



TRAVERSE AREA
DISTRICT
LIBRARY

Strategic Plan

2021-2024

Traverse Area District Library Strategic Plan 2021-2024

Adopted by the
Traverse Area District Library
Board of Trustees
on June 17, 2021

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This document will be available online at the Library's website:
www.tadl.org

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Acknowledgments

The development of the strategic plan took many hours and the dedicated effort of many people. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all those who helped make this plan a reality.

- The Library staff for their contributions to the process, and who will ultimately make this plan succeed.
- The members of the Library Board of Trustees for their participation and support of the process.
- The members of the Strategic Planning Committee for their time and expertise in interviewing community leaders and participating in several time- consuming planning meetings.
- The community leaders who agreed to be interviewed for this process and the community members that took the time to complete our community survey and shared their aspirations for the community.

Together we are creating a library we all love!

Michele

Michele P. Howard, MILS
Library Director

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Vicki Shurly, Peninsula Community Library Director
Linda Smith, Teen Services Coordinator
Jennifer Thomet, Interlochen Public Library Director

Community Leaders Interviewed

Community leaders interviewed consisted of residents with a range of ages, experiences, and educational backgrounds.

Interviewees represented a wide range of community facets including: education; working professionals; community activists; small and large business owners; elected and governmental positions; non-profits; public boards; clergy; Veterans; parents; youth/students; retired residents; young professionals; arts and cultural groups; LBGTQ+; minority groups; public safety; etc.

Some of the entities and roles represented included: Newton's Road, Poverty Reduction initiative; STEM education; TCAPS STEP program; township clerks and supervisors; Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians; Traverse Symphony Orchestra; Interlochen Center for the Arts; schools; school librarians; teachers and principals; social workers, psychologists, and speech pathologists; Twilight Rotary Born To Read; realtors; Friends of TADL; local radio stations; Disability Network; TC Mayor; Traverse Area Historical Society; Human Rights Commission; League of Women Voters; SEEDS; attorneys; NORTE; former employees; library patrons; TART Trail; former homeless individual; newspaper editors and writers; Asian and Hispanic demographics; State of Michigan Corrections; wellness and healing centers; Great Start Collaborative; TC Chief of Police; English as a Second Language (ESL); Lions Club; and more.

The youngest interviewee was age five. A few of the younger interviewees answered the interview questions by drawing what they would like their town to be like. Their important ideas ranged from more family play structures to *a town that includes books!* Adults, coincidentally, expressed parallel desires in the form of educational, enrichment, and entertainment opportunities as well as their love of TADL – complete with its much-appreciated books, programs, and people!



Executive Summary

In order to guide this effort, the Board elected to work with consultants at the Midwest Collaborative for Library Services of Lansing, MI to facilitate a strategic planning process that would help to align library services with the aspirations and needs of the community. Based on the work of the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, community members were asked “What kind of community do you want?” and “How can the library help?”

The Strategic Planning Committee recommended that the Library Board adopt four key focus areas for the period 2021-2024. The focus areas are:

INCLUSIVE SPACE

Enhance gathering spaces where people can be themselves, encounter one another, and have more access to diverse materials, programs, and services.

PURPOSEFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Enrich existing, and seek-out new relationships, that enhance and impact our quality of life.

INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Excite and energize the community by expanding the idea of what a library can be and provide.

TARGETED OUTREACH

Deepen our connection to our community by seeking out new relationships and be a conduit to resources and services.

Overview of the Planning Process

1. The Library Board approved working with consultants from the Midwest Collaborative for Library Services (MCLS) to facilitate the creation of a new strategic plan that would be based on community needs. MCLS, based in Lansing, MI, is a non-profit, member-driven organization whose mission is to facilitate sharing resources and to collaborate with other organizations to benefit Michigan and Indiana libraries. MCLS uses a planning process based on the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation's "Turning Outward" approach. "Turning Outward" is a process that entails taking steps to better understand communities; changing processes and thinking to make conversations more community-focused; being proactive to community issues; and putting community aspirations first.
2. An eighteen-person Strategic Planning Committee was assembled, which included representatives from the Library Board and the Library Staff.
3. At an initial virtual meeting with the consultants, the Strategic Planning Committee brainstormed a list of community leaders to interview, as well as a strategy to invite community members to participate in Community Conversations. The participants needed to represent as many groups and stakeholders in the Traverse Area District Library service area as possible.
4. Strategic Planning Committee members were each assigned community leaders to interview. The interview was based on the Harwood Institute's "Ask" exercise, which entailed asking five simple questions to get a sense of people's aspirations for the community, and how the library might help the community to achieve those aspirations. 71 community leaders participated in the interviews.
5. MCLS consultants created a public survey that was offered through the TADL and member library websites and asked the same questions as the community leader interviews. 386 people participated in the online survey.
6. MCLS consultants compiled the information from the community leader interviews and the community survey to identify themes. This information was used to create a "Community Narrative" to summarize the public knowledge that was gathered.
7. In addition to the "public knowledge", MCLS consultants created a benchmarking report. Consultants benchmarked data points from the Traverse Area District Library against 10 national and 2 Michigan libraries of similar size, and with similar annual expenditures to understand how the Traverse Area District Library stands in relation to its peers.

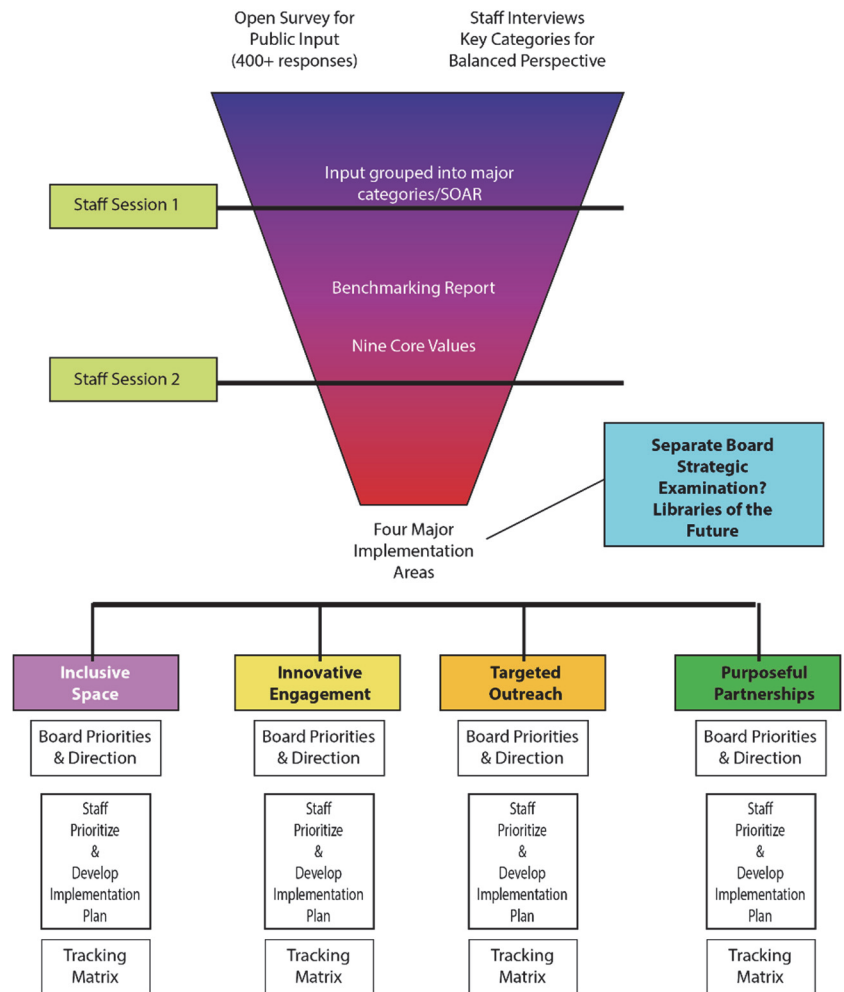
8. The Strategic Planning Committee met via Zoom on March 24, 2021 to participated in a SOAR analysis of the library, identifying strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. The strengths became the basis for the library’s core values. The aspirations became the basis of the library’s vision statement, and opportunities resulted in the identification of four key focus areas.

9. In April, the staff were invited to participate in a survey to share possible activities and ideas that excite them for each of the newly drafted key focus areas.

10. On April 14, 2021 MCLS consultants met via Zoom to work with key library staff on the creation of a tactical plan to address the key focus areas that were identified by the strategic planning committee. The group answered the questions for each priority: “How will the patron benefit?”; “How will the community benefit?”; “What activities might occur?” “What will success look like?”; “What organizational issues will need to be addressed including facilities, technology, policies, staffing, etc.?” This work created the basis for the development of goals, objectives, and activities that make up the three-year strategic plan.

11. Work continued through May 2021 with the creation of the draft strategic plan, including the refinement of goals, objectives, and activities. The library’s leadership team created an initial implementation plan that addressed each potential activity and assigned a target date for startup and/or completion, and which department(s) would be assigned responsibility. A measurement plan was created to track the progress of the goals identified in the strategic plan. Organizational competencies needed for each strategy were created by early June, with the knowledge that assignments and work related to each new initiative will reveal a plan that is flexible and evolving, in order to adapt to changes that may be needed along the way.

Overall Look at the Strategic Planning Process



TRAVERSE AREA DISTRICT LIBRARY

MISSION

To provide dynamic resources and innovative services that stimulate intellectual curiosity, facilitate lifelong learning, promote literacy, and nurture personal enrichment.

VISION

We are a forward-thinking and responsive hub that connects, supports, and strengthens our community.

