

**2022 NPR Illinois Community Advisory Board  
Advice and Recommendations Report to Licensee**

To: Dr. Janet L. Gooch, Chancellor, University of Illinois Springfield  
Dr. Tim Killeen, President, University of Illinois System  
University of Illinois Board of Trustees  
Molly Jo Lamb, Executive Director, Center for State Policy and Leadership

From: NPR Illinois Community Advisory Board

Date: November 29, 2022

This letter to the University of Illinois leadership is to fulfill the NPR Illinois Community Advisory Board's obligation to advise the station's governing body as outlined below.

NPR Illinois considers maintaining a community advisory board to be a best practice. The NPR Illinois Community Advisory Board (CAB) meets regularly to offer perspectives to the management team and, as directed by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting Community Service Grant, has:

1. The right to review the station's programming goals.
2. The right to review the service provided by the station.
3. The right to review significant policy decisions rendered by the station.
4. The obligation to advise the station's governing body of whether the station's programming and other significant policies are meeting the specialized educational and cultural needs of the communities served by the station, and to make recommendations that the CAB deems appropriate to meet such needs (47 U.S.C. § 396(k)(8)).

In addition to advising the station's governing body, the NPR Illinois Community Advisory Board meets quarterly around the following goals:

1. Provide diverse perspectives on public affairs and community engagement opportunities that inform the station's programming and services.
2. Raise awareness and open doors to new audiences for NPR Illinois.
3. Commit to 100% board giving as part of a broader campaign to support sustainability through fundraising, memberships and other sources.
4. Serve as ambassadors for NPR Illinois within the University of Illinois System and at the local, state and federal levels, when needed.

The NPR Illinois Community Advisory Board has discussed the programming, services and significant policy decisions for Fiscal Year 2022. The CAB finds the combination of

programming, services and policy decisions as responsive to the needs of the community to the best of its ability given limited human and financial resources and ongoing implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Programming and Services**

**Public Affairs Programming:** NPR Illinois is critical to an informed public and is directly aligned with the University of Illinois Springfield's core academic mission as a public affairs university. NPR Illinois is uniquely positioned within the Illinois capital as one of the only nonprofit, independent journalism organizations that generates local public affairs reporting. The CAB believes that NPR Illinois journalism and community engagement activities connect Illinois students, policymakers and community members with the information and analysis they need to make informed decisions. NPR Illinois' position within the media landscape is critical to counteract the industrywide divestment of human and financial resources into public affairs and Statehouse news coverage.

- As of December 2021, NPR Illinois' role of coordinating a Statehouse service that shares news coverage with NPR affiliates stations in Illinois has transitioned to Chicago-based WBEZ. That transition is intended to allow the Statehouse news service more flexibility in hiring reporters and leveraging external funding and advertising revenue for Statehouse coverage than is possible under University policies. The transition requires more time to fully implement.
- The locally produced *Statewide* weekly radio show features analysis and perspectives of respected journalists with a front row in the Illinois Statehouse Press Corps. *The 21<sup>st</sup>* also offers a statewide news talk show four times per week through a beneficial partnership with Illinois Public Media. The CAB applauds both Illinois-focused public affairs programs as accessible to the listenership live on air or through on-demand podcasts.
- The CAB recommends that NPR Illinois continue efforts to dedicate necessary resources to implement its plan for a Statehouse editor, multiple reporters and UIS Public Affairs Reporting interns to focus locally produced Statehouse coverage and local government coverage, including in-depth features and analysis to round out the daily headlines. Full Statehouse and reporting staffing levels have been challenged in the past year and are essential to effectively serve as a watchdog for public accountability in state and local government.

**Community Engagement:** NPR Illinois has dedicated more staff and time in FY 2022 to locally producing *Community Voices*, a daily feature of local residents, leaders, visitors, listeners, donors, sponsors, nonprofits and volunteers around what they care about their communities and how to make their neighborhoods grow.

