



## **KASU Station Activity Summary for 2021. Submitted to CPB on 2/15/22.**

*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 our largely rural, tri-state area. The station seeks to provide its listeners with a diverse selection of public radio programming, reflected in the station's slogan - "Music, News, Arts, and Views."

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 promotion of live performances remained limited due to the ongoing pandemic, but program host Marty Scarbrough was still able to promote some online performances and also new music being recorded and produced while musicians were unable to perform live.

For nearly 20 years, a large part of KASU's in-person engagement has been exemplified by our monthly Bluegrass Monday concert series. These concerts held in the Collins Theater in nearby Paragould, Arkansas, had to be shut down for most of the 2021 fiscal year because of the pandemic. Working with the theater's board and the state Department of Health, we were able to re-start these concerts, under certain COVID restrictions, in May of 2021. The restrictions, and continued concerns about the virus, kept audience numbers down, but those who were able to attend enjoyed the return of live music.

The Arkansas Roots Music Festival is the capstone event of the Delta Symposium, an annual academic presentation of research on the heritage and culture of our Mississippi Delta region. The symposium was converted to a virtual event for 2021, and the Arkansas Roots Music Festival was held over a chilly Memorial Day weekend. A small crowd averaging about 150 enjoyed the outdoor event held at a local lake, featuring several musical acts from around the state. There was plenty of room for social distancing, plenty of distance between performers and the audience, and masks were worn by participants who were not performing.

Our regular KASU Music Nights at the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival in nearby Dyess, Arkansas, had to be shut down, as the festival was cancelled due to the pandemic. We were heavily involved in the planning for the event, and in discussions regarding changes in the festival for the future.

The Downtown Entertainment Series in nearby Newport, Arkansas, received approval from the Arkansas Department of Health to go on, as events are held outdoors in a local park with plenty of room for social distancing. The series was re-branded as Monster Nights, and KASU's monthly concerts through the summer were dubbed Monster Groovez. The stage was well distanced from the audience, sanitizer was provided throughout the park, and masks were strongly recommended for people moving about or interacting within the park. This worked well, and audiences ranging between 100 and 200 enjoyed these live monthly concerts.

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, on election issues and candidates, on developments in city and county government, and on the ongoing pandemic. The news staff, led by KASU News Director Johnathan Reaves, has provided stories dealing with agricultural and economic issues, changes in local government and in the local economy, and challenges in education as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

KASU has continued to air the weekly COVID-19 news conferences from Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson. In addition, News Director Johnathan Reaves has had regular conversations with Dr. Shane Speights, Dean of the NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine, located on our campus. In these interviews, Dr. Speights presented the latest information he has about the virus, offering KASU listeners facts, providing new information as more became known, and debunking myths about the disease. These interviews are broadcast and also presented on the station's website and social media. A Coronavirus tab was set up on the station's website, to provide easy access to all of KASU's reporting and to links for coronavirus information. Many KASU members expressed their appreciation for these broadcasts and services while making their donations to the station.

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 and the "Create @ State" podcast are 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 selections in a number of genres. All of these programs align with KASU's mission to provide educational and entertaining programming that is truly unique to our audience.

With the help of grants from the Kays Foundation at Arkansas State University and the Arkansas Arts Council, KASU launched the new program, "In Performance at A-State," in October, 2020. The program presents selected recordings from a variety of concert performances given by the Music Department at Arkansas State University, with information about the groups or musicians featured and the works they are performing. The program is hosted by A-State Music Professor, Dr. Ed Owen. By showcasing the work of our university's Music Department, we hope to engage more music students and their families, as well as music students from area public schools.

*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 has partnered with the NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine, located on the Arkansas State University campus, to present a weekly segment called *Delta Health*. This short program features the voice of a medical professional from the college discussing a topic of particular concern to people living in our Mississippi Delta region. The program dealt with a variety of health issues prior to the pandemic, but it has focused primarily on COVID-19 since the outbreak of the virus.

