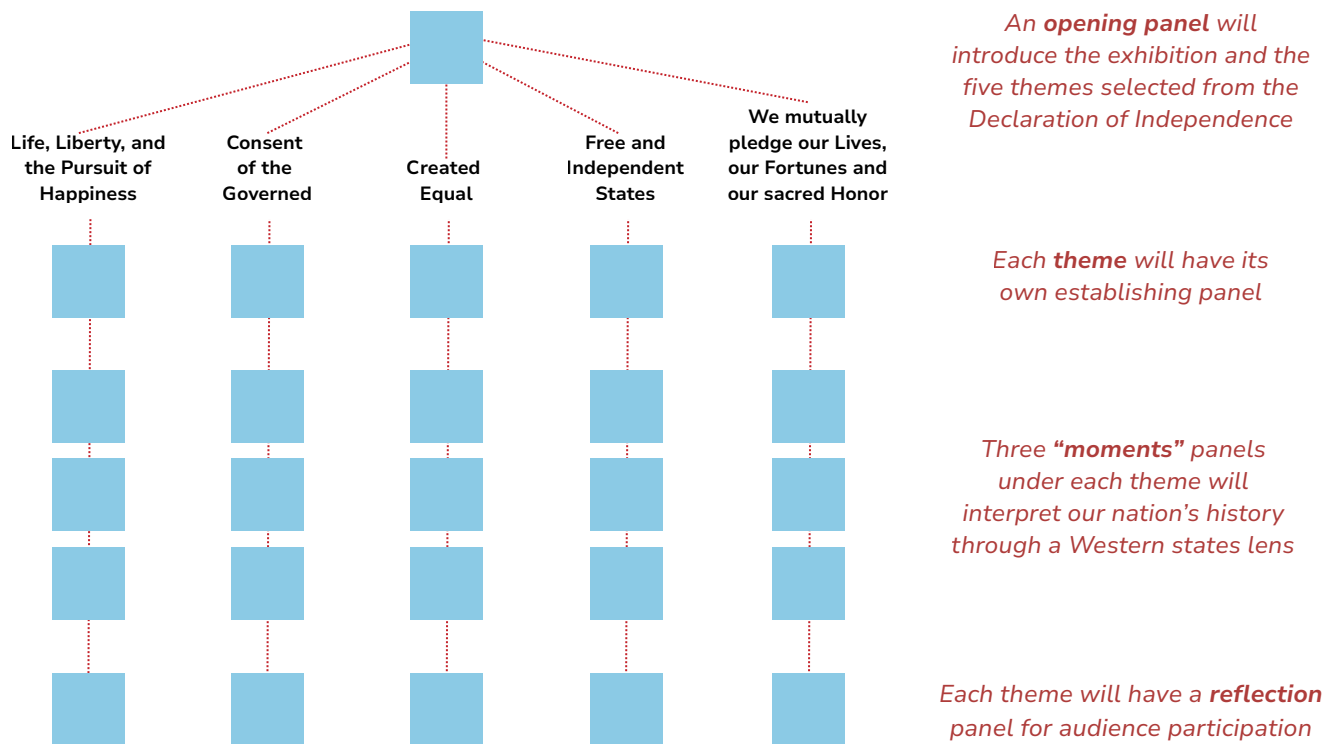
Any community in any state can access the ready-to-use content and create their own customizations. whether their state is a participating partner or not.



Core Panel Kit

The exhibit is completely modular, meaning each of the core panels is designed to stand on its own so users can mix-and-match any combination of panels. **All provided content is optional to use.** The core 26 panels will not be editable by user organizations, but blank templates will be provided for users to create additional panels to add their own content to their version of the exhibition.

Core panels will be designed to be printed at a scale of 24" wide by 36" tall allowing for easy production through self-service printing stores. We estimate printing costs to be \$35 per panel for a simple matte poster print or \$70 per panel mounted on foam board.



