

GR A250

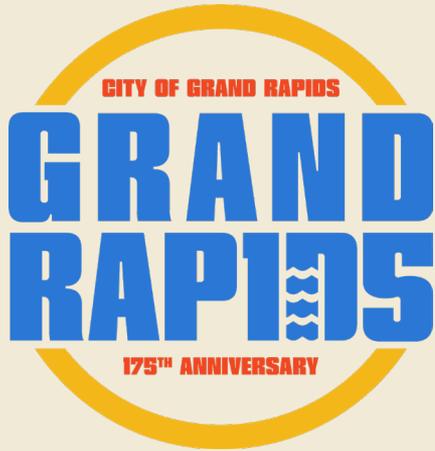
We're celebrating the 250th anniversary
of the founding of America.

MOMENTOUS MILESTONES

May 2, 2025
175th Anniversary of Grand Rapids' Municipal Incorporation (1850)

April 4, 2026
190th Anniversary of Kent County's Establishment (1836)

July 4, 2026
250th Anniversary of the U.S. Declaration of Independence (1776)



PROFESSIONAL CONNECTION

ICMA Code of Ethics & GR A250

GR A250 can reaffirm select core ICMA values:

- Affirm dignity and social responsibility
- Serve the best interests of all community members
- Foster engagement and constructive communication
- Uphold honor and integrity
- Commit to continuous improvement
- Honor public trust



HONORING OUR PAST, INSPIRING OUR FUTURE

This historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Second Sentence

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

U.S. CONSTITUTION

Preamble

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

NORTHWEST ORDINANCE OF 1787

Article 3

“Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”

NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE, STATE & LOCAL EMPHASIS

“The 250th anniversary of our nation’s founding that will offer an opportunity for education, civic involvement, and examination of the historic themes and values upon which our country is based....”

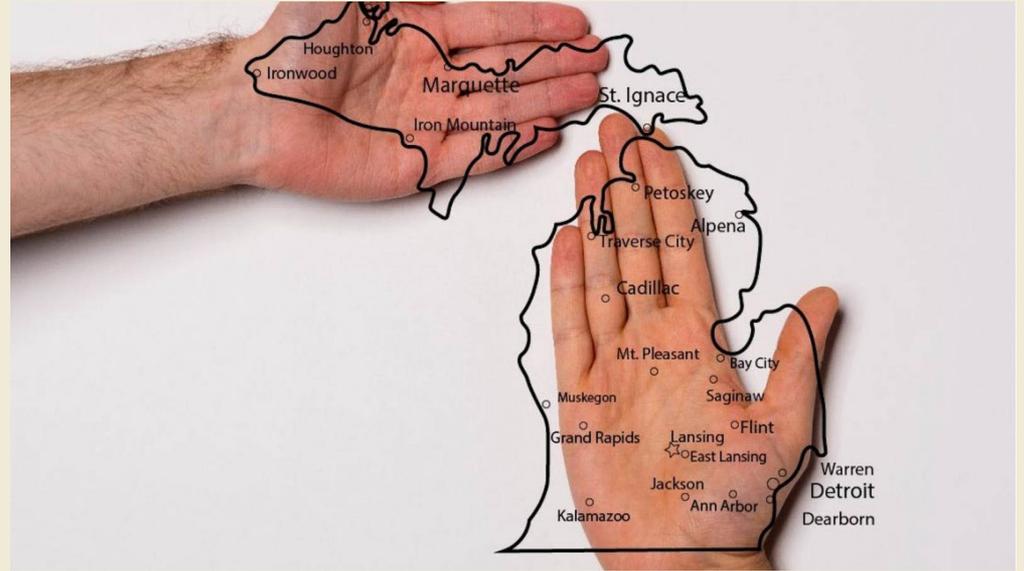
“With that in mind, I am designating the directors of our private and our public statewide history organizations as Michigan’s official points of contact for the commemoration of the Michigan USA 250th Committee.”

