

CPB Station Activity Survey Local Content and Services Report – FY2016

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.

Vermont Public Radio’s strategic vision is to “explore the whole Vermont story together.” Further, our mission is to provide an essential and trusted independent voice for news, information, music and culture in our region. Our purpose is to inspire an informed public and engaged community. Our approach is to provide a multiplatform service for listeners and users in our communities.

This public service includes 13 local newscasts each day, the locally produced weekday newsmagazine Vermont Edition, social media news feeds, a daily news email, a community news project which aggregates local government documents, a dynamic website, news blogs, videos, podcasts, live audio from the Vermont State Legislature, a music discovery project highlighting regional musicians, a student composer project, a young writers project partnership, a commentary series of more than 50 essayists, and locally produced weather reports all day. One way that we know that we are serving our listener and user needs is that we are among the top-listened to stations per capita in diary markets in the nation.

A number of new initiatives characterize our goals and approaches to community service. Among them are:

The New England News Collaborative

VPR joined seven other public radio stations in New England to form the New England News Collaborative, a CPB supported start-up. VPR was one of early framers of the Collaborative, which was formed to provide regional context on significant issues in New England that go beyond state lines in a never-before realized news collaborative. The project focuses on in-depth, multi-media projects around the key themes of climate change, energy, the environment, infrastructure and immigration. The first project was called “The Big Switch,” which included five in-depth stories on energy storage, current demand, wind turbine placement, solar panels, and fossil fuels. The Collaborative also produces a weekly program – “Next” – about New England, which airs on Sundays at noon on VPR.

But Why Podcast

“But Why” is a new podcast especially for kids and their parents. The podcast, with new episodes released every two weeks, is hosted by Jane Lindholm and is produced by Lindholm and former Morning Edition Producer Melody Bodette. The podcast, which explores issues like “why is the world split into countries” and “why do your fingers turn wrinkly in the tub” already has nearly 20,000 subscribers.

Brave Little State Podcast

“Brave Little State” is an audience-driven podcast that empowers VPR’s listeners and engages them in the reporting process by inviting them to help ask and to answer questions about our

region and its people. The podcast features diverse voices and is a distinct, long-form narrative storytelling in an on-demand platform. The name is taken from Calvin Coolidge's speech after the 1927 flood when he said: "If the spirit of liberty should vanish in other parts of the Union, and support of our institutions should languish, it could all be replenished from the generous store held by the people of this brave little state of Vermont." Sample episodes have included a deep look at embezzlement in Vermont and a linguistic history of the Vermont accent. The podcast is reported and produced by Angela Evancie.

Campaign 2016 – Primaries and Conventions

VPR provided comprehensive coverage of the Iowa Caucuses, the New Hampshire Primary, the South Carolina Primary, the Nevada primary and the Super Tuesday primaries. With Sen. Bernie Sanders in the presidential race, VPR had reporters in place during key times with live reports and in-depth stories, especially in advance of Iowa and New Hampshire. For Iowa, VPR News sent a three-person team to the state for three days before the caucus, producing a week of stories and robust digital content. Stories included a profile of a farmer who is a Sanders' supporter, a co-reported piece on Sanders and Clinton get-out-the-vote effort, a profile of conservative Republicans, and a piece on why the caucuses are so difficult to poll. A Vermont Edition program focused on answering listener questions about Iowa. All of the work featured extensive audience engagement. VPR will continue to provide coverage for and from Vermont of this unique election season. VPR provided wall-to-wall coverage of the Vermont delegations at both the Republican and Democratic conventions, and was the only Vermont news organization to do so.

Bennington Water Contamination

VPR has demonstrated its commitment to public service with its comprehensive reporting of the contamination of around 100 private wells in the North Bennington area. This continuing coverage has brought attention to the situation in which the wells were polluted with PFOA, the chemical used by the ChemFab company to treat industrial fabrics.

"State of Recovery" Heroin Series

In a 10-part series, VPR News looked at the progress that has been made since Gov. Shumlin highlighted the state's opioid epidemic in his state-of-the-state address two years ago. Among the stories produced were pieces on Narcan and how it saves lives but has unintended consequences, the link between pain management and opiate abuse, and personal and community stories about addiction.

Act 46 Continuing Coverage

Act 46 – which gives schools three years to merge voluntarily with neighboring districts - has been the subject of 20 stories on VPR and VPR.net, examining all aspects as well as Town Meeting votes, where five school districts approved mergers. The coverage included an interactive map at VPR.net, where readers could hover over any town to determine its status regarding school mergers.

VPR Poll Series

VPR produced the only statewide media poll in advance of Super Tuesday and the Vermont Presidential Primary. The 34-question poll of 895 people on mobile and landline phones provided a strong public service in reflecting Vermonters' values on a number of important issues and brought insight to the 2016 campaigns. The poll was widely cited and VPR made the complete results available online to anyone who wished to use them. The Castleton Polling Institute conducted the poll and will conduct two additional polls for VPR prior to the General Election in November.

