



WISCONSIN LIBRARIES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Final Report & Evaluation



Training



Connections



Discussions



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THRIVING LIBRARIES

Wisconsin Libraries Transforming Communities

FINAL REPORT & EVALUATION

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Overview

Background

In 2019, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) responded to a 2018 report by Russell Consulting, Inc., “Recommendations for Strengthening Community Engagement in Wisconsin’s Public Libraries”, identifying the need to invest in community engagement training for its public libraries. The study results called for the DPI Library Division to take on a primary role in serving as a clearinghouse for community engagement topics, providing training and conferences focused on community engagement, and developing core competencies for library staff to succeed in this critical effort. Based on the recommendations of the Russell Report, DPI included in their Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Five-Year Plan 2018-2022, a specific goal for “stronger engagement of public libraries with their communities and utilization of data to actively adapt to community needs.”

In the fall of 2019, DPI issued a Request for Proposal for training to develop and implement Wisconsin Libraries Transforming Communities (WLTC). Thriving Libraries, LLC, (TL) was one of seven proposals considered. DPI hired TL to create and implement a framework for its WLTC initiative.

The 18-month, two-track program was built on the work done by the American Library Association's (ALA) Libraries Transforming Communities program. The Wisconsin cohort represents the first state-wide partnership with ALA to change the role of libraries in their communities. The initiative was designed "to increase awareness of community engagement as critical to public library sustainability and to provide training and resources to facilitate the effective community engagement practices of libraries with their local communities."

WLTC Framework

DPI collaborated with TL to develop the plan for 18 months of training and support for this first cohort to build skills and competencies in community engagement. Program goals included:

- Inspiring public libraries to participate in communities to meet community needs on a local level
- Gaining a thorough understanding of community needs and future aspirations from diverse stakeholders and building a deeper relationship with under-served communities
- Understanding community-based planning strategies so public library staff can develop and implement programs and service offerings that serve community aspirations and needs

How can these lofty goals be achieved? By adopting community-based planning strategies where all library activities, services, and programs are informed and driven by needs and aspirations identified by their communities. During the program, participants would learn how to build deep, authentic relationships in their community to inform the development of library policies, practices, and services. WLTC would help participants develop these critical skills during an 18-month learning cohort supported by peer coaches. The WLTC framework had two simultaneous tracks:

- Internal: Coaches participated in a masterclass in leadership and were assigned up to two teams to support throughout the training, having a chance to implement what they had learned.
- External: Teams of up to three people comprised of a library representative and a community representative who worked together to engage deeply with their communities and develop a project that addressed an aspirational need or desire identified through the team's deep community engagement.

Each team was paired with a coach to guide them through their journey. Coaches held teams accountable while supporting and encouraging the teams through the process. The coaches received training in authentic leadership, risk management, resilience, and self-care.

Cindy Fesemyer, the DPI sponsor for WLTC, collaborated with TL to develop an application inviting participants to consider which track would benefit their learning journey. Those who were interested in personal growth and leadership skills applied to be a coach. Participants interested in creating community-focused organizations applied to be a team.

Each team identified a community partner and secured permission and support from their organization's leadership as part of the application process. An advisory board of Wisconsin library professionals representing different types and sizes of libraries undertook a rigorous review process to choose the participants. Twelve teams and seven coaches were selected to participate in the program in January 2020. Most coaches were assigned to work with two teams. Community partners included:

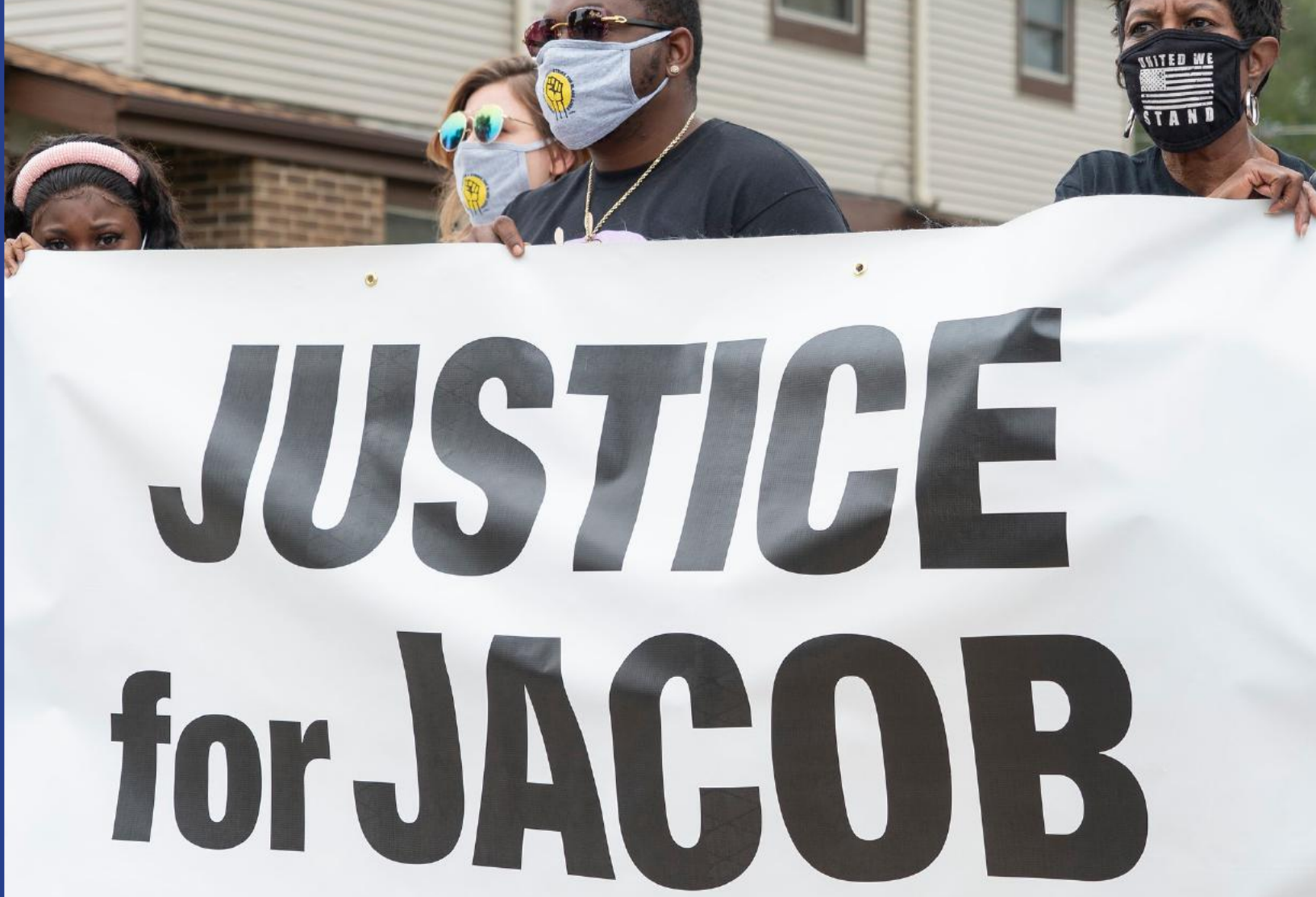
- A local Rotary club.
- School board members.
- The county health department.
- A Latinx community network.

The Best Laid Plans.....

WLTC officially launched in February 2020. Initially designed as a hybrid learning opportunity, it included a mix of four in-person interactive training sessions for teams and coaches, with monthly virtual learning exchanges, including webinars and coach and cohort calls. The initial coach training, designed as an in-person event, was scheduled for mid-March 2020. As COVID-19 began to spread across the country, that session and the first in-person cohort session, slated for April 2020, became virtual. Despite hopes that the pandemic would wane and allow future in-person learning, that did not happen, and the entire program was conducted virtually. Despite the numerous challenges faced during 2020-2021, no teams or coaches dropped out of the program. All completed the training, and many reported that the program was a touchstone that kept them going and connected through a challenging time.

Thriving Libraries developed a pragmatic and straightforward approach of identifying risks, prioritizing risks based on their potential impact...

The shift to virtual signaled the necessity of risk assessment and mitigation to ensure that the program could continue and provide a meaningful experience for participants and impact their communities. Thriving Libraries developed a pragmatic and straightforward approach of identifying risks, prioritizing risks based on their potential impact and the likelihood of occurring, and, finally, identifying strategies to address or mitigate the risks. The mitigation strategies became known as the "5 T's - tolerate, treat, transfer, terminate or take advantage." This analysis worked well for program implementation and was shared with the teams and coaches, which proved helpful for their WLTC projects and their day-to-day jobs.



Community rally in support of Kenosha protesters after the shooting of Jacob Blake
Photo by Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association

In May 2020, George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis, a city geographically close to Wisconsin. His murder, following that of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, sparked a racial equity conversation across the country. It raised a question for the cohort, who were navigating the challenges of doing community engagement work during a pandemic, of how to engage with communities experiencing devastating racial and social trauma. These challenges were compounded when Jacob Blake was shot in August 2020 in Kenosha, presenting an opportunity for the Kenosha Library team to take a leadership role in convening community conversations around the issue of law enforcement and minority communities.

The lenses of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are critical to developing authentic community relationships. TL brought Ozy Aloziem onto the training team to provide expertise and focus on those issues. Ozy, the EDI Manager for the Denver Public Library and a nationally-known EDI speaker, brought deep knowledge of and commitment to highlighting inclusivity in library services and operations. She joined WLTC in September 2020 and provided advice and counsel to teams and coaches throughout the program.

Learning Objectives, Formats and Strategy

The learning objectives for this program were identified before the launch and remained consistent despite the platform change. Upon conclusion, participants would be able to:

- Develop skills and strategies to identify community needs, wants, and aspirations, including using demographic information to ensure that all segments of the community are reached
- Plan and carry out programs and/or services in response to community engagement knowledge with a particular focus on programs and services addressing the needs of people who are typically under-served, under-represented and under-recognized
- Measure the success of those activities which can have both short-term impact and long-term results
- Work with their community to translate this information into a community narrative.

As noted above, participants chose to be part of a team or serve as a coach. The teams turned outward, focusing on their community and developing community engagement skills through an experiential, project-based approach. After in-depth community analysis and input, each team developed a project identified as a community need or aspiration and allowed teams to put their new skills into action.

Coaches worked in a more inward-facing manner. They were paired with one or two teams and provided advice, counsel, and some pushing and prodding along the journey. Coaches focused on developing their leadership and facilitation skills. Still, their involvement in the larger cohort expanded their understanding of community engagement knowledge used in their libraries.

The learning strategy focused on meeting participants where they were. Teams applied the community engagement training to develop a community-focused project in a real-time setting.

The learning framework included monthly training for teams and coaches as well as full-cohort sessions. There were four full-cohort sessions for both teams and coaches. Teams had a monthly meeting that coaches were welcome but not required to attend and a monthly webinar to support their learning. Coaches also had monthly training calls and had special training sessions before each full-cohort session. Although all of the workshops were virtual, there was extensive interaction through break-out rooms, collaboration tools like Jamboard, document sharing for project ideas, and informal interaction through the chat function. In addition to these workshops, coaches had regular calls with their teams to help them through the process.

Team members applied what they were learning by doing a deep dive into community engagement, convening a mix of virtual and, when possible, in-person focus groups, community meetings, surveys, and conversations, as well as planning and executing their projects. One team leveraged curbside pick-up to engage in (fully masked!) conversations with their patrons. The WLTC participants contributed a tremendous amount of effort and energy to the program while going through the most challenging time in their professional and personal lives.

The learning strategy focused on meeting participants where they were. Teams applied the community engagement training to develop a community-focused project in a real-time setting. Teams reflected on their experiences to build a path and practice to continue the work long after the program ended.

All participants attended the virtual Lead the Way: Libraries at the Heart of Community Engagement Conference sponsored by the University of Wisconsin Information School in November 2020 in addition to required training by TL.

Here is a summary of subjects covered in the required training:

APR

April 2020

Whole systems thinking, understanding community engagement, listening skills, asset mapping, power mapping, self-care, and resilience

SEP

September 2020

Community engagement from an equity lens, organizing public knowledge, using Census data, practicing the community narrative, identifying quick wins

MAR

March 2021

Evaluation from an equity lens, evaluation techniques and strategies, risk mitigation, leadership mindset, time management, and boundary setting, internal and external communication, restorative practices

JUL

July 2021

Storytelling skills and real-time practice, how to continue the community conversation, reflecting on the journey, celebrating success

Leveraging Support

Given the multiple challenges of the pandemic, racial justice protests regarding systemic racism, and societal unrest, implementing the community projects required a significant effort. DPI provided each WLTC team \$2,000 to implement their identified project. Allowable costs directly related to the community project included salaries, wages, fringe benefits, travel, materials and supplies, consultant fees, food, performance, and marketing costs. Libraries were required to fund and track all their eligible costs initially and were reimbursed for their expenses.

Eligible teams were also encouraged to participate in the ALA Libraries Transforming Communities Leading Conversations in Small & Rural Libraries grant to tackle issues ranging from sustainable communities to media literacy to COVID-19 to unemployment through three rounds of grants in 2020 and 2021. Several of the WLTC participating libraries received awards in the first two rounds of funding.

Evaluation

From the outset, DPI emphasized the importance of evaluating the substantial investment it had made in this program. TL employed a variety of evaluation tools and methods. The quantitative evaluation included assessments of knowledge, skills, and learning for participants to establish a baseline at the beginning of the program and then assess at the mid-point and the conclusion.

Qualitative assessment was continual. During the April and September 2020 and March and July 2021 trainings -- each spanning two days -- daily check-ins provided real-time feedback incorporated into the remaining training time. There were more extensive evaluations at the end of each training. There were also opportunities for coaches to evaluate teams and teams to evaluate coaches. Coaches contributed personal reflections both before and after the program.

The following list summarizes each of the survey instruments TL used to evaluate learning and to which participant group(s) the instrument applied. Italicized items indicate surveys that used both qualitative and quantitative measures. All other items were qualitative-only measures.

