

IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY 2026 FINALIST

Focus Area

Education

Friends of Fife Lake Public Library

<https://www.tadl.org/about/fife-lake-public-library>

INITIATIVE

Room for Community: The Fife Lake Learning Hub

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(from Meet the Finalists)

In Fife Lake, many needs land at the same public door. A child hears the first story that makes reading feel possible. A student comes because school requires internet, and home does not have it. A senior comes for movement, laughter, and companionship. A job seeker prints the application that could mean paying next month's rent. A local group comes because community needs a place to gather.

The Fife Lake Public Library in southeast Grand Traverse County is a vital resource in a rural area with few alternatives. Serving over nine townships across four counties, this expansion will better meet residents' needs. Impact100's grant for the Learning Hub will become the tables people gather around, the technology they learn on, the audio-visual equipment for workshops and meetings, and accessibility making participation possible.

Impact100's grant means this new space becomes access, dignity, connection, and opportunity for all close to home.

The following sections contain information from the application, as written by the applicant. While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough review and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our eligibility requirements.

ORGANIZATION'S VISION STATEMENT

Exceed the expectations of the community, making us a go to place for up to date resources, information and entertainment.

ORGANIZATION'S MISSION STATEMENT

Provide an environment that stimulates the intellectual, recreational, and vocational needs of our changing population and promote community involvement in the library.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

Friends of the Fife Lake Public Library is the community support and fundraising organization for Fife Lake Public Library, a rural public library with roots reaching back to 1887, when a \$17 grant from Grand Traverse County helped begin library service in Fife Lake. In its earliest years, residents borrowed books from places as humble as a local newspaper office, general store, or restaurant. In 1945, the library settled into the historic school building that once housed the Township Hall and served residents there for 60 years. When the library outgrew that space, neighbors once again built the next chapter together through local fundraising, donated time, labor, materials, land, and furnishings, opening the current building in 2006. The Friends continue that tradition by giving residents, donors, and volunteers a formal way to invest in the library's programs, materials, facility needs, and long-term service to the community. The Friends support the Library's mission to provide dynamic resources and innovative services that stimulate intellectual curiosity, facilitate lifelong learning, promote literacy, and nurture personal and professional enrichment. The Friends are the applicant for this proposal and serve as the library's 501(c)(3) fundraising fiduciary. As fiduciary, the Friends receive, separately track, document, and report charitable funds, while the Library delivers direct public benefit through its staff, facility, programs, and community relationships. The Library owns the building and land, operates the facility, manages programs, and serves the public. The library is governed locally by a six-member volunteer Library Board of Trustees. It is also part of the Traverse Area District Library network, which provides system infrastructure and support such as catalog, technology, and shared library resources. The Library remains locally governed and manages its own programming, calendar, outreach, closures, social media, newsletters, and community relationships. This structure matters because Fife Lake is a small rural community where institutions are personal and trust is built over time. In small towns, a library can hold more than books; it can hold a community together. Families know the library staff. Students see the library as part of their learning routine. Seniors come for help, programs, conversation, and connection. Local groups look to the library as one of the few affordable places to gather. The Library serves the Village of Fife Lake, Fife Lake Township, and nearby rural communities. Fife Lake Township has approximately 1,670 full-time residents, while the Village of Fife Lake has fewer than 500 residents. The service area includes rural roads, lakeshore homes, farms, forests, seasonal residents, families with children, older adults, job seekers, people with disabilities, residents living on fixed or limited incomes, and community organizations. Because people often cross township and county lines for school, work, services, and connection, the library's reach reflects rural life while remaining rooted in Fife Lake. The library serves people across age and life stage. Children and families use the library for story time, early literacy, books, and no-cost enrichment. K–12 students use it for reading materials, school support, internet access, and learning opportunities beyond the classroom. Older adults rely on the library for programs, technology help, exercise, social connection, and assistance navigating online forms and information. Job seekers and residents without reliable home internet use public computers, Wi-Fi, printing, and staff support. Local organizations use the library for affordable meeting space and public

