

Annual Report

2025

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Northern Community Radio

Dear Friends,

It's wild how fast a year can fly by. As I sit down to reflect on the past twelve months at KAXE, what keeps coming up is just how lucky we are to be part of this community and how much we've grown together.

This year brought some incredible milestones. Our newsroom expanded, and with it, our ability to tell more local stories that matter. The Up North Report found its stride and secured ten Severeid Awards, six Page One Awards, and a regional Edward R. Murrow Award. That's proof that what we're building here in Northern Minnesota is being recognized far beyond it.

We deepened our collaboration with listeners, partners, and institutions, including a partnership with the University of Minnesota's journalism school. Through the Report for Minnesota project, we're mentoring the next generation of journalists who tell stories right here at home and in doing so, we're reinforcing the value of trusted, local reporting in rural communities.

Our music programming continues to be powered by an unstoppable group of volunteers, now contributing over *70 hours* of original programming each week. That's not a typo. Seventy hours. Each week. From longtime hosts to new voices, this rich mix of sound and personality is a reminder that what you hear on KAXE comes directly from the heart of this region.

We also introduced new programs like Headwaters and After Dark, expanded our coverage of the arts and local events, and brought the community together for another unforgettable 5th Annual Grand Rapids Riverfest. We saw strong growth in our website traffic, newsletter subscribers, and business and member support. A reflection that the work we're doing resonates.

Of course, it wasn't all smooth sailing. Like most in public media, we were impacted by state and federal funding cuts. Through it all, we stayed focused on what matters most: serving our community with honesty, creativity, and heart.

Thank you for tuning in, sharing your stories, supporting our work, and reminding us why local media matters. Whether you're a first-time listener or a sustaining member who's been with us for years, you are the reason this station exists.

We can't wait to see where we go together next.

With deep gratitude,
Sarah Bignall
CEO and General Manager
Northern Community Radio



Strengthened Local News & Programming You Count On

KAXE/KBXE continued to expand its local journalism efforts through new partnerships, collaborative reporting projects, and locally focused news features. We partnered with the University of Minnesota on Report for Minnesota, hosted a summer intern, and mentored student reporters at the State Capitol during the legislative session. We also strengthened content partnerships with MinnPost, Minnesota Reformer, and the Timberjay, helping bring more in-depth regional reporting to our audiences.

Our journalism efforts were recognized with 10 Severeid Awards, a Regional Edward R. Murrow Award, and six Page One Awards from the Minnesota Society of Professional Journalists. Audience engagement with our local news coverage also continued to grow significantly throughout the year.

Our “appointment” programming that you count on - The KAXE Morning Show, Phenology, and Green Cheese continue draw new fans to these well-established favorites. Our Season Watch podcast and student Phenology programs continue to thrive, with over 700 student Phenology reports aired this year!



Audience & Membership Growth

Our audience grew significantly this year — both online and on-air — fueled by local storytelling, community-driven music programming, strong digital engagement, and an increased presence across Northern Minnesota.



Website and Digital Growth

- 549,348 unique visitors to KAXE.org
- Over 1.16 million pageviews between October 2024 and September 2025.
- 71.8% of visitors accessed KAXE.org via mobile devices

On-Air and Streaming Engagement

- KAXE was streamed over 471,087 hours during the past year
- Averaged over 2,634 unique streams per day

Membership Support

- Members and Donors showed up in force, with \$234,113 gifts in June, July, August

The Federal Public Media funding rescissions had a significant impact on KAXE, resulting in the loss of more than \$200,000 in anticipated funding — approximately 12% of the station's overall budget — along with an additional \$60,000 reduction in state Legacy funding. Our priority was preserving staff positions, so we reduced spending on outside contractors while our community responded with incredible support, far exceeding our \$100,000 local fundraising goal.



Community | Culture | Capacity

KAXE/KBXE continued creating opportunities for connection through local programming, live events, and community engagement.

We launched new locally produced programs including *Ham Radio*, hosted by Heidi Holtan and James Beard Award-winning chef and author, Amy Thielen, along with *Headwaters*, a new staff-hosted music program. We also expanded volunteer-hosted programming with *After Dark*. In total, volunteers now produce 70 hours of programming each week, bringing distinctive local voices and musical choices to the airwaves and helping create a sound that is uniquely Northern Minnesota.



We also hosted the 5th Annual Grand Rapids Riverfest in September, welcoming more than 1,800 attendees with performances by Courtney Barnett, Margo Price, Jeremie Albino, and Alan Sparhawk. Additional community events included Get Downtown with KBXE in Bemidji featuring Chastity Brown and Dilly Dally Alley, and Kickin' It with KAXE at Rapids Brewing Co. with Molly Maher, Teague Alexy, and Woodblind. We also continued building audience engagement through interactive features like our popular Question of the Week.

