
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. “Arkansas Roots” has its own Facebook page, where upcoming shows are promoted. The show page also regularly promotes the musicians playing each week at local music venues, playing some of the music from upcoming performances and tagging the artists’ pages whenever possible. This cross-promotion has been very well received and appreciated by the musicians and their fans, and it has attracted new audiences as these fans share and then tune in to hear their favorite band’s music. The station’s in-person engagement is exemplified by our monthly Bluegrass Monday concert series; the Arkansas Roots Music Festival; KASU Music Nights at the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival; the Downtown Entertainment Series in nearby Newport, Arkansas; and other music events the station sponsors.

KASU has continued to provide local and regional news from our own news team, to incorporate stories shared through cooperation with other public radio stations in the state, and to share stories from Arkansas Public Media, the Regional Journalism Collaborative formed over two years ago with help from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Often, media events are presented to our audience as they happen, through Facebook Live. These videos are available on demand for later viewing, and these events are shared, along with other news stories, on our website and through social media. KASU’s news team has been diligent, both on-air and online, in providing information on road construction and traffic pattern changes; on weather-related road closings, school and event closings and cancellations; on changes in trash pickup, public transportation, and other community event schedules; and on developments in city and county government. The news staff, led by KASU News Director Johnathan Reaves, has provided stories dealing with issues such as school security, state immigration policy, the controversial growth of the medical marijuana industry in the state and local region, and economic and industrial development in the
region. Johnathan has also continued to provide periodic interviews with members of the Arkansas Congressional delegation. These live interviews run 10-15 minutes in length and cover a wide variety of topics. Each interview is recorded and then put on the KASU website for on-demand listening, shared on social media, and often shared and promoted by the Congressional staffs in Washington, reaching people far outside the broadcast region.

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.

One new initiative the KASU has undertaken is the addition of a new program called “A-State Connections.” This locally-produced program 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.

KASU has also added two locally-produced, weekly music programs to our schedule. Both programs air on Sunday evenings and are hosted by community volunteers, with production assistance from KASU staff. “Six Degrees of the Delta” is an hour-long program highlighting the associations and connections between popular music and our Mississippi Delta region. “Mr. Rogers’ Rock Collection” features well-known regional radio personality Dennis Rogers playing progressive rock from his personal collection and sharing his knowledge of the genre. Both of these programs align with KASU’s mission to provide educational and entertaining programming that is truly unique to our audience.

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.

As previously mentioned, KASU continued to participate in the Regional Journalism Collaboration known as Arkansas Public Media. This organization, administered from the offices of KUAR in Little Rock, supported one reporter at each station in the partnership, tasked with providing long-form and multi-platform stories on key issues in each station’s broadcast region. APM reporter Ann Kenda continued her work at KASU, providing coverage of agricultural and health care issues in our region, among other stories. In the last half of the year, APM received a grant from Delta Dental to produce stories on oral health in Arkansas. Under this initiative, Ann produced stories on issues such as pediatric dentistry, the link between dental health and heart health, and free dental clinics that serve those who cannot afford regular dental care.

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.

KASU has partnered with the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism to record a weekly feature with one of the department’s travel writers. Each week, KASU’s Mark Smith talks with Kim Williams about upcoming festivals, events, and attractions around the state. This feature airs on Saturday and again on Monday, as part of KASU’s “Arkansas Roots” program.

KASU maintains a long tradition of offering live music performances throughout the region. We pride ourselves in helping to kick-start the downtown revitalization effort in Jonesboro in the 1990s, by starting a live, monthly blues concert in a downtown restaurant that was one of the few struggling businesses remaining on a largely shuttered Main Street. Today, Jonesboro’s Main Street is a thriving arts and entertainment area, with restaurants offering live music almost every night of the week. In 2019, KASU again partnered with another downtown revitalization effort in nearby Newport, Arkansas. DRIVE, the Downtown Revitalization and Improvement Volunteer Effort, sponsored 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 DRIVE’s Downtown Entertainment Series. These blues and jazz concerts brought outstanding performers from Memphis, Little Rock, and other locations to Newport each month, for a memorable evening of outdoor music and fun.

