

Traverse Area Community Media

15th Annual Report to Local Government Sponsors

City of Traverse City

East Bay Charter Township

Charter Township of Elmwood

Charter Township of Garfield

Presented by:



Land Information Access Association
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Introduction

The nonprofit **Land Information Access Association (LIAA)** began operating the public- and government-access cable television stations for northwest Lower Michigan on July 1, 2008. This is our 15th major report concerning the development and operation of the public- and government-access TV systems. This report describes the work, undertaken by LIAA's **Traverse Area Community Media (TACM)** staff members and active volunteers, to record and highlight many aspects of our community both on cable TV and online. These efforts are being undertaken with the support and participation of the **City of Traverse City** and the **Charter Townships of East Bay, Elmwood and Garfield**.

Last Year's Goals

Even with the lifting of the pandemic era programs and policies, the shift in media interests among our constituents was still apparent in the 2022-23 period. Though many volunteers are again visiting the media center on a more regular basis, many also appreciate the increased convenience and accessibility offered by remote and hybrid options. We continue to offer remote options for nearly all media center services. This increased accessibility and flexibility now influences all our media center goals. Here are the main goals that we listed in last year's annual report, as well as a description of how we worked toward them.

- **Offering government meetings on YouTube, AppleTV+, and Roku live and on-demand**

In 2022-23, we broadcasted roughly two thirds of government meetings live on YouTube. Recordings of these meetings were viewable within seconds of the live event's conclusion. YouTube also allows for free automated captioning and viewing on a Smart TV (via the corresponding YouTube app for a given user's television). We were also accepted into the developer platforms for AppleTV+ and Roku and are currently working on the Channel 189 and 191 apps for each platform. We expect the rollout of those apps to occur within the next six months.

- **Continue to introduce technical support for new media venues**

As the media landscape changes at an ever-quickening pace, we have made sure to keep ourselves up to date on the new media platforms (e.g., Twitch, TikTok, YouTube Live, and Facebook Live). Volunteer producers have expressed increasing interest in creating media that is first submitted to the CommunityTV platform and later gets posted to the social media platforms of their choosing. We offer one-on-one or group support for all producers interested in learning how to use these platforms.

- **Expanding new trainings**

In 2022-23, we formalized our new podcasting training program and began developing a livestreaming training program. Through discussions with current volunteer producers, it has become apparent that short- and medium-form livestream programs are viewed as the next popular trend in amateur video production and media consumption.

- **More regional event coverage and place-based content**

Over the past year we worked with local member nonprofits to cover important community events. We also partnered with the Traverse Area District Library (TADL) to ensure that its popular public meeting facilities are configured to connect directly to Channel 189 when there are community events of interest.

- **Continued and expanded support for virtual platforms**

We worked with volunteers and staff at participating jurisdictions to offer technical support for the continued demand for virtual participation options. Many media center users appreciate the convenience of being able to use media center services without having to make the trip to the media center. We see hybrid/virtual trainings and technical support as permanent fixtures of the media center moving forward.

Next Steps for Traverse Area Community Media

As we reflect on another year of community media center work, we remain committed to our mission of uniting people through the creation and sharing of digital media. In the spirit of our mission, we have set forth a few new annual goals that incorporate our dedication to fostering creativity, inclusivity, and knowledge-sharing within our community. These goals not only embody our organizational vision but also define our commitment to amplifying local voices, expanding access to media resources, and connecting people in our community. The following goals are not a comprehensive list of all the work that we will do over the next year, but reflect some new or renewed areas of focus and improvement.

- **Expansion of community partnerships**

In the coming year we will focus on expanding our community partnerships. We understand the importance of these collaborations in enhancing our local media offerings. We'll actively seek new partnerships with local organizations, schools, and community groups. By working closely with these partners, we aim to bring a wider range of voices and perspectives into our content. Our goal is to enable the creation of meaningful, impactful media that truly represents our diverse community.

