

August 2026: Mid-year update

VANTAGE POINT



ISSUE NO. 17



LETTER FROM ESTHER

Dear TAT friends,

This year is moving along quickly and eventfully as TAT turns the corner on several new training resources, a major capital investment project and unprecedented anti-trafficking campaigns. In this edition of Vantage Point, we are sharing where we have been focusing our work so far this year and what is yet to come. From launching a new, impressive mobile exhibit, to releasing new training for the truck stop industry, seeing our partners in law enforcement and industry supporting survivors and re-energizing the state trucking associations toward anti-trafficking, we continue to see the spark of individual action that leads to collective movement.

Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." TAT's community of people who are motivated, equipped and strategic in action is making a difference. Across a variety of stakeholders, industries, agencies, missions, business models, funders and capacities, we see momentum building! Beyond training and equipping, the TAT team is constantly building relationships towards a shared goal of eradicating human trafficking. If you are reading this letter and aren't already involved, give me a call. We would love to see your spark join this community.



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

-Margaret Mead

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Esther', is written over a dark blue background.

Major Jon E. Smithers

Commander of the Indiana State Police Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division



Commander Smithers (left) volunteered at the Freedom Drivers Project during last year's Indy 500, along with other members of the Indiana State Police.

Once upon a time, there were three Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division (CVED) officers named Mike from three Midwest states -- Mike Eslinger from Indiana, Mike Krumm from Michigan and Mike Crispin from Ohio. Unwittingly laying the groundwork for what would later become the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance's (CVSA) Human Trafficking Awareness Initiative (HTAI), the three decided, one year, that during National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, they would work as a team to blanket their states with TAT materials to fight human trafficking by spreading awareness. And, in the mode of trash-talking sports enthusiasts who unabashedly touted the supremacy of their state's college teams, to one another and others, they decided they'd also use their Tri-State Initiative as a means to continue their friendly competition, measuring which group of officers went to more places, spoke to more people and distributed the most TAT materials.

The Tri-State Initiative proved so successful that Michigan's Krumm pushed the CVSA to replicate it internationally, which they eventually did in the form of the HTAI. Major Smithers remembers those days with the Mikes, having served as a Captain under Eslinger during the Tri-State Initiative era. He said, "I really became aware of the human trafficking problem, and TAT, when I came to CVED in 2013. CVED had developed a strong relationship with our counterparts in Michigan, particularly Mike Krumm, and he was a big advocate for TAT. His influence led us to invite TAT to come to our office and train all our troopers and motor carrier inspectors with the TAT model. I believe we had all our CVED personnel fully trained with the TAT model by late 2014."

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In the Spotlight: Major Jon E. Smithers (continued)

A native Hoosier, law enforcement hadn't been on Smithers' radar in college, having graduated from Ball State University with a marketing degree. But after graduation, a trooper he deeply respected mentored him and convinced him law enforcement was a great way to serve his community.

Smithers graduated from the Indiana State Police Academy in December 1994 and spent five years as a road trooper with the Indiana State Police (ISP) in Indianapolis. From 2000 on, his career evolved with promotion after promotion, becoming captain and then assistant commander of CVED until promoted to his current position as major and commander in 2017. Along the way, he was selected to be part of the first, large class of troopers outside of the CVED to receive the certifications required to conduct federal CMV inspections, a certification he's maintained. He also worked for six years as a hostage negotiator.



"The Indiana State Police have been killing it, especially these last couple of years, on engagement," stated TAT Deputy Director and Senior Director of External Affairs Kylla Lanier. "Whether through their help at the Indy 500 last year, the World Cup HTAI in July, executing the Iowa MVE or Jon assigning law enforcement modules yearly to his troops, they are committed and consistent in their efforts, and I believe, as part of that original vanguard from the Tri-State Initiative, Jon's leadership has been a critical factor."

