

RIVER EDGE

PUBLIC

LIBRARY

STRATEGIC

PLAN

2024 – 2027

Strategic Plan

About the planning process

Following the success of the first two strategic plans, but with a delay of several years due to the pandemic, the Library Board of Trustees felt that it was important to continue to think and act strategically. Resources will continue to be limited, so it is important to use what we have wisely. The use of feedback from the public, staff and trustees was cited as an important factor.

Mission Statement

The mission of the River Edge Public Library is to satisfy the educational, cultural, recreational and informational needs of the community through provision of access to print and non-print materials and a variety of programs.

River Edge Public Library: a Brief History

The Library can trace its origins to 1933 when the Literature Department of the Woman's Club of River Edge started a lending library for Borough residents. In 1952 a referendum was held to municipalize the Library and it was overwhelmingly passed. The Mid-Bergen Federation of Free Public Libraries, precursor to the Bergen County Cooperative Library System, was formed in 1959 with River Edge as a charter member.

The current 14,000 square foot facility was built in 1960 with 2 expansions in 1973 and 1994. In 2011-12 the Interior Makeover Project was implemented in response to expressed community needs. The Project included a new floor plan, carpeting, lighting upgrade, furniture, shelving, paint colors and circulation desk. Public feedback was highly positive and usage increased. A new roof and clear story were installed in 2015.

In the following years the Borough was planning a community center that would have been adjacent to the Library, but this was shelved due to cost concerns. However, the Borough did manage to improve drainage, pedestrian accessibility and parking by the Library. The Library now benefits from these improvements.

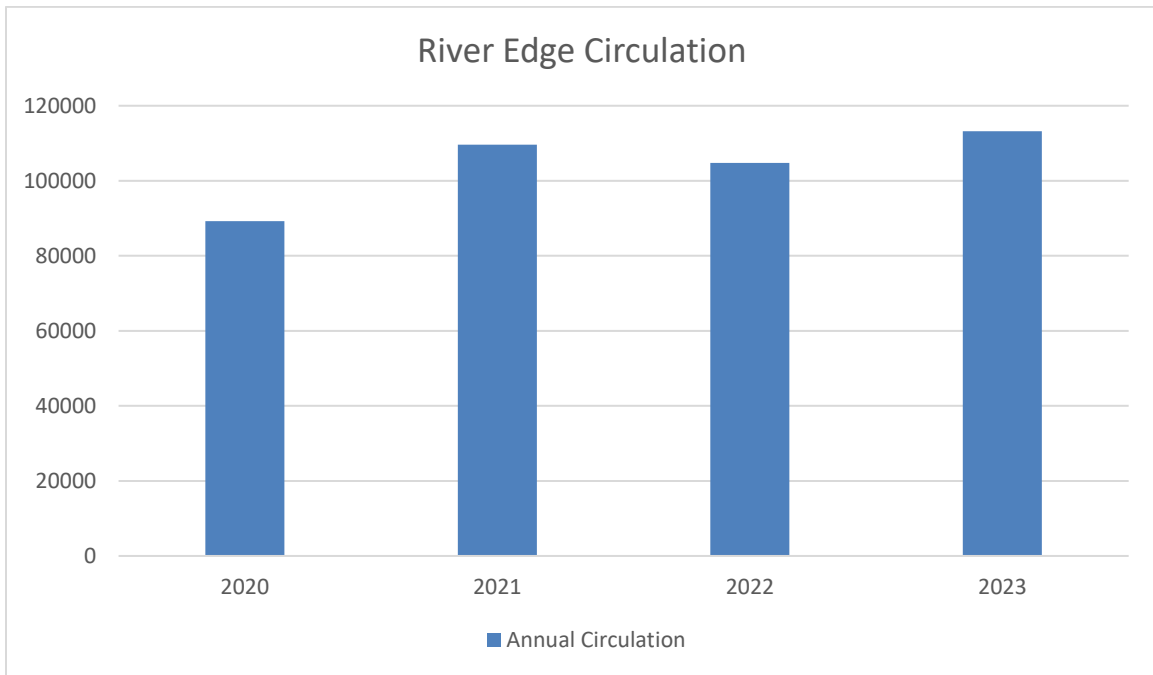
In late 2019 and early 2020 the Board of Trustees was considering a new strategic plan when a worldwide pandemic closed businesses schools, libraries worldwide.

