



GEORGIA READS for AMERICA 250

HONOR THE PAST. READ FOR THE FUTURE.



GEORGIA READS FOR AMERICA 250 MAYOR'S READING CLUB GUIDE



**MAYOR'S
READING CLUB**

a Georgia *Forward*  program

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INTRODUCTION

In 2026, communities across Georgia will join the nation in commemorating the **250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence**. This anniversary—known as the **America250** or semiquincentennial celebration—is an opportunity for every city, town, and county in the state to honor the story of America while strengthening the civic foundations that prepare Georgia for the next 250 years.

Local leadership will be key to making this moment meaningful. Through storytelling, reading, and community engagement, Mayors and local partners can bring this national milestone to life in ways that feel personal, relevant, and inspiring. **GeorgiaForward's Mayor's Reading Club**, in partnership with **Georgia Reads** and the **Georgia Council on Literacy**, offers a powerful platform to connect literacy, local history, and civic pride as part of **Georgia Reads for America250**. Reading helps communities understand where they've been—and imagine where they're going.

This guide is designed to support Mayors and Program Coordinators as you plan America250 events and literacy initiatives that reflect your community's story. Whether you host a single reading event or build a yearlong celebration, these tools are meant to be practical, flexible, and easy to use.

As you explore this guide, please know how much your leadership is valued. Mayors and Program Coordinators across Georgia are already doing the important work of championing literacy, supporting families, and building partnerships that make reading visible and meaningful. Your commitment to the **Mayor's Reading Club** strengthens communities across our state.

Thank you for the work you do every day to support literacy and civic life in Georgia. Your leadership will help ensure that **America250** is not only a celebration of the past, but a meaningful investment in the next generation of Georgians.

With appreciation,



Chan Weeks

GeorgiaForward Senior Program Manager
Georgia Municipal Association

GEORGIA AMERICA250

Georgia America250 is the statewide effort to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by honoring Georgia's role in the nation's history and engaging communities in meaningful reflection, education, and celebration. Through coordinated events and partnerships, the initiative encourages cities, schools, cultural institutions, and community organizations to explore local history, elevate diverse stories, and create programs that connect the past to the present in ways that are locally relevant and forward-looking.

Within this broader effort, **Georgia Reads for America250** serves as the statewide literacy and civic learning component. The initiative is designed to unite communities around reading, learning, and storytelling during the America250 commemoration. Its purpose is both celebratory and strategic: honoring America's founding while also addressing literacy challenges that affect families, schools, and communities across Georgia.

The primary goals of Georgia Reads for America250 are to improve literacy for all ages, strengthen civic understanding, celebrate Georgia's diverse history, support schools and libraries, and encourage long-term community engagement. By connecting reading with civic engagement, the initiative provides a framework for communities to explore local heritage, uplift community voices, and inspire family learning as part of the America250 celebration.

A broad coalition of partners—including the Georgia Department of Education, GeorgiaForward, the Georgia Historical Society, the Georgia Municipal Association, Georgia Public Broadcasting, the Georgia Public Library Service, and organizations across the state—are working together to provide resources, promotional support, and coordination for these efforts. Cities are encouraged to explore statewide tools, events, and updates through the Georgia Reads for America 250 website at www.america250.georgiareads.org.

CIVIC LITERACY

A core component of Georgia Reads for America250 is civic literacy. Civic literacy is the understanding of how government works, what rights and responsibilities citizens possess, and how individuals can meaningfully participate in civic life. It includes the ability to access and evaluate information, the confidence to express opinions, and the willingness to contribute to community well-being.

Civic literacy begins with reading. Individuals who read regularly build the vocabulary, comprehension, critical thinking skills, and background knowledge needed to engage in democratic processes. When families read together, children learn not only language and literacy skills, but also values around fairness, responsibility, leadership, and citizenship.

Georgia, like many states, faces significant literacy challenges. 1 in 10 adults have low literacy skills, while 62% of Georgia's third grade students read below grade level. These challenges directly affect civic participation. People who struggle with reading often struggle to complete forms, understand ballots, navigate government websites, engage in public decision-making or follow local news. Literacy is not only a workforce or educational priority—it is also a civic one.

When communities strengthen literacy, they strengthen democracy. Reading helps residents understand their community's story, make informed decisions, and contribute as confident citizens. This guide supports Mayors in using reading as a tool to expand civic understanding and participation.

Definitions for Civic Literacy

To support consistent messaging, the guide incorporates definitions adapted from civic literacy resources:

Advocacy is the act of speaking or acting in support of an idea, cause, or change.