But Smithers, a man who prefers elevating his teammates rather than taking up the spotlight himself, gives a great deal of credit to ISP Motor Carrier Inspector, Zone Coordinator Kimberly Hill. "Hill leads CVED's human trafficking efforts," he commented. "She speaks to trucking industry and private groups several times a year across the state and handles almost all media interviews regarding human trafficking. Every industry presentation she does, no matter the main topic, she includes a human trafficking section. Her passion for raising awareness has led her to serve as secretary on the leadership team for CVSA's Human Trafficking Prevention Program. And I credit TAT for creating the passion and awareness around fighting human trafficking. In my opinion, it's the key to combating the problem in the U.S. I don't know of any group that does it better."

Smithers said it was also at Hill's suggestion several years ago that he reviewed TAT's entire catalog of law enforcement training material and decided TAT's material was the way the ISP should fulfill the state law requiring every state certified police office to complete human trafficking training annually. After needed agency approvals, ISP has now been using TAT's law enforcement training for its 1300 enforcement personnel for three years.

Although Smithers hasn't personally encountered a human trafficking case, he now treats every encounter as a potential human trafficking situation. "I'm more aware of it and use the knowledge I've gained from TAT in every commercial vehicle inspection or traffic stop I make,"

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In the Spotlight: Major Jon E. Smithers (continued)

he said. “I’ve learned that trafficking not only relates to sex for sale but also to labor trafficking. I think the education in TAT’s training modules has had that same effect on every ISP trooper and motor carrier inspector.”

Married to Barbara, the former vice president of the Indiana Motor Truck Association, who he met through trucking and with whom he shares four adult children, Smithers is up for retirement at the end of 2028, and harkening back to those sports-minded Mikes, he’s got a specific goal in mind.

“I am an avid sports fan, especially baseball,” he confessed, “and I want to attend a game at every major league baseball ballpark. Currently, I’ve been to 13, but once I retire, I hope to speed up that process, so I can then start on the minor league ballparks. I really enjoy traveling and baseball, and they seem to mesh well.”



“...trafficking not only relates to sex for sale but also to labor trafficking.”

–Major Jon E. Smithers

New scholarship opportunity supports survivors

Applications from 276 survivors of human trafficking are now under review for a \$5000 Survivor Scholarship from the American Bus Association Foundation (ABAF), in partnership with TAT. This scholarship, specifically aimed at supporting a survivor of human trafficking, adds a new opportunity to the ABAF scholarship program. The scholarship can be used to cover expenses, including, but not limited to, education, housing, food assistance, daycare services, treatment recovery or rehabilitation needs.



**American
Bus Association™**

The American Bus Association (ABA) has been a TAT partner and supporter since the launch of TAT’s bus program in early 2018 and, in 2024, received the TAT Champion Award in the Association Category for its unwavering commitment to combating human trafficking. By opening doors and providing platforms for TAT to reach its members, the ABA has been instrumental in advancing TAT’s mission within the bus industry and continues to deepen their anti-trafficking initiatives through education, awareness and collaboration.

“At ABAF, we understand the importance of supporting survivors to rebuild their lives however they see fit,” said Lew Myers, ABA director of Government Relations and Research. “Since its inception, the Foundation has awarded more than \$1 million in financial support through scholarships, and it only made sense to incorporate ABA’s commitment to combating human trafficking into the scholarship program. We are proud to be the first TAT industry partner to launch a scholarship like this and honored to play a small part in supporting a survivor’s healing journey.”

State Trucking Associations engaged in friendly competition to fight human trafficking

From January through July 30, TAT ran the STA (state trucking association) Driven-to-Defend Challenge, designed to excite and motivate STAs to keep the issue of human trafficking before their membership.

Thirty-five STAs competed against each other to earn badges and make an impact in the fight against human trafficking. Badges were awarded for completing activities such as hosting TAT to speak, spreading awareness, distributing materials, amplifying reach, engaging community and promoting impact. Each badge had several activities to choose from and a name like Hub, Spotlight, Dispatcher, Storyteller, Community and Influencer. To earn a badge, an STA only had to choose to do one activity listed but was free to do more. STAs could track each activity they completed, as well as those completed by other STAs, on an interactive map.



