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Visit Philadelphia, TED Launch International Idea Search for Democracy-Focused TED Talks

*Anyone can apply by Nov. 30 to speak at TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures in June 2026.
A touring Dear Democracy activation begins today.*

PHILADELPHIA, September 17, 2025 – Visit Philadelphia and TED today opened an international speaker search for [TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures](#), inviting anyone worldwide to apply for a chance to deliver a TED Talk at the June 13, 2026, event at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. Changemakers, thought leaders, community advocates and everyday citizens can [submit ideas](#) exploring democracy's past, present and future through Nov. 30.

TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures marks the conclusion of Visit Philadelphia's three-year partnership with TED, which has featured various live panel discussions and fireside chats. The day-long event — held in honor of the semiquincentennial, America's 250th birthday in 2026 — will feature brand-new TED Talks exploring democracy, presented in Philadelphia, the birthplace of modern democracy.

Coinciding with the TED Democracy Idea Search launch, the organizations also today debuted Dear Democracy, a mobile activation that will travel to major cities including Philadelphia, New York City and Atlanta throughout 2025, collecting handwritten messages about democracy from the public.

Visit Philadelphia is investing \$250,000 in advertising to promote the TED Democracy Idea Search in international markets including London, Berlin, Paris, Montreal and Vancouver. Selected speakers will work directly with TED's curation team to develop their Talks for the June event, which will be livestreamed to audiences across the U.S.

Tickets for TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures will go on sale Oct. 28.

"Philadelphia has long been a place where bold ideas about democracy shape our nation's history," said Angela Val, president and CEO of Visit Philadelphia. "This partnership redefines destination marketing, going beyond promoting attractions to create platforms that invite the world to not only visit where democracy began, but actively participate in shaping its future. We're demonstrating how tourism can facilitate the conversations that matter most during America's 250th."

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The partnership between Visit Philadelphia and TED, which began in July 2024, has brought together more than 1,200 participants through panel discussions, fireside chats, video series, and community programs.

“Over the last two years, TED and Visit Philadelphia have brought together grassroots organizers, elected officials, and everyday concerned citizens for our TED Democracy event series, all of whom care deeply about democracy,” said Jay Herratti, CEO of TED. “TED knows the power of ideas, and with the launch of TED Democracy Philadelphia’s 2026 marquee event on June 13, 2026, we look forward to highlighting ideas that will inspire hope, ignite action, and celebrate how far we’ve come as a nation as we look to strengthen democracy for the next 250 years.”

Visit Philadelphia’s partnership with TED Democracy is made possible thanks to support from Bank of America, Comcast NBCUniversal, Highmark Blue Shield, the Philadelphia Funder Collaborative for the Semiquincentennial and the Philadelphia hospitality community. Major support for the June event and livestream has also been provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts. More information on TED Democracy Philadelphia, the TED Democracy Idea Search, and TED Democracy Live can be found on Visit Philadelphia’s website [here](#).

"This event comes at a pivotal moment when our democratic institutions face unprecedented challenges, but also opportunities," said Ally Gomberoff, impact partnerships manager at TED. "Now is the time to harness our collective wisdom and reimagine a shared future, ensuring democracy remains vibrant and responsive to the needs of all citizens."

TED Democracy Live

To expand access to TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures for audiences nationwide, The Pew Charitable Trusts’ support will enable the production of TED Democracy Live, an initiative in which libraries across the country will livestream the June event to bring these crucial conversations to every state and territory in the U.S.

To produce TED Democracy Live, Visit Philadelphia is collaborating with the American Library Association (ALA) to identify 50-plus libraries — at least one in every U.S. state and territory — that will host a satellite event next June as part of TED Democracy Live. Participating libraries will have the unique opportunity to engage adults, youth and families in every community in meaningful conversations about democracy and provide access to world-class content from TED Democracy speakers. Libraries can apply [here](#) to be a part of this activation.

“The Pew Charitable Trusts is very pleased to support TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures,” said Susan K. Urahn, Pew’s president and CEO. “We’re particularly gratified to sponsor TED Democracy Live so that more people around the country can engage with the day’s speakers, topics and conversations. As critical public spaces where citizens can read American history, learn different perspectives, and enjoy community discussions, libraries are important to strengthening democratic values and therefore uniquely positioned to host the livestream event. And since Philadelphia is Pew’s

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hometown, the birthplace of American democracy, and the location of the country's first public library — founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1731 — we think there isn't a city more well-suited to host the day's in-person activities."

Dear Democracy Activation

Alongside the speaker search, Visit Philadelphia today unveiled Dear Democracy, a mobile activation inviting Americans to share handwritten messages about democracy. The activation features a truck displaying oversized TED letters where participants can share personal messages, reflections and aspirations for democracy.

The Dear Democracy truck begins its journey today at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia before traveling to New York City, Chicago and Atlanta through the end of 2025. The schedule includes:

- 9/17: National Constitution Center - Philadelphia
- 10/11: Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center - New York City
- 10/14: TED Speaker Series #3 at Penn Museum - Philadelphia
- 10/25: Navy Pier - Chicago
- * *More cities to be announced in the near future*

Letters to democracy can also be submitted virtually via Visit Philadelphia's [Dear Democracy web page](#).

"Dear Democracy is about inviting people to reflect on what democracy means to them, not as an abstract concept, but as a lived experience that touches everyone," said Neil Frauenglass, chief marketing officer at Visit Philadelphia. "By creating a physical space for these personal expressions to come to life, we're helping to spark the same kind of civic engagement and dialogue that will take center stage at TED Democracy Philadelphia next year."

Get Involved - At a Glance

- **Apply to speak:** [Submit](#) ideas at by Nov. 30
- **Submit** a virtual letter [here](#)
- **Libraries:** Apply to host TED Democracy Live [here](#)
- **Watch** "The Great Experiment" [here](#)

About Visit Philadelphia:

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

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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/media-center.

About TED:

TED is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to discovering, debating and spreading ideas that spark conversation, deepen understanding and drive meaningful change. Our organization is devoted to curiosity, reason, wonder and the pursuit of knowledge — without an agenda. We welcome people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world and connection with others, and we invite everyone to engage with ideas and activate them in your community.

TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, but today it spans a multitude of worldwide communities and initiatives exploring everything from science and business to education, arts and global issues. In addition to the TED Talks curated from our annual conferences and published on TED.com, we produce [original podcasts](#), [short video series](#), [animated educational lessons](#) (TED-Ed) and TV programs that are translated into more than 100 languages and distributed via partnerships around the world. Each year, thousands of independently run [TEDx](#) events bring people together to share ideas and bridge divides in communities on every continent. Through the [Audacious Project](#), TED has helped catalyze nearly \$6 billion in funding for projects that seek to make the world more beautiful, sustainable and just. In 2020, TED launched [Countdown](#), an initiative to accelerate solutions to the climate crisis and mobilize a movement for a net-zero future, and in 2023 TED launched [TED Democracy](#) to spark a new kind of conversation focused on realistic pathways towards a more vibrant and equitable future. View a full list of [TED's many programs and initiatives](#).

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About The Pew Charitable Trusts' work in Philadelphia:

Founded in 1948, The Pew Charitable Trusts uses data to make a difference, addressing the challenges of a changing world and helping communities thrive. In our hometown of Philadelphia, Pew promotes pathways to economic advancement, access to civic and cultural enrichment, and the safety and well-being of all residents by strengthening local nonprofits', government's, and civic institutions' abilities to address complex challenges. Pew does this through its grantmaking, capacity building, research, policy analysis, and stakeholder convenings. Learn more at pew.org.