Jay Peak and EB-5

As part of its continuing coverage, VPR produced a set of in-depth stories on the allegations of fraud filed by the Securities and Exchange Commission against the owners of the Jay Peak resort. VPR detailed the allegations in a 1700-word piece. Two months later, after more than two dozen stories and programs – digital and broadcast - for some of the most comprehensive coverage of one of the biggest stories of the year, Vermonters are well informed about what has happened at Jay Peak and what has gone wrong with the oversight of the foreign investment program.

Gas Pipeline

VPR also has provided significant reporting of the Vermont Gas Systems installation of the new pipeline with stories that routinely reveal significant issues regarding the cost and construction.

National Parks Project

A 12-part broadcast series and digital buildout of VPR's "Our National Parks" series was produced with UVM professor and host Robert Manning. In the series, Manning offered insights into the parks and the issues they face today. An interactive map of the series provides an opportunity for engagement at the VPR.net site. In addition, the series has been shared with other public radio stations around the country through the Public Radio Exchange.

"Becoming Bernie" – Broadcast and Digital Programming

VPR's hour-long special program on the rise and record of Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders was produced in October for broadcast and digital. The extensive examination and original digital project was picked up by NPR.org and resulted in thousands of views. The broadcast program aired on Minnesota Public Radio, WNPR in Hartford, CT, Maine Public Broadcasting, KUOW in Seattle and a half-dozen other stations.

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. VPR continues to be committed to partnerships with organizations whose missions complement VPR's. This year's continuing and new collaborations include the following:

Listenwise

VPR is a participant in Listenwise, the award-winning listening skills platform that uses the power of listening to advance literacy and learning for students. One example of audio for the classroom was the use of VPR's coverage of refugees in Vermont.

Podcast - Rumble Strip Vermont

Rumble Strip Vermont, a podcast by independent producer Erica Heilman, is being produced as a monthly broadcast segment for VPR. Heilman's character-driven storytelling has been gaining attention by listeners for her intimate conversations with Vermonters.

Outdoor Radio

In partnership with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, VPR produces a monthly feature called "Outdoor Radio," which explores the natural world with biologists Kent McFarland and Sara Zahendra.

Awesome Etiquette

Awesome Etiquette, the podcast by Lizzie Post and Daniel Post Senning of the Emily Post Institute on etiquette in the 21st century, is recorded at VPR and as a result a partnership has developed and a broadcast segment which airs on Sundays. Awesome Etiquette guides listeners through everything from traditional etiquette quandaries to newly emerging issues in the modern world.

Live from the Fort

VPR has deepened a partnership with local musicians with the music discovery video series *Live from the Fort*. This project expanded into a monthly video of short interviews and song set with local musicians. In partnership with the Radiator, the studio sets are now broadcast on this non-profit music channel in Burlington, Vt.

Dorothy's List

Each school year, thousands of Vermont students read the books nominated for the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award. Thirty books make the annual list, and fourth- through eighth-graders vote for their favorite title in the spring. Each month, Vermont Edition highlights a book nominated for award. We visit schools and libraries where the book is being read, check out how young readers are interacting with the book and relay students' questions to the author.

VSO on VPR

VPR continues its partnership with the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, which makes it possible to produce for listeners a weekly concert broadcast. This program includes current and archival performances. It is hosted by longtime VPR Host Walter Parker and airs on Wednesday nights at 8. Parker also is a regular speaker at the beginning of VSO performances.

Student Composer Showcase

Each month, VPR Classical features the musical work of a young musician in Vermont in collaboration with Music-COMP, the online mentoring program that connects students with professional composer mentors in an online discussion forum, and organizes live performances of student work.

VPR Café

The VPR Café is a weekly feature that's all about Vermont food and the people who grow it, prepare it and love it. VPR's Ric Cengeri talks with local food writers who share stories from the farms, kitchens and eateries of Vermont that connect our communities.

Young Writers Project

VPR partners with the Young Writers Project to present selections of the work of young writers in Vermont. Each week, VPR features on VPR.net a submission from the Young Writers Project. The work may be an essay, it may be non-fiction or fiction, or it may be poetry. The weekly selection might be a student blog post or it might be a video. The idea is to provide another avenue to hear the voice of the people of Vermont, in this case, the young people of Vermont.

Newspaper Collaborations

VPR partners with the Rutland Herald and the Times Argus newspapers to share news stories about government and policy issues and participates in a new political podcast.

Eye on the Sky

Through a continuing partnership with the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium, VPR brings Vermonters a unique view of the weather through daily forecasts as well as unique features such as the Eye on the Night Sky. The partnership includes detailed information through social media outlets.

Art Hounds

Each week, producer Mary Williams curates listener recommended arts and cultural events around the region in a segment called ArtHounds. The program is adapted from Minnesota Public Radio News and is powered by the Public Insight Network.

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.

VPR receives regular listener feedback each day through online comments, emails, social media and phone calls. With each Vermont Edition program, VPR connects with listeners for additional discussion. This provides Vermonters an opportunity to increase their awareness about hundreds of topics each year and to share their views and to engage in a statewide conversation.

