



**Congressional
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Commemorative Commissions: Overview, Structure, and Funding

Updated February 2, 2023

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R41425



R41425

February 2, 2023

Jacob R. Straus
Specialist on the Congress

Commemorative Commissions: Overview, Structure, and Funding

Congress statutorily establishes commemorative commissions to oversee and coordinate the federal government’s commemoration of a person or event. Typically, commemorative commissions coordinate celebrations, scholarly events, public gatherings, and other activities, often to coincide with a milestone anniversary. For example, the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission was created “to prepare a comprehensive program for commemorating the quincentennial of the voyages of discovery of Christopher Columbus, and to plan, encourage, coordinate, and conduct observances and activities commemorating the historic events associated with those voyages.”

Using a dataset of statutorily created commemorative commissions since the 96th Congress (1979-1980), this report examines the content of typical legislative language used to create commemorative commissions. Additionally, this report examines commemorative commission funding. This report does not address noncommemorative congressional commissions, commemorative entities created by the President, or statutory commissions tasked with designing and building monuments and memorials in Washington, DC.

Commemorative commission measures generally include certain legislative language. Most often, the language outlines the commission’s mandate, provides a membership and appointment structure, enumerates the commission’s duties and powers, and sets a termination date. A variety of options are available for each of these organizational choices, and legislators can tailor the composition, organization, and working arrangements of a commission. As a result, the organizational structure and powers of individual commissions are often unique.

Congress has generally funded commemorative commissions in three ways: through appropriations or transfers, through solicitation of nonfederal money, or through a combination of appropriations and nonfederal money. In instances where commemorative commissions must raise funds, they are generally provided with the authority to accept monetary and in-kind donations. Commissions without the statutory authority to solicit funds or accept donations are generally prohibited from engaging in those activities.

For general information on congressional commissions, see CRS Report R40076, *Congressional Commissions: Overview and Considerations for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Contents

Introduction	1
Cataloging Commemorative Commissions	1
Authorizing Commemorative Commissions	3
Legislative Features	3
Establishment and Mandate	3
Findings	3
Membership and Appointment.....	4
Commission Duties.....	5
Commission Powers.....	6
Staff.....	6
Relationships with Other Entities	7
Termination	8
Consideration of Legislation in Congress	8
Funding.....	9
Authorized Funding Levels.....	9
Appropriation of Authorized Funds	10
Nonfederal Funding	11
Donations	11
Donation Acceptance	12
Fundraising	13
Estimating Costs.....	13

Tables

Table 1. Commemorative Congressional Commissions Created by Law	2
Table 2. Authorization for Appropriations for Commemorative Commissions.....	9

Contacts

Author Information.....	14
-------------------------	----

Introduction

Congress creates commissions for a variety of purposes. In addition to investigatory commissions that provide expert advice or study a complex policy issue, Congress also creates commissions to commemorate a person or event. Typically, these commissions are statutorily mandated to coordinate celebrations, scholarly events, public gatherings, and other activities, often to coincide with a milestone anniversary. For example, in 2017, Congress created the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Commission to “plan, develop, and carry out programs and activities that are fitting and proper to honor Frederick Douglass on the occasion of the bicentennial anniversary of Douglass’ birth” and to “recommend to Congress programs and activities that the Commission considers fitting and proper to honor Frederick Douglass on such occasion, and the entity or entities in the Federal Government that the Commission considers most appropriate to carry out such programs and activities.”¹

This report examines commemorative commissions created by statute since the 96th Congress (1979-1980), with a focus on the typical structure of legislation and funding.² This report does not address noncommemorative congressional commissions, commemorative entities created by the President, or statutory commissions tasked with designing and building monuments and memorials in Washington, DC.

Cataloging Commemorative Commissions

Each Congress, legislation is typically introduced to authorize commemorative commissions. To compile a list of commemorative commissions created since the 96th Congress, a database search was conducted in Congress.gov.³ Each piece of legislation returned was examined to determine (1) if the legislation contained a commission and (2) if the commission was commemorative in nature.

The search of Congress.gov found a total of 22 enacted commemorative commissions. **Table 1** lists the name, public law number, and date of enactment. Of the 22 commissions, 9 were created to commemorate individuals and coincided with a milestone anniversary of their birth.⁴ The other 13 commissions were created to commemorate an historical event or aspect of American history.⁵

¹ P.L. 115-77, §4m, 131 Stat. 1252 (2017).