- *Baseline, Midpoint, Final Survey* (teams and coaches)
- *Assessments of Team Members* (coaches only)
- *Assessments of Coaches* (teams only)
- *Coach Training Evaluation* (coaches only)
- *Full Cohort Training Evaluation* (teams and coaches)
- Daily Check-ins (teams and coaches)
- Weekly Status Reports (coaches only)
- Written Reflections (coaches only)

As the program progressed and evaluations occurred regularly, TL committed to using feedback to develop, tweak or significantly revise approaches to learning in that challenging environment and time. Key findings from evaluations include:

- Participants stuck with the program: As the 18 months progressed, the world experienced pandemic, ongoing civil unrest, a contentious national election, and an insurrection. Despite these challenges, participants remained engaged. While we cannot quantify resilience, the baseline, midpoint, and final surveys suggest that participants persisted even though the training content challenged their confidence, as we expected it would.
- Participants were highly satisfied with the training. As TL adjusted to an all-virtual model and prototyped methods for online engagement, individuals connected across the cohort and in their teams. They were almost unanimously satisfied with the training and consistently rated statements about the content's conciseness, effectiveness, and utility.
- Participants shifted in core learning goals: Coaches and teams expressed significant shifts in their different core learning goals. In particular, coaches described relating to change differently, and team members reported relating to their communities differently.

With more than 600 survey responses and 18 months of webinars, workshops, conference calls, and small meetings, the findings presented here merely scratch the surface of the things we've learned in WLTC. We encourage readers to explore the raw data for the rich stories they tell. The raw data for each survey is available at <https://bit.ly/30DC3bk>.

Detailed case studies developed for five of the teams are included in Appendix pg. 54.

Conclusions

TEAMS

"Instead of the answer, we start with questions. For librarians, who like to have plans and timelines, it's preserving the space for the process and allowing the community to guide." - Isa Small

WLTC presented an amazing learning experience for the teams, coaches, and trainers!

Team members were dedicated to the WLTC program. In some cases, the program seemed to be an exciting and aspirational activity that took their minds off the day-to-day challenges of providing library service during COVID-19.

Given the 18 months of the program and the challenging context, some staff changes and realignments occurred. Most libraries and community partners stepped up with an alternative or additional staff members to continue the program.

Team member Isa Small, LE Phillips Memorial Public Library in Eau Claire, was initially concerned about how the team would manage to implement a project during a pandemic, yet she learned to trust the process. Small noted, "Instead of the answer, we start with questions. For librarians, who like to have plans and timelines, it's preserving the space for the process and allowing the community to guide." Small says COVID-19 and her experience in the WLTC cohort will provide a reset for her organization, allowing it to reflect on how to provide programs and services moving forward.

COACHES

The coaches had multiple challenges. While working through a roiling landscape, they supported their teams as they were learning about community engagement. Teams turned to their coaches for support and advice, and not all coaches had a background in community engagement before the program. It would be helpful to have a Community Engagement 101 for the coaches before the next WLTC cohort.

"Through WLTC, we're building a pipeline of leaders of people who are in middle management and are considering roles in administration, learning to lead with heart and care and compassion, not just for our teams and our public, but for ourselves." - Adriana McCleer

Because seven coaches and twelve teams were participating in the cohort, several coaches were assigned to work with two teams. If possible, pairing one team with one coach is preferable, primarily for a more manageable workload and focus.

Coaches appreciated a detailed preview of topics and activities planned for training and a clear understanding of the role they played.

Coaches anticipated that the training would lead to a new direction for Wisconsin's libraries. "Through WLTC, we're building a pipeline of leaders of people who are in middle management and are considering roles in administration, learning to lead with heart and care and compassion, not just for our teams and our public, but for ourselves," said Coach Adriana McCleer, the Community Partnerships Supervisor at Appleton Public Library.

Conclusions

OVERALL

Despite shifting to a completely virtual program, the DPI coordinator, participants, and trainers agreed that the experience was valuable. While we would have preferred face-to-face interactions, the move to virtual did not detract from the program's benefit. Most participants are looking forward to establishing a second WLTC cohort so that their colleagues can participate in the positive experiences they did.

All participants are interested in continuing their community engagement skill development and are committed to developing a community of practice with their colleagues in other Wisconsin libraries to create a foundation to continue this work. The coaches remain in touch, and team members connect with colleagues in their organizations and the Wisconsin library community to share their WLTC experiences.

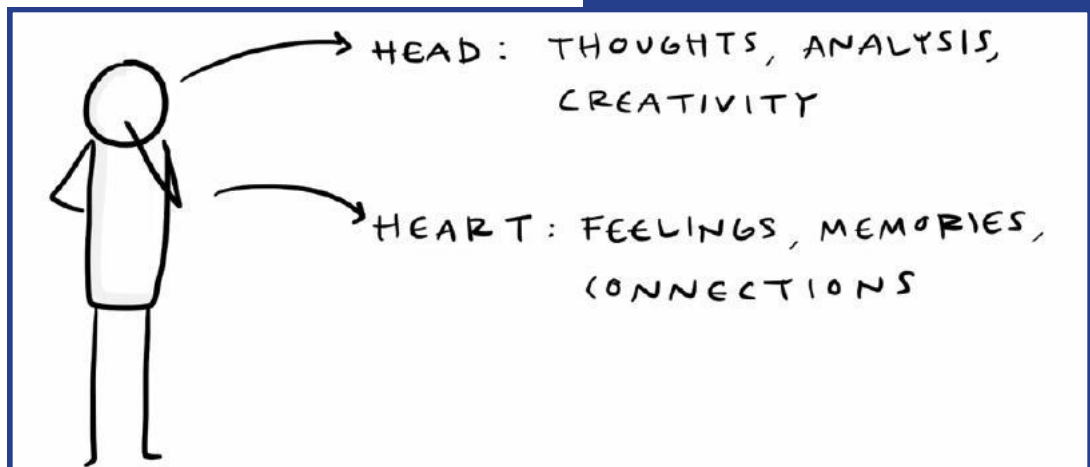
The WLTC program built resilience among the cohort that qualitative or quantitative measures cannot strictly measure. TL trainers continued to be amazed that, although a few team members were replaced during the 18 months, no team or coach dropped out of the program. The experience of learning, growing, and connecting with colleagues who were dedicated to making a difference in their communities, no matter what the external circumstance, created resilience in these participants that will serve them well for the rest of their careers and lives.

The WLTC program has generated interest nationally. Cindy Fesemyer and the TL team have presented at two community engagement classes in the University of Washington Information School Master's of Library and Information Science program and at the March 2021 Southeast Collaborative Library Conference, including the Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Virginia state libraries. We also presented a program with the WLTC team from the Kenosha Public Library at the June 2021 ALA Annual Conference.

The experience of learning, growing, and connecting with colleagues who were dedicated to making a difference in their communities, no matter what the external circumstance, created resilience.

DPI has made a significant investment in this program to build skills in their library staff and partners to help build healthy communities in Wisconsin. We strongly recommend that this program or a similar initiative be available for Wisconsin's many interested library staff.

Slide from Coach call Art by Beck Tench



Evaluation

Introduction

Wisconsin Libraries Transforming Communities (WLTC) evaluation used both qualitative and quantitative measures to assess how well participants achieved the learning goals set out by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Thriving Libraries (TL), and the Russell Report. Participants were assessed before, during, and after the program, and rapid assessments in the form of “daily check-ins” and training-specific evaluations were used at each multi-day virtual training event. TL also measured the cohort’s learning progress through the implementation of a community-based project. See the Case Studies for more information on how participants engaged in the training content with their communities.

The following list summarizes each of the survey instruments TL used to evaluate learning, and to which participant group(s) the instrument applied. Italicized items indicate surveys that used both qualitative and quantitative measures. All other items were qualitative-only measures.

- *Baseline, Midpoint, Final Survey* (teams and coaches)
- *Assessments of Team Members* (coaches only)
- *Assessments of Coaches* (teams only)
- *Coach Training Evaluation* (coaches only)
- *Full Cohort Training Evaluation* (teams and coaches)
- Daily Check-ins (teams and coaches)
- Weekly Status Reports (coaches only)
- Written Reflections (coaches only)

In all, there were 26 surveys administered to both participant groups across the 18 months, yielding a total of 609 completed survey responses. The raw data for each survey is available at <https://bit.ly/30DC3bkk>

COACHES	TEAMS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Baseline, Midpoint, Final Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Baseline, Midpoint, Final Survey
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assessments of Team Members	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessments of Team Members
<input type="checkbox"/> Assessments of Coaches	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assessments of Coaches
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach Training Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> Coach Training Evaluation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full Cohort Training Evaluations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full Cohort Training Evaluations
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Daily Check-ins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Daily Check-ins
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Weekly Status Reports	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly Status Reports
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Written Reflections	<input type="checkbox"/> Written Reflections

Baseline, Midpoint, Final Survey

TL administered a survey at three points in the training program to assess their learning over time. At each point (February 2020 for Baseline, October 2020 for Midpoint, and July 2021 for Final), participants were asked the same seven questions. Team and coach surveys asked different questions, so as to align with the specific learning goals of the two groups. Both surveys included six questions with a 7-point Likert scale from Never (1) to Always (7) and one open-ended question. All questions were required (fig. 1).

	Team Questions	Coach Questions
1	I am confident working within community and/or institutional partnerships.	I can stay present to myself and others, even in difficult moments.
2	I am confident talking to and working within my community to reach shared aspirations and identify issues of concern.	The work-related choices I make come from a place of self-compassion.
3	I am confident in developing a plan and taking action on a community-based project.	I have successful ways to cope with or recover from stress while I am "on the clock."
4	I am confident I can align library priorities with community aspirations.	I have strategies I trust to recover from failure.
5	I am eager to create and implement practices that encourage communities to become sustainable, resilient, economically robust, and inclusive.	I am actively nurturing resilience and well-being in my own work life.
6	I am willing to initiate and/or support change, even if it may make others uncomfortable.	I am actively nurturing resilience and well-being in the lives of my colleagues.
7	Describe how you work with your community today to identify an issue of concern. Please respond in 2-3 sentences. (100-word max)	Describe how you respond today to institutional resistance to new ideas or changes. Please respond in 2-3 sentences. (100-word max)

fig. 1

The response rate to the team surveys was 97% (29 out of 30 responding) at baseline, 100% at midpoint (28 out of 28 responding), and 92% (24 out of 26 responding) at final. Because team membership fluctuated throughout the program due to job changes and other life events, 19 team members (63%) completed all three surveys, though 22 (73%) team members completed at least the baseline and final survey. TL used data from these 22 participants for our analysis. The response rate to the baseline, midpoint, and final coach surveys was 100% (fig.2).

Teams	<i>n</i>	Response Rate
Baseline	29	97%
Midpoint	28	100%
Final	24	92%
Coaches		
Baseline	7	100%
Midpoint	7	100%
Final	7	100%

fig. 2

Assessment of Teams

Coaches were asked to rate their teams on the following measures using a five point Likert scale from “No Concerns” (1) to “Serious Issues” (5):

- Collegiality
- Competence
- Engagement
- Enthusiasm

Assessment of Teams	<i>n</i>	Response Rate
April 2020	6	86%
September 2020	7	100%
March 2021	7	100%

fig. 3

The response rate to the team assessment by coaches was 86% (6 out of 7 participants) in April 2020 and 100% in September 2020 and March 2021 (fig. 3).

Assessment of Coaches

TL also employed surveys asking teams to assess their coaches in May 2020 and March 2021. Teams were asked to rate their coach on the following abilities using a 5-point Likert scale from “Serious Issues” (1) to “No Concerns” (5).

- Listens well
- Communicates effectively
- Facilitates conversation and work in our teams
- Manages time effectively
- Responsive in communication

Assessment of Coaches	<i>n</i>	Response Rate
May 2020	17	57%
March 2021	25	86%

fig. 4

In addition, teams were asked the following open-ended questions:

- Are there any specific details you’d like to add about the above ratings? (Optional)
- Did the technology or virtual training platform influence your perceptions of your coach? In what way? (Optional)
- What’s going well so far with your coach?
- What could be going better with your coach?

The response rate to the coach assessment by teams was 57% (17 out of 30 participants) in May 2020 and 86% (25 of 29 participants) in March 2021 (fig. 4). It is likely that the early numbers were low because teammates didn’t feel ready to judge their coaches on these measures with so little interaction at that point in the program.

Coach Training Evaluation

The Coach Training Evaluation assessed the coach-only training that preceded main training events. This evaluation was administered at the end of the full cohort training so that coaches could assess their training after they engaged with their teams. In addition to the team health metrics described in the “Assessment of Teams” section above, this survey asked the following open-ended questions:

- 1 Thinking back on the past two days, what are you especially proud of in your interactions with your team? (It may be tempting to talk about your pride in your team members or others, but specifically reflect on what you have done that brings a sense of confidence and/or accomplishment in your skills as a coach.)
- 2 What could have gone better in this experience? (Were there moments that you wish you could do over or differently somehow? Please describe what happened, how it felt, what your inner chatter was, and what your behaviors were like.)
- 3 Were there skills from any of the coach calls that were helpful to you during this session? If so, which skill(s) specifically, and how was it helpful?
- 4 Were there times you wish you had training in certain skills or capacities? (This could be things we haven't covered yet, or things we have but should cover more in-depth. If so, please let us know what might have helped you feel more competent or confident as a coach.)
- 5 Is there anything else you'd like to share? (Optional)

The response rate for the coach training evaluation was 86% (6 out of 7 participants) in April 2020 and 100% in September 2020 and March 2021. TL did not administer a full coach training evaluation for the July 2021 coach-only training, though coaches were asked to submit a daily check-in survey (see below) for that training (fig 5).

