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Proposal for Erie County Semi-Quincentennial Celebrations

This proposal outlines a comprehensive plan to leverage Erie County's designated Lead Assets to celebrate the **250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026**. Each Lead Asset would receive \$50,000 (split evenly between Erie County Government and ECGRA) to plan, implement, and host signature events. The events are spread throughout the year, with special concentration in June and July around the 4th of July celebrations, highlighted by the return of the **Flagship Niagara**. October and November are reserved for the **Global Summit of the Jefferson Educational Society (JES)**, which is included as a culminating civic event.

In addition, the **JES will produce year-round programming** tied to the Semi-Quincentennial. This will include lectures, living-history reenactors, and concerts with educational components — building on the model of community engagement pioneered during the **Perry 200 Commemoration**. These programs will ensure continuous opportunities for civic reflection, public history, and educational enrichment throughout calendar year 2026.

To broaden countywide participation, 3-5 open competitive slots will be established, allowing organizations from across Erie County to apply for \$10,000-15,000 each. This ensures that grassroots, cultural, historical, or civic groups beyond the designated Lead Assets can design and deliver signature Semi-Quincentennial events, further expanding reach and inclusivity.

Proposed Annual Timeline & Lead Asset Events

- **February / Early Spring – Erie Art Museum**
Founding Art: 250 Years of American Vision — a juried themed exhibition responding to themes of independence, revolution, and civic identity. Includes receptions, artist talks, and educational tours.
- **March / Early Spring – Erie Arts & Culture**
Voices for Liberty Festival — a citywide open arts festival featuring visual arts, spoken word, music, and dance centered on themes of freedom, citizenship, and democracy.
- **April – expERIENCE Children's Museum**
Young Patriots: 250 & Me — interactive, child-friendly exhibits and activities exploring independence, colonial games, and civic simulations.
- **May – Erie County Historical Society**
From Colony to Commonwealth: Erie in Revolutionary Times — a symposium,

- walking tours, and living-history programs exploring Erie's ties to early American history.
- **June – Erie Philharmonic**
Symphony of Independence — outdoor concert under the stars featuring American composers, a new commissioned piece, and fireworks finale.
 - **Late June / Early July – Erie Playhouse**
Patriots on Stage — a festival of American drama and short plays commissioned on independence themes, culminating just before July 4.
 - **July (4th of July focus) – Flagship Niagara League**
Return of Niagara & Semiquincentennial Sail Festival — relaunch of the Niagara, ship tours, maritime concerts, tall-ship activities, fireworks, and children's maritime workshops.
 - **August – Erie Zoological Society**
Wild Liberty: 250 Years of Nature & Freedom — late evening zoo programs with patriotic music, animal conservation talks, and family activities.
 - **September – Mercyhurst Institute for Arts & Culture**
Cultural Legacies: Identity & Independence — arts and cultural programming exploring American identity, including underrepresented voices.
 - **October & November – Jefferson Educational Society**
Year-Round Semiquincentennial Series — lectures, historical reenactors, and concerts with educational components, culminating in the **Jefferson Society Semiquincentennial Summit**. This major civic gathering will bring together scholars, civic leaders, and the public with keynote addresses, panels, youth forums, and a gala.
 - **Open Competitive Slots (Three)**
Countywide Semiquincentennial Grants — three organizations from across Erie County, chosen through a competitive process, will each receive \$70,000 to design and implement their own signature Semiquincentennial event. These could include community festivals, historical programs, artistic performances, or civic engagement initiatives that reflect the diversity and vibrancy of Erie County.
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Notes On Integration & Coordination Mechanisms

- Convene a 250th Erie Planning Commission including Erie County, ECGRA, Lead Assets, and other partners.
- Created a unified branding & marketing strategy in conjunction with the Commonwealth of PA.
- Leverage the funding allocations with additional sponsors and private contributions.
- Encourage collaborative programming and crossover events between institutions.
- Collect metrics on attendance, economic impact, and media coverage.
- Dedicate a reserve fund for contingencies and weather disruptions.
- Embed youth & school outreach in every lead asset event.

- Align Erie’s celebrations with state & national Semi-quincentennial programming.
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Narrative for Funders

By committing \$50,000 per lead asset and an additional \$50,000 for competitive grants (totaling \$500,000 for 10-14 slots), split jointly between Erie County and ECGRA, we empower Erie’s anchor institutions — and additional grassroots organizations through additional competitive awards — to host signature Semiquincentennial events. These celebrations will culminate with the return of the Flagship Niagara in July 2026 and the Global Summit of the JES in late November.

Additionally, the JES’s year-round Semi-quincentennial programming will ensure the community is engaged throughout the year, deepening civic reflection and educational participation. The plan ensures inclusive participation, leverages local arts and culture, drives tourism, and leaves lasting civic legacies.