



Be a Texas Voter!

Voter Engagement Toolbox for Community Organizations



League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund

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Welcome to the League of Women Voters of Texas

Be a Texas Voter! Campaign

Why join the LWV-TX *Be a Texas Voter! Campaign*?

We are nonpartisan.

We don't endorse a party or a candidate.

We support and defend voters.

We want Texans to vote.

Partner with the League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) and encourage Texans to *Make Democracy Work*. As citizens, we have the power to determine who holds elected office. We elect officials from local school board members to the president of the United States. Elected officials make important decisions that have an impact on our everyday lives, for example, taxes, roads, minimum wage, teacher pay, social security, and health care.

Why conduct voter registration in your community?

Registering to vote is the first step to *Be a Texas Voter!*

Elections matter to the future of Texas communities and the quality of life of their residents. Providing voter registration in your community organization, business, school, or nonprofit, helps citizens create the tradition of voting and become more involved in their communities.

Why promote voting in your community?

Voting is the second step to *Be a Texas Voter!*

Low voter turnout in a community means that a small minority of citizens elect officials who decide policies that affect the community as a whole.

Low voter turnout decreases government accountability and increases political dissatisfaction within our communities. Using evidence-based methods to increase voter turnout among low-turnout populations is key to meeting the League mission to encourage informed and active participation in government.

The *Be a Texas Voter! Campaign* is nonpartisan.

There is one rule: Use of *Be a Texas Voter! Campaign* materials for voter registration, education, and engagement activities must be nonpartisan. Participants in the campaign must not support or oppose candidates or parties and must follow local and state voter registration guidelines.

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Getting Started With Voter Engagement: A Checklist for Nonprofits

Get Started



Before you begin, think about why voter engagement work is important. Take a look at the Nonprofit VOTE [Benefits of Voting Fact Sheets](#). Then make a list of the benefits to your organization, your community and the individuals you serve. This might include advancing your issues, building clout, or empowering your clients by promoting engaged and active citizenship.

CAPACITY

- Get buy-in from your executive director or other leadership.
- Choose a leader who can involve and motivate other volunteers or staff.
- Consider ways to engage the people you serve in your election activities.
- Identify assistance and resources from a community partner and your local elections office.

Resources

Nonprofit VOTE – [A Voter Participation Starter Kit](#) (for nonprofits and social service agencies)
In your community – find your [local League of Women Voters](#) and your [county election official](#)

KNOWLEDGE

- Understand the guidelines for 501(c)(3) organizations on how to stay nonpartisan.
- Learn about important voting dates in Texas.
- Find out what's on the ballot for the upcoming election.

Resources

Nonprofit VOTE – [Nonprofits, Voting & Elections: A 501\(c\)\(3\) Guide to Nonpartisan Engagement](#)
Texas Secretary of State – Who-When-Where-How-What – www.VoteTexas.gov
Vote411 – Enter your address to get personalized election information – www.VOTE411.org
League of Women Voters of Texas – A nonpartisan resource for voting and public policy issues – www.LWVTexas.org and [local Leagues](#)

PLANS

- Choose your target audience – clients, constituents, staff, your local community or others.
- Select appropriate opportunities for engagement: as part of daily services, in classes, at trainings or events, as a project for a youth group or incorporated into community outreach.
- Use the Be a Texas Voter! Timeline on page [13](#).

Voter Registration

Decide on your approach. Some nonprofits actively register voters, while others focus on promoting registration by announcing deadlines, making forms available or helping voters register online. If you plan to conduct voter registration make sure to:

- Familiarize yourself with [Texas voter registration](#), [how to obtain and return forms](#), and guidelines for [hosting a registration drive](#).
- Set concrete and attainable goals and tie them to deadlines.
- Target pre-existing opportunities—as part of services, tabling in your lobby, at events, or in the community at citizenship ceremonies, graduations, or other events.
- Enlist volunteers and staff to enhance your efforts.

Resources

Texas Secretary of State – [Texas Voting](#) and VoteTexas.Gov
League of Women Voters of Texas – [Handy Dandy Guide to Voting in the November 8, 2016 General Election](#) in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
Nonprofit VOTE – [Voter Registration Checklist](#) and [Getting Started With Voter Engagement: A Checklist](#)

Engaging Candidates

Plan at least one activity that engages local candidates on your issues.

