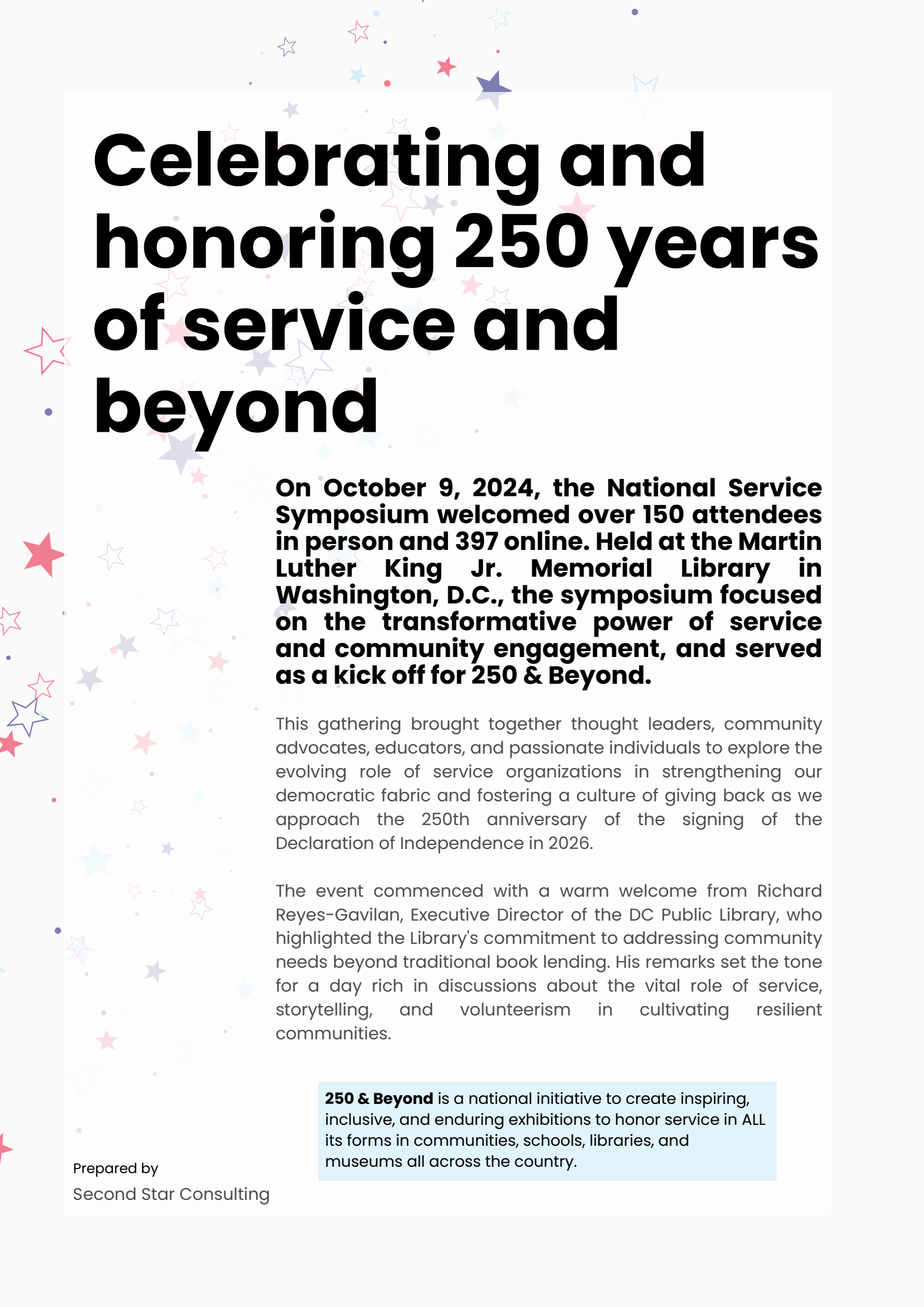


National Service Symposium Event Summary

October 9, 2024

The logo features the number '250' in a large, blue, sans-serif font. The '0' is a solid blue circle containing a white ampersand '&'. Below this, the word 'BEYOND' is written in a smaller, red, all-caps, sans-serif font. The background of the '250' and the ampersand circle is a collage of blue-tinted photographs of diverse young people.

