



## Why does Mary care?

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If you ever visit Michigan Radio's morning editorial meeting, or any meeting where we talk about what stories to cover and how much time to give them, you will eventually hear someone ask, "Why does Mary care?"

We sometimes forget to tell our interns that Mary isn't real, because we know so much about her. She's the profile of a typical public radio listener. We've given her an age, a location, a profession, and a lot of power. The mere mention of her name can stop a story before a reporter has even conducted an interview.

Since Michigan Radio has a whole state to cover, deciding which stories to cover in depth, which stories to just mention, and which to ignore is a constant discussion. Something that is important in Grand Rapids may not matter to listeners in Detroit, and something that's creating a lot of buzz in Ann Arbor may be boring to listeners in Flint.

There's a lot that happens in Michigan. There's hard news that happens at the State House, there is environmental and arts news everywhere, and every community has interesting features and fascinating people.

So when stories are proposed, or assigned or edited – the question is often asked, "Why does Mary care?"

There can be lots of follow up questions to that. "Will this change how she lives her life or the opportunities available to her children?" "Will this surprise, entertain or anger her?" "Is this a story she will want to talk about with her friends?"

As news director, I get hundreds of emailed press releases each day, scores of phone calls from public relations firms, and, a dozen ideas that Michigan Radio reporters pitch to me.

Some of them, like Presidential visits or flooding in Grand Rapids are obviously going to get covered. But most of the stories will have to pass the Mary test. If we can't answer why Mary would care, we're unlikely to cover the story.