² For information on the design of noncommemorative congressional commissions, see CRS Report R40076, *Congressional Commissions: Overview and Considerations for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

³ The search of Congress.gov was conducted in two iterations. The first query searched for the subject term “Federal Advisory Bodies.” The second query added terms commonly associated with commission legislation, including “commission,” “board,” “task force,” and “advisory committee.”

⁴ The individuals are Ronald Reagan, Abraham Lincoln, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Dwight Eisenhower, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Frederick Douglass.

⁵ The events commemorated are the voyage of Columbus, the founding of the colony at Jamestown, the writing of the Constitution, the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, the Seneca Falls convention, the first successful airplane flight, World War I, the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the granting of women’s suffrage, the arrival of African Americans in the Americas and their contribution to American history, the Virgin Islands becoming a United States unincorporated territory, and the centennial of the creation of Route 66.

Table I. Commemorative Congressional Commissions Created by Law
96th to 117th Congresses (1979-2022)

Commission	Public Law	Date Signed
Route 66 Centennial Commission	P.L. 116-256	December 23, 2020
400 Years of African-American History Commission	P.L. 115-102	January 8, 2018
Frederick Douglass Centennial Commission	P.L. 115-77	November 2, 2017
National Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission	P.L. 115-31 ^a	May 5, 2017
Virgin Islands of the United States Centennial Commission	P.L. 114-224	September 29, 2016
John F. Kennedy Centennial Commission	P.L. 114-215	July 29, 2016
United States Semiquincentennial Commission	P.L. 114-196	July 22, 2016
World War I Centennial Commission	P.L. 112-272	January 15, 2013
Ronald Reagan Centennial Commission	P.L. 111-25	June 2, 2009
Commission on the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade	P.L. 110-183	February 5, 2008
Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission	P.L. 107-202	July 24, 2002
Brown v. Board of Education 50 th Anniversary Commission	P.L. 107-41	September 18, 2001
Jamestown 400 th Commemoration Commission	P.L. 106-565	December 23, 2000
James Madison Commemorative Commission	P.L. 106-550	December 19, 2000
Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission ^b	P.L. 106-173	February 25, 2000
Centennial of Flight Commemoration Commission ^c	P.L. 105-389	November 13, 1998
Women’s Progress Commemoration Commission	P.L. 105-341	October 31, 1998
Thomas Jefferson Commemoration Commission ^d	P.L. 102-343	August 17, 1992
Dwight David Eisenhower Centennial Commission ^e	P.L. 99-624	November 7, 1986
Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Commission ^f	P.L. 98-375	August 7, 1984
Commission on Eleanor Roosevelt Centennial	P.L. 98-162	November 21, 1983
Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution ^g	P.L. 98-101	September 29, 1983

Source: CRS search of Congress.gov database at <http://www.congress.gov>.

Notes:

- a. The bill establishing the National Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission was enacted by reference in P.L. 115-31, §431(a)(3), which enacted S. 847 (115th Congress), the Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission Act.
- b. The act establishing the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission was amended by P.L. 108-59 (July 14, 2003), which extended the termination date for the commission.
- c. The act establishing the Centennial of Flight Commemoration Commission was amended by P.L. 106-68 (October 6, 1999), which provided for additional duties for the commission and clarification of the hiring and funding practices of the commission.
- d. The act establishing the Thomas Jefferson Commemorative Commission was amended by P.L. 103-191 (December 14, 1993), which extended the deadline for the final report of the commission.
- e. The act establishing the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission was amended by P.L. 107-117 (January 10, 2002), which provided for additional funding through private donations.
- f. The act establishing the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Commission was amended by P.L. 100-94 (August 18, 1987), which provided for additional duties for the commission and extended the termination date.

- g. The act establishing the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution was amended twice. P.L. 99-549 (November 27, 1986) authorized further appropriations and extended the termination date of the commission. P.L. 102-181 (December 3, 1991) extended the termination date of the commission.

Authorizing Commemorative Commissions

Legislative Features

Commemorative commission legislation, similar to measures authorizing noncommemorative commissions, generally includes certain features, including the commission’s establishment, findings that summarize the commemorative subject’s history and importance, a membership and appointment structure, duties and powers, a termination date for the commission, and a funding provision.

A variety of options are available for each of these organizational features, and legislators can tailor the composition, organization, and working arrangements of a commission, based on the particular goals of Congress. As a result, the organizational structure and powers of individual commissions are often unique.