Coach Training Event	<i>n</i>	Response Rate
April 2020	6	86%
September 2020	7	100%
March 2021	7	100%
July 2021	n/a	n/a

fig. 5

Full Cohort Training Evaluation

The Full Cohort Training Evaluation assessed the full cohort training and was completed by everyone on the last day of each main training event. These surveys asked participants to rate their satisfaction with the training (i.e. Completely satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Neither satisfied or dissatisfied, Somewhat dissatisfied, Completely dissatisfied), and also provided an optional, open-ended question to tell us more about their rating. To encourage participants to be completely open with their feedback this survey was anonymous. Everyone was asked to rate their agreement with the following statements on a five-point Likert scale from “Strongly Agree” (1) to “Strongly Disagree” (5).

- The workshop was concise and informative.
- The workshop contained practical examples and useful techniques that applied to my current work.
- Given the time constraints, the topic was sufficiently developed.
- The workshop enhanced my understanding of the topic.
- The activities were effective.
- My understanding of community engagement has shifted.

In addition, the survey asked the following open-ended questions:

- Please share the why behind your last answer. (Refers to the statement, “My understanding of community engagement has shifted.”)
- What one or two things from this workshop will you implement at your work? (Optional)
- Please share additional comments you have about this workshop. (Optional)

The response rate for the “Full Cohort Training Evaluation” was 84% (31 out of 37 participants) for April 2020, 89% (31 out of 35 participants) for September 2020, 67% (24 out of 36 participants) for March 2021, and 61% (20 out of 33 participants) for the July 2021 training (fig. 6).

Full Cohort Training Event	<i>n</i>	Response Rate
April 2020	31	84%
September 2020	31	89%
March 2021	24	67%
July 2021	20	61%

fig. 6

Daily Check-ins

The response rate for the “Full Cohort Training Evaluation” was 84% (31 out of 37 participants) for April 2020, 89% (31 out of 35 participants) for September 2020, 67% (24 out of 36 participants) for March 2021, and 61% (20 out of 33 participants) for the July 2021 training.

1. What went well today?
2. What could be better?
3. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

The response rate for the Daily Check-in was 98% (41 out of 42 participants attending across both days, the first of which was coach-only) for September 2020, 76% (55 out of 72 participants attending across both days) for March 2021, and 73% (24 out of 33 participants) for July 2021. We did not administer the Daily Check-in during the first training (April 2021) (fig. 7).

Training Event	<i>n</i>	Response Rate
April 2020	n/a	n/a
September 2020	41	98%
March 2021	55	76%
July 2021	24	73%

fig. 7

Weekly Status Reports

Coaches were asked to complete a single-question, open-ended survey after every team meeting they held. This survey asked:

- How is your team doing? (What is your team doing that's totally braggable? Are there additional tools/training that could help support your team's work?)

Although the response rate for these status reports was not calculated, as TL did not track team/coach meetings, however, there were 186 reports submitted across the 18 months of the program.

Written Reflections

Coaches were asked to complete a written reflection in April 2020 and July 2021 that featured the following prompts, which were identical across both reflections. The first three questions were required.

- What, if anything, do you find stressful in your work as a librarian? How do you cope with this stress? Does it help?
- Recall a challenging experience you've had with a library worker or visitor. What happened and what was challenging for you about it?

- Recall a time when you helped a library worker or visitor that was struggling. What happened and how did it turn out?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

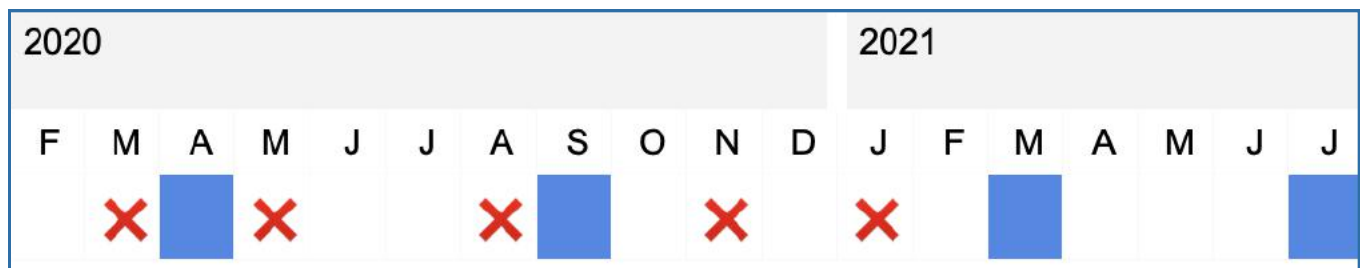
The response rate for the Written Reflections was 86% (6 out of 7 coaches) in April 2020 and 100% (7 out of 7 coaches) in July 2021 (fig. 8).z

Written Reflection	<i>n</i>	Response Rate
April 2020	6	86%
July 2021	7	100%

fig. 8

Finding: WLTC fostered resilience and dedication in its participants

Findings across our evaluations tell a story of resilience and dedication on the part of everyone involved in WLTC. As noted in the Overview, the training approach shifted from one that relied on highly interactive, in-person sessions at key milestones, to a virtual-only model in the abrupt shift our world made in response to COVID-19. As the 18 months progressed, the world changed through the pandemic, ongoing civil unrest, a contentious national election, and an insurrection. These events hit our participants particularly close-to-home as Kenosha, WI took on a national spotlight in the shooting of Jacob Blake. The following timeline shows our training events (in blue) and the months in which crises unfolded in our country and around the world:



- March 2020: COVID-19 reaches global pandemic
- April 2020: First Virtual Training Session
- May 2020: George Floyd's murder in St. Paul, MN
- August 2020: Shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, WI
- September 2020: Second Virtual Training Session
- November 2020: US Presidential Election
- January 2021: Insurrection at the US Capitol
- March 2021: Third Virtual Training Session
- July 2021: Fourth Virtual Training Session

Despite the changes these events had on our home and work lives, participants stuck with the program. While there were some shifts to team membership throughout the program, no teams or coaches dropped out. This would be an indicator of success for any program, but to persist through such massive change in our country and world indicates significant dedication on behalf of our participants, and a significant effort on the part of DPI and TL to make the program meaningful and worthwhile.

While resilience cannot be quantified, the baseline, midpoint, and final surveys suggest that participants persisted even though the training content challenged their confidence, as we expected it would. Community engagement is a general term, often used but rarely in the way WLTC intended for participants to understand it. As team members began to incorporate their prior understanding of community engagement to a more relational, equitable, and evolving one (amidst national events that challenged the norms of our society, in particular in areas of relationship and equity), they often indicated lower scores of confidence. In our view, the non-linear shifts in self-ratings across baseline, midpoint, and final surveys reveal productive frustrations, plateaus, and growth spurts of any healthy learning experience.

The following charts show how much each participant's confidence rating increased or decreased from their initial rating (February 2020) rating at baseline (October 2020) to their final rating (July 2021) at the end of the program. Charts are ordered by participant and their sum total of the difference between baseline and final surveys.

TEAM PARTICIPANTS

Of the 22 team participants we have complete survey results for baseline, midpoint, and final surveys, 100% of participants moved in their confidence ratings on at least one measure. 77% (17 out of 22) reported feeling more confident in at least one of our six measures. Two participants were more confident on every measure, and seven participants were more confident on three or more measures. 50% (11 out of 22) reported feeling less confident on one or more measures. Four participants experienced less confidence on three or more measures (fig. 9).

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
T01	1	1	1	1	1	1
T02	1	1	1	1	1	1
T03	1	1	1	1	0	1
T04	2	1	1	0	0	1
T05	1	1	1	1	0	0
T06	1	1	1	-1	0	2
T07	1	1	1	0	0	0
T08	0	0	0	2	0	0
T09	1	-1	1	0	0	1
T10	1	0	0	0	0	0
T11	0	1	0	0	0	0
T12	0	0	0	0	0	1
T13	0	0	0	1	0	-1
T14	0	0	0	1	-2	1
T15	4	-1	-1	-1	-1	0
T16	0	-1	-1	1	0	0
T17	-1	1	-1	1	0	-1
T18	0	0	0	0	-1	0
T19	0	0	0	-1	-1	0
T20	-1	-1	-1	0	0	-1
T21	0	-2	-1	-1	-1	-2

fig. 9

As for how confidence was rated per measure:

1	I am confident working within community and/or institutional partnerships.	45% more confident 9% less confident 41% no difference
2	I am confident talking to and working within my community to reach shared aspirations and identify issues of concern.	41% more confident 23% less confident 32% no difference
3	I am confident in developing a plan and taking action on a community-based project.	36% more confident 23% less confident 36% no difference
4	I am confident I can align library priorities with community aspirations.	41% more confident 18% less confident 36% no difference
5	I am eager to create and implement practices that encourage communities to become sustainable, resilient, economically robust, and inclusive.	9% more eager 23% less eager 64% no difference
6	I am willing to initiate and/or support change, even if it may make others uncomfortable.	36% more willing 18% less willing 41% no difference

Again, it is important to note that at a time of such uncertainty, division, and change in our country, we see participants that rated themselves the same confidence as when they began the program as a sign of positive growth. The ground shifted under all our feet, and these participants remained standing. For those participants that rated themselves less confident, eager, or willing, we suspect these participants may have been overly confident coming into the program.

COACHES

Of the seven coaches we have complete survey results for baseline, midpoint, and final surveys, 100% of coaches moved in their confidence ratings on at least one measure. Six out of seven coaches (86%) report feeling more confident in at least one of our six measures. Three coaches were more confident on every measure, and six out of seven coaches were more confident on three or more measures. At the same time, two coaches (28%) reported feeling less confident on three or more measures (fig. 10).

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
C01	3	3	3	1	2	0
C02	1	1	2	3	3	2
C03	3	2	1	1	1	3
C04	1	1	0	2	1	1
C05	0	1	0	1	0	1
C06	-1	2	1	-1	-1	1
C07	-1	-1	0	-2	0	-1

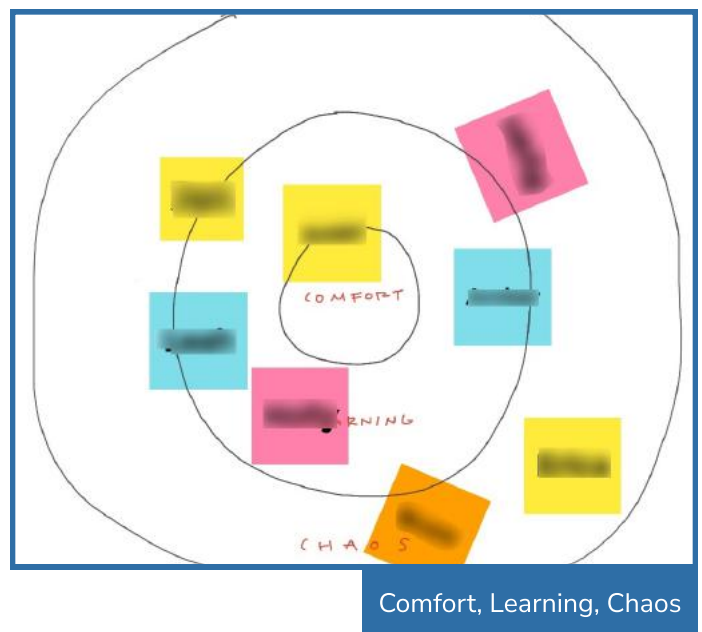
fig. 10

As for how confidence was rated per measure:

1	I can stay present to myself and others, even in difficult moments.	57% more confident 29% less confident 14% no difference
2	The work-related choices I make come from a place of self-compassion.	86% more confident 14% less confident 0% no difference
3	I have successful ways to cope with or recover from stress while I am “on the clock.”	57% more confident 0% less confident 43% no difference
4	I have strategies I trust to recover from failure.	71% more confident 29% less confident 0% no difference
5	I am actively nurturing resilience and well-being in my own work life.	57% more confident 14% less confident 29% no difference
6	I am actively nurturing resilience and well-being in the lives of my colleagues.	71% more confident 14% less confident 14% no change

As was noted in the team analysis, we see coaches that rated themselves the same confidence as when they began the program as a sign of positive growth, given the hardships that accompanied them through the training. We also presume those who ended up less confident may have new understandings of these concepts or may have been overly confident coming into the program.

We also see evidence of participant resilience in artifacts they co-created during our interactive training sessions. For example, in monthly coach calls, we would occasionally ask coaches to map themselves across “Comfort, Learning, and Chaos.” Seen here in the October 2020 coach call, some coaches are clearly entering, or are fully in, chaos:



Another example of the complexity of participants' experiences can be seen in the "What's the Weather Inside You?" activity, where participants posted a photo of weather to indicate how they were doing. In this team example, several images indicate stormy or cloudy weather ahead.



Finding: More Chocolate, Less Broccoli

As the TL team adjusted to an all-virtual model for the training, we prototyped and iterated methods for providing ways for participants to connect even though they could not bond through meals and other activities we'd prepared for the initial in-person gatherings. These ideas included socially-oriented breakout rooms, ice breaker questions, working lunches, evening social hours, and participatory activities during the training itself. We also incorporated stretching sessions, music, and drawing into our time together, and did our best to offer breaks and shortened windows of time for the training itself.

It was quite challenging to do this, given the content we'd planned and the time and attention we originally expected to have. One issue that occurred repeatedly in the trainings was that because participants were attending virtual trainings from work or from home, we had inconsistent broadband availability, and many participants had a hard time getting away from work to give their full focus to the training. We also experienced a learning curve, cohort-wide, as coaches and teams (and trainers) learned new technologies to support interactive activities.

But the efforts were worth it. Individuals connected across the cohort, and also in their teams. They were almost unanimously satisfied with the trainings, and consistently rated statements about the conciseness, effectiveness, and utility of the content highly (fig. 11).

Full Cohort Training	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Completely Satisfied
April 2020	3%	42%	55%
September 2020		35%	65%
March 2021	4%	29%	67%
July 2021		45%	55%

fig. 11

Here are some participant quotes shared at the end of each training event:

April 2020

- This was a wonderful experience. It came at the perfect time with this ongoing pandemic. I feel both anxious and inspired but know I have a support system to succeed.
- I never really thought about the difference between community outreach and community engagement, and I used to use them interchangeably.