Customization

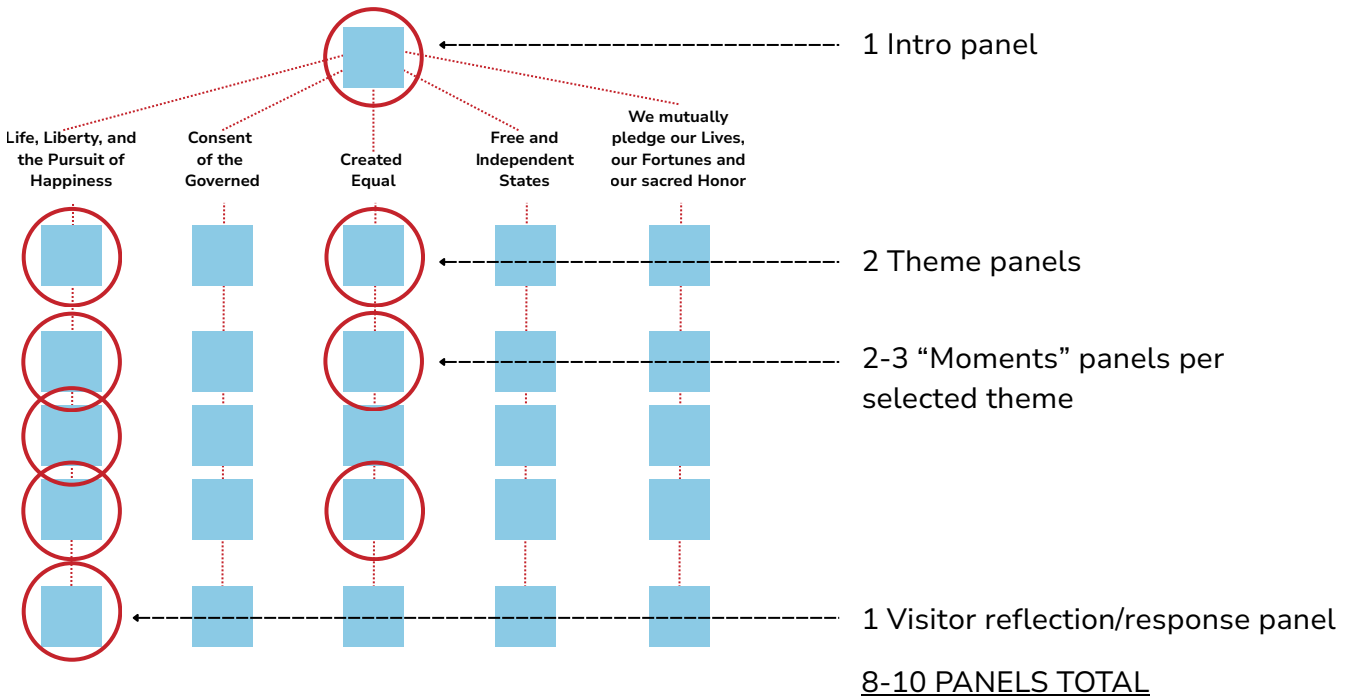
This exhibit is designed to be customized in three primary ways:

1. **Mix-and-match** the ready-to-use content to create your own version of the core exhibition, large or small.
2. **Include content from a statewide partner.** Some participating states are enhancing the exhibition by providing other ready-to-use regional or state "moments" panels that further illustrate each Declaration theme. Users from any state can add this material if desired.
3. **Add your own content.** Locally generated content or adaptations can come in many forms: use the provided templates to add "moments" from local history; add nationally or regionally significant "moments" you think are missing; come up with your own reflection questions; exhibit objects from your collection alongside the exhibition panels; . . . and/or create other complementary exhibition content we haven't thought of!