Establishment and Mandate

Commission legislation includes a section that establishes the entity. For example, the Dwight David Eisenhower Centennial Commission establishment clauses stated “There is established the Dwight David Eisenhower Centennial Commission.”⁶

Findings

Commemorative commission legislation often includes a section of findings. Typically, these include facts about the people, places, events, or institutions being honored or studied. For example, the legislation to authorize the Centennial of Flight Commemorative Commission stated

Sec. 2. FINDINGS

Congress finds that—

- (1) December 17, 2003, is the 100th anniversary of the first successful manned, free, controlled, and sustained flight by a power-driven, heavier-than-air machine;
- (2) the first flight by Orville and Wilbur Wright represents the fulfillment of the age-old dream of flying;
- (3) the airplane has dramatically changed the course of transportation, commerce, communication, and warfare throughout the world;
- (4) the achievement by the Wright brothers stands as a triumph of American ingenuity, inventiveness, and diligence in developing new technologies, and remains an inspiration for all Americans;
- (5) it is appropriate to remember and renew the legacy of the Wright brothers at a time when the values of creativity and daring represented by the Wright brothers are critical to the future of the Nation; and
- (6) as the Nation approaches the 100th anniversary of powered flight, it is appropriate to celebrate and commemorate the centennial year through local, national, and international observances and activities.⁷

⁶ P.L. 99-624, 100 Stat. 3497 (1986).

⁷ P.L. 105-389, §2, 110 Stat. 3486 (1998).

Membership and Appointment

Commemorative commission statutes contain a variety of membership and appointment structures. Similar to general congressional advisory commission statutes, the legislation may require that commission membership contain specifically designated Members of Congress, typically Members in chamber or committee leadership positions. In other cases, selected congressional leaders appoint commission members, who may or may not be Members of Congress. A third common statutory scheme is to have selected congressional leaders recommend members, who may or may not be Members of Congress, for appointment to a commission. These leaders are often required to act either in parallel or jointly, and the recommendation may be made either to other congressional leaders, such as the Speaker of the House and President pro tempore of the Senate, or to the President.⁸ For example, the Ronald Reagan Centennial Commission had 11 voting members appointed by the President and Members of Congress and one ex officio member. Appointments were required to be made within 90 days and members were appointed for the life of the commission. The Reagan Centennial Commission's statute stated

Sec. 4. MEMBERSHIP

(a) NUMBER AND APPOINTMENT.—The Commission shall be composed of 11 members as follows:

- (1) The Secretary of the Interior.
- (2) Four members appointed by the President after considering the recommendations of the Board of Trustees of the Ronald Reagan Foundation.
- (3) Two Members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.
- (4) One Member of the House of Representatives appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives.
- (5) Two Members of the Senate appointed by the majority leader of the Senate.
- (6) One Member of the Senate appointed by the minority leader of the Senate.

(b) EX OFFICIO MEMBER.—The Archivist of the United States shall serve in an ex officio capacity on the Commission to provide advice and information to the Commission.

(c) TERMS.—Each member shall be appointed for the life of the Commission.

(d) DEADLINE FOR APPOINTMENT.—All members of the Commission shall be appointed not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.⁹

In some cases, appointment authority might be statutorily limited. For example, statutory language may require the appointment of Members of Congress, as occurred in the Reagan Centennial Commission, or the selection of individuals who are specifically qualified by virtue of their education, knowledge, training, experience, expertise, distinguished service, or recognized eminence in a particular field or fields. For example, the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission statute stated

Sec. 5. MEMBERSHIP.

(b) QUALIFIED CITIZEN.—A qualified citizen described in this subsection is a private citizen of the United States with—

⁸ For more information on appointments to advisory commissions, see CRS Report RL33313, *Congressional Membership and Appointment Authority to Advisory Commissions, Boards, and Groups*, by Jacob R. Straus.

⁹ P.L. 111-25, §4, 123 Stat. 1767 (2009).

- (1) a demonstrated dedication to educating others about the importance of historical figures and events; and
- (2) substantial knowledge and appreciation of Abraham Lincoln.¹⁰

Appointment limitations might restrict the number of available candidates and make finding suitable appointments potentially more difficult. Limitations, however, also allow Congress to influence the nomination process in instances when the President or another noncongressional official has appointment authority.

Most commemorative commission statutes also specify that commission members are not compensated, except to reimburse members for expenses directly related to their service, such as travel costs.¹¹

Commission Duties

The duties of commemorative commissions are numerous and varied. Commonly, the authorization language provides general guidance to the commission on its duties and activities. For example, the Women’s Progress Commemorative Commission statute stated

Sec. 4. DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION.