As previously mentioned, KASU continued to participate in a statewide cooperative to share news and exchange stories with other public media stations in Little Rock, Fayetteville, and Texarkana. This service adds to the variety of stories and voices heard on KASU and helps supplement the local news provided by our reporters.

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. The station also has a banner displayed in the Foundation's Arts Center.

As outlined previously, KASU maintains a long tradition of offering live music performances throughout the region. Our Monster Groovez concerts are the result of a partnership with a downtown revitalization effort in nearby Newport, Arkansas. DRIVE, the Downtown Revitalization and Improvement Volunteer Effort, sponsors a series of events in the spring and summer at a park in downtown Newport. KASU, with funding from a local industry, provided a live, monthly concert as part of the city's Monster Nights Downtown Entertainment Series. These blues and jazz concerts bring outstanding performers from around the state and region to Newport each month, for a memorable evening of outdoor music and fun. These concerts were enjoyed in the summer and early fall of 2020, and again in the spring and summer of 2021, with approval of the Arkansas Department of Health.

KASU also continued its 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 station acknowledges the support of several local businesses who underwrite the concert series. While these concerts were shut down by the pandemic, we were able to resume the

series, under COVID restrictions, in May 2021. Our audience numbers were seriously impacted by COVID restrictions, but the concerts remain a popular feature at the theater.

The pandemic has prevented the continuation of KASU's annual "Jazz for the Holidays" concert in the nearby town of Pocahontas, Arkansas. Renowned jazz trumpeter Gary Gazaway, a Pocahontas native, had been collaborating with an outstanding group of musicians from around the region to present a concert of holiday classics. We are hoping to engage with local businesses to resume this yearly tradition when the pandemic abates.

KASU once again partnered with A-State's Department of English, Philosophy, and World Languages on the capstone event in the Delta Symposium at Arkansas State University. The Arkansas Roots Music Festival, typically held on the final day of the Symposium, had to be postponed after the symposium was converted to a virtual event. The music festival was held on Memorial Day weekend, at an outdoor stage in a local park, under special COVID restrictions.

KASU News Director Johnathan Reaves served as President of the Board of Directors of the Public Media Journalists Association (PMJA). In that role, he was involved in the organization's fundraising for a foundation to provide funding for training and internships for budding journalists and for journalists who are new to the realm of public media. Johnathan was also instrumental in the planning of PMJA's annual convention, which was held virtually.

KASU maintains memberships in four area Chambers of Commerce - Jonesboro, Paragould, Newport, and Batesville. KASU's Director of Underwriting and Corporate Relations, Doreen Selden, typically helps with planning for the Jonesboro Chamber's Business Expo, and also attends similar events in the other towns. All of these events were cancelled due to the pandemic. Doreen did attend virtual Business After Hours events and virtual Chamber meetings.

KASU has also partnered with Arkansas Heritage Sites at Arkansas State University to present KASU Music Nights as part of the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival, held in Cash's hometown of Dyess, Arkansas. The festival was cancelled due to the pandemic, but KASU has remained involved in planning for changes to the festival in the future.

*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 assisted in planning the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival, which ended up being cancelled by the pandemic. However, station personnel were involved in the planning for a scaled down event which occurred in the fall of 2021. Adam Long, Director of A-State Heritage Sites, which organizes the festival, said, "We are grateful for our ongoing partnership with KASU. KASU helps us share Johnny Cash's musical legacy in Northeast Arkansas. Guests walk away telling us that they understand better the way that place and context influence art."

KASU collaborates with A-State's Department of English, Philosophy, and World Languages in the annual Delta Symposium at Arkansas State University. The event showcases research into the music, culture, and heritage of the Mississippi Delta region and its impact on our nation and our world. KASU's Arkansas Roots Music Festival typically caps off the symposium. This year, the symposium had to be held virtually, and the music festival was postponed to a later date, under

COVID restrictions approved by the Arkansas Department of Health. Dr. Greg Hansen, a professor of folklore and English, said, “This music festival connects the university to the community.... Producing, coordinating, and publicizing the event would not be possible without the generous support from KASU.”