250 &
BEYOND



Celebrating and honoring 250 years of service and beyond

On October 9, 2024, the National Service Symposium welcomed over 150 attendees in person and 397 online. Held at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, D.C., the symposium focused on the transformative power of service and community engagement, and served as a kick off for 250 & Beyond.

This gathering brought together thought leaders, community advocates, educators, and passionate individuals to explore the evolving role of service organizations in strengthening our democratic fabric and fostering a culture of giving back as we approach the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 2026.

The event commenced with a warm welcome from Richard Reyes-Gavilan, Executive Director of the DC Public Library, who highlighted the Library's commitment to addressing community needs beyond traditional book lending. His remarks set the tone for a day rich in discussions about the vital role of service, storytelling, and volunteerism in cultivating resilient communities.

250 & Beyond is a national initiative to create inspiring, inclusive, and enduring exhibitions to honor service in ALL its forms in communities, schools, libraries, and museums all across the country.

Throughout the Symposium, speakers and panelists shared inspiring stories and insights on the importance of engaging young people in service, recognizing diverse narratives, and fostering civic participation. From personal accounts of change-makers like Grandma Elnora to innovative projects led by youth, attendees were reminded of the profound impact that service can have on individuals and communities alike.

As we reflect on the key takeaways from the event, we encourage everyone to consider their role in this collective effort to uplift and inspire through honoring service. Learn more about how you can get involved in making service a key theme for the upcoming Semiquincentennial in 2026 and continue honoring and inspiring service as an enduring legacy for years beyond. Together, we can work towards a more inclusive society, ensuring that the spirit of service continues to thrive in our nation.

The speakers

Welcome

Richard Reyes-Gavilan,
Executive Director, DC Public Library

Service across the country

Matthew Farley, Chief Strategy and
Operations Officer, Campus Compact
Pam Siebert, VP of Community Impact
and Evaluation, National Youth
Leadership Council

Michael DeVaul, National Executive
Director for Boys and Young Men of Color,
YMCA

John Marks, Researcher,
American Association for State and Local
History

America's semiquincentennial and service

Rosie Rios, Chair, America 250

The future of civil society

Jennifer Sirangelo, President & CEO, Points
of Light
Carol Spahn, Director, Peace Corps
Koby Langley, Division Vice President,
American Red Cross

Emcee

Julie Budkowski,
National Museum and Center for Service

250 & Beyond overview

Congressman Brian Baird, Founder,
National Museum and Center for Service,
Dr. Akilah Watkins,
President & CEO, Independent Sector

Youth & service

Kaleb Sy, Sophomore,
Columbia University & Board Member,
National Youth Leadership Council

Stories of service

Michael Smith, CEO, AmeriCorps

Personal and community impact

Deborah March, Program Manager, John
Lewis Leadership Program

JoAnna Arnold, Education specialist and
service learning advocate

Addison Drinnon, Senior, Furlow Charter
School

Patrick Rogan, Designer principal,
Assemble

Moderator: Annette Weichlein, Project
Manager, National Museum and Center
for Service

Closing remarks

Congressman Brian Baird, Founder,
National Museum and Center for Service
& special guest Lisa Cohen, Rotary DC

Welcome from DC Public Library

**Richard Reyes-Gavilan,
Executive Director, DC Public
Library**



In his address, Richard Reyes-Galvan, Executive Director of the DC Public Library, emphasized the evolving role of libraries as vital service organizations in the community. He welcomed attendees to the historic Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library and highlighted its significance to the community of D.C., particularly after its modernization in 2020.

Richard pointed out that libraries have transitioned from primarily focusing on book lending to offering essential services, especially during emergencies. He provided examples such as distributing COVID-19 test kits and vaccines, and supporting unhoused individuals through social workers and care kits.

He also noted the library's engagement in civic activities, serving as election sites and providing classes on misinformation to empower residents. This shift reflects a broader commitment to meet community needs and foster civic participation. Richard celebrated the library's recognition with the 2024 National Medal of Museum and Library Service, reinforcing the idea that libraries are not just spaces for reading, but integral parts of the social service ecosystem. He concluded by urging continued efforts to promote literacy alongside these service initiatives.

**"Public libraries are service organizations...
our business model has shifted from helping
residents find the right book to helping
residents find the right service."**

— Richard Reyes-Gavilan



Introducing 250 & Beyond

**Dr. Akilah Watkins, President & CEO,
Independent Sector and
Congressman Brian Baird, Founder,
National Museum and Center for Service**

The opening remarks by Brian and Akilah highlighted the importance of service and the need to recognize and encourage acts of service in society. Brian spoke about the spirit of service as a fundamental aspect of democracy and national character, citing examples of various organizations and individuals who contribute to their communities selflessly. He also addressed the decline in the spirit of service in the country, pointing out challenges in recruiting volunteers and raising funds for service organizations.