Diversity · Open Access · Flexibility · Innovation · Teamwork · Stewardship

Diversity

We strive to offer a wide variety of resources, programs, and services that meet the needs of all segments of our community.

Open Access

We desire to provide equitable access to all and provide a place where people feel welcome and respected.

Flexibility

We listen and adapt to the changing needs of our community and develop life-long resources and services that grow with our patrons.

Innovation

We are consistently evaluating, evolving and embracing growth.

Teamwork

We are a friendly, creative, and caring team that help each other, and our patrons, to improve and succeed.

Stewardship

We hold ourselves accountable for the effective use of our funding and take responsibility for the resources entrusted to our care.

KEY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2021-2024

INCLUSIVE SPACE

Enhance gathering spaces where people can be themselves, encounter one another, and have more access to diverse materials, programs, and service

PURPOSEFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Enrich existing, and seek-out new relationships, that enhance and impact our quality of life.

INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Excite and energize the community by expanding the idea of what a library can be and provide.

TARGETED OUTREACH

Deepen our connection to our community by seeking out new relationships and be a conduit to resources and services.

FOCUS AREAS, GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

Inclusive Space

Enhance gathering spaces where people can be themselves, connect with one another, and have more access to diverse materials, programs, and services.

GOAL 1 Create dynamic, varied, and comfortable open-ended spaces that allow for individual and group experiences.

OBJECTIVES

- Library users will report being satisfied with the accessibility of library spaces.
- Library users will report feeling comfortable visiting the library.
- The public will be reserving the use of library spaces more often.
- There will be an increase in the number of people visiting the library.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Audit indoor space layouts and accessibility.
- Continually seek input from diverse community groups about what they want or need from the library to feel welcome.
- Create a welcoming entrance that reflects our diverse community.
- Design and construct dedicated outdoor spaces for programming, gathering and seating.
- Design/redesign more open ended and diverse meeting spaces.
- Designate 1st floor bathroom gender neutral, family, nursing and/or handicap accessible.
- Enhance department entrances.
- Install community art displays.
- Purchase flexible and accessible furniture.
- Improve internal wayfinding.
- Investigate placing a visible sign out front of all locations with event marketing capabilities and dual signs at each drive entrance.
- Update the website design and accessibility.

GOAL 2 Empower people of all ages and abilities to take more investment/stake/interest in the library by enriching their experiences in the physical and virtual space.

OBJECTIVES

- Diversity among staff and volunteers will increase.
- Library programs and collections dealing with equity, diversity and inclusion topics will increase.

Please see the following page.

GOAL 2 Empower people of all ages and abilities to take more investment/stake/interest in the library by enriching their experiences in the physical and virtual space.**OBJECTIVES, continued**

- Library users facing challenges will report that the library has helped them to move forward.
- Library users report that the library connects them to needed resources.
- Library users will report feeling represented (seeing themselves) in the library and in the collection.
- Library users will report that they feel less isolated and feel less alone in the community after attending programs and conversations at the library.
- Staff will report increased comfort working with different kinds of people.
- There will be an increase in circulation.
- There will be an increase in program attendance.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Conduct a diversity audit for collections, programming and staffing.
- Update collection development policy to include inclusive collecting.
- Create inclusive web space and racial and social equity pages.
- Create more inclusive community group displays.
- Explore creating quiet hours for people who are neurodiverse or have sensory needs.
- Explore increasing outside hires using diverse hiring practices.
- Explore offering after-hours library access and programming.
- Hire a consultant to design and update technology to assist with disabilities.
- Make training and educating staff a priority including cultural and inclusivity competencies.
- Replace display cases with touch panel digital signage.
- Review policies for inclusivity and equity.
- Update the website design and accessibility.

PURPOSEFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Enrich existing, and seek-out new relationships, that enhance and impact our quality of life.

<p>GOAL 1 Retain and strengthen collaborations with other organizations to help reach a cross-segment of the community.</p>
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OBJECTIVES

- An increase of partnerships will expand the community profile.
- Community partners report we are willing and active partners.
- Community partners will increase sharing and liking TADL content on social media.
- More community organizations will seek us out to partner with them to further the library's mission.
- Partners will promote TADL programs, services and resources.
- The number, longevity and depth of partnerships will increase.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Connect patrons to community organizations that can provide them with needed services and assistance.
- Create a partnership coordinator/outreach staff position.
- Create and maintain a partnership database with linked data including internal and external contact information.
- Develop cross marketing opportunities with partners and potential partners including those with established mobile outreach units.
- Host a nonprofit organization fair to help bring people to the organizations and connect them with each other.
- Improve tribal outreach.
- Identify potential new partners.
- Provide services to schools in our area like peer-to-peer with librarians, literacy staff as well as technology, and library cards.
- Create an environment that raises the status of the library the extent that other nonprofit orgs think of the library first as a partner to help reach a cross-segment of the community.
- Retain and strengthen local history partnerships.

INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Excite and energize the community by expanding the idea of what a library can be and provide.

GOAL 1 Excite and energize the community by expanding the idea of what a library can be.

OBJECTIVES

- Library users will report learning a new skill or enhancing their existing skill set.
- Library users will report that the library has offered them a new or unique experience.
- Library users will report that they see the library as the primary cultural and civic hub in the community.
- Library users will report they are excited about the items in the Library of Things collection.
- Library users will report they are excited to come to the library.
- Library users will report they have deepening relationships with others in the community by connecting and learning at the library.
- The number of first-time program attendees will increase.
- The number of returning program attendees will increase.
- There will be an increase in the variety of staff created programs.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Continue to build digital online resources and programming.
- Create DIY and artistic programming.
- Create intentionally accessible resources, services, and programs.
- Create multigenerational programs.
- Develop a culture among the staff of innovation, try new things and take risks.
- Develop a skills-sharing series.
- Enhance personalized library services.
- Expand drop in and open-ended programming.
- Expand our Library of Things collection and programs using the Things.
- Explore ways to create programs that harness staff expertise.
- Highlight our diverse community with cultural programs that have global access and are locally sourced.
- Host listening and watch parties featuring music, audio books, or movies.
- Host open mic night and outdoor music events.
- Host programs where “patrons are the program” (cooking contests, chili cook-off, etc.)
- Invest in innovative, sharable technology that can expand virtual reality and gaming programming and more.
- Investigate resources that increase literacy skills for kids and adults.
- Look for local experts to create and host their own programs.
- Install a new, updated physical and virtual suggestion boxes.

Please see the following page.

GOAL 2 Provide interactive experiences between library staff and the community by meeting people outside of the library.

OBJECTIVES

- Library users will say that the bookmobile makes library access more convenient.
- Library users will say they encountered the library in a place they did not expect to.
- Staff will feel less stress and more support with an outreach coordinator in place.
- The number of outreach programs will increase.
- The attendance at outreach programs will increase.
- Staff will feel more comfortable reaching out to and planning programs with diverse populations in mind.
- Staff will report feeling adequately trained to support patron led programs.
- The number of community engagement programs and conversations will increase.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Continue to build on already existing programs.
- Create an outreach coordinator staff position.
- Create hybrid programming outside the library's walls.
- Create popup and offsite programming in unexpected places.
- Establish a bookmobile service.
- Expand school outreach opportunities and teacher bonds.
- Improve/create services and resources for the homebound.
- Investigate implementing a book bike and/or motorized E-bike service.
- Provide library programming and set up booths at local festivals.
- Reach out to vulnerable populations like migrants, shelters and the homeless.

TARGETED OUTREACH

Deepen our connection to our community by seeking out new relationships and be a conduit to resources and services.

GOAL 1 Retain and strengthen the relationship between the community and the library using fresh and innovative approaches to specific groups that do not use or partner with the library.

OBJECTIVES

- Feedback from surveys, social media, focus groups and suggestion box comments related to library experiences & programs will become more positive.
- Library users will report being listened to.
- Library users report they have a better understanding of what the library has to offer.
- Media opportunities featuring TADL staff and services will increase.
- TADL representation in the community will increase.
- New user groups will use and value the library.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Continually seek input from diverse community groups about what they want, what they need from the library, and why they don't use us.
- Continue to make coming events, news, service district map updates a priority to attract new users.
- Create an Outreach position that also focuses on volunteers.
- Create informational and promotional library materials using various language and non-language versions.
- Create purposeful connections with local media personalities.
- Create traveling displays and booth space.
- Develop a fluid and dynamic online experience with intuitive links that attracts many users.
- Host radio, tv, and podcast segments.
- Investigate and expand the community's access to the library's informational and promotional materials.


Appendix A: Community Report

Summary of Interviews and Public Survey

The Traverse Area District Library embarked on a new strategic planning process in January 2021, which included engaging members of the community. This report summarizes the engagement process and resulting themes that were identified. “Community” has been defined as the library service area of the Traverse Area District Library. The library system is unique in its model, and includes a main branch in Traverse City, two branches - East Bay and Kingsley, and three member libraries - Fife Lake Public Library, Interlochen Public Library, and Peninsula Community Library.

Traverse Area District Library, known from here as TADL or the Library, used a combination of one-on-one interviews with a wide variety of community leaders and a public, online survey open to all residents or workers in the service area. The interviews and survey were based on The Harwood Institute’s model of community engagement, which seeks to “Turn Outward” to the community to determine their aspirations, and in turn, prioritize services that are in alignment with the true needs of the community.

The members of the Library’s strategic planning committee conducted one-on-one interviews with various community leaders, asking about their aspirations for the community, the concerns they have and challenges facing the community, their thoughts about what it might take to reach those aspirations, and identifying areas where the Library might help. Seventy-one community leaders were interviewed. The public survey was offered through the websites of TADL and the member libraries and asked the same questions. Three-hundred-eighty-six people participated in the online survey.



