

2018 WMMT Local Content & Services Report

(from WMMT's Community Service Grant for CPB)

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.

WMMT's goal is to be a 24 hour voice of mountain people's music, culture, and issues. Achieving that goal means, in part, amplifying the voices of those people - our community - covering and addressing issues and stories of interest and including community members in the production of those stories.

Beyond our community information services of PSAs and a community calendar, news and public affairs programming continue to be an integral part of our work at WMMT. The majority of our programming addresses five major content areas: arts and culture, health and wellness, prison and criminal justice issues, the environment, and economic transition. WMMT's "Making Connections" project focuses primarily on economic transition in the region, which sits at the intersection of many of our community issues; these productions are broadcast on-air as well as on our website to continue to serve as a resource and story bank of work related to economic transition. During 2018, we produced long and short-form content, partnering with community members and organizations, covering everything from the fight to save pensions in Kentucky to the struggle young folks face trying to stay in Central Appalachia. A few of the stories included:

-A new bakery in Letcher County, Kentucky, highlighting that sometimes a rebuilding an economy, and lives, means adding one or two jobs at a time. Partners at the Hemphill Community Center where the new Black Sheep Brick Oven Bakery opened aim to provide Letcher County, KY residents with healthy, locally sourced breads and baked goods while supporting Drug Court participants in their journeys to recovery.

-A program teaching area students how to build drones. The Ohio Valley has been a leader in aerospace engineering and, with support from the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC), high school students are learning to build their own drones - developing a skill set that could prepare students not just for college, but also for finding a good job close to home.

-The fight to save Black Lung benefits. One in five veteran coal miners in Central Appalachia now has black lung disease, but the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund which provides critical support to miners and their families is at risk of disappearing. We spoke with attorneys, retired miners, and miners' widows about the disease and the working

conditions that caused it, the struggle for benefits for miners and their families, and the organizing effort now going on to save the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund.

We also offer our news and public affairs programming via podcast in order to broaden our community reach and accessibility. In addition to our bi-weekly news magazine, we continue to produce monthly programs related to arts, food and health, kids, and local culture and history -- all of which cover a variety of issues and interests in our listening area. A grant from CPB has allowed us to create a network with several other media outlets in the area -- the Ohio Valley ReSource. This regional collaboration builds stronger, more intentional partnerships across three states and engages new audiences through various platforms and with diverse content. Now well into the second round of the collaboration, it has proved beneficial both here in our local community as well as in building across the region -- and even nationally, with NPR airing OVR-produced stories. We have produced a series in partnership with another radio station, covering the "Struggle to Stay" over the course of a year of a young African American male from Eastern Kentucky as he faced different obstacles in figuring out where his future would be. We have also had ongoing coverage of the rise in Black Lung cases throughout Central Appalachia. These stories, reported in partnership with Howard Berkes of NPR, brought this issue to the public and the reporting itself won several awards in the national field.

We feel we are at our best when working and collaborating with a diverse group of partners and are always looking to expand that network. Our communities are often portrayed in a negative light by negative media. We aim to increase the agency our community feels to talk about their own experiences, stories, and visions. Within that, we recognize there are parts of our community that often feel ignored, erased, or "othered." Our goal is to make those voices feel represented and heard, as well. We want to be a voice for the many identities that exist in our communities and provide resources, support, space, and engagement to those ends.

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 Ohio Valley ReSource (discussed in Question 1) allows us to both strengthen and expand our connections to the larger community and with other public media outlets,

with partners across Kentucky and in West Virginia and Ohio. West Virginia Public Broadcasting's "Inside Appalachia" regularly rebroadcasts pieces from WMMT, airing several WMMT-produced pieces during 2017. WMMT works with the Letcher County School System to provide music instruction in traditional music in four elementary and middle schools as well as the county high school, in a program designed to further the requirements of the Kentucky Educational Reform Act. Music in the schools is also the focus of "Kids Radio," a weekly half-hour program produced by area musician and educator Randy Wilson with cooperation of the Hindman [KY] Settlement School, who we also partner with to produce the monthly "Knott Downtown Radio Hour," a mix of local and regional artists, music, and stories. We broadcast a program called "Breaking Beans" in partnership with the statewide Community Farm Alliance (CFA). This partnership came about after a citizen journalist training with CFA members. This monthly program focuses on community agriculture and local foods work in the region. Traditional music, a cultural resource for which Appalachia is famous, continues to blossom throughout the region, with WMMT playing no small part. We program twelve hours of traditional music each week. We host a monthly jam session and provide publicity and support for several others in the area. The station also provides logistical support for a week-long traditional music school held each summer. Traditional music's younger cousin, bluegrass, forms a vital part of WMMT's program stream, and local artists are a frequent presence on air. In the realm of performance, WMMT hosts several bluegrass concerts yearly featuring such nationally reclaimed artists as Larry Sparks and Blue Highway, as well as Appalshop's annual Seedtime on the Cumberland Festival and several traditional music concerts. 2018 saw the continuation of a quarterly "Feminist Friday" series - live shows featuring female musicians and artists - in conjunction with our volunteer programmer who hosts a music show of the same name. WMMT broadcasts an extensive array of public service announcements, produced at the station and serving organizations in the listening area. The station produces a weekly interview program with guests from community organizations with a wide range of cultural, social, and economic concerns. Appalshop convenes the Letcher County Culture Hub, a group of businesses, non-profits, arts groups, etc, who work together to amplify our cultural assets to bring in more resources in order to diversify and strengthen our local economic landscape. As a member and convener, we are able to partner and support many of these community groups with our broadcasting. A weekly "community calendar" program stream complements the other community service programs that are a prominent feature of the broadcast schedule.

