2026-9333 NEA Big Read

Application ID

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Application Type

NEA Big Read

Organization Information

Gateway Regional Arts Center
101 East Main St
Mt. Sterling, KY 40353
Phone: 859-585-6018

Mission Statement

The Gateway Regional Arts Center leverages the transformative power of art and culture to address critical community challenges by providing extraordinary creative experiences, sharing local and global perspectives, and promoting the arts as an important solution to holistic well-being. The institution serves as a flagship hub of arts & cultural education for Central and Eastern Kentucky, and aims to foster civic dialogue through creative and artistic activities that are accessible to all people, honoring the rich diversity of voices in our rural communities.

Annual Operating Budget

$500,000-$999,999

Location Designation

Rural

Applicant

Jordan Campbell
Executive Director
101 East Main St
Mt. Sterling, KY 40353

Phone: 859-585-6018
Email: director@grackentucky.org

Publicity name

> What should we call your organization when we conduct any future publicity?

Gateway Regional Arts Center

Project Summary

> Please provide one to two sentences that summarize your project in plain, easy to understand language. This description will be displayed publicly when the grantees are announced.

Kentucky’s Revolution: Women on the Frontier is a region-wide NEA Big Read led by Gateway Regional Arts Center across rural Eastern Kentucky. Using Women of the Revolution: Bravery and Sacrifice on the Southern Battlefields as the anchor text, the project will explore America250 through women’s bravery, labor, and civic belonging in Revolutionary-era Kentucky and the wider southern frontier. The program includes a public kick-off book giveaway, three+ discussions in multiple locations (plus a virtual option), an America250 heritage event, an expert talk/panel, and a community creative response through storytelling/performance and/or a small exhibit.

Short description

> Please write a brief, one-paragraph, high-level description of your project. Cover the key highlights of your project and the minimum programming requirements as stated in the application guidelines.

From September 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027, GRAC will deliver Kentucky's Revolution: Women on the Frontier across Eastern Kentucky - a program combatting the poverty, long travel distances, and limited access to professional arts and humanities programming that reduce opportunities for community-wide learning and dialogue in our region. Centered on _Women of the Revolution: Bravery and Sacrifice on the Southern Battlefields_, this NEA Big Read will invite residents to examine how Revolutionary ideals were lived on the frontier through women's experiences of work, survival, family and community leadership, and public courage.

Program events will include:
(1) a "Books & Bonnets" kickoff at GRAC with a frontier photo-booth, live fiddle/ballads, and a free book giveaway;
(2) three "Porchlight Book Circles" hosted at the public library, DuBois Community Center, and a rotating rural site (plus a Zoom option);
(3) an America250 signature night, "Heroines of the Hinterland," pairing local frontier stories with women's civic voices and a community toast to the Declaration;
(4) "Ask a Historian: Kentucky on the Edge," a panel with U. of KY/public historians and audience Q&A;
(5) "Letters Across Time," a community storytelling staged reading where participants write monologues/letters from women's perspectives, performed alongside a pop-up exhibit of local journals, petitions, and maps.

GRAC will partner with Montgomery County Public Library for book distribution, the Montgomery County America250 Planning Committee for coordination/outreach, the DuBois Community Center to broaden participation and foreground Black women's perspectives where records permit, and the Montgomery County Historical Society to support local historical sources/contextual interpretation.

Prior grant recipient?

> Have you received a grant from Arts Midwest before?

Yes

Project Start Date

When will the project begin?

09/01/2026

Project End Date

When will the project end?

06/30/2027

Book Title

Women of the Revolution: Bravery and Sacrifice on the Southern Battlefields by Robert M. Dunkerly

Book quantity

Approximately how many books do you intend to order for your programming?

600

Requested Amount

What is the grant amount you're seeking? Please refer to the application guidelines for minimum/maximum limits. This field will automatically round to the nearest $10 increment.

$20,000

Proposed number of partner organizations

9

Proposed number of book discussions

Must be at least 3

7

Proposed total number of events (including book discussions)

12

Anticipated adults served

> An estimate of individuals 18 and older to be served by the project.