programming. Residents most affected by rural barriers include older adults, families with limited income, people without reliable home internet, residents with disabilities, and children or teens with few nearby enrichment options. After the current building opened in 2006, library use grew significantly: reported users increased by 70%, and circulation rose by 700% from 2006 to 2022, showing that when Fife Lake invests in library capacity, residents use it. Current use also demonstrates the breadth of the population served and the community's trust in the library: the library has 1,777 cardholders, nearly matching the full-time population of Fife Lake Township. Friends of the Fife Lake Public Library was not created for this grant; it exists because the community has long understood that a rural library is more than a building. It is where children begin reading, students keep learning, seniors stay connected, residents solve practical problems, and neighbors gather. As applicant, the Friends bring the fundraising and fiduciary structure; the Library brings the public service mission, staff, facility, and daily relationship with residents. Together, they sustain a trusted rural institution that serves Fife Lake through learning, access, connection, and community care.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

The Library serves a rural lake community in southeastern Grand Traverse County, centered in the small Village of Fife Lake and Fife Lake Township and extending into nearby rural areas including Union Township, Springfield Township in Kalkaska County, and surrounding communities. This is a spread-out service area of small neighborhoods, rural roads, seasonal homes, farms, forests, and lakeshore residents. Distance shapes daily life here; a short errand in a larger town can mean a long drive for a rural family, senior, or job seeker. People often cross township and county lines for school, work, basic services, technology access, and community life. For many, the library is one of the only free public places to learn, gather, use technology, and receive help. Fife Lake Township has approximately 1,670 full-time residents, and the Village of Fife Lake has fewer than 500 residents. The population grows during the summer as seasonal residents and visitors return, increasing demand on local services. Year-round residents face rural barriers that can limit access to opportunity: distance from services, modest or fixed incomes, few nearby educational resources, and uneven home internet access. To reach services outside the village, residents often need a personal vehicle, a shared ride, or help from family or neighbors. Library staff regularly see residents come in because home internet is unreliable or unavailable for the task at hand. The library serves families with young children, K–12 students, teens, homeschool families, older adults, caregivers, veterans, job seekers, remote workers, people with disabilities, seasonal residents, and residents living on fixed or limited incomes. These groups are underserved in different ways. Children and teens have fewer nearby enrichment options outside school. Older adults may face isolation, mobility barriers, or limited comfort with technology. Job seekers and remote workers need internet, printing, and digital support. Families with limited income need free access to books, programs, and learning resources. Local organizations need affordable meeting space. Children and youth are a central population. the Library partners with Forest Area Community Schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. Library staff spend an average of three days each week providing story time, literacy activities, and time for students to check out materials. Through this partnership, the library has connected students with more than 2,000 library items. Older adults are also central to the community served. Fife Lake's median age is in the mid-50s, which means senior access is not a secondary benefit; it is core to serving the local population. Many older adults rely on the library for programs,

technology help, exercise, social connection, and a safe public place to remain active in community life. Current use shows how deeply the community depends on this resource. The library has 1,777 cardholders, nearly matching the full-time population of Fife Lake Township. That level of use is unusual for a small rural community and shows that the library serves not a narrow audience, but residents across generations, income levels, and life circumstances.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED AND GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES

