

Expressions of Freedom – Statewide Creative Arts Contest

Hosted by the *America 250 Alabama* Commission

As part of the year long celebration of America’s Semiquincentennial (250th birthday), the *America 250 Alabama* Commission invites artists, writers, and musicians to participate in the **Expression of Freedom Contest**.

Categories include painting, poetry, and original song.

Participants from across Alabama – youth and adults – are encouraged to submit work.

Winners in each category and age division will receive a \$250 prize, and will be featured at Sweet Home 250, the Alabama’s official Independence Day celebration, held July 3-4, 2026 at the American Village in Montevallo.

Contest Theme

Voices of Freedom — 250 Years of the American Story

Explore the many voices that have defined, defended, expanded, and reimagined freedom—from everyday citizens to community movements, from the founding era to the present and beyond.

Eligibility

- Two Age Divisions:
 - **Youth: 15 & under**
 - **Adult: 16+**
- Must be a **current resident of Alabama**

Categories & Submission Requirements

1. Painting

- Accepted media: Acrylic, oil, watercolor, mixed media
- Maximum size: **24" x 36"**
- Submit:
 - 3 photos of the completed artwork
 - Artist statement (150–250 words) explaining the “voice” represented

2. Poetry

- Length: Up to 40 lines (or 500 words for prose poetry)
- Format: PDF/DOCX, 12 pt font

3. Original Song

- Length: 3–4 minutes
- Format: MP3 or /WAV
- Additionally include:
 - Lyric sheet (required)
 - Optional score or lead sheet
- Notes:
 - Styles rooted in American music traditions - or creative contemporary blends – are welcome.
 - Judging focuses on lyrics and musical composition.
 - The songwriter **does not** have to perform the submitted vocal.

Creative Prompts (Optional Inspiration)

Painting

1. *Witness*: Depict a moment—historic or current—when an ordinary person’s voice inspired a community.
2. *Echoes*: Show how a voice carries across generations through layered or time-spanning imagery.
3. *Thresholds*: Illustrate literal or symbolic doorways people cross on the path to greater freedom.

Poetry

1. *Letter Never Sent*: Speak in the voice of someone history overlooked.
2. *Freedom Catalogue*: A list poem tracing freedoms sought, won, and shared.
3. *Counterpoint*: Two voices in dialogue—different eras, identities, or hopes—in conversation.

Original Song

1. *Carry the Verse*: A call-and-response structure passing the mic to different voices.
2. *Road to July*: A musical journey 1776 to today, exploring freedom's meaning.
3. *Unquiet Quiet*: Begin sparsely and build to fullness – mirroring voices joining together.

Key Dates

- Call for Entries Opens: **March 1, 2026**
- Submission Deadline: **May 15, 2026**
- Judging Window: **May 16-May 31**
- Finalists Announced: **June 5, 2026**
- Exhibition & Awards: **July 3-4, 2026** (at Sweet Home 250)

Awards Structure

- **Grand Prize** (per category & division)
- **Honorable Mentions** (per category & division)

How to Submit

Submit your entry through the online portal at:

america250a1.org Deadline:

May 15, 2026

Judging Process

- **Blind Review**: Artists names withheld in first-round scoring
- **Diverse Panel**: Include visual artists, musicians, writers, educators, and archivists
- **Conflict of Interest**: Judges must recuse themselves from entries by known associates
- **Calibration**: Judges conduct a sample scoring round to align evaluation standards

Content & Community Standards

- Family-friendly and respectful content only
- **Original work only (no AI-generated submissions)**
- Artists retain full copyright
- *America 250 Alabama* receives a non-exclusive license to exhibit, publish, and promote the work with proper attribution