Not later than 1 year after the initial meeting of the Commission, the Commission, in cooperation with the Secretary of the Interior and other appropriate Federal, State, and local public and private entities, shall prepare and submit to the Secretary of the Interior a report that-

- (1) identifies sites of historical significance to the women’s movement; and
- (2) recommends actions, under the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.) and other law, to rehabilitate and preserve the sites and provide to the public interpretive and educational materials and activities at the sites.¹²

In some instances, the enacted legislation tasked the commission with carrying out commemorative events. For example, the Dwight David Eisenhower Centennial Commission statute said

SEC. 3. DUTIES.

The Commission shall-

- (1) in cooperation with the Eisenhower World Affairs Institute in the District of Columbia, the Eisenhower Foundation in Abilene, Kansas, and such other public or private entities as the Commission considers appropriate, encourage, plan, develop, and coordinate observances and activities commemorating the centennial of the birth of Dwight David Eisenhower; and
- (2) submit recommendations to Congress relating to a joint meeting of both Houses of Congress to commemorate that centennial.¹³

¹⁰ P.L. 106-173, §5, 114 Stat. 14 (2000).

¹¹ For example, the Ronald Reagan Centennial Commission (P.L. 111-25) specifically prohibits commission members from receiving compensation [§4(f)] but allows travel expenses to be reimbursed [§4(g)].

¹² P.L. 105-341, §4, 112 Stat. 3197 (1998); 16 U.S.C. §470a.

¹³ P.L. 99-624, §3, 100 Stat. 3497 (1986).

Commission Powers

Most commemorative commission statutes specify certain powers and authorities.¹⁴ These can include an authorization to hold hearings and other public meetings, obtain official data and information from federal agencies, utilize the U.S. mail, and secure administrative support services. For example, the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission statute stated

SEC. 7. POWERS.

- (a) HEARINGS AND SESSIONS.—The Commission may, for the purpose of carrying out this Act, hold such hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take such testimony, and receive such evidence as the Commission considers to be appropriate.
- (b) POWERS OF MEMBERS AND AGENTS.—Any member or agent of the Commission may, if authorized by the Commission, take any action that the Commission is authorized to take by this Act.
- (c) OBTAINING OFFICIAL DATA.—The Commission may secure directly from any department or agency of the United States information necessary to enable the Commission to carry out this Act. Upon request of the Chair of the Commission, the head of that department or agency shall furnish that information to the Commission.
- (d) MAILS.—The Commission may use the United States mails in the same manner and under the same conditions as other departments and agencies of the United States.
- (e) ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES.—Upon the request of the Commission, the Administrator of General Services shall provide to the Commission, on a reimbursable basis, the administrative support services necessary for the Commission to carry out its responsibilities under this Act.¹⁵

In addition, Congress often grants commemorative commissions the ability to accept gifts and donations. Without such an authorization, commissions would likely not be able to accept donations of money, personal services, or other in-kind gifts.¹⁶ For example, the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission statute stated

Sec. 7. POWERS.

- (g) DONATIONS.—The Commission may accept and use donations of—
 - (1) money;
 - (2) personal services; and
 - (3) real or personal property related to Benjamin Franklin or the occasion of the tercentenary of his birth.¹⁷

Staff

Commemorative commissions are usually authorized to hire staff. The number of staff members is not generally specified, however, which allows the commission flexibility in judging its own staffing requirements. Typically, the statute will specify maximum rates of pay, but the commission is often allowed to set specific pay rates within the confines of any guidelines. For example, the Thomas Jefferson Commemorative Commission statute stated

¹⁴ For more information on the powers generally granted to commissions, see CRS Report R40076, *Congressional Commissions: Overview and Considerations for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

¹⁵ P.L. 106-173, §7(c), 114 Stat. 16 (2000); 36 U.S.C. note prec. §101.

¹⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Principles of Federal Appropriations Law: Third Edition, Volume II*, GAO-06-382SP, February 2006, pp. 6-222-6-223, at <http://www.gao.gov/special.pubs/d06382sp.pdf>. Historically, the Comptroller General has issued guidance that states “the rule is that a government agency may not accept for its own use ... gifts or money or other property in the absence of specific statutory authority.”

¹⁷ P.L. 107-202, §7(g), 116 Stat. 742 (2002); 36 U.S.C. note prec. §101.

SEC. 7. STAFF AND SUPPORT SERVICES.

(a) EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR- The Commission shall have an executive director appointed by the chairperson of the Commission with the advice of the Commission. The executive director may be paid at a rate not to exceed the maximum rate of basic pay payable for GS-15 of the General Schedule.