On an ordinary day in Fife Lake, the Library is asked to serve as the classroom, technology center, senior center, study room, job-search desk, and community room for a rural area with few alternatives. A child comes for story time. A student needs Wi-Fi or a book for school. A senior asks for help with a phone, tablet, or online form. A job seeker prints an application. A local group looks for a room it can afford. These are not occasional requests; they are the daily needs of a community that relies on one trusted public space. The problem is not lack of interest. It is that the library does not yet have enough space to meet the demand already at its doors. The expansion will address the square footage barrier; Impact100's Activation Package addresses the next barrier: making that new space fully usable for learning, technology, accessibility, and public programs from day one. In Fife Lake and the surrounding rural townships, there are few alternate places where residents can receive free educational support, technology assistance, senior enrichment, literacy programming, or affordable meeting space. Last year, the library recorded 31 community room rentals and still maintained a wait list, showing that demand for affordable public gathering space already exceeds what the current building can provide. Underserved residents feel this most. Rural children and teens have fewer nearby enrichment options outside school. Older adults may face isolation, fixed incomes, mobility limitations, or limited confidence with technology. Residents without reliable home internet need public computers, Wi-Fi, printing, and staff help for schoolwork, job searches, telehealth appointments, benefits, government forms, and communication. Last year, the library recorded more than 2,100 Wi-Fi sessions and 900 public computer uses, showing that digital access is an essential service, not a convenience. Current use proves the depth of need. Last year, the library offered 125 programs, served 1,184 regular program participants and 824 passive program participants, circulated 24,233 items, and issued 74 new library cards. Without activation, the new space would not fully solve the problem residents experience. A senior may arrive for a program and still struggle to hear. A presenter may be ready to teach a digital workshop but lack the tools to do it well. A community group may finally have a room, but not a flexible setup that allows people to gather comfortably. The Activation Package makes the difference between space that exists and space that serves. Room for Community: The Fife Lake Learning Hub will enhance proven work by turning new square footage into an active public learning environment: flexible enough for crowded programs, accessible enough for seniors and residents with disabilities, technology-ready for digital learning, well-appointed for literacy and lifelong learning, and measurable through use and outcome tracking. With Impact100's support, the library can expand learning access for the people already coming through its doors.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

The Learning Hub Activation Package will be sustained as permanent library infrastructure, not as a grant-dependent program. Impact100-funded furnishings, presentation technology, accessibility supports, program equipment, signage, wayfinding, research tools, and evaluation materials will become library-owned assets that make the 2,280-square-foot Learning Hub usable for education, technology support, senior enrichment, partner use, and community learning beyond the grant period. Sustainability matters because this is not a one-time event; it is the next public asset Fife Lake residents will rely on for years. Fife Lake Public Library will own, schedule, maintain, program, and evaluate the Learning Hub as part of regular library operations. Staff already perform the functions needed to sustain the activated space: program scheduling, community room management, partner coordination, patron support, attendance tracking, and public access. The Activation Package increases capacity within this existing model; it does not create a new organization, separate staffing structure, or temporary program that ends when grant funds are spent. Ongoing upkeep will be incorporated into the library's regular facility planning, maintenance review, scheduling systems, and annual budgeting process. Technology upkeep, troubleshooting, and replacement planning will be managed through library operations, TADL-supported systems where applicable, and future facility/program planning. Consumable launch supplies will support the initial launch period; future program supplies will be incorporated into annual program planning and Friends support as appropriate. No ongoing Impact100 funding will be required to sustain the activated Learning Hub. Governance will remain with the Fife Lake Public Library Board of Trustees, which oversees policy, budgeting, facility priorities, maintenance review, and annual evaluation. The Friends of the Fife Lake Public Library will continue as the library's fundraising and donor stewardship partner, providing supplemental support for programs, equipment, furnishings, and future facility needs as appropriate. The library's affiliation with Traverse Area District Library strengthens sustainability through shared catalog, technology, digital resources, and operational infrastructure, while Fife Lake Public Library remains locally governed and responsible for its own programming, outreach, calendar, and community relationships. The library has successfully managed growth before. After the current building opened in 2006, library users increased 70% and circulation rose 700% from 2006 to 2022. In this sustainability context, those numbers show the library can absorb expanded capacity, scale services responsibly, and turn capital investment into long-term public use. Current use supports sustainability because the activated Learning Hub will serve demand that already exists. Program participation, room reservations, cardholder use, and technology access show an existing base of residents and partners who will use the space immediately and consistently. Use will be reviewed through room reservations, program attendance, technology-use data, partner feedback, participant feedback, and annual Board review. These measures will guide scheduling, room-use policies, program mix, partner engagement, maintenance planning, and future equipment needs. Impact100's grant will create lasting educational capacity through library-owned assets, regular operations, Board governance, Friends support, TADL infrastructure, community use, modest earned support, and a proven record of managing growth.