September 2020

- While initially dismayed about having to go into breakout rooms with relative strangers, it ended up being the best part! I feel like I have new friends all over the state (and country, too)!
- Thank you for all the work that is being done to make these training sessions happen virtually. Thank you for listening to what is being said in the surveys and for helping us to understand that it is also important to step away sometimes and stretch or re-focus. I come away from these sessions motivated to do more for our community. There were wonderful ideas and exercises that inspired me. I want to spend the entire afternoon just letting it all sink in. One of the most important takeaways from the last few months is learning to really listen to what people are telling you - and making sure that we are reaching the people we need to listen to. THANK YOU!

March 2021

- I have already noticed myself incorporating some of the practices we've learned into projects I'm working on within my organization. I am currently working on a project that would initiate change in an organization with a lot of fixed mindsets at many levels and I came away with many useful ideas on how to manage the change in this kind of environment.
- Every time we meet my idea of community engagement shifts a bit more because I learn so many new things.

July 2021

- I feel like I finally understand what it is to really listen to the community, that I need to let go of any preconceived ideas going into any project and be present in the moment. I've noticed that even when I am approaching internal projects at the library now that I am pausing to reflect on who I need to hear from first before starting on a plan of action.
- I have a better understanding of the "nitty gritty" behind this work now. Perhaps one of the bigger takeaways for our group was the realization that we can't make decisions about those people we wish to reach without having them at the table. Good intentions and hard work aren't enough, and you may even be setting yourself up to fail if you haven't made sure that you're well-informed and adequately involving all who have a stake. Learning the risk assessment component was also vitally important, and something that we may not have sufficiently been considering before this training.

After the first training in April 2020, TL added an activity called “Last Words” to the end of each multi-day training event. Each participant was asked to place a virtual sticky note that conveyed what they were feeling at that point in time. These words paint a rich picture of where everyone was at the end of these events.



September 2020 (Training theme: Equity, Public Knowledge, Census Data)



March 2021 (Training theme: Evaluation, Risk Management, Leadership, Restoration)



July 2021 (Training theme: Storytelling, Celebrating Success, Sustaining the Work)


In an effort to create “more chocolate” in the March session, the entire cohort co-created a 52-slide deck of restorative practices. Some of these practices were inward-facing, restoring to team members and coaches. Others were outward-facing, ways teams and coaches could create restoration for their communities. After creating the slides, participants looked over the entire deck together and would ask to hear more about a specific slide number. The person who created that slide would then describe their practice or recommendation.


For example, here’s an outwardly oriented slide one participant created and described:

Authentic Conversations

OUTWARD

Relationships matter. And in order to see the change that is necessary for every community we have to have authentic conversations with everybody (different social, economic, academic backgrounds); in different settings.
There is no ‘I’ in TEAM but there is a ‘U’ and an ‘i’ and commUnity.
The change starts with U and I.
Lets talk.






“To me, there are three things we all should do every day. We should do this every day of our lives. No. 1 is laugh. You should laugh every day. No. 2 is think. You should spend some time in thought. No. 3 is you should have your emotions moved to tears, could be happiness or joy. But think about it. If you laugh, you think and you cry, that's a full day. That's a heckuva day. You do that seven days a week, you're going to have something special. Make”

March 2021 (Training theme: Evaluation, Risk Management, Leadership, Restoration)

And here’s an example of an inwardly-oriented slide created by a participant:

Really NOTICING small moments of joy in my day (for example: the soft, purring cat is rubbing against me; it smells like spring when I walk outside; how delicious my food is; the way a hug feels), and paying attention to the fact that I am actually having these moments even when things are rough.

INWARD



March 2021 (Training theme: Evaluation, Risk Management, Leadership, Restoration)

These efforts to integrate more chocolate into an otherwise “nutritionally dense” program created a spirit of conviviality, which can be seen as its heights in our July 2021 training “Awards Show,” emceed by TL’s trainer, Susan Hildreth:



July 2021 (Training theme: Storytelling, Celebrating Success, Sustaining the Work)

Finding: Foundational shifts in core learning goals

While coaches and team members had different learning goals, they both expressed significant shifts in core learning goals. In particular, coaches described relating to change differently and team members described relating to their communities differently.

COACHES AND CHANGE

The baseline, midpoint, and final survey featured the open-ended question, “Describe how you respond today to institutional resistance to new ideas or changes.” At baseline, coaches talked about institutional resistance to change through their own analysis and shared ways in which they persuade others to see it from their own perspective:

- “I’ve become better at stating my own understanding even when it may upset people.” (C03, Baseline Survey)
- “I sometimes try to marshal lots of evidence for the change, and rely on relationships to help make it easier to deliver my message.” (C04, Baseline Survey)
- “I try to think through strategies to bringing people along.” (C01, Baseline Survey)
- “I tend to delve into research to present an informed case for change complete with possible outcomes and benefits.” (C02, Baseline Survey)
- “I try to explain the reasons behind the change, that is, how this change will improve service.” (C06, Baseline Survey)
- “I create a detailed plan in order to clarify desired outcomes, adapting that plan in order to match outcomes with established institutional values or goals.” (C05, Baseline Survey)
- “I look to see how I can move forward while being considerate of the feedback, and adjust my case to be more persuasive.” (C07, Baseline Survey)

But in later surveys (midpoint and final), their statements reflected an appreciation for other points of view, a desire to hear and support resisters, and a recognition that change is constant and inevitable. Some coaches also mentioned specific content from the training, such as risk management and whole systems thinking:

- “If there is resistance to change, I’ll throw a worry party! We will work through that resistance together and decide what to do with the worries.” (C02, Final Survey)
- “I’ve been working more closely with the managers to gain trust so they can more openly express disagreement.” (C03, Final Survey)
- “Change is our constant, so I understand resistance to new ideas and such changes. I respond with acknowledgement that this is challenging, and efforts to support people in moving through these changes.” (C01, Final Survey)
- “I listen and imagine the situation from the perspective of the resisting party and try to find the value in their position. I reflect on it; I may write about it or discuss it with team members or that person to find out more about the resisting perspective.” (C02, Midpoint Survey)
- “I try to see the reasoning from their end and then take that back to compare with my own. I try to obtain as many different perspectives as I can, admittedly sometimes to the point where it is counterproductive.” (C07, Final Survey)
- “Try to be thoughtful and empathetic about what the causes of resistance might be.” (C04, Midpoint Survey)
- “I am noticing a heightened institutional awareness of community needs and priorities, so am finding it useful to approach institutional resistance from a community and a whole-systems perspective (i.e. who is impacted by certain decisions & in what ways and how does that move outward)” (C05, Midpoint Survey)
- “I try to listen first. What is being said by whom, why are they saying it, do they feel like it’s a safe environment to share their thoughts.” (C07, Midpoint Survey)

TEAMS AND COMMUNITIES

The baseline, midpoint, and final survey featured the open-ended question, “Describe how you work with your community today to identify an issue of concern.” At baseline, participants talked about learning of community concerns in institutional terms. They wrote of participating in coalitions, attending meetings, distributing surveys, and inviting feedback.

- “I am a member of two community coalitions -one focusing on healthy active communities and the other focusing on preventing youth substance abuse.” (Baseline Survey)
- “I have done surveys in the community to gain feedback as well as making myself available at functions, events and at outreach sites. I hand out business cards in the community and give people the opportunity to connect with me.” (Baseline Survey)
- “I attend various meetings of community organizations. The Library provides avenues for direct feedback about library services via comment forms.” (Baseline Survey)
- “I've, so far, done very little with community partnerships, simply because I don't know where to start. As a librarian, I'm always looking for ideas that may be implemented at our library to involve more people. I aspire to do more community outreach in the future.” (Baseline Survey)

By the midpoint survey, their statements reflected the importance of one-on-one conversations, relationships, and equity.

- “I prefer Individual conversations to find any areas of concern within my community.” (Midpoint Survey)
- “Through individual or group conversations, keeping in mind that we need to speak with underserved populations in addition to regular patrons.” (Midpoint Survey)
- “I engage our community members in conversations about their current concerns, not only for themselves within our community, but for the individuals they may represent within our community too. It's important to make genuine connections with the community members we serve and for our community to recognize our organizations as a trusted resource within the community.” (Midpoint Survey)
- “We have been inviting folks to one-on-one conversations, usually about 40-60 min. We've set up an informal conversation table outside during curbside hours, this has helped us connect with library users that we don't know personally. And we're trying to pay attention and observe other conversations that are taking place in the community.” (Midpoint Survey)

Team Member Assessment: February 2020

Welcome to the WLTC program! Please help us better understand where new Team members are starting from by answering the following questions. We ask for your name to help track progress, but all information gathered will be anonymized unless permission is given. This will be used throughout to help evaluate our 18-month program.

This assessment is due no later than Wednesday, February 12, 2020.

Baseline survey, February 2020

In the final survey, team members continued to mention the importance of conversations, but their statements reflected a focus on relationships, community aspirations, and an understanding of the trust and authenticity that is needed to address community concerns. Some team members seemed to move from a midpoint perspective that “listening is important” to a realization that what you do with what you hear, and how, is even more important.

- “I like doing the exercises where community participants are able to create an organic conversation around issues. I embrace the idea of doing more aspirations, challenges, issues and who do you trust exercises in our community.” (Final Survey)
- “I try to listen carefully in all conversations. When I hear a complaint or dissatisfaction about the library or the community, I follow up with questions. What would you like to see? What would make it better? What would help? Etc. This helps me to gain insight into the community without forcing what I think will help.” (Final Survey)
- “This work starts with a lot of listening! Both for concerns, but also community readiness. As the community finds it's new normal we have more opportunities to do just that. When we take the time to do it thoughtfully and use the tools we've been practicing, the path almost presents itself.” (Final Survey)
- “I believe that the key to being successful in this endeavor hinges on building relationships. One-on-one and participation in small group discussions allows people to be honest and authentic.” (Final Survey)
- “My work within our community moves at the speed of trust so the work has not changed; we will continue to do the work WITH the community, NOT to and for the community.” (Final Survey)

CONCLUSION

With over 600 survey responses and 18 months of webinars, workshops, conference calls, and small meetings, the findings presented here merely scratch the surface of the things we've learned in WLTC. We encourage readers to explore the raw data for the rich stories they tell. Among the lessons learned, there are many more actively being learned as participants engage in leadership, cultivating relationships, and thoughtfully engaging EDI in their communities. We hope the three findings presented here move community engagement efforts forward across the state of Wisconsin, and in other states that wish to implement similar programs.

These days, we pivot so much that it can feel like we're running around in circles, but our evaluation shows that those pivots pay off, both immediately and across time. As our training program endeavored to teach others the importance of relationships, so, too, it reminds us that the work we were doing as trainers was one and the same. We engaged our community of team members and coaches by prioritizing relationships with them. Through connection and authenticity we retained participants, co-created a convivial virtual learning space, and saw significant and promising changes in the ways our participants engage in the work we set out to do together.

Case Studies

Eau Claire Census

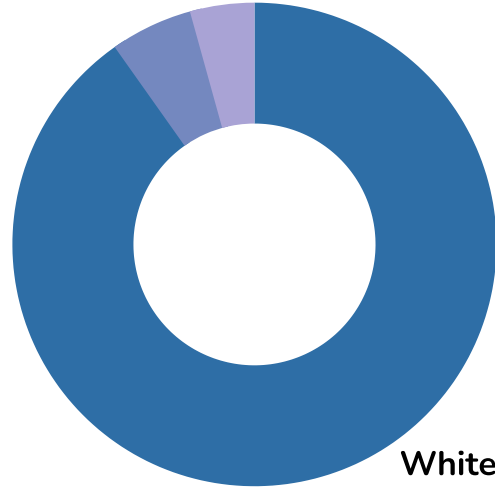
POPULATION
69,421

SERVICE AREA
32 SQ MILES



STATISTICS

Asian 5.5%
Other 4.3%



White
90.2%



DEMOGRAPHICS

94.4%



HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES

86.6%



HOUSEHOLDS
WITH INTERNET

Eau Claire



What happens when a library centers community aspirations in its policies? That's what the L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library explored during the Wisconsin Libraries Transforming Communities (WLTC) cohort. "It was the exact work that I'd wanted to do on my own, but it's big and messy," said Isa Small, Programming and Communications Services Manager. "I've learned that it is truly possible to engage with the community and do something that they need."

OVERVIEW

The past twenty years have brought many changes to Eau Claire, the eighth-largest city in Wisconsin. While it remains a predominantly white community – 91.7 percent as of the latest Census data – its Hmong and Latinx communities have grown.

The Eau Claire branch of the University of Wisconsin, the Chippewa Valley Technical College, three large hospitals, and manufacturing make up the economic base. City boosters cite a cultural renaissance as the driving force behind the explosion of music festivals, breweries, and art shows, bringing foot traffic to the city. While the city has been growing steadily, it manages to retain a small-town feel and attitude. Although it has the most significant income disparity outside of Milwaukee, Isa Small, the Programming and Communications Services Manager at L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library, says "everyone feels safe and supported."

Small leaped in with both feet when the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) announced the opportunity to join the WLTC cohort. She was interested in community engagement but knew it was "big and messy," so she appreciated the chance to work with others. As the person in charge of marketing, communications, and programs,

she spends time thinking about maximizing the library's impact in the community without increasing the staff or budget. She had been thinking about getting input from the community, and thought committing to this program, along with the built-in support, would be a way to start.

Small and her community partner, Trish Cummins, Director of Partnerships for The Village Project, Inc., were supported by Coach Adriana McCleer, the community partnerships supervisor at the Appleton Public Library. The latter participated in the coach track of WLTC. "What happens a lot in libraries is that we're amazing librarians, and we're promoted to be supervisors – but don't always have the background and experience to be successful," said McCleer. "Having this unique opportunity to focus on coach training, facilitator training, and self-care was interesting, and I had institutional support to participate."

