

Traverse Area Community Media

16th 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
3291 Racquet Club Dr. Unit A
Traverse City, MI 49684

www.liaa.org

October, 2024

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 16th 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

In the 2023-24 period, we continued to prioritize accessibility and flexibility by offering both in-person and remote options for nearly all media center services. However, much of the staff time that was originally planned for last year's goals was redirected toward an office relocation. We moved from 324 Munson Ave. to 3291 Racquet Club Dr. Unit A in Traverse City. The planning and execution of the move took three to four months, and the full process was prolonged by the relocation of the broadcast connections for our two cable channels, which took about eight months to complete while working with Charter Communications. Despite these challenges, we made meaningful progress on several key goals:

- **Volunteer-supported regional documentary series**

While the full development of the regional documentary series is still in progress, we made significant strides by engaging volunteers and gathering community interest. Volunteers expressed excitement about the project and contributed by brainstorming ideas and preparing for future productions. Some initial work has been done on topics such as local history and environmental preservation, setting a strong foundation for more structured documentaries in the coming year. This project remains a key focus moving forward, and we are confident that with the groundwork laid this year, we will bring several short-form documentaries to life soon.

- **Expansion of community partnerships**

We continued to strengthen partnerships with local organizations, particularly with the Traverse Area District Library (TADL). We recorded and livestreamed community events from the McGuire Room, with the local candidate forums being the most popular. These partnerships have helped us expand our place-based content, providing local nonprofits and community groups a platform to share important stories and events.

- **Improving turnaround times for GovernmentTV programming**

Although we aimed to reduce the turnaround time for processing and airing government meeting recordings, the system upgrades are still ongoing. We've made incremental progress in integrating our media database with the website, and we expect further improvements in the coming months. Reducing the time it takes to upload meeting recordings remains a priority for the upcoming year.

Next Steps for Traverse Area Community Media

As we look back on another transformative year at the community media center, our commitment to uniting people through the creation and sharing of digital media has only deepened. This year, we are focusing on new initiatives and enhancing our established programs to foster creativity, inclusivity, and knowledge-sharing within our community. Our mission is to continue amplifying local voices and expanding access to media resources in innovative and impactful ways.

The goals outlined below reflect our continued dedication to providing the tools, platforms, and support necessary for community members to tell their stories and engage with one another. While these goals represent key areas of focus, they are only a glimpse of the exciting work we will undertake in the year ahead as we continue connecting people through the power of digital media.

- **Create a Digital Archive of Local Histories**

We will begin building a digital archive of local histories, featuring interviews, documentaries, and oral histories from community members. This archive will serve as a valuable resource for future generations and provide a platform for preserving and sharing the rich stories and traditions of the region. Volunteers and local historians will be invited to contribute content, ensuring that a wide range of voices are represented.

- **Increase Accessibility for Government Programming**

We will continue to improve accessibility for government programming by enhancing features such as closed captioning, language translation, and user-friendly video navigation. These improvements will ensure that government meetings are more inclusive and easier for all viewers to access, regardless of language or ability.

- **Work with Government Sponsors to Upgrade Video Recording Equipment**

In collaboration with our government sponsors, we will upgrade the video recording equipment in their meeting rooms. This project will replace outdated equipment and significantly improve both the audio and video quality of recorded meetings. By modernizing the technology in these rooms, we will enhance the viewer experience and ensure more reliable, high-quality broadcasts of government meetings.

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.

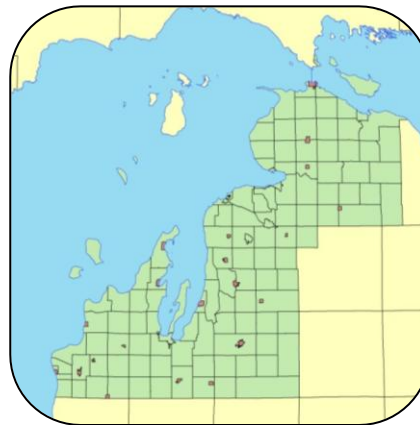


Figure 1: PEG Station Television Viewing Area

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 provides 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 be a Traverse Area Community Media

Traverse Area Community Media Staff

Matthew Kern, Interim Director, Station Manager
Matt Cowall, Executive Director (outgoing Oct. 2024)
Joe Torrence, Media Specialist
Rob Astor, Technology 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

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. 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 4,973 hours of programming (see Figure 2: CommunityTV Programming Hours). Over 1,854 hours of programming were also provided on *GovernmentTV* (see Figure 3: GovernmentTV Programming Hours).