(b) STAFF- The Commission may appoint and fix the pay of additional personnel as it considers appropriate, except that an individual so appointed may not receive pay in excess of the maximum rate of basic pay payable for GS-13 of the General Schedule.

(c) APPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN CIVIL SERVICE LAWS- The executive director and staff of the Commission may be appointed without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service, and may be paid without regard to the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of that title relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates, except as provided in subsections (a) and (b).

(d) STAFF OF FEDERAL AGENCIES- Upon request of the chairperson of the Commission, the head of any Federal agency may detail, on a nonreimbursable basis, any of the personnel of the agency to the Commission to assist it in carrying out its duties under this Act.

(e) EXPERTS AND CONSULTANTS- The chairperson of the Commission may procure temporary and intermittent services under section 3109(b) of title 5, United States Code, at a rate which does not exceed the daily equivalent of the annual rate of basic pay prescribed for level V of the Executive Schedule under section 5316 of such title.

(f) ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES- The Administrator of General Services shall provide to the Commission on a reimbursable basis such administrative support services as the Commission may request.¹⁸

Many commemorative commissions are also authorized to accept voluntary services. The Thomas Jefferson Commemorative Commission's statute specifically stated

Sec. 8. CONTRIBUTIONS.

(c) VOLUNTEER SERVICES- Notwithstanding section 1342 of title 31, United States Code, the Commission may accept and use voluntary and uncompensated services as the Commission determines necessary.¹⁹

Relationships with Other Entities

To fulfill their duties, most commemorative commissions serve as the federal coordination body for a federal recognition of a person, group, or event. In this role, the commission often works closely with nonfederal entities, including private groups, and state and local governments. Because of these cooperative efforts, federally created commissions are often only a portion of any commemoration, and federal funds appropriated to a commemorative commission are generally only a portion of the total funding ultimately expended for commemorative activities and events.

For example, the Brown v. Board of Education 50th Anniversary Commission statute stated

¹⁸ P.L. 102-343, §7, 106 Stat. 918 (1992); 36 U.S.C. §149 note.

¹⁹ P.L. 102-343, §8(c), 106 Stat. 919 (1992). Additionally, 31 U.S.C. §1342 places limitations on voluntary services. It states, "An officer or employee of the United States Government or of the District of Columbia government may not accept voluntary services for either government or employ personal services exceeding that authorized by law except for emergencies involving the safety of human life or the protection of property. This section does not apply to a corporation getting amounts to make loans (except paid in capital amounts) without legal liability of the United States Government. As used in this section, the term 'emergencies involving the safety of human life or the protection of property' does not include ongoing, regular functions of government the suspension of which would not imminently threaten the safety of human life or the protection of property."

SEC. 3. DUTIES.

In order to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Brown decision, the Commission shall—

- (1) in conjunction with the Department of Education, plan and coordinate public education activities and initiatives, including public lectures, writing contests, and public awareness campaigns, through the Department of Education’s ten regional offices; and
- (2) in cooperation with the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence, and Research in Topeka, Kansas (referred to in this Act as the “Brown Foundation”), and such other public or private entities as the Commission considers appropriate, encourage, plan, develop, and coordinate observances of the anniversary of the Brown decision.²⁰

Termination

Commemorative commission statutes usually include a termination provision. Termination dates are generally linked to either a fixed period of time after the establishment of the commission, the selection of members, or the date of submission of the commission’s final report. Alternatively, some commissions are given fixed calendar termination dates. For example, the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission statute provided a termination timeline after the commission issued its final report, while the Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution had a fixed calendar termination date. Those statutes stated

Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission

SEC. 10. TERMINATION.

The Commission shall terminate 120 days after submitting the final report of the Commission pursuant to section 8.²¹

Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution

TERMINATION

SEC. 7. The Commission shall terminate on December 31, 1989.²²

Consideration of Legislation in Congress

Once a commemorative commission bill is introduced, it is typically referred to a House or Senate committee based on the relationship of the bill’s subject matter to the jurisdictional statements of House and Senate committees defined in House Rule X and Senate Rule XXV. For example, the House version of the Route 66 Centennial Commission Act (H.R. 66, 116th Congress)²³ was referred to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure based on that committee’s jurisdiction over subjects involving transportation, transportation infrastructure, and “roads and the safety thereof.”²⁴ The Senate version (S. 1014, 116th Congress)²⁵ was referred

²⁰ P.L. 107-41, §3, 115 Stat. 226 (2001).

²¹ P.L. 106-173, §10, 114 Stat. 17 (2000).