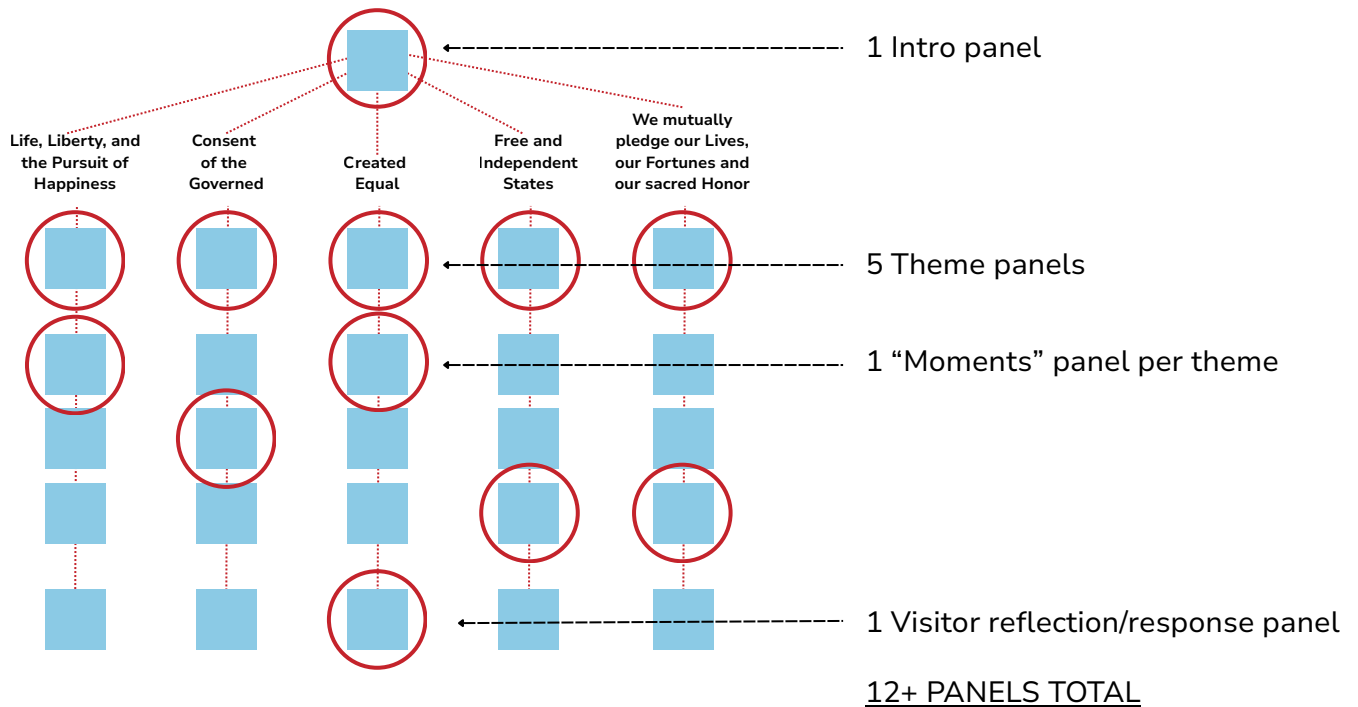
What if we don't have space to display all the panels?

MTMU is designed to be scaled to fit your organization's needs. With the number of panels provided, we anticipate that most users will display only some of the content. **We recommend including a minimum of 8 panels for a comprehensive experience.**

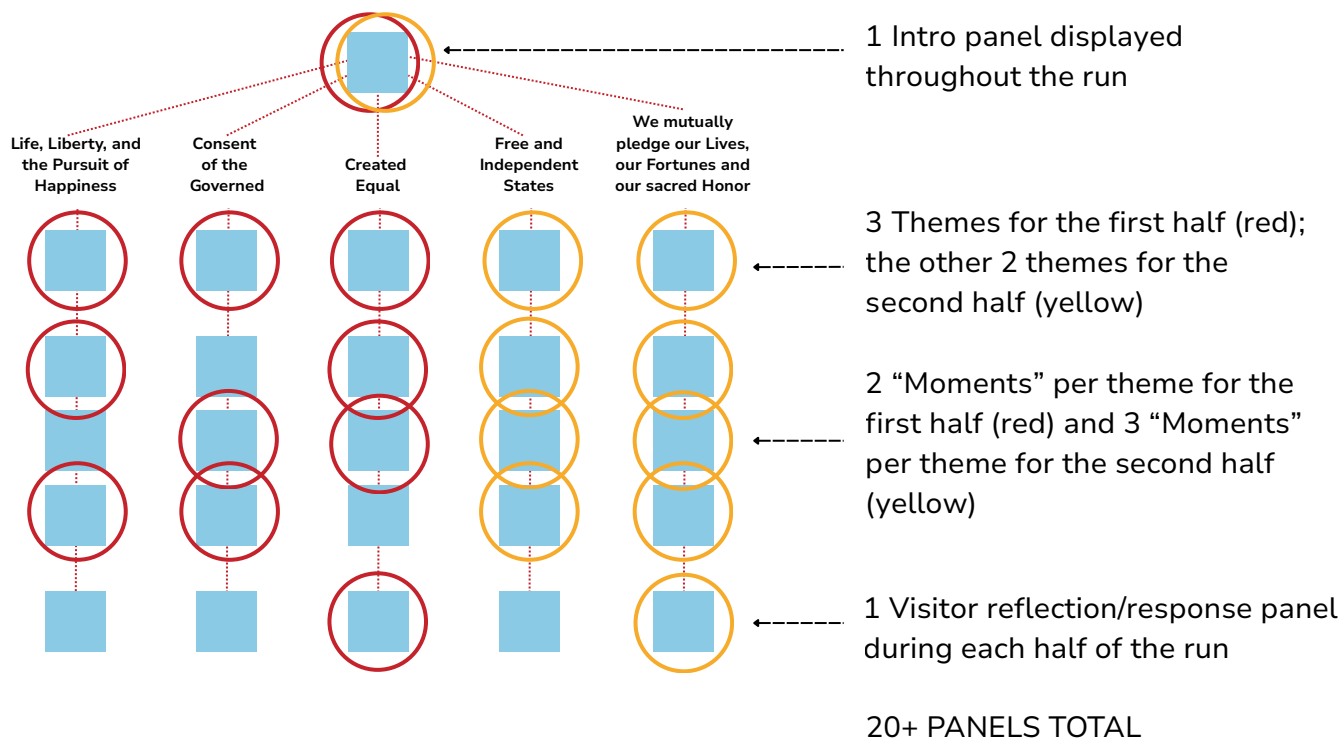
Example 1: Choose fewer themes with more “moments” featured per theme