- **Volunteer supported regional documentary series**

Many volunteers at the media center have expressed an interest in working on a documentary but lack the amount of time needed to dedicate to a large project. We will survey volunteers and viewers to get ideas for short-form documentaries and work to incorporate volunteers as camera operators, video editors, and interviewers. Based on conversations with volunteers, some initial ideas include local historic landmarks, environmental preservation efforts, regional culinary arts, local music histories, educational initiatives, community gardens, geographical histories, and many more.

- **Improving turnaround times for GovernmentTV programming**

As it is currently configured, it takes between 8 and 24 hours to process government meeting recordings in order to get them on our website and ready for airing on Channel 191. We will

work over the next year to dramatically shorten this wait time by upgrading the integrations between our media database and our website.

Summary of Community and Local Government Benefits

LIAA's Traverse Area Community Media provides many services to the participating local governments and citizens of the Grand Traverse region. Some of these core services are described below.

Government-Access Television – Traverse Area Community Media provides video acquisition, scheduling, transcoding (i.e., changing media formats), and cablecast services for the City of Traverse City and the Charter Townships of East Bay, Elmwood and Garfield, as well as Grand Traverse County. We also contract with, schedule, and supply trained video operators to the participating local governments.

Video Streaming and Multi-function Website – Citizens use the Traverse Area Community Media website (www.TACM.tv) to watch *CommunityTV* and *GovernmentTV* channels streaming 24/7. Programs are also available for playback on demand through the website. The website also offers an up-to-the-minute *Community Calendar* (with events contributed by the public) and a TV schedule. For video producers, the website provides an easy way to submit video for playback.

Video Training and Education Classes – Traverse Area Community Media provides Field Producer and Studio Producer trainings for organizations and individuals. Traverse Area Community Media also works with area schools to provide instruction for specific projects or classes.

High-Quality Television Studio – Traverse Area Community Media provides citizens with access to a professionally equipped, automated TV studio.

Audio and Video Editing Stations – Traverse Area Community Media offers a hands-on computer laboratory used for instruction and for local producers to edit and complete their projects. We offer both professional and consumer-level editing software, along with services that can provide music, video clips, graphics and other enhancements for video projects.

On-Site Technical Assistance – Traverse Area Community Media's highly qualified staff members are available to answer questions and provide technical assistance 50 hours per week and as requested on weekends.

Scheduling of Local Content – Local producers are assured that the video content they submit will be cablecast quickly, predictably, and with more than one play.

Useful Viewer Services – Our channels carry an attractive, easy-to-read *Community Calendar*. Programming schedules are regularly posted. We have also negotiated the ability to post CommunityTV channel programming in the on-screen cable guide, allowing viewers to see what's playing and schedule

DVR recordings.

Equipment Support and Installation for Local Governments – Traverse Area Community Media provides participating local governments with direct assistance to specify and install video equipment as needed to assure that public meetings are recorded and cablecast to local residents.

Background – PEG-Access Television

Under federal and state laws, municipal governments may demand access to the cable television delivery system as part of their franchise agreements with cable TV providers. Cable providers must supply public, educational and government (PEG) access TV stations for the delivery of content generated by and for the community. In northwest Lower Michigan, the City of Traverse City and East Bay, Elmwood and Garfield Charter Townships have joined together to exercise this option, protecting the delivery of four PEG-access TV channels.



Figure 1: PEG Station Television Viewing Area

In July 2008, LIAA took over the operation of both the public- and government-access television services for northwest Lower Michigan (see Figure 1: PEG Station Television Viewing Area). Prior to that time, the public-access TV station was known as *TCTV 2* (channel 2) and was operated by the Traverse Area District Library. The government-access TV station was operated by the City of Traverse City. Two educational-access TV stations were — and continue to be — operated by Traverse City Area Public Schools and Northwestern Michigan College respectively.

In accepting the responsibility of providing both the public- and government-access TV services, LIAA offered a new approach, with improved public services, greater technical capacity, and better viewing experiences. We have worked to provide community TV services comparable to those available anywhere, continually enhancing citizen education experiences, developing higher-quality video content, and offering dependable technical support for citizens and participating governments.

