

# Coalition 2026 forms to ensure monumental year sparks 'Philadelphia's renaissance'

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Philadelphia is preparing for a deluge of visitors in 2026 for the nation's semiquincentennial festivities, MLB All-Star Game, FIFA World Cup and more.

Philadelphia Business Journal; Getty Images

## In This Article



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Ten major tourism organizations and public entities are teaming up to create a coalition to prepare Philadelphia for 2026, when the city will host several large-scale events including FIFA World Cup matches and celebrations for America's 250th anniversary.

Coalition 2026 will serve as an organizing body for the major events and programming throughout the year, bringing all of these groups under one "umbrella" so each member knows what the others are working on and can identify opportunities to work together, according to Chair Michael DelBene.

The group's purpose isn't to dictate what kind of programming and events are held and when, and it's not meant to run the activations itself. Instead, its focus is to help "remove hurdles" that arise and provide the support needed for the busy year to run smoothly. As DelBene puts it, Coalition 2026 will "build the track" that the trains — in this case, the organizations and their programming — will run on.

"I want Philadelphia to win 2026. It's ours to win. It's also ours to lose. We're not going to let that happen," said DelBene, who is CEO of Welcome America Inc., which puts on the annual Wawa Welcome America celebration in the summer and the Philly Holiday Experience in December.

Coalition 2026 was awarded a small seed grant for an undisclosed amount from the William Penn Foundation last September to help jumpstart its formation. On April 28, the coalition received a \$1.5 million grant from the foundation to help set up the initial infrastructure needed for the group to begin its work, such as finding office space and hiring staff that will help facilitate communication and planning between organizations.

William Penn Foundation Board Chair Kathy Christiano said in a statement that the grant program is "pleased" to invest in the coalition and encourages others to support the coalition and its work.

DelBene hopes to raise a third round of funding in the fall through contributions from community members and local companies to continue the coalition's staffing efforts.

The idea of creating a group to oversee Philadelphia's preparations for 2026 has been a topic of discussion for the past several years. The April 2019 announcement that the city would be the host of the 2026 MLB All-Star Game compounded the already high expectations for the year, when Philadelphia will also be home to celebrations for the nation's semiquincentennial and two golf championships.

Being selected as one of the 11 U.S. host cities for the 2026 FIFA World Cup last year, however, finally kicked the plan into high gear.



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Michael DelBene is chair of Coalition 2026 and president and CEO of Welcome America Inc.

## Coalition 2026

Soon after the game-changing June announcement, DelBene began compiling a group made up of some of the city's biggest organizations in the tourism industry to figure out how the city could maximize the massive opportunity that has presented itself.

"Imagine the RNC, the DNC, the NFL Draft and the papal visit, all coming in one year," DelBene said. "That's the scale of what we're talking about."

The two major sporting events alone could bring more than half a million people to Philadelphia in 2026. The MLB All-Star Game is expected to bring in more than 100,000 visitors and generate upwards of 30,000 hotel room nights, according to the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the World Cup matches are projected to draw 450,000 people and generate a \$460 million economic impact for the region.

From those discussions, Coalition 2026 was formed. Members of the coalition are: Welcome America Inc.; Visit Philadelphia; Philadelphia Soccer 2026; the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau; Philadelphia250; the City of Philadelphia; The Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia; the Philadelphia Visitor Center Corp.; the World Affairs Council; and America250PA.

Outside of the 10 member organizations, Coalition 2026 will bring other community leaders and stakeholders together in the form of working groups, whose job it is to address critical aspects of the year. The eight groups created so far will focus on transportation, public safety, cleaning and greening, workforce development, public communications, community engagement, hospitality and signature events.

Members of the transportation working group, for example, could include officials from SEPTA and the city's Department of Aviation.

The signature events group is currently made up of 11 prominent institutions planning significant activations for 2026 but will continue to grow as more organizations announce their own programming for the year. Current members are the African American Museum of Philadelphia, Historic Philadelphia, the Mann Center for the Performing Arts, Mural Arts Philadelphia, the Museum of the American Revolution, the National Constitution Center, Opera Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Zoo, the Please Touch Museum, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and the World Affairs Council.

DelBene said the other working groups will also evolve as opportunities or problems arise throughout the next few years.

"We are very aware that we have to stay very nimble," he said. "Things may come up that we didn't expect. Things may happen that we weren't planning for. Events could get added."

Coalition 2026 also plans to put on regular meetings with different neighborhoods, industries and other groups throughout the city over the next couple of years to keep everyone updated on the coalition's progress and impact. The first of these events will be held in the fall in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce for Greater Philadelphia to introduce the coalition to the business community, provide a progress report and let companies know how they can get involved.

DelBene wants to get businesses involved in three ways: by donating to and investing in the organizations and events that the coalition is supporting through its work, serving as ambassadors of Philadelphia to outside companies, and encouraging employees to volunteer at events or serve as members of the working groups.

He already counts the creation of Coalition 2026 as an achievement of its own, but when Jan. 1, 2027 rolls around, DelBene will measure its success in two more ways.

If the organization has done its job, 2026 will have been the “spark for Philadelphia’s renaissance,” positioning the city as a global leader for hosting large-scale events and as a hub for living, working and getting an education. It will also have transformed the city into something “fundamentally different” than what it was in 2025.

“Our commitment is to change the narrative, change the landscape, change the canvas of Philadelphia, and make it more ripe for all of these successes,” DelBene said.