STA Driven-to-Defend Challenge badges

"The response to the STA Driven-to-Defend Challenge has been incredibly encouraging," said Chris Moreno, TAT Industry Training Program specialist, "and we're seeing strong momentum nationwide. More importantly, the challenge has created stronger collaboration and engagement with state trucking associations, and their receptiveness and commitment to this initiative has been outstanding. Additionally, it provided TAT with 22 presentation opportunities at state events."

"For most people, learning about the harsh realities of human trafficking is a transition from ignorance to enlightenment, and in my own life, I owe that education to TAT," declared Mark Colson, president and CEO of the Alabama Trucking Association (ATA). "Once we are educated about the prevalence of human trafficking in all of our communities, then ignorance is no longer an option. We are only then left with the choice to ignore or to act. Thank God TAT exists, because it allows us to act and be a part of an organization that educates the public and provides human trafficking awareness training to professionals, like pro-truck drivers, to be the eyes and ears, report human trafficking and save lives. From trade associations promoting TAT training to its members, to supporting victims' advocacy organizations that help victims break this vicious cycle, we all have a duty to be part of the solution."

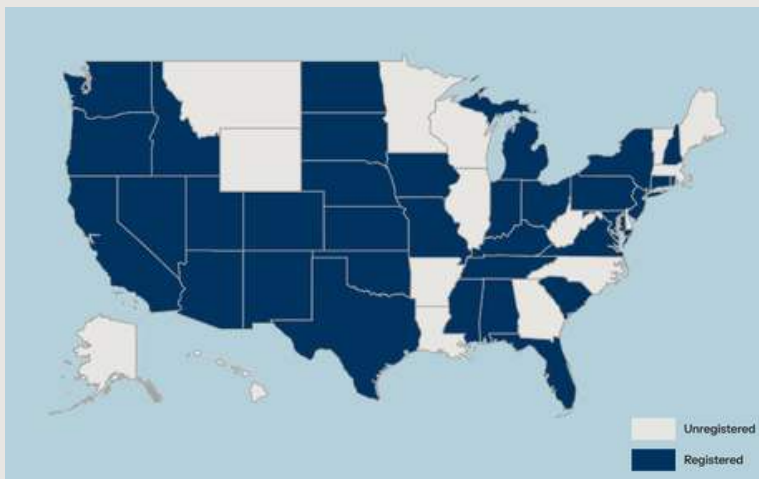
By the end of the challenge, the Trucking Association of New York (TANY) and the Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association (PMTA) had completed all six badges. The Nebraska Trucking Association (NTA) and the ATA weren't far behind, having each completed five of six badges.

Rebecca Oyler, PMTA president and CEO, said, "As leaders in the trucking industry, we, too, have the ability to choose to make a difference. Through training drivers, educating colleagues and

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Mid-year highlights and updates: STA challenge (continued)

spreading the word about TAT's resources, we can mobilize the eyes and ears of the trucking industry to stop human trafficking. We appreciate everything TAT does to empower our members to act."



"Having TAT as part of our Safety Symposium was a powerful reminder that our role as an industry goes beyond freight; we're part of a larger network that can make a real difference," Kendra Hems, TANY president, said. "TANY is proud to continue prioritizing this issue and partnering with organizations leading the charge."

Screenshot of the interactive map on the challenge webpage

TAT by the Numbers January-July 2026

- Total reported TAT-trained individuals now exceeds 2.65 million.
- More than 584,154 educational materials were distributed, including 402,730 wallet cards, 4,246 posters (not including World Cup posters), 136,602 window decals and 3,397 World Cup campaign resources.
- 599 total agencies trained on law enforcement modules and through in-person trainings, an increase of 122 from last semester.
- 36 total agencies trained on State Drivers Licensing Agency modules, the same as last semester.
- 18 states now require industry-specific training at the CDL school level as three more were added – Idaho, Nebraska and Iowa.
- 11 Coalition Builds were held.
- 1,323 people have completed the new TAT in Action: Trucking Refresh training, with 37 companies committed to implementing it.
- 19,466 downloads of the TAT app, a change of 33.26% over last semester. 1,480 clicks to the hotlines or 911, a change of 145.03% over last semester.

2.65+

MILLION professionals trained!