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. These concerts remain the most well-attended events the station sponsors.

KASU continued what has become an annual event in early December, 2018, with our “Jazz for the Holidays” concert held in the nearby town of Pocahontas, Arkansas. Renowned jazz trumpeter Gary Gazaway, a Pocahontas native, brought together an outstanding group of musicians from around the region and presented a wonderful concert of holiday classics for a near capacity crowd at a local venue. With the backing of local businesses, the concert was again a tremendous success, and attendees were already excitedly planning to come back next year.

KASU once again partnered with the Delta Symposium at Arkansas State University to help fund and promote the speakers, special events, and musical performances that highlight the scholarship and research into the culture and traditions of the Mississippi River Delta region in which we are located. The Arkansas Roots Music Festival, held on the final day of the Symposium, is sponsored by KASU in conjunction with the ASU Department of English, Philosophy, and World Languages. Designed as an outdoor event at a local park, this year’s festival had to be moved indoors due to inclement weather. The April 2019 concert showcased a variety of musical styles, with string band music from the Ozark Highlands Trio; bluegrass from the Kurt and Andrea Stephenson band; blues from Marcus “Mookie” Cartwright; and 1950s-style rock and roll from The Boss Tweeds.

KASU News Director Johnathan Reaves continued his role as Small Station Representative on the Board of Directors of the Public Radio News Directors Incorporated (PRNDI). He has been worked with that organization in planning of the group’s annual convention and in the process of renaming the organization as the Public Media Journalists Association (PMJA). Johnathan has done excellent work to cultivate awareness of KASU and other small stations within this national organization.
KASU maintains memberships in four area Chambers of Commerce - Jonesboro, Paragould, Newport, and Batesville. In 2019, we participated in annual Business Expo events in Jonesboro and Paragould. KASU’s Director of Underwriting and Corporate Relations, Doreen Selden, helped with the planning for the Jonesboro Business Expo, serving on the Chamber’s business network committee. This committee also organized several Lunch & Learn events for area businesspeople. Doreen also often attends the Jonesboro Chamber’s Business After Hours events and ribbon-cuttings for new businesses.

Finally, KASU partnered with Arkansas Heritage Sites at Arkansas State University to present KASU Music Nights as part of the first Johnny Cash Heritage Festival, held in Cash’s hometown of Dyess, Arkansas. The festival was held in October, 2018, and featured three days of lectures, scholarly presentations, and film screenings, culminating with a major concert featuring friends and family of Johnny Cash. KASU’s Music Nights provided entertainment for festival attendees following the first two days of the symposium, bringing a variety of performers from around the region to pay tribute to Cash’s legacy and keep the crowd dancing well into the evening. Several area businesses and the local electrical workers’ union provided support for these Music Nights.

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, provided live music for two nights during the event, and then participated in the planning for the following year’s festival. The festival is held in Cash’s hometown in October. As part of the festival, the station sponsors KASU Music Nights, two nights of live concerts by a variety of musicians and bands. These concerts cap off two days of symposium sessions and presentations, and precede a larger concert on the final day of the festival that features nationally-known performers and members of the Cash family. Paula Miles, Assistant Director of A-State Heritage Sites, which organizes the festival, said, “I think our collaboration between Heritage Sites and KASU is vital to the success of our festival each year. The work that the KASU staff does in selecting the highest caliber of talent for the festival each year is a great help to all of us in planning the festival and making it a success.” She added that one of the musicians featured this year on the KASU Music Nights stage, Cory Jackson, was so impressive that Roseanne Cash invited him to open on the “big stage” for the next year’s festival.

KASU continues to invest 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 collaborates with A-State’s Department of English, Philosophy, and World Languages to cap off the symposium with a day of live music that has come to be called the Arkansas Roots Music Festival. Dr. Greg Hansen, a professor of folklore and English, says, “I always look forward to working with KASU in selecting the talent that we present each year to round out our symposium. The Arkansas Roots Music Festival is really turning into a fun annual event for the community.”

