

CPB Local Content Report for Fiscal Year 2024

ID: 1668

Grantee Name: WLSU

City: Madison

State: Wisconsin

Licensee Type: State

July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

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 2023. 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.*

Wisconsin Public Radio's (WPR) WLSU is committed to community service through news, information, music and entertainment content on air, online and in communities across the state. All of the station's content is produced with the highest standards of ethics and audience service. WPR strives to reflect and serve Wisconsin's communities and perspectives with programs, events and digital content that is trustworthy, informative, useful, civil and inspiring.

Our reporters, producers, hosts and staff regularly gather input on community issues, programming decisions and other concerns of our listeners and the broader public. Staff and leadership rely on state and national survey results, including regular Marquette Law School polls in Wisconsin, to help guide the production of news and information coverage.

During FY2024, WPR journalists at WLSU and seven other affiliated news bureaus offered grounded and engaging coverage, with thoughtful interviews and analysis of the issues affecting Wisconsin communities. The public relied on WPR for accurate, unbiased news about personal and public health, the environment, policing, politics, education, prison reform, sports and cultural life in Wisconsin.

In January, the 2024 presidential election campaign got underway and WPR committed to encouraging more Wisconsinites to participate. In addition to rigorous election coverage, WPR journalists also produced a bilingual voter registration guide and an engagement effort that invited anyone to submit questions for the candidates. They also

held a series of public “Reporter Office Hours” at locations around the state to meet with Wisconsinites and to learn more about their top issues and concerns during the spring and summer months. Some of this work was part of a year-long collaboration with America Amplified, a national project involving public radio stations around the nation funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

As the national debate around abortion rights continued in 2023, WPR’s special series “How We Got Here: Abortion in Wisconsin Since 1849” explored how the state’s abortion ban came to be, and how Wisconsinites have lived with and without it since. The series was heard during weekday news programs, a special documentary and posted as articles on wpr.org.

WPR also shared stories of Wisconsinites with their eyes on the future, like Jadyn Mathison, an Onalaska High School senior who signed up for the region’s youth firefighter program so she could continue a family tradition. Or Naomi Littlegeorge, who joined a project to record and preserve the sounds of Hoocąk for an instructional app, so future generations can use current tools to learn and study the Ho-Chunk language.

As part of WPR’s continuing commitment to training the next generation of journalists, the station hired three reporters as part of our fellowship program.

During the reporting period, WPR changed its schedules, including on WLSU and its affiliates. The organization also added a new station, WEPP, serving rural Rice Lake. As noted in the FY2023 SAS report, WPR conducted some of its most significant audience research in the past 30 years prior to the changes, including focus groups, a survey focused on technology use and a content survey that had 6,000 responses. The reorganized statewide service was designed to help listeners more easily find and enjoy news and music on the radio and on wpr.org.

On May 20, 2024, WPR’s two networks - “NPR News & Music” and “The Ideas Network” - became “WPR News” and “WPR Music.” The Ideas Network name was retired and its staff and many of its programs will be part of WPR News. All of WPR’s 39 stations shifted format to either WPR News or WPR Music. WLSU, which was an NPR News & Music station, became a WPR News station offering local, state, national and international news all day, every day. Most listeners continued to hear both services, but some needed to reset their radio dials to get the programs they were used to hearing.

To help listeners explore the changes and prepare for the new service, WPR launched an extensive communications campaign on air, online, and in the media. A dedicated web portal, wpr.org/new, included updated station maps, schedules for the new networks and other details about the changes.

WPR engaged with communities and audiences across the state with in-person and online events in FY2024. Approximately 700 people attended more than 10 in-person community events regarding WPR’s schedule changes in the spring of 2024. The events helped explain the changes and included time for questions and answers. Our hosts and reporters appeared at community events organized by local orchestras, libraries and universities.

WPR collaborates with PBS Wisconsin to offer a toll-free phone number and email

account for public feedback. Each year this in-house audience services team answers tens of thousands of requests from Wisconsinites eager to learn more about the news and information they hear on air or see online. These public comments are compiled and shared with the entire WPR staff regularly. With changes to our website and schedule during the reporting period, our audience services team answered questions about the new services and helped listeners find their favorite programs and networks.

Although WLSU became an all-news network at the end of this fiscal year, the news-classical service, and its affiliates, were dedicated to providing a cultural resource to its listeners, with curated classical, folk and jazz music and other related programming for most of the reporting period. Concert recordings from venues around the state, interviews, and performances ranging from small student ensembles to professional symphony orchestras were part of WPR's "Wisconsin Classical" program on WLSU. Local broadcast series included the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and the Madison Opera, among others.