CommunityTV Total Hours of Programming

July 2023 - June 2024

4,973 hours (slightly up from 4,797 hours in the previous reporting period)

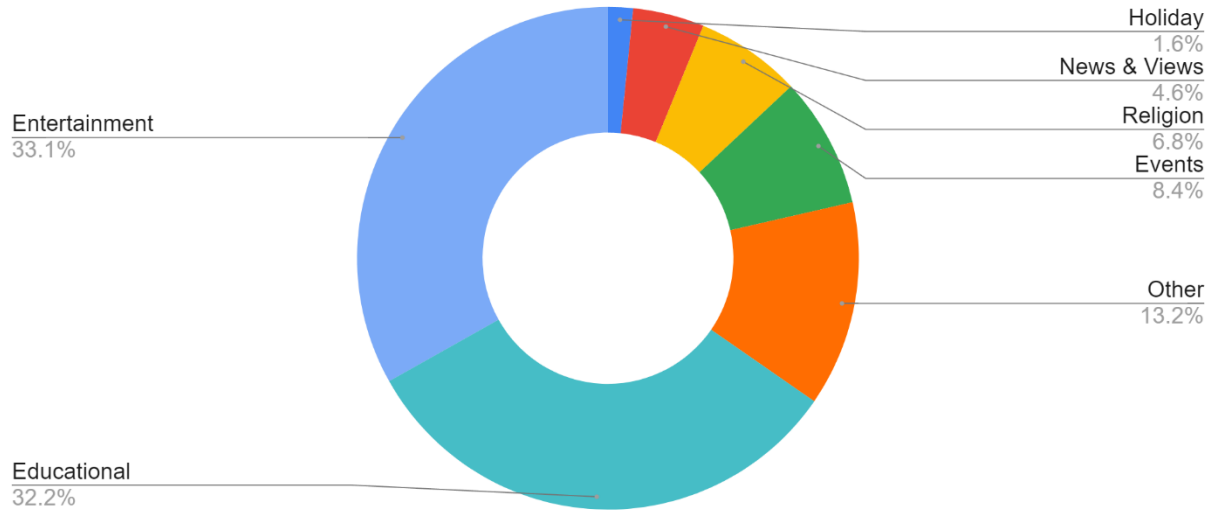


Figure 2: CommunityTV Programming Hours July 2023 to June 2024

GovernmentTV Total Hours of Programming

July 2023 - June 2024

1854 hours (1,970 total hours in the previous reporting period)

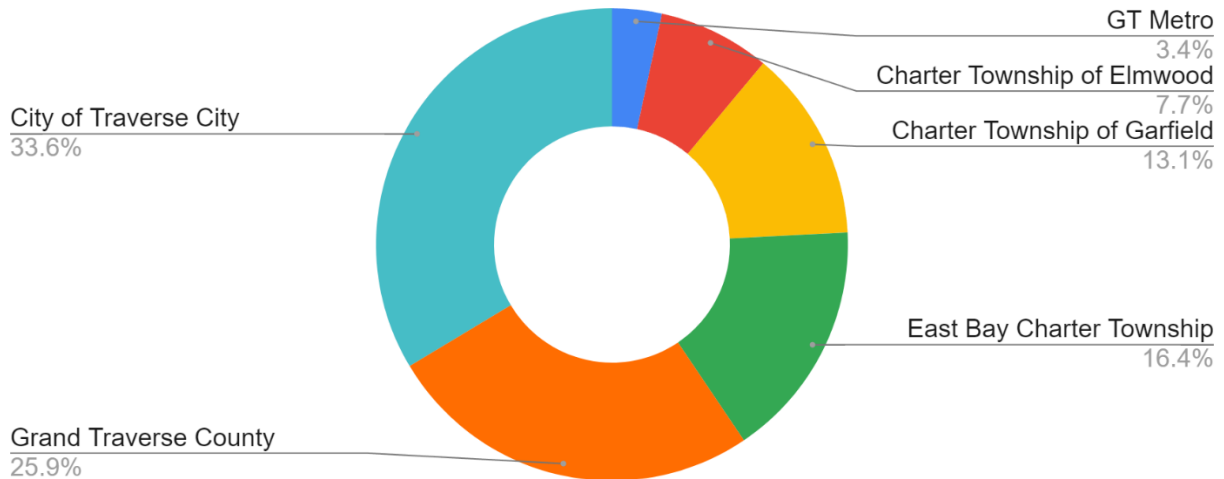


Figure 3: GovernmentTV Programming Hours July 2023 to June 2024

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.

