WERN: Telling Public Radio’s Story 2015-2016

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.

Wisconsin Public Radio’s (WPR) WERN is committed to community service through news, information, music and entertainment content on air, online and in communities across the state. All of our content is produced with the highest standards of ethics and audience service. We strive to serve Wisconsin’s diverse communities and perspectives with content that is trustworthy, informative, useful, civil and inspiring.

WPR regularly gathers input on community issues, programming decisions and other concerns of our listeners and the broader public. Twice during the reporting period the station partnered with St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin for a statewide survey of residents. Results of the survey, which focuses on state and national issues and concerns, is used to guide production of news content heard within newscasts and special segments during WPR’s broadcasts of NPR’s Morning Edition and All Things Considered.

Results of the survey were used to shape stand-alone news stories, but they also influenced coverage of stories throughout the year in broadcast and on wpr.org. During the reporting period, WPR provided unbiased coverage on the Wisconsin Supreme Court race, presidential primaries, policing, education, immigration, the economy and much more.

The WPR news team received numerous awards during the reporting period. Our reporters covered the state’s long-term unemployed, looked at ageing in Wisconsin, explored challenges in literacy, evaluated progress made on Governor Scott Walker’s campaign promises, and tracked every gun homicide in Wisconsin for a year. Reporters at our seven statewide affiliated news bureaus also supplied carefully researched stories from diverse voices and locations across the state.
And, in addition to the reporters’ contributions to the daily news broadcasts, WPR’s regional reporters also contributed to award-winning local programs - including Route 51 in Wausau and the cultural magazine Spectrum West in Eau Claire and Menomonie - on affiliated stations.

WPR also collaborated with Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) and University of Wisconsin-Extension to hold a series of meetings with residents and leaders in communities around the state. Staff from across our organization - including reporters, hosts, producers, membership and administrative staff - attended meetings in Green Bay and Barron to listen and learn about the issues and concerns of those communities. Like the Wisconsin Survey noted above, results of these engagement meetings were shared throughout the station and influenced our content in FY2016.

Beyond broadcast, WERN’s and its affiliates news and cultural stories are also featured in articles at wpr.org where audiences can post comments, ask questions and connect with other listeners through our online forums. During the reporting period, wpr.org received more than 10 million pageviews and delivered thousands of articles and live-streamed and archive audio.

WPR also uses Twitter and Facebook to distribute content, engage audiences on and off air, and for promotion. During the reporting period, WERN and its affiliates invited listeners to post questions, share information and engage with our hosts and guests on social media. Our main Facebook page “Likes” increased by 31%, to more than 37,000, as users continued to turn to WPR’s social media to stay up to date on everything from breaking news to job openings and community events.

On top of our survey, our community engagement events, our website, and our social media pages, WPR collaborates with WPT to offer a toll-free phone number and email account for public feedback. Each year this in-house audience services team answers more than 36,000 requests from Wisconsinites eager to learn more about the news and information they hear on our programs. These public comments are compiled and shared with the entire WPR staff on a regular basis.

The station and its affiliates are also dedicated to providing a cultural resource to its listeners, with curated classical, folk and jazz music and other related programming. Concert recordings from venues around the state, interviews, and performances ranging from small student ensembles to professional symphony orchestras are part of WPR’s Wisconsin Classical program. During the reporting period, WPR launched a new summer music series focused on regional rap, folk and indie-rock music groups. The series, called Set List, was posted online at wpr.org/setlist and some segments were used during our statewide broadcasts of NPR’s Morning Edition.

Live music continues to be an important part of our mission and programs like The Midday regularly feature performances from some of the best state, national and international talents available. We are proud to sponsor many community performances, knowing that exposure on WPR’s airwaves and website help keep local musicians and venues strong. Simply Folk
broadcasts concerts recorded in Wisconsin, songs for the season and traditional music of people the world over. Higher Ground with Dr. Jonathan Overby features “world music with African roots and more” each Saturday night. WERN’s The Odyssey Series explores many types of music and its power to create greater understanding of those near and far.