Through May 20, WLSU programs like "The Midday" featured live music performances from some of the best state, national and international performers. "Simply Folk" featured traditional and modern folk music from throughout the U.S. and the world. "The Road to Higher Ground with Jonathan Øverby" featured "world music with African roots and more" each Saturday night. WLSU's "The Odyssey Series" explored many types of music and its power to create a greater understanding of those near and far.

WLSU and its affiliates' news and cultural stories are also featured at wpr.org. The site was rebuilt and relaunched in January 2024 to make it easier for audiences to listen to our live streams and explore and share our news, information and cultural content online. Combined, the new and rebuilt site received millions of pageviews and delivered thousands of articles and live-streamed and archived audio during the reporting period.

WLSU and its affiliates invited listeners to post questions, share information and engage with our hosts and guests on social media. WPR's main Facebook page had nearly 70,000 followers, gaining approximately 5,000 new followers during the reporting period as users turned to WPR's social media to stay up to date on breaking news, special programs, community events and more. The Ideas Network Facebook page had nearly 29,000 followers over the reporting period; note, this page was renamed WPR Music, Arts & Culture at the end of the reporting period as part of broader schedule changes in late Spring 2024. WPR's Instagram had more than 4,200 followers during FY2024, growing more than 45%.

WLSU's licensee, the Wisconsin Educational Communications Board, partners with the University of Wisconsin to produce and distribute programming under the banner of WPR. WPR is committed to offering its programs on the radio and online. According to Nielsen, the partnership reached a weekly average of 315,000 listeners in FY2024. WPR's websites had more than 14.8 million annual pageviews, an increase of more than 16% over the previous year.

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 WLSU and affiliates provide extensive election coverage and collaborate with PBS Wisconsin to broadcast important events, including the annual governor's State of the State address, budget address, and state celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. WPR encourages its listeners to experience the state from diverse perspectives. "Wisconsin Life," WPR's state culture collaboration with PBS Wisconsin, continues this commitment by featuring stories of unexpected Wisconsin people and places on WPR, PBS Wisconsin and online at wisconsinlife.org.

WPR regularly partners with the non-profit Wisconsin Watch on investigative journalism projects. The groups collaborate on reporting projects and sometimes share content for distribution to a broader audience. As noted above, WLSU and its affiliates also continued their commitment to educating the next generation of reporters with the Mike Simonson Fellowship for Investigative Journalism, which is a partnership with the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism. The fellowship helps attract some of the brightest young minds in journalism to public broadcasting and supports a shared commitment to in-depth reporting on issues important to all Wisconsinites.

In August and September, WPR partnered with StoryCorps to record the stories and experiences of northeast Wisconsin area residents. StoryCorps interviews are designed to help family, friends and even strangers record meaningful conversations with one another about who they are, what they've learned in life, and how they want to be remembered.

StoryCorps' mobile studio was stationed at the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Brown County in Green Bay for four weeks. They recorded more than 100 interviews, in-person and virtually. The recording sessions were free and all participants received a digital copy of their recording. Recordings from Green Bay were archived in the Library of Congress and some were used for statewide broadcast on WPR's "Wisconsin Life" series. One story aired nationally during NPR's "Morning Edition."

WPR's partnership with the Green Bay Press Gazette on a special series called "Home is Here," focused on changing demographics in the Green Bay area, continued in FY2024. The project was part of the NEW (Northeast Wisconsin) News Lab – a local news collaboration in northeastern Wisconsin made up of six news organizations: the Green Bay Press-Gazette, Appleton Post-Crescent, FoxValley365, The Press Times, Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Watch. The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay's Journalism Department is an educational partner. Five stories by Black, Asian, Native American and Hispanic residents who call northeastern Wisconsin home were shared on WPR's "Wisconsin Life" series and in a live community event.

WPR's nationally distributed program, "To the Best of Our Knowledge," partnered with the Center for Humans and Nature and the Kalliopeia Foundation on a special series called "Deep Time." The series explored biological time, geological time, cosmic time, and ancestral time. It aired on WPR and stations nationwide during FY2023 and FY2024.

Wisconsin Remembers: A Face for Every Name is a traveling exhibit that features a photo for each of the 1,163 Wisconsinites officially listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. This poignant display was created in 2016 by WPR in

partnership with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum and PBS Wisconsin. Wisconsin Remembers appeared in locations around the state in FY2024.

