

Northern Public Radio
Corporation for Public Broadcasting – Station Activities Survey
For fiscal year ended June 30, 2015
Excerpt: Local Content & Services Report

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.

The station's goals include presenting news and information curated with the regional listener in mind. We seek out national programs and develop local content that's unbiased, in depth and informative to the citizens in our broadcast region and beyond. We look for ways to frame national and international issues for the local audience.

Community engagement is a multiplatform priority for the stations. We regularly engage with arts, cultural and educational institutions to ensure broad community access related to their activities and offerings and look for partnership opportunities where appropriate. The completion of a performance and recording studio this year has been instrumental for event based activities the station has conducted throughout the year. Future objectives include the development of a local music program and “lifelong learner” programs.

The managing editor keeps a pulse on the community through a daily digest of available information including media outlets, community events, activities, conversations and beyond. In addition, the director of community engagement advances partnerships and services through a regional network of contacts. These efforts yield ongoing interaction throughout the community, across platforms, at live events and participation at community gatherings.

Jump to question:

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.

Our audience includes a broad geographic area in diverse communities with a wide range of challenges and opportunities. Several key initiatives were identified as a means of deepening our community connections.

Perspectives, a community commentaries feature is now a broadcast component at the station. These commentaries come in the form of recorded essays from contributors speaking on a topics ranging from education and politics to gun violence and families. Regular contributors include university faculty, a high school teacher, a newspaper columnist, a minister and more.

Key initiatives also included the launch of Context, a live event-based program created to take a deeper dive into issues affecting the people who live and work in the communities we serve. This year’s Context events have brought together WNIJ, the Rockford Public Library, police,

legislators, community leaders, published writers and more.

The station continues to strengthen its relationship with the Rockford Symphony Orchestra. This year that partnership included the development of a collaborative studio in downtown Rockford. In addition to shared studio space, the RSO is a broadcast partner on featured on Encore. Encore has made performances widely available that otherwise would require a ticket to the concert hall.

WNIJ features bring all manner of community conversation to the air. The “Politics on Tap” series experimented with citizen journalism as we hit the streets to learn what was on the minds of local voters. The occasional series "Pass the Torch" examined the transition of leadership and the relationships between mentor and mentee. Stories included a local high school athlete’s return as a coach following a semi-pro career as well as police recruits, and musicians. The WNIJ Book Series explores regional literature through author interviews and live events in partnership with library participation to promoted wider accessibility.

Additionally, WNIJ regularly partners with other Illinois public and commercial media to provide news from the capitol and around the region. This includes collaborative discussions on topics ranging from common core to the Illinois budget crisis. The station provided essential election coverage this fall that not only provided night of results, but presented the issues and candidates prior to, resulting in a broad access to information and understanding for voters.

The stations also maintain programming partnerships with the non-profit sector throughout the year to showcase the arts and culture thriving in the communities we serve and to identify community needs and opportunities.

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.

This year’s initiatives resulted in greater awareness of the role public radio plays in a community and broader understanding of key issues and opportunities facing local communities and residents.

The commentaries feature, “Perspectives” has broadened the scope of topics presented on the air. This has allowed for stronger ties with a much more diverse group of voices and, well perspectives than previously heard on the station. Indicators of success include the significant web traffic and social media engagement generated by these pieces. Listeners regularly write to applaud this project and to seek more information on what they heard and often to learn how they can add their own essay to the lineup.

Context examined Illinois’ medical marijuana pilot program this year. Expert panelists discussed the diseases that qualify for marijuana treatment, grow centers, dispensaries, and the legal rights

protecting patients. Context event, such as this one provide essential information on new and developing issues and provide a venue for residents to connect with lawmakers, policy experts, advocates and more. Attendee feedback was positive. Guests told us they appreciated the opportunity to have their specific questions answered and to learn more about the resources available through this program.

The broadcast of the RSO concerts also increased awareness and interest in the local music scene and requests to include other performances have followed. The Rockford Symphony Orchestra Executive Director has been a vocal champion.

The stations' digital offerings continues to grow and offer measurable success. We hear directly from users that they appreciate the expanded content available online as well as the stream services that listeners use to keep connected to their communities even when they're not in range of a transmitter.

Jump to question:

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 2014, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2015. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

The station operates a radio information service called NIRIS. NIRIS provides access to local and regional print material for visually and print impaired residents throughout northern Illinois. NIRIS broadcasts 24 hour per day.

The station regularly look at issues affecting diverse audiences; this is always a consideration when making programming decisions and developing content. Issues such as legislation social and human service programs, marriage equality, geo-policing, food programs, education, and healthcare are regularly presented.

In FY16 we will continue to examine these issues for broadcast and as part of the Context series. Free Range Radio presents longer form pieces frequently touching on the issues affecting diverse audiences and WNIJ will move to weekly broadcasts of the investigative journalism program "Reveal" which looks at a wide range of topics.

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?

Without this funding, program and project initiatives would have been slower to develop due to a lack of resources. This funding also ensures the stations have the resources to present the highest quality journalism and music content available. This funding is used for local and nationally distributed programming.