-Governor Gretchen Whitmer



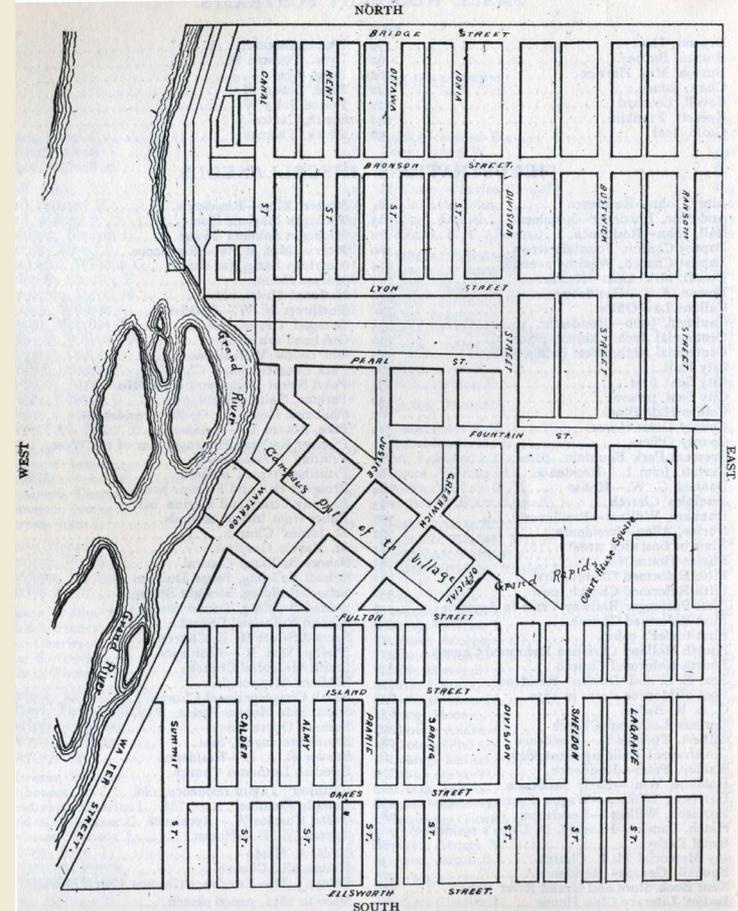
POWER OF PLACE

- History is beneath our feet
- Understanding the political, economic, cultural, and societal forces that have shaped our communities allows us to better understand our past and inform our future



CAMPAU TRIANGLE

- Remnants of land battles between original settlers Louis Campau and Lucius Lyon in the 1830s are visible in Grand Rapids still today
- Campau was Grand Rapids' first white settler and landowner
- Lyon was a government surveyor and land speculator who arrived in 1831
- They each owned parts of what is now downtown Grand Rapids and refused to coordinate platting of their land
- Lyon favored a standard English grid format and Campau wanted to follow traditional indigenous paths
- When the streets were finally connected, the contrast was stark
- These instances highlighted the need to have centralized planning at the local government level



MANOOMIN PROPHECY

- Centuries ago, the Anishinaabeg migrated to the Great Lakes from the east coast of the U.S. searching for the land where “the food grows on water”
- The prevalence of wild rice in the Grand River watershed enticed tribes to settle along its shores
- These tribes remain today and still incorporate manoomin into their cultural rituals and ceremonies
- This example demonstrates how our natural environment has shaped our cultures and communities throughout history



LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN AMERICA 250

- Build historical literacy and make connections to local identity

Program ideas: pop-up exhibits, establish new historical markers, walking history tours, establish or highlight digital archives

- Bring people together to build community

Program ideas: festivals, performances, book or film series, interfaith gatherings in places of worship

- Connect place to our history and stories

Program ideas: permanent or pop-up art displays/murals, renaming public spaces for public figures, commemorative installations, new parks/greenspaces

- Strengthen civic engagement

Program ideas: non-partisan voter registration drives, citizen academies on local topics, "Civic pride" days highlighting how local government works



**Arch Erected in Downtown
Grand Rapids in 1876 to honor
the U.S. Centennial**

An aerial night view of a city skyline. A prominent glass skyscraper with green and blue lighting is on the left. A river flows through the center, with a bridge crossing it. The city lights are reflected in the water. The sky is dark blue.

IT IS ABOUT PRINCIPLES, NOT POLITICS.

GR A250 is a unique opportunity to think about the founding principles of our country and what they mean today.



THIS IS



OUR MOMENT



OUR PRINCIPLES

Our pillars are designed to guide the GR A250 initiative, just as our nation's founding principles have guided its progress through the years.

PEOPLE

Dignity, Equality, Freedom

We recognize the inherent worth of every person.

We know we are better together and accomplish more when we find common ground.

We believe that everyone can discover, develop and apply their unique talents to benefit themselves and others.

It is important that we remember and reflect on the heritage and experiences of the people who came before us.

History + Heritage
Grand Rapids Firsts
Tell Your Story

PURPOSE

Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness

We are bound by shared ideas, institutions and documents (Declaration, Bill of Rights, Constitution) that are still relevant and can be applied in new ways today.

We believe America provides opportunity for all.

Together we can make the American Dream real for every one of us.

We can be a community united in purpose and pride.

Volunteer Opportunities
Community Engagement
Learning Resources

PROGRESS

A More Perfect Union

Together we can build a brighter future for generations to come.

No matter how much progress we've made, we can always do better.

Every generation has the opportunity and obligation to demonstrate how we can equitably create a more perfect union.