In March 2014, Charter Communications moved to an all-digital format and relocated all PEG TV channels to the 180s and 190s. Viewers now find public-access TV as CommunityTV on Channel 189, and government-access TV as GovernmentTV on Channel 191. During discussions about the channel change with Charter, CommunityTV was able to secure the ability to display programming in the on-screen schedule guide through the company Rovi. CommunityTV programming began appearing on the schedule in March 2014.

Summary of Community and Government TV Services and Operations

LIAA Oversight – Founded in 1993, LIAA is a nonprofit community service organization with 30 years of experience in helping citizens, nonprofits, and local governments use media, technology and community planning to improve civic engagement.

LIAA’s overall management and corporate policies are the responsibility of a volunteer Board of Directors composed of six well-regarded community leaders, educators, and foundation representatives from across the state. LIAA’s Executive Director, Technology Director, and Station Manager provide overall guidance and management of day-to-day operations for Traverse Area Community Media.

GovernmentTV Advisory Committee – As the primary financial supporters of Traverse Area Community Media, representatives of the four participating governments gather quarterly to review media center operations and strategies, plan any services they may need from the media center, and discuss any government initiatives that may be of interest to or informed by the media center. This committee has adopted the *Policies for the Operation of Government-Access Cable Television* that guide operation of GovernmentTV. This committee ensures that the media center meets its contractual obligations to each of the participating governments.

Media Center Staff – LIAA’s Traverse Area Community Media staff consists of a full-time Station Manager and a full-time Media Specialist, each with extensive experience in TV operations and training. In addition, LIAA’s Technology Director and Information Technology Specialist provide support for the media center, including contractor management and scheduling, website development and support, and networking and hardware support.

Participation/Membership – Membership in Traverse Area Community Media allows residents to submit content for playback on Channel 189 and gain access to our free video training courses. Individuals who live in any of the participating jurisdictions can

Traverse Area Community Media Staff

Matthew Kern, Station Manager
Joe Torrence, Media Specialist
Rob Astor, Technology Director
Matt Cowall, Executive Director

LIAA Board of Directors

John Egelhaaf, Executive Director
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Sandra Clark, Director
Michigan Historical Center

Kathryn Buckner, Executive Director
Americana Foundation

Pat McGinnis, City Manager
City of Portage

Luke Forrest, Executive Director
The Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM)

Jennifer McKay, Policy Director
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council

GovernmentTV Advisory Committee Members

Susanne Courtade
Township Clerk, East Bay Charter Township

Connie Preston
Township Clerk, Elmwood Charter Township

Lanie McManus
Township Clerk, Garfield Charter Township

Sarah Lutz
Deputy City Clerk, City of Traverse City

be a Traverse Area Community Media Member for free. To engage people from throughout the CommunityTV viewing region, individuals who live outside of the participating jurisdictions may become Members by paying a fee of \$50/year or \$6/month. All members are given the same level of access to training, equipment, and cablecast services.

Nonprofit organizations that wish to produce and cablecast their own shows can also participate in Traverse Area Community Media. These organizations pay a membership fee of \$100/year and receive the same services and support as individual Members. For example, member organizations can borrow equipment, use the studio, and receive training at discounted rates.

Equipment and Facilities – One of the most important tasks of public-access television is the maintenance and loaning of video equipment for community use. We also provide certified producers access to video editing workstations in LIAA’s computer lab, available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. as well as any time upon request.

Additionally, we provide access to a remote-controlled video and audio studio and control-room facility within LIAA’s building. Among other things, the studio offers access to three remote-controlled High Definition (HD) cameras, a green screen for composited backgrounds, production lighting, a high-quality teleprompter, an array of microphones, audio mixers, and an HD camera switcher.

Programming – Another key role of Traverse Area Community Media is the transcoding, scheduling, and cablecasting of video content for both CommunityTV and GovernmentTV. In the past year, CommunityTV scheduled and broadcast 4,797 hours of programming (see Figure 2: CommunityTV Programming Hours). Over 1,970 hours of programming were also provided on *GovernmentTV* (see Figure 3: GovernmentTV Programming Hours).

