

CPB Station Activity Survey

- 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.**

Six key outputs defined the strategic initiatives at Vermont Public Radio in this reporting period. The outputs are designed to strengthen the impacts and outcomes of the organization and included: (1) investigative reporting, (2) podcasting, (3) human resources, (5) directed giving, and (6) an upgraded digital audio system. These outputs supported the overall strategic plan to "explore the whole Vermont story, together." Under that umbrella, to address community issues, needs and interests, the organization promotes key initiatives that include innovation in news and enterprise reporting, communication and collaboration, use of VPR facilities to expand the dimension of our public service, channeling inspiration into support for public radio, and maintaining a sound financial plan to accomplish the above.

The focus on the initiatives and outputs resulted in a variety of long and short-form content, digital and in-person engagement, education services, community information, partnership support, and new audiences.

Examples of the work that addressed community issues, needs and interests included most prominently a limited run podcast series titled *Jolted*. *Jolted* was a five-part reported podcast about the school shooting threat against Fair Haven Union High School. A small team from the newsroom dug into what happened, the legal challenges it raised, and the significant changes that resulted in Vermont's gun laws as a result of the planned shooting, which was prevented by local officials. The series was launched as a podcast and later was broadcast over the air. The project was a combined project of VPR's investigative, podcasting and news teams. It was intended to explore and explain the potential tragedy and to engage the community of Fair Haven and the state of Vermont in a full and deep discussion of the issue that has concerned the nation.

One of the main issues of this year was the run-up to the midterm elections. On Primary Election Day, VPR hosted a live blog with information on polling places and turnout around the state. After the polls closed, VPR News broadcast live updates from 7 to 10 p.m., and continued to update the website. The following day Morning Edition Host Mitch Wertlieb interviewed the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, Christine Hallquist, and All Things Considered Host Henry Epp talked with Gov. Phil Scott. The live coverage followed a set of profiles, interviews and candidate debates. VPR contributed to the NPR report with coverage of the Hallquist win, which became a national story.

To determine what the community issues are in Vermont, VPR joined with Vermont PBS to conduct a public opinion survey in July to determine the top concerns. A joint website was only one aspect of the poll, which was fully transparent and opened all the data to public use. Full news coverage included top issues for Vermonters and name recognition of primary election candidates (which were borne out in the actual results of the election.) The poll was discussed in an episode of Vermont Edition and was the focus of Vermont This Week on Vermont PBS.

VPR addressed a number of community issues and needs with special reports.

In one special report, VPR provided in-depth coverage on the impact of the aging Baby Boom generation on Vermont in a variety of ways. The 11-segment project included an examination of the impact on the

economy, housing, and medical systems as well as a statewide conversation on Vermont Edition and various perspectives on social changes in the commentary series.

Another special report looked at the nearly 4,000 Vermont veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11, and how they are healing their invisible wounds of the nation's longest-running war through farming. In this special series and digital presentation, VPR's Peter Hirschfeld explored the stories of three Vermonters. Listeners heard the story of Lucas Papineau, who joined the Vermont National Guard when he was 18 years old, and found that farming had helped repair his relationship with his family. We heard the story of Brett, who worked an old hill farm in Norwich. Brett served in the Army, brought in a small flock of sheep to start reclaiming the soil, and told VPR that farming saved his life. "You can never say goodbye to the kind of experience that combat brings," he told Hirschfeld. And listeners heard from Jon Turner, who hosts educational workshops at Wild Roots in Bristol, where he makes sure that at least two veterans are in every class.

A special report on dying in prison examined the limited transparency in health care that is provided to Vermont's inmate population. In an in-depth examination of this issue, VPR reported that Vermont inmate Roger Brown died of metastatic cancer at the prison infirmary in Camp Hill, Pa., and that he wrote in his diary that prison medical staff provided him with ibuprofen, Tylenol and gel shoe inserts to manage his pain, never telling him that he had cancer. VPR also reported the story of Bobby Hutt, who spent months requesting medical care for pain in his leg, when one day his femur snapped. A lawsuit filed by his sister alleged that cancer should have been detected earlier and treated.

When Vermont became the first state to legalize marijuana through an act of the Legislature, VPR reporters covered this story extensively. Reporters covered debates in the House and the Senate and the bill-signing by a Republican governor that allows possession of up to an ounce of marijuana. Specifics of the law and a variety of detailed information were published on VPR.net.

