

Traverse Area Community Media

13th Annual Report to Local Government Sponsors

City of Traverse City

East Bay Charter Township

Charter Township of Elmwood

Charter Township of Garfield

Presented by:



Innovative ideas for sustainable communities since 1993

Land Information Access Association
324 Munson Avenue, Traverse City, MI 49686
www.liaa.org

September, 2021

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 13th 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**.

A Note About the Name

Prior to May 2019, **Traverse Area Community Media** was known as the **UpNorth Media Center**. Before this change of name, the media center was frequently mistaken for other area organizations and businesses that shared the "up north" name, and the confusion was exacerbated by regional proliferation in the use of "up north" branding. This brand confusion prompted LIAA to explore alternative names. After much discussion, Traverse Area Community Media was chosen because it better describes what we do and where we work.

Last Year's Goals

In our last Annual Report, we set out a list of our top goals. Due to prolonged facilities closures and the need to take most of our services to virtual platforms, we were forced to make adjustments to these goals. In some cases we were able to carry on as normal, just in a virtual setting. In other cases we offered limited in-person, distanced, and contact-free services. The goals that we were unable to achieve will be moved forward into the current year's list of goals.

It is important to note that during this reporting period, most government meetings were supported directly by LIAA staff as opposed to contractors. Between July 2020 and June 2021, LIAA staff logged 695 hours of government meeting support. This represents a nearly 400% increase as compared to the 174 hours from the last reporting year prior to COVID (2018-19).

- **Increased virtual participation options**

Throughout the pandemic, we have offered most of our trainings and services virtually over Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, and other online platforms. During this reporting year we offered over 60 virtual trainings. Most of these trainings were centered around using Zoom Meetings and Webinars, but we also offered trainings in smartphone video, video editing, and online media management.

- **Continued community event broadcasting**

Before COVID-19, we were beginning to cover a wider diversity of community events in the Grand Traverse area. And though our in-person coverage has been limited, we continued using Zoom Webinars as a platform for virtual community events. We focused on events that were educational, arts-focused, hyper-local, and encouraging of civic engagement. Noteworthy broadcasts include the Fall 2020 Candidate Forums, Newton's Road STEM Education weekly programs, League of Women Voters monthly civic programming, and a large number of events highlighting the Michigan Citizen's Redistricting Committee.

- **Increased educational programming**

Due to strains placed on school districts and educational organizations during the pandemic, we were unable to carry this goal forward in the ways that we had hoped. Throughout the summer and fall of 2020 we were broadcasting weekly STEM education and career-building programs with Newton's Road.

We plan to carry this goal forward into 2021-22, and hope that as COVID numbers decrease, school staff and educational organizations will be able to dedicate resources toward community partnerships that include media creation.

- **Major equipment upgrades**

In January of 2021 we completed our upgrade of our Channel 189/191 video servers. A video server is responsible for storing and scheduling all the media on the television channels, as well as switching between different video sources. The new video servers offer expanded file support, native support for broadcasting virtual meetings, higher resolution playback of media, and easier program scheduling. This was a complex process, requiring dozens of hours of training, and multiple months to fully transition. Though it was a major technical challenge for our team, it was a necessary step to improve the services that we offer.

- **Increased accessibility for disabled community members**

Due to our facilities closure, we were unable to undergo an accessibility audit by the Disability Network. This goal will be moved into the current year to ensure that we are striving to improve access to our facilities and services.

Changes in Response to COVID-19

Except by appointment, LIAA's office was closed to the public for the entire reporting year of 2020-21. During this time, we worked to continue offering as many of our regular services as possible, while reducing the risk of contributing to community spread of the COVID-19 virus.

LIAA staff continued to prioritize the facilitation, recording, and broadcast of Government meetings for the four funding jurisdictions. Due to the temporary reduction in volunteer participation, we were able to shift staff time toward GovernmentTV operations that would normally be staffed by independent contractors. LIAA provided in-meeting technical support for all virtual government meetings, as well as numerous Zoom trainings for jurisdictional staff and board members.

For the public-access side of Traverse Area Community Media, our work took the form of virtual trainings, virtual community events, and increased access to our online video submission process. We also increased our support to member non-profits, offering free Zoom Webinar trainings, Zoom facilitation, and access to broadcast live programming on CommunityTV 189.