CommunityTV Total Hours of Programming

July 2022 - June 2023

4,797 hours (slightly down from 5,067 hours in the previous reporting period)

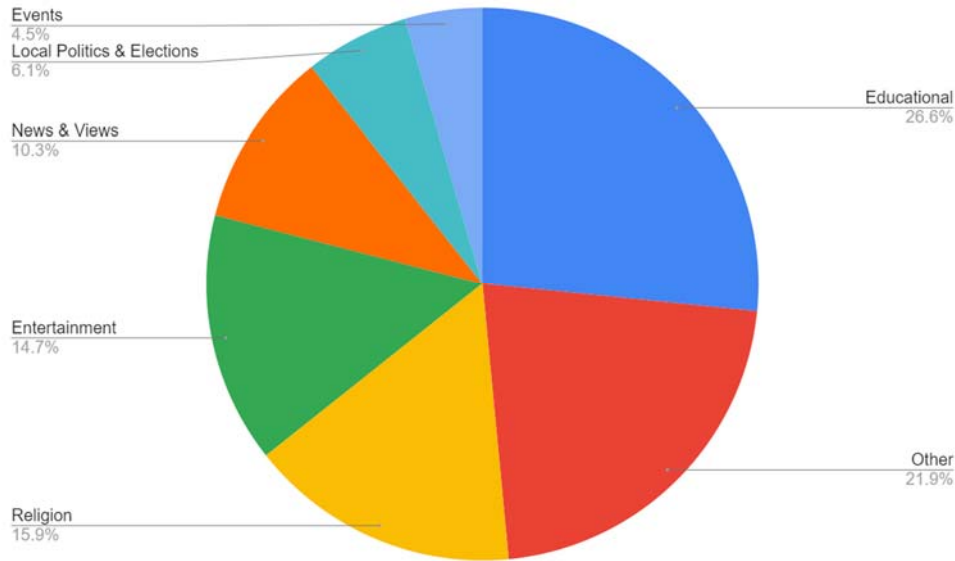


Figure 2: CommunityTV Programming Hours July 2022 to June 2023

GovernmentTV Total Hours of Programming

July 2022 - June 2023

1,970 hours (2,194 total hours in the previous reporting period)

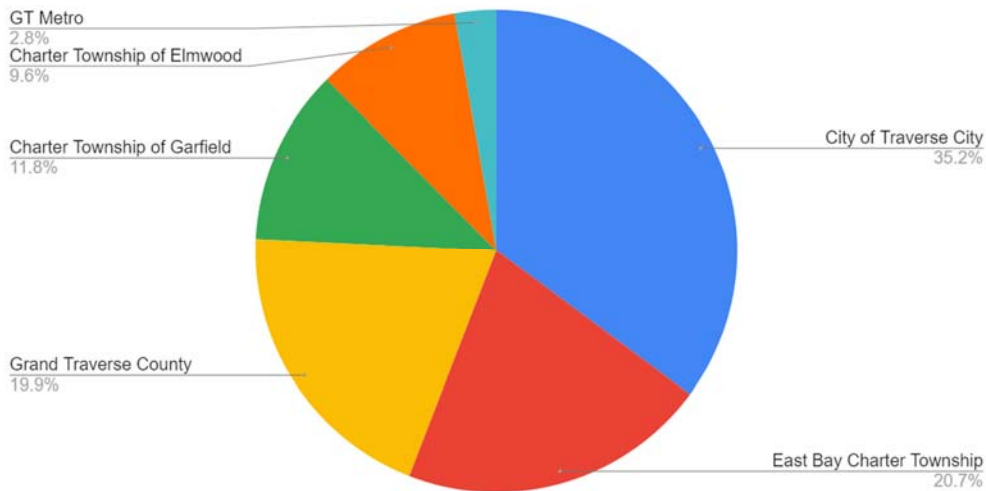


Figure 3: GovernmentTV Programming Hours July 2022 to June 2023

Video Production Training and Support – Other important goals of public-access television are educating, training and supporting certified producers in the use of video production equipment, and in the art of telling stories or showing events with digital media.

