

General Manager's Report
Mendocino County Public Broadcasting
March 2017
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Overview

The first two months of 2017 were dominated by the acute impact on broadcast operations and news coverage of the wettest winter in decades on the heels of years of drought, and concerns about the effect of the national elections on community broadcasting. KZYX news coverage of the series of winter storms, some of them violent and all of them laden with extraordinary "atmospheric river" rainfall loads, was generally excellent, though staff were stretched thin on weekends.

Fallout from the national elections continues. Attacks by the new president and many Republican lawmakers on the national news media and on public broadcasting have reignited fears of possible severe budget cutbacks to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which provides about 20% of the KZYX annual operating budget and also supports National Public Radio and other news organizations whose broadcasts comprise an essential part of KZYX news and public affairs programming. Once a new MCPB board is seated, management will recommend that the board undertake a fresh strategic plan to address long-term funding, technological challenges and opportunities affecting our operations and broadcasts, and strategies for expanding membership and financial support so as to ensure KZYX has the strength and independence to serve the public interest for years to come.

Finance and Budget

Much of 2016 was marked by leadership, operational and budgetary instability arising mainly from high levels of staff turnover, which led in turn to budget overruns and reduced fundraising activities. Aided by Diane Hering's leadership as interim general manager, the new general manager and staff have worked hard to stabilize staff operations and expenses, and focused on the fundamentals of managing annual and sustaining membership contributions and organizing effective pledge drives.

The station's first fully online pledge drive, the two-day Give Big to My Station campaign organized with the National Federation of Community Broadcasters on 30-31 December, brought in about \$6k, which ranked third nationwide among the 40+ stations participating. Give Big provided valuable learning about non-traditional fundraising, and probably would have been more effective had the new website been more fully functional.

The February pledge drive brought in nearly \$60K in new pledges, short of an ambitious public goal but almost in line with budgetary planning. Given the amorphous uncertainty about federal funding for public broadcasting, including KZYX, we opted for pledge drive messaging that emphasized the need for community participation to keep independent media strong without creating a sense of imminent crisis. We just don't know what's coming. If and when the attacks on the federal funding shift from political swagger to specific proposals and actions, KZYX will take a much sharper tone in fundraising messaging, and likely launch campaigns specifically tied to the potential loss of CPB funding.

Staffing

Diane Hering, who brought experience and a stable hand as Interim General Manager during the second half of 2016, took medical leave in December and January, but rejoined the staff as part-time membership director in February, bringing essential knowledge, leadership and stability to our membership operations, which produce the lion's share of annual revenue. The News Department has been depleted by Valerie Kim's maternity leave and by the departure of Nina Gerona, who had become adept at producing the morning weather and roads report; production of weather and roads

has been taken up by News Director Sheri Quinn and reporter Jason Morash, but the news operation remains strained, especially when stories break on weekends and after hours and when technology breakdowns interrupt news filing processes.

Operations

During the long series of rain-laden winter storms, the KZYX broadcast signal faltered briefly at times due to power and internet outages, but generally was restored within minutes. Freezing rain and icing prompted automated safety systems to shut down the 91.5 transmitter on 21 February, and the outage resolved itself after several hours.

Internet services essential to programming, production and communications have at times been unstable, with the unhappy result that news and other programming that staff had produced did not get onto the air, causing frustration for staff and listeners alike. An internal review of these mission-critical communications services is under way, and will include an assessment of emerging services that were not previously available. Because of its central role in emergency broadcasting, KZYX continues to rely on a stable, time-tested analog studio-transmitter link (STL), but is planning the addition of an internet-based backup system using the latest digital switching technologies as they become available in Mendocino County.

Operations Director Rich Culbertson took great strides to restore technical and operational stability on his return to KZYX in the second half of 2016. The challenge in 2017 is to build a broader support structure for operations to ensure that Rich is not the only recourse when systems falter. This is being addressed through training of staff and volunteer programmers, and through a nascent collaboration with Mendocino Community College.

The new KZYX.org website, built the Core Publisher platform supplied by National Public Radio as part of our affiliation agreement, was launched in January and continues to improve, though more work remains to be done. The relaunch was challenging for reasons both technical and operational, and staff spent scores of hours undergoing training and working with NPR specialists planning and executing the rollout and refining the site. The site has been evolving to showcase KZYX news reporting, local programming and station and community events, while also supplying a fresh stream of national and international news. In coming weeks, KZYX programmers will be coached in how to manage and update their own program pages and posts. KZYX members should be mindful that the site remains in its developmental phase, and that all aspects of station operations are being affected. KZYX News is shifting news production to the Core Publisher platform, meaning that what once were mainly audio stories now become multimedia stories with text, pictures, hyperlinks and even video accompanying the audio to give listeners a richer, fuller news experience. We thank listeners for their support and patience through this important transition.

Mendocino Community College

KZYX has launched a promising collaboration with the Recording Arts and Technology program at Mendocino Community College, one of the strongest academic and vocational programs on campus. The program aims to add broadcast technology and programming to the technical skill sets already being taught to students in Recording Arts. The first fruit of the collaboration came on 27 January when MCC students joined with KZYX News to engineer a quality recording and broadcast of a Town Hall Meeting featuring Representative Jared Huffman and Assemblyman Jim Wood. The event provided the students with the valuable technical experience of broadcasting a public event, while also teaching the central role of public broadcasting to civic affairs and government.

Next, the MCC Recording Arts program will be hosting and managing the live broadcast of the MCPB Board of Directors candidates forum on 15 March, an event that aims to establish a student-supported live broadcast capacity from the college.

A third collaboration, building on the first two, will be co-production of a biweekly KZYX public affairs program broadcast from the College with Recording Arts student engineering and support from West Company. The initiative kicks off with a public forum at the college on 29 March that will be recorded and edited for the program's broadcast debut on 19 April. Thereafter, the program pilot will air every other Wednesday evening from the college, with student participation in the technical broadcast as well as programming content.

Under the technical collaboration, Recording Arts students meeting basic standards will be offered opportunities to engineer public affairs, music and other radio broadcasts at KZYX, forming a pool of well-trained young talent to support the station as it embraces the latest technologies, including a digital STL, distribution of KZYX programming via podcasts, and cross-promotion of KZYX programming via KZYX.org and social media.