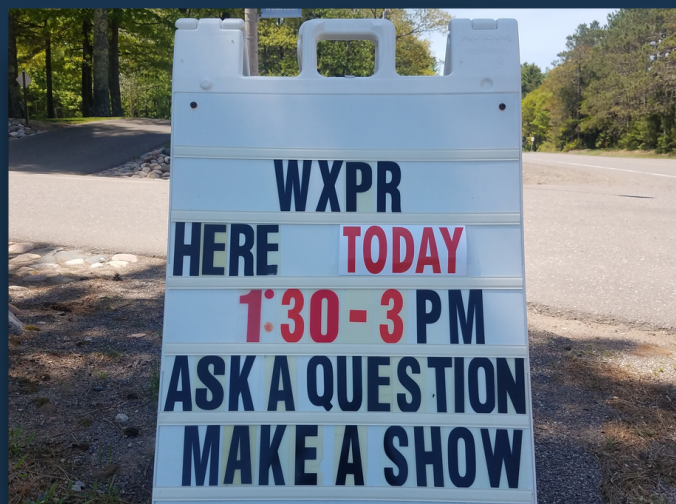


STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

2022-2025



Founded in 1983, WXPR has for nearly 40 years grown and developed as a core resource in rural northern Wisconsin. Local news, local music, local arts and culture are all station priorities. From studios at 28 North Stevens Street in downtown Rhinelander, Wisconsin, WXPR can be heard at 91.7fm in a 70 mile radius of Rhinelander, with extended service to Ironwood, Michigan via translator at 100.9fm, and through a shared transmitter in Wausau, Wisconsin at 91.9fm WXPW, and around the world at wxpr.org.

The station is proud of the WXPR community. From the Rhinelander studios, scores of volunteers produce and deliver over 70 hours of unique programming weekly incorporating classical, blues, jazz, contemporary, American standards, polka, folk, bluegrass, and traditional country.

WXPR's listening region, while rural, is dynamic in a fluctuation of the population both seasonally and more recently an influx of new, permanent residents. More than ever before, people of different ages are able to live in the Northwoods and work remotely providing WXPR a base of potential new listeners and members.

Given the rural nature of the region, local news coverage is essential to the mission of the station, informing citizens of significant issues facing our local communities and our broader society. As an NPR affiliate, WXPR is the only public radio station within its region offering local news coverage. The station is a voice for the community, sponsors numerous community events, helps nonprofit organizations get their messages out, and supports local musicians and live music.

Early in 2021, WXPR's Board of Directors committed to a significant process over the remainder of 2021 to explore key issues facing the station and its service area, as these impact the future direction of the station. The commitment was made in recognition of the dramatic challenges society has faced through 2020-21 in the form of the pandemic, economic challenges to rural communities, and calls for social justice and equity. The result of this work in strategy development are offered in this summary Strategic Framework.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Community Needs Assessment

Over the summer and early fall, 2021, an extensive process of community interviews, focus groups, surveys and data analysis was completed, as noted to the right.

The board established key questions it sought to answer in the process – questions that probed what was felt to be “at the center of the table” and could make the most difference to the future of the organization. All of these were incorporated into the station's internal and external assessment processes.

“AT THE CENTER OF THE TABLE”

- **Listenership:** What makes them flip the switch? How do we get people in the door? Conversely, why are they not listening?
- **Next Generation:** What are youth looking for? and how can we get them engaged?
- **Terrestrial Radio:** What's the future of traditional broadcast?
- **News Coverage:** What do listeners seek? And How can we change the public's perception of public radio's partisanship?
- **Equity:** Who are we not engaging and how can we be more representative of the total demographics of our region?

Through this process there were new discoveries – *people don't listen because they don't know we exist!!!* – validations – *we are highly respected among those with whom we work* – and some rich new opportunities – *working with students, working with tribal partners, engagement in a national Digital Transformation cohort.*

We offer here a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges identified or re-affirmed through this process, as well as a summary of issues and strengths that became the basis for forming a path forward.