Each year, WPR and PBS Wisconsin also collaborate on culture and entertainment programs, including The Final Forte, an annual classical music competition for young performers managed by the Madison Symphony Orchestra. The final competition features four young soloists performing live on stage with the orchestra. The free public event is also broadcast statewide live on WLSU and its affiliates and by PBS Wisconsin. WPR also has ongoing partnerships with the Wisconsin School Music Association, Madison Opera and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra to broadcast live and recorded concerts statewide.

WPR hosts regularly make special appearances at events around the state that encourage cultural diversity, music education, the arts and more. 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.

WPR amplified the messages of many community, government and nonprofit organizations that provided vital services to listeners around the state. In FY 2024, WPR offered listeners information on how to register to vote, where to vote, and how to vote in person or absentee in advance of state and local elections, including the Presidential Primary, held in the spring. This included on-air promotion of the voting information site of the State of Wisconsin Elections Commission, MyVote.WI.gov. WPR also partnered with state and regional nonprofits to air messages that directed listeners to providers of free mental health counseling and gave information on accessing emergency heating assistance among other things.

WLSU and its affiliates also partner with dozens of non-profit arts and community organizations in communities throughout the state to shine a light on local arts and culture events and activities.

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.

WLSU 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 WPR 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. WPR's audience engagement project WHYsconsin invites anyone to submit questions or experiences on any Wisconsin topic through an online portal.

As mentioned in our FY2023 report, WPR partnered with PBS Wisconsin, the Public Service Commission and the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association to promote the federal government's Emergency Broadband Benefit Initiative and support access to this essential service throughout the state for several years. When new legislation extended the program under a new name, the Affordable Connectivity Program, WPR continued

the promotional partnership into the current reporting period, helping even more people get access to affordable high speed internet service. The program concluded in the fall of 2023. When thanking WPR for their on air and online promotion, Alyssa Kenney at the Public Service Commission said: “Wisconsin achieved almost 50% enrollment and remained in the top 10 states for program enrollment in this critical internet affordability program.”

As noted above, the Wisconsin Remembers exhibit created by WPR and partners, which features a photo for each of the 1,163 Wisconsinites listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., has been requested by community groups and displayed in dozens of locations throughout the state. In FY2024, a non-profit veterans group called Vets and Friends of Wisconsin, reached out with a request to partner and produce a version of the traveling exhibit for permanent display in their coffeeshop and food pantry in Appleton. It is the second location in the state to have a permanent public display of the exhibit.

WLSU and its statewide affiliates support music education through partnerships with the Wisconsin School Music Association, the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra, the Madison Symphony Orchestra, the University of Wisconsin School of Music, Viterbo University, Lawrence University and other programs around the state. In FY2024, WPR sponsored community performances, competitions and educational conferences.

WPR’s commitment to celebrating young talent over the reporting period included the statewide broadcast of selections from the annual Wisconsin School Music Association Honors Concerts and the Madison Symphony Orchestra’s “Final Forte” Bolz Young Artist Competition. In FY2024, we worked closely with the Madison Symphony Orchestra to try and boost attendance at the final competition concert. Numbers had dropped following the pandemic and so we increased our promotion and outreach efforts. More than 1,000 people registered to attend and the symphony’s marketing director Peter Rodgers said, “This is definitely a nice step forward to pre-pandemic numbers. Thanks to everyone for your work to increase attendance this year. What a magical concert and production.”

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

WPR news, talk and digital teams were honored with more than a dozen state, regional, and national awards for investigative reporting, series, feature stories, and podcasts during the reporting period. These included award-winning pieces on topics ranging from Wisconsin’s aging prison population to a sharp decline in high school football participation to refugee resettlement to a rock and roll camp for girls.

Awards included seven honors from the Milwaukee Press Club, including four Gold awards for feature reporting; four Regional Murrow awards from the Radio Television Digital News Association for feature and series reporting; and three awards for Medium-Market Radio News and Talk from the Wisconsin Broadcaster’s Association. WPR’s “To The Best of Our Knowledge presents Luminous” was a finalist for Best

Knowledge, Science, or Tech Podcast from the Ambies, the national audio production awards from the Podcast Academy.

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 2023, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2024. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

WPR, including WLSU and its affiliates, is committed to serving all Wisconsinites and to reflecting the diverse experiences and perspectives of our state in its programs and staffing. This includes highlighting voices from people of all backgrounds in Wisconsin.