Example 2: Use all the themes but with fewer “moments” per theme



Example 3: Rotate the content throughout the year



Our community has particular interests . . .

Some of the exhibit themes may resonate with your community more than others. To tailor the exhibit, you can opt to display just the themes and/or moments that feel most relevant. We also encourage you to use the template panels to share local “moments” that connect to the exhibition’s themes that resonate with your audience. This is a great way to incorporate items from your collection.

Additionally you can develop your own response prompts or activities that encourage visitors to reflect on historic or current moments related to the themes or ideas of most interest to you.

We think you missed some important national “moments” in the core panel kit

Use the templates to add anything you think is missing! There are just too many significant moments from our nation’s history to be able to include all of them in one exhibition. If there are other moments from local, state, regional, or national history you think are essential, we encourage you to add them.

Some of the provided content may not be the right fit for our community

Leave it out! We understand not all the provided content will resonate with every community. We hope the core kit provides enough varied content that you will be able to find a grouping of panels that will work for your community.

What if we have a large audience of non-English speakers?

The intro, theme, national moment, and reflection panels will be available in both English and Spanish. If you would like to translate additional panels or languages, we recommend professional translation services where possible. The American Translator Association provides a directory to find translators in your area: atanet.org/directory.

Apps such as Google Translate, DeepL, and Microsoft Translator may provide some basic accommodations for non-English speakers and are free for visitors to download and use. However, these translations vary in their accuracy. You may wish to publish a disclaimer to notify visitors when information has been translated using these machine-translation services.

Downloading the Materials

In order to access the digital files, you will be required to sign a simple use agreement attesting that you agree not to alter any of the text or content on the ready-to-use panels created by the design team. This content was carefully drafted and vetted by participating organizations and professionals and must remain in its original format.

By **January 2026**, you will be able to download the entire panel exhibit and accompanying materials, including:

- All 26 ready-to-print panels (PDF)
 - One (1) intro panel
 - Five (5) theme panels
 - Fifteen (15) national “moments” panels
 - Five (5) visitor reflection panels
- Illustrator (.ai) & Canva templates and related graphic assets to help you create local “moments,” additional reflection panels, etc.
- Implementation guide, including:
 - Accessibility recommendations
 - More suggested panel groupings, local interpretation ideas, and object pairings
 - Evaluation suggestions and sample questions
 - Programming ideas
 - Press release template
 - Social media template
 - Flyer template

Exhibit Content

The exhibit connects five themes drawn from the Declaration of Independence to historical “moments” that have shaped our understanding of these founding principles over time. Each “moment” draws on three different historical perspectives and features a specific artifact around which the interpretation is oriented.

Please note that the following text is a draft and is subject to change as the project team continues to write and finalize the exhibition content.

Declaration Theme #1 | Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

The United States was founded on the principle of individual liberty. How have Americans exercised these inalienable rights throughout history, and how has that impacted the American identity?

Moment #1 | 1607: English Colonization

Tobacco built the early American economy, transforming Jamestown into England's first lasting colony. John Rolfe's Caribbean tobacco thrived in Virginia, fueling exports and serving as currency. Indigenous tribes like the Powhatan traded the crop for European goods, while enslaved Africans, first brought in 1619, provided the labor that sustained this growing prosperity.

Artifact image: Tobacco pipe fragments from Jamestown (c. 1608–1624)

Moment #2 | 1849: Gold Rushes

Gold rushes from California to Colorado sparked massive migration and transformed the West. Prospectors sought fortune, building boomtowns and fueling America's expansion. But for Indigenous peoples, the rush brought devastation—land loss, violence, and broken treaties. Mexican and Chinese miners faced discrimination and dispossession, yet many resisted, shaping the region's complex legacy.

