KASU Station Activity Summary for 2023. Submitted to CPB on 2/15/24.

1. Describe your overall goals and approach to address identified community issues, needs, and interests through your station’s vital local services, such as multiplatform long and short-form content, digital and in-person engagement, education services, community information, partnership support, and other activities, and audiences you reached or new audiences you engaged.

KASU is the only public radio station serving a mostly rural area. The station seeks to provide its listeners with a diverse selection of public radio programming.

KASU provides music programs in a variety of styles and genres that are not being offered by other radio stations in our region. From our classical and jazz programs in the evening and overnight, to blues, bluegrass, celtic, and Americana programs on the weekends, to our noontime “Arkansas Roots” program which airs six days a week, KASU serves an audience with diverse musical tastes and interests.

In addition to classic and obscure recordings, “Arkansas Roots” features new music from Arkansas musicians and promotes performances at local venues. The program host, Marty Scarbrough, regularly interviews local artists and musicians, as well as community members who are involved in planning and organizing events in the region. A periodic segment of the program called “New Music Monday” features new music being produced by artists with roots in the state. In addition to on-air promotion, Marty posts daily show promotion on local media, tagging musicians and acts featured on the show whenever possible. These tags exponentially increase the reach of the show promotion and foster more reaction and interaction with listeners and fans of particular acts who may not have heard of the program.

This year, KASU began planning for a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the “Arkansas Roots” program. The celebration itself will be included in next year’s Station Activity Summary, but planning for the event began in FY 2023.

A large part of KASU’s in-person engagement has been exemplified by our monthly Bluegrass Monday concert series. These concerts, which have been going on for over 20 years, are held in the Collins Theater in nearby Paragould, Arkansas. These concerts continue to be our most popular station event. KASU’s Bluegrass Monday is on the national radar in bluegrass fan circles, and the concert attracts and books world-class, award-winning acts year after year. The success of these concerts has led the town to organize an annual Big Grass Bluegrass Festival, which has been held for the past three years. KASU helps plan and promote this festival, and our Bluegrass Monday host also emcees the city’s festival.
KASU also has a partnership with A-State Heritage Sites, an Arkansas State University project to restore and preserve several historic Arkansas sites and to promote heritage tourism. One of those sites is the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home in Dyess, Arkansas. KASU regularly interviews the directors of both Heritage Sites and the Johnny Cash site about special events, and we also work together to present live music events in our region. This year, we planned and jointly presented a short concert series for Summer 2023 at a local brewery and restaurant. The first of these concerts was held in June, the last month of FY2023, and it was quite successful.

The Arkansas Roots Music Festival developed from a partnership with our university’s Department of English, Philosophy, and World Languages. It was designed to be the capstone event of the Delta Symposium, an annual academic presentation of research on the heritage and culture of our Mississippi Delta region. This year, we added A-State Heritage Sites to the partnership and held the festival on April 1st, at the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home. Five musical acts played through a Saturday afternoon, with between 200 and 300 people attending.

KASU also teamed up with the other NPR stations in Arkansas to plan a music festival based on NPR’s Tiny Desk Contest. Little Rock Public Radio (KUAR) did the primary planning and coordination of this event, but KASU was involved in selection of the acts and promotion of the event. Arkansas entrants to the national contest were judged by a committee made up of representatives from KASU, KUAR, and KUAF-Fayetteville, and the top three acts were invited to perform at the first Arkansas Tiny Desk Festival. The NPR Tiny Desk producers gave their approval in the planning stages. The festival itself will be on next year’s report, but the planning occurred in FY2023.

KASU has continued to provide local and regional news from our own news team, and to incorporate stories shared through cooperation with other public radio stations in the state. KASU’s news team has been diligent, both on-air and online, in providing information on news events, weather events, election issues and candidates, and community concerns.

In addition to music and news, KASU also offers regular features and interviews promoting the activities of Jonesboro’s Foundation of the Arts and other arts organizations in the area, keeping listeners informed about art exhibits, performances, plays, film festivals, and concerts throughout the region. KASU’s news and interviews, along with NPR programs such as “1A,” “Fresh Air,” and “Here and Now,” provide listeners with multiple viewpoints on a wide variety of topics.