Akilah shared her personal story of starting a youth organization at the age of 14, emphasizing how service has the power to unite people and drive positive change in communities. She discussed the role of volunteering in strengthening civil society, democracy, and the nonprofit sector. Akilah highlighted the value of volunteer hours and encouraged attendees to engage in service activities.

Both Akilah and Brian introduced the initiative to create a National Museum and Center for Service, aiming to honor and inspire service across the country. Emphasizing the importance of celebrating service in all its forms and connecting people to opportunities for involvement, Brian shared the need to increase engagement in service nationwide through inspirational local exhibitions and museums.

Key takeaways

250 & Beyond is a call to action for schools and communities across the country to celebrate and inspire service for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 2026 and to continue honoring that legacy for years beyond.

"Volunteers hold up the foundation of civil society. They strengthen democracy and help support the charitable sector."

— Dr. Akilah Watkins

Service across the country

The first expert panel of the day highlighted the essential role of history organizations in promoting service and community engagement. Panelists emphasized the significance of storytelling to inspire and educate young individuals, involving local schools and afterschool programs in service initiatives, and aligning personal stories with service efforts to create lasting impact.



Pam Siebert,
VP of Community Impact
and Evaluation,
National Youth Leadership
Council



John Marks,
Researcher,
American Association for
State and Local History



Michael DeVaul,
National Executive Director
for Boys and Young Men of
Color, YMCA



Matthew Farley,
Chief Strategy and
Operations Officer,
Campus Compact

Panel moderators: Brian Baird and Dr. Akilah Watkins

John Marks underscored the importance of grounding history organizations in an ethic of service and collaboration within the community. Pam Siebert emphasized the value of sharing stories of success to unite and inspire individuals, while Matt Farley advocated for meeting people where they are and investing in diverse storytellers for a collective narrative. Michael DeVaul encouraged young people to find purpose in service and take active steps towards creating positive change, emphasizing equity in action.

Brian Baird shared a powerful reflection from a young advisor on the importance of experiencing success in service endeavors, fostering confidence in the ambitious vision of spreading service exhibitions nationwide. The panelists collectively highlighted the importance of inspiring future generations, promoting active citizenship, and engaging in service efforts to make a meaningful impact on society.

Overall, the panel discussion reiterated the transformative power of service and volunteerism in building resilient communities and fostering intergenerational collaboration for a brighter future. These insights will serve as a guiding light for continued efforts to promote service initiatives and community engagement beyond the symposium.

Key takeaways

- History organizations must be grounded in an ethic of service and community engagement.
- Local schools and afterschool programs should engage youth in service activities.
- We can meet people where they are and invite them to participate in service initiatives.
- Centering purpose and aligning personal stories with service efforts is important.
- Community members should be active and engage in solving community problems, rather than just discussing them.
- It is important to invest in diverse storytellers and ensure a collective history is shared and celebrated.
- Equity lies in the actions taken to make a difference in the community.
- There is value in lifting up all stories and weaving them into a national narrative to create a sense of unity and purpose.

Youth and service

**Kaleb Sy,
Sophomore, Columbia University &
Board Member, National Youth
Leadership Council**



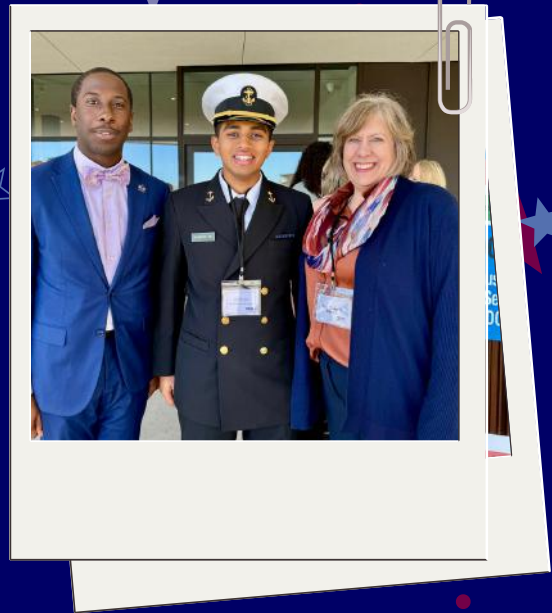
In his keynote speech, Kaleb Sy discussed the transformative power of service and the critical role that young people play in shaping societal change. He began by defining service as an act of helping others without seeking personal gain and highlighted its significance in American identity. By referencing historical figures from the founding of the nation and the Civil Rights Movement, he illustrated how youth activism has been pivotal in driving progress.