Civic literacy refers to the knowledge and skills needed to participate effectively in civic life, including understanding government processes and civic responsibilities.

A **citizen** is a member of a community with certain rights and duties.

Civic engagement includes activities that contribute to community well-being or influence public decisions.

Civic responsibility refers to the obligations citizens share to vote, be informed, respect laws, and contribute to the common good.

Democracy is a system in which people govern themselves, directly or through elected representatives.

Information literacy refers to the ability to find, evaluate, and use information responsibly.

Legislation refers to laws created by governing bodies.

Literacy includes the ability to read, write, and communicate effectively.

Media literacy refers to the ability to understand and evaluate media messages.

Public service includes work done to serve the community, whether paid or volunteer.

Policy refers to plans or guidelines created by government bodies to address issues.

Reading proficiency refers to the ability to read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

HOW CITIES CAN PARTICIPATE

Georgia cities can participate in America250 by creating literacy-centered programs that connect reading, local history, and civic pride. The Mayor's Reading Club offers a flexible and visible way for Mayors and Program Coordinators to lead these efforts and engage families across the community.

Lead Through the Mayor's Reading Club

Cities are encouraged to use the Mayor's Reading Club as the anchor for America250 programming. Activities may include:

- Civic Storytime with the Mayor featuring books about leadership, community helpers, Georgia history, or civic values.
- America250 Reading Challenges, such as 250 minutes, 250 pages, or 25 books.
- "If I Were Mayor..." writing, art, or video contests for students.
- Family Literacy Nights that combine reading with hands-on civic activities.
- Pop-Up Reading Corners at City Hall, parks, festivals, or community centers.
- Book Walks or outdoor reading trails in public spaces.

Planning Tools

Included at the back of this guide are ready-to-use sample agendas and an event planning worksheet. These tools are designed to help cities organize America250 and Mayor's Reading Club events, engage partners, and reflect on outcomes to strengthen future programming.

Engage Schools, Libraries, and Community Organizations

Strong partnerships help cities reach more families and create richer programming.

- **Schools** can integrate America250 themes into reading, writing, and social studies lessons and encourage student participation in Mayor's Reading Club activities.
- **Public libraries** can host storytimes, reading challenges, book displays, author events, and provide access to books for all ages.
- **Museums and historical societies** can offer local history exhibits, speakers, artifacts, and storytelling opportunities.
- **Faith-based organizations, nonprofits, civic clubs, youth organizations, and local businesses** can host events, provide volunteers, support book distribution, or sponsor activities.

Youth Leadership Opportunities

Local youth councils and youth leadership groups can play an active role in planning and supporting America250 programming. Involving young people helps build civic literacy, leadership skills, and long-term community engagement. Additional ideas and guidance for youth-led projects can be found in GeorgiaForward's Statewide Youth Council Project Guide for America250, listed in the Resources & Support section of this guide.

Build on What Your City Already Does

America250 programming does not need to start from scratch. Cities can:

- Add a reading or storytelling component to existing festivals or celebrations.
- Incorporate local history into established Mayor's Reading Club events.
- Recognize community helpers, educators, and civic leaders during literacy programs.
- Expand a single event into a seasonal or yearlong series.

Partner Tip

Libraries and schools are often the best first partners—they already reach families and have space, materials, and staff to support literacy programming.

COMMUNICATIONS & PROMOTION

Clear and consistent communication helps ensure strong participation in Mayor's Reading Club and America250 events. Thoughtful promotion also allows cities to connect local efforts to the statewide Georgia Reads for America250 initiative.

Promote Your Events

Cities are encouraged to share Mayor's Reading Club and America250 activities through existing communication channels, including:

- City websites and community calendars
- Social media platforms
- School and library newsletters
- Community bulletin boards
- Local newspapers, radio, and community television

When posting on social media, use the hashtags **#GAReads250** and **#MayorsReadingClub** to help connect your city's activities with GeorgiaForward and the broader statewide effort.

Share with GeorgiaForward

GeorgiaForward is eager to help amplify local efforts and celebrate community successes. Cities are encouraged to:

- Copy GeorgiaForward on press releases related to Mayor's Reading Club & America250 events.
- Invite GeorgiaForward staff to attend events when possible.
- Share photos, videos, and social media posts after events so they can be highlighted and shared statewide.

Stay Connected

Sharing your success helps strengthen the statewide story of literacy and civic engagement across Georgia.

RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Communities participating in the Mayor's Reading Club and Georgia Reads for America250 have access to a strong network of statewide partners and tools. These resources are designed to support local planning, strengthen literacy programming, and connect community efforts to Georgia's broader America250 celebration.