1,050

Anticipated youths served

> An estimate of individuals 17 and younger to be served by the project.

150

Anticipated total participants

> This will auto-calculate based on your responses above and after you click the "Save" button.

1200

Organization description narrative

> Tell us about your organization and the values that drive its work.

Gateway Regional Arts Center (GRAC) - the operating name of Montgomery County Council for the Arts, Inc. - is a rural cultural anchor based in downtown Mt. Sterling serving Central and Eastern Kentucky. Our mission is to leverage the transformative power of art and culture to address critical community challenges by providing extraordinary creative experiences, sharing local and global perspectives, and promoting the arts as a vital solution to holistic well-being - accessible to all people and honoring the rich diversity of voices in our rural communities.

GRAC is best known regionally for cross-sector, community-based programming that meets people where they are. Alongside year-round exhibitions, classes, and public performances, we deliver arts experiences in settings that often sit outside traditional cultural infrastructure—working with public schools, residential foster care youth, youth in the justice system, people in recovery, older adults, and rural communities with limited transportation. We operate professional theatre and storytelling initiatives, visual arts education, wellness-based programs, and community events that build social connection and civic dialogue.

Our work is grounded in long-term partnerships and practical access strategies: rotating multi-site programming across counties, plain-language invitations, free or low-cost participation, and intentional outreach through trusted community organizations. In a region with few professional arts venues, persistent poverty, and long travel distances, GRAC helps make high-quality arts and humanities engagement feel local, welcoming, and relevant.

For America250, GRAC is developing a coordinated slate of public-facing humanities and cultural programs that elevate frontier Kentucky narratives often overlooked in national storytelling. Kentucky’s Revolution: Women on the Frontier extends that vision through an NEA Big Read that invites residents to learn together, discuss hard history with care, and create new community-based interpretation rooted in local records and lived experience.

Theme statement

> Provide a rationale for your chosen NEA Big Read book and your plans for using the theme (America250) in your programming.

GRAC selected _Women of the Revolution: Bravery and Sacrifice on the Southern Battlefields_ because America250 invites communities to revisit the nation's founding with a wider lens - beyond familiar battle narratives - to the everyday people whose labor and courage made revolutionary change possible. This book offers an accessible entry point to discuss women's agency in the Revolutionary era: the ways women sustained households and communities under extreme uncertainty, contributed to local defense and survival, and navigated questions of rights, responsibility, and belonging at the birth of the nation. These themes align directly with our program framing - bravery, labor, and civic belonging - and provide a strong bridge to Kentucky's frontier context.

This focus resonates in rural Eastern Kentucky, where history is often carried through local memory and place-based stories, yet access to arts and humanities programming remains limited by poverty, geographic isolation, and few professional cultural venues. Our subregion-wide Big Read is intentionally designed to reduce those barriers through multi-site programming across communities and a virtual option for residents who cannot travel. We will connect the book's southern battlefield context to Kentucky's Revolutionary frontier experience - highlighting how founding ideals were enacted and contested on the edge of early America, and inviting participants to consider who is centered in historical memory and who is missing.

Kentucky's Revolution: Women on the Frontier will also align with GRAC's broader America250 initiative, "Drawing on Ingenuity & Bravery: Kentucky's Role in the Revolution and Life on the American Frontier," by turning historical interpretation into public dialogue and creative response. In close partnership with the Montgomery County America250 Planning Committee, we will design welcoming programs that reflect regional identity and community relevance. In partnership with the DuBois Community Center, we will broaden participation and deepen interpretation by foregrounding Black experiences - especially Black women's perspectives where documentation exists - and ensuring outreach extends beyond GRAC's typical audience. With the Montgomery County Historical Society and regional scholars, we will incorporate local records, journals, and expert context in ways that are accurate and accessible.

Across all activities, we will prioritize inclusive facilitation, ADA-conscious planning, and plain-language engagement so the Big Read strengthens connection across counties while honoring America250 through meaningful conversation, local creativity, and shared civic reflection.