Artifact images: Assayer's scales from Fairbanks and Company, New York (c. 1860); Gold samples from Chaffee, Colorado (c. 1860)

Moment #3 | 1956: Interstate Highways

By the 1950s, Americans were captivated by the open road. The Interstate Highway System and postwar prosperity made car ownership widespread, while models like Ford's Model T and later the Mustang became symbols of freedom. Cities and suburbs were redesigned for automobiles, fueling demand for gasoline and reshaping daily life. Yet this car-centric culture also deepened social and racial divides: highways displaced communities, redlining limited access to suburban homes, and pollution and traffic transformed urban environments.

Artifact image: Gasoline pump from Golden, Colorado (1930s–1970s)

Questions to consider for developing local interpretation/customization:

English Colonization: What plants and crops were being cultivated by Indigenous communities in your area in the 1600s? What objects do you have in your collection from the earliest colonial settlers in your area?

Gold Rushes: What industries drew large waves of migration to your community? What objects do you have in your collection related to those industries and migrants?

Interstate Highways: How have the layouts/designs of cities and towns in your area been affected by the Interstate Highway System? Which communities were most impacted by those federal actions? What objects do you have in your collection that represent automobile culture in your community?

Declaration Theme #2 | Consent of the Governed

From the moment the Founders challenged the injustices of British rule, civic engagement has shaped the course of our nation. How have multiple generations of civic participation influenced American democracy?

Moment #1 | **1676: Bacon's Rebellion**

In 1676, Nathaniel Bacon led Black and white colonists in a revolt against Virginia's royal government whose policies they thought favored the upper-class and Native Peoples over poorer English colonists. In its aftermath, Virginia's leaders codified racial slavery, passing laws restricting Black peoples' freedom and linking Blackness with servitude. Meanwhile, Native leaders like Pamunkey chief Cockacoeske engaged in diplomacy even as she recognized that the colonists were unreliable partners, eventually signing a peace treaty.

Artifact image: Iron grenade fragments from Jamestown (1676)

Moment #2 | **1735: Freedom of the Press**

In 1735, New York printer John Peter Zenger stood trial for publishing articles criticizing royal governor William Cosby. Though English law forbade any criticism of the Crown, Zenger's lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, argued that truth should be a defense against libel. The jury agreed, declaring Zenger not guilty. Their verdict became a powerful symbol of liberty, helping to inspire the principle of freedom of the press later enshrined in the First Amendment.

Artifact images: Pages from issues of *The New York Weekly Journal* (March 10, 1734; March 17, 1734; and June 16, 1735)

Moment #3 | **1846: War with Mexico**

In 1846, President James K. Polk sent U.S. troops into Mexico to seize disputed lands and fulfill the nation's "Manifest Destiny." The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war, forcing Mexico to surrender half its territory and nearly doubling U.S. size. Expansion brought gold, opportunity, and turmoil—fueling debates over slavery that pushed the nation toward civil war. For Mexicans and Indigenous peoples, the treaty marked displacement, discrimination, and the loss of land and sovereignty.

Artifact image: Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848)

Questions to consider for developing local interpretation/customization:

Bacon's Rebellion: What federal actions in your region led to the removal or confinement of Indigenous communities? What documents, images, or newspaper articles do you have that demonstrate the resilience of local Indigenous communities?

Freedom of the Press: What are the most important local news stories from your community's history? What copies of important news stories do you have in your collection?

War with Mexico: What conflicts or government actions led to how your state (and the territories it was part of) was formed? What specific treaty documents have been influential to the formation of your state and its relationships with Indigenous communities?

Declaration Theme #3 | Created Equal

Our pursuit of civil rights for all continues as we work toward a more perfect union. Who has been included and who has been excluded in “We the people” throughout history?

Moment #1 | 1848: Declaration of Sentiments

Long before the 19th Amendment guaranteed women's right to vote nationwide in 1920, the organized fight for women's rights began with the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention in New York. Activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott drafted the Declaration of Sentiments, demanding equal political, social, and economic rights for women. The American West was at the forefront of the suffrage movement with frontier communities embracing bold experiments in equality; Wyoming's suffrage law in 1869 was the first, and ten more western states would follow before suffrage was adopted in the east.