Next Steps for Traverse Area Community Media

Due to the continued need to manage the pandemic in our community, we have never relied so heavily on media to connect with each another. This dramatic change in media usage and consumption is continuing to inform all our goals for the year to come. Here are our central goals for the upcoming year:

- **Expanded support for hybrid (in-person/virtual) events and meetings**

Creating events that are enjoyable and productive for virtual and in-person attendees is one of the most technologically challenging problems that we have faced as a result of the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic we have experimented with many software and hardware configurations to meet this need, and we have recently become comfortable with the practice in specific settings. This year we will strive to expand this hardware/software toolkit as well as sharpen our skills. Our goal is to be able to support hybrid-style meetings and community events in any venue, at any scale, and with minimal setup.

- **Increased use of web-streaming platforms**

In the past year, we have experienced a large uptick in our YouTube and Facebook Live viewership, with a noticeable downward trend in viewers using our website to access livestreams. We want to meet viewers where they are, on their platforms of choice. We will always support live viewing through our website, but in this upcoming year we will make use of YouTube and Facebook Live for all our live community events broadcasts.

- **Equipment upgrades for jurisdictions**

The equipment used to record government meetings that is located at all four jurisdictions is reaching its end-of-life. All jurisdictions would benefit from minor to major upgrades of video and audio equipment. We will work with each jurisdiction to

ensure that we provide equipment upgrade paths that fit the specific needs of each meeting room while fitting within individual equipment budgets.

- **New media trainings**

It is a major understatement to say that the media landscape has changed in the past five years. Ever-changing software, hardware, online platforms, and media consumption habits create a unique challenge for community media centers. We hope to meet this challenge by surveying our content producers. Based on our findings, we will offer new trainings in a range of subject matter, ranging from documentary film production to podcasting.

- **Goals carried over from 2019-20**

As previously stated, our ability to fully realize some of our goals from 2019-20 was hampered by facilities closures and the stretched capacities of community partners. Here are the goals upon which we will redouble our efforts:

- a. **Increased educational programming**

- b. **Increased accessibility for disabled community members**

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 and predictably, 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.

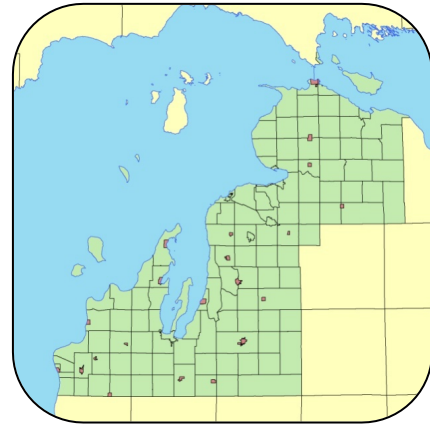


Figure 1: PEG Station Television Viewing Area

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 28 years of experience in helping citizens, nonprofits, and local governments to 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 five 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.

<p style="text-align: center;">LIAA Board of Directors</p> <p style="text-align: center;">John Egelhaaf, Executive Director <i>Southwest Michigan Planning Commission</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sandra Clark, Director <i>Michigan Historical Center</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kathryn Buckner, Executive Director <i>Americana Foundation</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pat McGinnis, City Manager <i>City of Grand Haven</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Luke Forrest, Executive Director <i>The Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM)</i></p>

<p style="text-align: center;">GovernmentTV Advisory Committee Members</p> <p>Susanne Courtade Township Clerk, East Bay Charter Township</p> <p>Connie Preston Township Clerk, Elmwood Charter Township</p> <p>Lanie McManus Township Clerk, Garfield Charter Township</p> <p>Sarah Lutz Deputy City Clerk, City of Traverse City</p>
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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 be 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 Financial Administrator, 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.

2020-21 Traverse Area Community Media Staff

Matthew Kern, Station Manager
Joe Torrence, Media Specialist
Kim McNeil, Financial Admin/GovTV Manager
Jim Muratzki, Technology Director
Rob Astor, IT Specialist

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 be Traverse Area Community Media Members 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 are able to 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 cablecast 4,550 hours of programming (see Figure 2: CommunityTV Programming Hours). Over 1,913 hours of programming were also provided on GovernmentTV (see Figure 3: GovernmentTV Programming Hours).