Programming description

> 1. Describe your programming plans in detail, including types of activities and locations, and the involvement of local talent (e.g., writers, artists from other disciplines, teachers, field experts) and art works (e.g., companion books, films, visual art, etc.). Be sure that your plans meet the minimum project requirements. Be sure that your plans meet the minimum project requirements outlined in the guidelines.
> 2. Explain how your programs meet your goals and the goals of the NEA Big Read: to inspire meaningful conversations, celebrate local creativity, elevate a variety of voices and perspectives, and build stronger connections in each community. Explain how you plan to assess those goals to determine if they are met.

Kentucky's Revolution: Women on the Frontier is a six-county NEA Big Read designed for rural communities where distance, limited cultural venues, and economic barriers reduce access to humanities learning and dialogue. Using Women of the Revolution: Bravery and Sacrifice on the Southern Battlefields as the anchor text, GRAC will connect America250 themes—civic belonging, courage, work, and memory—to Revolutionary-era Kentucky and the wider southern frontier through discussion, public history, and creative response.

CORE PROGRAM COMPONENTS:

1) Kickoff + book giveaway: "Books & Bonnets: A Frontier Launch Party"

A festive public opener at the Gateway Regional Arts Center featuring a free book distribution, short dramatic readings of frontier-era excerpts, live Appalachian fiddle/ballad repertoire, and a "history-in-your-hands" table of replica documents/maps. Local partners will help sign up participants for discussion circles and accessibility supports.

2) Book Discussions (7 total): "Porchlight Book Circles"

Facilitated discussions will be hosted across the Gateway Region to reduce mobility barriers:
- Montgomery County Library (Mt. Sterling)
- Bath County Library (Owingsville)
- Menifee County Library (Frenchburg)
- Powell County Library (Stanton)
- Morgan County Library (West Liberty)
- Rowan County Library (Morehead)
- One region-wide virtual circle (Zoom) for residents who cannot travel, caregivers, and those with disabilities.

Each circle will use an accessible discussion guide (plain language and optional deep-dive prompts) and a "local bridge" segment connecting the book's themes to Kentucky frontier sites and records.

3) America250 public heritage event: "Heroines of the Hinterland: An America250 Night of Story & Song"

A signature community event honoring America's artistic and cultural heritage through women's perspectives. Program elements include frontier music, short interpretive readings, and a community "Declaration Table" where participants respond to prompts about rights, responsibilities, and belonging—then add their reflections to a traveling display that moves county to county. The "Heroines" event will be held on campus at Morehead State University in nearby Rowan County.

4) Presentation inspired by the book: "Ask a Historian: Kentucky on the Edge"

A lively, audience-centered panel with regional historians/public scholars and local-history keepers focused on women's labor, safety, family survival, and civic participation on the frontier—plus what the archive reveals and what it cannot. This event will be held at the Ascension Episcopal Church, the current meeting site for the Montgomery County Historical Society's monthly meetings.

5) Artistic project / creative response: "Letters Across Time"

A guided community writing + performance-based interpretation project. Participants will write short letters/monologues from women's viewpoints (settler, Native, Black where records support, healer, organizer, mother, worker). Local theatre artists will shape a staged reading performed at GRAC (with a livestream available). A small pop-up exhibit of reproduced local materials (journals, petitions, maps, family records—where available) will accompany the performance. This exhibit will outlive the grant period, providing ongoing educational opportunities from the project that will continue to educate and inspire our region's citizens and will act as a time capsule of both history AND this project itself - captured in time for posterity - as its own local women's history project.

LOCAL TALENT & COMPANION WORKS
Programming will feature local facilitators (librarians, educators, theatre artists), regional musicians, and community storytellers. Companion materials may include curated short readings from Kentucky frontier accounts and primary-source images/maps displayed at each site to ground discussion in place. When hiring artists, facilitators, and historians, preference will be given to those with local ties and those with expertise in the area of Kentucky women's history. We will rely on GRAC's robust Gateway Artist Directory as a first line of defense to identify and hire artists.