Artifact image: Original printing of the *Declaration of Sentiments* (1848)

Moment #2 | 1957: School Desegregation

Nine Black students, later known as the Little Rock Nine, integrated Little Rock Central High, challenging Arkansas's segregated schools and testing the Supreme Court's desegregation ruling. They faced harassment, threats, and isolation, while Governor Orval Faubus resisted federal authority by sending the National Guard and later closing schools insisting education was a state issue, not a federal one. The students' courage became a national symbol of the Civil Rights Movement and the fight for racial equality.

Artifact image: *The Pix*, Little Rock Central High School yearbook (1958)

Moment #3 | 1990: Americans with Disabilities Act

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, activists demanded equal rights for people with disabilities. Protests like San Francisco's 1977 federal building occupation and Denver's "Gang of 19" blocked buses for accessibility, while Gallaudet University students led the 1988 "Deaf President Now" campaign. These efforts built momentum for the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, ensuring accessible services, accommodations, and protections against discrimination for people with permanent and temporary disabilities, transforming education, employment, and public life.

Artifact image: Frontier Horizon emergency procedures brochure in braille (1983)

Questions to consider for developing local interpretation/customization:

Declaration of Sentiments: What did the suffrage movement look like in your community? What campaign objects do you have in your collection?

School Desegregation: What is the history of segregation, codified or not, in your community and how does it compare to the national Civil Rights timeline? What objects from your collection demonstrate that the concept of "separate but equal" was a myth?

Americans with Disabilities Act: What leaders have worked to make your community more accessible, physically or otherwise? What objects from your collection represent early efforts to create accessibility for all members of your community?

Declaration Theme #4 | Free and Independent States

The power given to the states was designed to further democratize the nation and diffuse the power of the executive. How have the identities and priorities of each state affected the development of our nation?

Moment #1 | 1787: Constitutional Crisis

Paying for the new nation challenged America under the Articles of Confederation. Continental currency, designed by Benjamin Franklin, failed to meet the country's debts, leaving soldiers unpaid and sparking unrest like Shays's Rebellion. Economic crisis highlighted the need for a stronger federal government. In 1787, delegates created the Constitution, establishing a central government, balanced branches, and a system to manage national finances, setting the foundation for a stable economy while shaping the young United States.

Artifact images: Various bills of early United States currency (1776, 1778, & 1779)

Moment #2 | 1970: Environmental Movement

DDT, introduced after World War II, initially promised farmers and public health leaders a miracle solution against insects. By the 1960s, scientists like Rachel Carson and Clarence Cottam revealed its deadly effects on ecosystems and humans. Their warnings spurred the environmental movement, leading to Earth Day in 1970 and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, reshaping public awareness of ecological risk and balancing technological triumphs with responsibility for nature's fragile systems.

Artifact images: KILZUM insecticide (c. 1970); Sherwin-Williams insecticide (c. 1970); Insect spray with DDT (c. 1970)

Moment #3 | 1975: Marriage Laws

Marriage laws in the American West have continually tested national boundaries as states determined their own attitudes toward personal rights. Western states pioneered key reforms including California's 1948 *Perez v. Sharp* striking down interracial marriage bans, early same-sex marriage victories, age-of-consent protections, and the 1969 introduction of no-fault divorce. These milestones represent the West's enduring role as a leader for social change, redefining marriage as both a personal right and a reflection of evolving American values.

Artifact image: Certified copies of marriage licenses from the Boulder County Clerk (1975)

Questions to consider for developing local interpretation/customization:

Constitutional Crisis: What were the precipitating events that led to the formation of your local government? What documents or photographs do you have in your collection related to the founding of your local government?

Environmental Movement: What environmental issues have sparked the activism in your community? What objects in your collection demonstrate the effects of that environmental issue, or, represent the community members who worked to address it?

Marriage Laws: How have social attitudes in your community evolved over time, toward marriage laws? What documents or photographs do you have from significant or controversial marriage unions in your community?

Declaration Theme #5 | We mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor

The work of democracy is continuous. What moments from our past can help us understand how to build a stronger, more just future for all?

Moment #1 | 1776: American Revolution

In the harsh winter of 1778 at Valley Forge, George Washington kept the Continental Army, made of individual state militias, united despite cold, disease, and shortages. His leadership transformed the Army into a disciplined force, ultimately winning independence at Yorktown. When the nation needed its first president, Americans turned to the leader they trusted. His service, particularly setting the standard for the peaceful transfer of power, defined the presidency. Yet liberty was limited—enslaved people like William Lee fought alongside him but remained in bondage, highlighting the Revolution’s contradictions.