²² P.L. 98-101, §7, 97 Stat. 722 (1983).

²³ H.R. 66 (116th Congress), passed the House, February 6, 2019.

²⁴ U.S. Congress, House, “Rule X, Organization of Committees, clauses 1(r)(19) and 1(r)(20),” *Constitution, Jefferson’s Manual, and Rules of the House of Representatives of the United States Congress One Hundred Sixteenth Congress*, H.Doc. 115-177 (Washington: GPO, 2019), at <https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/HouseRulesManual116/rule10.xml>.

²⁵ S. 1014 (116th Congress), became P.L. 116-256, 134 Stat. 1142 (2020).

to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, which exercises jurisdiction over the “construction and maintenance of highways” (clause 1(h) of Senate Rule XXV).²⁶

Commemorative commissions that address other policy areas would likely be referred to the appropriate committee of jurisdiction, depending on the topic addressed. Neither the House nor Senate rules provide any restrictions specifically concerning consideration of commission legislation.

Funding

Historically, commemorative commissions have been funded in two ways: through appropriations or through the commission’s solicitation of nonfederal money. At times, commissions are authorized both for appropriations and to receive and use donations. Some commemorative commissions are not provided with explicit authorization to solicit funds or accept donations. Commissions without the statutory authority to solicit funds or accept donations are generally prohibited from engaging in those activities.²⁷

Authorized Funding Levels

Since the 96th Congress, authorized commemorative commission statutes have varied widely in their funding provisions and the amount of funding authorized. **Table 2** lists the authorizing language and the funding amounts authorized by each of the acts. Of the 22 commissions,

- five were authorized specific funding levels for each fiscal year;
- two were authorized a lump-sum appropriation, which remained available to be expended over specified fiscal years;
- four were not authorized specific levels of funding. Instead, the acts’ language authorized “such sums as necessary” for an unspecified number of fiscal years;
- one authorized a specific level of funding for the first fiscal year, and such sums as necessary for an unspecified number of subsequent fiscal years;
- one was not specifically authorized any appropriation;
- seven were specifically barred from using federal funds; and
- two could only make expenditures from donated funds.

Table 2. Authorization for Appropriations for Commemorative Commissions

Commission Name	Funding Authorization Amount or Language
Route 66 Centennial Commission	All expenditures shall be made solely from donated funds
400 Years of African-American History Commission	All expenditures shall be made solely from donated funds
Frederick Douglass Centennial Commission	No federal funds are authorized or may be obligated for the commission

²⁶ For more information, see U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Rules and Administration, “Rules XXV, Standing Committees,” Rules of the Senate, at <https://www.rules.senate.gov/rules-of-the-senate>.

²⁷ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Principles of Federal Appropriations Law: Third Edition, Volume II*, GAO-06-382SP, February 2006, pp. 6-162, <http://www.gao.gov/special.pubs/d06382sp.pdf>.

Commission Name	Funding Authorization Amount or Language
National Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission	Such sums as necessary for FY2017 to FY2021, available for life of the commission
Virgin Islands of the United States Centennial Commission	No federal funds may be obligated for the commission
John F. Kennedy Centennial Commission	No federal funds may be obligated for the commission
United States Semiquincentennial Commission	Donations and an authorization of such sums as necessary
World War I Centennial Commission	No federal funds may be obligated for the commission
Ronald Reagan Centennial Commission	No federal funds may be obligated for the commission
Commission on the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade	No statutory authorization of appropriations
Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission	\$500,000 for period of FY2002 through FY2007
Brown v. Board of Education 50 th Anniversary Commission	\$250,000 for FY2003 and FY2004
Jamestown 400 th Commemoration Commission	Such sums as necessary
James Madison Commemorative Commission	\$250,000 for FY2001
Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission	Such sums as necessary
Centennial of Flight Commemoration Commission	\$250,000 for FY1999; \$600,000 for FY2000; \$750,000 for FY2001; \$900,000 for FY2002; \$900,000 for FY2003; and \$600,000 for FY2004
Women’s Progress Commemoration Commission	Such sums as necessary
Thomas Jefferson Commemoration Commission	\$250,000 for FY1993 and \$62,500 for FY1994
Dwight David Eisenhower Centennial Commission	\$50,000 for FY1987
Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Commission	\$220,000 per fiscal year for FY1984 through FY1992; and \$20,000 for period from October 1 through November 15, 1992
Commission on Eleanor Roosevelt Centennial	No statutory authorization of appropriations
Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution	\$300,000 for FY1984 and such sums as necessary for subsequent fiscal years through FY1989

Source: CRS compilation of commission authorization statutes.

