WMUK Station Activity Survey 2013: Telling Public Radio’s Story

1. WMUK’s approach to addressing identified community needs: Each year WMUK solicits input from our entire community on matters related to programming, station activities and news coverage. WMUK seeks comment about a wide range of community issues and interest from people in our coverage area. This includes our federally defined “city of license” Kalamazoo, Michigan. It also includes our broadcast coverage area of Southwest Michigan.

WMUK’s twelve-member Friends Advisory Committee provides input on community issues and helps ensure we are meeting community needs. WMUK also has frequent contact by e-mail, phone, and other means with area local governments and school districts. These include but are not limited to the City of Kalamazoo, the County of Kalamazoo, and the Kalamazoo Public Schools. WMUK also maintains regular communication with a large number of educational, environmental, arts, neighborhood, religious, human service, political, health care, business, labor and minority organizations in our city of license and surrounding areas.

WMUK News holds quarterly meetings with representatives of minority and neighborhood organizations to solicit their input on community issues. WMUK also welcomes news coverage suggestions and concerns from individual listeners.

Many WMUK staff members receive community input by serving on boards and committees of organizations such as the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, Kalamazoo Bach Festival, Gilmore Keyboard Festival and the Richmond Center for the Visual Arts.

Our approach to meeting the needs and interests gathered above is manifested in many ways. We produce local programs weekly that meet the identified needs of specific music audiences, such as Grassroots (acoustic music), The Pure Drop (Celtic music) and Alma Latina (Hispanic music). We also produce programs which feature classical music and local or visiting musicians. We acquire and play programs which meet the needs of specific music audiences such as Acoustic Café, Performance Today and The Metropolitan Opera.

We produce short-form newscasts and stories to keep audiences updated on state and local events. WMUK produces a weekly thirty-minute public affairs segment and five or six features on local arts and culture each week through Arts & More. All of these programs and features are posted online. Audiences for these stories are also engaged through social media. Acquired programs like Morning Edition and All Things Consider, keep listeners informed on national and international issues. WMUK broadcasts daily Public Service Announcement keep WMUK’s informed about community activities.
2. Key Initiatives, partnerships and collaborations: During the past year WMUK was involved in a number of partnerships within our broadcast community. In February of 2013 we helped sponsor a local acoustic music festival, Cooper’s Glen and promoted it through underwriting credits and on our acoustic music program, “Grassroots”. WMUK staff were present at the festival to talk with audience members. WMUK staff were also involved in recognizing and introducing performing artists.

Last March we engaged in the “Partnership for Pre-School Readiness” with Kalamazoo Community Foundation and Kalamazoo County Ready 4’s, an organization providing pre-kindergarten education for all in Kalamazoo County. We helped trigger gifts to this organization and increased public awareness about the importance of pre-kindergarten education readiness.

Later in the spring, WMUK engaged in a leadership role with BRAVO, a classical music competition recognizing and celebrating the musical talents of high school students in and around Kalamazoo. More than 400 teachers and 150 parents and are invited to encourage well over 30,000 students to participate in this program. Of that number there are typically 300 inquiries about the competition from which 30 participants are invited to audition. Of those who audition, typically 8 to 12 finalists emerge who are invited to perform at the final concert. The finest performances from that evening concert are then broadcast on WMUK.

WMUK staff members participated as adjudicators and/or moderators for the final BRAVO concert. WMUK staff served on the steering committee for the competition. BRAVO offers the participants an opportunity to meet with music artists from the community in a forum designed to illuminate issues on the topic of being a professional performing artist. This forum takes place in WMUK’s recording studio, and is followed by a tour of the station and interaction with WMUK staff involved in our classical music programs. Since its inception, over 300 students have performed the final concerts and had their performances rebroadcast on WMUK.

Throughout the year, WMUK regularly records and broadcasts live performances by several music organizations within the community, including the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, Fontana Chamber Arts, Western Michigan University School of Music and the Saugatuck Chamber Music Society. In addition, Cara Lieurance conducted live interviews with the staff, conductors and artists from these and other organizations. WMUK also broadcast special presentations by Maestro Raymond Harvey to illuminate upcoming performance by the Kalamazoo Symphony. During the summer months WMUK partnered with the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo to help bring attention to a free series of Concerts in the Park through promotions on our air. WMUK Staff members were present to talk with the audience, emcee and introduce musical performers.

Last year, WMUK worked with WMU’s Center for the Humanities and the Kalamazoo Public Library to promote local and visiting speakers and authors, and to provide and disseminate information about their lectures or their works. Finally, WMUK staff were also present as judges for The Kalamazoo Fret Board Festival and the Glass Arts Society Competition.
A key partnership for WMUK news has been with M-Live (the Kalamazoo Gazette) in coverage of public affairs issues on West Southwest and in cohosting candidate debates in our area.

3. Impact of key initiatives and partnerships with community organizations: Our involvement with the Cooper’s Glen Acoustic Music Festival is an excellent example of the benefits such a partnership can bring to a small non-profit. Tom Nehil, President of the producing organization, Great Lakes Acoustic Music Association, wrote “We feel our roots are inextricably intertwined with WMUK’s. Our mission is to promote, perform and preserve acoustic and folk music. We were successful to no small degree thanks to WMUK and its programming in the area of traditional music.” Tom went on to detail the specific impact of the partnership with WMUK: “The surveys we have conducted during the last two years, indicated that the festival is continuing to attract newcomers and that the festival has a wide geographic reach – throughout Southwest Michigan also north and east and south of Kalamazoo. Many of our attendees indicate that it is through WMUK that they have heard about our events.”