Artifact image: General George Washington’s spurs (1775)

Moment #2 | 1863: Emancipation Proclamation

After Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, Black Americans could finally fight for freedom and citizenship. The US Colored Troops enlisted roughly 179,000 men, serving in infantry, artillery, and Navy roles despite segregation and white officers. Nearly 40,000 died securing Union victory, abolition, and constitutional freedom, showing courage and sacrifice even under paternalistic and discriminatory conditions. Their service proved central to the war effort and advanced the fight for equality, though full integration would take decades.

Artifact image: “Men of Color: To Arms! To Arms! Now or Never” broadside (1863)

Moment #3 | 1944: D-Day

In June 1944, Allied forces launched the D-Day invasion on Normandy’s beaches, breaking Hitler’s defenses and beginning Europe’s liberation. Captain David Hall, serving in a segregated unit, and thousands of troops supported the assault, including Jewish soldiers fighting to confront Nazi persecution. Despite heavy casualties, the invasion succeeded, turning the tide of World War II and advancing both the fight against fascism abroad and the struggle for equality at home. On the homefront, citizens sacrificed and contributed in many ways to the war effort and to their communities.

Artifact image: US Army M1 combat helmet (c. 1940)

Questions to consider for developing local interpretation/customization:

American Revolution: Who have been the most important leaders in your community and what impact have they had? What objects do you have in your collection that tell their stories?

Emancipation Proclamation: Are there figures from community who have served the country, in the military or otherwise, despite facing disadvantages or discrimination? What objects do you have in your collection that tell their stories?

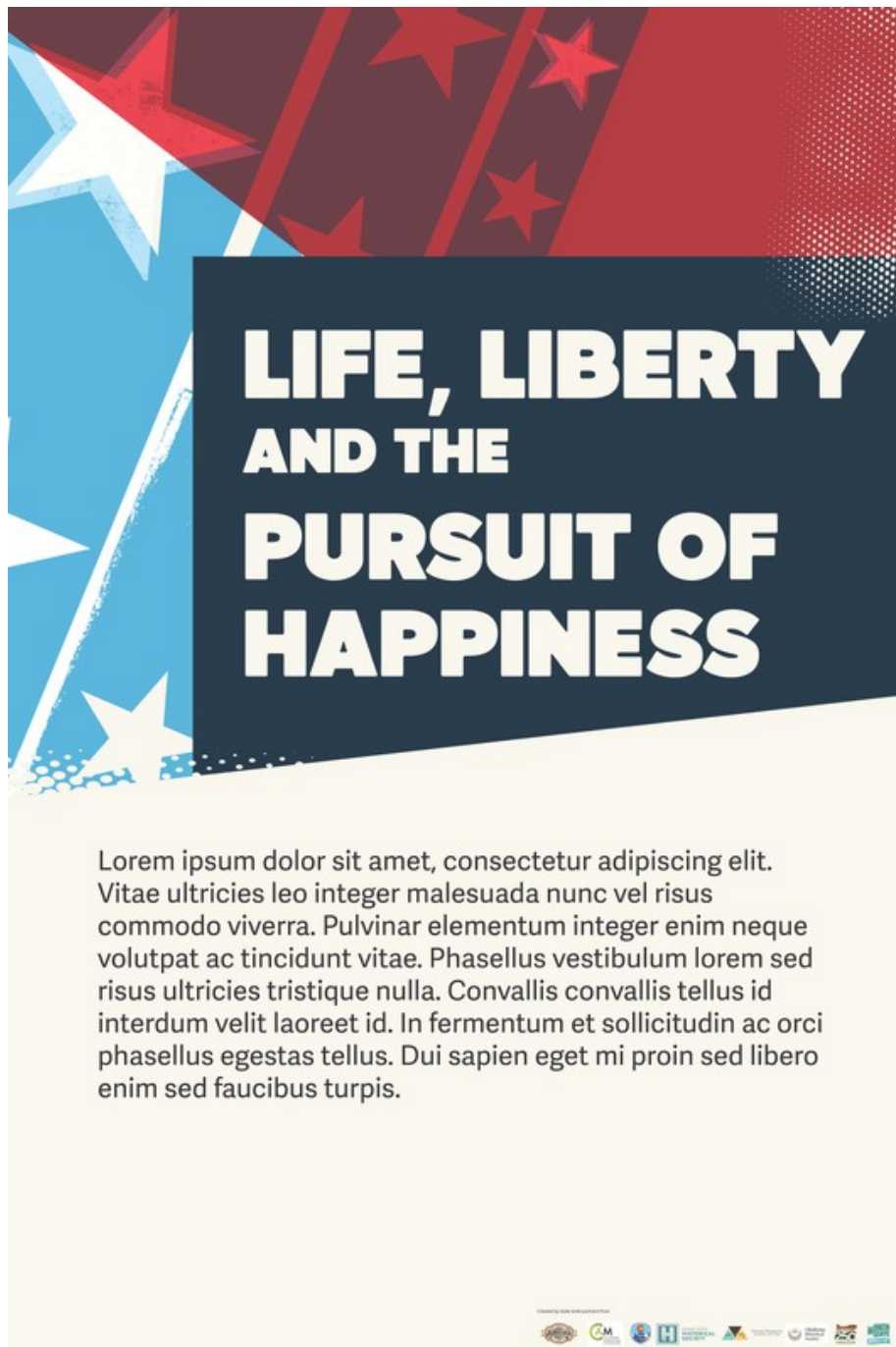
D-Day: What important community building has happened in your community during wartime? What objects from your collection represent the lasting impact of those contributions?