All producers are required to take our *Producer Orientation*. In the past year, we have begun offering this training as a quick online video followed by a quiz. This provides participants with the basic concepts and rules of public-access video production and permits them to request airtime for a video presentation as a Certified Producer. There is no fee for this introductory course, and it is often combined with other classes.

We also offer a course for *Field Producers* that teaches people how to use cameras, lights, microphones, and video editing equipment. This two-part course gives people the ability to operate and care for the mobile equipment and editing workstations available through Traverse Area Community Media. We promote this course to nonprofit groups with an offer to have their volunteers trained to record their events. Graduates of this course are qualified to borrow and use the video production equipment at no charge (if their membership is current).

Our *Studio Producers* course gives members the ability to set up and operate the audio, video and lighting equipment in the Traverse Area Community Media studio. They also learn how to use the green screen or other backdrops to record their show. Members who complete this course are qualified to use the studio to produce shows at no charge.

Once members are trained, Traverse Area Community Media staff provide ongoing assistance, such as equipment refreshers, project planning help, and one-on-one or group video editing support.

GovernmentTV Management and Oversight – Traverse Area Community Media coordinates and manages government television services for the viewing region. This activity includes assistance in the video recording of local government meetings, transport and transcoding of the video products, coordination in scheduling cablecasts, and the actual cablecast of most programs. Additionally, the media center helps to specify, install and maintain the video equipment for local governments (e.g., cameras, digital data transfer systems), occasionally providing for improvements and repairs.

Traverse Area Community Media contracts with videographers to run the cameras and video switcher systems at roughly 25 different government meetings each month. The media is automatically transferred to Traverse Area Community Media over the internet through digital data compression systems for streaming and cablecast. Media center staff members work closely with local government officials to ensure that the video production equipment in each location is working properly, troubleshooting hardware and software problems.

Website – LIAA has a long history of creating and hosting websites for nonprofit organizations, local governments, and special projects. Traverse Area Community Media’s website at TACM.tv is a key communications tool for CommunityTV, GovernmentTV, and all aspects of the media center. This website provides a regularly updated program schedule, news and notes, public comment opportunities, access to documents (such as the *Policies and Procedures*), a Community Calendar, help for producers, and other information. The website also provides a place to submit content: Members may request airtime and send video through the website; organizations submit Community Calendar events which are then automatically shown on our TV channels and on the website; and our *Meeting reView* solution helps governments link agendas and meeting documents to meeting videos.

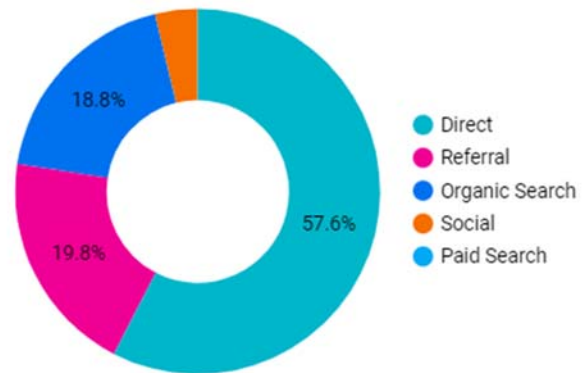


Figure 4: Website Visitor Sources for 2022-23

The website provides quick links to real-time viewing of CommunityTV and GovernmentTV online, 24 hours per day, seven days a week. Visitors can also search the archives for past video presentations and watch them online through a video-on-demand streaming service. Website hits (i.e., unique sessions) average around 2,041 per month. As can be seen in Figure 4, more than half of visitors come to the website directly (from, for example, a bookmark in their browser). Around 18.8% of visitors arrived on the TACM.tv website via search engines (such as Google). This indicates that the website continues to serve a specific community of users, as would be expected by something as local as CommunityTV and GovernmentTV. Just under one-fifth of visitors access the website by referral, which is usually a link from a participating government’s website. The remainder of visitors (3.8%) come in through our social media platforms.