The KASU program “A-State Connections” is a locally produced program that focuses on research, programs, and activities at Arkansas State University that have an impact beyond our campus. This program has led to partnerships with other campus departments and organizations, and it has spawned a podcast that focuses on student research. This program is aimed at informing audiences of the impact of our higher learning institution on the broader community, and at engaging with more of our diverse student population.

Five nights a week, KASU presents our locally produced “Jazz Tonight,” which features recordings from the station’s extensive jazz library. KASU also continued to offer locally produced, weekly music programs, airing on Saturdays and Sundays and hosted by community volunteers. These programs present our audience with diverse music and genres. All of these programs align with KASU’s mission to provide educational and entertaining programming that is truly unique to our audience.
2. Describe key initiatives and the variety of partners with whom you collaborated, including other public media outlets, community nonprofits, government agencies, educational institutions, the business community, teachers and parents, etc. This will illustrate the many ways you’re connected across the community and engaged with other important organizations in the area.

KASU continues to participate in a statewide cooperative to share news and exchange stories with other public media stations in Little Rock and Fayetteville. This service adds to the variety of stories and voices heard on KASU and helps supplement the local news provided by our reporters. This year, managers of the three Arkansas NPR stations began meeting to discuss ways to enhance our news cooperative into a more formal statewide news collaborative. The three news directors began meeting and producing a half-hour weekly roundtable program to run on all three stations, discussing news of statewide interest. These efforts are still in their early stages, but they are going well, and we are excited to work more closely with our sister stations in the state.

In addition to the radio news collaboration, KASU continued partnerships with several arts organizations in the region to present or promote various concerts and performances. KASU has partnered with the Delta Symphony Orchestra in a trade agreement in which KASU promotes the orchestra’s concerts in exchange for recognition in concert programs and on the organization’s website. We have a similar arrangement with the Fowler Center, Arkansas State University’s performing arts center. A partnership with the Foundation of Arts of Northeast Arkansas includes interviews and promotion of their events and performances, for which KASU gets placement in their programs and in their season brochure.

KASU also maintains a long-time partnership with the Collins Theater in the nearby town of Paragould, where the station sponsors its very popular Bluegrass Monday concert series each month. The Paragould Advertising and Promotion Commission underwrites the series, providing a grant to assist with costs. KASU also acknowledges the support of several local businesses who underwrite the concert series.

KASU maintains a long tradition of offering, sponsoring, and promoting live music performances throughout the region. The station is proud to sponsor and promote a variety of concerts and events at the Fowler Center on our campus, as well as an annual performance by the Batesville Symphony in Batesville, Arkansas; the Big Grass Bluegrass Festival in Paragould, Arkansas; and the annual Beatles at the Ridge Festival in Walnut Ridge, Arkansas.

KASU partners with A-State’s Department of English & Philosophy; A-State Heritage Sites; and the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home on the Arkansas Roots Music Festival.

KASU maintains memberships in four area Chambers of Commerce - Jonesboro, Paragould, Newport, and Batesville.

3. What impact did your key initiatives and partnerships have in your community? Describe any known measurable impact, such as increased awareness, learning or understanding about particular issues. Describe indicators of success, such as connecting people to needed resources or strengthening conversational ties across diverse neighborhoods. Did a partner see an increase in requests for related resources? Please include direct feedback from a partner(s) or from a person(s) served.

KASU’s partnership with A-State Heritage Sites and the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home brings together musicians and music lovers for live performances that help to continue Johnny Cash’s legacy of promoting lesser-known musicians, allowing more people to hear their music. For our
June 2023 event in the Summer Concert Series at a local brewery and restaurant, we featured a popular local band called “TRIPPP.” The concert was well attended, with several patrons telling us how much they enjoyed it. One attendee, Karen Rogers, commented on Facebook, “What a show those guys put on last night!”

Director of the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home, Penny Toombs, says, “KASU helps us make more people aware of our programs and events, improving our outreach and increasing our number of visitors.”