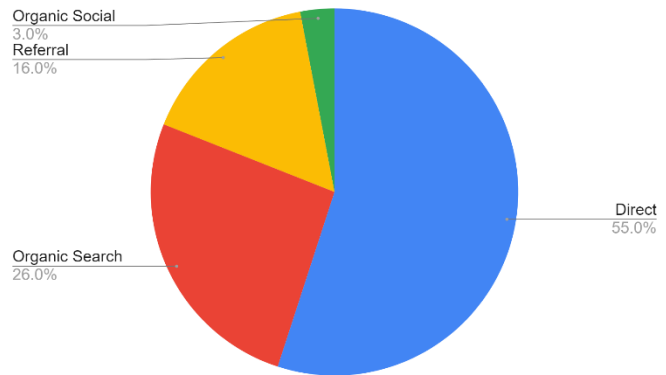


Figure 4: Website Visitor Sources for 2023-24

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 2,268 per month. As can be seen in Figure 4 (Website Visitor Sources for 2023-24), more than half of visitors come to the website directly (from, for example, a bookmark in their browser). Around 26% 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. Sixteen percent of visitors access the website

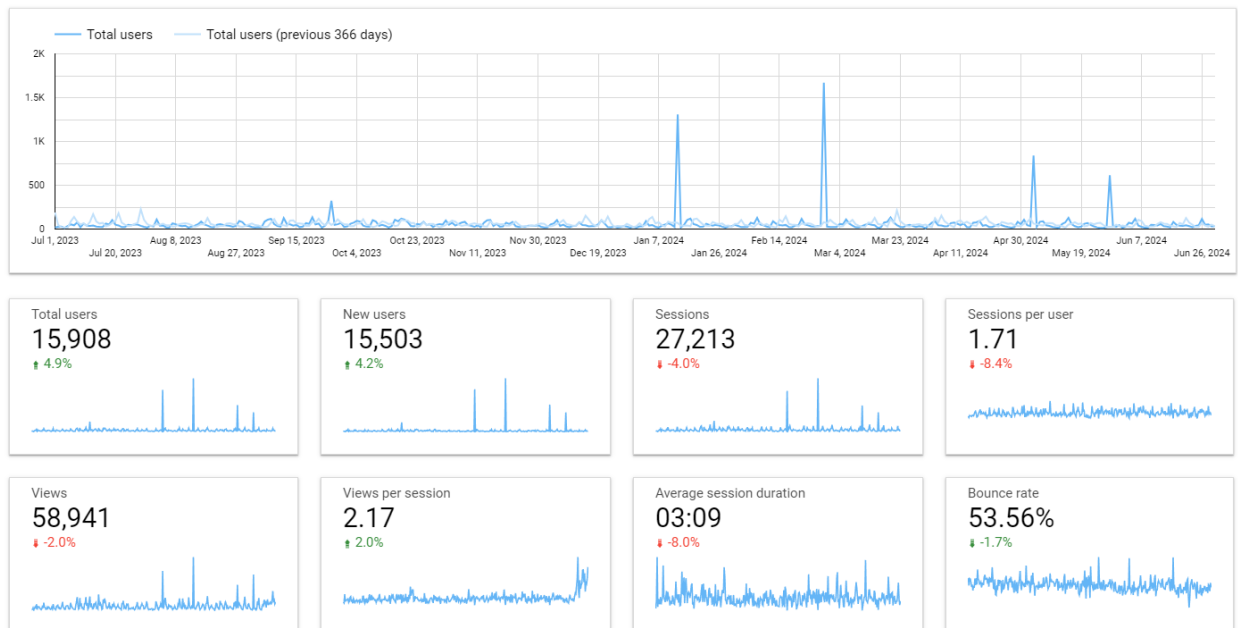


Figure 5: Website Sessions for July 2023 to June 2024 (dark blue) compared to July 2022 to June 2023 (light blue).

by referral, which is usually a link from a participating government’s website. The remainder of visitors (3%) come in through our social media platforms.

In the past year, the TACM.tv website received a total of 27,213 visits from 15,908 unique visitors as seen in Figure 5. Visitors to the website view an average of around 2.17 pages each, meaning once they get to the website, they are engaged to view pages beyond the one they originally sought. Bounce rate is a measure of the percentage of users that leave after viewing only one page. Average bounce rate for websites like ours is 40 to 60%.
