- Identify a race that's important to your community—city council, mayor, state representative, Congressional representative, or other.
- Choose from five main candidate engagement options:
 - Candidate forum
 - Candidate appearances
 - Sharing evidence-based information
 - Candidate questionnaires
 - Asking questions at events
- Be familiar with nonpartisan guidelines for candidate work which requires equal treatment of all candidates in the same race.

Resources

Nonprofit VOTE – [Working with Candidates](#) and other resources available at the [Candidate Engagement website](#)
League of Women Voters of Texas – Ask your [local League](#) for help conducting a candidate forum.



501(c)(3) Permissible Nonpartisan Activities Checklist

The IRS tax code contains a single sentence related to the political activities of 501(c)(3) organizations. It says that 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations are "prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office." This political prohibition is generally known to mean:



A 501(c)(3) organization or staff member working for or representing the nonprofit MAY NOT:

- X Endorse a candidate.
- X Make a campaign contribution to, or an expenditure for, a candidate.
- X Rate candidates on who is most favorable to their issue(s).
- X Let candidates use the organization's facilities or resources, unless those resources are made equally available to all candidates at their fair market value.

A 501(c)(3) organization or staff member working for or representing the nonprofit MAY:

- ✓ Connect with candidates on a nonpartisan basis.
- ✓ Conduct a wide range of nonpartisan engagement activities to encourage participation, educate voters, and talk to candidates about their issues.

Permissible nonpartisan activities include:

- ✓ **Conduct or promote voter registration.** Conduct voter registration drives and incorporate registration into ongoing services. Promote voter registration on your website and in your communications.
- ✓ **Host or cosponsor a candidate forum.** Help your community familiarize themselves with the candidates and where they stand on the issues.
- ✓ **Distribute nonpartisan sample ballots, candidate questionnaires, or voter guides.** Provide nonpartisan information about who and what is on the ballot to help your constituents and community understand what's at stake.
- ✓ **Continue issue advocacy during an election.** Continue your regular issue advocacy or lobbying activities related to pending legislation. Election season is a great time to put a spotlight on your organization's mission and goals.
- ✓ **Educate voters on the voting process.** Demystify the voting process by helping voters determine where, when, and how to vote. Look up polling locations and describe to new voters what will happen at the polls.
- ✓ **Encourage staff to serve as poll workers or translators.** Nonprofit organization staff members and volunteers can facilitate the democratic process and help your community participate fully on Election Day.
- ✓ **Educate the candidates on your issues.** Send candidates your evidence-based information and policy ideas. Be sure to share the materials with every candidate in a particular race.
- ✓ **Organize get-out-the-vote activities.** Offer rides to the polls, distribute cards with election information, and turn Election Day into a celebration!
- ✓ **Encourage and remind people to vote.** Incorporate voting reminders into services and programs. Make the election visible in your communications and at your agency.

Resources

Nonprofit VOTE – [Nonprofits, Voting & Elections: A 501\(c\)\(3\) Guide to Nonpartisan Engagement](#)

Bolder Advocacy – [Election Checklist for 501\(c\)\(3\) Public Charities: Ensuring Election Year Advocacy Efforts Remain Nonpartisan](#)

IRS – [Election Year Activities and the Prohibition on Political Campaign Intervention for Section 501\(c\)\(3\) Organizations](#)

[Political Campaigns and Charities: The Ban on Political Campaign Intervention](#) (15-minute webinar & printable booklet)

Volunteer Deputy Registrars in Texas

Although you don't need to be a volunteer deputy registrar to assist people with voter registration, becoming deputized as a VDR provides additional training and allows you to give people registering to vote a receipt to prove they registered.

What is a volunteer deputy registrar (VDR)?

Volunteer deputy registrars are entrusted with the responsibility of officially registering voters in the State of Texas. They are appointed by county voter registrars and charged with helping increase voter registration in the state.

How do I become a VDR?

