

6.1 Telling Public Radio's Story

The purpose of this section is to give you an opportunity to tell us and your community about the activities you have engaged in to address community needs by outlining key services provided, and the local value and impact of those services. Please report on activities that occurred in Fiscal Year 2016. Responses may be shared with Congress or the public. Grantees are required to post a copy of this report (Section 6 only) to their website no later than ten (10) days after the submission of the report to CPB. CPB recommends placing the report in an "About" or similar section on your website. **This section had previously been optional. Response to this section of the SAS is now mandatory.**

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 overriding goal of WNIJ News is to provide clear, accurate news reports that reflect the listening community we serve. We seek out national programs and develop local content that's informative and pleasurable to the citizens in our broadcast region and beyond. We look for ways to frame national and international issues for the local audience. Our primary vehicle is broadcast news, supported by online posting of stories that we cover. We seek to engage the community through social media by alerting them to our news activities via social media and soliciting comments through the same media. We seek community involvement by providing opportunities for on-air comment through our Perspectives feature and through pursuing comment and expertise for our news stories.

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.

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. For instance, WNIJ listeners have a thirst for literature, so we offer frequent interviews with regional authors pegged as our "Read With Me" series. As the name implies, we invite listeners to read the featured works before we broadcast the interviews. Another part of this pre-broadcast engagement involves video "teasers" with the authors reading their work or chatting with the interviewer, teasers which are shared on Facebook and Twitter. The actual interviews are broadcast on our FM station, with additional content at WNIJ.org. That additional content includes a video of the author reading a different excerpt from the one audiences heard during the radio interview. Before these interviews air, or appear on WNIJ.org, we reach out to area libraries and bookstores so they can alert their patrons about the series and WNIJ's commitment to regional literature. In addition to our "Read With Me" interviews, we offer writing contests at least twice a year, one for short fiction and one for poetry, and invite regional authors to judge and issue prompts. These contests attracted hundreds of submissions from area listeners, ranging in age from 18 to 83.

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.

Major collaborations for WNIJ are with other members of the Illinois Public Radio consortium, where we share stories we have developed with other areas of the state and share with our audience relevant stories from elsewhere in the state. We also interview reporters and editors from regional news media to provide more complete information on important stories. We regularly work with faculty and staff at Northern Illinois University and other area institutions of higher education to provide in-depth discussion and analysis of issues and developments. We cooperate with public health departments to provide health information and warnings to our listening audience.

Public libraries and independent bookstores in the WNIJ area promote our "Read With Me" series to their patrons. We'll expand this partnership to include bringing our author-interviewees into the libraries to broaden the discussion about their work and regional literature. Also, libraries and bookstores helped promote our writing contests for short fiction and poetry.

Our audience includes a broad geographic area in diverse communities with a wide range of challenges and opportunities. Several key initiatives are ongoing 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 a live events series called, Context. This program was created to take a deeper dive into issues affecting the people who live and work in the communities we serve. This year's Context looked crime and policing in the Rockford community, the Rockford mayor and police chief along with the city's state representative were panelists for this event.

The station continues to broaden its relationships with regional musicians through a weekly program called Encore. Encore has made performances widely available that otherwise would require a ticket to the concert hall. This year WNIJ forged a new partnership with a regional cultural center, this has translated into live and broadcast based classical music performances.

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 allows 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.

Literature programming has increased awareness of the many authors who are writing in the WNIJ-WNIU area. The most measurable impact results from our writing contests (flash fiction and poetry) where we attracted submissions from all over northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin

Context examined crime and policing in the major metro in our market. This event aimed to connect residents with the mayor, police chief and state legislator while providing deeper awareness of how the city and residents are responding to issues. Attendee and panel feedback was positive.

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.

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 2016, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2017. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

WNIJ News reported an in-depth series on crime in our area's largest city, the people (minority community) most affected, and the official efforts to reform law-enforcement practices. The station also held a community forum to discuss the issues and activities to reduce crime.

Writing contests are open to everybody -- including creative writing students -- so people of diverse backgrounds have an opportunity to be winners. During the "Read With Me" interviews, half of the featured authors are women. As for ethnic diversity, we have featured and will continue to feature authors as diverse as the listening area. The project is also expanding with discussion of books for teens and middle-grade readers by partnering with NIU Literacy Education prof. Melanie Koss, who chaired the 2017 Printz Awards for teen readers. Prof. Koss will now be a regular feature on WNIJ with her recommendations of new books (by national and regional authors) for young readers.

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 FY17 we will continue to examine these issues for broadcast and as part of the Context series.

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, programming and engagement 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 on local and nationally distributed programming. CPB funding is also leveraged to raise dollars from other foundation, the CPB brings a high profile funder to the station image.