Kaleb emphasized the importance of protests and advocacy, asserting that they are essential for challenging injustice and pushing for change. He cited contemporary examples of young activists like Justin Pearson and Justin Jones – both young members of the House of Representatives in Tennessee who addressed gun violence in their communities, reinforcing the notion that young voices remain vital in today's societal landscape.

Moreover, he urged the younger generation to not only protest but to also bring innovative solutions to complex problems, emphasizing that achieving equality requires actionable ideas. Kaleb concluded with a vision of an America where all individuals are afforded basic rights and dignity irrespective of their backgrounds, calling for continued activism to build a more inclusive society. His overall message was one of hope and empowerment, encouraging young people to embrace their roles as change-makers in the ongoing quest for justice and equality.

"Young people have shaken things up in society by not waiting for convenience, but striving towards a sense of belonging, where poor children have access to an education, where people don't just look at themselves as democrats or republicans, but as we, the people."

— Kaleb Sy



“When Americans come together... it doesn't matter what your political affiliation is. It's about neighbors coming together to build a home for other neighbors”— Dr. Akilah Watkins





Stories of service

**Michael Smith,
CEO, AmeriCorps**

Michael Smith delivered a powerful keynote speech, expressing gratitude on behalf of President Biden, Vice President Harris, and the AmeriCorps family for the dedicated work of the over 1.25 million members, senior volunteers, and alumni nationwide.

Michael shared personal stories illuminating the transformative power of service, citing individuals whose lives were positively impacted through their service, such as Grandma Elnora from Tennessee who lost her son to gun violence when he was 19 years old. When she approached retirement age, she found herself grieving all over again and then she learned about the Foster Grandparent Program. Now when she goes to the grocery store, she finds joy when she hears children calling her “grandma”. He emphasized the importance of service, not just as a volunteer opportunity, but a vital pathway to personal and community growth, illustrating how service can lead to greater civic engagement and resilience in the face of crises, like Hurricane Katrina and other recent natural disasters and events.

Michael spoke of the growing polarization in the country, advocating for service as a unifying force that brings people together across different backgrounds and ideologies. His closing remarks invoked the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., reminding attendees that while the path to justice is long, it requires collective action and commitment.

**"Americans come together, they don't care what color hat you're wearing. They don't care what color your skin is. Americans still run towards the crisis, run towards their neighbors."
— Michael Smith**

Key takeaways

- There is a dual nature to service — AmeriCorps members not only contribute to their communities but also gain valuable skills that lead to long-term personal growth and societal impact.
- Service bridges divides and fosters social cohesion.
- AmeriCorps is a force for good, responding to crises, such as natural disasters, and continues to make a positive impact in the lives of individuals and communities.
- Service is linked to the pursuit of justice, and is important in addressing societal challenges.
- It is important for individuals to come together to support one another through collective action, as in Congressman Lewis's call for getting into "good trouble" and taking action.

The personal and community impact



Addison Drinnon
Senior, Furlow Charter
School



Deborah March
Senior manager, John Lewis
Leadership Program



Patrick Rogan
Designer principal,
Assemble



JoAnna Arnold
Education specialist and
service learning advocate

The next panel discussion featured Annette Weichlein, Project Manager with the National Museum and Center for Service, facilitating a conversation with educators, students, and designers involved in creating campus and community museums of service. The panelists shared their experiences of developing exhibits that focus on service, storytelling, and belonging.

JoAnna Arnold, a former educator from South Georgia, emphasized the importance of involving students in service learning projects to create a culture of peace and provide opportunities for them to serve. She highlighted the impact of student-led initiatives in addressing community needs, such as youth gun violence prevention.

High school senior Addison Drinnon discussed her project focused on environmental sustainability, creating a butterfly garden inspired by Rosalynn Carter's work. She emphasized the importance of educating everyone on the meaning of service and showcasing projects to inspire others.