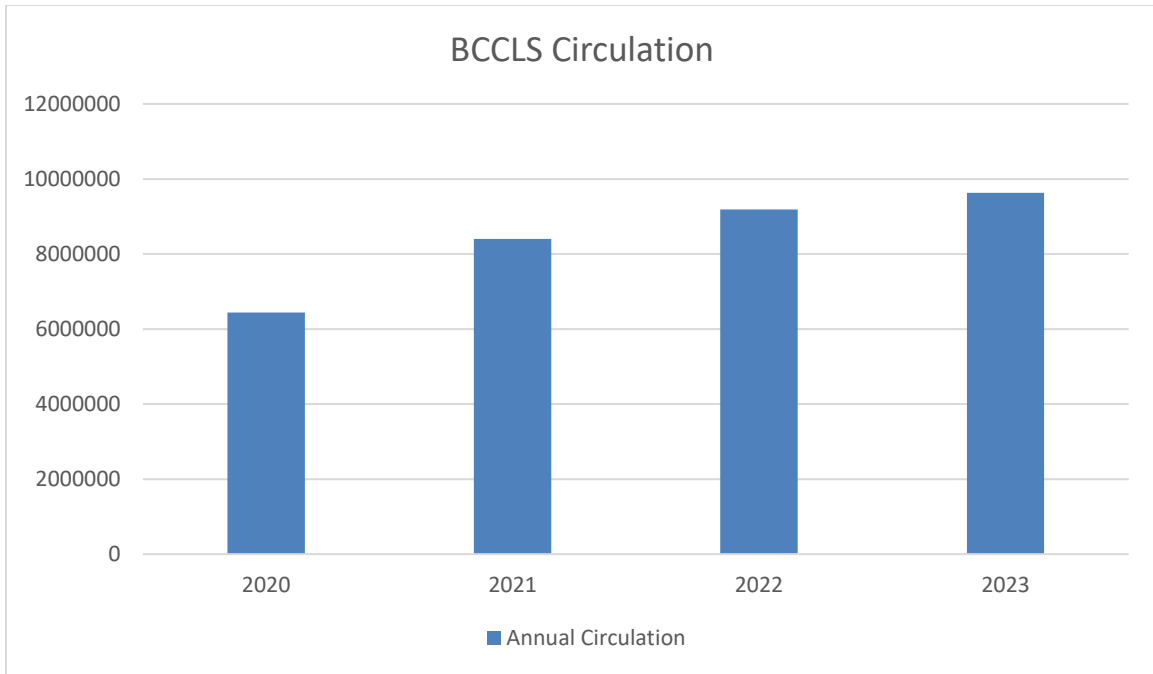
At that time, we were preparing to write a State grant for construction funding. We were given an extension to do this and were ultimately successful. Just over 30 libraries state-wide, out of hundreds of applicants, received funding. With matching funds from the Borough, plus donations from the Friends and bequests we were able to implement A Space For Success. This project included a HVAC overhaul, a multi-purpose room with a collapsing glass wall, an ADA compliant children’s service desk, a technology bar and a natural gas-powered generator.

In early 2024 the generator was finally online and the staff trained on its usage. Thus, the building is in a very good position to serve the community well in the future due to all of the physical improvements and reinforced climate resiliency.

Community Usage

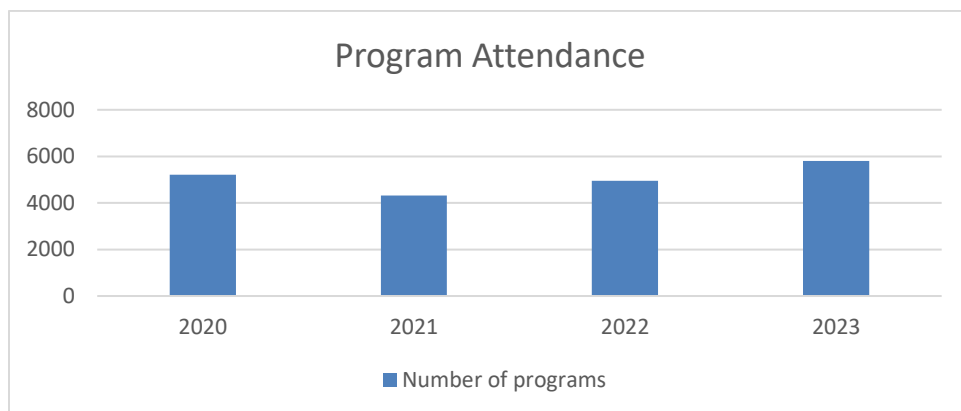
River Edge Public Library is a hive of community activity once again and delivers extraordinary value to the taxpayer. In 2023 usage could be summarized in the following way.