- GeorgiaForward - www.GeorgiaForward.org
- Statewide Youth Council Project Guide - www.GeorgiaForward.org/America250
- Georgia Reads for America 250 – www.america250.georgiareads.org
- Explore Georgia's America 250 page - www.georgia250.com
- Georgia Public Library Service - www.georgialibraries.org
- US Semiquincentennial Commission and America250 - www.america250.org

Georgia Public Library Service "25 for 250" Book List

The following titles represent the Early Elementary selections from the Georgia Public Library Service's 25 for 250 recommended reading list. The remaining twenty titles—spanning Late Elementary through post-High School—along with the complete statewide list, can be found at: www.america250.georgiareads.org/#Books. Communities are encouraged to explore the full list when planning programs for older students, families, and community-wide reading initiatives.

Early Elementary

1. *Hey, Georgia* by Malcolm Mitchell
2. *Delivering Justice: W.W. Law and the Fight for Civil Rights* by James Haskins
3. *Hard Work, but It's Worth It: The Life of Jimmy Carter* by Bethany Hegedus
4. *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Doreen Rappaport
5. *The Flag We Love* by Pam Munoz Ryan

PLANNING TOOLS

Sample Agenda 1 - America250 Kickoff Event

Ideal for launching a citywide celebration or reading initiative.

Duration: 60 minutes

Audience: Families, community members, partners, media

Agenda:

Welcome & Opening Remarks (5 minutes)

- Mayor greets attendees, explains the significance of America250.
- Overview of the year's vision and the role of literacy in civic life.

Icebreaker: "Book That Built Me" (10 minutes)

- Volunteers share a book that shaped their understanding of community or leadership.

Civic Storytime with the Mayor (10 minutes)

- Mayor reads a picture book about community helpers, Georgia history, or democracy.
- Brief discussion about the book's big ideas.

America 250 Overview & Local History Spotlight (10 minutes)

- Short presentation about the city's founding or an important local figure.
- Optional slideshow, photos, or historical artifacts.

Small Group Activity: "What We Love About Our Community" (10 minutes)

- Families discuss and record their thoughts on paper leaves or stars for a community display.

Announcements: Reading Challenges & Upcoming Events (10 minutes)

- Launch the "250 Minutes/Pages/Books" reading challenge.
- Invite residents to future storytimes and civic literacy events.

Closing & Group Photo (5 minutes)

- Thank partners and participants.
- Take a commemorative America250 group photo.

Sample Agenda 2 - Mayor's Reading Club Storytime Program

Designed for recurring events at libraries, schools, parks, or City Hall.

Duration: 30–45 minutes

Audience: Children ages 3–10 and caregivers

Agenda:

Welcome from the Mayor or Librarian (3 minutes)

Quick introduction and statement on the importance of reading and America250.

Icebreaker: “If I Were Mayor...” (5 minutes)

Children share one thing they would do if they were Mayor.

Storytime (10 minutes)

- Mayor reads two short books OR one longer book.
- Titles may focus on leadership, community helpers, Georgia history, or civic values.

Interactive Question Time (5 minutes)

- Ask: “What did this story teach us about helping others?”
- Invite 3–4 children to share thoughts.

Activity Station (10 minutes)

Choose one:

- Create Your Own City Flag
- Design a Mayor Badge
- Draw Your Favorite Place in Georgia
- Coloring sheets about community roles

Closing (2 minutes)

- Hand out stickers or bookmarks.
- Promote the next reading event.

Choose the Right Book

Select books that highlight leadership, community helpers, local history, or civic values. Picture books with clear messages and engaging illustrations work best for mixed-age audiences (See GPL “25 for 250” book list in the Resources & Support section of this guide for suggestions).

Prepare for Storytime

Strong read-alouds support early literacy and help keep children engaged.

These resources offer practical guidance for leading storytime:



Impactful Read Alouds in Early Literacy Microcredential (KSU)



MRC Webinar: “Reading to and Engaging with Children”

Sample Agenda 3 - Family Civic Literacy Night

Perfect for schools, community centers, or libraries.

Duration: 60–90 minutes

Audience: Families with children ages 6–12

Agenda:

Welcome & Overview (5 minutes)

Explain that civic literacy helps families understand how to participate in community life.

Icebreaker Game: Civic Literacy Bingo (10 minutes)

Players mingle to find people who match squares such as “Visited City Hall” or “Has a library card.”

Reading Relay: Quotes on Leadership (10 minutes)

- City leaders or volunteers take turns reading short quotes from Georgia figures (MLK Jr., Jimmy Carter, Juliette Gordon Low).
- Families discuss what the quotes mean.