CommunityTV Total Hours of Programming

July 2020 - June 2021

4,550 total hours

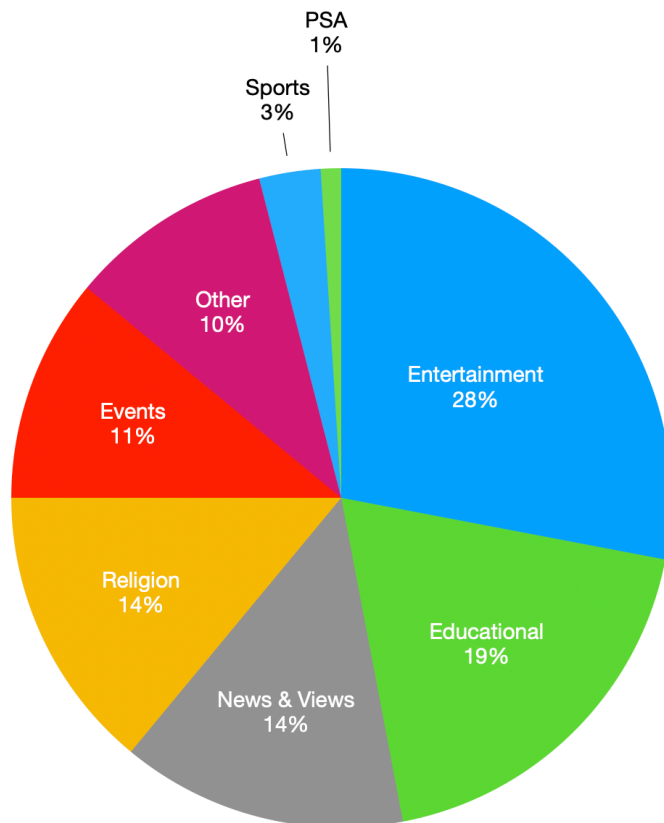


Figure 2: CommunityTV Programming Hours July 2020 to June 2021

GovernmentTV Total Hours of Programming

July 2020 - June 2021

1,913 total hours

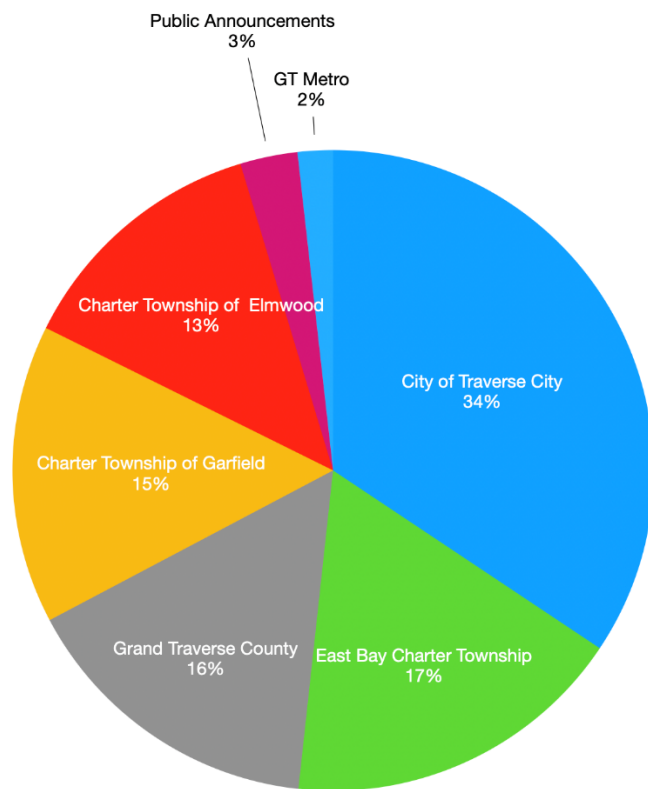


Figure 3: GovernmentTV Programming Hours July 2020 to June 2021

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 (as long as 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 video editing support.

In the last year, Traverse Area Community Media hosted 49 trainings, and logged an additional 190 hours of direct assistance to Producers. With our return to more in-person services, support and trainings, we expect to see both of these numbers return to pre-COVID levels.

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.

The website provides quick links to real-time viewing of CommunityTV and GovernmentTV online, 24 hours a 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 1,957 per month. As can be seen in Figure 4: Website Visitor Sources, nearly half of visitors come to the website directly (from, for example, a bookmark in their browser). Just under one third of visitors arrive on the TACM.tv website via search engines (such as Google). This indicates that the website is serving a specific community of users, as would be expected by something as local as CommunityTV and GovernmentTV. Visitors also access the website by referral, which is usually a link from a participating government’s website. The remainder of visitors come in through our social media platforms.