- 8,132 MeeScan checkouts.
- #4 in monthly value per library card rankings (December 2023), currently at \$784 per library card.
- 35,058 items borrowed from other BCCLS libraries and 14,804 items borrowed by patrons of other BCCLS libraries.
- 91,552 library visits as measured by foot traffic counter.
- 58 hours of operation per week, 4 evenings till 9 PM and all day Saturday, compares well with other BCCLS libraries, many with larger budgets (see attached report).

Attendance at Library and community-sponsored events for adults has rebounded after the pandemic with 3 meeting spaces available for use:



While many local libraries struggle to fill positions and often close at short notice due to lack of staff, River Edge Public Library is fully staffed with four full-time employees and 11 part-time employees.

Library Finance

The Library is funded almost exclusively by local property taxes. Additional sources of income include State Aid, fines and fees, gifts and monies raised by the Friends of the Library. During the Great Recession the Library endured enormous budget cuts and overnight went from 8 full-time employees to 4. The funding situation began to improve in 2013 and hours and services were restored in the following years.

It is worth noting that in 2008, before painful cuts began in 2009, the total funds available to the Library was \$826,609. In 2022 that number was \$857,651. During the same period the 1/3 of a mill figure dipped for several years before recovering slowly then surging during the pandemic years and up to the present day. That figure now stands at \$770,651.¹ If this trend continues the Library will be out of compliance with the minimum funding standards set out by the State Library.

What We Achieved in the Last Six years

This section describes the improvements since the first year of our last strategic plan, 2017. Progress in many areas was interrupted by the pandemic, but most of our stated goals were achieved, especially in the area of building renovations.

Building Improvements

- HVAC overhaul
- Natural gas generator that strengthens the climate resiliency of the community
- Additional multi-purpose room with collapsing glass wall
- Technology bar
- ADA compliant children's service desk
- New staff work stations

¹ Source: The State Library of New Jersey.
2024_Minimum_Amount_Needed_To_Qualify_For_1.25_Per_Capita_One_Third_Mill.exe

- Security cameras
- New hot water heater & sump pump
- New, larger book drops

Service Hours

- Wednesday evening hours extended to 9 PM for a weekly total of 58

Programs

- In response to public feedback more programs have been organized for the evenings and weekends. (The pandemic severely curtailed our ability to have successful programs with 2023 being the first ‘normal’ year since 2019). As a result, program attendance is back to pre-pandemic levels.

Collections

- Added AdvantagePlus service from OverDrive to meet the surging demand for digital content. Earmarked \$8,000 to fund the service.
- Added Kanopy for patrons who like streaming video content.
- Improved funding for world language collections to \$10,000 per year. River Edge now has 4th largest Korean language collection and 5th largest Chinese language collection in BCCLS, despite diligent weeding.
- Graphic novel and young adult collections expanded and improved.

Technology Improvements

- Managed Wifi service.
- MeeScan self-checkout.
- EnvisionWare public PC management system.
- Mobile printing, scanning, PC printing.
- Online fine payment.
- 80” smart TV.

Communication

- New web page launched using Weebly platform. Several staff members regularly update.

- LibCal Calendar is linked to the web page and used for every library-sponsored program.
- Continued active efforts to sign patrons up to email list on ConstantContact yielded 2,272 contacts. Improved strategy has increased open rate.
- Facebook group now has 1,400 followers and Instagram has 922. Twitter discontinued.
- Many patrons are already using BCCLS app to search for and borrow items, plus store their account details, partially due to in-person promotions at Circulation.

Friends

- Despite the pandemic we have a group largely consisting of new recruits which has lots of energy and fundraising ideas. The Board liaison to the Friends has helped to facilitate goodwill between the two bodies.
- The recent community use survey yielded a list of potential new volunteers.