WPR is committed to reflecting Wisconsin's diversity on air. WPR's journalists and producers rely on guest experts, authors, scientists, elected officials and business owners to provide context, perspective and experience to their coverage. More than 3,500 individuals may appear on WPR airwaves each year. WPR has worked to diversify the pool of on-air guests and experts that we interview for news and information content through enhanced training and data collection.

Throughout the reporting period, WLSU and its affiliate reporters covered stories that explored issues reflecting diverse experiences and perspectives, including education, the environment, sports, criminal justice, entrepreneurship, immigration, music and Wisconsin history, among other topics.

In FY2024, WPR journalists launched a community engagement effort as part of the CPB-funded American Amplified election coverage project. The project included a bilingual voter registration guide and an outreach effort that invited anyone to submit questions for the candidates. They also held a series of public "Reporter Office Hours" at locations around the state to meet with Wisconsinites and to learn more about their top issues and concerns this year. The project continued through the summer and included plans for a candidate survey and guide for voters in the fall, during the next reporting period.

As noted above, WPR's "Home is Here" collaboration with the Green Bay Press Gazette looked at growing diversity in the Green Bay area and invited residents to share their stories on air, online and during community events. "Wisconsin Life," a collaboration with PBS Wisconsin, has featured stories by and about immigration, religion, community and important figures and events of Wisconsin's past and present. Through community partnerships, the station regularly features and promotes events and educational activities that embrace diversity and inclusion.

Each January, the station broadcasts the official state ceremony honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., produced and hosted by WPR's Dr. Jonathan Øverby. WPR's music programs also reflect the diversity of musical traditions around the world, including "The Road to Higher Ground" and "The Odyssey Series," which focus on music from around the world and its power to create a greater understanding of those near and far.

WLSU and its affiliates also broadcast the annual State of the Tribes Address from the State Capitol. It is live streamed on wpr.org. The broadcast, along with our regular news and cultural coverage including state and Tribal perspectives, is part of a stationwide commitment to collaborating with, and learning from, First Nations in our service area.

WPR includes overlooked composers and conductors in our music programs - not because they've been overlooked, but because they create incredible music that audiences will enjoy. Composers such as William Grant Still and Florence Price, and conductors like JoAnn Faletta and Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla are just a few examples.

WPR's music database includes information on the race and gender of composers and musicians. This allows music staff to more easily identify music from artists considered underrepresented, and ensure that we are reflecting the experiences and perspectives of people across Wisconsin. These efforts began before the current reporting period and are ongoing projects.

WPR also schedules many nationally-produced programs on our station, including content from NPR, American Public Media, PRX and others. When selecting such programs for broadcast in Wisconsin, we look at a variety of factors, including the host with an eye on bringing more diverse perspectives and experiences to our schedule.

With staff, studios and offices located throughout Wisconsin, WPR continues its work to reflect the diversity of Wisconsin experiences and perspectives throughout the organization. In addition to our compliance with all state and federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requirements, WPR works closely with our human resource offices at the University of Wisconsin to manage our recruitment and hiring practices equitably and inclusively. The station promotes job openings through mainstream employment listings and paid, targeted promotion through social media and professional networks.

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?

WPR uncovers, shares and preserves the stories of Wisconsin's people. Its programs celebrate Wisconsin's way of life. WPR reaches out beyond broadcasts to serve Wisconsin online and in the community. Without CPB funding, all of these things would be affected. WLSU is the flagship station for the largest and only statewide radio news organization in Wisconsin. WPR's news team and talk show producers work together to provide deeper coverage and conversation of big issues like elections, the economy, immigration, health and more. Because of strong funding support, WPR continues to attract and keep the best available broadcast journalists, producers and hosts, including two full-time reporters at the Capitol.

Federal support, in addition to state, business and individual support, is critical to WPR's balanced, sustainable and responsible approach to funding its essential services. During down cycles in the economy or health emergencies like the recent pandemic, reliable funding from the CPB allows WPR to maintain services and a lifeline of information for all Wisconsinites. Without CPB funding, it would be difficult to maintain our coverage of news events that are essential to families, businesses and communities across the state.

The scope of national programs broadcast on WLSU and its affiliates would be greatly diminished without CPB's support. Programs like NPR's "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered" help listeners connect with their elected officials, their nation and the world. Without CPB funding, WPR's ability to put local and statewide news in a national and international context would be limited.

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