HOW GOALS WILL BE MET & ASSESSMENT STRATEGY
This design advances NEA Big Read goals by combining:
- Meaningful conversations (facilitated circles and historian Q&A)
- Local creativity (Letters Across Time writing and staged reading)
- More voices & perspectives (intentional partner outreach and multi-site access)
- Stronger connection across communities and small KY rural counties

We will assess success through attendance totals, book distribution numbers, brief post-event surveys (paper + QR code), facilitator reflection notes, partner debriefs, and documentation of creative outputs (number of letters/monologues submitted; participation diversity by county/location). We have a dedicated part-time staff member who solely works on program evaluation, bringing recommendations to our team in realtime so adjustments can be made to strengthen program impact.

Project partnerships narrative

> 1. Describe your partnerships with libraries (as applicable) and community organizations. Indicate if these are new partnerships or describe your history of working with these partners.
> 2. Explain the role each partner will play in your program.

GRAC will deliver Kentucky's Revolution: Women on the Frontier through a partner network that reduces distance barriers and expands participation beyond GRAC's typical audience. NEA Big Read requires partnership with a library and at least one community organization that broadens reach; our project is built around both.

1) LIBRARY PARTNERS: Book Distribution & Hosting

Montgomery County Public Library will serve as the coordinating library partner for book ordering, distribution support, and one Porchlight Book Circle. In addition, GRAC will collaborate with public library branches/systems in Bath, Menifee, Powell, Morgan, and Rowan Counties as hosting sites for book discussions, registration support, and local promotion through library newsletters and community calendars. These library sites are essential access points in rural communities and provide trusted, welcoming venues with strong public visibility. GRAC has worked in close partnership with ALL of these area library systems with a touring NEA Big Read community reader's theatre discussion group of Thornton Wilder's OUR TOWN. These partners are excited to work with us again in this capacity to further our impact on the region through collaborative literary arts.

2) COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS: Audience Expansion & Culturally-Grounded Engagement

a. Montgomery County America250 Planning Committee (on which GRAC's ED sits) will co-develop outreach strategies, help coordinate cross-county participation, and connect program content to ongoing America250 activities so the Big Read is part of a larger community story rather than a standalone event.

b. DuBois Community Center (frequent GRAC collaborator on Black History/Arts programming) will support outreach that expands participation, particularly by engaging residents and families whose voices and histories are too often excluded from public commemorations. DuBois will advise on

culturally respectful framing and help host or co-host a discussion or creative workshop.

c. Montgomery County Historical Society (a close working partner) will assist with local historical context and provide guidance on appropriate use of local records and accounts for the pop-up exhibit element, helping ensure accuracy while keeping interpretation accessible.

3) LOCAL TALENT & FIELD EXPERTS: Discussion Facilitation & Kentucky Historical Expertise

GRAC will contract with regional humanities practitioners (historians/public scholars, educators, and theatre artists) to facilitate discussions, lead the historian talk/panel, and support the Letters Across Time creative process and staged reading. Partners will be confirmed early in the project timeline with clear roles, dates, and accessibility expectations.

GRAC also wishes to explore partnerships with the Lady Veterans Connect, whose coordinator we have a great working relationship with, as well as our local Daughters of the American Revolution chapter. These partnerships have not been confirmed, but our longstanding successful veteran arts initiative with the American Legion Post 22 opens the door to strong partnerships with these other women-led organizations centered on military service and women's history & contributions to democracy. Their missions certainly align with our programming goals, so a forthcoming partnership on this project will be sought by GRAC's Big Read project personnel.

Together, these partners ensure the project is region-wide, multi-site, community-led, and designed to reach new participants across counties and backgrounds while meeting NEA Big Read partnership and programming expectations.

Describe the community your program impacts

> Please describe the community you plan to reach with your programming with details about the underserved group(s) you intend to reach.

Kentucky's Revolution: Women on the Frontier serves adults across the Gateway Region of rural Appalachian Eastern Kentucky (Montgomery, Bath, Menifee, Powell, Morgan, and Rowan Counties) where communities are geographically dispersed and often excluded from sustained arts & humanities programming due to limited venues, long travel distances, and economic barriers. Many residents live 30–60+ minutes from a professional cultural space, and participation drops sharply when events require gas money, nighttime driving, or unfamiliar institutions.

