

MINUTES
TEXAS AMERICA250 COMMISSION
Bullock Texas State History Museum
1800 N. Congress, 4th Floor Boardroom
Austin, Texas 78701
January 8, 2026
11:00 AM
VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING

The Texas America250 Commission convened with the following designated Members of Commission Agencies in attendance: Margaret Koch, Presiding Chair, Bullock Texas State History Museum, Pat Hardy, State Board of Education, and Lynn Young, America250 Representative.

Tim Fennell, Director, Travel Texas, Economic Development and Tourism, Governor's Office, Rodney Franklin, Director of Parks, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Jelain Chubb, State Archivist & Director, Texas State Library and Archives Commission were excused.

I. Call to Order and Establishment of a Quorum, Introductions

Margaret Koch, serving as the Commission's presiding chair, called the meeting to order at 11:04 am.

Chair Koch requested that AI note-taking through Zoom be deactivated during Texas America250 Commission meetings.

In the interest of time, Chair Koch invited members of the advisory panel to introduce themselves via the meeting chat. The chat record was saved and filed for recordkeeping purposes.

Chair Koch then conducted roll call. A quorum was not present.

II. Discussion and Possible Action on Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

As a quorum was not present, the Commission was unable to take action on approval of the previous meeting minutes.

III. Consideration of the Following Agenda Items:

1. Presentation on My America 2026 — Rick Rendon, Founder, Empower Peace

Rick Rendon, Founder of Empower Peace, along with Molly Lomenzo, presented on [My America 2026](#), a national youth engagement initiative commemorating America's 250th anniversary.

Mr. Rendon provided background on Empower Peace's post-September 11 initiatives, including the original *My America* project, which invited students in Massachusetts to write messages of peace, hope, and patriotism on 6-inch by 6-inch fabric tiles. More than 50,000 tiles were collected, featuring tributes

to first responders and others, and were assembled into a mosaic of an American flag approximately half the size of a football field.

Building on this model for the 250th anniversary, *My America 2026* aims to engage students in grades K–12 across all 50 states through artistic expression, civic action, and public commemoration. Participating students will create individual tiles with messages, drawings, and poems reflecting what unity, democracy, and being American mean today. These tiles will be assembled into a large American flag mosaic, anticipated to measure approximately 150 feet by 80 feet, or roughly half the size of a football field.

Free classroom kits are expected to be available beginning in late January, with completed tiles due as soon as possible and no later than **October 1, 2026**.

For additional information, educators and partners may contact Molly Lomenzo.

Pat Hardy volunteered to spearhead this initiative in Texas.

Emily Hermans, Texas Historical Commission (THC), offered to distribute educator toolkits to Texas school districts.

Sheri Capehart, Sister Cities International, expressed interest in sharing the initiative with Sister Cities International and exploring contacts at AT&T Stadium in Arlington as a potential host site for the completed flag.

Item 2. Presentation on Freedom Trucks — Brittany Baldwin and Ben Miller, America250

Brittany Baldwin, Senior Policy Advisor – America 250 presented on the **Freedom Trucks** initiative.

Ms. Baldwin explained that Freedom Trucks is a partnership with **Freedom250**, modeled after the Freedom Train from the Bicentennial era. Through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the initiative has developed **six mobile museum exhibits**, each housed in an 18-wheeler truck, that tell the story of the United States' path to independence.

Each of the six trucks will feature identical museum-quality content, allowing them to travel independently and reach communities across the country. The trucks will travel across the country, bringing museum-quality exhibitions directly to communities nationwide.

A schedule of tour stops will be made available on the [Freedom 250](#) website, along with a request form for communities interested in hosting a stop.

During the discussion, Pat Hardy suggested the State Fair of Texas and rodeos as potential stops for the exhibition. Monte Monroe shared hopes that the Freedom Trucks would also visit rural areas of Texas.

Item 3. Presentation on Sister Cities International — Joe Blackman, MBE, Board Member, Austin Sister Cities International

Joe Blackman, MBE, and Sheri Capehart of Sister Cities International (SCI) provided a presentation on the organization and its role in supporting the U.S. Semiquincentennial.

They shared that Sister Cities International is a national nonprofit organization that links U.S. communities with global networks. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the organization was founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956 to promote international understanding through people-to-people connections. SCI expressed enthusiasm for leveraging its network and established community connections to support Semiquincentennial initiatives nationwide.

Mr. Blackman and Ms. Capehart noted that SCI recently became an official partner of America250.org and is focused on building global connections in support of the U.S. 250th anniversary celebrations. SCI highlighted its extensive network of approximately 500 member cities across the United States, many of which maintain direct relationships with mayoral offices and local communities.

SCI also shared that it has launched a sports diplomacy initiative to cross international boundaries during the FIFA World Cup, noting that Arlington will host more games than any other state.

Item 4. Report on Website Analytics, Engagement, and Advertising

Chair Koch provided a report on website analytics, engagement, and advertising.

Since its launch, the Texas America250 website has received approximately 12,000 visitors, with a small margin of error due to automated bot traffic. Most traffic originates from organic web searches, primarily Google and Bing, with the fourth-largest referral source being the Story of Texas website, reflecting effective partner cross-promotion.

The most visited page is the homepage, followed by the Events page, indicating strong interest in programming and activities. Chair Koch noted that traffic trends, referral sources, and engagement metrics will continue to be monitored as content, outreach, and promotional efforts expand throughout the year.

Chair Koch encouraged all advisory panel members to repost America250 content on their social channels to broaden reach.

IV. Public Comment

Tim Gleisner, TSLAC, provided updates on recent initiatives. He announced that TSLAC has shipped out 538 traveling exhibits and recently launched the [Texas America250 Reading Challenge](#).

Margaret Koch reminded the group that a survey link to collect oral histories from Texas veterans is available on the TXAM250 website.

V. Adjournment

Next meeting is currently scheduled for February 12, 2026 at 11am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:09 p.m.