The members of the Library’s strategic planning committee conducted one-on-one interviews with various community leaders, asking about their aspirations for the community, the concerns they have and challenges facing the community, their thoughts about what it might take to reach those aspirations, and identifying areas where the Library might help.

The notes from the interviews and survey have been summarized in a blended community narrative and public knowledge summary. The most-shared community aspirations have also been organized in a word cloud illustration for visual reference. Additionally, information on how the interviewees and survey participants believe the Library can help the community to reach its aspirations are organized, themed, and aligned with specific aspirations or concerns that they might address.


Community Narrative

Community members openly shared their aspirations and concerns. The following is a narrative of the information, summarized in a blended form of The Harwood Institute models of the “Community Narrative” and “Public Knowledge Summary”. The themes are listed in the order most mentioned.

It is important to recognize that this Community Narrative was written in a specific and intense context. Locally and nationally, there is incredible political polarization and division. These interviews and surveys were completed on the heels of both an extremely divisive presidential election and inauguration and a local political situation that gained national attention. There are clearly frustrated people across the community and across the political spectrum. At the same time, we are almost a year into a global pandemic which has caused disconnection, isolation, and fear for most. These factors came through loud and clear in the interviews and survey responses and are important to consider when using the narrative and public knowledge summary to guide long-term planning.

Traverse Area District Library Community Narrative/Public Knowledge Summary

The Traverse Area District Library community, including residents of their member library communities, collectively aspires to be a community that is, above all else, welcoming, friendly, kind, and respectful. They aspire to be diverse in all ways – racially, economically, sexual orientation, age, gender, education level, skill sets, and more. They want a community that offers many and varied opportunities. These opportunities include convenient recreation, entertainment, shopping, and restaurants, but also opportunities for jobs, professional growth, and enrichment for all ages. They want a community that values the arts and provides cultural programs. They desire to live in an inclusive community, where truly all are welcome and can feel at home. They recognize the importance of connection, and desire to be united in shared experiences, goals, and vision. They aspire to be a community where people take care of each other and where the needs of all are met. This aspiration is most often mentioned in regard to affordable housing but reaches beyond into making sure that those in need of any services can access them. They want to be a community that builds each other up, seeks the common good, and brings out the best in all; a community that looks out for its most vulnerable.



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Community Narrative

At the same time, many feel a keen sense of individual freedoms and responsibility and desire a community where those freedoms are respected. They value education and want to live in a community that offers quality schools, varied educational opportunities, and lifelong learning. They hope to have a community that is safe, with low levels of crime, and family-friendly. While their political leanings vary


widely, they are agreed that they want a community where people are politically active, involved, and engaged. Many want opportunities for safe, civil discourse involving critically-thinking participants who are open to hearing and understanding other points of view. They desire a community that is naturally beautiful and environmentally sustainable for the long term. They want to be led by appointed, elected, and unofficial leaders who are honest, ethical, responsible, and forward-thinking, and who communicate with the public.

In addition to the aspirations above, many who identified themselves as users of the Kingsley branch, Interlochen Public Library, and Peninsula Community Library aspire to live in a peaceful, rural community, although they still aspire to have access to convenient recreation, stores, and amenities.

Community Narrative - Diversity &

Inclusion

The desire to live in a community that values diversity and inclusion appeared in the largest number of interviews and survey responses, far and above all other answers, and across all physical parts of the service area. Diversity was used in a very broad way, encompassing racial, ethnic, culture, socio-economic, gender, sexual orientation, identity, education level, age, background, and point-of-view. It is a shared aspiration across the TADL service area to be a community where truly ALL are welcome, and where people can learn from each other. There is a desire to be sure that children are exposed to others different than themselves in order to learn that the world is wider than their own.



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[Community Narrative](#)

Participants want a community where all have a voice, and where leadership is representative of the wide and diverse population. Some expressed that they wish it went beyond simply being diverse into celebrating differences as strength. They desire a community that is just and equitable, where all are heard, and all contribute; a community that acts upon inequity so that it becomes ever more inclusive. Some shared that they would aspire to be a community that is truly, and in all ways, integrated, where people who are different have shared experiences to build upon. Many want a community where people are open-minded and open to learning from each other and evolving.

As is often the case, the highest aspirations of this community are also one of the areas of greatest concern. There is a sense that the community is not diverse enough, that it is still too homogenous and insulated. Some feel that, while the community has become a bit more diverse in recent years, the attitude around that has not kept up and so people who are “outside the norms” of the community – whether that be financially, racially, in sexual-orientation, or otherwise – are not made to feel safe and welcome enough, which then slows the progress toward more diversity. Some even feel that the diversity is shrinking again, as people are no longer willing to be where they don’t feel welcome or wanted. Specifically, community members mentioned that they would like the community to be more welcoming to those of the LGBTQ+

community, and that they'd like to see more racial diversity and cultural representation. Several mentioned a large migrant worker population in the area, and that they feel this piece of the community, so important to the economic structure, is not respected and is underrepresented.

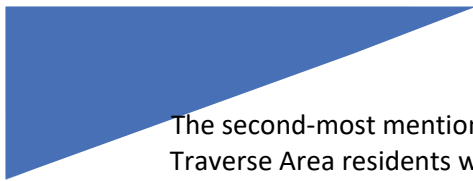
A few mentioned wanting to see local leadership be more representative of the actual community. Participants are concerned about an apparent assumption that everyone thinks alike, rather than an openness to become aware of and place value on different viewpoints. There was much mention of the area being more exclusionary than inclusive. Many expressed that they would personally like to see the diversity and inclusion grow but feel that the community as a whole is more and more unwilling to embrace this. Some feel that recent political extremism and polarization has contributed to a public perception of the Traverse Area as racist and unequitable, which hinders growth. Phrases such as, "us-vs.-them mentality," "zero-sum attitude," and "systemic division" were mentioned as concerns. There was also mention of youth leaving the community, and a feeling that this is sometimes because of the inability for young people to feel welcome and safe to be themselves.

Community Narrative – Opportunity

The second-most mentioned aspiration for Traverse Area residents was opportunities. Some expressed a hard-to-achieve desire for a community that is small, walkable/bikeable, and where everyone knows each other, while still having convenient access to all the advantages of a big city. This included everything from quality public transportation to social services to stores to a variety of restaurants and entertainment options. Many mentioned a desire for a busy, social, vibrant, and engaging city-center or downtown with lots of available options. Access to quality healthcare was mentioned repeatedly.

Respondents want to live in a creative community with cultural activities and a focus on the arts and music. Some expressed a desire for these events, activities, and opportunities to be available all year, rather than only in the summer for tourists. Many would like to be part of a growing community, although what was meant by "growth" widely varied (growth of industry or activities or people or jobs or green space or tourism or full-time residents.) A large number expressed the desire for outdoor activities and recreation opportunities.

The largest concerns addressing this theme of "opportunities" centered around maintaining the balance of growth in order to have variety and access with retaining the small-town feel, "small-town values," and quiet, peaceful, close-knit community they have cherished. There was a lot of recognition that they "want it all" and how difficult that balance is to achieve. Those served by the Kingsley branch, Interlochen Public Library, and Peninsula Community Library especially expressed the desire to stay rural and natural, but admitted that they, too, struggled with the balance of wanting amenities and opportunities close at hand. Many do feel that there are lots of opportunities in the area already, or at least that there will be once the pandemic restrictions are loosened. For many, there is a



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[Community Narrative](#)

sense that local leadership is too focused on growth and money over the charm and character of the community. Several mentioned concerns that young people are moving away due to a lack of jobs and things to do.

Community Narrative - Connection & Unity

Almost as strongly as the first two themes, connection and unity came through the interviews and surveys loud and clear. It makes sense that in this time of global pandemic, with businesses including the Library closed and people instructed to distance, people are feeling an acute desire for connection, and are concerned about the disconnected nature of their community. The answers people shared, though, about both aspirations of and concerns for their community, seemed to go beyond just this current time of separation. It is clear that the people of the Traverse Area desire a community that is focused on the common good and building community together.

People spoke both about being interconnected with and needing each other, as well as desiring a connection to the bigger world. They want to know their neighbors and live in a community where there is sharing, of ideas and resources. They spoke of being a cohesive community, where those living in, working in, and being served by the community have a united sense of values and purpose, and in which the local organizations form partnerships to support that purpose. A community that all are proud of, that has a sense of togetherness, positivity, and building each other up. A community that supports small, local businesses, which in turn then provide job and income opportunities for residents. They desire a community where decisions are made collectively, and where residents with the various points of view mentioned previously find common ground and learn to work together toward the greater good.



It is clear that the people of the Traverse Area desire a community that is focused on the common good and building community together.

[Community Narrative](#)


Connection and a sense of unity was the second-largest area of concern for both interviewees and survey participants, after taking care of each other (which is similar and has some overlap.) It is clear that the community is struggling with division and disconnection. Much of this has to do with the pandemic, and the isolation, loneliness, and disconnection many are experiencing this past year. However, it came through equally clearly that the political issues facing the country have deeply affected the Traverse Area. People spoke of concern over the accelerating divisions as people become more and more politically polarized. There were concerns over adversarial language and a growing tendency to react to each other with judgment, criticism, or even violence rather than empathy and effort to understand. They spoke of a desire to return to the civility, politeness, and respectfulness of the past, and are concerned that the community (and wider world) seem to be losing these attributes and ways of being.

Community members also spoke of an area that is geographically spread out and the difficulties this creates. In such a widespread community, it can be hard to find shared goals since the needs vary so much. In the more rural parts of the area, residents spoke of it being difficult to form community because of physical distance, especially for young people and seniors, even before the pandemic.