Youth on Transportation Safety Month more than doubles participants

This May, in TAT's second annual Youth on Transportation (YOT) Safety Month, 54 partners took part, more than doubling last year's participation of 22. Partners included 10 from school transportation, 15 from transit, 17 from associations, five from law enforcement/government agencies, three task force partners, three NGO partners, one casino partner and one energy partner.

YOT Safety Month unites the transportation industry and other key stakeholders to reach youth and caregivers with information about human trafficking. This YOT Safety Month, TAT featured four events focused on reaching Native and Indigenous communities with recently adapted YOT materials, including:

- A Freedom Drivers Project (FDP) event at the Tamastslikt Cultural Institute in partnership with the Umatilla Human Trafficking Task Force (UHTTF) on May 1. Ahead of May 1, UHTTF provided consultation to create custom youth and caregiver posters to be deployed in the local Native community. The task force also gathered feedback from high school students at the Nixyaawii Community School on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.



- A weeklong "tour" through the Four Corners region, including YOT Coalition Builds (CB) in Page, Arizona and Gallup, New Mexico and a Murdered and Missing Indigenous Persons (MMIP) walk/run with the FDP in Ignacio, Colorado. Sky Ute Casino in Ignacio also displayed YOT materials throughout the casino during the MMIP walk/run and later in the month during the Southern Ute Bear Dance, estimating more than 1 million impressions. Meanwhile, the City of Page and the University of New Mexico Gallup have both committed to displaying the Native YOT posters.

Daisy Bluestar, executive director of Native Love, was one of the speakers at the CBs.



(L) TAT Training Specialist/Survivor Leader Kelley Marshall received a hug from an audience member after sharing her lived experience at a CB.

Truck stop training and breakroom posters part of new TAT-in-Action, animated, training series

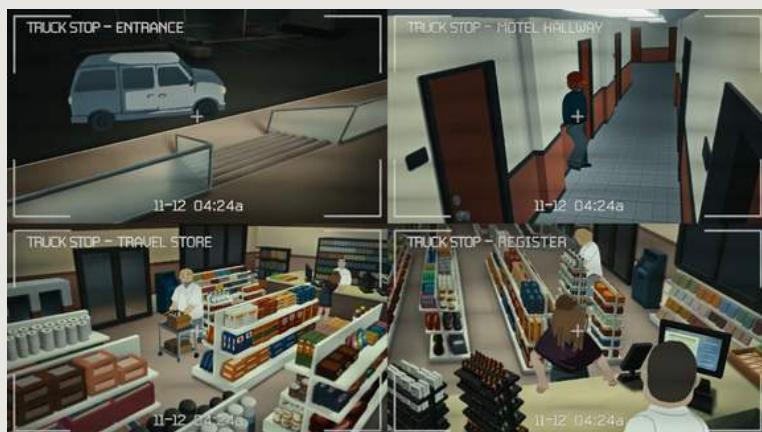
In Q3, TAT will launch its first training video specifically designed for truck stop employees as the second offering in its new TAT-in-Action, animated, training series.

The eight-minute video includes two animated recreations of real-life scenarios in which one of TAT's everyday heroes took simple, yet significant, steps to prevent or disrupt suspected human trafficking situations they encountered while working at a truck stop convenience store. The training weaves together the animated stories with concise training points, including an overview of red flag indicators and guidance on how to report suspicions and employ a victim-centered approach.

Like TAT's other training videos, once completed, it will be available via the [TAT portal](#), with interactive quiz questions and direct deployment for truck stop companies for whatever system(s) they use for training.

Along with that, TAT is offering a new truck stop poster for employee break rooms. The idea for the poster came directly from participants at a TAT Junction Briefing who suggested a "be on the lookout" poster would be helpful with reminders of indicators and space for management to add internal contact info.

Earlier this year, TAT released its first animated training: a TAT in Action: Trucking Refresh for people who'd already been trained with their industry-specific, TAT trucking video. The third and final video in the series will be for motorcoach/transit.



Animation scenes from the new truck stop employee training video

TAT works with partners on effective World Cup activities



Sara Sefried, TAT director of Strategic Partnerships, shared World Cup information at the Youth on Transportation Coalition Build in Miami earlier this year.