- The CAB acknowledges and applauds the diversity of voices and new understanding of communities and neighborhoods, bringing relevancy of the storytelling to potentially new audiences and finding connections between a wide range of populations throughout the listenership area.
- The CAB repeats its FY 2021 recommendation to communicate clear metrics for evaluating whether *Community Voices* is effective as a daily feature or as a less frequent feature such as weekly to ensure the daily segment does not jeopardize editorial content and staffing of news that is critical to NPR Illinois' mission impact.
- The CAB also highlights the availability of locally produced features and partnerships such as *This I Believe* scholarship and essay program for local high-school seniors and *Podcast Academy* as effective opportunities for younger generations to engage with NPR Illinois and build a connection that can last a lifetime.

**National Programming:** The national NPR programming available on NPR Illinois ranges from the *BBC World Service* to *Travel with Rick Steves*. The mainstay of national news and analysis through programs such as *Morning Edition*, *On Point*, *Here and Now*, *Fresh Air*, *All Things Considered* and *Marketplace* meet the listening area's educational needs about national politics, government and economic conditions throughout the day and evening, as well as through podcasts.

Nationally produced cultural programming such as *SNAP Judgment*, *Moth Radio Hour*, *Splendid Table*, *Sound Opinions*, *Latino USA*, *This American Life* and jazz and other musical programming provide a varied and enriching menu of options for listeners through livestreaming or podcasts.

The strong mix of local and national programming provides a valuable service to the NPR Illinois community.

## **Significant Policies**

Multiple University policies affected NPR Illinois' path to sustainability and mission impact in the past fiscal year.

1. The State Universities Civil Service System and classifications of NPR Illinois staff positions, combined with a backlog of hiring through the University of Illinois HR system, have affected NPR Illinois' ability to fill vacancies in a timely manner. These vacancies have significantly affected the station's ability to carry out its mission in the past year. The length of vacant positions for editorial, business and development functions—constituting about half of the 2019 staffing levels—have had broad implications for programming, operations and core components of a fundraising plan.

2. The absence of NPR Illinois' Director of Development position for eight months of FY 2022 significantly hindered NPR Illinois' ability to launch and promote a fundraising campaign. This position has direct implications for NPR Illinois' ability to carry out its mission since the University, as the NPR licensee, began phasing out cash support for NPR Illinois in 2021 by \$100,000 a year over five years.<sup>1</sup> The CAB strongly supports and appreciates the increased involvement by the University of Illinois Springfield Division of Advancement with a new Director of Development to coordinate NPR Illinois fundraising and development efforts.
3. The University's and NPR Illinois' commitment to systematically address Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) is essential for NPR Illinois to enrich programming and services, broadening NPR Illinois' relevancy to the diverse communities it serves. The CAB applauds existing efforts through training, digital transformation projects, recruiting and University-level engagement. The CAB has also supported these efforts by prioritizing advisory board recruiting to offer diverse perspectives, resources, networks and editorial content for NPR Illinois management's consideration. For example, the CAB has members representing diversity in age, race and ethnicity, geographic area, and political affiliation, as well as personal and professional networks and areas of expertise.

### **CAB Recommendations for Other Opportunities to Advance Mission**

The CAB recommends that NPR Illinois explore the following:

1. Schedule an introductory conversation with the University Chancellor and an annual meeting with the Chancellor and the CAB to stay informed about university priorities, how NPR Illinois aligns with those priorities and how the CAB can offer perspectives on how NPR Illinois adapts to the educational and cultural needs of the communities it serves.
2. With CAB support, coordinate listening sessions and focus groups of diverse segments of the communities served by NPR Illinois to gain insight into "growing the audience."
3. Re-envision Public Radio Week or other donor and community engagement activities to reconnect the NPR Illinois community around efforts to grow the audience and support sustainability by contributing toward the capital campaign.
4. Discuss the appropriateness of NPR Illinois staff being classified as civil servants and identify whether any options exist to provide more flexibility to NPR Illinois in filling vacant positions that are essential to programming and services. Better define sufficient staffing levels to effectively serve the NPR Illinois mission. Combine these discussions with specific priorities and goals for diversifying NPR Illinois staff.

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<sup>1</sup> University annual cash support historically was between \$250,000 and \$450,000, which accounted for 20% of operations. The University continues to provide significant in-kind supports include building space, human resources, DEI efforts and marketing support.