

Declaration of Independence Toolkit 2025

Sources and Resources for Commemoration and Learning



“We hold these truths to be self-evident...” Who were the first people to hear Thomas Jefferson’s memorable words spoken in public? And who was the first person to read them? According to our embraced heritage, the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence happened in Philadelphia July 8, 1776. This moment in history is reenacted every year in Independence Square. There was, in fact, a reading that day, but it was not the first one. Thirty years ago, a historian presented evidence of a public reading four days earlier, July 4, 1776, itself. [1] According to the scant testimony he found, someone read the Declaration that day to a crowd gathered outside the State House (later renamed Independence Hall). Here we will add additional evidence of that first public reading ([The First Public Reading of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, Journal of the American Revolution, 2021](#)).

American Tradition

The tradition of publicly reading the Declaration of Independence on July 4th is a long-standing one. It commemorates the day the document was adopted by the Continental Congress in 1776. This act of reading, often accompanied by other patriotic celebrations, helps to reinforce the significance of this foundational document for American identity and the pursuit of freedom. The reading also often serves as a central part of broader Fourth of July celebrations, emphasizing the nation’s birth and its values. While the Declaration of Independence’s historical context is central to the foundation of this nation, its principles continue to resonate with contemporaries, making the reading of the Declaration of Independence a timeless tradition.

Visit [VA250.org](#) to discover [historical sites and museums](#) and [events commemorating historic milestones](#) in Virginia history. The American Revolution can be felt in every corner of the state. Explore Virginia’s living history, interactive exhibits, tours, events, festivals and more and discover why Virginia’s history is America’s story!

Engaging the Community in a Declaration of Independence Reading on July 4, 2025

A community reading of the Declaration of Independence is a great way to celebrate the Fourth of July and engage your citizens in the history and principles of the United States. Below are suggestions of how to organize and involve your community:

1. Plan and Prepare:

- Choose a location and time: Consider a public space like a park, community center, or even a significant local historical site.
- Secure necessary permissions: If you plan to use a public space, obtain any required permits or reservations.
- Gather materials: Consider providing print copies of the Declaration of Independence for participants.

2. Promote the Event:

- Spread the word: Utilize various channels to announce your event such as –
 - Use community calendars of civic or neighborhood associations to post announcements on local event websites and community calendars.
 - Use various social media platforms to spread the word.
 - Distribute flyers or posters in local businesses, libraries, and community hubs.
 - Submit a press release or event announcements to local newspapers.
- Emphasize the significance and importance of reading the Declaration and its connection to the meaning of Independence Day.
- Encourage organizers to begin their events with a reading of the Declaration.

3. Execute the Reading:

- Engage participants: Encourage volunteers and attendees to take turns reading sections of the Declaration.
- Discuss the meaning: After the reading, facilitate a brief discussion about the key ideas and principles of the Declaration, such as equality, unalienable rights, and the consent of the governed.
- Celebrate: End the event with a celebratory activity like singing patriotic songs or serving refreshments.

4. Additional Tips:

- Record the celebration for history and prosperity by posting videos and pictures on local websites and social media pages.
- Collaborate and partner with local historical societies, libraries, or community organizations.
- Ensure the location is accessible to all individuals. Consider having an ASL interpreter available.

Following these steps helps to create a memorable and educational Fourth of July event that fosters community spirit and civic engagement.

Communities Across the Commonwealth of Virginia Hosting Public Readings

- [America. Made in Virginia: Fourth at the Fort](#): Hampton City
- [July 4th at Monticello](#): Albemarle County
- [July 4th Naturalization Ceremony](#): City of Richmond
- [An American Celebration at Mount Vernon](#): Fairfax County
- [Reading of the Declaration of Independence at Historic Pohick Church](#): Fairfax County
- [Red, White, and Lights 2025](#): Henrico County
- [Reading of the Declaration of Independence](#): Loudoun County
- [July 4th at Colonial Williamsburg](#): Williamsburg

Communities Outside of Virginia Hosting Public Readings

- National Archives on Constitution Avenue: Washington, D.C.
- Independence Square (July 8, 2025): Philadelphia, PA
- Front steps of Town Hall: Town of Trumbull, CT
- Old State House: Boston, MA