Top strengths on which to build:

- Our strength as a respected and balanced **Local Voice**
- Our strength utilizing individuals from the **community as hosts** of shows
- Our accessibility through our **work across multiple platforms**

Other strengths:

- Strength of current General Manager
- Strength of current team
- **Reputation as trustworthy**
- Experience in **storytelling**; valued the North Storytelling Project—need to reinstate
- Offer local listeners **the “wide world”**

Top internal “weaknesses”/challenges:

- Marketing; need to be known
- Schedule: promote to interest groups—where/when to listen
- Continued decline in membership

Other “weaknesses” to address:

- Small staff; stretched thin
- Need to engage new demographics
- Need to grow partnerships
- Need to find new avenues to listen and engage
- Ongoing need to achieve financial stability
- Need for succession planning at all levels
- Need to develop/diversify board

External Opportunities:

- Breaking traditional media perceptions/roles; new platforms
- Stories of people who live here
- New visibility thru joint events/ marketing with partners; become known; span arts/film
- Find more ears! Play out & about
- A school initiative training in podcasting, announcing; promoting journalism as a career
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion initiative—Community of Practice

External Challenges

- Relevancy for broadcast in the future; rapidly evolving environment
- Remaining nimble in a rapidly evolving media environment
- Need to be Next Generation: Youth do not listen to broadcast
- Need to maintain our neutrality in reporting

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Issues likely to be Drivers of Change

Through the assessment process and conversations to synthesize what we learned, it became quite clear that there were a select number of issues that, if addressed well, could drive change for WXPR toward a stronger and more resilient future. All of these issues fall under the umbrella of ensuring that the station assures its relevancy today and into the future. These Drivers of Change became the basis of the Strategic Framework.

- **BECOME KNOWN.** It became clear throughout the focus group process that WXPR, while perhaps recognized for call letters, the station is not well-known for the content of its programming nor the scope of what it provides to the community. There is significant work to be done to build identity, understanding, and engagement in WXPR. There is a need to build brand awareness and ownership. This effort must be at the forefront as a Strategic Imperative of the organization, and should be tracked in terms of all levels of participation in the station, including the potential to reverse the declining membership that has been experienced for several years. At the heart of this Driver of Change is striving to help all current supporters, listeners, and potential new audiences find themselves and find a welcome. WXPR must help its core and potential constituencies find relevancy within the station's work.
- **ADDRESS ISSUES OF EQUITY AND INCLUSION.** Advancing a culture of inclusion is an imperative that all public media organizations nationally are called to incorporate as a strategic focus in their work. NPR stated in its own 2021-2023 plan "NPR must change to survive," and established a plan with one key goal: "Diversify our audiences to reflect, serve, and inspire America."

As WXPR considered its own issues of equity and inclusion, the focus was set around two key underserved audiences – youth, and the Indigenous communities within the region. WXPR can best drive change in this arena through partnership work with organizations working within these target communities, as well as in internal work within the station, especially to diversity the Board of Directors, as well as building awareness around implicit biases wherever they may be found and addressing these biases.

- **ENGAGE YOUTH,** a next generation audience. There is already momentum growing for a partnership between educators and WXPR on a podcasting initiative. By training students on how to create stories, edit, and share on WXPR platforms, the Podcast Initiative offers students with learning that meets multiple learning objectives, as well as may lead toward careers in journalism. The partnership will focus on inviting a next generation to find welcome and relevancy within the station.
- **ENGAGE TRIBAL COMMUNITIES.** WXPR must listen, learn, and build partnerships that will allow the station to become relevant within the lives of tribal neighbors. In the assessment interview, the group expressed significant interest in working toward sharing Native cultural teachings and traditions via WXPR platforms.
- **WORK WITH OTHERS** Strengthen and expand community partnerships, relationships. Growing a listener base and growing a community of support is a product of a strong role with important partners across all sectors of the community. To be relevant, the station must build an intentional path toward relationships that cultivate relevancy through the experience of partner engagement.
- **CONTINUE TO BUILD DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION.** Nimbleness; ability to navigate and also to remain relevant as a public broadcast organization in an ever-changing media environment. To be relevant into the future, the station must continue to integrate digital technology into all areas of the business, fundamentally changing how the station provides value to audiences, as well as invites audience participation and communication.



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: Our Blueprint for Change

MISSION:

WXPR exists to inform, entertain, and engage our community; enrich lives with music, information, and interaction; and build positive lasting relationships.

VALUES:

What guiding principles inform and set boundaries around our decision making?