Demographics of the Community

The population On April 1st, 2020, was 12,049 (up 6.25% from 11,340 in 2010).

Median household income is \$150,073 (up from \$72,062 in 2010) compared to the State average of \$96,346.

72% of the adult population completed a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 55% in 2010.

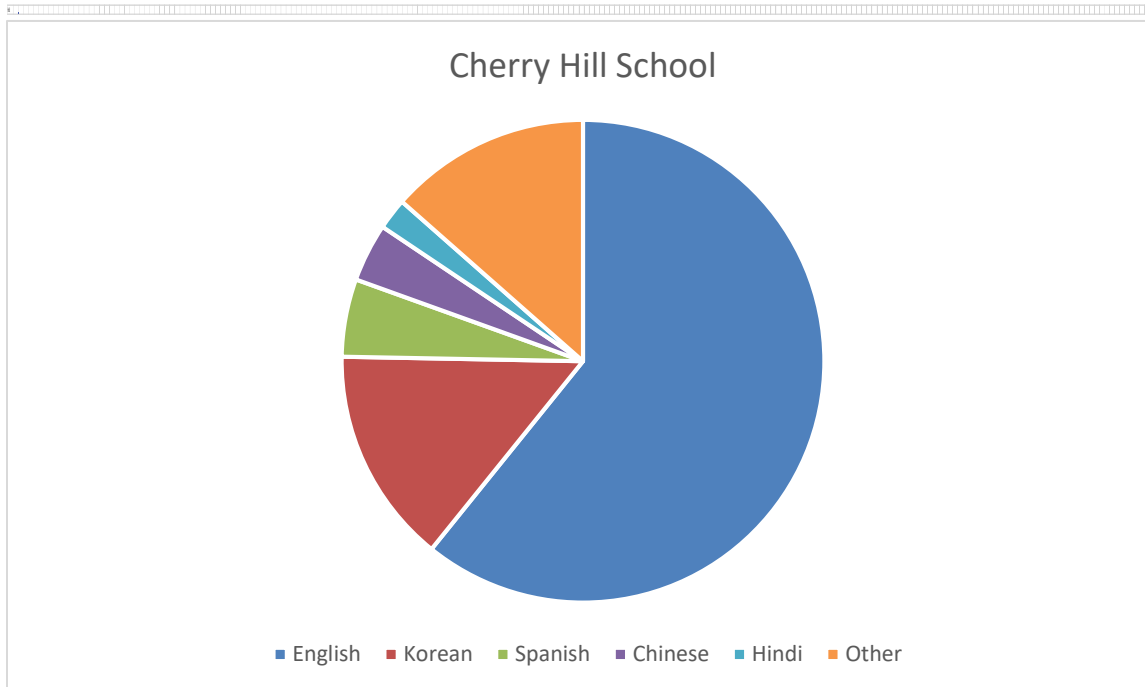
Population Changes by Race and Ethnicity:

	2010	2022
White	73.4%	59.1%
Black	1.5%	5.2%
American Indian	0.1%	0%
Asian	22.2%	30%
Native & Other Pacific Islanders	0.1%	0%

2 or More Races	1.5%	5.6%
Hispanic or Latino	7.7%	6.4%
White, Non-Hispanic	67.6%	55%
Foreign Born		28%