Community Narrative - Takes Care of Each Other

A natural next aspiration of a community that wants to connect and find strength in their diversity is to be a community that takes care of each other. Many directly used the words “cares about each other,” “cares for others,” and “takes care of its most vulnerable,” while others showed the same aspiration through desires for accessible public transit for those who can’t or don’t drive, accessible social services, and experiences and opportunities being available to all, regardless of socioeconomic status. They aspire to be a community where children are valued and taken care of in such a way that residents stay in the community their whole lives. They aspire to be a community where families are supported through quality, affordable childcare. A community that places an emphasis on including those who have been excluded and looks out for each other. A community where people know their neighbors and help each other. A community where everyone has enough, and inequities are justly addressed. A community that is food-secure, has jobs and affordable housing, and values outreach. They hope for a community where there are plenty of volunteer opportunities and engaged community members ready to fill them.

Participants spoke of an aging population and the changes that brings to the needs of a community; of a lack of affordable childcare that leaves families struggling; of “exploitative systems” and “entrenched barriers” leading to an ever-widening system of “haves and have-nots.” Mentioned were concerns about drugs, guns, homelessness, lack of internet access, quality public transit, and accessibility services for those with disabilities. Some feel there is a lack of awareness about mental health in the community. It was expressed that there are many organizations and social service agencies around, but some questioned whether they match the needs of the community. For example, one expressed concern over a lack of services for “those outside the cultural norms of the area.”



Taking care of each other was also, however, the most-discussed concern.
Community Narrative

They do feel like there are lots of individuals and organizations who want to address these problems but are concerned that organizations are too often siloed or territorial, causing duplication of services and leaving gaps of unmet needs. Some worry that individualistic attitudes, fear, and the polarized political situation, along with the pandemic, is only contributing to a deepening apathy and an unwillingness to speak up or act to fix long-standing systemic problems.

Community Narrative - Values Lifelong Education

Traverse Area is a community that values education and lifelong learning opportunities and aspires to be a community where these values are shared and prioritized. Many feel that the value is already there, but that perhaps there is room to improve when it comes backing that value up with adequate resources. Community members spoke of desires such as a community that promotes learning; that is literate, intelligent, and informed; that has quality and trustworthy schools; that offers and supports a variety of educational opportunities, including tracks other than college; where young people are given the tools they need to succeed.

They want a community that is curious and dives deeper into what they want to learn about. There were concerns mentioned about educational disparity and lack of access to education for those without wealth, and for those for whom a traditional educational track is not appropriate. A few spoke of inflexibility in curriculum in local schools, and politics affecting what children are taught. It was mentioned that there is a large migrant worker population in the area, and that the children of these workers are falling through the cracks.

Many expressed a desire to live in a community comprised of educated, thoughtful people who trust science and facts; people who are media-literate and can think critically and evaluate information. Some expressed concerns that this is getting less common, and that more is being based on emotions, extreme and inflexible positioning, and a “toxic technocratic media cycle.”

It was mentioned many times that a quality library is at the heart of their aspirational community, as it provides access to books, learning and enrichment programs, internet connectivity, and open, truthful, trustworthy information, accessible by all regardless of financial status. It was clear that this community values its library system, and interviewees and survey participants from the Main Library, both branches, and all three partner libraries had wonderful things to say about the good work the Traverse Area District Library is already doing. There is concern about access to all of these important services and information due to COVID-related closure and restrictions, but this is due to an uncontrollable global event rather than choices and strategies of the Library, and hopefully temporary. Participants look forward to full services and access being restored!

Community Narrative - Affordability

Throughout interviews and surveys, the words “affordable” and “affordable housing” came up many times as both aspirations and concerns. This community aspires to be one where people have access to quality, affordable housing, and many said that there is not enough available. They desire a community that is “economically stable,” “vibrant,” “successful,” and “thriving,” but vary in opinions about how to achieve that. Some feel there needs to be an increase in businesses coming to the area to boost the local economy and job availability, while others feel this will negatively affect other aspirations (like beauty, environmental concerns, and the small-town feel.) Some feel that to stay “thriving in a dynamically changing world,” the area will need to evolve and are concerned that the community is not open to that.

They aspire to retain residents over a lifetime, and to be a community where those lifelong residents can retire comfortably. Many spoke of fears of having to leave the community when they retire, as they will not be able to afford it. Others spoke of not being able to attract young families and young professionals because the area is too expensive. Concerns over “livable wages” were raised again and again.

There was again concern raised over pandemic-caused struggles for small businesses, and hopes that the community will find new and innovative ways to support their local business community, and thereby boost the local stability and the opportunities for stable jobs. There was some mention of empty buildings, but it was unclear if this is a long-term problem or due to the current crisis; either way, it may affect the community in long-term ways. Many feel the “wealth-gap” is growing and that economic disparity is

increasing and becoming more obvious. They hope the community will find opportunities for housing, services, activities, recreation, learning, and enrichment that are affordable enough to be available to all.

Community Narrative - Safety

People in the Traverse Area want to live in a community that both IS and FEELS safe. They desire a community that has a low crime rate, is drug-free, and where kids are able to have freedoms, “like in the past.” Some specifically want an area free of guns (more than one person said, “except for hunting,”) and referred to a recent, local County Commission meeting that became national news and stirred up fear. They spoke about physical safety concerns increasing instead of decreasing.

The safety concern most raised, though, was poor roads and sidewalks making it unsafe or difficult to get around. Many expressed the desire for a walkable and bikeable community, and pointed to issues with sidewalks, busy roads, and lack of traffic signals and crosswalks.

Even more than physical safety, this community spoke of aspiring to be one that is safe for every resident to be themselves and speak out against injustice, and many respondents feel the community has a long way to go to achieve this. They spoke of issues with bullying and intimidation between each other as well as between leadership and residents. They spoke of fear of each other and that even in a community that wants more diversity, people remain afraid of those different than themselves. They hope for a community where everyone is free to truly be themselves, and where it is safe to be “different.”

Community Narrative - Sustainable Beauty

Not surprising to anyone who has ever set foot in the Traverse Area, the community places a high value on the natural beauty they are graced with. They want to live surrounded by picturesque views and access to lakes, parks, trails, and outdoor recreation. Many spoke of the peacefulness the water brings. They recognize that their community already meets and exceeds these aspirations, although several mentioned that more trails would be great. The concerns raised here had mostly to do with the sustainability of this gift.

Many mentioned concerns over environmental-consciousness – or lack thereof – and whether the community was thinking long-term enough to keep the beauty for future generations. This caused some clashes between those who want to see the business community or convenient access to stores grow, and those who want to keep a low-skyline and more focus on the environment. Some expressed that they feel the community is “getting crowded” and that increased vehicular traffic is contributing to congestion, noise, and physical pollution. There was mention of desire for farmland preservation, continued ruralness in the outlying areas, and increased green space in all towns and corners of the district. Several mentioned valuing and working to maintain healthy air and water and raised concerns over pollution of both.

There are fears about abuse of natural resources and environmental destruction, and many feel the community has work to do regarding increased environmental consciousness and responsibility. The idea of being a “regenerative community” was promoted. Some would like to see greener and renewable energy given more attention. More than one person would like the community to focus more on sharing resources

instead of buying new.

Attractiveness, cleanliness, and beauty were mentioned over and over, although sometimes with the purpose of attracting new people, and other times with the purpose of the community being comfortable and enjoyed by those already living there. One thing that stood out about this community is the tension that being a desirable destination creates. As an area that heavily relies economically on tourism, includes a large percentage of second homes and vacation rentals, yet is also home to many full-time residents, there is a clear divide in focus, and a need to find a balance that serves all.

Many in this community wish the local government and infrastructure would be more focused on residents and want to live in a town that prioritizes those who contribute to the community year-round. Others recognize that much of the financial wellbeing of the community is created through visitors and partial-year residents, and want to be sure that adequate resources are put into supporting the tourism system, including taking care of the people who are employed by the industry. While many expressed aspirations and concerns that highlighted this divide, some pointed out that a balance needs to be achieved to ensure prosperity and sustainability for the area and to create a cohesive community with shared goals.

Community Narrative - Civil Discourse & an Involved Citizenry

Residents of this community expressed a desire for an increase in civil discourse and an involved citizenry, and a concern that these are decreasing in favor of apathy and an inability to disagree respectfully. They spoke of a hope for residents to be able and willing to engage in issues facing the community, nation, and world with facts and empathy, and a willingness to try to see someone else's point of view, while still standing strong for their own beliefs. Some expressed a frustration at feeling "censored," and others are worried that the area is being unfairly defined or represented to the wider world by one small, extreme position. Some expressed fears that misinformation is being spread and that people don't know who to trust or what to believe.

People mentioned, again in this category, a desire for more balance and a willingness to seek first to understand. They want a community where people are involved and participatory and feel this would lead to a more effective ability to solve problems facing the area. They hope people will be plugged into current events, locally and globally, yet that they will "stop blaming politics for everything." Again and again, residents voiced that there are not safe places, resources, or opportunities for open discourse. Many are concerned that those who are involved are so extreme and have their heels dug in on either side, and that those who feel more moderately have just disengaged.

Community Narrative - Responsible Leadership

Much of the community expressed aspirations regarding local leadership, including those who are appointed, elected, and unofficial leaders. Many adjectives were used to describe their desired leadership, including, "respectful," "BIPOC and LGBTQIA+," "transparent," "forward-thinking," "diverse," "trustworthy," "progressive," "conservative," "honest," "just," "balanced," "positive," "quality," "unafraid," and "visible." They want leadership that strives to truly represent their constituents rather than their own interests or perspectives; leadership that is politically balanced and cares about the community. They want honest and

frequent communication from their leaders, and a focus on both the long- and short-term, the big picture and day-to-day, “the macro and micro.” They want to see strong accountability by (and expected of) their leaders.

