

2/12/21

SAS Radio Section 6 - Local Content and Services Report – “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 2019. 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.

WMRA’s mission is to be a trusted source of news and information that supports an engaged community. WMRA’s vision is to be recognized as the essential, community-supported source of news, information, and stories significant to our listening area. WMRA seeks to achieve these goals through long-form stories, news features, a daily news podcast, digital media, and community involvement. In Fiscal Year 2020, WMRA’s local news team continued to report on local issues and the impact of national issues on local communities. Local news was especially crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 12, 2020, WMRA reported on the first confirmed case in its listening area, and continued to provide daily case count updates in local newscasts. Throughout the pandemic, WMRA journalists have reported on how restrictions have affected local schools, retirement homes, small businesses, food banks, cultural organizations, and more. In addition to news reports, WMRA produced a series of interviews with the mayors of several cities within the listening area. In early summer 2020, WMRA reported on a local protest for racial justice in response to the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

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.

WMRA regularly partners with Virginia Public Radio and WCVE in Richmond to provide more comprehensive coverage of local and state news. Highlights included Virginia Public Radio’s two-part report from inside the ICE Detention Center in Farmville, plus a report on the effects of COVID-19 on Virginia’s Latino communities. WMRA shares these stations’ features on-air and

in WMRA's daily news podcast, "The WMRA Daily". WMRA also features content from local, independent newspapers—Harrisonburg's "The Citizen" and Charlottesville's "Charlottesville Tomorrow"—on the station's website and mobile app.

The station partnered with a local business and a track club for its second 5K race in July 2019. WMRA was once again a media sponsor for the Red Wing Roots Music Festival, and the station produced an on-air interview with one of the festival's founders. Many of WMRA's partnerships with cultural organizations were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, WMRA's local news team continued to report on how the pandemic restrictions affected these organizations, whether they were forced to pivot performances online or temporarily shut down their operations.

WMRA's cultural event series, "Books & Brews," resulted in 12 hours of community engagement and featured six local authors. In September 2019, James Madison University presented its third installment of the John Grisham Writers Hour series. Author John Grisham spoke with historian Jon Meacham in front of a live audience. WMRA edited the discussion to an hour-long podcast for broadcast on WMRA and for national distribution. WMRA plans to continue producing and distributing the podcasts for future installments, but the COVID-19 pandemic has currently placed the series on hold.

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.

WMRA continues to be voted "Best Radio Station" every year by readers of the Harrisonburg daily newspaper. The Virginia Association of Broadcasters awarded WMRA first place for 2019 Feature Reporting for medium market stations for the May 2019 story, "A Day in the Life of Highland County's Sheriff." The VAB also awarded WMRA second place for Human Interest Series for the December 2019 story, "Staunton High Schooler Wins National Song-Writing Award."

WMRA's "Books & Brews" events continue to be well attended with two back-to-back events in Harrisonburg and Charlottesville per month. Notable topics in the 2019-2020 season included mental health issues, freshwater fishes of Virginia, and the history of American Indians in the Southeast. In addition to the live events, WMRA recorded interviews with "Books & Brews" guests for on-air and web distribution. WMRA's spring 2020 season of "Books & Brews" was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but WMRA successfully transitioned the events online beginning in summer 2020. The third installment of the John Grisham Writers Hour was released in podcast form in November 2019 and was downloaded 319 times.

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 2020, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2021. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

In Fiscal Year 2020, WMRA continued to report on local news affecting diverse communities. In February 2020, WMRA produced a two-part story on the legacy of Harrisonburg’s “urban renewal” and its effect on African-American neighborhoods. WMRA also produced a two-part story on concerns over Valley poultry workers (a predominantly Latino and immigrant community) and their lack of COVID-19 protections at work. In August 2019, WMRA launched an occasional news series, My World, which asks local students to submit their questions about the environment. The first two stories focused on the environmental effects of the local interstate. The purpose of this series is to help local students engage in local journalism and environmental issues. Other WMRA local news features included reports on an LGBTQ club in Waynesboro, workshops for immigrants’ rights groups, a vigil for DACA recipients after the Trump Administration ended the program, and a proposed African American history center in New Market. In November 2019, WMRA interviewed Dr. Gail Christopher, a change agent who facilitates racial healing workshops.

WMRA reported on the 22nd annual Harrisonburg International Festival in September 2019. The festival features the art, music, and food of Harrisonburg residents from Mexico, Russia, China, West Africa, and other parts of the world.

WMRA’s sister station, WEMC, continues to air “Concierto”—which is broadcast in both English and Spanish—on Saturday afternoons, and addresses the needs of the strong Hispanic and Latino population in WMRA’s audience.

WMRA’s mobile app, which allows listeners to access news in areas with limited radio broadcast coverage, continued to grow in its second year. In Fiscal Year 2020, the app had 3,565 unique users and an average of 300 daily users. WMRA’s daily news podcast had 39,856 downloads with an average of 109 downloads per day. Station news stories had over 15,000 total downloads over the course of the fiscal year. The most popular story on WMRA’s website was a report on a Staunton neighborhood whose residents engaged in howling each evening during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. This story had 4,646 views in Fiscal Year 2020, with an average user visit time of about five minutes.

In Fiscal Year 2021, WMRA created a special news series, Mental Health Matters. The nine-part series explored access to mental health services, and how therapies have adjusted to the crises of a global pandemic, economic downturn, and protests over police brutality and racial injustice. Topics included access to mental health support for people of color and children. In addition, WMRA plans to continue coverage of local workers’ strikes and protests for racial justice in summer 2020 and beyond.

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?

With CPB funding, WMRA can afford to provide national news programming from NPR. This eases WMRA's financial burden, so the station can focus its efforts on providing more coverage of WMRA's local communities. WMRA covers a large geographic area, with many listeners living in rural areas with no reliable internet or television. A significant portion of WMRA's audience relies on radio—and WMRA in particular—to stay connected on a local, national, and international scale. Without CPB funding, WMRA would have to significantly reduce its local news reporting, which would lead to the local community losing the in-depth coverage and insights that national news reports alone cannot provide. This is especially crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, as WMRA continues to report on matters important to community safety.