Grand River + Natural Resources
Innovation + Growth
Art + Culture

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Partnerships, Participation & Activation

Steering Committee

Subcommittees:

Archives
& Records

Athletics

City & County
Government

Communication

Community Groups
& Neighborhoods

Events

Faith Based
Community

Health Care

Impact
Measurement

K-12 Education

Manufacturing

Military

Museums & Arts

New Americans

Philanthropy

Restaurants
& Brewery Industry

Sister Cities

Youth

SIGNATURE INITIATIVES

Projects bringing People, Purpose, and Progress to life in 2026

- **Democracy Café**
 - Mobile, pop-up civic learning experience bringing interactive exhibits, local history and opportunities for simple civic action directly into neighborhoods, schools, libraries and festivals.
- **July 4 “United by Community” Celebration**
 - Celebrating the nation’s birthday through experiences that highlight unity, civic pride and shared purpose. The day will blend neighborhood-level gatherings with citywide civic moments that honor the founding principles of the United States. At the neighborhood level, GR A250 will distribute Block Party-in-a-Box kits to empower residents to host hyper-local celebrations.
- **Community Time Capsule & Civic Landmark**
 - Public ceremony and installation capturing stories, hopes, artifacts and reflections from 2026, housed within a commissioned sculpture symbolizing future-facing civic progress.
- **Youth Civic Engagement Initiative**
 - Portfolio of youth-designed competitions, service challenges, storytelling and leadership labs elevating the next generation’s voice in shaping Grand Rapids’ future.

SUBCOMMITTEE & PARTNER INITIATIVES

Projects bringing People, Purpose, and Progress to life in 2026

- **Athletics Recognition & Visibility**
 - Celebrates student and professional athletes across West Michigan through branded patches, decals, signage and public storytelling that ties athletic pride to civic identity.
 - Fans can get a sneak peak on January 15, 2026 at Grand Valley State University for their Men's and Women's basketball games versus Davenport University.
- **Business Engagement Partnership**
 - Mobilizes the Chamber and business community to recognize the region's entrepreneurial spirit, promote civic-purpose leadership and activate workplaces around the GR A250 themes.
- **“Join or Die” Civic Engagement Screenings**
 - Film screenings and community dialogues hosted with local civic partners exploring the meaning of civic participation, community building and democracy today.
- **Citywide Branding & Visibility Campaign**
 - Neighborhood banners, downtown building wrap, airport signage and regional advertising that unifies Grand Rapids under a shared visual identity for the anniversary year.

SUBCOMMITTEE & PARTNER INITIATIVES

Projects bringing People, Purpose, and Progress to life in 2026

- **Sister Cities Airport Art Collaboration**
 - Permanent installation at Gerald R. Ford International Airport celebrating Grand Rapids' global friendships and the value of cross-cultural understanding.
- **“Doing History Harvest”**
 - Interactive public events where residents bring personal archives, photos and artifacts to be digitized and preserved, ensuring inclusive representation of community history.
- **“Meditations Journal” Interfaith Anthology**
 - A printed and digital collection showcasing reflections, prayers, artwork and meditations from Grand Rapids' diverse faith communities.
- **“Hadithi Voices” Storytelling Project**
 - Multimedia storytelling centering immigrant and refugee experiences; exhibitions highlight the evolving people and cultures shaping Grand Rapids today.

SUBCOMMITTEE & PARTNER INITIATIVES

Projects bringing People, Purpose, and Progress to life in 2026

- **Manufacturing Central Showcase**
 - A downtown exhibit space (under exploration) where manufacturers display products, stories, innovations and regional industrial heritage.
- **Manufacturing Month / Plant Tours**
 - A greatly expanded regional initiative exposing students and residents to modern manufacturing through hands-on tours and career pathway exploration with up to 250 companies participating.
- **Manufacturing Mobile Lab**
 - A mobile STEM and manufacturing learning experience built for student engagement.
- **“250 Trees for 250 Years”**
 - Tree-planting challenges during ArborFest and NeighborWoods events celebrating environmental stewardship and community beautification.

SUBCOMMITTEE & PARTNER INITIATIVES

Projects bringing People, Purpose, and Progress to life in 2026

- **Tuskegee Airmen Exhibit - Grand Rapids Children's Museum**
 - An interactive exhibit honoring the service and legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen, connecting local youth to national history.
- **GR Symphony Semiquincentennial Performance**
 - A special performance tied to the anniversary themes of unity, civic identity and American musical heritage



JOIN THE ADVENTURE

GR A250 is both a **celebration**
and a **call to action**.

It invites us to **reflect on our nation's founding ideals** and to explore how those principles apply to us today, as individuals and as a community.



THERE'S A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Every American deserves the chance to achieve a life of meaning and abundance — a future rooted in our founding principles and sustained by civic pride. GR A250 is an opportunity to lean into that responsibility.

We are bringing people together from all different walks of life to engage with the founding principles of our country in new and tangible ways.

When we reflect on our shared past and work toward a more connected, purpose-driven future, we move closer to realizing a more perfect union — right here in our own city.



BETTER FUTURES

Civic engagement is one way we can build a stronger, more connected community within Grand Rapids and beyond.

Resident involvement has a direct impact on:

- Creating a future rooted in **purpose, pride and participation**
- Building **stronger community connections** through shared values and service
- Advancing a **citywide movement** that honors where we've been and shapes where we're going



Celebrating **250 years** since the signing
of the Declaration of Independence.