- a. As enacted in 2016, the United States Semiquincentennial Commission’s statute (P.L. 114-196, 130 Stat. 685 [2016]), provided that “All expenditures of the Commission shall be made solely from donated funds” [§9(a)]. In 2020, Congress amended the Commission’s statute (P.L. 116-282, 134 Stat. 3386 [2020]) to allow for the potential of future appropriations (§2(d)). The amended language reads: “(a) In General.—All expenditures of the Commission shall be made from donations, earned income, and any funds made available to carry out this Act under subsection (f).” and “(f) Authorization of Appropriations.—There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as are necessary to carry out this Act.”

Appropriation of Authorized Funds

In general, commissions are funded directly by specific appropriations or through general agency appropriations. For example, the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution

received funding in both regular annual and supplemental appropriations acts,²⁸ and the Women’s Progress Commemoration Commission was funded through National Park Service (NPS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) appropriations.²⁹

It is also possible for the funding structure to change during the life of a commission. For example, from FY1999 through FY2001, the Centennial of Flight Commemorative Commission was funded through a specific line-item in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) operations appropriations. In subsequent years, the commission was funded through general agency appropriations.³⁰

Several of the commemorative commissions received agency appropriations under the NPS through the DOI. These appropriations have not appeared as specific appropriation act line-items. Instead, they were budgeted within agency appropriations under headings such as “Operations of the National Park System” or “National Recreation and Preservation.” For example, the Jamestown 400th Commemoration Commission was funded in FY2005 under the “National Recreation and Preservation” heading of the NPS appropriations, as part of a larger appropriation for related activities for the Jamestown 2007 celebration.³¹

Nonfederal Funding

Donations

In some cases, while the operational expenses of the commission itself were funded through the appropriation of federal funds, the legislation also authorized the commemorative commissions to accept donations, including donations of money, property, personal services, memorabilia, or volunteer labor.

For example, the Commission on the Eleanor Roosevelt Centennial was authorized to “accept donations of money, supplies, and services to carry out its responsibilities.”³² Similarly, the James Madison Commemorative Commission’s statute provided that the commission could

²⁸ For example, the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution received a \$330,000 appropriation in the 1985 Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 99-88, 99 Stat. 305 [1985]) and a \$775,000 appropriation in the 1986 Commerce, Justice, State, and Judiciary Appropriations Act (P.L. 99-180, 99 Stat. 1157 [1985]).

²⁹ U.S. Department of the Interior; National Park Service, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2002 Budget Justifications*, p. NPS-240, at <https://www.nps.gov/upload/fy-2002-greenbook.pdf#page=243>.

³⁰ From FY1999 until FY2001, Congress placed in the appropriations for FAA operations a specific amount for the commission. Beginning in FY2002, FAA did not specifically receive an appropriation for the commission. However, FAA allotted to the commission \$900,000 in FY2002, \$900,000 in FY2003, and \$400,000 in FY2004 from its operations account. Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2000, P.L. 106-69, 113 Stat. 991 (1999); Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2001, P.L. 106-346, 114 Stat. 1356A-5 (2000); Omnibus Appropriations Act, 1999, P.L. 105-277, Title III, §339, 112 Stat. 2681-472 (1998); Centennial of Flight Commemorative Commission Final Report, Appendix 2, available at <https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/flight/20110713060008/http://www.centennialofflight.gov/about/2004NtPlan/app2.htm>; Centennial of Flight Commemorative Commission Meeting Minutes, available at <https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/flight/20110712222609/http://www.centennialofflight.gov/about/minutes.htm>.

³¹ U.S. Department of the Interior; National Park Service, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Justifications*, p. NR&P-63, at https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/FY_2007_greenbook.pdf#page-288.

³² P.L. 98-162, §4(d), 97 Stat. 1014 (1983).

accept donations of money, personal services, and property, both real and personal, including books, manuscripts, miscellaneous printed matter, memorabilia, relics, and other material related to James Madison.³³

In some cases, the authorizing language placed specific limitations on donations. For example, the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Commission could

accept donations of money, property, or personal services, except that the Commission may not accept donations (1) the aggregate value of which exceeds \$25,000, in the case of an individual; or (2) the aggregate value of which exceeds \$50,000 in the case of donations from a foreign government, a corporation, a partnership, or any other person.³⁴

In at least one case, the authorizing language specified that only donated funds could be used to pay for commission expenses. For example, the 400 Years of African-American History Commission statute specified that “all expenditures of the Commission shall be solely made from donated funds.”³⁵