Contact your [county voter registrar](#). The county voter registrar will explain your county's training requirements for becoming a VDR, which usually involve attending a free 1-2 hour training session. Once you have completed training, the voter registrar will issue you a certificate of appointment and give you a receipt book (some counties have voter registration forms with tear-off receipts). You must be at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, and a Texas resident. All of the qualifications are listed in the online Texas Secretary of State [Texas Volunteer Deputy Registrar Guide](#).

What are the main duties of a VDR?

A VDR may distribute and accept a voter registration application form from any eligible resident of the county in which you are deputized and may hold voter registration drives. VDRs also may distribute and accept applications from voters who wish to change or correct information on their voter registration certificate (e.g., name or address). VDRs are required to review the application for completeness in the applicant's presence, provide a receipt, and deliver the applications within the required time to the county voter registrar office. There is no minimum time commitment required.

Can I still conduct voter registration if I am not a VDR?

Absolutely!

1. Use the self-addressed postage-paid form found at [county election offices](#).
2. Print a [voter registration application](#), have clients fill out, sign and mail in to their [county election office](#) (requires postage).
3. You may review the application for completeness. Unless you are a VDR, you MAY NOT collect completed forms. Neither VDRs nor non-VDRs may mail a completed form or provide an envelope or postage.

There is no online voter registration in Texas. Clients can fill out voter registration forms online, but the form must be printed, signed, stamped, and mailed in. Online forms are available at:

www.VOTE411.org
LWVTexas.turbovote.org/register
www.VoteTexas.gov/register-to-vote/

Resources

Texas Secretary of State – [Texas Volunteer Deputy Registrar Guide](#)
League of Women Voters of Texas – [Register to Vote](#)

Voter Registration Best Practices

Do Do Do Do Do Do Do Do Do Do

Voter Advocates

- ✓ Stay nonpartisan.
- ✓ Treat voter registration as another service you are offering.
- ✓ Provide voter registration *and* voter education (See Voter Education Best Practices on page **11**).
- ✓ Ask clients "Can I update your voter registration?" rather than "Do you want to register to vote?"
- ✓ Use an official statewide or county voter registration form. See [Where to Get an Application](#).
- ✓ Tell clients who complete a voter registration form that they will be mailed a voter registration card after their application is processed by the county clerk.
- ✓ If you are not a deputy voter registrar, you can still review the completed form to check for errors.
- ✓ Texans appreciate reminders about elections and voting. Have clients sign up for election reminders at LWVTexas.turbovote.org/register.

Deputy Voter Registrars

- ✓ Only deputy voter registrars may collect voter registration forms.
- ✓ Deputy voter registrars must review completed forms in the applicant's presence to make sure they are accurate and complete, provide receipts, and remind clients to keep the receipt as verification of their voter registration.
- ✓ Deputy voter registrars must deliver the completed voter registration forms in person to the county voter registrar by 5 pm on the 5th day after they are received *OR* on the voter deadline date, whichever occurs first. This includes weekends and holidays.
- ✓ Deputy voter registrars may only register voters in the county where they became deputy registrars. They may be deputy registrars in more than one county.

Working With Special Populations

- ✓ Do assure victims of domestic violence, assault, or stalking that they can keep their address private if they register to vote. Visit [The Address Confidentiality Program website](#) for more information.
- ✓ Register people with a past felony conviction if they have completed their term of incarceration, parole, supervision, or probation (i.e., "off paper").
- ✓ Register people who are homeless by having them describe where they live and/or using a shelter or outreach center as their mailing address.
- ✓ Texas Disability Project has created a [REV UP Campaign](#) designed to get more people with disabilities and supporters registered and voting!

Voter Registration Don'ts

Don't Don't Don't Don't Don't Don't Don't Don't

- X *Don't* engage in political discussions or tell your personal opinions about political issues or candidates.
- X *Don't* link voter registration to a single issue.
- X *Don't* determine whether applicants are qualified to vote.
- X *Don't* make applicants provide their sex or a phone, Social Security, or driver's license number.
- X *Don't* advise applicants on how to vote or rate candidates on issues.
- X *Don't* photocopy or print multiple copies of an applicant's voter registration form.
- X *Don't* provide an envelope or postage to applicants to mail their completed voter registration form.
- X *Don't* accept a voter's application for submission if you are not a deputy voter registrar.
- X *Don't* use a drop box for voters to leave their applications.
- X *Don't* mail completed voter registration forms.