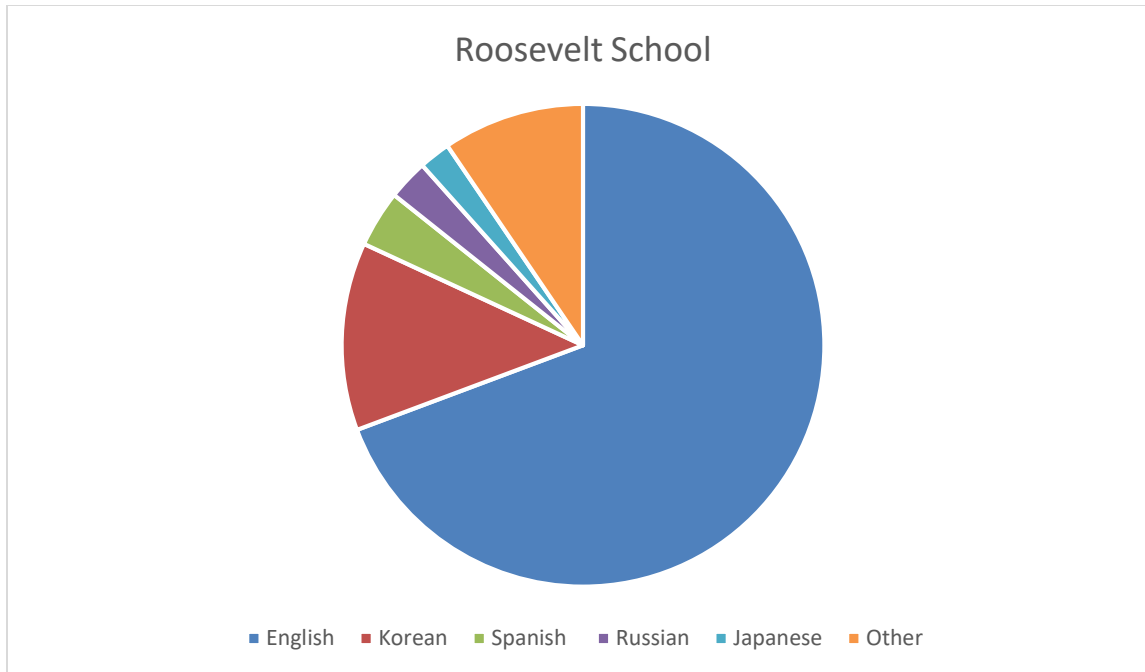
A large minority of the population (35.6%, up by 2% since 2014) speak a language other than English at home.²

Language Diversity (primary language spoken at home)³



² US Census 2020

³ NJ School Performance Report 2021-2022



Capital Needs

Public bathrooms. The current bathrooms were built in 1994. They need to be renovated to bring them to current ADA and other standards. It is hoped that Community Development Block Grant funds can be used to fund the project. We will need to include the adjacent breakroom in the renovation as it is often used to support Friends fundraising activities and programs.

Water Fountain. The current water fountain is also about 30 years old and needs to be replaced. The new fountain would allow patrons to fill up their own drinking vessel.

Landscaping. There are plans to landscape and redesign the exterior of the building. The Library will continue to give its input and minimize interruption to services. For example, we would like to see a shady seated area where patrons can read, socialize or use the WiFi.

Ceiling fans. Two old ceiling fans at the front entrance will be replaced with efficient and attractive models. This will help to improve air quality inside the building for a relatively low cost.

Air Purifiers. Efficient air purifiers will be installed in the staff work area and meeting rooms. This will help to promote air quality in the building and minimize health issues caused by viruses and pollution.

Feedback from Staff, Trustees and Public Via Community Use Survey and SWOT Analyses

In 2023 we conducted a community use survey over several months. Well over 400 library patrons responded. In addition, the Library Director conducted several SWOT analysis sessions with trustees, staff and the Young Adult Volunteer Crew. A number of actionable items were identified where there would be a reasonable expectation of success, depending on the availability of funds. Each of these items would contribute to the overall improvement in service over the next 3 to 4 years and onwards:

Library of Things. We already have hotspots, puzzles and museum passes and feel we can expand on this by using the media shelving which is being weeded. Budget \$1,000 per year and seek quality donations of items to add. (2024, 2025, 2026)

More programs. Our patrons need more programs for all ages and at various times, including evenings and weekends. They would like registration to be easier. With our construction project completed we should have time to present more programs, particularly adult programs. They will be funded by the Friends with the possibility of additional funds from the operating budget. (2024, 2025, 2026)

Saturday hours in the Summer. This would be convenient for families where both parents are working long hours from Monday to Friday. Would depend on the availability of staff. (2024 pilot program in July followed by assessment)

More digital content. Clearly our patrons like what we offer via Libby and Kanopy and would like more, plus shorter wait times for the most popular titles. We think we can meet much of this need by subscribing to Hoopla and also investigating a service for world language books in digital formats. We will advocate for BCCLS to hire a digital content librarian. (Hoopla will be funded by operating budget at about \$4,000 per year, beginning in 2024, depending on level of support).

Expand English as a Second Language service. We feel we can do this by joining Literacy Volunteers of America Pascack Valley. LVAPV offers training and

support for tutors which is badly needed. This will cost \$2,500 per annum and would be ideal for the Friends. We would join in 2024.