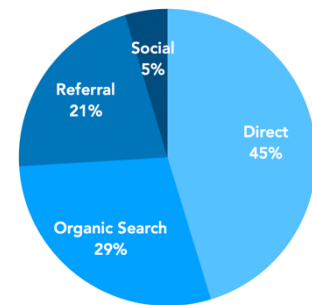


Figure 4: Website Visitor Sources

In the past year, the TACM.tv website received a total of 27,017 visits from 14,740 unique visitors as seen on Figure 5: Website Sessions . 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.

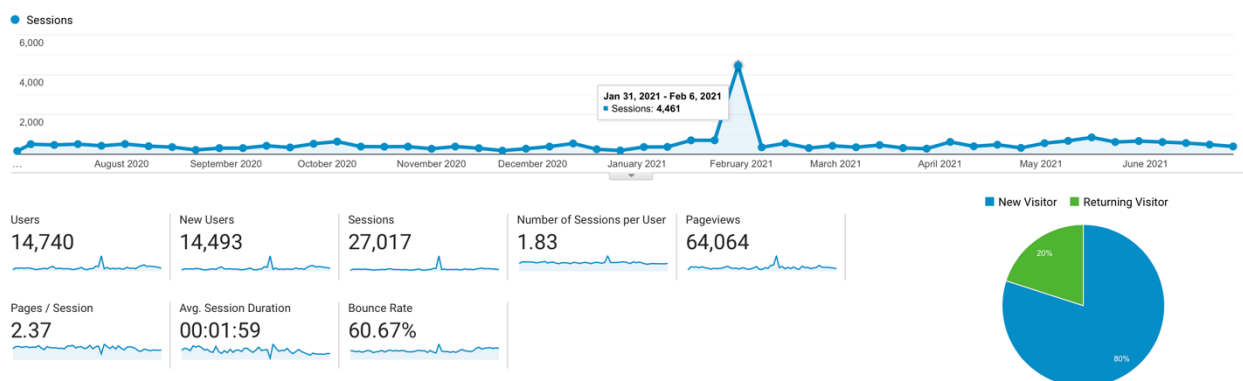


Figure 5: Website Sessions July 2020 to June 2021

The TACM website received 64,064 pageviews for this reporting year (see Figure 6: Website Top 10 Pages). Out of all the pages on TACM.tv, municipal pages received some of the highest percentages of views. The GovernmentTV concurrent stream page (allowing viewers to watch cable channel 191 online) had 5,341 views. Grand Traverse County’s page continues to be the most viewed for on-demand video at 2,559 pageviews.

Page	Pageviews	% Pageviews
1. /govtvnow.asp	5,314	8.29%
2. /default.asp	5,061	7.90%
3. /govtvmeetings.asp	4,568	7.13%
4. /govtv_gtcounty.asp	2,559	3.99%
5. /trafficbot.live	2,042	3.19%
6. /bottraffic.live	1,929	3.01%
7. /govtv_cityoftc.asp	1,574	2.46%
8. /govtv_eastbaytwp.asp	1,472	2.30%
9. /govtvschedule.asp	1,449	2.26%
10. /communitytvsched.asp	1,361	2.12%

Figure 6: Website Top 10 Pages July 2020 to June 2021

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 Charter Cable TV can still watch the public-access and government-access stations.

Internet users viewed the CommunityTV livestream 998 times during the last year, with the highest traffic occurring during the local candidate forums in September and October of 2020 (see Figure 7: CommunityTV Concurrent Stream Viewers). This represents a decrease in traffic from the previous reporting period, however, we are now streaming all our live CommunityTV programming on YouTube. During this same period we logged 39,991 livestream views on our YouTube account. This represents a dramatic shift in how our audience is accessing our live content. This shift has informed our goal to utilize YouTube and other web-streaming platforms on all our live productions in the future.