Talking to Texans about Voter Registration

Adapted from *Texas Voter Registration Toolkit for Community Health Centers* (pp. 10-11),
published by the Texas Association of Community Health Centers (2015).

Asking the Voter Registration Question

Helping someone register to vote starts with having a good way to ask the question. Use your experience to identify what works best for you. Here are suggestions.

Make a transition to voter registration:

"Another important service we offer is helping you register to vote or update your registration. Your being a voter really matters to your community. I can help you quickly register to vote or update your registration right now."

Start with this question:

"Can I update your voter registration?" This has proven more effective than asking *"Do you want to register to vote?"*

If the person says they're registered, be sure to ask:

"Have you moved recently?" Many people move and need to update their voter registration or they will be unable to vote.

"Would you like to sign up for voting and election reminders?" LWVTexas.turbovote.org/register

It's Fast, Easy... and Convenient

Assure the client it's easy to do and can be done quickly.

"It'll just take a few minutes."

"Here, let me show you how easy it is." Show the form and the sections to be filled out.

Remind them doing it now saves the time and the trouble of doing it later.

"Doing it here will save you time. We already have a postage paid form for you to fill out and pop in the mail."

Or, if you are volunteer deputy registrar (VDR):

"Doing it here will save you time. We already have the form, and as a volunteer deputy registrar, I'll return it for you to the correct election office."

It's Important

If people hesitate or say they don't want to register, talk about the importance of voting or the importance to the nonprofit or their community.

"If you're not registered, you can't vote—don't miss the opportunity express your opinion in the next election."

"Every vote counts. Some elections are decided by less than 100 votes."

Acknowledging Client Responses

1. Client response: *"Yes. I'm already registered and my information is current."*

Acknowledgement: *"That's great! Please remind your family and friends to register, too. Would you like to sign up for election reminders?"*

LWVTexas.turbovote.org/register

2. Client response: *"Yes but I moved recently."*

Acknowledgement: *"Doing it here will save you time."*

Or, if you are Volunteer Deputy Registrar (VDR)

Acknowledgement: *"Doing it here will save you time. We already have the form, and as a volunteer deputy registrar, I'll return it for you to the correct election office."*

3. Client response: *"I don't want to register" or "I don't care about voting."*

Acknowledgement: *"I understand. There are a lot of challenges out there. It's important the voices in our communities are heard. Our ability to serve people like you can depend on the support of elected officials and it helps when they know our community is registered to vote."*

4. Client response: *"I don't have time."*

Acknowledgement: *"I know you are really busy. The form only takes a couple minutes. You can save time by registering with me today. We already have a postage paid form for you to fill out and for you to pop in the mail."*

Or, if you are Volunteer Deputy Registrar (VDR)

Acknowledgement: *"Doing it here will save you time. We already have the form, and as a Volunteer Deputy Registrar, I'll return it for you to the correct election office."*

Know Your Voter Registration and Education Opportunities

Where can community organizations provide voter registration activities?

- First, start by registering your volunteers, board members, and staff!
- Lobbies and waiting rooms
- Check-in station
- Health fairs
- National Voter Registration Day (4th Tuesday in September) www.NationalVoterRegistrationDay.org
- Anywhere you conduct outreach activities!

Be a Texas Voter!

❖ Voter registration is the First Step

❖ Voting is the Second Step

Educating New Voters

Encourage your new voters to "be informed" about voting and elections.

After a newly registered voter votes in one election, it is common for them to become a repeat voter. New voters are interested in participating but many are uncertain about what will happen when they go to vote and are intimidated by the process. Help new voters overcome these barriers by increasing voter confidence and instilling a tradition of voting.

Share nonpartisan voter and candidate information from the resources at the bottom of the page. Promote the [LWV-TX Voters Guide](#) on your website, social media, and educational materials.