Breakout Sessions (20 minutes)

Families rotate through stations:

1. How City Government Works (Hands-on Demo)
2. Local History Story Corner
3. Georgia Reads Craft Table (make a bookmark or mini-journal)

Panel with Local Leaders (15 minutes)

- Police chief, firefighter, librarian, teacher, or city council member speaks briefly.
- Q&A with children.

Reflection & Closing (5 minutes)

- Families share one thing they learned about civic life.
- Promote upcoming reading challenges or events.

Use Real-Life Examples

Connect civic ideas to everyday experiences—schools, parks, libraries, and local services—to help families see how government affects daily life.

Sample Agenda 4 - America250 Reading Challenge Launch Event

Promotes a citywide reading challenge. Cities may offer flexible options such as minutes read, pages read, or books completed, allowing families, schools, and individuals to participate in ways that fit their needs.

Duration: 45 minutes

Audience: Everyone

Agenda:

Opening by Mayor (5 minutes)

Discuss why reading is central to America 250.

Explanation of Challenge (5 minutes)

250 minutes, pages, or books—flexible for all ages.

Motivational Storytime (10 minutes)

Read a book about perseverance, leadership, or Georgia heritage.

Activity: Build a Personal Reading Goal (10 minutes)

Families write goals on America250-themed cards.

Community Pledge (5 minutes)

Group recites: “We commit to reading for our future.”

Closing & Materials Distribution (5 minutes)

Hand out reading logs, stickers, or certificates.

Make Reading Visible

Post reading trackers or progress boards in libraries, City Hall, or online to build momentum and excitement.

Promote Ongoing Engagement

Use the launch event to invite families to upcoming storytimes, reading celebrations, or America250 activities.

Sample Agenda 5 “If I Were Mayor...” Student Showcase

Encourages students to explore civic leadership by sharing ideas about how they would serve their community if they were Mayor.

Duration: 60 minutes

Audience: Best suited for students in grades K–8, with flexibility to expand to high school through essays, presentations, or multimedia projects.

Agenda:

Welcome & Purpose (5 minutes)

Mayor explains why youth leadership matters.

Student Presentations (30 minutes)

Students share essays, posters, or videos answering: “If I were Mayor, I would...”

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Ask:

“What makes a strong leader?”

“How can young people help our city?”

Recognition Ceremony (10 minutes)

Certificates for all participants.

Closing Photo & Refreshments (5 minutes)

Pre-Work for Students

Students complete a short project before the showcase. Cities may choose one or more of the following formats:

- A written response or essay
- A short video or recorded message
- A drawing, poster, or visual project
- A presentation or speech

Teachers or program coordinators may guide students by asking:

- What is one thing you love about your community?
- What would you improve or change as Mayor?
- How would your idea help people in your city?

Completed projects are submitted in advance and displayed or presented during the showcase event.

Event Planning Worksheet

EVENT NAME :

DATE : / /

LOCATION:

TIME:

PURPOSE OF EVENT (CIVIC OR LITERACY GOAL)

TARGET AUDIENCE:

Describe the purpose of this event and what you hope families or community members will learn or experience.

Families, students, early learners, teens, adults, seniors, or mixed ages.

EVENT DESCRIPTION

Outline the program elements, flow of activities, and event goals.

PARTNERS & ROLES

List schools, libraries, nonprofits, civic groups, and their responsibilities.

NOTES

PROMOTION STRATEGY

How will you engage families? Social media, flyers, school newsletters, city website, radio, etc.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Books, tables, chairs, microphones, crafts, activity supplies, signage.

SUCCESS MEASURES

Attendance, reading participation, engagement levels, volunteer involvement, survey results.

CONTINUING FORWARD

As Georgia prepares to commemorate America250, our cities and towns stand at the center of this historic moment. Mayors and community leaders have a unique opportunity to transform this anniversary into a catalyst for lasting impact. By championing literacy, elevating local history, and fostering civic engagement, communities can build pride in where we come from while investing in the generations who will shape where we go next.

America250 is far more than a celebration of the past—it is an invitation to imagine and build the future we want for Georgia's families, children, and neighborhoods. Through the Mayor's Reading Club and Georgia Reads for America250, leaders can open doors to learning, strengthen connections between residents, and ensure every child grows up with the confidence and skills to participate fully in civic life.

This milestone reminds us that democracy thrives when communities read together, learn together, and work together. As you plan your local events and initiatives, we hope you embrace this moment as a chance to spark curiosity, deepen understanding, and cultivate pride in the stories that make your city unique. The work you do today will help shape a stronger, more informed, and more connected Georgia for the next 250 years.

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