

2/8/2022

SAS Radio Section 6 - Local Content and Services Report – “Telling Public Radio’s Story”

The purpose of this section is to give you an opportunity to tell us and your community about the activities you have engaged in to address community needs by outlining key services provided, and the local value and impact of those services. Please report on activities that occurred in Fiscal Year 2021. Responses may be shared with Congress or the public. Grantees are required to post a copy of this report (Section 6 only) to their website no later than ten (10) days after the submission of the report to CPB. CPB recommends placing the report in an "About" or similar section on your website. **This section had previously been optional. Response to this section of the SAS is now mandatory.**

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.

WMRA’s mission is to be a trusted source of news and information that supports an engaged community. WMRA’s vision is to be recognized as the essential, community-supported source of news, information, and stories significant to our listening area. WMRA seeks to achieve these goals through long-form stories, news features, a daily news podcast, digital media, and community involvement. In Fiscal Year 2021, WMRA’s local news team continued to report on local issues and the impact of national issues on local communities. Local news reporting remained crucial throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with coverage of Black Lives Matter protests in summer 2020, the vaccine rollout in early 2021, and the ongoing effects of the pandemic on local schools and the local community overall.

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.

WMRA regularly partners with Virginia Public Radio and WCVE in Richmond to provide more comprehensive coverage of local and state news. Highlights included a two-part report from Virginia Public Radio about educators who, in light of social distancing requirements, found creative ways to teach their classes outside. WMRA shares these stations’ features on-air and in “The WMRA Daily” news podcast. WMRA also features content from a local, independent newspaper, “The Harrisonburg Citizen,” on the station’s mobile app.

As in the previous fiscal year, many of WMRA's partnerships with cultural organizations were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, WMRA found ways to reach the community virtually.

In June 2021, WMRA partnered with the nonprofit organization StoryCorps to produce the special series, "StoryCorps in the Valley and Central Virginia." Over one month, 138 interviews between local community members were recorded remotely. WMRA edited 11 of these interviews for broadcast on air; they were also published on the station's website and shared via the station's email newsletter and mobile app. Featured interviews included the co-founders of the Native American Church of Virginia discussing their experiences with law enforcement, the military, and religion; co-founders of Children of Shenandoah, descendants of people displaced from the Blue Ridge Mountains during formation of Shenandoah National Park; and members of an advocacy group for parents of LGBTQ children.

WMRA collaborated with local Americana band, The Steel Wheels, to create the podcast, "We Made You A Song." Listeners commissioned songs which The Steel Wheels then recorded and produced. Each episode explores the story behind the song, the people involved, and the songwriting process. The podcast's first season aired between October and December 2020.

WMRA's cultural event series, "Books & Brews," resulted in five hours of community engagement between September 2020 and April 2021. Due to social distancing restrictions, all five events were held virtually using Facebook Live and later archived on the station's website and mobile app.

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.

WMRA's "Books & Brews" events were held virtually in Fiscal Year 2021. Not only did the events remain well attended, holding them virtually allowed WMRA to reach a larger audience than before. On average, 617 people attended the events, more than triple the attendance for an in-person event. The all-virtual season of "Books & Brews" featured discussions about local and regional history: Southern migration, the use of slave labor in building the Blue Ridge Tunnel, white supremacy and confederate monuments. The final "Books & Brews" event of the fiscal year discussed the current polarized environment as well as specific tactics for communicating across the divide and the importance of trauma and resilience for today's leaders. With 869 attendees, this was the most popular "Books & Brews" of the fiscal year. As "Books & Brews" returns to in-person events in Fiscal Year 2022, WMRA plans to partner with a local audio-visual production company to livestream the events on WMRA's Facebook page, to continue reaching as broad an audience as possible.

WMRA's mobile app, which allows listeners to access news in areas with limited radio broadcast coverage, continued to grow in its third year. In Fiscal Year 2021, the app had 4,374 unique users and an average of 360 daily users. WMRA's daily news podcast had 52,659 downloads with an average of 144 downloads per day. Station news stories had over 13,000 total downloads over the course of the fiscal year. The most popular story on WMRA's website was a report on Virginia's move to decriminalize possessing an ounce or less of marijuana and how this new law may not have a positive effect on some Virginia residents with prior convictions. This story had 3,229 views in Fiscal Year 2021, with an average view/engagement time of nearly eight minutes. The first season of the "We Made You A Song" podcast had over 5,500 downloads over Fiscal Year 2021. The second season, released in fall 2021, currently has 13,480 downloads from 7,228 unique users.

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.

In summer 2020, WMRA produced the special news series, "Mental Health Matters." The nine-part series explored how mental health services were affected during the pandemic and other community crises. One story focused on how local mental health providers were working with those affected by race-based trauma and police brutality, as well as barriers to mental health services for people of color. Other topics included suicide prevention, the effects of isolation on children's mental health, and emerging treatments such as virtual group therapy and arts-based therapies.

Throughout Fiscal Year 2021, WMRA reported on the Black Lives Matter movement in the local community, covering rallies inspired by nationwide protests after the deaths of George Floyd and others in 2020. Reports included a strike demanding racial economic justice for workers, a protest calling for a local mayor's resignation after making a racist Facebook post, local artists creating BLM-inspired art, and concerns about militia presence at rallies and protests. In addition, WMRA covered how statewide police reform would affect local residents and officers, through interviews both local police and community activists.

In Fiscal Year 2022, WMRA hired a full-time news reporter. This new position expanded WMRA's capacity to report on and engage with members of underserved communities. So far, WMRA has created an ongoing series covering local jails and prisons, exploring topics such as jail renovations, inmate suicides and for-profit contractors in state prisons. WMRA continues to report on local services that help marginalized and underserved populations, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent topics have included a homeless shelter's struggles with safely housing the local homeless population, a legal aid organization providing assistance to those facing eviction, and a new free clinic for low-income residents, and a start-up making public

spaces more accessible to people with disabilities. WMRA plans to continue reporting on these topics in Fiscal Year 2022 and beyond, as they remain important, ongoing issues.

WMRA's sister station, WEMC, continues to air "Concierto"—which is broadcast in both English and Spanish—on Saturday afternoons, and addresses the needs of the strong Hispanic and Latino population in WMRA's audience.

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?

With CPB funding, WMRA can afford to provide national news programming from NPR. This eases WMRA's financial burden, so the station can focus its efforts on providing more coverage of WMRA's local communities. WMRA covers a large geographic area, with many listeners living in rural areas with no reliable internet or television. A significant portion of WMRA's audience relies on radio—and WMRA in particular—to stay connected on a local, national, and international scale. Without CPB funding, WMRA would have to significantly reduce its local news reporting, which would lead to the local community losing the in-depth coverage and insights that national news reports alone cannot provide. This is especially crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, as WMRA continues to report on matters important to community safety.