KASU’s “Arkansas Roots” does more than just play local and regional music. Throughout the year, the program offers arts features that inform the listeners about concerts, recitals, plays, and exhibits that are being presented in the community. There are well over 100 of these features produced over the course of a year. KASU donor Susie Cover commented, “Always compelling interviews! Learn something new every time we listen.”

The Collins Theater in Paragould, Arkansas continues to host KASU’s Bluegrass Monday concert. KASU’s longest running concert series, Bluegrass Monday brings nationally known, award-winning bluegrass bands to the Collins each month to perform. The Chair of the Paragould Advertising and Promotion Commission, Neal Adams, says, “This event brings people from all walks of life and a broad area into our historic, 99-year-old Collins Theatre. The economic impact is that many patrons of the event come into our downtown a couple of hours before the show to dine and shop in our stores and restaurants. Bluegrass Monday has brought an awareness of bluegrass music to our community and brings outside people into our city for fellowship and to learn about each other’s communities.”

4. Please describe any efforts (e.g. programming, production, engagement activities) you have made to investigate and/or meet the needs of minority and other diverse audiences (including, but not limited to, new immigrants, people for whom English is a second language and illiterate adults) during Fiscal Year 2023, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2024. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

KASU seeks to grow our audience and reach out to underserved populations in our community. We continue to offer NPR programs that often address issues faced by diverse populations, such as “1A,” “It’s Been a Minute,” “Throughline,” and “Code Switch/Lifekit.” Our Office of Diversity at Arkansas State University helps with underwriting for “Latino USA” from American Public Media. We also air “Fiesta,” a classical music program showcasing Latin American and Iberian music.

KASU also offers weekend programs of music and information produced by local staff and volunteer personnel of ethnicity. Programs such as “Arkansas Roots,” “Rhythm and Grooves,” and “Tradition,” feature roots music from the soul, rhythm & blues, and gospel traditions, which appeal to a diverse audience and often include obscure and vintage recordings and fascinating information on Arkansas’ diverse history and culture.

Our KASU news team seeks out local stories and strives to provide information about local and regional events that involve or engage diverse populations. KASU News Director Brandon Tabor and Program Director Marty Scarbrough provided coverage, promotion, and feature interviews on such events as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Conference held at Arkansas State University; the Jonesboro Juneteenth Celebration; and the A-State Museum’s exhibit on Jonesboro’s Black
Business District. KASU News also reported on disputes over library books and PRIDE month displays in Jonesboro and other area libraries.

Student Cidney Davis worked with KASU’s news department to initiate a vox pop-style segment called “ASK-U” – an anagram of KASU. The segment surveyed a variety of people, gathering opinions on diverse topics in the community. Cidney also interviewed several international students at the university about their backgrounds and their American experience. These segments were aired on KASU’s “A-State Connections” program.

In FY 2024, KASU’s news department will continue to cover diversity conferences, PRIDE events, Hispanic Heritage Month, and other events and news items that affect or impact diverse audiences.

5. Please assess the impact that your CPB funding had on your ability to serve your community. What were you able to do with your grant that you wouldn't be able to do if you didn't receive it?

KASU is the only public radio station serving a mostly rural, tri-state region. We would not be able to provide the local and regional news, the unique, locally produced music programs, the live music performances, and other programs and services without the support we get from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Small stations like KASU are the ones most greatly impacted by CPB funding, as this funding makes up a significant percentage of our budget.

We continue to fund one staff position from the Community Service Grant, that of Corporate Relations Director. This staff member seeks out underwriting partners to enhance local support for KASU’s mission and programs, and they maintain the customer relationship with existing contributors. They also assist with fundraising drives and events, and they attend business related functions in the community. The Community Service Grant makes her job – and our financial growth -- possible.

KASU’s staff and volunteers produce over 19-hundred hours of local programming. We could not fill an entire schedule of quality programming seven days a week, 24 hours a day, without financial support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The Community Service Grant (CSG) allows KASU to provide outstanding nationally syndicated programs, as well as a wealth of unique local programming. Without the CSG, the quality of all our programming would suffer, and it would be very difficult to maintain our loyal listeners and to attract new audiences to this rich and vital public media service.