WERN’s licensee, the Wisconsin Educational Communications Board, partners with the University of Wisconsin-Extension to produce and distribute programming under the banner Wisconsin Public Radio. According to Nielsen, the partnership reached an average of 488,000 listeners each week in the spring of 2016. WPR’s websites – including WisconsinLife.org and WisconsinVote.org - had more than 10.5 million page views.

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.

WPR’s WERN and affiliates provide extensive election coverage and collaborate with Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) to broadcast important events, including the governor’s State of the State address, budget address, and state celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We encourage listeners to experience the state from diverse perspectives. Wisconsin Life, our state culture collaboration with WPT, continues this commitment by featuring stories of unexpected Wisconsin people and places on WPR, WPT and online at wisconsinlife.org.

In FY2016, as in all election years, we invited ballot-certified candidates to participate in broadcast debates, forums and interviews and to record unfiltered candidate statements. During the reporting period, WPR and WPT collaborated to host and broadcast a candidate debate for the State Supreme Court election. And WERN and its affiliates also carried the presidential primary debates broadcast nationally through NPR.

WisconsinVote.org, WPR and WPT’s award-winning election site, offers immediate access to voting information, candidate statements and extensive unbiased reporting on issues that affect the people of Wisconsin. The site served more than 308,000 visitors during the fiscal year.

WPR, WPT and University of Wisconsin-Extension also collaborated during the reporting period to launch a long-form, digital-first news site called WisContext.org. The site presents the reporting, research and community-based expertise of these partners to provide information and insight about urgent and emergent issues that affect Wisconsin, including: agriculture/food, environment, health, money, people/policy and science/technology. WisContext.org content is open to syndication, and may be republished by media organizations and educators free of charge.
Wisconsin Remembers: A Face for Every Name is a traveling exhibit that features a photo for each of the 1,161 Wisconsinites officially listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. This poignant display was created by WPR and WPT in partnership with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum for use by veterans and community groups at schools, libraries and other public buildings in every county.

Over the past eight years, students, teachers, and many other volunteers from throughout Wisconsin collected photos from friends and families of those who were killed in the war. The images they found help tell the story of the Wisconsinites behind the names on The Wall and will be part of a permanent Education Center being built on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.

The partners also collaborate on culture and entertainment programs, including Final Forte, an annual young performers classical music competition managed by the Madison Symphony Orchestra. The final competition features four young soloists performing live on stage with the orchestra. It is a free public event and is broadcast statewide live on WERN and its affiliates and recorded for later broadcast by WPT. WPR also continued our partnership with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, broadcasting live and recorded concerts statewide.

WERN and its affiliates expanded their commitment to educating the next generation of reporters with the first Mike Simonson Fellowship for Investigative Journalism in partnership with the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism. The fellowship, like our Lee Ester News Fellowship, helps attract some of the brightest young minds in journalism to public broadcasting. During the reporting period, WPR also announced a third fellowship, The Second Century News Fellowship, focused on diversity and inclusion.

WPR hosts regularly make special appearances at events around the state that encourage cultural diversity, music education, the arts and more. And, each month, WPR sponsors dozens of community events around the state to help local nonprofits in the arts, science, business and more connect with our listeners.

Portage County Ice Age Trail, North Lakeland Discovery Center, Marshfield Cultural Fair, Highground Veterans Memorial Park, Center for the Visual Arts, Boys and Girls Club, Wausau Chamber of Commerce.

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.

WERN and its affiliates provide the largest network of news bureaus of any media in the state, providing in-depth explorations of Wisconsin’s public affairs issues and ideas. Every day our broadcasts and online resources help people across the state connect with elected officials and public servants at all levels of local, state and national government. Our coverage of the state and federal elections during FY2016 was particularly important to voters.

In election years, we invite ballot-certified candidates to participate in broadcast interviews and to record unfiltered candidate statements. WPR and WPT’s non-partisan WisconsinVote.org project helps citizens find information about voter registration and candidates, and hosts public issue and candidate forums throughout the state. During the reporting period, which included state elections and federal primaries, the site garnered more than 308,000 visits.