	Page title	Views ▾	Views
1.	Watch GovernmentTV Now - Traverse Area Community Media	8,168 	13.86%
2.	Welcome - Traverse Area Community Media	4,728 	8.02%
3.	GovernmentTV - Traverse Area Community Media	4,175 	7.08%
4.	City of Traverse City Meetings - Traverse Area Community Media	2,077 	3.52%
5.	Find Meetings - Traverse Area Community Media	1,785 	3.03%
6.	Browse GovernmentTV Meeting Videos - Traverse Area Community Media	1,718 	2.91%
7.	Show Comments - Traverse Area Community Media	1,576 	2.67%
8.	Grand Traverse County Meetings - Traverse Area Community Media	1,563 	2.65%
9.	Government TV Program Schedule - Traverse Area Community Media	1,052 	1.78%
10.	East Bay Charter Township Meetings - Traverse Area Community Media	974 	1.65%
11.	Watch CommunityTV Now! - Traverse Area Community Media	968 	1.64%
12.	Add Your Event - Traverse Area Community Media	896 	1.52%
13.	East Bay Charter Township Live Meetings - Traverse Area Community Media	894 	1.52%
14.	About GovernmentTV - Traverse Area Community Media	810 	1.37%
15.	CommunityTV Program Schedule - Traverse Area Community Media	769 	1.3%

Figure 6: Top Fifteen Pages on the TACM.tv Website by Views

The TACM website received 58,941 page views, small increase of 6% from the previous reporting period. 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 8,168 views.

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 968 times during the last year, a 63% increase over the previous period. This was following three years of declining website livestream views due to users accessing our livestreams on YouTube and Facebook. During this same period, we logged 840 livestream

views and 724,812 overall views on our YouTube account. This represents a significant and lasting shift in how our audience interacts with our content. Consequently, we remain committed to incorporating YouTube and other web-streaming platforms into all future live productions.



Figure 7: CommunityTV Concurrent Stream Viewers July 2023 to June 2024 (dark red) compared to July 2022 to June 2023 (light red).

The GovernmentTV livestream was viewed 8,168 times during the last year, with the highest volume being 364 on September 5, 2023 (see Figure 8: GovernmentTV Concurrent Stream Viewers).

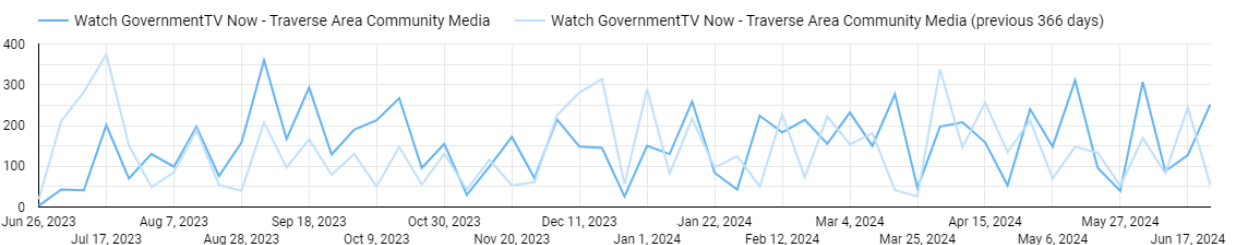


Figure 8: GovernmentTV Concurrent Stream Viewers July 2023 to June 2024 (dark blue) compared to July 2022 to June 2023 (light blue).

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 192,017 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 three independent YouTube accounts for East Bay Charter Township, Charter Township of Garfield, and the City of Traverse City.

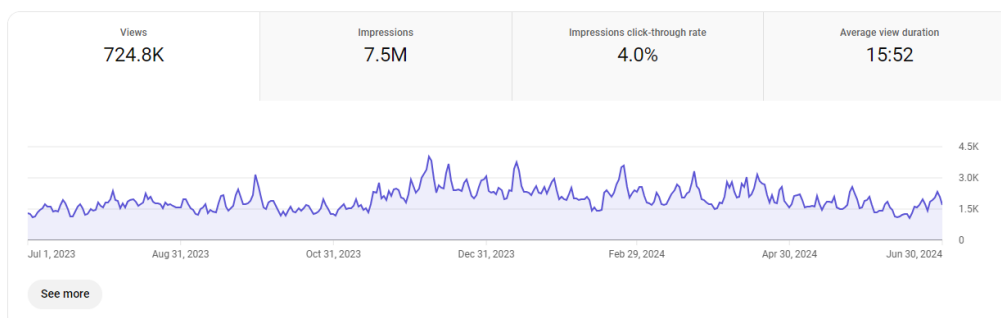


Figure 9: YouTube Viewer Metrics July 2023 to June 2024

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 16th 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 16 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.