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Visit Philadelphia and TED Announce Programming and Initial Speaker Lineup for "Founding Futures" Ahead of America's 250th

PHILADELPHIA, March 31, 2026 – Visit Philadelphia and TED will present [TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures](#) on Saturday, June 13, 2026, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. In honor of America's 250th birthday, the event centers Philadelphia—the birthplace of modern democracy—as the setting to explore the evolving story of our democratic systems.

Rather than simply celebrating what was built in the past, TED Democracy tackles current challenges in civic discourse. It asks attendees to imagine the democracy we want to build moving forward: How do we, together, create a more just, inclusive, participatory and resilient future?

Scott Shigeoka, host and creator of The Curiosity Mobile, will co-host the event alongside TED Democracy curator Kelly Stoetzel, a creative producer and former TED Head of Conferences who specializes in turning powerful ideas into unforgettable experiences.

"Philadelphia is where democracy was born, but its future is still being written," said Angela Val, president and CEO of Visit Philadelphia. "This event brings some of the world's most compelling voices to our city at a defining moment—not just to reflect on our past, but to challenge how we shape what comes next. As we approach 2026, it's an opportunity to engage, question and reimagine the kind of democracy we want to build together for the next 250 years."

"TED has always been a platform for ideas that shape the world, and there is no better place to stage a global conversation about the future of democracy than Philadelphia, its modern birthplace," said Laura Beyer, TED's Head of Partnerships. "With TED Democracy, we are surfacing the next generation of ideas to ensure our democratic systems remain resilient. We are thrilled to partner with Visit Philadelphia to bring these brand-new talks to the world from the very city where the American experiment began."

15+ Original, Brand-New TED Talks

During the day-long event, the Marian Anderson Hall stage will host some of the world's brightest thinkers, offering more than a dozen brand-new TED Talks designed to challenge perspectives and inspire

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action. Topics will range from media literacy and race to the intersection of AI and democracy, economic equity and more. Additional speakers will be announced in the coming weeks. The initial featured lineup includes:

- **Jon Alexander (London):** An author advocating for active citizenship and democratic renewal through writing, advising and convening.
- **Terrill Bouricius (Burlington, VT):** A former elected official who is working toward reform within the U.S. system of representation.
- **Aria Florant (Brooklyn, NY):** CEO of Liberation Ventures, a catalyst for creating a culture of repair in America.
- **Jen Golbeck (Sugarloaf Key, FL):** A computer scientist and AI researcher whose work touches on the ethics of AI.
- **Xochitl Gonzalez (Brooklyn, NY):** A Pulitzer Prize finalist author and part-time staff writer at The Atlantic, with a focus on economic inequality.
- **Schmichael Hallman (Rockville, MD):** An author and national leader of the Urban Libraries Council advancing libraries as essential civic infrastructure.
- **Sally Kohn (Allentown, PA):** A nationally recognized television commentator, writer and executive presence coach working with top executives and political leaders.
- **Jeffrey Maurer (Carmel, IN):** A writer and former candidate for the Indiana Secretary of State who is working to prepare future generations to think independently.
- **Katie Paris (Shaker Heights, OH):** A former public servant whose work focuses on community organizing and helping to increase civic participation.
- **Janelle Persaud (Guyana):** A media specialist and TEDxTurkeyen organizer focused on democracy, development and governance in postcolonial societies.
- **Tami Pyfer (South Jordan, UT):** A former elected official and advisor doing work around dignity in speech.
- **Scott Reich (Port Washington, NY):** A legal scholar and historian who explores how individuals and communities respond to adversity.
- **Laura Smythe (Philadelphia, PA):** A journalist and communications specialist focused on the intersection of legacy journalism, social media, AI platforms and the creator economy.

Immersive Experiences & Connection

Beyond the main stage, TED Democracy is designed for deep connection and civic innovation. Attendees can engage with immersive activations brought to life by premier partners or participate in small-group discovery sessions to become co-creators of civic solutions.

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Built-in breaks will transform the venue into the Public Square, featuring diverse local food and drink through the Flavors of Philadelphia culinary program, along with a bookstore and curated retail from local vendors. The PEW Spotlight Stage will offer short, engaging live interviews and musical performances, while the Restore Lounge provides a peaceful haven to unplug and recharge.

Visit Philadelphia's partnership with TED Democracy is made possible thanks to support from Bank of America, Comcast NBCUniversal, Highmark Blue Shield, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of Tourism, the Philadelphia Funder Collaborative for the Semiquincentennial and the Philadelphia hospitality community. Major support for Founding Futures, the June event and TED Democracy Live livestream has also been provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Sign up for the [TED Democracy Philadelphia newsletter](#) to stay in the know on all the latest happenings and ticket releases.

Tickets for Founding Futures are on sale now and can be purchased [HERE](#).

Visit Philly 2026 Overnight Hotel Package

Planning your Philadelphia visit? Visitors attending TED Democracy can extend their stay with Visit Philadelphia's 2026 Overnight Hotel Package, a first-of-its-kind offer that includes free hotel parking and admission to some of the most popular attractions across Greater Philadelphia's five counties.

It is designed to help visitors easily explore the city and the surrounding countryside. At a time when travel is more expensive than ever, the package is a great way for travelers to save money and spend more time enjoying the city's offerings. Perks include:

- Two tickets to [Universal Theme Parks: The Exhibition at The Franklin Institute](#)
- Two tickets to Chester County's world-famous horticultural display garden at [Longwood Gardens](#)
- Two tickets to the [Elmwood Park Zoo](#)
- Two tickets to the [Mercer Museum](#)
- Two tickets to the [Brandywine Museum of Art](#)

More information on how to book can be found [HERE](#).

Dear Democracy Sweepstakes

Enter for a chance to win a Philadelphia getaway and tickets to TED Democracy. The prize includes a two-night hotel stay, two event tickets, a \$1,000 travel gift card, \$500 in dining at Garces and Starr restaurants and tickets to the Museum of the American Revolution and the National Constitution Center.

Go to visitphilly.com/features/dear-democracy-sweepstakes/ to enter.

About Visit Philadelphia:

VISIT PHILADELPHIA® is our name and our mission. As the region's official tourism marketing

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agency, we build Greater Philadelphia's image, drive visitation and boost the economy. On Greater Philadelphia's official visitor website, visitphilly.com, visitors can explore things to do, upcoming events, themed itineraries and hotel packages.

Compelling photography and videos, interactive maps and detailed visitor information make the site an effective trip-planning tool. Visitors can also find loads of inspiration on Visit Philly's social media Channels.

Note to Editors: For high-resolution photos and high-definition B-roll of Greater Philadelphia, visit the Photos & Video section of visitphilly.com/mediacenter.

About TED:

TED is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to discovering and sharing ideas that spark conversation, deepen understanding and drive meaningful change. Rooted in curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge, TED brings together people across disciplines and cultures to better understand the world and engage with ideas in their communities.

Founded in 1984 as a conference focused on Technology, Entertainment and Design, TED has grown into a global platform spanning science, business, education, the arts and more. Through TED Talks, podcasts, TED-Ed educational content and independently organized TEDx events around the world, TED reaches audiences in more than 100 languages. The organization also leads major initiatives, including the Audacious Project, which has helped catalyze more than \$3 billion in funding for global impact, as well as Countdown and TED Democracy.

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