According to Katherine Joslin another WMUK partnership produced similar results: “WMUK has been instrumental in the growth of the University Center for the Humanities at Western Michigan University. Each year, WMUK’s excellent staff has worked closely with the Center for the Humanities to design targeted spots for our lectures and events to maximize exposure for the Center. In a very short time, the Center has grown from an unknown entity on campus to a central place for the exchange of ideas among faculty, emeriti, alumni, undergraduate and graduate students, and people in the wider community. This growth could not have happened without the services of WMUK and its engaged listening audience.”

Karen Santamaria, Reading Together Coordinator for Kalamazoo Public Library also had praise for their partnership with WMUK: “KPL—specifically its annual community read, Reading Together—is grateful for a strong collaborative relationship with WMUK. In April of 2013, WMUK helped coordinate and promote the final event of Reading Together 2013, a special public appearance by journalist and co-host of NPR’s On the Media, Brooke Gladstone. Thanks to the participation of many community partners, including WMUK, this event, which took place on the campus of Western Michigan University, was a huge success, drawing an audience of 300 residents who came to hear Brooke’s remarks on the influence of media.”

Similarly Sandy Standish, Director of Kalamazoo County Ready 4’s also had favorable comments on their partnership with WMUK: “Kalamazoo County Ready 4s was so fortunate to have had the opportunity to partner with WMUK during last spring’s campaign! The partnership not only resulted in increased funding to support the work of KC Ready 4s, but perhaps even more importantly, it provided us an opportunity to communicate the importance of high-quality pre-kindergarten to a wider audience. Due to this partnership, we experienced an increase in the number of calls we received from families, which resulted in enrolling more children in pre-kindergarten. WMUK is a wonderful community partner on many levels, and we are very
appreciative that they focused their efforts on supporting our earliest learners and our work. Joyful, Intentional, Life Changing . . . The Power of Pre-Kindergarten! Thank you, WMUK, for providing KC Ready 4s with this wonderful opportunity to spread our pre-kindergarten message!

Other partnerships also had measurable impact. According to Beth McCann of the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo noted an increased awareness for both All Ears Theatre and for their Concerts in the Park series as a result of their partnership with WMUK: "The Arts Council's partnership with WMUK for All Ears Theatre has introduced new generations to the genre of radio theatre. It's wonderful to see over 300 people at an All Ears performance but is even greater to know that hundreds more can experience true radio theatre in the context and comfort of their home. WMUK's loyal support for the last 12 years has made this possible."

"WMUK's support of Arts Council programs is exceptional. They have been a long time partner of All Ears Theatre and for the past two years, a partner with summer Concerts in the Park. Their support has fostered greater attendance and ensured that these treasured programs will continue to grow and be a part of the Arts landscape in the greater Kalamazoo area."

The Glass Arts Society also cited an increased interest and attendance by the public at its events as a result of its partnership with WMUK: “Though this partnership we have reached an audience of thoughtful listeners and supporters of Arts and Cultural events and organizations, such as ours. During our annual Battle of the Glassblowers weekend in April, many WMUK staff served as guest judges for some of the competitions. This added a sense of broad community support and recognition to the Glass Art Center and WMUK.” Several music and cultural organizations have noted increased attendance at concerts because of interviews or play on WMUK.

4. Meeting the needs of minorities and diverse audiences: In the past year, WMUK made extensive efforts to broadcast programs designed to meet the needs of minority audiences in our service area. Each Sunday afternoon WMUK presents “Alma Latina”, Spanish language music program, produced by WMUK. The program is now in its 36th year and is the oldest continuously running Spanish language program in the state. Alma Latina is followed by just under 1,000 Spanish speaking residents of Southwest Michigan weekly. WMUK was present to honor the producer, Mike Ramirez, as he received a Western Michigan University Excellence in Diversity Award.

In 2014 WMUK plans extended involvement with our local Hispanic community through co-sponsorship of the annual banquet honoring Caesar Chavez and through coverage of events at a local elementary school with an emphasis on bilingual education.

WMUK’s five minute Arts & More segments on Tuesdays and Fridays have continued to be an excellent means of focusing on and exploring events and cultural activities of minority populations during the past year. Last year, Arts & More features told the stories of the Native
American, Chinese American, Middle Eastern American, Hispanic American and the African American communities, to mention but a few. In 2014 WMUK will expand our Arts & More features so that more stories of minority cultures and community members can be shared.

Through Arts & More and some of our news features we have also been able to focus the public attention on stories from the GLBT community. We have also focused on the stories of veterans and the issues that face those transitioning to civilian life. In the past Fiscal Year, we began our outreach to veterans and their families participating in StoryCorp’s Military Voices Initiative. We hosted this initiative in our studios and partnered with Western Michigan University’s Office of Military and Veterans Affairs. This project spanned two fiscal years. In 2014 we will extend our outreach to local veterans and partner with organizations and agencies which serve them.

Finally in 2014, one of WMUK’s classical music hosts, Cara Lieurance plans a series of interviews with minority musicians who will comment on the rich history music performed and written by individuals of mixed or non-European ancestries.

5. Impact of Corporation for Public Broadcasting Community Service Grant Funding:
Without CPB funding WMUK, could not acquire and produce programs that bring local and national news to our audiences. CPB funding makes it possible to focus on the arts of other cultures and the great music and arts organizations of our local community. This expanded coverage of the arts and culture is present on both WMUK 1 and WMUK 2, our secondary channel. Ultimately, more listeners learned of performances and arts activities in our community and from all indications attendance and participation were increased. The CPB Community Service Grant was also instrumental in WMUK’s efforts to engage new and diverse audiences in our community, including Hispanic American, Native American and African American audiences, as well as audiences in the GLBT community and our local veterans. Although membership and underwriting dollars have been steady, these funds alone cannot pay for the rich array of programs that our audiences are used to and demand. Consequently, WMUK’s impact in the community would be lessened without CPB funding through our CSG Grant.