Vermonters have long been aware of speed traps in the state, and investigative reporter Emily Corwin looked into where police issue the most speeding tickets in Vermont. She gathered data statewide and then visited the three towns of Mount Tabor, Plymouth and Bridgewater. VPR produced three on-air pieces and digital buildouts of those stories with data tables for people to look up how many tickets are issued in each town. All of the online pages for the project received 30,048 page views. The week the series was published, VPR's website received 32 percent more traffic than VPR.net received the same week a year ago.

Investigative reporting into groundwater pollution and reporting on a decline in milk prices led VPR to increase its focus on what is a crisis in dairy farming. A community engagement forum in VPR's Stetson Studio One brought together key people in the industry, VPR reporters, and the farming community to have a deep conversation about the subject. The News and Brews event was recorded and was produced later as a program on Vermont Edition. VPR's Investigative Reporter Emily Corwin and Senior Reporter John Dillon developed perspectives from Jackie Folsom, legislative director for the Vermont Farm Bureau; from Chris Kilian, vice president of the Conservation Law Foundation; from Roger Allbee, former Vermont agriculture secretary; and from Joshua Faulkner, an agricultural engineer with UVM Extension. Stetson Studio One was at capacity for the event.

In addition to these special reports, VPR's weekday news magazine Vermont Edition regularly addresses key community issues. A few highlights from the period include the following programs:

- A new investigation from BuzzFeed assembled allegations of abuse — possibly including murder — at a former Catholic orphanage in Burlington
- An examination of the changes in rail, road and air travel in Vermont and Quebec.
- Seven years after the devastation of Tropical Storm Irene, just how ready were homeowners and towns for future floods?
- After nurses at the UVM Medical Center went on a two-day strike the program heard from both sides.

- François Clemmons, longtime Middlebury resident, returned to the program to discuss his memorable role as Officer Clemmons on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.
- A scoop for Vermont Edition: Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard joined the show to discuss border issues, refugees, and U.S.-Canada relations.

Regarding new audiences and as part of VPR's strategic planning project for podcasting, the station conducted an on-air and digital audience education campaign. The campaign included a custom infographic, *A Beginner's Guide To Podcasts*, on VPR.net, a suite of on-air promos and live reads for VPR News and VPR Classical, a series of emails, and paid and organic social media content. VPR also distributed the guide at two VPR events – the Farm Show and a Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility the VBSR networking event. The Guide was the number-one post on VPR.net during the month.

Following the successful promotional campaign for podcasts in January, VPR launched a similar campaign to educate listeners and users about smart speakers. Again, VPR combined heavy broadcast promotion, email and social media to let people know the versatility of smart speakers. The campaign and web page offered information about how to customize the smart speaker listening experience. As the campaign took hold, vpr.net/smart saw upward of 150 clicks a day, more than 3,000 for the month.

VPR also co-hosted, with WBTV-LP a successful event to bring the podcasting community together to share ideas and possibilities. The "Invasion of the Pod People" was the first gathering of its kind in Vermont and also took place at VPR's Stetson Studio One. Guests included representatives from WBTV-LP, VT Digger, VCET, Vermont Humanities Council, RETN, VTPBS and VPR. There were 60 attendees and 20 different podcasts represented at the event.

VPR engaged audiences in a new way with its people-powered podcast *Brave Little State*. *Brave Little State* receives questions from listeners about issues that are important to them, the questions are voted on, and then VPR's reporting team answers the questions (with the question-asker) in a monthly episode of the podcast. Examples of how community issues and educational needs were addressed in *Brave Little State* include what happened with a Utah developer's plan to build an eco-utopia for 20,000 people on 5,000 acres in four towns. The podcast also explored what has happened to the hippies that moved to Vermont in the 1960s and 1970s. And the program explored the history of French-Canadian immigration in Vermont, and answered an often asked-question about whether Vermont is really losing young people. Many Vermonters work three jobs, and *Brave Little State* explored that issue.

Another example of a listener-driven podcast is VPR's *But Why*, the podcast for curious kids and their parents. Twice a month, the podcast answers questions large and small about nature, words, people, and even the end of the world. Some sample *But Why* episodes answered these questions:

- How Was the Universe Created?
- Why Is Milk White?
- How Does Your Heart Work?
- Why Do We Laugh?
- Why Do People Die?