- **Local:** We give voice to the community
- **Unique:** We express the culture of the north woods
- **Public:** We work collaboratively toward collective impact
- **Quality:** We hold high programming and presence standards
- **Leadership:** We lead within our region in ways that create pride and connection
- **Inclusion:** We are committed to equity, diversity, accessibility, inclusion
- **Balance:** We bring the world to the north woods and the north woods to the world

VISION:

If we are successful, a decade from now we promise our community a Broadcast Media Organization that is....

- **Relevant:** Our region will have a broadcast media hub that continues to be relevant to our region's needs in programming, news, and a "Northwoods Culture."
- **Representative:** Our region will have a broadcast media hub that is responsive to younger and broadly diverse demographics.
- **Built on Partnership:** Our region will have a broadcast media hub that is collaboratively with anchor community partners.
- **Local:** Our region will have a broadcast media hub that is the No. 1 primary choice for celebration of our local, northwoods culture
- **Sustainable:** Our region will have a broadcast media hub that is both nimble enough to navigate change as well as secure both financially and in human resources to our community, and improve the world

POSITIONING BYLINE:

Mirror of the Northwoods, window on the world



STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

What follows outlines initiatives and objectives considered to be highest priority to set direction and significantly move the station toward a sustainable future and a vision that assures that WXPR will continue to be relevant, representative and identified as a core local resource.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 1: EXPAND LISTENER BASE

1. Become known as a leader in diversity, equity and inclusion

- Cultivate relationships with tribal communities; support Indigenous needs to reach their base and tell their story.
- Become known as a leader in DEI initiatives throughout the listening area

2. Grow our next generation, youth audience

- Cultivate relationships with local schools to build a podcast training opportunity and support of career paths within broadcast media.

3. Strengthen WXPR Visibility and Positioning

- As a key element of community engagement and listener expansion, shape an explicit strategy to reach our target markets that positions WXPR as the core source of “all things local.”

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 2: FOCUS ON RELEVANCY

1. Build positioning as a key resource in local content delivery.

- Build local and regional positioning of the station as a key resource in provision of local news.
- Build local and regional positioning of the station as a key resource in provision of local music and connection to arts and culture.
- Become the local “storyteller.”
- Continue to develop the role and position the station as a core resource in public safety and environmental issues.

2. Develop presence across digital media platforms

- Through the opportunity before WXPR As a participant in the Digital Transformation cohort, strive to remain nimble and build stronger digital presence in a rapidly evolving media environment.
- Develop WXPR as a digital leader within new media platforms.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 3: INVEST IN THE FUTURE

1. Invest dollars into station initiatives that build relevancy and sustainability.

- Achieve financial sustainability through investment in key areas that will build relevancy and responsiveness as well as build digital presence.

2. Build sustainers through becoming known for our key role as local storyteller.

- Grow the membership base, especially among sustainers as well as new target listener base segments, through the positioning and telling the station’s story. Become known. Build a sense of community.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 4: FOSTER ADAPTABILITY

1. Ensure ongoing pipeline of strong and representative board leadership.

- Develop systems for board recruitment, retention and learning that ensure a continual strengthening of the roles and understanding of responsibilities of board members.
- Develop systems to ensure membership diversity, as well as a culture of equity and inclusion on the board.

2. Develop operations capacity to nimbly respond to change.

- Develop systems, documentation and staff development plans to ensure ability to nimbly respond to change. Focus on ability to adapt systems and pass on leadership as needs arise.

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AS A TOOL TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

It has become commonly recognized that plans, both short and long term, rarely unfold in the manner predicted due to the rapid pace of societal change, coupled with the turbulence experienced socially, economically, political, or environmentally. In this milieu, organizations at all levels are turning to planning processes that serve the traditional purpose of setting organizational direction and focus, while offering flexibility to adapt to marketplace changes. A strategic framework invites both charting a course, while also encouraging feedback loops and key performance indicators to encourage a learning process along the way and the flexibility to respond as needs change. A strategic framework offers guidance as a blueprint rather than a detailed set of prescriptive deliverables. In our experience, a Strategic Framework is an “elegantly simple” tool that can be easily understood and communicated to all key stakeholders as a guide to decision making.



PROJECT TEAM

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James Cape, Board of Directors/Volunteer Host
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