Donation Acceptance

For a majority of commemorative commissions, the commission’s statute does not mention the word “fundraise.” Instead, statutes commonly provide the commission with the authority to accept donations. For example, the Jamestown 400th Commemoration Commission was authorized to “accept donations and make disbursements of money, personal services, and real and personal property related to Jamestown and of the significance of Jamestown in the history of the United States.”³⁶ Examples of other commissions with similar language include the following:

- Eisenhower Memorial Commission:
 - (b) Donations. – (1) The Commission may accept, use, and dispose of gifts or donations of money, property, or personal services.³⁷
- Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution:
 - (h)(1) The Commission is authorized to accept, use solicit, and dispose of donations of money, property, or personal services.
 - (2) The Commission shall prescribe regulations under which the Commission may accept donations of money, property, or personal services.³⁸
- Women’s Progress Commemoration Commission:
 - (b) Donations.—The Commission may accept donations from non-Federal sources to defray the costs of the operations of the Commission.³⁹
- Commission on the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade:

³³ P.L. 106-550, §8, 114 Stat. 2749 (2000); 36 U.S.C. note perc. 101.

³⁴ P.L. 98-375, §7(a), 98 Stat. 1260 (1984).

³⁵ P.L. 115-102, §9, 131 Stat. 2252 (2018).

³⁶ P.L. 106-565, §4(d)(1), 114 Stat. 2815 (2000).

³⁷ P.L. 99-624, §5(b)(1), 100 Stat. 3498 (1986).

³⁸ P.L. 98-101, §5(h), 97 Stat. 721 (1983).

³⁹ P.L. 105-341, §7(b), 112 Stat. 3199 (1998); 16 U.S.C. §479a note.

(c) Powers of the Commission. —The Commission may—(1) accept donations and gift items related to the transatlantic slave trade, the institution of slavery, and the significance of slavery to the history of the United States.⁴⁰

- Brown v. Board of Education 50th Anniversary Commission:

(b) Gifts and Donations.—(1) Authority to accept.—The Commission may accept and use gifts or donations of money, property, or personal services.⁴¹

In addition, some commissions, such as the Centennial of Flight Commission, are provided with the authority to accept only nonmonetary donations. In that instance, the statutory language stated,

Donations.—The Commission may accept donations of personal services and historic materials relating to the implementation of its responsibilities under the provisions of this Act.⁴²

Fundraising

None of the 22 commemorative commission statutes discussed in this report contain specific language that authorizes fundraising.⁴³ Commissions, however, could be provided with authority to fundraise. To provide statutory fundraising authority, a commemorative commission could be required to develop a fundraising plan in a similar fashion to language that required such a plan from a noncommemorative commission—the National Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission. That statute stated

Fundraising Plan.—The Commission shall develop a fundraising plan for supporting the creation and maintenance of the Museum through contributions by the American people, and a separate plan on fundraising by the African American community.⁴⁴

Estimating Costs

Commission costs can vary widely. Overall expenses for any individual commission are dependent on a variety of factors, the most important of which are the number of paid staff and duration of the commission. Many commissions have few or no full-time staff; others employ large numbers. Additionally, some commissions provide compensation to members; others only reimburse members for travel expenses. Many commissions finish their work and terminate within a year of creation; in other cases, work may not be completed for several years.

Secondary factors that can affect commission costs include the number of commissioners, how often the commission meets or holds hearings, and the number and size of publications the commission produces. Although congressional commissions are primarily funded through congressional appropriations, many commissions are statutorily authorized to accept donations of money and volunteer labor, which may offset costs.

For more information on commission funding and costs, see CRS Report R45826, *Congressional Commissions: Funding and Expenditures*, coordinated by Jacob R. Straus.

⁴⁰ P.L. 110-183, §4(c)(1), 122 Stat. 609 (2008).

⁴¹ P.L. 107-41, §5(b), 115 Stat. 228 (2001).

⁴² P.L. 105-389, §8(a), 112 Stat. 3490 (1998).

⁴³ The 400 Years of African-American History Commission, however, has statutory language that requires all its expenditures to be paid from donated funds (P.L. 115-102, §9).

⁴⁴ P.L. 107-106, §3(b), 115 Stat. 1010 (2001).

Author Information

Jacob R. Straus
Specialist on the Congress

Acknowledgments

This report was initially coauthored with Matthew E. Glassman, former analyst on the Congress. The listed author is available to answer questions from congressional clients about its content

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.