PROJECT

Small hosted conversations with community members during the pandemic. To overcome awkward virtual discussions, she invited a group of community members to participate in a virtual crafts session. Before the meeting, Small and her team assembled craft kits and delivered them to each participant, so they would all be working on the same project as they talked. Small found crafting allowed people to have a robust conversation without hesitation or self-consciousness because they could focus on what they were creating.

As conversations with residents continued, a theme was the lack of leadership in the community on equity, diversity, and inclusion. As Small dove deeper into the conversation, questions arose about the library's role in the EDI conversation. She decided to examine the library's policies, beginning with its programming policy. She started the process of realigning the programming policy to support community-wide goals.

The result was a programming policy that focuses on providing diverse and inclusive programming and ensures that the library spaces are welcoming and inclusive. The policy includes language reflecting the willingness to be held accountable for the goals it has identified.



Word cloud created by Isa Small to represent trends in Eau Claire community conversations

ACTIONS

During the community conversations, participants stressed the importance of involving community members who were already working with an equity-based framework and those directly impacted by the decisions in the programming policy. Small and Cummins convened a cohort of residents to participate in the process, providing each of them with a \$200 stipend for their time and expertise, funded from a grant from DPI.

Each one-hour session began with Small sharing the library's current programming policy and general inclusivity statements from other libraries. "And then I just tried to be quiet," said Small. "I wanted to leave it up to those community members to talk about and work around the issues themselves. I think it worked successfully."

Which does not mean it was easy. "They were probably the least comfortable meetings that I've ever been in," said Small, but allowing people the time and space to talk through their experiences permitted the

library to create an authentic policy that reflects the concerns and aspirations of its community. Once she aggregated the data from the working group, Small shared what she had heard with the library administration and staff members whose work would be directly impacted. She saw it as an opportunity to build buy-in, make any necessary tweaks, and think about applying what they had learned to other policies and procedures.

...allowing people the time and space to talk through their experiences permitted the library to create an authentic policy that reflects the concerns and aspirations of its community.

The new policy sparked a vigorous discussion with the Board of Trustees, who asked why the policy's language was necessary. Small's team mapped out a plan, including a timeline, of implementing what had been discussed. The result was a new policy that reflected the input of the community.

Aerial view of Eau Claire, Wi



OUTCOMES

As the working group reviewed the original programming policy, they reported to Small that it was too long and too hard to understand. “It led to the question, how are you sharing this out to the community,” said Small. “It made us think of ways to let the community know what we’re working on, as well as an invitation to tell us when we aren’t meeting that goal.”

Now that the programming policy reflects community aspirations, Small recommends the library establish guiding principles to review the remaining library policies. “People want more of that,” said Small, “as well as building in accountability.”

“When we opening ourselves up and say we’re trying to figure this out and we really need your help creating this policy, you’re putting yourself in a vulnerable position, and you’re asking for library staff to learn and grow alongside people which can be a real change in how we hold power.” -Isa Small

Small's work as part of the WLTC cohort gave her time to reflect on how the profession traditionally approaches decision-making. “A lot of times in the library world, we’re more comfortable being experts, so when people come to us, we have the answers. When we open ourselves up and say we're trying to figure this out and we really need your help creating this policy, you're putting yourself in a vulnerable position, and you're asking for library staff to learn and grow alongside people which can be a real change in how we hold power.”

Learning to work in an uncomfortable space leads to more authentic outcomes but can be unsettling, especially when discussing equity and racial justice. Small modeled how to trust the community when things got hard or uncomfortable.

CONCLUSION

Coach McCleer, initially concerned about the inward focus of the Eau Claire project, supported the team through the process and was heartened by the practice of including community members in the decision-making.

Reflecting on the team's accomplishments, Coach McCleer said, “Eau Claire was focused on equity and inclusion, not just representation. There were places where it felt uncomfortable, and they questioned, ‘what if I don’t get it right’ and learned that’s part of the process. They now have a model of how to do this again.”

For Small, the project has strengthened her relationship with community partners. “It’s definitely raised the profile of the library, and made me more consistently aware of EDI issues, and has normalized having those conversations.” The best part – it’s much easier for Small to find community partners for collaboration.

Both Coach McCleer and Small valued the support and structure of the WLTC program. “WLTC gave us an opportunity to implement a process and practice community engagement – it’s not formulaic,” said McCleer. “We have tools and strategies. The more we do it, the more comfortable it gets – it’s like a muscle, the more we use it, the easier it gets.”

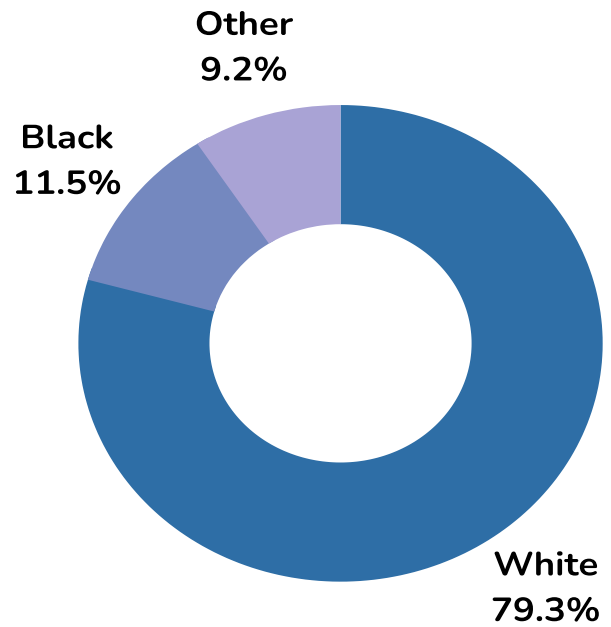
Kenosha Census

POPULATION
99,986

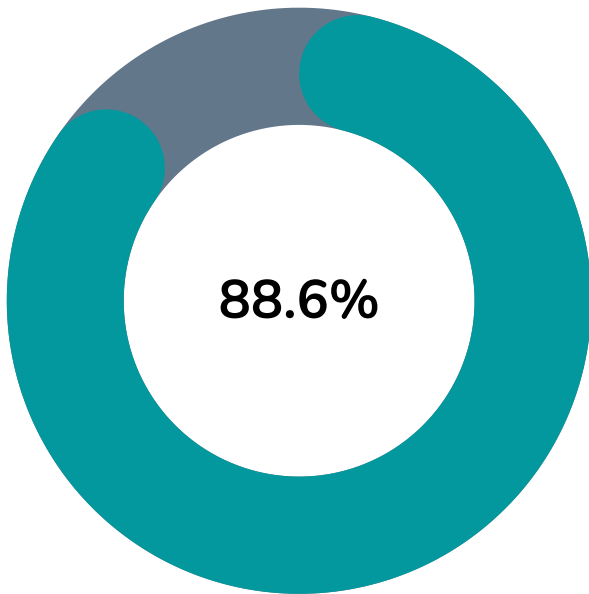
SERVICE AREA
26.93 SQ MILES



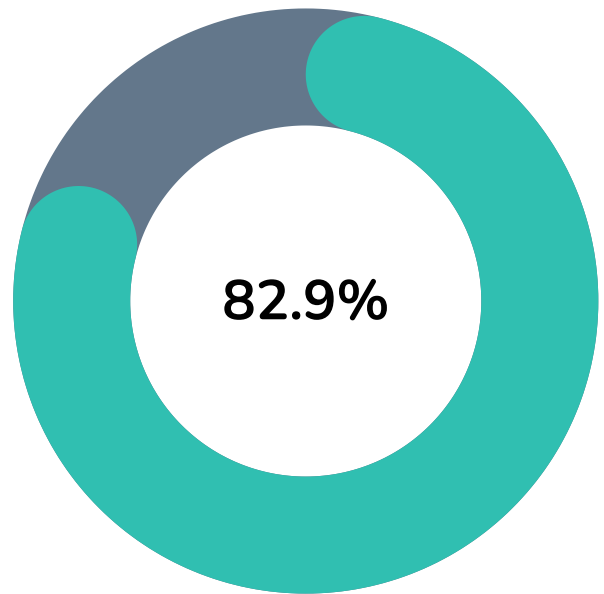
STATISTICS



DEMOGRAPHICS



HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES



HOUSEHOLDS
WITH INTERNET

Kenosha



“When Kenosha dealt with the shooting of Jacob Blake, we were talking to people who didn’t feel that they were being heard,” said Zander Miller. “I thought, let’s focus on that. How can we listen to people and share their stories?” The result was the 60 for 30 project, which captures and amplifies the stories of the Kenosha community.

OVERVIEW

On the southwest shore of Lake Michigan is Kenosha, Wisconsin, a city of just under 100,000 people. “Kenosha is the greatest city in the world,” said Brandon Morris, the Manager of Community Engagement and College & Career Readiness at Building Our Future. “We have the best of both worlds – we’re like a small town, but we’re a city that’s in between two bigger cities – Milwaukee and Chicago.”

According to Zander Miller, the Digital Strategies Librarian at the Kenosha Public Library, the dynamic, diverse city has events all summer long and is a great place to raise families. One advantage is the feeling of being known and recognized. When Miller and Morris attend community events, they see their friends, neighbors, colleagues – and others they recognize in passing.

Residents are proud of their city and its history, including landmark businesses like Frank’s Diner, which has been serving breakfast and lunch to the community since 1926, when the train car that became the diner was pulled into town by a team of horses. It recently received national attention on Guy Fieri’s television show, *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives*. Home to several colleges, universities, and Fortune 500 companies, Kenoshans benefit from a mix of indoor and outdoor activities, including a thriving downtown and all that Lake Michigan has to offer – including two lighthouses.

During the Wisconsin Libraries Transforming Communities (WLTC) program, Morris and Miller worked with Coach Leah Langby, the Library Development and Youth Services Coordinator at the IFLS Library System. Barbara Brattin, the Director of the Kenosha Public Library, approached Miller about partnering with Morris, who she knew from the library’s ongoing relationship with Building Our Future. “I was five months into being a librarian and hadn’t done any community engagement and thought it would be a good way to learn about the community and connect with another community organization,” remembered Miller.

Morris jumped at the opportunity, not just because of his commitment to and expertise in community engagement. When he went to the library to meet Miller in person, “It was a Black male librarian, and I don’t think I’d seen one before,” he said. “And that was it. I was all in.”

Coach Langby was interested in learning more about community engagement. While much of her job includes coaching people, she hadn’t had formal training and was eager to add tools to help her colleagues and learn alongside other Wisconsin library professionals.

PROJECT

The team hit the ground running, leveraging Morris's experience in community engagement and broad community connections. Initially focused on the aspirations of Kenoshans, in late August 2020, after a police officer shot Kenoshan Jacob Blake multiple times in his back, both men noticed a new urgency in the conversations they were having.

After conferring with Coach Langby, the two men settled on a focus for their project: capturing and sharing the stories of community leaders. Their 60 for 30 project, reflecting the \$60 each participant was paid for a 30-minute interview, acknowledging the value of the expertise shared by participants, focused on Kenosha's culture. Interviews were recorded at the library. They are shared on the library's YouTube channel (<https://www.mykpl.info/60for30>) and have become a part of its digital collection.

Zander Miller in the 60 for 30 studio

Goals for the project included determining whether people felt they were being listened to and if they felt good about contributing to the project. The team wondered if people were interested in learning about Kenosha's culture and if it would help people find ways to create what they wanted to happen in the community. Based on the conversations from the project, Miller made a web page of resources to help people identify the next steps.

Their 60 for 30 project, reflecting the \$60 each participant was paid for a 30-minute interview, acknowledging the value of the expertise shared by participants, focused on Kenosha's culture.

To measure the project's impact, the team set a lofty goal of having 500 views on its YouTube channel in one month. The first interview was released before Juneteenth and quickly racked up more than 200 views with minimal marketing. "We've hit 500 in less than a month," reported Miller.

ACTION

The 60 for 30 series captures the melting pot of Kenosha, and as is evident from the number of views, has garnered a significant amount of interest. Initially, "some of the people we approached were nervous about it," said Morris. "Now that it's out and is on the site, people want to know how to get involved. People love that it's diverse."

Miller attributes much of the success to Morris's involvement. "This project, in my eyes, would have been impossible without Brandon," said Miller. "Brandon recruited 28 of 30 people for the interviews." Morris' participation gave the project a legitimacy the library wouldn't have had on its own.





Kenosha, Wisconsin Photo by David Wilson

“When people came in and saw the setup and the three cameras and the podcasting set up, they said, ‘What is this? What did I sign up for?’, remembered Miller. “People had to trust Brandon to participate.”

The team faced numerous challenges. The interviews were taking place against the backdrop of the racial justice movement in 2020. They had an ambitious goal of capturing thirty stories and had to schedule the in-person interviews amid a pandemic. And for Miller, it was a deep dive into a new community since he had recently relocated from Minnesota.

The project leveraged Miller's experience in broadcasting, which came in handy as he modified a library space to function as a professional video studio. “I wanted a product that looked and felt special,” said Miller. In addition to ensuring excellent sound and video quality, Miller thought about the set, including material related to the speaker's topic from the library's collection to highlight during each episode and comfortable chairs for interviewees.

One of the biggest challenges was time. Each interview is 30 minutes long, but planning, editing, and putting together the finished product take a considerable amount of time.

There were days, recalls Miller, when it felt like an endurance test, as he conducted as many as four interviews in a row.

Both men laud Coach Langby's role as being essential to the project's success. “Being supported by and having someone to bounce ideas off of was important,” said Miller. “I could complain or worry about things that I wouldn't say necessarily to other staff.” Coach Langby helped the teamwork through risk mitigation exercises about potential pitfalls.

“Once we worried about it, we knew we could handle it,” said Miller. “We had solutions and figured out it wasn't a big deal.”

OUTCOMES

The result is a unique collection of organic conversations capturing people's passion for their community, highlighting the many initiatives taking place in the city. For Miller, who is relatively new to the community, it's been a great way to plug in and meet people. “Twenty-nine of the interviewees I had never met before,” said Miller. “Afterwards, when I go to events, whether Back to School or Black Wall Street, I see people that I interviewed.”