In the past year, the TACM.tv website received a total of 24,495 visits from 14,770 unique visitors as seen in Figure 5. Visitors to the website view an average of around 2.3 pages each, meaning once they get to the website, they are engaged to view pages beyond the one they originally sought.

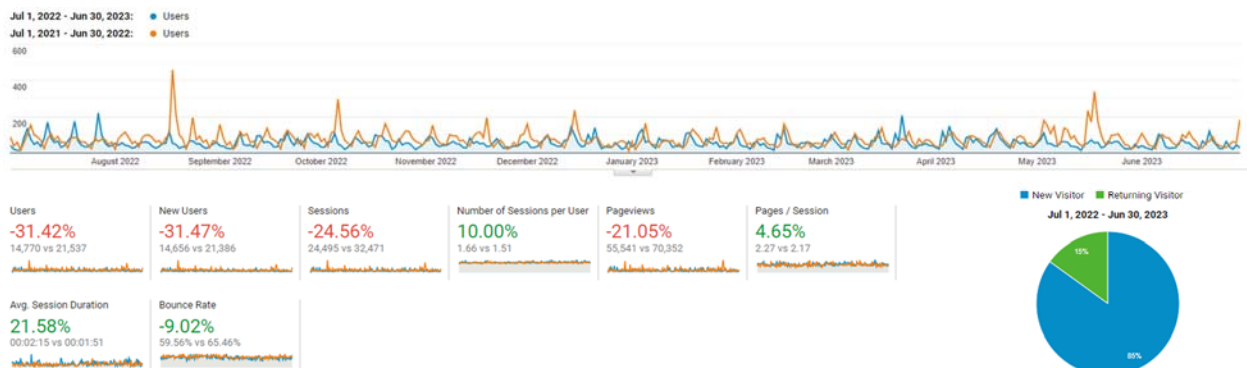


Figure 5: Website Sessions for July 2022 to June 2023 (blue) compared to July 2021 to June 2022 (orange).

The TACM website received 55,541 pageviews, a roughly 20% decrease from the previous reporting period. However, this reduction in website visitors coincided with the introduction of Facebook and YouTube livestreaming for the City of Traverse City and East Bay Charter Township. YouTube and Facebook are platforms completely independent of our website, with government meeting metrics that are difficult to parse from other social media posts. In the coming year we will coordinate with the clerks of each jurisdiction to make sure that we are able to capture those analytics as well. Out of all the pages on TACM.tv, municipal pages received some of the highest percentages of views (see Figure 6). The GovernmentTV concurrent (live) stream page (allowing viewers to watch cable channel 191 online) had 7,060 views.

Page	Pageviews	% Pageviews
1. /govtvnow.asp	7,060	12.71%
2. /govtvmeetings.asp	4,062	7.31%
3. /default.asp	3,616	6.51%
4. /govtvschedule.asp	1,773	3.19%
5. /govtv_cityoftc.asp	1,757	3.16%
6. /browsemeeings.asp	1,692	3.05%
7. /govtv_gtcounty.asp	1,484	2.67%
8. /govtv_eastbaytwp.asp	1,477	2.66%
9. /searchmeetings.asp	985	1.77%
10. /governmenttv.asp	889	1.60%

Figure 6: TACM Website Top 10 Pages 2022-23

Traverse Area Community Media provides simultaneous web streaming of both CommunityTV Channel 189 and GovernmentTV Channel 191. This live TV streaming involves a special set of computers and requires a substantial amount of internet bandwidth to be purchased by Traverse Area Community Media. This internet stream ensures that people who do not have Spectrum Cable TV can still watch the public-access and government-access stations.

Internet users viewed the CommunityTV livestream 595 times during the last year, a 26% reduction. This is the third year with a decline in website livestream views, however, we are now streaming all our live CommunityTV programming on YouTube. During this same period, we logged 1,540 livestream views and 664,277 overall views on our YouTube account. This marks a persistent and noteworthy change in how our audience engages with our content. As a result, it is our continued aim to integrate YouTube and other web-streaming platforms into all our upcoming live productions.