Sewage Bot

In 2015 VPR began developing a new way to tell the story of Vermont's sewage overflows. The station's web developer wrote a script to use the state information on reported overflows and tweeted the news @dirtywatervt. After a year of reporting and tweeting on the subject, legislation was introduced that called for improved public notification of sewage spills. As a result the state launched its own email and text messaging system and the VPR bot was later retired.

PFOA Impact

VPR provided in-depth and continuous coverage of PFOA in water supplies. The story first developed in southwestern Vermont and the reporting has been a reminder that Vermont's water is also vulnerable to chemical contamination. The reporting showed that blood tests for some were hundreds of times higher than safe levels. The reporting put a new light on issues of water safety in Vermont.

How the Iowa Democratic Caucus Works (Featuring "Legos")

As a preview to the Iowa Caucuses, VPR chose a unique way to explain the unfamiliar process Iowa uses to select presidential candidates. VPR's digital team decided to tell the story with a video, using Legos to represent how voters move around to choose a candidate. The video drew an audience of more than 17,000 to VPR.net in one week, and on YouTube, the video was viewed about 330,000 times.

Meet the Candidates

VPR helped voters connect with candidates for higher office, bringing the latest from the campaigns. To help voters prepare for the Primary Election, VPR produced a "Meet the Candidates" podcast to hear from the candidates on the top issues facing the state.

Reddit AMAs

When the presidential primaries were winding down, the Vermont political primary season was just beginning. To give Vermonters a better sense of the people hoping to hold the state's top office, VPR and [Vermont's Reddit](#) community held [AMAs \(Ask Me Anything\)](#) with the candidates to learn about their [policy proposals](#) and priorities for the state. This was in addition to live interviews with the candidates on *Vermont Edition*.

Star Gazing Party

VPR's annual star-gazing party connected our sky-watchers in August. VPR listeners filled the phone lines for an hour program as we answered questions about the stars, planets and constellations.

VuHaus National Music Project

VPR's "Live from the Fort" community music discovery series entered a new phase with a partnership with the national music video project called VuHaus. VuHaus presents single-song videos and live stream concert sets to its online users across the country.

Commentator Series

The impact of issues that affect the Vermont community are reflected every day in two broadcast commentaries. Just one such example was an essay by a mother who lost her 38-year-old daughter to drugs and alcohol and had begun speaking about it publicly.

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.

Refugee Resettlement

VPR has provided comprehensive coverage of Rutland, Vt.'s plan to to resettle up to 100 Syrian refugees, which was proposed by Rutland's Mayor Chris Louras. The reporting covered all aspects of the proposal including the controversy that arose in the community about the plan.

Black History Month

For Black History Month, VPR planned several special programs that included "The Legacy of Sister Rosetta Tharpe" about gospel roots in rock and roll, "Stars for Freedom" on the story of how black actors and entertainers in Hollywood contributed their money and connections to the civil rights movement, and "The Space Race" on the story of how the color barrier was broken at NASA.

Women's History Month

For Women's History Month, VPR aired a series of stories about "Women and Nature." In collaboration with the Vermont Commission on Women, we met six Vermont women who made notable contributions to the conservation, recreation and appreciation of the Natural World. They were as follows: Cyndy Bittinger, historian and educator, considered the contributions made by Caroline Crane Marsh, wife and biographer of George Perkins Marsh, to the early days of conservation and environmental awareness. Reidun Dahle Nuquist of the Green Mountain Club,

reflected on the role women played in the creation and stewardship of the Long Trail. Cara Nelson told the story of her grandmother, Catherine Robbins Clifford, one of three young women who became famous as the three musketeers, for through-hiking the Long Trail in 1927. Jeanie McIntyre, President of the Upper Valley Land Trust, recalled how Sylvia Wright gave her town a mountain. Deb Reger, creator of Moccasin Tracks for UVM radio, described the relationship between nature and the Native American woman. And Katherine Stearns explored how the vision of Mary Lincoln Beckwith can still be seen in the landscape and gardens of Hildene.

Special Programming

Programming addressing the needs of diverse communities also included the following: the Veterans' Day Special: "We've Never Been The Same: A War Story"; the annual "Hanukkah Lights"; "Dying Words" about Jeff Schmalz and the groundbreaking reporting he did on AIDS for the New York Times; "Season's Griot" a Kwanza celebration; Gospel Roots of Rock n Roll for Black History Month; the Truth Be Told Series on Race in the Workplace

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?

This year, CPB funding made it possible to launch the New England News Collaborative. The full impact of this project is yet to be seen; still, it has brought together eight public radio stations in New England to serve the region and explore common issues in the region of immigration, environment, infrastructure and culture. The project is bringing together the region with reported stories from participating stations as well as the weekly program "Next."

CPB funding also constitutes approximately 9 percent of VPR's budget and helps VPR to contribute to its growing role as a news organization and its importance to the public not only as a broadcast organization but as a multi-platform news source for listeners and digital users.

The CPB grant continues to support in-part the 13 daily newscasts which are broadcast each weekday. The grant also helps to support the statewide conversation that occurs in the weekday news magazine Vermont Edition.

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 helps to make it possible to purchase national programming from NPR.

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.