

Request for Proposals: America 250 DRAFT 12/23/24

Introduction:

The Chicago History Museum (CHM) invites visual artists to submit a proposal to create an original work for display in the museum as it marks the 250th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 2026. The work should form a response to or be in dialogue with one of four documents—the Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution, Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, or Northwest Ordinance—that the museum is going to foreground in learning, engagement, and an exhibition throughout that year.

Four commissions, one related to each of the four documents, are going to be awarded.

Each commission is going to be awarded to a different artist (or artist collective). Artists are allowed to submit multiple proposals as long as each work of art proposed is paired with a different one of the four documents.

Each work is expected to be on display in the museum’s lobby for a period of three months.

Important Dates:

- 2025
 - February 12: Request for Proposals sent out
 - March 31: Proposals due to the museum
 - May 5: Four Chicago-based artists awarded commissions
 - October 24: Review of final design by museum of four original works
 - December 1: *Facing Freedom* closes
- 2026
 - January 12: Installation of four documents and first original work in museum lobby
 - April 6: Installation of second original work in museum lobby
 - July 4: *Facing Freedom* reopens
 - July 6: Installation of third original work in museum lobby
 - October 5: Installation of fourth original work in museum lobby
- 2027
 - January 4: Deinstallation of fourth original work in museum lobby

Summary of the Opportunity:

To mark the 250th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the Chicago History Museum is reimagining its first-floor exhibition *Facing Freedom in America*. Opened in 2010, *Facing Freedom* invites visitors to consider how fights for freedom and equality built on and challenged our founding documents, transformed what it means to be free, and aided the development of rights to ensure freedom for all. Based on the central idea that the history of the United States has been shaped by conflicts over

what it means to be free, *Facing Freedom* uses images, artifacts, and interactive elements to explore familiar and not-so-familiar stories from the nation's past. From women's suffrage and the formation of labor unions to Japanese incarceration and a local school boycott, the exhibition highlights some of the ways Americans have struggled over the meaning of freedom.

In 2026, *Facing Freedom* is going to reopen with a refreshed design to share new stories and experiences with visitors around expanding understandings of freedom while centering Chicago's role in civic and social movements. Welcoming visitors into the exhibition is going to be an area in the museum's lobby where facsimiles of four related documents—the Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution, Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, and Northwest Ordinance—are going to be displayed alongside an original work of art. Over the course of the year, the work of art is going to change four times. Each work is going to be in response to or in dialogue with one of the four documents on display in the lobby.

The work can assume a range of forms and mediums. It can encourage interaction and social practice. The intention is to amplify the work of four Chicago-based artists (or artist collectives) who explore themes present in the *Facing Freedom* exhibition.

Site:

The museum's lobby is accessible to visitors prior to purchasing a ticket for admission. To the west, the lobby looks out on Clark Street through glass doors and windows. Displayed on either side are photographs, neon signs, and other artifacts related to the history of the city of Chicago. The east end of the lobby opens into the museum, including the *Facing Freedom* exhibition on the first floor. The area designated for display measures approximately 29 by 20 feet and has access to electrical outlets. Framing the display area, in museum cases, are going to be the facsimiles of the four documents referenced above.

Budget:

Four awards of \$10,000 each are going to be given to four Chicago-based artists (or artist collectives). The award is intended to cover the artist fee, production, and any costs associated with the installation and deinstallation of the work, including delivery.

Proposal for Artwork:

The Chicago History Museum is open to proposals from Chicago-based artists (or artist collectives) for the creation of original works of art in any medium that can be safely displayed within its lobby for a period of approximately four months. The original works of art should be related to the four documents referenced above in some way. The Chicago History Museum intends to honor and respect the vision of the four artists who are selected for this opportunity. Artists retain ownership and copyright of the work, but CHM retains the right of first refusal upon its deinstallation. CHM retains the right to use

the work and reproductions of the work in educational and promotional materials and online.

Selection Process:

Within a month of receiving proposals, a body made up of Chicago History Museum staff, allied institutions, and affiliated artists is going to convene to evaluate them. Each proposal is going to be evaluated by its

- **Vision**—does the proposed work reflect a clear, coherent creative vision or perspective that can engage a diverse community of visitors?
- **Feasibility**—are the costs of the proposed work covered by the award and can it be safely displayed in the museum’s lobby for a period of approximately three months?
- **Relevance**—does the proposed work respond to one of the four documents and does it encourage visitors to reflect upon or understand differently that document?
- **Accessibility**—does the proposed work have the capacity to be meaningful and relevant to a multi-generational, diverse community of visitors?

What to Submit

- **Description of the Work:** This typed 1,000-word document should clearly describe the work being proposed; how it is going to engage with one of the four documents and diverse audiences; and how it fits within the timeframe and budget associated with the award.
- **Budget:** The budget should break down individual costs associated with the work and describe how the \$10,000 award is going to be spent.
- **Artist Statement:** This typed 250-word document should share the artist’s vision and values as expressed in their work.
- **Portfolio:** Samples of relevant past work that can be shared through a PDF, PowerPoint, or URL.

Additional RFP Terms

- **Changes to the RFP:** CHM reserves the right to modify, amend, or withdraw this RFP at any time, for any reason, and at its sole discretion, and reserves the right to cancel or modify the terms of the RFP and the commission at any time. The submission of a proposal constitutes acknowledgment and acceptance of these terms.
- **Selection Process:** The selection of the commissioned artwork will be at the sole discretion of CHM’s selection committee. CHM reserves the right to reject any or all submissions.
- **Written Agreement:** Artists who receive the award will be required to enter into a formal written agreement with CHM to outline the terms of the commission. No artist shall be considered officially selected until this agreement is executed.

- **Intellectual Property:** The intellectual property rights to the commissioned artwork will be addressed in the written agreement. CHM will obtain the necessary rights to display, reproduce, and promote the work in relation to the project.
- **Limitation of Liability:** By submitting a proposal, the applicant agrees that CHM, its affiliates, officers, employees, and agents will not be held liable for any damages, losses, or expenses related to the submission, selection, or rejection of the proposal.
- **Governing Law:** This RFP and any resulting agreement will be governed by the laws of the state of Illinois.

Contact

Please submit all proposals to Paul Durica, Director of Exhibitions, by 5pm CST on **March 31, 2025**. Proposals should be submitted by email (durica@chicagohistory.org) with the subject line, "America 250 Proposal." Please direct any questions to Paul by email or phone (312-799-2170).

Appendix:

For more information on *Facing Freedom*, please go to <https://www.chicagohistory.org/facing-freedom/>.