**"Step into the middle of [the story] , find your own voice
and find your inspiration within that story."**

- Patrick Rogan

Deborah March, Program Manager of the John Lewis Leadership Program at the John Lewis High School, shared insights on incorporating service learning into the curriculum to empower students to create positive change in their communities. She emphasized the significance of involving students in designing and showcasing their service projects, reflecting the diverse voices and experiences of the community.

Patrick Rogan, a designer involved in creating community exhibits, highlighted the importance of the process in sharing stories authentically and meaningfully. He emphasized the need to empower voices and inspire audiences through exhibits that are inclusive, relevant, and engaging.

The panel underscored the value of student-driven service projects, the impact of community engagement, the significance of storytelling in service initiatives, and the importance of creating meaningful and authentic exhibits to inspire others to get involved in service activities and make a positive impact in their communities.



"As I think about the next 250 years, I think about how big we can dream."

— Carol Spahn, Director, Peace Corps



The future of civil society

The final panel discussion focused on the vital role of service and volunteerism in American democracy and society, and how these activities can strengthen social connections and combat issues like isolation.

Jennifer Sirangelo opened the conversation by sharing impressive statistics about volunteerism, including the significant number of Americans who volunteered during the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasized the intrinsic value of service in building community and social fabric.

Carol Spahn shared insights from the Peace Corps, discussing its mission of promoting world peace through cross-cultural relationships and the importance of community service in diplomacy. She stated that service reflects a "can-do" attitude inherent in American culture.

Koby Langley discussed the mission of the American Red Cross and the essential role of volunteers in disaster response and in building community resilience. He underscored the importance of volunteerism in creating unity and community spirit.

The panelists delved into the barriers that prevent people from participating in volunteer activities, such as the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on social engagement, the necessity for a compelling call to action, and the need for organizations to adapt to the changing expectations and definitions of volunteering among younger generations. The discussion highlighted the critical importance of volunteerism not only for addressing community needs but also for fostering personal growth, social cohesion, and a healthier democratic society.



Jennifer Sirangelo,
President & CEO,
Points of Light



Koby Langley,
Division Vice President,
American Red Cross



Carol Spahn,
Director,
Peace Corps

Panel moderator: Dr. Akilah Watkins

Key takeaways

- Service plays a key role in strengthening democracy and community bonds.
- There is power in inclusive storytelling and recognition of volunteers to inspire others to serve.
- There is a growing need to make volunteering more accessible, especially for diverse communities and different age groups.
- There is a powerful potential in community-centered volunteering models to bring diverse voices together to drive positive change.
- In order to address pressing societal issues, there is a need for significant increase in volunteer participation and more flexible volunteer opportunities that can help address the socio-economic barriers to participation.

“Volunteering isn't just considered something that's nice to do, but that it is an essential part of being a member belonging to the community.” — Jennifer Sirangelo

America's semiquincentennial and service

**Rosie Rios,
Chair, America250**



Rosie Rios delivered the closing keynote address emphasizing the significance of planning for America's upcoming 250th anniversary. She described America250 as the largest and most inclusive commemoration in the country's history, highlighting the commission's bipartisan nature and its focus on engaging the next generation of leaders.

Rosie discussed various initiatives and programs launched by America 250, including America's Invitation, America's Field Trip, Our American Story, and America Gives. These initiatives aim to involve the public in sharing their stories, experiences, and contributions to American history. She emphasized the importance of community-driven efforts and volunteer service, leading up to the Guinness World Record attempt for the most volunteer service hours in 2026.

Rosie expressed the goal of inspiring a culture of giving back and highlighting the values on which the country was founded. By seeking to involve organizations, businesses, and individuals across the nation, America250 aims to create a meaningful and lasting impact, setting the stage for significant national events like the World Cup and Olympics in the coming years.

America250 program highlights

- America's Invitation — A nationwide invitation to the American public to take part in the commemoration and celebration of America's 250th Anniversary.
- America's Field Trip — A national student competition, asking participants to express what America means to them.
- Our American Story — The largest oral history project in the country.
- America Gives — A national campaign aimed at making 2026 the largest year of volunteer service recorded by one country.

