

African American Advisory Council Meeting: Monday, March 31, 2025

Summary Report for Senator Mamie Locke, Chair

VA250 Commission Meeting

The VA250 African American Advisory Council held a hybrid meeting virtual and on location at Fort Monroe, in Hampton, VA. This meeting was held in preparation for Civics Season and considered programming, communications, and the vision for commemorating Juneteenth and the 4th of July 2025. This year's 4th of July programming will serve as the official kickoff to the semiquincentennial signature programming. The lively discussion recapped the final *A Common Cause for All Conference* at Colonial Williamsburg attended by 600 people, 300 organizations, 100 museums, 61 localities across Virginia, and 40 states.

Community engagement activation is a high priority, Sr. advisors Eola Lewis Dance and Reggie Tupponce will support Cheryl Wilson in coordinating and identifying opportunities to engage, educate, and inspire at the advice of the African American Advisory Council, Tribal Nations Leadership Advisory Council, and Education Steering Committee. Key questions addressed during the AAAC meeting included: What messages will resonate with the African American community in this current moment? How will we deliver those messages? The team will build on the work of Brand Federation and seek consultation with organizations like JMI, to implement a Virginia/national wide message; as well as global message (per the recommendation of Fort Monroe National and the William Tucker 1624 Society).

An activation strategy is in progress and will focus on the **faith community**, VA250 will coordinate with faith leadership, provide collateral and schedule site visits with VA 250 leadership and council members, and attend the June 1st-5th faith leadership conference. The team will work with local commissions to identify additional gatherings to attend and provide with resources. VA250 will work with Virginia **HBCUs**, the team will follow-up on current programming and opportunities for new gatherings, and will work with the development team on a fundraising strategy: ([Norfolk State University](#), [Hampton University](#), [Virginia Union University](#), Virginia State University, Virginia University of Lynchburg). Additionally, the team will coordinate directly with key **organizations** such as [Daughters of the American Revolution Forgotten Heroes Program](#), [Sons of the American Revolution](#), [Association of African American Museums](#), [Association for the Study of African American Life and History](#), [African America History and Genealogical Society](#), [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#), and [Society of First African American Families](#), as well as the YWCA, Underground Kitchen and local commissions.

Two presentations were provided for consideration: **Bill Schermerhorn** (VA250 Sr. Advisor - Events): Provided an in-depth and poetic overview of the vision and programming: *A Call to the Youth of Virginia - In Celebration of our Nation's 249th Birthday*. Tentative Schedule 7/4/25 from 8:00 am- 10:00 pm; anticipating 30,000 attendees and will include a naturalization ceremony, flag raising ceremony, living history discussion, and Community Quilt Project led by renowned artist Steve Prince, and more...please share with Bill and Eola suggestions from your local community. **Melinda Gainer** and **Nikki Thorpe** (Commemorative Partners): provided recommendations for engaging the black community nationally and in Virginia over the next 16 months, with a theme centered on culture and healing. This growing partnership was initiated by the Virginia Symphony Orchestra and other Virginia and national organizations to create the America Music Collective 250; and proposed two key initiatives to take place in 2026 on July 5th: The Table of Truth and The Soul Food Anthology. Additional partnerships and fundraising strategies are needed and in progress ([PRESENTATION](#)).