

Printmaking by the People: A Citywide Project for 2026

A Proposal by Mural Arts Philadelphia

Vision

Printmaking by the People – organized as a reflection on the nation’s semi-quincentennial – will engage people in communities across Philadelphia in a dialogue about how the Declaration of Independence has set the stage for life in our city and our nation today.

The project will reimagine printmaking’s historic role in public communication and civic dialogue, particularly its roots in Philadelphia as a means of disseminating debates about the movement for independence. Today, we will ask people to explore how we have succeeded, what work remains to be done, and what their own passions and commitments are for the future, and express their ideas through the same tools.

The project will involve printmaking workshops across the city, led by facilitators and artists, that feature small-group dialogues and hands-on printing activities. The workshops will provide a space for people to create prints with their own messages, which can be assembled into public displays in their communities, uploaded into an online archive and incorporated into a culminating mural in Philadelphia.

We will select a lead mural artist/s who will be charged with conceptualizing and producing the mural, and will be encouraged to collaborate with the artists and facilitators leading the workshop process. But we are open to teams and collaborations from within Philadelphia, as well as beyond the city.

The Dialogue We Seek

The community engagement process will ask Philadelphians the following questions – which were addressed by the Declaration of Independence 250 years ago, and which have newfound urgency today:

- What is your perspective on Declaration of Independence and this milestone moment?
- What are the common values that motivate us?
- What are the changes we seek today?
- What will we do to achieve that change?

The Process

Mural Arts, working collaboratively with the printmaking community and other advisors, will establish a framework for the workshops. It will then seek artists to help design and lead workshops, print organizations to help produce the workshops, and community-based organizations to host the workshops. (Examples could include community art or print centers, libraries, schools and Mural Arts community art spaces). This would allow individual artists to explore their own voices and techniques, within the overall goal of generating a citywide project. Mural Arts would collect copies of the artworks that are created and archive them as source material for public art projects – including a signature mural for 2026 – and exhibitions.

Outputs

Mural Arts will work with the muralist team to organize the production of a signature, legacy mural that is in a highly visible location. In addition, there could be other public art outputs, depending on public interest and funding, such as:

- Smaller permanent murals or temporary wheat paste projects in neighborhoods
- Digital projections in on walls or screens in Center City
- An iconic poster, compiling work created in the community



- Exhibitions in galleries
- A searchable database of posters

Partners

Philadelphia250 is a lead collaborator on this project.

We are currently discussing partnerships with the Free Library of Philadelphia, Brandywine Print Workshop, the Print Center, the Soapbox Community Print Shop and Zine Library, Second State Press and similar organizations throughout the city.

Timeline

Roughly, we envision the following project roll-out:

- January through June, 2024: Commission a small number of workshops to explore the pragmatics of this project and provide a “proof of concept”
- October 2024 through October 2025: Plan and implement community workshops
- November 2026 through June 2026: Organize murals, exhibitions and other outputs