"I mean, let's start with dreaming big. I love that word because I think the American dream is alive and well." — Rosie Rios



Closing remarks

**Brian Baird, Founder & Chair,
National Museum and Center
for Service**

Guest: Lisa Cohen, Rotary DC

The closing remarks highlighted the importance of service and the impact it can have on individuals and communities. Brian emphasized the significance of celebrating service accomplishments, inspiring service, and sharing stories of service. He mentioned the creation of exhibitions of service to show that every person can make a difference. The goal is to encourage more people to engage in service, support service organizations with volunteers and financial resources, and spread the message that everyone can contribute to making the world a better place. Brian invited Lisa Cohen, past president of Rotary DC to share her inspirational story of service.

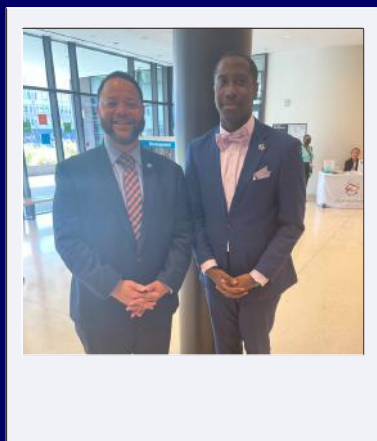
Lisa was a foster child who experienced moving between placements with her belongings in trash bags, which made her feel small and determined to make a difference. Lisa initiated the Move with Dignity Luggage Project, which provides suitcases for foster children to have their own luggage. She successfully advocated for legislation to outlaw the use of garbage bags for transporting foster youth's belongings and make it mandatory for them to have their own luggage. This legislation, known as Lisa's Law, was unanimously signed and rolled out to ensure that foster children in the District of Columbia have their own suitcases. Lisa's story demonstrates the impact of small acts of kindness, service and advocacy in positive societal change. Read Lisa's Law legislation at the [Council of the District of Columbia website](#).

**"Our task, our goal,
our opportunity is to
leave here and say
how can we
celebrate this
remarkable
accomplishment."
— Brian Baird**

Take the 250 & Beyond commitment
www.250andbeyond.com/thecommitment

"Service is the act of willingly helping others without seeking personal gain, driven by a yearning desire for society to reimagine how it protects people and their collective well-being."

— Kaleb Sy



250 & BEYOND

The spirit of service has always been fundamental to our national character and essential to our democracy.

In 2026, America will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, providing an ideal opportunity to celebrate the American spirit of service — a spirit so powerfully expressed in the closing words of the Declaration of Independence itself.

250 & Beyond is a national initiative, led by a coalition of leading service organizations, to create inspiring, inclusive, and enduring exhibitions to honor service in ALL its forms in communities, schools, libraries, and museums all across the country. It is a call to action, honoring our past, celebrating our present and inspiring our future, helping us respect our differences and transcend our divisions. If our nation is to last another 250 years, we must renew and sustain the American spirit of service among all our people and institutions.

How to get involved

Every school and community across the country is invited to participate.

01 Commit to 250 & Beyond

Join the growing list of organizations who are committed to telling the story of those who serve, in communities across the country and inviting all Americans to participate.

- [Learn more at \[www.250andbeyond.com/thecommitment\]\(http://www.250andbeyond.com/thecommitment\)](http://www.250andbeyond.com/thecommitment)

02 Create a local museum of service

Communities across the country are creating local exhibitions of service for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Join the movement in celebrating and inspiring service in public spaces and connecting people to ways of getting involved. Be a part of a nationwide launch of exhibitions in a national celebration for volunteer month in April 2026.

- [Learn more at \[www.250andbeyond.com\]\(http://www.250andbeyond.com\)](http://www.250andbeyond.com)

03 Access the toolkits

Access comprehensive toolkits designed to assist communities and schools across the country in creating their own museums of service. These toolkits offer guidance and resources, ensuring that every school and community can honor its unique contributions to civil society.

- [Learn more at \[www.nmcfs.org/toolkit\]\(http://www.nmcfs.org/toolkit\)](http://www.nmcfs.org/toolkit)

Thank you!

A special thank you to all the individuals and organizations who came together to make this Symposium possible.

Organizing partners

**NATIONAL MUSEUM
AND CENTER FOR
SERVICE**



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Symposium planning committee:

AARP Foundation, American Association for State and Local History, American Institute of Graphic Arts, America's Service Commissions, California Volunteers, Campus Compact, Interfaith America, Karsh Institute of Democracy, Made By Us, National Council for Social Studies, National Youth Leadership Council, Partnership for Public Service, PBS Books, Peace Corps Foundation, Serve Colorado, The Volcker Alliance, Urban Libraries Council, Washington State Historical Society, WETA

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