What New Voters Want

- Reasons why to vote, from a peer perspective
- Help with or training on how to vote
- Basic information about what is on the ballot

Voter Education Best Practices

- ✓ Remind registered voters to vote in all Texas elections. Your vote counts!
- ✓ Provide a few examples about why it is important to vote.
- ✓ Have voters sign up to get text or email reminders for elections or early voting at LWVTexas.TurboVote.org/register
- ✓ Help voters understand where to find what is on the ballot, who the candidates are, and where to vote. Share the resources at the bottom of the page.
- ✓ Explain that they have a right to vote.
- ✓ Let them know that businesses are required to let their employees vote.
- ✓ If a first time voter, simply explain what happens when you go to vote.
 - Show a photo ID – explain or show the seven forms of acceptable ID to the person. [Required Identification for Voting in Person](#)
 - Sign a form to record that you are voting.
 - Each county has a different voting system:
 - Some counties vote with a paper ballot. Just fill out and turn in.
 - Many counties vote with a voting machine. To practice on the voting machine your county uses, visit this Texas Secretary of State website, scroll to the bottom of the page, and select your county name and hit GO: www.VoteTexas.gov/voting/how/
- ✓ If it is close to Election Day:
 - Ask about their plan to vote.
 - Offer transportation information.
 - Provide a sample ballot found on your county website.
- ✓ *Celebrate Election Day and Democracy!*

Resources – Sample Ballots, Where to Vote, Candidate Information

Vote411 – Enter your address to get personalized election information – www.VOTE411.org

League of Women Voters of Texas – A nonpartisan resource for voting information – www.LWVTexas.org/elections.html and [local Leagues County election office](#)

Local newspapers

Local library – Some local Leagues distribute voters guides to their local libraries

Promote Voting and Elections in Texas on Your Website and Social Media

Voting is What Makes Democracy Work

Most Texans have access to the Internet and social media on their cell phones.

1. Promote voting and elections on your website! Place a link to the [League of Women Voters of Texas](#) or your [local League](#) where voters can find election information, the nonpartisan *LWV-TX Voters Guide*, and other voter education information. Your clients will know that your organization believes voting is important.
2. Promote voting and election information on social media especially the month before an election. Follow and share [LWV-TX Facebook](#) posts or retweet [@LWVTexas](#) tweets



Other Ways to Promote Voting in Your Community

- Put up posters and signs in waiting areas, hallways, exam rooms, or anywhere people can see them. Important election dates and voter information posters are available at [www.LWVTexas.org](#).
- Have volunteers and/or staff wear buttons or stickers that promote voting.
- Mention the availability of voter registration and voter information in your newsletter or on inserts in mailings.



See original, nonpartisan posters for printing and public distribution at [www.aiga.org/vote/](#)

LWV-TX Election Reminders

Texans register, yet few vote –

- **Never forget to vote!** Sign up for voting and election reminders sent via text or email at LWVTexas.TurboVote.org/register.
- Once you're signed up, TurboVote sends you text or email reminders about registration deadlines, upcoming elections, polling places, photo voter ID requirements, and more.
- Strengthen your community by increasing the number of voters through voting reminders.



Be a Texas Voter! Timeline & Important Dates

January–March

- Designate a leader who will oversee and coordinate your *Be a Texas Voter! Campaign*.
- Hold an all staff meeting to familiarize employees on the benefits of voting.
- Sign up Texans for voting and election reminders at LWVTexas.TurboVote.org/register
- **Monday, February 1, 2016:** Last day to register to vote for March 1 primary.
- **Tuesday, February 16, 2016:** First day of early voting for March 1 primary.
- **Friday, February 26, 2016:** Last day of early voting for March 1 primary.
- **Tuesday, March 1, 2016:** Election Day. Celebrate Democracy!

April

- Create voter engagement plan and set goals for the year.
- Review NonprofitVote webinars and website. www.nonprofitvotes.org
- **Thursday, April 7, 2016:** Last day to register to vote for May 7 local election.
- **Monday, April 25, 2016:** Last day to register to vote for May 24 primary runoff.
- **Monday, April 25, 2016:** First day of early voting for May 7 local election.

May

- Learn Texas voting rules at www.VOTE411.org or www.VoteTexas.gov
- **Tuesday, May 3, 2016:** Last day of early voting for May 7 local election.
- **Saturday, May 7, 2016:** Election Day. Celebrate Democracy!
- **Monday, May 16, 2016:** First day of early voting for May 24 primary runoff.
- **Friday, May 20, 2016:** Last day of early voting for May 24 primary runoff.
- **Tuesday, May 24, 2016:** Primary Runoff. Celebrate Democracy!