Just as preparations began months in advance for North America to take the global stage with World Cup games and activities, so, too, did preparations and strategies by TAT and a multitude of partners to fight the anticipated increase in human trafficking as a result of this major sporting event.

While the full impact of all that was accomplished may take many more months to compile, just a few of the outcomes include:

- In 2025, TAT launched its Shut Out Human Trafficking Campaign to highlight the connection between major sports events and human trafficking, and, in the months leading up to this summer, worked with 43 partners throughout the U.S. and Canada to raise awareness about human trafficking for their employees and networks.
- TAT presented or exhibited at 31 events (virtual and in-person) with its industry and law enforcement partners, reaching a total audience of 2,016 people focused on human trafficking and major sports events. In-person events were held in nine of the 13 World Cup host cities, while virtual events attracted significant national audiences, primarily from motorcoach/transit, trucking and logistics, law enforcement and human trafficking task forces.
- TAT organized three Coalition Builds in World Cup host cities (Miami, Florida, Kansas City, Missouri and Atlanta, Georgia), during which transportation and law enforcement stakeholders gathered to discuss local strategies to combat human trafficking with a special focus on preparing for major events and influxes in tourism and potential human trafficking activity.

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Mid-year highlights and updates: World Cup (continued)

- At events in three World Cup host cities (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, New York/New Jersey and Dallas, Texas), 315 people toured TAT's Freedom Drivers Project (FDP).
- TAT mailed out 380 major-event themed "know the signs" posters to be distributed by 23 different partners in the trucking and bus industries and law enforcement. Additionally, TAT created co-branded posters and postcards for targeted distribution with multiple partners, including with the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, New Jersey State Police, and the Missouri Attorney General, Missouri Department of Transportation and the Missouri Trucking Association.

Missouri

In addition to the distribution of materials to Missouri Trucking Association members and in Missouri scale houses, welcome centers, rest areas and at commercial vehicle roadside inspections, reports from Dianna Haines, director of Anti-Trafficking Operations for the Missouri Office of the Attorney General, showed that the state's human trafficking tip hotline received nine times the number of tips in May-June over the previous four months according to data collected by Simply Report. Similarly, an emergency support pipeline through Safe House Project that began May 1 followed the same curve, with Missouri-identified-and-engaged survivors climbing from an average of four a month to more than 10 a month, with cases now actively moving through initial meetings, program deliberation and placement research.

New Jersey

In New Jersey, the New Jersey State Police reported distribution of posters (pictured to the right) throughout the state in every DMV, truck stop and all medical centers, and the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General declared the combination of [World Cup anti-trafficking operations throughout the state resulted in the rescue of nearly 100 suspected trafficking victims and over 70 arrests.](#)

Georgia

Following the Atlanta Coalition Build in 2025, where TAT helped develop and launch the "Eyes on the Road Campaign" in partnership with the Georgia Office of the Attorney General (AOG), 20 companies signed up for the campaign, including hotels, transportation companies, one airline, one convenience store and parking lot businesses. The Georgia AOG also led Georgia-based efforts, prior to the World Cup, for [Operation "Coast to Coast,"](#) a nationwide initiative to locate victims, arrest buyers and sellers, and seize criminal assets, which recovered 11 missing children in Georgia alone and initiated multiple human trafficking investigations as a result. And leading up to the Atlanta World Cup games, they participated in Operation "Global Chain," an international law enforcement effort to combat human trafficking from June 8-12, including partnerships with FBI, INTERPOL, EUROPOL, AMERIPOL, the Georgia AOG Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit, and other state and local law enforcement. Kara Murray, Communications director for the Georgia AOG, reported that this effort also recovered 11 missing children in Georgia alone.



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Mid-year highlights and updates: World Cup (continued)

UPS

Kendis Paris, director of Grantmaking Strategy for The UPS Foundation, commented, “As part of our ongoing partnership with TAT, the 2026 UPS Freedom Drivers Project Hub Tour brought survivor-centered education directly into our hubs and communities in World Cup host markets for activities or games -- Miami, Philadelphia, and Bayonne, New Jersey -- helping our employees and visitors recognize signs of trafficking and know how to respond. Together, these three stops engaged 673 UPSers, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Beyond raising awareness, these events create opportunities for UPSers to volunteer alongside TAT, encourage one another to get more involved in the issue, and become ambassadors for anti-trafficking efforts in their own communities.”

