

*** Did your project encourage partnerships and collaborations with any community partners or other WiLS members? Who did you connect with during this process and how might you sustain those connections?**

The Appleton Public Library's (APL) project, Community Chords: Engagement through Music & Art, required organizing and collaborating with community members, businesses, organizations, and other city departments.

- The recruitment of artists allowed us to tap into our community's diverse talent. We have since connected the artists to our Artist-In-Residence program and with other community art opportunities.
- There were five piano host sites including APL, Fox Cities Performing Arts Center (PAC), Long Cheng Market, Appleton Downtown Inc. (ADI), and the Atlas Mill. Some host sites embraced and built off the project which strengthen the impact. For example, the PAC contracted a Hmong artist to paint a mural on their building and attempted to initiate a piano concert series with Hmong musicians. Long Cheng Market partnered with APL, Appleton Police Department, and Kiwanis Club to bring a Cop N' Kids Storytime at the market for families. The project has deepened partnerships and encouraged organizations to see the library as a space that fosters innovative community collaborations.
- The project needed lots of contracts because there were many individuals involved. We worked closely with our city's legal department to make sure that we were following legal procedures and best practices.
- The reinvented pianos were donated to community organizations to carry on the celebration of music, art, and Hmong culture outside of the project's dedicated month of May. We continue to receive ongoing photos of children and families engaging joyfully with the pianos.
- APL partnered with local Hmong talent to bring virtual classes and events to the community. These programs highlighted Hmong music, art, and literacy to align with the project. We received thank-yous from families of all kinds for bringing such unique classes and events to the community. One girl even asked if we would have the media animation class weekly because she enjoyed it so much! APL has maintained relationships with the Hmong performers and hopes to bring back some of them for in-person visits.
- Library volunteers graciously donated their time to sanitize and check on the conditions of the pianos twice a week. Everything was tracked using a shared Excel sheet.
- There were numerous community members interested in gifting their pianos. Many of them shared their piano's stories with us. We learned that one of the donated pianos had belonged to a deceased APL staff member. Another piano donor shared how letting go of the piano was symbolic to them also letting go of their daughter, who played the piano as a child, as she moved out and left for college. Through the stories, we found an underlying collective love for music and community.

*** Thinking about your project, what was the most innovative part? What can you, or your community, do now that it couldn't before?**

The most groundbreaking part for APL was the decision to place a reinvented piano inside the library and then encourage public engagement. It felt amazing to see the piano in action. It certainly gave perspective to what a library space can be. Families and patrons were happy to hear music and see our space used more creatively as well. Caregivers shared that their children loved the opportunity to make music and engage with an upright piano. For some, it was their first time. Staff observed lots of intergenerational interactions, folks with various skill-levels sharing their piano playing abilities, and families from all walks of life gathering around the piano. It is apparent that libraries have become more than our books and quiet spaces. We are a thriving community hub where literacy, music, the arts, and more come alive! It is my hope that the community will continue to inspire us to reimagine the future of libraries.

*** How do you think other WiLS members could use what you learned and accomplished at their own organization?**

Other WiLS members may benefit from replicating our successful marketing strategy to leverage a community focus of their choice and increase their online reach and engagement. Our marketing efforts to raise awareness of Hmong American Day and Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month included a unified hashtag and storytelling elements. We encouraged all collaborators to use the assigned hashtag and share our promotional videos and flyers with their followers as well. Most social media promotion for the project was shared in April, and during that month, we saw an increase in reach by 56.2%, engagement by 78.7%, and video views by 384%. We received 78 new page likes on Facebook. APL used Loomly: Brand Success Platform to track our social media analytics. Lastly, do not be afraid to explore your community and create dialogue around a project because you never know when you will find a hidden partner or meet someone excited to help and share their ideas.















Links:

<https://fox11online.com/news/local/appleton-celebrates-hmong-american-day-with-pianos> – piano images included

<https://www.cffoxvalley.org/2021/05/13/celebrating-and-remembering-hmong-american-day-in-the-fox-cities/> - radio recording at the bottom

<https://www.facebook.com/15476865245/videos/776969936296045> – an example of storytelling promotion