Miller spends a significant amount of time outside of the library building, at community events, and continues to build connections. “Just going and being visible is really important to our community,” he said.

Watching the two men work has inspired Coach Langby. “It’s exciting to see what’s possible when you combine a librarian committed and intentional to the community engagement process and a community partner with skills and connections,” she said.

For Morris, the project reminded him about the many resources available through the library. “We just have to continue to be intentional about engaging the community with the library and build the awareness that the library is our community resource,” he said. “It allows the conversation to continue about so many things that are going on here in Kenosha. And how folks from all different walks of life have so many different stories.”

While there were numerous challenges – the pandemic, the shooting of a citizen – the team managed to accomplish its goal. The project also connected family members who hadn’t communicated in years and brought together different community groups who began using the library’s meeting rooms.

Miller managed to maintain the project’s scope as the excitement built. Despite those challenges, the team is delighted with the trust their fellow Kenoshans placed in them. “I’m surprised people are that open. It’s still incredible to me that people are so open with me about their experiences,” said Miller. “I’ve learned so much about Kenosha and people’s lives.”

CONCLUSION

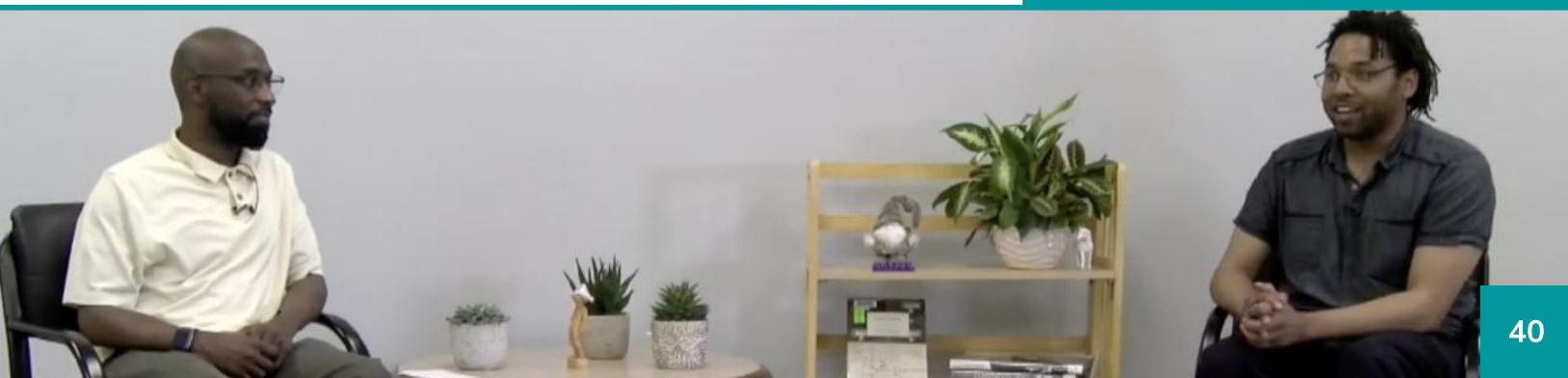
In the end, the process and project reaffirmed that “relationships matter, and authentic conversations matter,” said Morris. “You have to be intentional about both.”

For Miller, listening is key to community engagement. “Really listening, and making sure a person is being heard, and that it’s meaningful, is important,” he said. Equally important is “identifying the stories that can make changes happen.” Looking to the future, he retains the goal of continuing to amplify the community’s diverse voices. “We have to advocate – we go to more events and have staff at more events, even if it’s just to go to sit and talk to people,” said Miller. But he points out, it’s not magic, it’s work, and the library needs to build capacity to continue to do this work. For others interested in doing this work, he recommends, “Leave your ego at the door. If either Brandon or I were insulted easily, we would not have gotten far.”

Coach Langby attributes the success of the Kenosha team to their openness to following the community’s lead. “Because Brandon and Zander didn’t come in with an already formed idea, they saved themselves some time and heartache by starting fresh,” she said. Their approach allowed them to consider what the community wanted rather than impose their ideas.

While others may not directly emulate the team’s work, Morris recommends that others taking on community engagement double down on their collaboration, partnership, and listening skills. “Teamwork makes the dream work,” he said, “But play your part so that your team can reach its full potential. Know when to step in and when to step back.”

Zander Miller interviews Kenny Harper for Kenosha Public Library’s 60 for 30 project



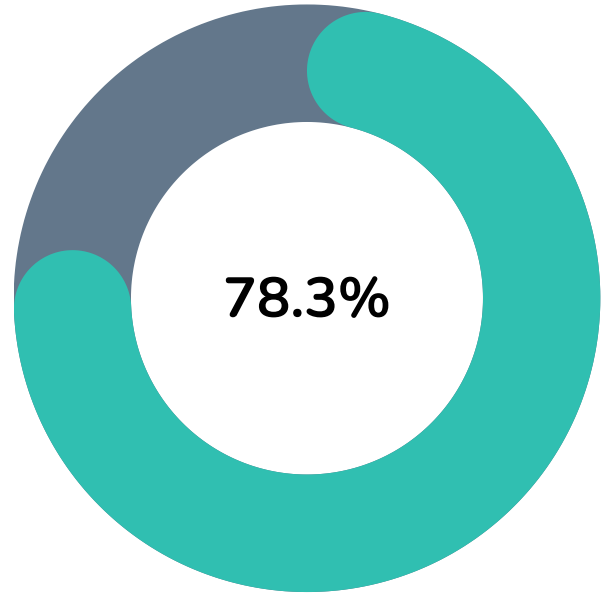
Marinette County Census

POPULATION
41,872

SERVICE AREA
1,399.35 SQ MILES

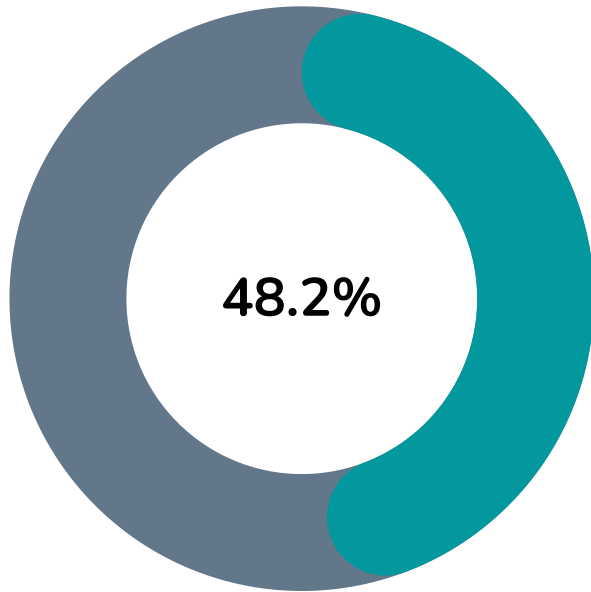


STATISTICS



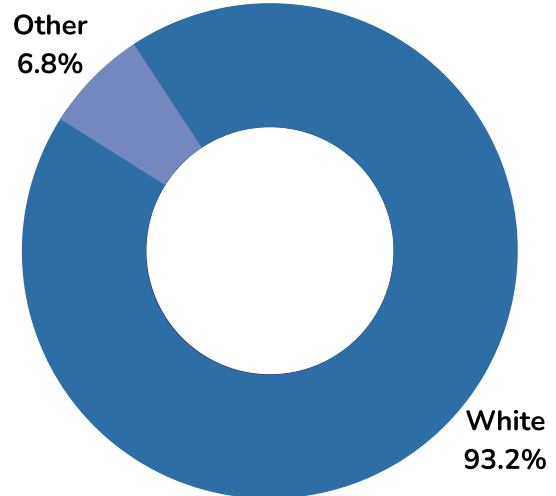
HOUSEHOLDS
WITH INTERNET

Town of Goodman



HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES

POPULATION: **604**



DEMOGRAPHICS

Marinette County



Goodman Public Library, open just three hours a week, felt too small to make the big changes they were hearing their community needed. “We heard over and over that a huge problem in personal life, in school life, in every aspect of life, was a lack of internet, connectivity, and broadband access” Rebecca Livick, librarian at Goodman Public Library shared. “But what can we do about that? We’re not anything huge with influence over that.”

OVERVIEW

Marinette County Library System (MCLS), in northern Wisconsin, has seven branches and the town of Goodman is home to their smallest. The library is located in the local high school, which is part of the Goodman-Armstrong Creek school district, the second smallest school district in Wisconsin. “Our little town is awesome,” said Samantha Smith, the Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum manager, “A small community with a lot of good roots in it.” She notes that much of their tax base are not permanent residents and the population, usually around 600 people, swells on the weekends with people visiting from out of town to use the all terrain vehicle trails.

Past MCLS director Jennifer Thiele’s motivation to apply for Wisconsin Libraries Transform Communities (WLTC) stemmed from her want to support a small and rural town. “I wanted to find a way to bring a rural community’s voice to the table because I think we are in a unique position to do so.” The Marinette County team came together when Thiele reached out to Smith. The pair had worked together previously on preventing budget cuts at the Goodman library. Smith was an advocate for the library in the community and started the petition that led to no changes in funding. “I knew this was a partnership that could benefit the library and the community.” Thiele said of Smith. When told of the WLTC opportunity Smith responded “I didn’t even know what I

was getting myself involved in at first but if it involved strengthening our library and our community, I was all about it.” Livick was new to her post as the Goodman librarian and excited for an opportunity to connect with the small town.

Kristen Anderson, director of Winding Rivers Library System, worked alongside the Marinette team as their coach. “I work with many small, rural libraries on a daily basis so the grit, determination and ingenuity of the Marinette team was not surprising to me.”

Like all teams in the WLTC initiative, best laid plans were set aside for a pandemic. The Marinette team found it hard to connect without being face-to-face and felt the sting of missed opportunities from canceled events. Smith had hoped to use summer events to introduce Livick and Thiele to the close-knit community. The team persisted in hosting community conversations and having several one-on-one interviews. Overwhelmingly they heard that Goodman needed better internet access.

PROJECT

While it felt like a problem too large to tackle, they had a \$2,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and a willingness to learn more. Livick decided to try researching options. She participated in a session at the 2021 Wild Wisconsin Winter Web Conference describing how the public library in Pottsboro Texas installed a hotspot on the roof through a grant from Information Technology Disaster Resource Center (ITDRC). It got the Team wondering if this was a viable option for Goodman. Livick started the application process with ITDRC and when she needed tech information she spoke to the head of IT at the Goodman Armstrong-Creek High School where the public library shares space. His response to her inquiry “well why don’t you just use the one we already have?”

It had been installed early in the pandemic but wasn’t turned on and no one in the town seemed to know it was there. The space that was covered by the hotspot was not user friendly. “They say word travels fast in a small town but sometimes it just doesn’t” Smith said. They took on the work of getting the word out. The community was excited and usage skyrocketed. Kids were seen sitting on the grass and steps around the access point which inspired the idea to create a space people would want to visit.

Coach Anderson noted this discovery was a big turning point for the team and a source of excitement not just about the possibilities for Goodman but how they could use what Livick had learned in other communities.

ACTION

Because they continued to keep the community in the conversation the team was able to learn the history of the area, including the unfortunate news that the first location they chose was a swamp, making it unsuitable for any structures. “We needed to decide with people who knew the town the best,” Smith said of the process. They also needed to bring along community partners in the decision process. It took permission from both the school district and the town to be able to implement their plan. Not surprisingly, they were happy to help an initiative that was so clearly based on the real need of the people. The Town of Goodman even included information about the project in their quarterly mailer.

With the approval of the location and using DPI funds to purchase supplies, the team moved forward with plans for a gazebo within range of the hotspot - a space where people could comfortably access this community resource. On a cold winter day Smith, Thiele, and Livick met at the corner of 5th and Main St. with cans of spray paint to mark out the area. It attracted attention from community members who wanted to know more and offers to help started coming in. Gravel, lumber, and even a sunscreen dispenser have all been donated.

Corner of 6th and Main,
location of the Goodman wifi hotspot





Planning map for wifi pavilion

Livick's in-depth research led the team to contact the neighboring city of Armstrong Creek to share what they had done. Armstrong Creek applied for a free wifi hotspot to mount on their community center. Smith said, "we don't have resources or people to research that kind of thing, it's not that our community doesn't want those kinds of resources, it's that they don't know how to find them or what's available to them."

CONCLUSION

Small and rural libraries have big capacity when they have the support of their communities. By actively listening to the issues the people of Goodman shared with Livick, Thiele and Smith, the team was able to rally resources and people to make a real difference. "When you get frustrated, keep going, I know it's hard but keep going" Livick said.

"It's a very small project that has a very big impact, but you have to start with realistic goals and know that no matter what you do it's still going to impact, whether big or small" Smith said, summing up her advice for others. Building the gazebo is the first step in plans to improve what is now being called the wifi pavilion. They are next working to add electricity, benches, and later a restroom so that it becomes a stop on the ATV trails.

They plan to continue to use what they learned with Smith pointing out that the skills and tools they picked up through WLTC have continued to be useful. "Hang on to those resources because they're good forever and not just through the project, I'm very grateful for them." Coach Anderson summed up their experience well, "the Marinette team embodied what public libraries do well: identified a need, found existing community partners and developed new ones, worked to maintain a high level of public trust, and then were able to efficiently and frugally meet the need."