This was an area of much concern, mostly regarding politics and elected/appointed, “official” leadership. Many referred to the recent County Commission meeting that gained national attention, one calling it a “shocking show of disrespect by our leadership.” When asked how the reality of the Traverse Area differs from their aspirations, people spoke of concerns over dishonest politicians and what they see as ineffective, unethical, irresponsible, unprofessional leadership. They spoke of a distrust by the public of their leaders, and shared concerns over appointed leadership not truly representing the interests of people in the community. They spoke of an “old boys club” and raised concerns over representation, meaning that the community is more diverse (racially, culturally, gender, sexual orientation) than the leadership. Some worry about short-term thinking or a lack of transparency. It was mentioned repeatedly that there are many “unofficial leaders” and influencers trying to solve problems, but that too often they are not as effective as they could be because of a general lack of trust, or because of duplication of services instead of partnerships.

Traverse Area District Library Community Aspirations



How can the Library help?

Interviewees and survey participants were asked how the Library can help achieve the identified community aspirations and address community concerns. The responses listed below were compiled and loosely themed, including some of the specific suggestions offered. Some suggestions could fall under more than one category. The suggestions are a combination of activities the Library already conducts (which the community wants to see continued or grown or may not be aware of) and ideas for new activities.

Keep the good work coming!

In both conversations and interviews, participants across the locations made it clear that they love and cherish Traverse Area District Library, and feel the Library is doing a great job. They had many, many quotes and examples of how and why they love what you're already doing and hope that you'll keep up the great work. One said, "I think our director and staff are doing an excellent job moving us forward." One interviewee shared a, "great admiration" for how the Library has contributed to the community in the past, and a hope that the Library can be central to bringing the community together. Another participant said, "Helping a community is the heart of a community, and the Library is the brain of that. Librarians are a helping profession."

Many acknowledged TADL as an invaluable, "hugely important resource to the Greater Traverse Area." Others spoke in general terms of what a library does for a community, including being for families, a free source of entertainment and opportunities, a connector, and a boost to the education level of residents. One person mentioned that TADL gives kids in the community the opportunity for freedom in a safe environment, and the opportunity to see a world wider than their own perspective. Another said, "The library is the center for public health and public learning; the library reinforces community." Several participants specifically recognized the Peninsula Community Library as a vital and well-respected "cornerstone" of the Old Mission community. One participant summed it up, saying, "(Traverse Area District Library) plays so much into our community already and the location is perfect with all that is happening on 8th Street."

Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Access

The most-mentioned way the Library can help create participants' aspirational community is to support diversity and inclusion, including making sure there is equal access to needed services for all community members. This included ensuring diversity and representation in the collection, artwork, and displays. It was pointed out that ALL should see themselves represented in the books and other resources available through TADL. One participant said, "The Library has tremendous influence and responsibility in curating and featuring stories that our children are exposed to and which instruct and inspire them to interact with our community and the world." Another person said that, "The Library can give everyone a place to see and be seen."

People spoke about creating awareness of, and exposure to, people who are different than each other, whether culturally, racially, in sexual orientation, in abilities, or in backgrounds, for mutual learning

and increased understanding, respect, and kindness. They would like to see opportunities for fostering intergenerational dialogue, to increase acceptance and tolerance. Another person feels, "the Library can help highlight that there are queer people in this community. Even something like a basic panel discussion for things like fighting racism, and intro on how to be a community ally, or info on gender vs sexuality, these are the kind of talks the Library could foster." Community members would like to see disability-awareness trainings offered.

Other ideas offered included curated and vetting a list of quality resources for EDI education and personal enrichment, and offering education to the community on what the, "wide range of normal is." There was interest in language instruction and resources in order to get a better understanding of other cultures. There is interest in more community activities to bring people together and celebrate diversity and strength in differences. It was also suggested that TADL could support area schools in regard to Equity, Diversity, & Inclusivity education and history curriculum. A specific example was given to investigate whether the Michigan history taught is fully accurate and tells the whole story. The idea was also raised that the Library could adopt a theme around kindness, caring, or inclusion and then take that into schools with stories and themed activities.

When discussing ensuring equal access, a variety of areas were mentioned, including finding innovative ways to provide computer and internet access, social services (even having an in-house social worker at the Library), and more accessible online resources. It was mentioned more than once that signage in the community, including at the Library, is written for a highly-literate, English-speaking population, and suggestions were given to incorporate more symbol signage or increased translation services, and that perhaps the Library could partner with other community organizations to increase this across the whole community (public transit, stores, media, etc.)

There was a suggestion to host an English as a Second Language (ESL) program for immigrants, using TADL staff as coordinators and volunteer tutors. Ideas were given for getting resources out of the building and to those who need them, whether through book delivery to the homebound, mobile libraries to bring services and wifi to neighborhoods with access issues, or a warming tent outdoors during the pandemic. It was offered that the Library should consider really making an effort to invite and encourage those who may not have experienced the Library to come in: "For some in a low socioeconomic demographic, (or those in minority groups,) I think the Library represents fear and insecurity, perhaps even superiority, which simply is not the case."

Many mentioned the branches creating more opportunity to utilize the Library, and some would like to see even more branches or small locations, even more spread out through neighborhoods and rural areas. One idea was to provide wireless internet servers in remote parts of the county without access. Another was to be sure there is proper engagement and education of the older population on using TADL's online services. One interviewee pointed out that it is a "full-time job to be poor," and wondered if the Library could find ways to help with the fact that many needs like filing paperwork, meeting with the courts, etc. have to happen during business hours, when those in need are also expected to be working. Similarly, someone else mentioned that, "the more we shift to an online culture, the harder it is for the poor to communicate what they need." They wondered if more person-to-person, relationship-building services, rather than large, impersonal networks, would be a route to relieving some of this burden.

One participant did mention a personal experience with not feeling as welcomed and represented at TADL, as a person of color, as he would have liked. It was mentioned by several that TADL is already doing “a good job” of trying to include diverse voices and creating a community of inclusivity, but that there is always room for more growth in this area, and that perhaps promotion of the associated activities, events, and resources could be improved or increased. A suggestion was to look critically at the entrances of the Library buildings and think about “placemaking” in these spaces, considering whether they are welcoming to all, including new people to the community. It was also suggested to conduct some “inclusivity assessments,” starting from within – building accessibility, policies, staff, collections.

Community Connector through Partnerships

In both interviews and surveys, participants made it clear that they see an important role of the Traverse Area District Library, and libraries in general, as a connector for the community – of people to each other, of people to information, and of organizations. As one person put it, “The Library is a key influencer because it has enduring and meaningful partnerships with hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals in our community.”

First, they talked about the Library connecting individuals and families to each other. The term “hub of the community” was used again and again. Holding events and activities that bring people together (once the pandemic has lessened, or virtually now) was suggested. One participant said, “A good thing I (have taken) from the pandemic is that technology can help us connect, and hear and see faces, voices, tones, it can be an amazing tool. It helps people find their people and connect. So I want the Library to figure out how we can develop some programming that they can use to grow year after year, and help us reach and find those partnership opportunities.” They like the idea that the Library creates opportunity for human interaction and exposure to others unlike themselves and would like to see more interest-based groups and meet-ups. Some mentioned wanting to use the Library as a place to relax, read the paper, and run into neighbors. An idea that was suggested was to look for opportunities to use existing programming time to connect people. For example, TADL could intentionally create an opportunity for parents to “talk and bond” and create their own subcommunity during Library Storytime, when their children are occupied.

It was stated that a library is a “clearinghouse of information,” and that it can be a central point of contact for community information for people to access. It was suggested that perhaps the Library create or grow a Community Liaison position, who would go to community groups such as the Grand Traverse Community Collaborative, the Northwest Food Coalition, or the Front Street Irregulars, and cull all information into a central resource. They would love to see the Library work with local organizations to create a new resource guide about the community as a whole, and asked that it be regularly updated and that there would be both print and online versions to access.

It was suggested that the Library could coordinate a volunteer group, or compile information on where and how to volunteer. There was interest in more job fairs and resources around job services the Library already offers. It was pointed out that by partnering with groups such as The Chamber or Networks Northwest, the Library could gain access to larger funding sources, but cautioned that it would be important to find ways to keep the content untethered and unbound to any agendas or biases of the organizations. Besides all of this, residents hope the Library will continue to be what they feel it always has been – a

container to hold truthful information, print and digital.

Many mentioned that if community organizations were more connected and less siloed, there would be less duplication of services, and more efficient service to the community, and that they feel the Library can be the central facilitator of that connection. They feel all the local non-profits need to be, “woven together into a network to make all systems more robust.” As one participant said, “we’re not in a huge city that needs repetition (in organizations.) There should be something unique in either your service or who you serve. We don’t have the funding available to be competitive with each other.”

Community members also said that the Library can be a link, an efficient way to connect people to organizations rather than one-on-one, slow, personal invitations. The Great Start Lending Library’s director was interviewed and was interested in a more collaborative relationship with TADL, sharing that they have significant budget for infant and toddler materials and would love to get those into the branches and partner libraries. The community members could envision the Library coordinating a fund to help school-aged children participate in extracurricular activities so that kids of all socioeconomic levels would be equal in opportunities, which would strengthen their ties as they grow into adults in the community.

The community feels the Library could help connect and unite community members around common goals. One interviewee summed it up: “The Library is the glue that holds the community together.”

Safe, Neutral Gathering Space

Community members from the Traverse Area see their Library as uniquely positioned as a safe, neutral gathering space. They feel that people trust the Library more than the government or other entities, and that it is seen as available to and belonging to all. Several different ways were suggested to capitalize on this position.