In addition, *But Why* was part of the first podcast festival for kids in April in Boston. "Mega Awesome Super Huge Wicked Fun Podcast Playdate" was produced by WBUR and includes *Circle Round*, *Brains On*, *Story Pirates*, *Wow in the World*, and *WHYY's Eleanor Amplified!!* *But Why* appeared before an audience of several hundred people and explored the world of owls and other birds, a program that would later be repeated for Vermont audiences.

VPR reflects the community's needs for music experience and education. VPR produces the *Live from the Fort* music series of Vermont music, which reaches new audiences with a live performance and live streaming on Facebook.

Timeline: Elements a five-part educational series of podcasts based on the four elements of antiquity – fire, water, earth and air, plus the extra element added by Aristotle, ether was produced by VPR during

the year. This series dives into music, history, art, science and philosophy. Through the stories and facts presented *Timeline: Elements* seeks to allow the listener to draw connections from different disciplines and time periods.

- 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.**

The most comprehensive partnership during this period was a new collaboration with Vermont PBS that involved a variety of projects that were developed to provide increased and improved public service to a larger audience.

The first of those projects was the production of the VPR News Minute. The News Minute is a 60-second look at top stories in the news on Thursday's just before the PBS NewsHour. The News Minute is also published on social media and autoplays with captioning, resulting in close to 10,000 impressions (showing up in social media feeds) and hundreds of engagement sessions in which users open the post. The newscast is taped in the VPR news center each week by Vermont PBS videographers and is hosted by VPR's Henry Epp. This new segment provided the basis for additional collaborations during the year.

As mentioned above, the second collaboration with Vermont PBS involved the surveying of Vermonters in two public opinion surveys, one of which was completed in this fiscal year, and a second that was completed in the next fiscal year. The VPR-Vermont PBS Poll was conducted in July. It was the only Vermont poll of the Primary Election season and had significant attention, with a new joint website seeing some 12,000 page views in the first week.

The third collaboration and the most complex was the planning for a series of VPR and Vermont PBS political debates, hosted and produced by the VPR news team in collaboration with the Vermont PBS production team. The debates were planned to occur in the fall prior to the General Election.

VPR also collaborates with Independent producer Erica Heilman to broadcast a monthly program based on her podcast *Rumble Strip*. This feature program has made a big impact on listeners who value it for its insights into the human condition in Vermont. Heilman and VPR also collaborate in episodes of the VPR podcast *Brave Little State*.

VPR's longtime partnership with the Fairbanks Museum continued with broadcast, digital and social media news about the weather in Vermont and the region. Also, there was a special event in August, when the Fairbanks sought to break the Guinness record for the number of people attending an astronomy viewing party (it did). VPR participated in this event by producing the annual star party at the same time. The event took place on Aug. 10, during the new moon and at the peak of the Pleiades meteor shower.

Previously, VPR looked into the cause of gun deaths in Vermont. Reporters and volunteers compiled a database of gun deaths in Vermont from 2011 through 2016, based on paper death certificates provided by the Vermont Department of Health. This year, at the request of the St. Albans Messenger newspaper, VPR collaborated to update the project with data from 2017. The updated data showed the following for 2011-17:

- 486 people died from gunshots in Vermont, an average of 69 people per year.
- 88 percent were male.
- 89 percent were suicides.
- 80 percent were suicides by white males.
- There were 52 homicides. At least five involved law enforcement.
- Of 433 suicides, 123 served in the U.S. armed forces.

1 person died from an accidental gunshot wound.

The New England News Collaborative, one of the largest collaborations VPR participates in continues to be a success with New England-wide stories being produced and shared especially for the eight collaborative stations. The Collaborative produces a weekly news magazine broadcast each Sunday on VPR.

- 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.**

Investigative reporting projects led to a number of impacts in the community. VPR's report on nitrates in the water led to Agriculture and Health agencies developing a new memorandum of understanding to better serve public health, notification to the public, and environmental protection. A farm forum in Stetson Studio One engaged key players on the issue.

The "Jolted" podcast series mentioned above led to greater awareness of how communities address potential violence in their school systems.