New web page design. The current web page is about 5 years old and was a big improvement over the previous one. However, we feel it can be much improved by redesigning it. A high school or college intern could be recruited at no cost or a professional hired for about \$4,000. (2025)

Passport Service. Many area libraries offer this value-added service. Many people would prefer to come to a local library than elsewhere to renew or apply for a passport. (2025, 2026)

Expand notary service. This is one of our most popular value-added services and a second notary public would improve service. Would depend on the availability of another staff member to take the training and work appointments into the schedule. (2024, 2025, 2026)

Value statement infographic. This could be distributed at the circulation desk, included in budget packet. (2024)

New toys for children's area. Some field trips to other areas libraries might yield some new ideas for increasing the appeal of our children's area to younger patrons. (2024)

Car charging stations. As a learning hub in the community it would be appropriate for the Library parking lot to offer car charging stations. We would need to cooperate with the Borough of River Edge to make this possible.

Marketing Plan

In order to improve public awareness of the programs and services we offer a marketing plan is needed. To some extent every public library struggles with this problem: how to maximize awareness of the very valuable services we offer in the community. If we can improve in this area the level of support in the community will also improve, especially with so many new families living here.

Since resources are limited, our strategy should focus on using the tools at our disposal more effectively. When we try something new, like redesigning our web

page, care needs to be taken to be sure it is cost effective. The return on our investment needs to be worth the funds and staff time we expend.

The Library uses various tools to communicate with the public. These include:

- Traditional printed flyers posted and distributed in-house.
- The Library's website located at www.riveredgepubliclibrary.org
- LibCal calendaring software which has a dedicated tab on the website.
- ConstantContact digital and email marketing platform.
- Social media platforms Facebook and Instagram.
- Local newspapers The Town News and The Bergen Record..
- Through BCCLS website and app
- Value statement (last updated in 2017).
- Email blasts from school districts.
- Email link to LibCal posts needs to be clickable.

We can improve our marketing game in the following measurable ways:

- Continue to produce attractive and informative flyers for all of our programs and make them available in a highly visible space near the circulation desk
- Post the same flyers as a movie on a new 55" TV screen to be mounted near the circulation desk.
- Redesign the Library's website drawing inspiration from other library websites that work better. This might be achieved by recruiting a high school intern who is interested in a career in UX/UI design, or, by hiring a professional designer. Goal: increase annual page views (28,311), unique visits (16,567) and average pages per unique visit (1.7) by 10%.
- Continue posting events regularly to LibCal making sure patrons can click on registration page easily, where appropriate. Attend training for any new or upgraded calendaring product offered by BCCLS
- Continue posting events and information to Constant Contact, making sure to schedule for Sunday mornings, where appropriate, for maximum open rate. Increase email list (2,290) by 10%.
- Continue to use social media platforms Facebook and Instagram to engage the public on issues facing libraries, library news and programs. On Facebook add new followers as requests are received. Respond to all

comments. Increase membership (1,465), annual views (50,635), annual posts (169), comments (281) by 10%. On Instagram increase followers (942) by 10%.

- Send a weekly press release on Fridays to The Town News. Reach out to Bergen Record to cover special events.
- Redesign our value statement as an infographic that is more easily digested by the public. It can be distributed through various channels and in person at the circulation desk. We should consider having it professionally printed, perhaps as attractive bookmarks. It could be unveiled during National Library Week and handed out at budget meetings.

Cost of achieving goals of marketing plan:

- Printed flyers are covered by the supplies budget line item and staff time which already exists. Add \$500 for a new value statement book mark.
- New 55" TV will cost about \$400, plus \$200 to mount.
- Web page redesign \$0 to \$4,000 to \$5,000, plus staff time.
- Calendaring software and LibCal are both included in our BCCLS bill, as is support and training.
- Social media platforms are free as of the present time.
- Traditional press releases are free.

Conclusion

The River Edge Public Library is a valued institution in the community and has performed well despite numerous challenges over the years. While many challenges remain, it is felt that the Library can rise to them. It is helpful to have a carefully considered plan where priorities have been identified.

This new strategic plan is based on feedback from the public, staff and trustees. It draws on observations and statistics on past performance. It is realistic in its objectives in relation to past and anticipated future support. Should circumstances change suddenly, favorably or unfavorably, adjustments can be made.