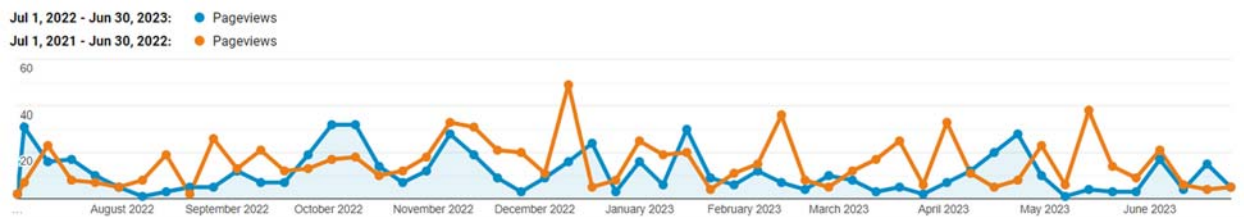


Figure 7: CommunityTV Concurrent Stream Viewers July 2022 to June 2023 (blue) compared to July 2021 to June 2022 (orange).

The GovernmentTV livestream was viewed 7,096 times during the last year, with the highest volume being 198 on July 20, 2022 (see Figure 8: GovernmentTV Concurrent Stream Viewers).

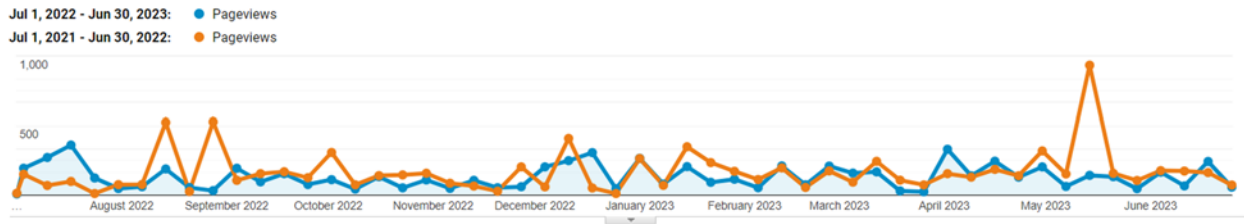


Figure 8: GovernmentTV Concurrent Stream Viewers July 2022 to June 2023 (blue) compared to July 2021 to June 2022 (orange).

Facebook – We continue to use social media as a complement to the website to increase community outreach. Traverse Area Community Media’s Facebook page helps to engage the community in discussion about events and programs on CommunityTV and GovernmentTV.

YouTube Channel – This channel provides an alternate place for people to find CommunityTV shows created by Traverse Area Community Media, driving a different demographic back to our website. A total of 195,700 hours of programming have been viewed on our YouTube page in the last year. It is important to note that this YouTube channel does not host any of the GovernmentTV content. Government meetings that are currently being streamed to YouTube are housed at two independent YouTube accounts for East Bay Charter Township and the City of Traverse City.