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 about 50-60 of these features produced over the course of a year.
KASU’s new local music programs are attracting attention. After the debut of one program, a listener commented on Facebook, “Just listened to the first “Six Degrees of the Delta” on KASU. Well done! … We have reason to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the Delta.” Another commented on the program, “An excellent weekly show that explores the music history of the Mississippi Delta.” Feedback on “Mr. Rogers’ Rock Collection” includes, “Great playlist! Some amazing tracks that were new to me along with some classics,” and “Really enjoyed the show tonight. Eric Burden, Ian and others. Way to go, KASU.”

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 for an enthusiastic crowd. The admission is free; we suggest a 5-dollar contribution when KASU literally passes the hat for donations 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. Attendees have commented on the Bluegrass Monday Facebook page, “Good music and a great way to promote the theater and the city to those who don’t live here” and “There’s no better supporter of bluegrass music or live music in general in our area than KASU and Marty Scarbrough! Keep up the great work!”

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 2019, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2020. 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. Among the national programs we air, we are proud to carry “1A,” which often addresses issues and problems faced by minority and diverse populations. This program has become one of our most popular national programs. We also seek out local stories and provide information about local and regional events that involve or engage the diverse populations in our region.

Stories aired on KASU’s local and regional newscasts throughout the year covered such issues as:
- The Jonesboro City Council’s discussion of the need for diversity on city boards and commissions.
- The start of a long and controversial struggle by the local NAACP to rename a Jonesboro street in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Court cases regarding the removal of Confederate monuments in Memphis, Tennessee. (Memphis is on the edge of our listening area, so some Memphis news is of interest to our listeners.)
- The state legislature approving the replacing of Arkansas statues in the U.S. Capitol with statues of Johnny Cash and civil rights icon Daisy Bates.
- Legislation to allow in-state tuition for immigrants at state institutions.
- Jonesboro’s annual Hispanic Celebration.
- The planning for a “Veterans Village” for homeless veterans in the Jonesboro area.
- The 100th anniversary observance of a massacre of black people in the nearby town of Elaine, and the ongoing racial tension in that area.
- Black History Month activities at Arkansas State University.
- Martin Luther King, Jr., Day activities on the Arkansas State campus.
- The controversy and court battle over an Arkansas town’s ordinance addressing LGBTQ rights.
An Arkansas College Savings Account that benefits Marshallese children living in Arkansas. (This story was produced by Arkansas Public Media.)

A program celebrating the integration of schools in the small town of Hoxie, Arkansas, in 1955.

In addition to these news stories, KASU’s “A-State Connections” and its associated podcast “Create @ State” presented features including a program to help transgender patients, and a book by Arkansas State professors on “Arkansas Women – Their Lives and Times.”

KASU is exploring ways to engage more with organizations such as the Hispanic Center of Jonesboro, and to better cover issues faced by the local Hispanic community. We also want to continue to find ways to cover issues faced by the LGBTQ population in our community.

In addition to news, 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.

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.

KASU’s staff includes five on-air personnel, one Arkansas Public Media reporter, and five volunteers who produced an estimated 806 hours of music programs, 80 hours of news and public affairs, and 75 hours of arts and culture features. Local programming is labor intensive. We could not fill an entire schedule of high quality programming seven days a week, 24 hours a day, without financial support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The Community Service Grant 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 go down 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 and Concert Hall have listeners throughout the area and are a great service to listeners in northeast Arkansas, southeast Missouri and northwestern Tennessee.

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, along with those of the Membership Development Director, 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. She also manages KASU’s still travel program, which has afforded KASU members with wonderful opportunities to experience exotic locations such as Cuba and Iceland. She has gone above and beyond the call of duty to
make sure our travelers had the most positive experience we could offer. The Community Service Grant makes her job – and our financial growth -- possible.