She continued, “Bayonne was particularly special. In addition to welcoming 167 employees through the exhibit, we partnered with TAT to host a VIP engagement and recognition event with representatives from the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice, the New Jersey Trucking Association, Coach USA, UPS leadership, and other key stakeholders. Attendees received guided tours of the exhibit, discussed opportunities for future collaboration, and participated in an awards ceremony recognizing leadership in the fight against human trafficking. TAT's Micah Larsen and Coach USA CEO Derrick Waters received awards for their contributions to advancing awareness and prevention efforts. It was a powerful example of how education, partnership and recognition can come together to strengthen a community's response to trafficking.”

Coach USA

In addition to Waters receiving an award in Bayonne, Coach USA wrapped one of their buses with a co-branded graphic with TAT and provided it for survivor travel for one day of the Action Collaborative Against Trafficking (ACT) event in May hosted by the New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking ahead of the World Cup games in New Jersey and Philadelphia. This two-day, survivor-informed, call to action brought together communities, organizations and individuals to raise awareness and take meaningful steps to prepare for the increased risks of human trafficking associated with large-scale events.

Waters said, “Coach USA is honored to participate in the ACT events, sponsored by the New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking, leading up to the commencement of the World Cup matches. It is crucial to raise awareness that major events, such as the World Cup, unfortunately, correspond with an increase in human and sex trafficking. At Coach USA, we are committed to combating and preventing human and sex trafficking through comprehensive training provided by TAT for all our coach and bus operators, as well as customer-facing team members. We trust these efforts and events will garner the necessary attention to effectively address and help eradicate human and sex trafficking.”



Driving Change Project, TAT's second mobile exhibit, about to hit the road

The Driving Change Project (DCP), TAT's second mobile museum, is having its outer wrap put on and then will hit the road. While the project took longer than anticipated to finish, it is worth the wait, as it features interactive exhibits that put a spotlight on both labor and sex trafficking in the U.S. and Canada. Visitors will encounter survivor stories, impact data and a dedicated commitment area where they can publicly pledge to drive change in their own communities.



TAT's sponsorship community, who collectively lend their support to TAT and the mission of raising awareness, generously outfitted the exhibit's 53-foot Great Dane trailer, donated by Great Dane. These sponsors include Inland Kenworth, Great Dane, TKO Graphix, Enbridge, Rockland Flooring, American Bus Association, UPS, Kegler Foundation, All State Fastener, SteelPro, PepsiCo and Aon.

Building on the success of TAT's original Freedom Drivers Project (FDP), which has educated more than 80,000 people across 43 states, Washington, D.C., and four Canadian provinces since its launch, the DCP introduces a more expansive, interactive and technologically advanced experience for audiences throughout North America.

"We're so excited to get this new, interactive exhibit on the road educating audiences about the realities of human trafficking and how they can drive change to end this horrific crime!" exclaimed Kylla Lanier, TAT deputy director and senior director of External Affairs. "Having walked through the exhibit as it was being created, I am stunned by its beauty and educational content. We are so grateful to our sponsors and Advanced Training Systems for bringing the exhibit to life!"

The DCP begins its life on tour with stops at the National Truck Drivers Appreciation Week Event with Sapp Bros. in Denver, a UPS Salt Lake City event, Penske's DCP Event along the East Coast, the WIT Accelerate! Conference in Dallas and the American Trucking Associations Management Conference and Exhibition in Charlotte, North Carolina in the first two months.

Progress pictures (right) and DCP rendering (top right)



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Driving Force



North Star



Freedom Driver



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Gold+

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Silver+



STAY CONNECTED WITH TAT



The TAT team takes a break at Game Show Battle Rooms in Denver, Colorado during their annual strategic planning sessions in June.



Download the TAT app for free [here](#).



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