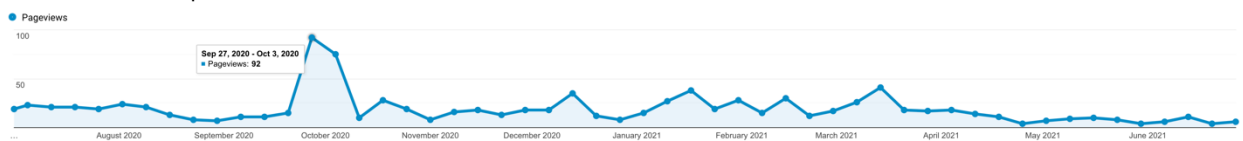


Figure 7: CommunityTV Concurrent Stream Viewers July 2020 to June 2021

The GovernmentTV stream was viewed 5,341 times during the last year, with the highest volume being 224 on April 7, 2021 (see Figure 8: GovernmentTV Concurrent Stream Viewers). Parallel to the reduction in traffic to the CommunityTV stream, the GovernmentTV stream saw a 43% reduction in traffic. Much of this reduction can be attributed to many viewers tuning in directly on Zoom. Grand Traverse County removing its live meetings from the TACM.tv stream from June 2020 through February 2021 was also a contributing factor. With operations returning to normal in July 2021, we are now seeing viewership statistics that more closely match pre-COVID operations.

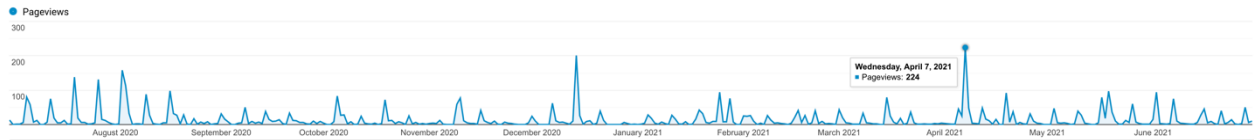


Figure 8: GovernmentTV Concurrent Stream Viewers July 2020 to June 2021

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. Throughout 2020-21, we utilized our Facebook page to broadcast 12 community events. In 2021-22, we will aim to increase this number to ensure that we are growing our Facebook account in conjunction with our YouTube account.

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. This past year, views of programs on the CommunityTV YouTube Channel increased by 125%, from roughly 125,500 to 283,300 (see Figure 9: YouTube Viewer Metrics).

A total of 371,000 hours of programming (413% increase) have been viewed on our YouTube page in the last year, with an average viewing time of over 20 minutes — a relatively long duration for YouTube channels.

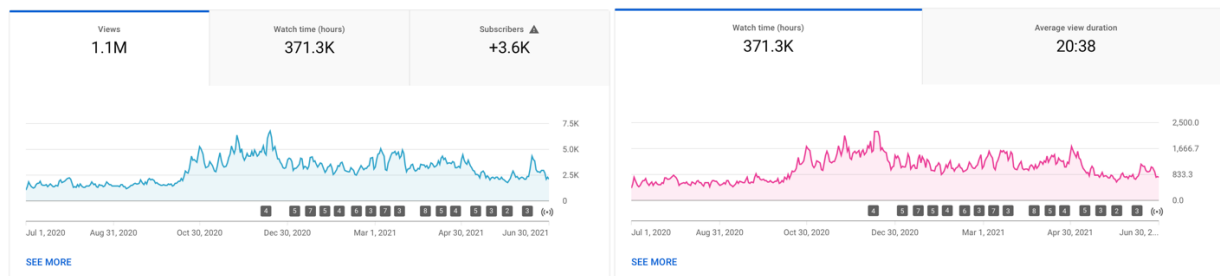


Figure 9: YouTube Viewer Metrics July 2020 to June 2021

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. During this reporting year, we broadcasted 25 live community events, a slight decrease from the prior reporting year (2019-20), but still a substantial increase from the six live broadcasts in 2018-19. Here are a few examples of the partnerships and projects Traverse Area Community Media has worked on this past year:

Candidate Forums – During the fall of 2020 we partnered with the League of Women Voters of the Grand Traverse Area as well as the League of Women Voters of Leelanau County to host 12 candidate forums focused around local and state elections. These forums amounted to some of our most-watched live programming for the entire reporting period.

Newton’s Road STEM Programming – Throughout the summer and fall of 2020 we hosted weekly STEM education and career-building programs with Newton’s Road. These programs were aimed at helping students and their parents navigate the new virtual learning spaces. It also exposed youth to great STEM-related career paths with a focus on guiding youth toward careers that they can pursue in the Grand Traverse Region.

Daily Exercising Classes for Seniors – For the entirety of the pandemic, we have aired 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 Traverse City Downtown Development Authority, 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 13th 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 will remain 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 13 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.