The Wisconsin Remembers exhibit, which features a photo for each of the 1,161 Wisconsinites listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., has been requested by community groups throughout the state. The exhibit was created by WPR in partnership with WPT and the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. An outdoor version of the exhibit was donated by several businesses, including Adams Outdoor Advertising, for display at the World’s Largest Brat Fest on Memorial Day Weekend, 2016.

As noted above, our hosts regularly make special appearances at events around the state that encourage literacy, music education, cultural diversity and more. We meet regularly with community members to ensure our programs are addressing issues that affect real people in Wisconsin. We help local nonprofits promote community events that celebrate nature, agriculture, science, performing arts, families and just plain fun. These promotional partners often report back that our broadcast announcement had a significant impact on their event attendance and success of their programs.
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.

WPR, including WERN and its affiliates, is committed to serving all Wisconsinites and to reflecting the diverse experiences and perspectives of our state in our programs and staffing. As noted above, our community engagement meetings – a partnership with UW-Extension and Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) – invited diverse partners to share their hopes and concerns about community issues with WPR, WPT and UWEX staff. Two meetings were held during the reporting period, in Green Bay and Barron, and minority individuals and organizations that serve diverse audiences were invited to participate. Production staff were encouraged to attend the meetings in person and comments from the meetings were shared with all staff.

During the reporting period, WPR and WPT collaborated to draft a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan to reinforce our commitment to serving all Wisconsinites. A cross-departmental, cross-organizational “change team” was created to work with leadership and staff on implementing the plan. WPR and WPT was one of a handful of area organizations selected for training through the YWCA’s program “Creating Equitable Organizations.”

This program encompasses both internal culture and external content and constituents and included internal staff assessments and training to support strategic planning and action towards change as framed by the Multicultural Organizational Development Model (MCOD) provided by the YWCA.

All WPR staff are encouraged to participate in a two-day Multicultural Awareness Workshop from the UW-Extension’s Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and several staff members have been trained to lead these workshops for other employees in the campus system. The facilitated workshops bring participants together from across the institution to “increase the diversity of our programs and partnerships; enhance our ability to apply multicultural concepts and practices in our work; and improve our ability to recruit and retain a diverse work force while valuing and building on the strengths and abilities of all our staff.”

On air and online during this reporting period, WERN and its affiliate reporters covered a significant number of stories that explored issues of diversity, including education, policing, business development, elections, immigration and a weeklong series looking at literacy in Wisconsin among other things.
In addition to exploring issues of diversity through our news coverage, our cultural coverage regularly features people and places that reflect Wisconsin’s diverse population. Wisconsin Life, our collaboration with WPT, has featured stories by and about immigration, religion, community and important figures and events of Wisconsin’s past and present.

Each January, we broadcast the official state ceremony honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., produced and hosted by WPR’s Dr. Jonathan Overby. Our music programming reflects the diversity of musical traditions around the world, including Higher Ground and the Odyssey Series, which focuses on music from around the world and its power to create greater understanding of those near and far.

Our website, wpr.org, also live streams the annual State of the Tribes Address from the State Capitol. And, through our community partnerships we regularly feature and promote events and educational activities that embrace diversity and inclusion.

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?

We share and preserve the stories of Wisconsin’s people. Our programs celebrate Wisconsin’s way of life. We reach out beyond broadcasts to serve Wisconsin online and in the community. Without CPB funding, all of these things would be affected. WERN is the flagship for the largest and only statewide radio news organization in Wisconsin. Because of strong funding support, we continue to attract and keep the best available broadcast journalists, including two full-time reporters at the Capitol.

The scope of national programs broadcast on WERN and its affiliates would be greatly diminished without CPB’s support. Programs like NPR’s Morning Edition and All Things Considered help keep our listeners connected to the world and help us put local and statewide content in a national or even international context.

CPB funding helps ensure that our cultural programming - including the presentation of local, national and internationally respected classical musicians – is available for tens of thousands of listeners every week. And, of course, CPB funding contributes to our ability to reach audiences beyond broadcast with online streaming, news and cultural content, mobile apps, community events and more.