First, they would like to see the Library use its neutrality and perceived sense of trustworthiness and as being welcoming and accepting of all to be a place for “healthier community conversations, to help with disagreements.” They feel TADL can take on more of a “Neutral Convener” role in creating space for open dialogue and the chance to take on hard topics. Since it’s already the center of the community, without religious or political agendas, and already fighting censorship and defending freedom of information based in facts, many feel it is in a prime spot to address important issues head on. One person mentioned that, “It is so important to have that neutral ground available for some of these talks, on topics like diversity and inclusivity.”

They would like to see the Library become an even more safe place to learn, listen, and become aware of the issues facing the community and varying points of view. They suggest that the Library take an intentional and active role in convening these events and discussions. As one person put it, “I’d like to see the Library host discussions about the future of the area away from Township buildings, where the community can speak together as concerned neighbors, not as board members versus ‘the public.’” Participants could imagine the Library not just providing space but helping teach people how to have civil discourse, how to be allies to those on the margins, and how to come together to learn even when they are afraid to say or do the wrong thing. It was suggested that the Library could support healing in a divided community through

lectures, events, or workshops on how to talk to each other.

Secondly, they feel TADL could go even further in this role, and could actively bring residents together to work toward shared community plans and goals and infrastructure improvements. They would like to see open discussion groups to support problem-solving from within the community and feel the Library could become the “neutral expert facilitators” for community engagement. They can see the Library being a place to host dialogue highlighting prior challenges and how the community came together to address issues, in order to facilitate discussion and generate ideas about addressing current issues. Hosting classes on how to create community leadership in neighborhoods was one specific suggestion. It was mentioned that the community got a good start with the Grand Traverse Community Foundation’s dashboard, which showed what the area is doing and where the gaps and challenges lie; the idea was raised that perhaps the Library could take that foundation and start a dialogue around where to take that next, working actively to include all voices. Another idea was to put major city projects and designs on display at the Library as they develop, to allow for public awareness and input, perhaps even dedicating a room or space to this.

Third, community members love that the Library has meeting space available to outside groups, and would like to see this continue and grow. They feel it is an asset that the Library can share with the community, and appreciate that TADL already, “does a great job hosting without judgement.” Some feel there is a need for more meeting rooms.

Support our Value of Education & Lifelong Learning

Interviewees and survey participants felt that one of the more obvious, direct roles the Library can take in supporting the aspirational community they desire is in supporting education and lifelong learning. This can start with traditional ways, like making sure the collection is strong and growing. One person mentioned that, “A knowledgeable community starts with reading and the Library can play a major role in that.” Many mentioned literacy initiatives and targeting young children and pre-reading learning as programs to develop and grow, and it was acknowledged that TADL already has a “stellar youth services department to engage kids and families.” It was mentioned that if the Library is not doing so already, sending liaisons to work with the local schools could greatly benefit the community. Some mentioned how the Library’s Facebook Live classes enrich their at-home learning for homeschool and preschool curriculums, and that they’d love to see these programs continued even after the pandemic.

There was some discussion of a considerable segment of the local population being agricultural workers, many with non-English speaking homes and migrant or partial-year work, and whose children are not part of formal summer school for various reasons. The suggestion brought forward was for some sort of “traveling library” to go to the agricultural camps or local churches near the camps, bringing music, puppets, storytimes, and crafts to the children, and perhaps even lending books. Those who suggested this felt it would solve a lot of access problems and help children in those communities to stay productive and learning. The “debilitating pause in the educational process, especially for young and developing minds (due to COVID)” is seen as creating new opportunities for innovative programming to help young minds, and participants feel the Library can play a significant role in that effort.

Some would like to be sure the Library has enough comfortable, usable space for students to study. One suggestion was to create a tutoring center, staffed by volunteer and paid tutors, possibly by partnering with STEP (Students in Transition Empowerment Program.) A participant referred to this balance as making the Library, “a one-stop-shop for learning.” Overlapping with the themes of “partnerships” and “safe, neutral spaces,” many of the comments around supporting education had to do with partnering with existing organizations to be the most effective, and/or providing space for these activities.

As people spoke beyond formal education into supporting a community aspiration of lifelong learning, they spoke of helping the community to grow through increasing people’s exposure to information and ideas. They would like to see workshops or programs created to help residents learn more about facts and critical thinking, and to develop the skills needed to gain more media literacy and navigating a polarized, 24-7 media cycle. It was mentioned that, “through the internet, many have access to vast quantities of information, but what we DO with it is the real issue. We need mentors who can teach with passion about building a better community (using the information.)” Another idea raised was to develop a literacy network in order to reduce the stigma surrounding adult illiteracy.

They would like to see the Library encompass research and formal educational opportunities, as well as recreation and casual reading that promote ongoing learning. One participant said, “To quote a Bible Proverb, ‘Education is your light, guard it well.’ The Library is the source of that educational light for a lot of people. It can protect and provide that light for people their entire lives. Schools play a role, but libraries are there for life.”

Continue and Grow Quality Programming and Library Services for ALL

Many of the appreciations expressed for TADL, as well as specific ideas for ways to help the community, had to do with programming and services offered by the Library. Some were clear that they already love a program and hope it will continue, others weren’t sure if they were suggesting a new idea or just weren’t aware of something already happening. Either way, those interviewed and who participated in the survey want to see quality programming and services available, innovating, and growing.

One mentioned having older people do storytimes for children as an intentionally intergenerational learning opportunity. Activities and programs like yoga, crafts, reading groups, beer/wine book clubs, music programs, cultural events, instrument play for toddlers, dogs reading with kids, young adult-specific opportunities, college-focused nights, teen after-school programming, basic technology classes, dance parties for all ages, and a tool shed for sharing were given specific mentions. Some of the services mentioned were tax services, MeLCat, access to free entertainment (dvds, music, etc.), job fairs, Read Alikes, and curbside service.

The Library of Things TADL offers was mentioned repeatedly and there was hope for expansion. A few would like to see programming and events specifically for full-time locals, perhaps around local history. Some suggested exploring how the Library could make itself available to outside events and programs benefitting the community, such as being an emergency shelter during bad weather, providing voter registration, or as a voting or vaccination site. It was clear that this community desires many, diverse offerings to ensure there is something at or from the Library for everyone in the community.

One participant suggested that the Library consider who is involved in planning and providing programs and think about whether broadening those involved at that stage might widen the audiences they serve.

Many mentioned that they appreciate all that has been done virtually to keep people busy during the pandemic but are “eagerly anticipating” the return of in-person events and programs as soon as possible and safe. Some asked that the Library consider what, such as virtual broadcasts of programs and curbside pick-up, might be of benefit to continue even after the pandemic, to benefit those whose access issues exist outside of the current medical crisis.

Get the Word (and Resources) Out

It seems that many who were interviewed or filled out the survey felt that while they already know the wonderful things the Library is and does, an unfortunately large part of the community does not. They want the Library to continue to do the fantastic work you’re doing, “but be more visible!” Many feel that a major way TADL can contribute to their aspirational community is by communicating what you do to a wider audience. They appreciated this opportunity to share their ideas, but want to be sure the Library is finding ways to ask these questions to those who aren’t already TADL users. Over and over, communication and outreach were mentioned.

One suggestion was to turn the director report or highlights of programs/services into a video segment on the monthly library newsletter. Another was to be sure that other nonprofit organizations know all of the amazing things TADL has to offer so that they can help spread the word among their constituents. There was also a suggestion to build, “better and more robust content via social media to engage younger patrons and create a TADL ‘voice’ to translate its resources and possibilities and inspire people to learn.” They want it known that the Library is “a resource hub for anyone wondering, ‘Can you help me?’”

Several mentioned getting excited to see the Book Bike out at the Farmer’s Market, and that this is a great start, but that they would like to see the Library out in the community more often and in more places. Some participants would like TADL to better communicate the available Library resources to the migrant and seasonal communities. Repeatedly, community members asked the Library to go out to the community rather than taking for granted that you’re here and they’ll come to you if they want to. One participant told a story of her work with the children of migrant workers: “Three years ago, we tried to bring kids to the Library using transportation services available during the summer, but it was an absolute nightmare and we never tried again. It’s hard to coordinate all those bodies coming into town, and would be much easier to bring the Library to the children.” They also feel better public transit routes including the Library would help get more people to the physical buildings.

A specific idea was to place a “greeter” at the door of the Library, whose job is to put marketing materials for the Library in peoples’ hands as they enter, adding to the welcoming nature of the Library at the same time. It was also suggested that the Library create or use signage to tell people that the phones are open for reference assistance even during the pandemic (in addition to the curbside phone number.) As a bigger strategy, a community member proposed that the Library use the state and national Library system “membership” (platforms and connections) to promote what is happening in this region, especially regarding partnerships and meeting regional goals. They continued, “TADL should be connecting our story with the

nation, it's really a story about visibility and lifting up the story of who we are, so we can meet more of those economic sustainability goals."

Opportunities, Entertainment, and Culture

Not surprisingly, perhaps, since a large aspiration was to be a community with lots of opportunities, entertainment, and cultural activities, many of the ideas for how the Library could help centered here. Respondents would like to see the Library be a "hub of collaboration between arts, education, and culture." They see the Library as a big audiovisual entertainment provider, and would like to see that grow even more, with a bigger and more current and appealing movie department. They suggest bringing in artists, writers, authors, and musicians for classes and seminars, or to display their work in the Library. There was a suggestion for murals or artwork when you first enter the buildings. One participant even asked, "Please let me check out art from the Library to hang on my walls (at home.) I would so love to have painting in my house, and always something fresh and new to put up."