To engage a true range of community members, GRAC will take a hub-and-spoke approach: one kickoff at GRAC, then rotating, trusted locations in each county - especially public libraries and community centers - so residents can join close to home. We will recruit participants through partner channels that already reach broad audiences (library systems, America250 networks, community center communications), along with local media (community calendars, radio, churches, 4-H/UKY Extension offices, senior centers, civic clubs, and social service partners). Events will be designed to be welcoming for readers at many levels, with plain-language invitations and discussion formats that value lived experience alongside historical interpretation.

ACCESSIBILITY

All events will be planned with accessibility in mind, consistent with NEA Big Read expectations for inclusive participation. Key access strategies include:
- Multiple locations across counties to reduce transportation burden.
- A virtual discussion option (Zoom) and livestream/recording elements where feasible.
- Accessible venues (ground-floor or elevator access, ADA restrooms) prioritized in site selection.
- Communication access: large-print discussion guides upon request; microphones used for speakers; captions for any video content; ASL interpretation available upon request with advance notice.
- Sensory-friendly choices: clear agendas, quiet seating options, and predictable program flow for participants who benefit from reduced stimulation.
- Plain-language materials and optional "discussion warm-ups" for readers who feel intimidated by formal literary programs.

By meeting people where they are across Appalachian Eastern Kentucky - both geographically and socially - this NEA Big Read will turn America250 into a literary and cultural experience that feels local: shared learning, shared story, and shared reflection across six rural counties.

Budget

Expense Description	Paid by Grant	Paid by Applicant	Paid by 3rd Party	In-kind	Total Match
Book Purchase (600 copies of Women of the Revolution)	$8,400.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Book distribution & shipping (freight, labels, protective bags)	$600.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Paid facilitators for Porchlight Book Circles (7 sessions)	$2,100.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Speaker honoraria for “Ask a Historian: Kentucky on the Edge” (3 panelists)	$1,500.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Performing artists for “Books & Bonnets” kickoff (music & readers)	$600.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Performing artists for “Heroines of the Hinterland” America250 event (music/readers)	$600.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00

Lead teaching artist/director for “Letters Across Time” (writing-to-performance project)	$2,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Printing & interpretation materials (discussion guides, large-print option runs, exhibit reproductions)	$1,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Marketing & outreach (print/digital ads, flyers across 6 counties)	$1,200.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Accessibility services set-aside (captioning/ASL/assistive listening upon request)	$1,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Venue rentals (as needed for larger public events in rotating counties)	$1,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Project management staff time (coordination, scheduling, partner mgmt, reporting)	$0.00	$12,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$12,000.00

Outreach & evaluation staff time (registration, survey tools, documentation, debriefs)	$0.00	$2,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$2,000.00
3rd-party underwriting (local sponsorships for print/outreach costs; non-federal)	$0.00	$0.00	$3,000.00	$0.00	$3,000.00
In-kind venue space (libraries/community centers hosting discussions/events)	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$3,000.00	$3,000.00
In-kind volunteer support (book distribution, event support, exhibit help)	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$2,000.00	$2,000.00
Total Project Expenses:	**$20,000.00**	**$14,000.00**	**$3,000.00**	**$5,000.00**	**$22,000.00**

Use this space to offer more detail about your budget

Certify

I certify on behalf of my organization that the information provided in this application is true to the best of my knowledge. Furthermore, I certify that:

- My organization is eligible to receive federal funds and not delinquent in the repayment of Federal debt.
- My organization is a unit/division of government, a Federally-recognized tribal government, an institution of higher education, or a 501c3 nonprofit.
- My proposed activity space(s) are accessible to people with disabilities.
- My project budget does not include match from another federal source.
- My organization does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.); on the basis of age, in accordance with the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq.); on the basis of sex, in any education program or activity, in accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.).

◉ I certify

Assurance of Compliance

This grant derives from federal sources, specifically the National Endowment for the Arts. As such, your project, if funded, must abide by certain terms. Please read the following terms carefully so you are aware of the assurances you will have to make. https://forms.office.com/r/tLazU4ZSgD

○ I acknowledge that these terms will apply to my grant, if funded, and we will be able to comply.