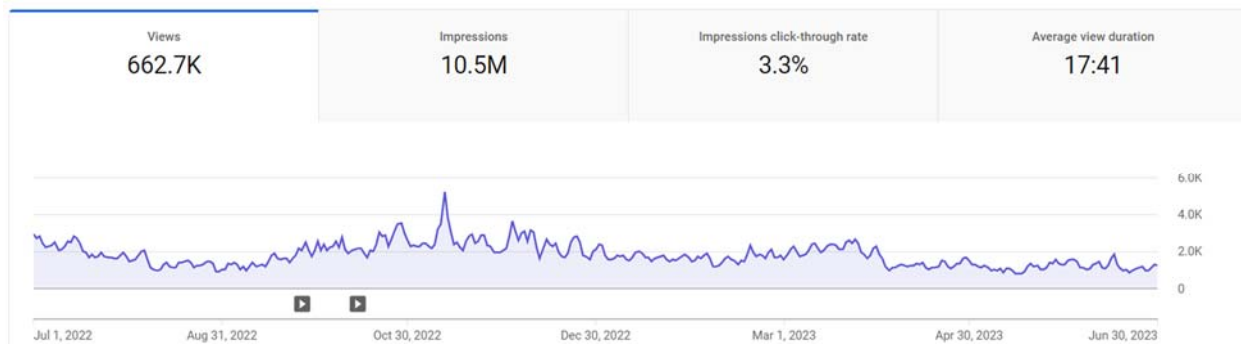


Figure 9: YouTube Viewer Metrics July 2022 to June 2023

Special Projects of Traverse Area Community Media

To provide citizens and participating local governments of the Grand Traverse region the best public- and government-access TV services, Traverse Area Community Media continued to expand the number of special productions this year. These projects help provide live virtual access to key community events, celebrate community culture and heritage, and help to assure easy access to video records of community events. Here are a few examples of the partnerships and projects Traverse Area Community Media has worked on this past year:

International Affairs Forum – IAF brings in world renowned authors and experts to discuss global political and economic issues. Throughout the year we provided technical support and recording for IAF productions.

League of Women Voters of the Grand Traverse Area Monthly Programs – Once per month, LWVGTA hosts an educational program with topics ranging from ARPA funds to media literacy.

Daily Exercising Classes for Seniors – Channel 189 broadcasts exercise programs for seniors every weekday at 9 a.m. We have partnered with the Senior Center to make sure that seniors are getting the programs that they want. We have also utilized Zoom as a platform to host virtual exercise classes and recordings.

Public Meetings and Events – Traverse Area Community Media recorded a wide variety of public meetings and events partnering with organizations such as the Battle of the Books, League of Women Voters Grand Traverse Area, the League of Women Voters of Leelanau County, FLOW, SEEDS, Traverse City Historical Society, GT Metro, Traverse Area District Library, Newton’s Road, Glen Lake Association, Traverse Symphony Orchestra, and Hear:Say Storytellers.

Funding and Expenses of the Community Media Center

LIAA’s Traverse Area Community Media is in its 15th year of operation under contracts with the City of Traverse City and East Bay, Elmwood, and Garfield Charter Townships. Under these contracts, LIAA provides Public-Access and Government-Access TV services, including education, technical assistance, equipment specification and management, scheduling and transcoding, video access on the Internet, and cablecasting. As stated in each contract, the primary purpose of this effort is:

“ . . . to provide a forum for resident citizens, community service groups, nonprofit organizations, and other non-commercial groups to present their views and to celebrate local achievement, provide community education, encourage civic engagement, present local culture and art appreciation, and support individual expression.”

The most important source of funding for public-access and government-access TV are franchise fees collected from Charter Communications by the local governments in exchange for the use of public property (right-of-ways). The fees are usually reflected on each cable subscriber’s monthly bill.

The franchise agreements between Charter Communications and the municipalities that participate in Traverse Area Community Media were renegotiated in 2017. As a result, the contract between LIAA and the participating municipalities was updated as well. The jurisdictions now provide support for PEG access through the dedication of thirty percent (30%) of their franchise fees to defray operation costs for the Media Center, and thirty percent (30%) of PEG fees to defray capital costs (i.e., new equipment and maintenance). The PEG fee formula was substantially reduced from the original contract with LIAA, as the equipment needs of the Media Center have stabilized over time (i.e., moving from a “startup” to a mature operation). This means more of the equipment fees paid by Charter remains in the hands of each participating municipality for their own equipment needs.

Our community’s public-access and government-access TV systems operated by LIAA are financially viable under the contracts with the City of Traverse City and the Charter Townships of East Bay, Elmwood, and Garfield. To provide greater flexibility, we have worked to enhance public-access TV funding through participation fees and fee-for-service work. In the coming year, we hope to continue building external funding by developing more underwriting and sponsorship opportunities.

Over the past 15 years, LIAA has kept costs at or below the funding levels provided. With the participation of additional municipalities, the entire PEG TV communications system would be stronger and more valuable to the community as a whole. We continue to work to recruit additional municipalities to take advantage of this powerful community resource.