

ILLINOIS AMERICA 250 COMMISSION
COMMISSION MEETING
April 28, 2025, 2:00 p.m.

Webex

Attending: Officer: Chair Gabrielle (Gabe) Lyon; **Commission Members:** Brad Cole, Michelle Donahoe, Jenn Edginton, Jessica Harris, Lindsay Laren, Elisa Marcus, Sara Phalen, Gerald Savage, Christina Shutt, and Dick Simpson; **State of Illinois employees:** Jayette Bolinski, Angela Clark, Meghan Lindstrom, Joel Sachnoff, and Toby Trimmer; members of the public: Erin Drain and Kayla Pilgrim.

I. Welcome

Chair Gabe Lyon called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Meghan Lindstrom called the roll and a quorum was present.

III. Review March 24 Commission Meeting Minutes

The Minutes from the March 24 meeting were presented for approval. Brad Cole moved to approve the Minutes, Jessica Harris seconded, and the Minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. New Business

Gabe thanked the Commissioners for their support and commitment to the mission of the Illinois America 250 Commission in light of the recent unanticipated activity and uncertainty about funding at the federal level.

Gabe invited attendees to introduce themselves, their organizations, and what they are most excited and hopeful for about America 250.

Introduction to Joel Sachnoff

Joel Sachnoff introduced himself as the new liaison for the Commission. He is a senior advisor to Director Finnie of the Department of Natural Resources and had been asked by Deputy Governor Andy Manar and the governor to set up a “strike team” of DNR and Governor's Office employees to help realize the goals of the Commission. Joel stated he would be in regular contact with Gabe to keep the line of communication open between the Commission and the Governor's Office. Joel also invited Commissioners to reach out to him outside of meetings as well if they need assistance or clarification on Commission work.

Gabe opened the floor for questions.

Dick Simpson asked if there was money available through the Department or if an amendment to the State budget could secure funds for the Commission. All programs discussed at previous meetings, including town halls and civic engagement short films for schools, would require more funding. Joel stated that there is an ongoing discussion about funding with the Governor's Office and the Department. He anticipates an answer to that within the next week.

Chair's Update

Review of Spring 2025 Timeline and Key Benchmarks

Gabe shared her screen and presented a slideshow for the Commission. She confirmed the Commission would continue a monthly meeting schedule as they continued to build momentum and confirm buy-in from more community partners.

Gabe shared a slide which stated the four priorities of the Commission: engaging youth, promoting local commemorations, uplifting local stories and places, and recognizing service.

Gabe shared two slides identifying 2025 and 2026 benchmarks. The first half of 2025 is focused on outreach and in July a statewide calendar is projected to launch. Gabe reported that the Commission has worked with DCEO and tourism sites to ensure there are both larger events and more local ones represented on the calendar. By September the Commission is projected to launch "Illinois in Service" and will announce youth opportunities. Gabe reported that the Commission will continue with outreach through 2026 and will consider Juneteenth the kickoff of the 250th anniversary which will start a summer of statewide celebrations and festivals.

Gabe shared a slide about the Commission's work with communities. There are forms on the website for different Illinois communities to sign up as a "250th community" and encouragement for them to brand their community's commemoration efforts. Another tool on the website allows organizations, including museums and other heritage sites, to sign up as promotional partners to share events, programs, and exhibits. Gabe recommended that Commissioners reach out to local organizations and share information about these new opportunities. She further recommended that they emphasize the Commission's connection to the national America 250 to show how the Commission can help them reach a national audience.

Gabe reported that work is being done to recognize service at the regional level but it is not ready for public release yet.

Gabe opened the floor for questions.

Dick stated that plans had been underway to work with anchor institutions to develop templates that similar institutions could use, such as a university developing a template for America 250 courses and speaker programs. He asked if a subgroup could be created with Joel and his team to focus on creating templates for institutions including universities, museums, and libraries. Gabe stated that the existing working groups are developing templates but not for higher education. She suggested the Commissioners consider the best way to address higher education and she would reach out by email within the next week to determine interest in the subject.

V. Working Group Updates
Commemorations

Brad provided the report for the Commemorations Working Group. He stated that the report at the last meeting included a resolution which had been distributed to governing entities including municipalities, park districts, and school boards. A few municipalities had turned in the resolution. Brad also reported that the group was looking into possible large scale events including one at Navy Pier and the Illinois Municipal League was looking into hiring a public relations or social media group to help manage that in conjunction with the work of the Commission.

Brad recommended the Commission consider a kick-off event be held at Kaskaskia on July 4th.

Sara Phalen asked if it would be helpful if Commissioners reached out to their own municipal leaders and advocated for the resolution. Brad agreed and recommended Erin send a copy of the resolution to all Commissioners by email and informed the Commissioners that the resolution had been sent to both mayors and city clerks.

Marketing

Elisa Marcus gave a short explanation of how the Office of Tourism gathers information about events occurring across the state. She also reported that the Office of Tourism is developing the fall/winter magazine set to be released at the end of August. Two pages have been allotted for the Commission and a

template has been created for the pages. Elisa recommended the Commissioners consider how they want America 250 to be advertised and determine marketing phrasing for the magazine.

Dick asked if Tourism had any plans to create a slogan for America 250 or purchase signage. He recommended following the work of South Carolina's America 250 efforts by developing a tagline and advertising in international airports. Elisa confirmed Tourism had previously purchased signage in airports and found the cost to be very expensive. She recommended searching for more affordable or free advertising opportunities especially in Chicago. Gabe recommended a marketing plan be developed to determine taglines and branding.

Education

Michelle Donahoe reported for the Education Working Group. She reported that the group had met with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and shared resources from the Bicentennial celebration. The working group has also discussed ongoing programs that America 250 could be added to, including ways to involve libraries like reading lists or summer reading programs. Gabe recommended continuing to work with the ISBE and explained how their work aligned with the goals of the Commission.

Brad left the meeting at 2:59 p.m.

Lindsay Laren reported that she had met with her library group and many members were aware of the upcoming commemoration and brainstormed program ideas. Potential deliverables discussed at the meeting included book lists, a year long online book club, recording oral histories, and developing an America 250 themed podcast.

Elisa shared links to the Office of Tourism's "Middle of Everything" website in the chat.

Elisa left the meeting at 3:01 p.m.

Lindsay reported that several university librarians had also considered international students and were gathering resources to teach them about the significance of Juneteenth and July 4th.

VI. Public Comment

Gabe opened the floor for public comment.

Erin directed the Commissioners to a public comment provided by Kayla Pilgrim in the chat. She encouraged the Commissioners to follow the Youth 250 Bureau resource links provided. She also stated that the members of the Bureau have completed their training and are available for organizations to consult on how to engage youth.

VII. Adjournment

Christina Shutt moved to end the meeting, Sara seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.