The community would like to see more music-focused outreach, and noted that it doesn't seem to exist elsewhere, so it might be a great opportunity for the Library to take on. Ideas included free concerts where the community is already gathered, which would also expand people's worldviews and exposure. One participant mentioned that they would love to borrow all of the Traverse City Film Festival films after each year's event. was repeatedly suggested that TADL partner with the Interlochen Center for the Arts more extensively. A specific idea was to offer guest passes or discounts at local cultural institutions with your Library card. Fitting together with desires expressed to be a more walkable community, there was a suggestion to offer dog water bowls outside the doors of the Library.

There was mention of expanded evening and weekend hours and increased staffing, in order to provide the opportunity for a safe "hang out" space for all ages, access to entertainment, and the ability for wider audiences to participate in programs. Some felt the community would benefit from a safe place for youth to congregate that isn't centered around athletics and is free or affordable. Several suggested a coffee/tea or snack shop within the Library. Participants recognized the potential financial challenges but would love to see some creative solutions.

Overall, the community feels the Library can build upon the rich value already in the community by highlighting it and making it freely available to all.

Capitalize on Our Outdoor Beauty

Participants had some thoughts about how TADL could help the community capitalize on the natural beauty of the area and encourage green initiatives for sustainability. They appreciate the Seed Library and hope to see that expand. One idea of how the Library could help promote a sustainably beautiful Traverse Area would be to create and organize a community garden. This would be a multifaceted project, since it would allow for green space and nature, but also act as new programming, bring people together to work on shared goals, depend on partnerships, and could include an educational aspect. One participant said that creating walking trails through the community garden could help achieve another aspiration for the community. They love the current children's garden and the opportunity that gives to teach the younger generation about

sustainability. Another suggestion was that the Library look at ways to partner with Boardman Lake, maybe to create educational programming. It was suggested that the Library put more mature trees of different varieties around the Library, labeled, to inspire curiosity, and sponsor tree planting each year. Another idea was to designate a landscape planning area in the Library, where people could put moveable pieces on a screen or board to plan their home projects, encouraging tree planting and having information available about options. They would enjoy programming that, “celebrates local farms and the people who feed us, local forests, fields, and waterways, and the diversity of life in these ecosystems that so richly reward the observant visitor,” as well as community courses or workshops on Climate Literacy. They would like to see the Library promote resources on smart transportation, urban cycling laws and guidelines, and utilize more signage along the TART directing folks to the Library. One participant commented that, “we are at a crossroad where we can become just another shoreline city/suburbia like so many others or choose to cherish and nurture those things that make our area truly special.”

Participants mentioned that the Library’s grounds are, “beautifully unique” and should be used to their fullest potential. Community members would like to see an outdoor, covered pavilion, which could be used for outdoor reading and enjoyment of Library resources, Library programming, and even other community events, along with play space and picnic tables. They could envision Storytime, checkers or chess matches, or other programs taking place outdoors in the summer. They hope TADL will, “remember to merge the Library with the outside natural world.” An idea was also offered to make outdoor meeting space usage available to the public.

Some participants hope that TADL will lead the way for the community as the, “green model.” One participant said, “it would be amazing to see the Library be a sustainable building... using alternative energy (like solar or wind) and teaching by example.” They would appreciate a place for the community to easily recycle batteries and can envision some chargers for electric vehicles in the parking lot. By living these principles in their own buildings and programs, starting initiatives to be more environmentally conscious, and offering programs and learning opportunities around sustainability, they feel the Library can set the example.

Evolve with Our Community

One interviewee said it this way: “Libraries need to grow and update with the times. It's not about just the books, it's about the information in the books. Philosophy can stay consistent but can adapt to newer technology while holding on to culture.” Traverse Area community members hope the Library will continue to grow with society and with new technology, and feel the Library, “will have a vital role (to play) in what comes next for our area.” They see the Library as something very different than libraries of 20 – 30 years ago and want TADL to communicate that to the community. Many feel the changes toward more of a community center, being a more welcoming place, and moving away from the old silent, intimidating stereotypes of the past should be embraced and advertised to the wider community, in order to draw more people into all TADL offers. One participant said, “A (thriving, effective) 21st Century library (may be) quite a different proposition from protecting the quaint, historical building it is in.”

As for ideas on HOW the Library should evolve in the near future, some would like to see more branches, or many neighborhood locations, even if very small, in order to better serve a spread-out, aging population with ever-more access needs. It was mentioned that TADL might be ready to explore a new,

updated logo. One participant suggested that the Library staff, “think outside the box” in exploring how the assets already available to them might serve an evolving community effectively. For example, asking, “Is there anyone on our staff that speaks other languages? If so, how could that be utilized? Are the immigrant populations in town using the Library’s services? If not, why not, and what could we do to help?”

There are some who want to be sure the Library retains its core, though, and feel that libraries have an important role to play in being a quiet space in the community, rarer these days in the wider community than in the past. They hope that TADL will, “get back to the basics of being a quiet place to read and think.” One person would like to see the model switched: rather than having a quiet room, this individual would prefer a quiet main space with a “noisy room” available. While it’s a tough balance to find, some want to be sure that as TADL evolves with the community, it doesn’t lose what it already did well.

Community members feel this is a “ripe time”, politically and culturally. They were happy to have been asked the interview and survey questions and suggested that the Library continue to poll the community regularly about their wants and needs. As one participant said, “I want the Library to be the beacon of reason, a catalyst for interaction, and open to all.” Another shared hope and encouragement, stating that, “the Library’s mission statement is strong and can handle growth and change.”

Appendix B: Implementation Plan

The Traverse Area District Library has created an Implementation Plan in order to turn the strategic plan into action and help the library accomplish the strategic plan's goals and objectives.

This plan outlines the potential activities, roles and responsibilities, and decisions necessary to turn the strategic plan into reality. Mapping out a strategic plan this way, brings the strategy to life and drives success. It also ensures more buy-in from stakeholders and guidance when everyone involved knows what, when and who will be initiating potential projects.

The Traverse Area Public Library will review this document each year to incorporate the ever-changing opportunities for library, and the needs and interests of the community.

Strategic Plan - Implementation Timeline

INCLUSIVE SPACE				INCLUSIVE SPACE				INCLUSIVE SPACE			
Year 1 -- 2022				Year 2 -- 2023				Year 3 -- 2024			
	Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed
Improves to Library Entrance	Director	Aug.		Investigate Outdoor Improvements	Facilities	March		Construct Outdoor Spaces	Facilities	Jan.	
Review Department Entrances	Dept. Heads	Sept.		Enhance Department Entrances	Dept. Heads	Jan.		Create 1st Floor Inclusive Bathroom	Facilities	March	
Audit Indoor Spaces and Bathrooms	Director/Facilities	July		Improve Internal Wayfinding	Marketing	Jan.					
Update Website for Accessibility	Asst. Dir. Technology	Sept.		Update Website Design	Asst. Dir. Technology	March					
Budget for physical improvements	Director/Business Mgr.	Oct.		Purchase Flexible and accessible furniture	Director	June					
Conduct Diversity Audit	Dept. Heads	Sept.		Adjust Collections & Policy to the Diversity Audit	Dept. Heads	Jan.					
Install Community Art Displays	Marketing	July		Invite Diverse Groups to use Displays	Marketing	Jan.					
Continued Staff Training on DEI Issues	Director	Jan.- Dec.		Continued Staff Training on DEI Issues	Director	Jan.- Dec.		Continued Staff Training on DEI Issues	Michele	Jan.- Dec.	

PURPOSEFUL PARTNERSHIPS				PURPOSEFUL PARTNERSHIPS				PURPOSEFUL PARTNERSHIPS			
Year 1 -- 2022				Year 2 -- 2023				Year 3 -- 2024			
	Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed
Create a list/database of all partnerships	Director/Leadership	Aug.		Maintain List of Partners	Director	Jan.					
Continued Services to Schools	Youth Services Staff	Jan.		Expand School Services	Youth Services Staff	Jan.					
Identify New Partners	All Staff	Jan.									
Investigate Holding a Nonprofit Fair	Adult Services	April									
Develop Cross Marketing Opportunities	Marketing	Jan.									
Improve Tribal Outreach	Director/Leadership	Jan.									

INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT				INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT				INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT			
Year 1 -- 2022				Year 2 -- 2023				Year 3 -- 2024			
	Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed
Purchase/Design a Bookmobile	Director/Leadership	Jan.		Expand Bookmobile Service	Director/Leadership	Jan.					
Expand Services to Homebound	TBL/Adult Services	Jan.		Create Outreach Position	Director	Jan.					
Develop a Culture of Innovation	Director/Leadership	Jan.		Develop Hybrid Programming outside library	Dept. Heads	Jan.		Create Library Pop-Up Services	Dept. Heads	Jan.	
				Investigate Literacy Initiatives	Youth Services/ Dept. He	June		Create Literacy Initiatives	Andy/ Dept. Heads	Jan.	
				Create E-Book Bike Services	Director/Adult Services	July					
				Library Booth at Local Events	Dept. Heads/Marketing	April					
				Build on Existing Programs Offerings	Dept. Heads	Jan.					
				Outreach to Vulnerable Patrons	Dept. Heads/Outreach	Jan.					
				Create Multigenerational programming	Dept. Heads	June					

TARGETED OUTREACH				TARGETED OUTREACH				TARGETED OUTREACH			
Year 1 -- 2022				Year 2 -- 2023				Year 3 -- 2024			
	Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed
								Seek out and Identify Missing User Groups	Leadership Team	Jan.	
								Collaborate with Diverse User Groups	Leadership Team	Jan.	
								Create Multilanguage Promo Materials	Marketing	Jan.	
								Create Traveling Displays	Leadership Team	April	
								Connect with TV, Media, etc.	Marketing	Jan.	