Sample Panel Designs

Please note that the following designs are conceptual and are subject to change as the project team continues to finalize the exhibition content.

All panels will be designed to be printed at a scale of **24" wide** by **36" tall** allowing for easy production through self-service printing stores. Printing the panels at a smaller size may present accessibility issues for your audience.

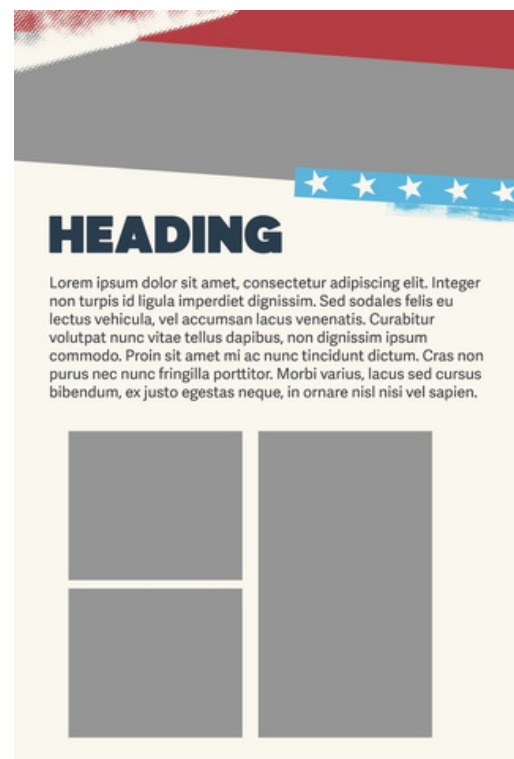
Theme Panel



“Moments” Panel



Customizable Templates



TheirStory Testimonial Integration

The Idaho State Historical Society, in partnership with TheirStory, the platform for oral history, is sponsoring a nationwide testimonial integration with the *Moments That Made US* exhibition. This integration is designed to capture real-time visitor reflections and lived experiences, allowing every MTMU user site across the country to collect and share community voices.

The core exhibition kit will include a dedicated testimonial panel featuring state-specific QR codes. Patrons can scan these codes to record audio or video reflections, instantly contributing their stories to a growing archive of content that users can access to promote their site, the exhibition, and America250's broader mission of commemoration, celebration, and civic engagement.

TheirStory provides web-based software solutions to capture, transcribe, edit, and preserve stories, including oral histories. Serving communities, libraries, archives, and cultural institutions, TheirStory helps users create and manage storytelling projects. Their mission is to create tools, services, and curriculum that empower communities to take ownership of their own narrative.

TheirStory

Let Us Know You're Interested

Have you filled out our interest form yet? Sign up to receive updates about all aspects of the *Moments that Made US* print-on-demand exhibition!

<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8338681/250-Moments-that-Made-US-Interest-Form>



Statewide Partner Directory

Arizona

Office of the Arizona Secretary of State

america250az.org

Laura Terech, lterech@azsos.gov

California

California Museum Association

calmuseums.org

Jennifer Caballero, cam@calmuseums.org

Colorado

History Colorado

am250co150.org

Leah Androne, leah.androne@state.co.us

Hawaii

Hawai'i America250 Commission

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Idaho

Idaho State Historical Society

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Kansas

Kansas Museum Association

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New Mexico

New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs

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