The way to build listener income for public radio news stations is to build the number of core listeners – extending the reach of the station while maintaining high core composition.

Individual giving is the largest single source of support for most public radio news stations. At a time when other sources of funds are uncertain, it is all the more important to understand the audience drivers of listener income.

Multiple studies have documented the basic equation of listener support:

- Giving begins with listening – regular use of the service.
- The importance of the programming to the listener comes next.
- Then, is it clear that the station needs support, that a personal gift will make a difference?
- Lastly, the listener needs to have some money to give.

SRG and Walrus Research took a close look at the relationship between audience and giving in the 2008 report *Individual Giving to Public Radio*. This updates the analysis, looking at the giving relationship between public radio’s news stations and their audiences in the markets measured by Personal People Meters as of summer 2010.

This report is part of a series examining the performance of public radio news stations. Reports and notes on methodology are available on the GROW THE AUDIENCE website: [www.srg.org/GTA](http://www.srg.org/GTA)
LISTENER INCOME: Core Cume

The number of core listeners is an excellent predictor of annual income from listeners. It explains almost 80 percent of the differences among public radio news stations in the level of individual giving.

On this chart nearly all the stations fall very close to the “best fit” line.

Blue circle stations have an “exclusive” public radio news franchise in their markets. Red circle stations share the format. There is no material difference between them in the core-cume/giving relationship.

Using this information, the way to build listener income is to build the number of core listeners. In practical terms, that means extending the reach of the station while maintaining a high core composition.

X axis is number of weekly cume listeners who are Core
Y axis is annual income from listeners per CPB FY 2009
LISTENER INCOME: Average Quarter Hour Audience

AQH audience can also predict the amount of listener income for public radio news stations – at 72%, almost as well as the number of core cume listeners.

Except for WBEZ, KQED and WHYY, most stations fall close to the line.

The predictive power of either core cume listeners or AQH listening makes sense in this context. Core listeners are the most loyal audience segment – on average they tune in more often and listen longer than other listeners. While they might be 50 percent of the weekly cume, they generate the majority of listening on an AQH basis.

For this analysis and the prior one we included total audience, beyond the metro, since the station pitches to all of its listeners.

X axis is the station’s total Average Quarter Hour listening audience

Y axis is annual income from listeners per CPB FY 2009
CORE LISTENERS: Key to News Stations’ Public Service Model

Combining these findings about individual giving with our prior report on predicting the audience for news stations, we see the crucial role of core listeners in the broadcast business model for public radio news stations.

We found three variables that, together, account for 72 percent of the variance in audience shares for public radio news stations:

- Core Composition of Cume
- Market College Grad Composition
- News Format Franchise

Of the three, the one most under a station’s control – and that is the most powerful of the three factors – is core composition.

This finding points news stations in the direction of programming that generates dedicated listening, a format that increases core composition.

As core composition contributes to a news station’s share of listening in its market, the number of core listeners contributes to the amount of listener support. To restate our earlier point and knit together these two imperatives:

**Extend the reach of the station while maintaining a high core composition.**

In all these formulations we are using “core listener” with respect to the patterns of a person’s radio use. A core listener is a person who listens to a given radio station more than to any other radio station. Some core listeners may be heavy listeners – to both the station to which they are core and to others. Other core listeners may be light listeners.

The lessons of this analysis align with the continuing themes of the GROW THE AUDIENCE initiative: **wider use and deeper value.** By doing both, public radio news stations will achieve larger audiences and greater resources with which to serve them.
METHODOLOGY

This analysis is based on public radio news stations that met the following criteria:

- Offered news/talk programming 75% or more of the time on weekdays 6am-7pm
- Broadcast *Morning Edition*
- Home to a PPM market as of Summer 2010
- At least a 0.5 PPM share in its home market

For total audience estimates such as core cume and AQH audience loyalty and core composition, we used AudiGraphics data for Fall 2009/Spring 2010.

For stations with in-market repeaters, we aggregated all listening data in the market.

Individual giving data are derived from stations’ Annual Financial Reports to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

We classified each station with reference to competition from other public radio stations – whether the station had a market exclusive franchise for *Morning Edition* or for the defined public radio news format.