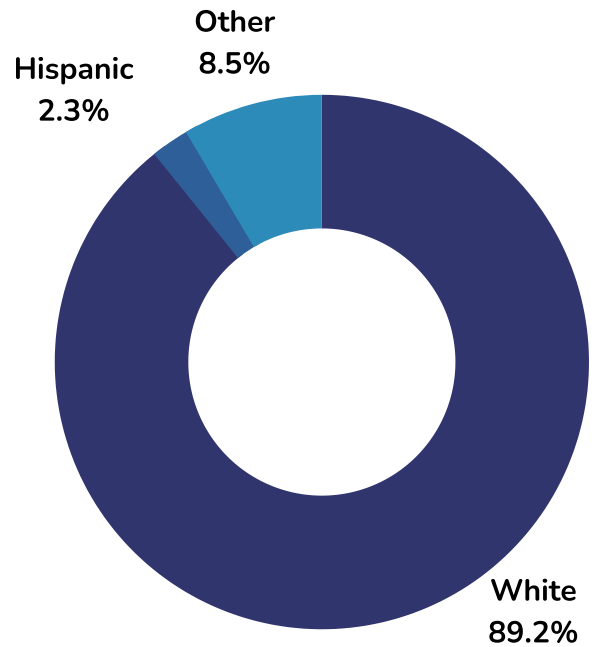
Village of Oregon Census

POPULATION
11,179

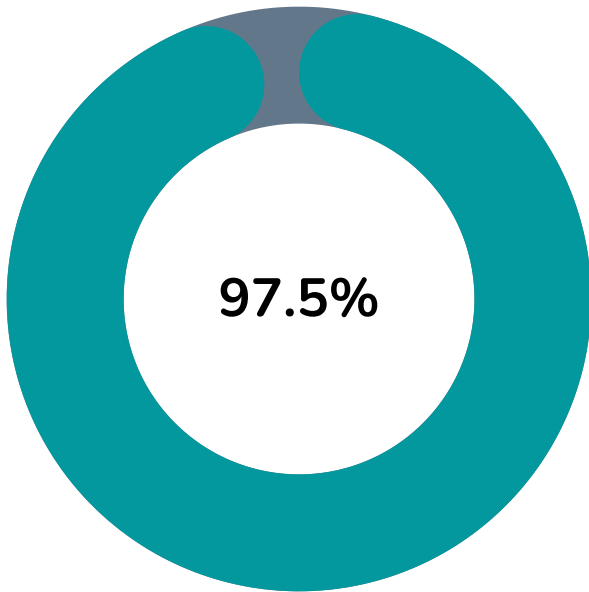
SERVICE AREA
4.2 SQ MILES



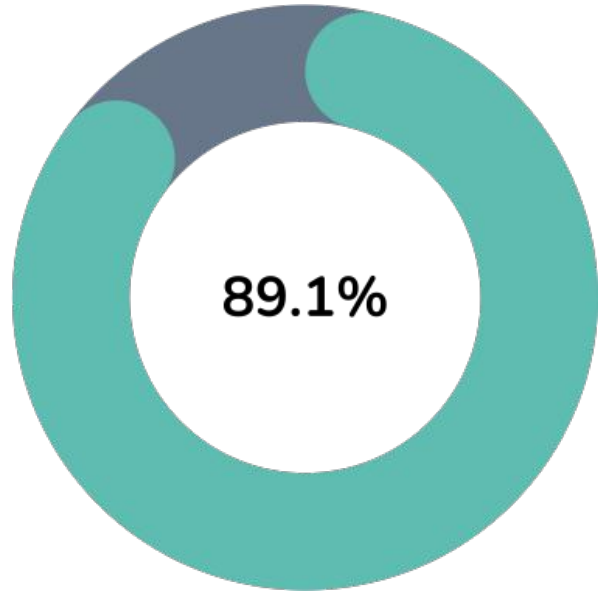
STATISTICS



DEMOGRAPHICS



HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES



HOUSEHOLDS
WITH INTERNET

Village of Oregon



In the Village of Oregon the Oregon Public Library rekindled the art of conversation. “People are getting away from the ability to carry a conversation and to bring that skill back again is a really powerful way to engage people” Holly Selwitschka said of the library’s actions. The library heard their community wanted to talk about tough topics and staff found a positive way to do it.

OVERVIEW

Being just south of Madison, Wisconsin, the Village of Oregon has shifted from an agricultural area to a bedroom community. In the 15 years that Kelly Allen, Youth Services and Community Engagement Librarian for the Oregon Public Library, has lived there the village's population has increased by more than 30%, jumping to 11,179 in 2020. “It’s a really welcoming community with a cute downtown and a ton of walking and biking paths” she said. Allen applied for the Wisconsin Libraries Transforming Communities (WLTC) program because she “wanted to be more effective in working with community organizations.” She invited Amy Miller, Community Education and Recreation Director of the Oregon School District, to be her partner. “I LOVE to work with Kelly! My job focuses on community outreach and engagement so this is a perfect fit” Miller added.

Holly Selwitschka, director of the Kimberly Village Public Library, applied to be part of WLTC coaching program because “the words engagement and resilience in the description really appealed to me.” She worked alongside the Oregon team as their coach. “The Oregon team did a very good job of connecting with their community. It’s kind of a small community to work with but they did a good job of working with the resources they have available.”

The team was able to act on an early trend that came up in conversations. “Community members wanted things to do outside of their homes and feel a part of a community, even at a distance “ Allen said. They partnered with the Oregon Area Wellness Coalition to create the Fall Fitness & Wellness Challenge which got people outside and active in the fall of 2020. The library received positive feedback that helped create momentum for the next big thing.

“Community members wanted things to do outside of their homes and feel a part of a community, even at a distance.”
-Kelly Allen

In Oregon community conversations “there was a lot of talk about getting people together, opportunities for learning about people different from them” Allen said. “Community members wanted opportunities to learn about race, neurodiversity, other community members who maybe you couldn’t see what their differences are, and they wanted to get together in a safe place to learn.” As this last part became more and more common in their conversations Allen and Miller focused on ways they could make an impact.

PROJECT

Principal of the four-year old kindergarten program (4K), Mary Hermes, was looking for support in meeting the school district requirement of hours outside of class that provide engagement in diversity, equity, and inclusion topics. Working with her, Allen and Miller took advantage of the existing monthly 4K storytime and planned a dual language version that created opportunities for conversation around differences. They named the initiative Storytime +.

Using the Zoom platform, 4K families were invited to Storytime +. The framework was straightforward and intentional. As a children's librarian Allen would read a story, then local native Spanish speaker Natalia Silva would read the same story in Spanish. Allen met Silva in a community conversation with Spanish-speaking parents learning English. After reading two books apiece parents and caregivers could stay on the call to talk to pediatricians Dr. Dipesh Navsaria and Dr. Laura Houser from the Healthy Kids Collaborative. Using a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

(DPI), each family received a copy of the books with resources on having conversations about race, read aloud tips, library resources, and book recommendations.

While the program was straightforward, behind the scenes Allen and Miller made sure they were being responsive to the concerns they had heard. "The hardest part was trying to be as inclusive as we could." Allen said. She and Miller made sure that each aspect of communication included both an English and Spanish portion, including the Zoom invite and Google Forms. Ahead of the program families were invited to submit questions to the pediatricians in case families felt more comfortable asking anonymously. The team worked with the school district translator to translate the pediatricians' answers to Spanish as well as the two stories so that their reader Silva could read the English to Spanish translation.

When deciding who to have on the call for the conversation Allen said they decided on pediatricians because "Pediatricians are used to being asked 'what's normal with that, how should I do this?' from families". Picking the books was also very intentional. They looked for books by diverse people with diverse characters. They went with *Saturday* by Oge Mora and *Ruby Finds a Worry* by Tom Percival.

Coach Selwitschka utilized the Thriving Libraries risk management framework to help the team work through concerns about doing a program around race and differences and the fear of backlash from a small number of community members. While they created a plan to mitigate risks, none of it was needed. Storytime + was well received.

Promotional material for the Oregon Fall Fitness & Wellness Challenge



Fall Fitness & Wellness Challenge



October 1 - November 15

3 Ways to Play & Win Prizes:

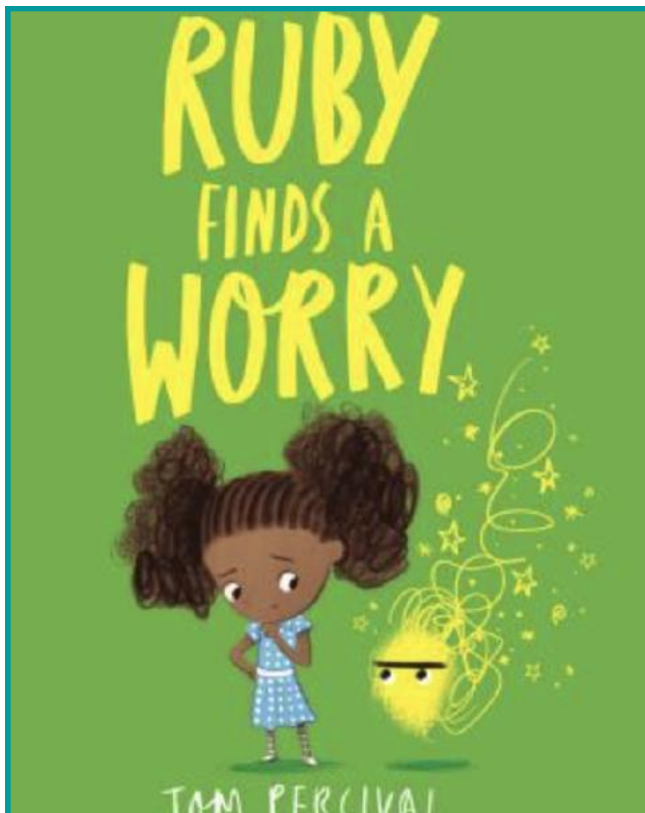


OUTCOMES

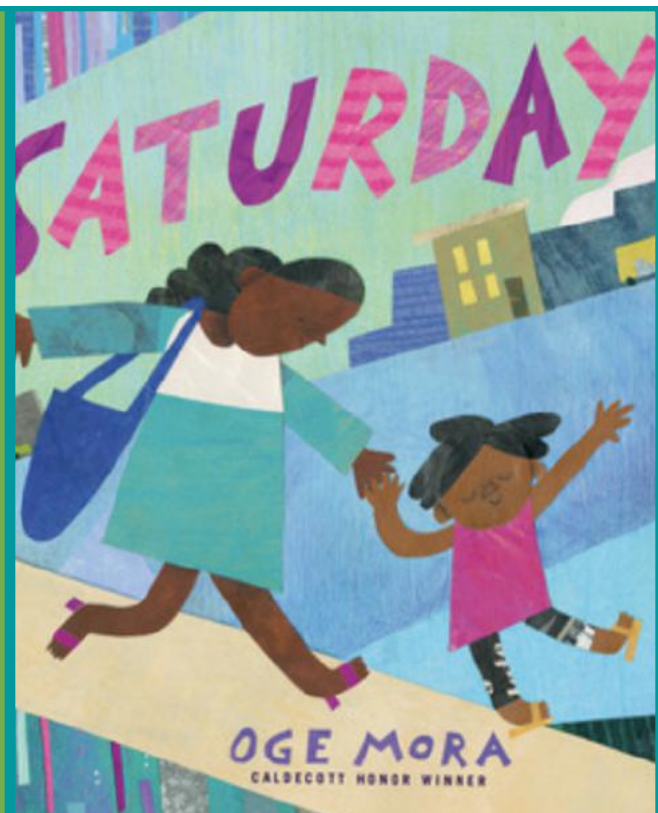
Forty-five families attended the first Storytime + program in May 2021. 4K principal Hermes told Allen after the program that in the past none of their Spanish-speaking families had attended the monthly story time but many had attended this one. “It has definitely deepened the partnership between the library and the 4K program. We’re a big resource for them” Allen said. She added “It created a connection with the Spanish language community and the library.” That new connection has led to the library asking the Spanish-speaking community for collection recommendations.

A challenge in implementing Storytime + was finding the books they wanted in Spanish. “Some we had to order from Amazon UK” Allen said. She added that a change for her has been “if I’m finding books I like and I’m not finding them in Spanish I’m contacting the publisher and making demands.”

The Oregon adult services librarian used information from community conversations to inform her technology programs and in general the library has shifted to a more intentional approach to “programming that features different voices in the community” Allen shared. She also said that hearing about people wanting to meet has influenced the plan for the new library. “We need places for people to gather, this has reaffirmed that.”



Ruby Finds a Worry
by Tom Percival



Saturday
by Oge Mora

Platteville Census

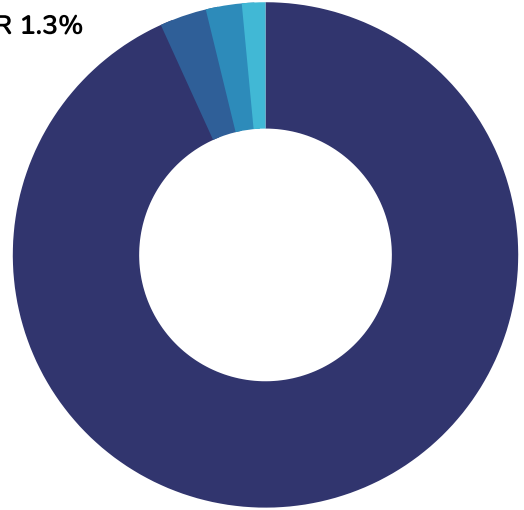
POPULATION
11,836

SERVICE AREA
5.45 SQ MILES



STATISTICS

WHITE 93.2%
BLACK 3%
HISPANIC 2.3%
OTHER 1.3%



DEMOGRAPHICS

96.5%



HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES

85.7%



HOUSEHOLDS
WITH INTERNET

Platteville



What happens when a team makes a plan, gets no support, and feels like they've failed. In the case of the Platteville team, guided by Coach Bruce Gay from the Waukesha Public Library, they have more conversations with their community and find a new way forward – establishing an informal communication network to benefit residents and stakeholders.

OVERVIEW

Southwest Wisconsin is part of the driftless area, which remained untouched during the last ice age. The result is an outdoor playground of river valleys and forested hills. The city of Platteville, population 12,000, is the largest in the county and home to the University of Wisconsin-Platteville (UW). Students swell the population for nine months of the year, bringing diversity to the 93% white community.