STRATEGIC PLAN				STRATEGIC PLAN				STRATEGIC PLAN			
Year 1 -- 2022				Year 2 -- 2023				Year 3 -- 2024			
	Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed		Role Responsible	Month	Completed
Set baseline numbers for measurement plan	Director	June		Conduct Annual Strategic Plan Survey	Director/Marketing	Jan.		Conduct Annual Strategic Plan Survey	Director/Marketing	Jan.	
Develop Strategic Plan Survey	Director/Marketing	June		Evaluate Activities and Adjust as needed	Director	Jan.		Evaluate Activities and adjust as needed	Director	Jan.	

Appendix C: Measurement Plan

The Traverse Area Library District will collect and monitor data at regular intervals in order to find out how it is progressing or developing in terms of the goals identified in the strategic plan. This monitoring will provide the library with the information needed to continually refine and enhance activities to reflect the changing needs and interests of the community.

A target has been established for each strategy in the plan. Targets include both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data will come from surveys, and provide information on outcomes, or about how people feel about an activity. Whenever available, qualitative survey questions will be derived from existing surveys available at the *Public Library Association's Project Outcomes* website. Quantitative data will be collected from the library's integrated library system, or manual tallies.

Measurement Plan **Strategic Plan 2021-2024**

INCLUSIVE SPACE	How?	When?	2019 Baseline	2020 - COVID	2021	2022	2023
Output: Library-wide Collection Diversity Audit	Staff	Annual	Teen only		All locations		
Output: Increased use of Meeting Rooms	ILS Data	Annual		0	5%	5%	5%
Output: Increased Book Circulation	ILS Data	Annual	1,092,936	591,121	5%	5%	5%
Output: Provide at least 4 DEI events each years	Staff	Annual	n/a	n/a			
Output: Increased Patrons Visiting the Library	ILS Data	Annual			25%	15%	10%
Outcome: Patrons see themselves reflected in our collection	Survey	Annual	n/a	n/a			
Outcome: Patrons see themselves reflected in our programs	Survey	Per Program	n/a	n/a			
Outcome: Patrons will say they feel welcome	Survey	Annual					

PURPOSEFUL PARTNERSHIPS	How?	When?	2019 Baseline	2020 - COVID	2021	2022	2023
Output: Create List/Database of Partners	Google Sheets	Constant					
Output: Increase Community Partners	Google Sheets	Annual	Unknown	Unknown	10%	10%	10%
Output: Increased Summer Reading Club participants	ILS Data	Annual/Sept.	2,852		5%	5%	5%
Outcome: Surveyed Patrons report learning about events via Library Partners	Event Survey	Per Program					
Outcome: The Library will be invited to more Events and Partnerships	Partnership List	Leadership Meetings					
Outcome: Non-profits will say we are a willing and active Partner	Partner Survey	Annual					

INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT	How?	When?	2019 Baseline	2020 - COVID	2021	2022	2023
Output: Increased attendance at Library Events	State Aid Data	Annual	39,468	Virtual Only	10%	10%	10%
Output: Creation of Bookmobile w/ regular Routes	State Aid Data		n/a	n/a	3 routes	5 routes	7 routes
Output: Increased visitors to the Library	ILS Data	Annual	568,791		25%	15%	10%
Output: Increased number of Library Card Holders	ILS Data	Annual	65,258		25%	15%	10%
Output: Create 3 Patron Led Programs per Years	Staff Survey	Leadership Meetings					
Outcome: Patrons will report learning something new and exciting at a library program.	Event Survey	Per Program					
Outcome: Patrons will report it was their first time attending an event.	Event Survey	Per Program					
Outcome: Patrons will say the library is serving the Community.	Survey	Annual					
Outcome: Staff will feel more connected to our community.	Staff Survey	Annual					
Outcome: Patrons will say they encountered the library at a place they didn't expect.	Survey	Annual					

TARGETED OUTREACH	How?	When?	2019 Baseline	2020 - COVID	2021	2022	2023
Output: Increased in cardholders ages 18-39	ILS Data	Annual					
Output: Create 1 new collaboration each year	Staff Survey	Annual					
Output: Alternative Language library materials	Staff Survey	Annual	Materials Only	Materials Only	Added database		
Outcome: More young families will talk to their friends and family about library events	Survey	Annual					
Outcome: More English as a Second Language Patrons will report using the library	Survey	Annual					

Appendix D: Supplemental Information

Communications Plan

- Long range plan will be made available on the library's website.
- A social media marketing piece will be created and shared on Facebook and Twitter
- A printed marketing piece which state the values, vision, mission, and key priorities, will be distributed at the library and other locations.
- Presentations on the plan will be made to local service organizations.
- An announcement about the new long-range plan will be made in the library's newsletter

Financial Resources and Sustainability

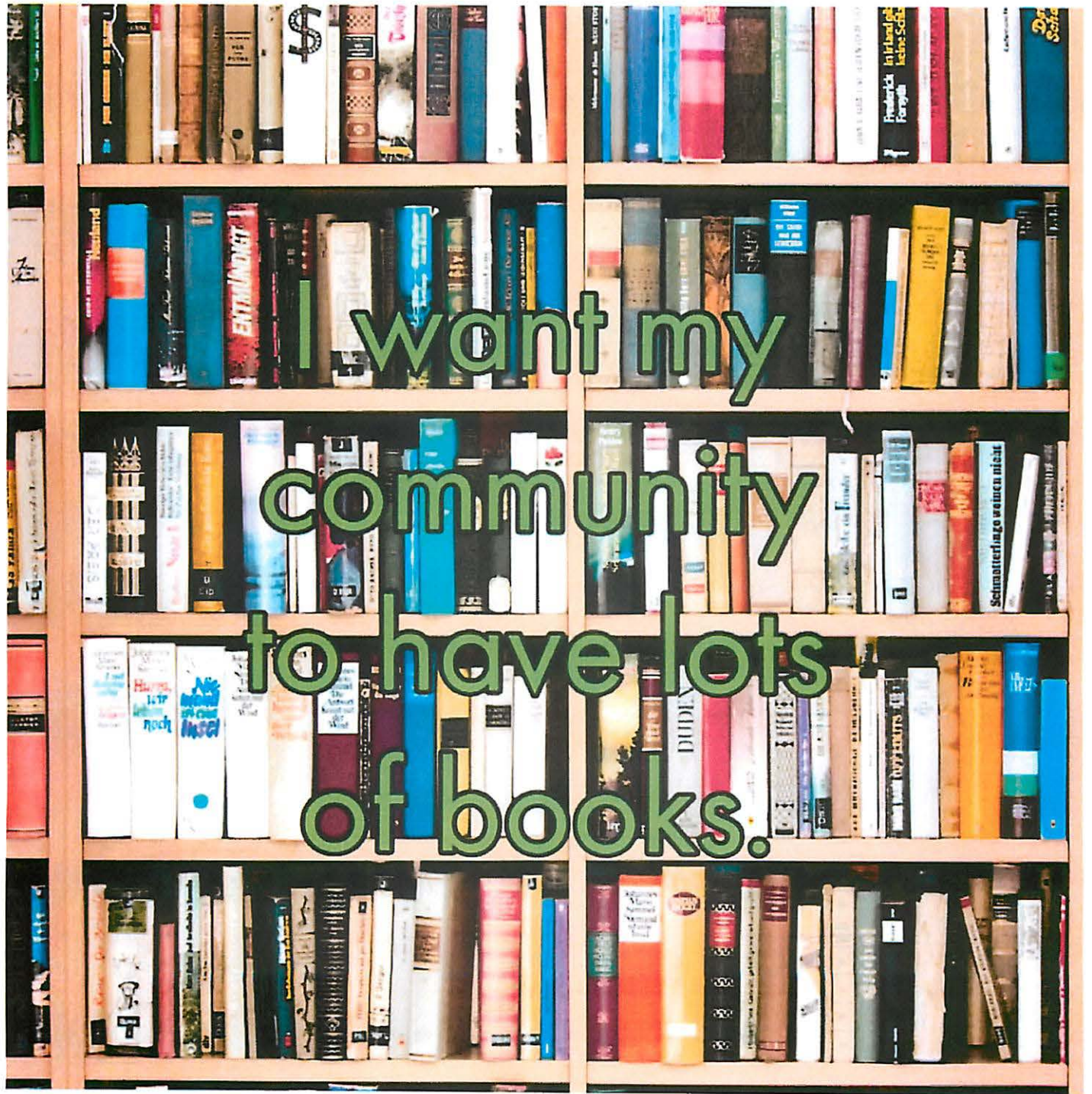
- Our Operating Fund Budget will be based on available sources of public funding and will not exceed the assessed value growth quotient for the budget year.
- State and Federal grants and grants from other institutions may supplement the budget.
- Funds may be used from the Traverse Area District Library giftfund.
- Collaboration with other groups in providing programs and services will enable cost-sharing.

Professional Development Plan

- The Library Director and Human Resources Manager will meet quarterly to assess staff training and discern areas of need.
- All staff will be encouraged to attend district and other conferences each year, and other training opportunities.

Collaboration

- We have memberships in the Michigan Library Association, Midwest Collaborative for Library Services (MCLS), and Traverse Connect (formerly the Chamber of Commerce).
- Community partners include Newtons' Road, TCAPS, Born to Read, Traverse Area Community Media and many others. We are a member of the Northland Library Cooperative and collaborate with regional public libraries in sponsoring larger programs or community events.



(Future) Community Leader

age 11