June

- Kick off your **Be a Texas Voter! Campaign** for the General Election.
- Find partners to help with voter registration.
- Start summer voter registration events.
- Continue to sign up Texans for voting and election reminders at LWVTexas.TurboVote.org/register.
- Meet your county election official.

July

- Add **Be a Texas Voter!** registration opportunities to your community events.
- Begin brainstorming and planning for **National Voter Registration Day**. Decide how your community organization will participate. Visit www.LWVTexas for more information.
- Continue to sign up Texans for voting and election reminders at LWVTexas.TurboVote.org/register.

August

- Promote community voter engagement events and **National Voter Registration Day**.
- Continue to sign up Texans for voting and election reminders at LWVTexas.TurboVote.org/register.

September

- The best time to start promoting **Be a Texas Voter!** for the General Election.
- Celebrate **National Voter Registration Day** (fourth Tuesday of September).
- Sign up Texans for voting and election reminders at LWVTexas.TurboVote.org/register.
- Promote the **Be a Texas Voter! Campaign** in person, emails, website, & social media.

October

- Promote early voting with your clients, volunteers, and staff in person, on social media, on your website. Post flyers and signs.
- Promote the *LWV-TX Voters Guide* and www.VOTE411.org in person, emails, website, and social media.
- **Tuesday October 11, 2016: Last day to register to vote for the November 8 election.**
- **Monday October 24, 2016: First day of early voting for the November 8 election.**

November

- **Friday November 4, 2016: Last day of early voting for the November 8 election.**
- Encourage your staff and clients to vote.
- Continue to have Texans sign up for voting and election reminders at LWVTexas.TurboVote.org/register.
- **Tuesday November 8, 2016: Election Day. Celebrate Democracy!**

December

- Review the year and prepare for the next.

Available Resources



www.LWVTexas.org

Nonpartisan LWV-TX *Voters Guide*, information on elections, and links to federal, state, and local elected officials. Issue information center has League positions on state governmental issues.



www.VOTE411

A nonpartisan resource provided by the League of Women Voters. Find registration, voting, and election information, along with your personalized LWV-TX *Voters Guide*.



www.VoteTexas.gov

Official information on how to register to vote and how, where, and when to vote provided by the Office of the Texas Secretary of State.



www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/votregduties.shtml

Find county voter registration officials and county elections websites.



www.nonprofitvote.org

Nonpartisan resources to help nonprofit organizations integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.



Texas Association of Community Health Centers

www.tachc.org

Information on voter registration activities for community health centers and a *Texas Voter Registration Toolkit for Community Health Centers*. For more information, contact Andrea Abel, TACHC Voter Registration Project Coordinator at aabel@tachc.org or (512) 329-5959



My Texas My Health

www.mytexasmyhealth.org/vote/

Developed by TACHC as a way to connect patients and consumers with Certified Application Counselors at community health center, the website now has voter education information and resources



REV UP America – Make the DISABILITY VOTE Count Campaign Texas – REV UP Toolkit

Developed by Texas Disability Project to empower and encourage voting.



www.communityhealthvote.net

Nonpartisan resources to help community health centers integrate voter registration assistance into patient services provided.



National Voter Registration Day

<http://NationalVoterRegistrationDay.org/>

Find information on how your organization can take part and make a difference on National Voter Registration Day.

Additional Online Resources

Voter Engagement Resource Library – Nonprofit Vote
www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/

Voter Participation Starter Kit – Nonprofit Vote
www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2010/08/a-voter-participation-starter-kit.pdf

Nonprofits, Voting & Elections: A 501(c)(3) Guide to Nonpartisan Voter Engagement – Nonprofit Vote
www.nonprofitvote.org/nonprofits-voting-elections-online/

Kit de Herramientas Para Inscripción de Votantes: Para Agencias sin Fines de Lucro y Servicios Sociales – Nonprofit Vote
www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2012/01/a-voter-registration-toolkit-spanish.pdf

Special Thanks



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www.tachc.org