Platteville experiences a town/gown divide while recognizing the vital role UW plays in the economy. When a local coffee shop tracked the change in business during the academic year, it saw an increase by more than 100% when UW was in session. “The thing we’ve realized the most is the population of Platteville does not necessarily reflect the university – they call it an island effect,” said Kelli Miller, outreach coordinator for the Platteville Public Library. “The university exists on its own, but the city and university are interdependent.”

Historically, the area was home to lead miners, and remnants of their heritage remain – including a mining museum with tunnels, creepy mannequins, and a mining trolley ride, a big hit with fourth graders, who visit on school trips.

The area’s natural beauty and quality of life make it a draw for families. “It’s a great place to raise kids – people told me that before I moved here, and it really is,” said Kelly Podach Francis, a former trustee of the

Platteville Public Library. “Everything is within walking distance, the schools are great, there’s a pool and a summer rec program. It’s a small town feeling with city perks without living in a big city.”

In 2017, the library opened its new 22,000 square foot building, which doubled its previous size. Miller, who recently relocated to Platteville from Madison, applied to the Wisconsin Libraries Transforming Communities (WLTC) cohort to get Platteville on the map. “We want to increase accessibility and visibility,” she said. “It was a good chance to put our name out there, generate interest in what the library was doing, and interact with our community.”

Podach Francis was eager to renew her relationship with the library and make a change in the community. She wondered, “What could we do if the University, school district, and the city worked together?” She pointed to the changing demographics, sparked by an influx of people moving to the area from Chicago to raise their children. “As we become more diverse, some local people become afraid,” said Podach Francis. “This project seemed like a good way to address those issues.”

Bruce Gay, director of the Waukesha Public Library, coached the team. Sparked by an interest in community engagement, he saw the opportunity to deepen his understanding of the relationship between public libraries and their communities, as well as bolster his coaching skills.

PROJECT

Doing community-based work can be tricky, as Miller and Podach Francis learned. “Our project goals shifted. When we started, we embraced the idea of being able to go out and instead of assuming what the community needed, have people inform us of what they actually wanted,” said Miller. “We had a new city manager that started at the same time as this process, who felt the same way.”

Aware that other attempts to change or bring new ideas to the fore had been unsuccessful, they embraced community engagement.

“Our original project was to work with local artists to create a mural in the downtown area of Platteville,” explained Podach Francis. “There are some buildings that could use beautification, and we wanted to work with a person of color to create a mural. There is not a lot of representation or reflection of the diverse community that Platteville has become in the last five to ten years. We were looking forward to doing that and making it an educational opportunity.”

Unfortunately, the Common Council, Historic Preservation Committee, and the city government opposed the idea. “We were not expecting to find that opposition,” said Podach Francis. “I still think it’s a great idea. It would bring people to our area and get people talking.”

ACTION

Coach Gay worked with the team to return to the drawing board and recalibrate a plan. The team had heard people were interested in creating a youth center but decided it was far too ambitious a project to tackle at this point. Their experience with coordinating the mural project and talking to other stakeholders in the community highlighted the need for improved communication and finding trusted people to take action on issues. “I thought there was more unity in the community than there was,” said Miller. “We have to go back to step one before taking on large-scale projects.”

They decided to position themselves as conveners and facilitators, pulling together the many groups working on different initiatives to improve communication between the many organizations and initiatives in Platteville.

The focus is to build bridges between different organizations and companies in the community and identify some common goals. “We were excited to have something to show that we aren’t alone in going through these challenges,” Miller said. The team intends to coordinate quarterly meetings with stakeholders to build on the momentum that the discussion at the first meeting has sparked.

“We were excited to have something to show that we aren’t alone in going through these challenges.” -Kelli Miller

The big takeaway from their experience, said Miller and Podach Francis, was finding the people in the community who were passionate about taking action on a project – and that those people are not always in leadership positions.



View from atop the Platte Mound M
Photo by Vincent Parsons

OUTCOMES

The team’s willingness to recalibrate paid off. “It’s gotten a lot of people talking,” said Miller. They reported what they had heard in community conversations to the Common Council, and the two women participated in focus groups the city convened in the summer of 2020. A common thread heard at local events like the Chalk and Cheese Festival was that communication between the many stakeholders was a community-wide challenge.

They believe their work as part of the WLTC initiative planted seeds in the community that will bear fruit in the coming years.

In the future, the team plans to convene quarterly community conversations for stakeholders to communicate directly and identify where to take action. They believe their work as part of the WLTC initiative planted seeds in the community that will bear fruit in the coming years.

Both women learned that despite their assumption that they were coming into a long-established community, the city has an abundance of relatively recent transplants. “They are a driving force and want to be connected,” said Podach Francis. As both were relative newcomers, they related to the challenges their neighbors were facing – finding ways to plug into the community, finding affordable housing that wasn’t for students, and learning the school schedule.

CONCLUSION

Despite having to adjust their plans, both women report the WLTC experience as being helpful. “I had a realization once we went through this process, I feel like I could get a better understanding of why so many projects don’t make it to fruition,” said Miller. “We felt like we had done the legwork, we had the buy-in, and then we had to go back to square one. You feel like you’ve done everything you’ve done to make things happen, but you don’t have anything to show for it. It shows why we don’t have a youth center in town, because obstacles happen, and people give up.”

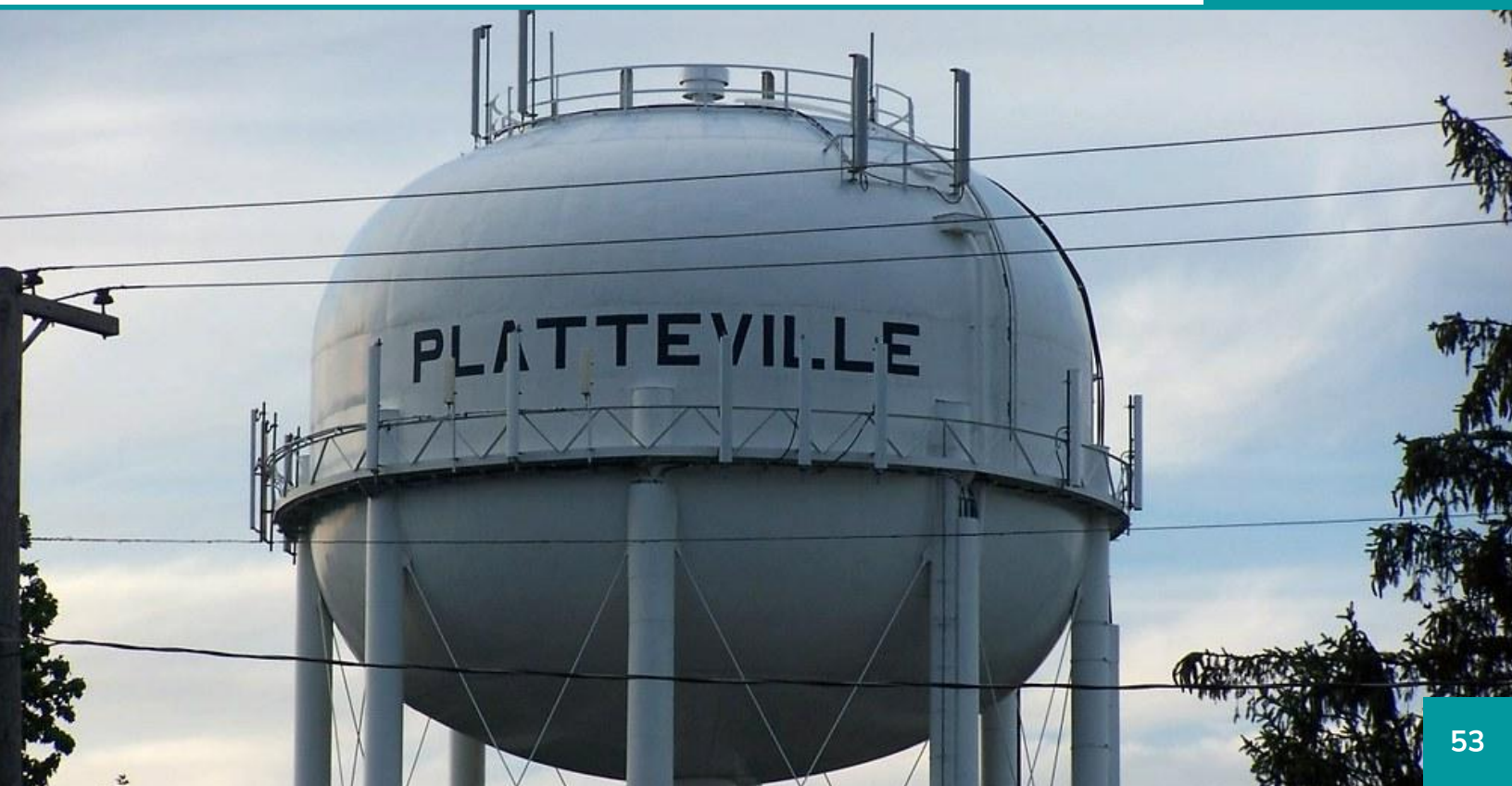
Rather than retreat, Coach Gay helped the team embrace a new strategy – addressing the communication issues many people had identified as an obstacle. Despite the initial disappointment, the focus on bringing people together to share common goals and aspirations is what they believe their community needs to succeed long-term. “It speaks to the larger issue of how do you attract new families to the area and how do you retain them because if they can't make things happen, they'll move on,” said Podach Francis.

One of the biggest lessons learned is to “be patient and prepare for setbacks,” said Miller. “We were so enthusiastic and naïve at the beginning of the process, and it was difficult to go through a setback, but I'm glad we did because it gave us a chance to learn more about what we had heard. Give yourself grace and give yourself time. Community engagement is not a one-and-done thing. Be patient and be happy that you've done as much as you have in the time that you have.”

Podach Francis concurs and recommends that others interested in doing deep community engagement work do as many interviews with community members as possible. “Do the interviews, do more of them, keep doing more of them, then do more,” she said.

“You can’t do too many of these interviews,” agreed Coach Gray, “you just have to keep going and going. You have to keep pushing. You may think you know better, and I clearly don't, so continue to ask the questions.”

Platteville Water Tower
Photo by J. Stephen Conn



Appendix

Teams



Angela Noel

Director,
Brodhead Public Library

**Brodhead
Public Library
Coach: Leah Langby**



Sabrina Meichtry

Social Worker,
Community Volunteer

**Brodhead,
WI**



Isa Small

Programming &
Communications Services
Manager

**L.E. Phillips Memorial
Public Library
Coach: Adriana McCleer**



**L.E. Phillips Memorial
Public Library**

Trish Cummins

Director of Partnerships,
The Village Project, Inc.

**Eau Claire
WI**



Zander Miller

Digital Strategies Librarian,
Kenosha Public Library

**Kenosha
Public Library
Coach: Leah Langby**



Brandon Morris

Manager of Community
Engagement, Building Our
Future

**Kenosha,
WI**



Emily Kornak

Director, Lake Geneva
Public Library

**Lake Geneva
Public Library
Coach: Kristen Anderson**



Jill Rodriguez

Rotary Club of Lake Geneva
and Community Volunteer

**Lake Geneva,
WI**

Teams



Laura Gravander

Teen Services and Outreach Librarian, Franklin Public Library



Ellen Henry

City of Franklin Health Department



Lauren Gottlieb

City of Franklin Health Department

Franklin Public Library
Coach: Ryan Clarinbole

Franklin, WI



Jennifer Thiele

former Director, Marinette County Library System



Rebecca Livick

Branch Librarian Goodman/Niagara, Marinette County Library System



Samantha Smith

Library and Museum Manager, Potawatomi Cultural Center,



Jenna Assmus

Adult Services Coordinator, Monona Public Library



Mark Buffat

Committee Member, Monona Sustainability Committee

Marinette County Library System
Coach: Kristen Anderson

Goodman, WI

Monona Public Library
Coach: Jennifer Fait

Monona, WI



Kelly Allen

Youth Services and Community Engagement Librarian



Amy Miller

Community Education & Recreation Director, Oregon School District



Kelli Miller

Outreach Coordinator, Platteville Public Library



Kelly Podach Francis

former library trustee, currently with University of Wisconsin- Platteville

Oregon Public Library
Coach: Holly Selwitschka

Oregon, WI

Platteville Public Library
Coach: Bruce Gay

Platteville, WI

Teams



Leslie Jochman

Directory, Plymouth Public Library



Trisha Thomas

Generations Intergenerational Center



Stephanie Newby

Administrative Assistant, Plymouth Joint School District

Plymouth Public Library
Coach: Jennifer Fait

Plymouth, WI



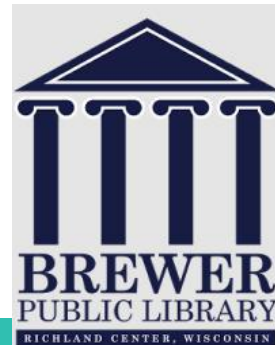
Martha Bauer

Director, Brewer Public Library



Chelsea Wunnicke

Extension Educator, Extension Richland County



Stacy Pilla

Youth Services Librarian, Brewer Public Library

Brewer Public Library
Coach: Bruce Gay

Richland Center, WI



Kerry Pinker

Manager, Children's Services, Waukesha Public Library



Julie Valadez

President and CEO, Hispanic Collaborative Network



Amanda Medina-Roddy

Board Member, School District of Waukesha

Waukesha Public Library
Coach: Adriana McCleer

Waukesha, WI

Coaches



Kristen Anderson
Director

Winding Rivers
Library System



Ryan Claringbole
Director

Monona
Public Library



Jennifer Fait
Library Branch Manager

Milwaukee
Public Library



Bruce Gay
Director

Waukesha
Public Library



Leah Langby
Library Development and Youth
Services Coordinator

IFLS
Library System



Adriana McCleer
Community Partnerships
Supervisor

Appleton
Public Library



Holly Selwitschka
Director

Kimberly
Public Library

Raw Data

Complete survey and data information can be found at <https://bit.ly/30DC3bk>