Despite ongoing budget challenges, KAXE/KBXE continued investing in staff development, technology, and organizational improvement. Staff participated primarily in online professional development opportunities throughout the year, including the next phase of Poynter's Digital Transformation program, which helped lead to the launch of the Season Watch podcast. We also participated in the Institute for Nonprofit News' Major Donor training as part of our efforts to strengthen long-term financial sustainability.

In addition, we continued upgrading broadcast equipment and invested in improved digital security systems to better protect station operations and infrastructure.



Community Awards and Recognition

Phil Collins Volunteer of the Year Award



DJ Ironsides

The Phil Collins Award honors a volunteer who goes “above and beyond” in the spirit of the late Phil Collins.

In 2025 DJ Ironsides was recognized for his thoughtful and creative On the River shows, his enthusiastic volunteering at Riverfest, and his dedication to helping other volunteers by compiling monthly singles lists to share music ideas across the team.

Harry Hutchins Conservation Award



Dave Murphy

This award celebrates those fostering the next generation of nature lovers.

Dave Murphy was instrumental in bringing Oak Grove Elementary School into the phenology program in 2023 — helping their Phenology Club grow to over 40 students this year!

Debbie Lentz Silent Star Award



Aili Kultala

The Silent Star Award recognizes behind-the-scenes heroes who contribute their time and talents off the air.

Aili Kultala’s leadership in ensuring Riverfest lived up to its sustainability promise — including manually sifting compost to reduce contamination — was extraordinary.

Her commitment to a greener future has made a real, lasting impact.

Kathy Dodge Community Arts Award



Dawn Stattine

Named for longtime KAXE volunteer and arts advocate Kathy Dodge, this award honors those who build vibrant arts communities.

Dawn Stattine of Brainerd has been a tireless supporter of the arts through her work with Grassroots Concerts, library author events, and her unflagging support for all things community-centered.

Jesse Davis Community Connector Award



Annie Humphrey

Created to honor Jesse Davis’s remarkable ability to bring people together, this award celebrates individuals who embody connection and community spirit.

2025 recipient Annie Humphrey, has built deep ties through projects like Fire in the Village and many other community-driven initiatives across the region.



FY25 Financial Snapshot

Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2025

At KAXE, we remain focused on responsible stewardship of resources, community engagement, and transparency.

Thanks to strong support and careful management, we ended the fiscal year in a solid financial position.

Audited FY25 Revenue

Grants \$ 1,125,449
Individual Contributions \$ 516,980
Underwriting \$ 176,040
Special Events \$ 260,418
Endowment Income \$ 14,022
AMPERS Revenue \$ 10,780
Interest Income \$ 10,924
Other Income \$ 29,641
Total Revenue & Support \$ 2,144,254

Audited FY25 Expenses

Program Services
Programming & Production \$ 1,209,973
Engineering & Broadcasting \$ 98,400
Support Services
Management & General \$ 183,575
Membership & Fundraising* \$ 644,937
Underwriting & Grant Solicitation \$ 3,259
Total Expenses \$ 2,140,144

*Includes Riverfest expenses

Bottom Line

Net Income: \$4,110
Net Assets at Year-End
(September 30, 2024): \$2,863,313
Cash and Equivalents: \$581,491

Note:

A significant portion of the “Membership and Fundraising” expenses reflects costs associated with hosting Riverfest, our one-day community music festival. These event costs are critical for community connection and not traditional fundraising expenses.

Staff FY2025



FY25 Northern Community Radio Staff

Senior Leadership

- Sarah Bignall, CEO/General Manager
- Kari Hedlund, Music Director
- Penny Holcomb, Director of Business Services
- Heidi Holtan, Director of Content & Public Affairs
- Chelsey Perkins, News Director
- Chris Walker, Development Director

Engineering

- Steve Neu, IT Broadcast Engineer

Fundraising, Grant & Business Services

- Heather Johnson, Development Associate – Member Services
- Jennifer Kellen, Development Associate
- Peggy Stevens, Development Associate/Legacy Coordinator

Programming

- Jennifer Barr, Producer/Host
- Andrew Dziengel, Producer/Host
- Dan Gannon, Volunteer Coordinator
- Malachy Koons, Music Programming Producer
- John Latimer, Staff Phenologist
- Charlie Mitchell, Phenology Producer

News Desk

- Megan Buffington, Reporter
- Larissa Donovan, Reporter

FY25 Board of Directors

- **President:** Jenn Gorman, Bovey
- **Vice President:** Kathleen Hermerding, Brainerd
- **Secretary:** Adrienne Reiners, Deer River
- **Treasurer:** David Murphy, Deer River
- **Board Member:** Bianca Karjalainen, Grand Rapids
- **Board Member:** Mike Spry, Nevis
- **Board Member:** Charlie Black, Grand Rapids
- **Board Member:** McKeon Roberts, Grand Rapids
- **Board Member:** Megan Maly, Meadowlands



DOCUMENT NOTES

Represents the Fiscal Year

Sarah Bignall, Author

Suggested edits to Sarah

Quick publish for use at Kick It 5/28

PDF version to be added to KAXE home page

Do not print this page