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.

Though WMMT reaches significant portions of three states (KY, VA, WV), our audience is almost entirely rural, making it difficult to obtain reliable audience measurements. This being the case, we largely get a sense of our impact through anecdotal evidence, of which we receive a great deal. Our ongoing collaborative pieces on the increase of Black Lung by Howard Berkes of NPR and WMMT reporter/producer Benny Becker) have been cited in multiple congressional hearings and also lead to a NIOSH study, in addition to raising awareness locally, regionally, and nationally. These ongoing pieces also have seen a great response in listeners asking where they could donate funds to those working to combat black lung.

In February, The Guardian covered WMMT's Calls From Home program in an article titled, "Passive, poor and white? What people keep getting wrong about Appalachia." Here's an excerpt: "Whitesburg, Kentucky, home to media organization Appalshop and its radio affiliate WMMT, has a long history of using community media to create social change by centering and elevating regional voices. One longstanding media project is the WMMT radio show Calls From Home, which broadcasts messages of news and inspiration into area prisons that receive its radio signal and provide families with a no-cost option to send a personalized message to their incarcerated loved ones. ...Appalachians inspired by and organizing through WMMT and Appalshop often do other work with prison communities, developing community theater programs about incarceration, and offering assistance and fundraising help to make in-person visits possible."

Providing these sorts of spaces, both physically and on-air, fosters dialogue and raises awareness about pressing and difficult issues. Our monthly old-time jams are well-attended; these help nurture the local traditional music community, bringing local musicians together to help keep our traditional culture alive. Finally, our web presence, and now podcast availability, provides access to our public affairs programming to audiences both near and far, and our statistics show an increase in web visitors from 2017 to 2018.

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 2017, 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.

WMMT's Central Appalachian broadcast area, often stereotyped as an enclave of "whiteness," has a little-known history of diversity. The prototypical instrument of mountain music, the banjo, came to America and to the mountains in the hands of Africans and African Americans. In recent years scholars have documented how the typical sound of mountain music is a deep and subtle blend of African and European cultures. In the era of industrialization, workers from all over Europe (as well as Black workers from the deep South) were recruited to come work in the mines. The recent history of the region has seen a shift in the opposite direction. Latest census figures show the community overwhelmingly white (98.8% according to the 2010 Census). WMMT ensures that its programming reflects the history and the diversity of the larger community.

WMMT's produces a weekly radio programs targeting the overwhelmingly African American population of five state and federal prisons in WMMT's coverage area. "Hot 88.7/Hip Hop from the Hill Top" is the only hip hop program on any radio station in the area and has developed a large and diverse audience. While this two-hour program airs, radio staff record calls from family members of prisoners who call in with shout-outs to their loved ones. The calls are edited as necessary and broadcast at the conclusion of the hip hop program.

We partner with organizations such as the East Kentucky Social Club (Harlan County, KY) and the Appalachian African American Cultural Center in Lee County, VA to highlight the present and historical stories and issues of African American communities in the region. We also intentionally partner with people and organizations to represent and celebrate Black histories, current realities, and futures in the mountains and beyond.

During FY18, we made a concerted effort to represent the LGBTQ+ experience in Appalachia on our airwaves through our in-house public affairs programming and via coverage of events in the region. We plan to continue strengthening this area of our work through a partnership with both the Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project and the Country Queers media project.

A few examples of the stories and voices we partnered with and broadcasted in 2018 are:

- An interview with the head of the CARE (Call to Action for Racial Equality) Coalition based in Charleston, WV.

- An hour-long radio documentary, "Game Changer: Football as a Catalyst for Peaceful School Integration." This documentary draws on 40 life story interviews with people in Mount Hope, West Virginia about the role football played in the 1956 integration of the schools in that mining community.

- An audio tour exploring the Appalachian African American Cultural Center in southwest Virginia with Founder and Director Ron Carson.

- A recording of Frank X Walker delivering the convocation speech at Alice Lloyd College in Pippa Passes, KY. Walker is a native of Danville, KY and a founding member of the Appalachian Poets.

- An interview with prolific Kentucky author and activist, Silas House, talking about his sixth novel "Southernmost" and the central themes of fatherhood, religion, class and queerness in the rural South. House also describes his writing process, and shares a list of authors and musicians who inspire his work.

- Excerpts from an ongoing oral history project called Country Queers, which aims to document the diverse experiences of rural and small-town LGBTQ+ folks throughout the U.S. Of the 60 interviews gathered in 13 states, this episode featured excerpts from 6 interviews in VA, TN, TX, CO, NC, & MA.

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?

Like many public radio stations that operate in economically challenged communities, WMMT would be unable to operate without support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Central Appalachia remains at a serious economic disadvantage along with other rural areas across the nation. Coal mining in WMMT's home of Letcher County—long the economic mainstay—is no longer the source of employment it once

was. Layoffs have become the norm and community members are grappling with the hard realities of whether to stay or leave the area. The resulting hardship shows up in listener contributions and underwriting. The community needs public broadcasting as much as any other but its ability to support it is much less. The number of contributors to the station compares well with the record of other public stations in similar-sized markets, but the average contribution is substantially less. WMMT continues to approach national foundations, but this funding is generally tied to production projects with little leftover to support general operation and maintenance. This is the gap that funding from CPB fills. Without such support, basic operation would be difficult if not impossible, and the local and national productions on Appalachia's music, culture, history, economic and social issues (which are central to the station's mission) could not happen.