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 over 100 of these features produced over the course of a year.

KASU’s local music programs continue to attract attention. Listener Paul Schniedermeier in Jackson, Missouri, referred to “Arkansas Roots” in an email to the station, saying, “I happened to be in Poplar Bluff (Missouri) and heard this program. Since, I have shared it with friends and family....” He went on to say how much he enjoyed it, despite not being a resident of Arkansas. In addition, a couple passing through our broadcast area on a cross-country trip called the station to say how much they enjoyed “Arkansas Roots.” They made a donation in appreciation of the program. Donors had similar compliments for *Six Degrees of the Delta*, *Rhythm & Grooves*, and *Mr. Rogers’ Rock Collection*, all produced in the KASU studios. Listener/Member Cheryl Pasmore said, “Local music programs are my favorites!”

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. When the concert series resumed under COVID restrictions, KASU began selling tickets to the event, with all proceeds going directly to the band. Underwriting support helps us pay for rental and technical assistance. KASU Program Director Marty Scarbrough emcees the event each month, and works diligently to book the bands well in advance. Theater Board Member Gina Jarrett says, “KASU has helped put Paragould and the Collins Theater on the map for bluegrass fans.”

*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 2021, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2022. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.*

KASU is continually looking for ways to grow our audience and reach out to underserved populations in our community. This year, we began discussing an opportunity to use some savings in programming costs to add some programs we felt would broaden the diversity of our program offerings. The actual programming change did not occur in this fiscal year, but planning began for the addition of “Throughline,” and “Code Switch/Lifekit” to our program schedule, among other public affairs programs. We also sought local funding to add “Latino USA” to our schedule, and we hope to add that program soon. We also seek out local stories and provide information about local and regional events that involve or engage diverse populations.

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.

Stories aired on KASU's local and regional newscasts throughout the year covered such issues as:

- The passage of the capital city's first hate crimes law, and the push for statewide hate crime legislation.
- The firings of a School Resource Officer and a Sheriff over racist posts on social media.
- The appropriation of state COVID-19 funds to address needs specific to minority communities.
- The debate over Confederate statue removal on state Capitol grounds.
- A Little Rock museum's plan to archive the pandemic impact on black Arkansans.
- Fundraising efforts for statues of Daisy Bates and Johnny Cash to replace current statues representing Arkansas in the U.S. Capitol.
- Controversial bills in the legislature to restrict social justice and diversity education.
- Controversial bills in Arkansas and Tennessee impacting transgender athletes in public schools.
- The pandemic impact on the state's Pacific Islander community.
- Renaming Arkansas State University's Military Science building after first African-American faculty member.
- The controversy and debate over a PRIDE month display at the Craighead County-Jonesboro Public Library.

*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 largely 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: Doreen Selden's position is paid for with CPB funds. Through her efforts, KASU continues to show increasing local support for its mission and programs. In addition to recruiting new underwriters, Doreen provides the important service of maintaining relations with existing contributors by personal visits, phone calls, and general public relations. She works the phones during our fundraising drives, attends business related functions in the community, and helps with special events and projects. The Community Service Grant makes her job – and our financial growth -- possible.

KASU's staff includes four on-air personnel and six volunteers who produced an estimated 1,742 hours of music programs, 115 hours of news and public affairs, and 120 hours of arts and culture features. Local programming is labor intensive. 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 well-known national public radio programs of news, discussion and music. Audience research shows that some of our most popular programs are 1A; Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me; and Morning Edition. KASU is able to provide these and other national programs because of the CSG. Without the grant funding, the quality of our music offerings would suffer, because it is practically impossible to find local hosts with the time and talent to produce classical and jazz music programs in this area. Performance Today, Concert Hall, and Jazz Tonight are prime examples of programs that are enjoyed throughout the region, and these programs are a great service to listeners in northeast Arkansas, southeast Missouri and northwestern Tennessee.