making the case
Transformative Growth in Public Media’s Local Journalism

Tom Thomas and Terry Clifford
Station Resource Group
grow the audience for public radio

Journalism

Become America’s most trusted and most widely-used source of daily news and information.
grow the audience for public radio

Local Journalism

Greater scale and capacity in local and regional reporting so we can realize the impact and significance to which we aspire.
Public service outcomes

• Trustworthy, original reporting on the issues and needs of our communities
• Civil discourse and a centering conversation on our future
• Partnerships that expand the depth of our stories and the reach of our work
• Engagement with audiences that leads to better decisions and solutions
Raise the bar

• Reporting staff – more feet on the street
• Editing and production capacity
• Digital skills throughout the newsroom
• Innovative community connections
• Voices and views that reflect America
Current News Staff and Aspirations
Selected Stations in Markets 11 – 30

In this group:
(in market order)
WDET, Detroit
WLRN, Miami
KUOW, Seattle
KPLU, Seattle
KJZZ, Phoenix
KWMU, St Louis
WYPR, Baltimore
WDUQ, Pittsburgh
KVCR, San Bernardino
Capital Public Radio, Sacramento
WVXU, Cincinnati
ideastream, Cleveland
WKSU, Cleveland
KUER, Salt Lake City
KCPW, Salt Lake City

SRG | DEI
Local Journalism Survey, 2010
In this group:
(in alphabetical order)
Boise State Radio
Colorado Public Radio
Georgia Public Radio
Hawaii Public Radio
Iowa Public Radio
Jefferson Public Radio
Minnesota Public Radio
Mississippi Public Broadcasting
New Hampshire Public Radio
New Jersey Network
Oregon Public Broadcasting
Prairie Public, North Dakota
Vermont Public Radio
Wyoming Public Radio
A transformative investment

• 1,000 new reporters, editors and producers
  – Equipment
  – Technical support
  – Fundraising to sustain them

• $100 million per year in new investment
Public Radio – Total Cash Revenue

Source: Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Station Resource Group
Public radio members

• Listening to the service
• Personal importance
• Education
• Need for listener support
Performance of news stations

- Size of the news staff does not help predict listening
  - Core composition
  - Education level in the market
  - News franchise

- Size of the news staff does not help predict listener support
  - Size of core audience
Performance of news stations

Stations with more resources are making mission-driven investments of those resources in local and regional community service.
A campaign for growth

- Public funds
- Seed funding from major national foundations
- Principal funding from local and regional philanthropy and major gifts
- A multi-dimensional plan for long-term sustainability
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Global warming activists

- Global warming is actually happening
- Global warming is harmful – to us
- Human activity contributes to global warming
- Personal action will make a difference
Local journalism supporters

- Local journalism is at risk
- This is harmful to our communities
- Public radio can be part of the solution
- Local philanthropy and major donors can make a difference
Test the case

• Three markets
  – St. Louis, Louisville, Vermont
• Major donors and local foundations
• In-depth conversations
  – KublerWirka
• Cross-check with national foundations
Local journalism is at risk

- Collapse of newspaper revenue
  - $20 billion in annual revenue lost in last five years
- Journalism positions disappear
  - Nearly one-third across the past decade
- Degradation of television news
  - Partisan cable shout-fests
  - Culture of celebrity
This harms our communities

- Challenge to democracy
  - Decline of accountability in public life
  - Erosion of public discourse
  - Less informed electorate
- Challenge to community
  - Loss of connection across social and geographic barriers
  - Weaker civic and cultural fabric
Public radio can play a role

Others urge public media to take a larger role in journalism

– Knight Commission
– FCC “Future of Media”
– Columbia Journalism Review
– New America Foundation
but public radio is not the answer

It gets complicated
Challenges raised

- Limits of broadcast-based radio
  - Only so much time
  - Don’t replace signature national shows
- Analytical reporting, yes
  - Hard news, not so much
- The quality standard is high
  - Local talent and execution inconsistent
- Reporting on hot topics has risks
  - Easy to offend benefactors
Areas of opportunity

• Value-added, discerning aggregator
  – Facilitate access to other news sources

• Develop content and audience across other media
  – Less and less a radio station, and more and more an organization that provides news and information that I can access in many other ways

• Partnerships with other players
Relative priority

• Competing community needs
  – Direct human services, civic development, education, health care, environment

• Finite resources

• Link effective philanthropy to quality of public discussion and debate about priorities
  – A catalytic role for effective giving
Making the case

Transparency about business models and mechanisms for investment

– Collaboration and partnership
– Local/regional/national
– Look to leverage and scale
– Avoid competition and redundancy
Making the case

Build on topical areas

- Economic future of the community
- Energy
- Public education
- Environment
- Healthcare
- Transportation
- Political accountability
- Social challenges (poverty, addiction, etc.)
Making the case

The importance of information stewardship

- Public trust
- High quality reporting
- Balance and fairness
Making the case

From serve the audience to serve the community

- Current case focused on personal benefits
- Not just more local journalism for current listeners
- May require difficult strategic trade-offs
The summary argument

Where we are

- Large and committed audience
- Demonstrated commitment to quality reporting
- Distinctive, impactful medium
- Experience in fundraising, membership, and a viable business model
The summary argument

Where we are going

– New audiences for our service
– New capabilities and journalism expertise
– Impact beyond audience metrics
– Embrace new channels and platforms
– Partner in content and production
Just one more thing . . .
Just one more thing . . .

Public radio may have a unique role as a news organizer

– A crossroads in the news ecology
– Make connections and collaborations
– Convene and facilitate a conversation about community information needs and solutions
– The next hire might not be a reporter, but an organizer
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