The data analysis of speed stops created greater awareness among Vermonters as to variations in enforcement from town to town.

VPR's collaboration with Vermont PBS provided increased public awareness to larger audiences about the issues of most importance to Vermonters as found in the polling. Both organizations saw an increase in audience usage for the joint website which held the poll data.

VPR's Tell Me More Tour provided an opportunity in each of 14 counties for community members to have first-hand contact with VPR staff to discuss issues of importance to them.

The audience education campaign around podcasting generated positive feedback on social media and with listener comments. The Beginner's Guide post was the most-viewed page at VPR.net in January.

But Why episodes have been used as educational tools in New York City public schools, and *Timeline*, the music podcast, has been used in college music courses.

Here are just a few examples of audience feedback on the impact of VPR programming:

"Our whole family LOVES the But Why podcast. We all learn new things from it and it's so great to have a podcast with real kids voices and the content shaped by real kids questions rather than by adult ideas of what kids want."

"It's a thank you for 'JOLTED' ... a really great series, not just relative to Vermont but relative to conversations going on in other parts of the country."

"I'm a middle school teacher and I used to play a story in a unit for my students off of VPR that was an interview ... about the bullying and suicide."

- 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 2018, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year**

2018. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

VPR provided comprehensive coverage of the decision by Bennington Rep. Kiah Morris not to seek reelection to the Vermont House due to being the target of hate online and in everyday life. The reporting included the investigation by the attorney general into the incidents.

Various incidents of racism led VPR to include questions in its public opinion survey on Vermonters' perceptions of racism in the state.

In a special report by Reporter Peter Hirschfeld, VPR uncovered a disturbing picture of workplace harassment at the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital in Berlin, where some African-American staff members said they had been subjected to racist comments by co-workers. Hirschfeld included reporting on the complaints, on the subsequent investigation, and on the reaction by Gov. Phil Scott, whose administration reviewed the conditions. The web buildout, as is regularly the case at VPR, included original documents and links and references to a deeper look at the issue.

As part of a New England News Collaborative series called "Facing Change," VPR continued its reporting on the several thousand migrant farm workers living in Vermont. The reporting found an increase in immigration enforcement and a rise in arrests and detentions by the U.S. Border Patrol in Vermont, New Hampshire and in northeastern New York. The workers are a significant part of the state's farm economy, so much so that twice a year the Mexican government travels to Vermont to assist its citizens.

Another story focused on the deportation of a longtime Vermont resident back to Kenya, due to administration policies on immigration issues.

VPR's news magazine, *Vermont Edition*, held a statewide conversation in one program regarding the Vermont Supreme Court decision to overturn the conviction of a man who put Ku Klux Klan flyers on the Burlington homes of two women of color. The decision highlighted the on-going tension around protecting speech even when it's potentially threatening or hateful.

After the federal government ended a temporary program for Haitians affected by an earthquake in 2010, Haitians needed to leave the U.S., causing people to cross into Canada from upstate New York. VPR reported on this continuing issue.

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?

While this was the last year of funding from the CPB under the original grant for the New England News Collaborative, the funding has made it possible for the in-depth reporting of the Collaborative for the listeners of eight public radio stations in New England, the regularly shared reporting, and the weekly program NEXT that ties it all together. This funding helped to create a lasting and valued benefit for this region of the country by its public radio stations. It also opened the door to additional collaborations and future planning by the radio stations.

VPR continues to play an increasing role in Vermont's journalism community to support the needs of the citizens, and the CPB funding helps VPR to build on the changing needs of the audiences for news and programming through different platforms and through different kinds of story-telling and information gathering.

VPR seeks to respond to the audiences needs in broadcast, podcast, and digital formats and through new collaborations. Each step of the way is a new challenge that requires resources to serve the public

during this continuing period of media transition. The CPB grant supports the changing nature of the work.

As VPR receives no funds from state government, the grant is an important source of funding and support as the demands by the public for digital news and podcasting increases.

The grant also helps to make it possible to purchase national programming from NPR, a key source of news for Vermonters.

Finally, the CPB funding has helped to make possible the network of transmitters and translators that connect Vermont into a statewide community. The mountain ranges of a rural state make it particularly difficult to serve the geographic area with news and music formats, and the grants help to make that possible as well.