

Local Content and Services Report

Corporation for Public Broadcasting – Station Activity Survey, Radio

Telling Public Radio's Story - 2020

- 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.**

For nearly 45 years, WGTE FM has been striving to bring two charter interests to bear in both our local and national programming: education and the arts (with an emphasis on classical music). During FY20 our priorities shifted somewhat with the onset of the global pandemic (more below), but we continue to provide essential content in those charter areas, and serve the community as a source of trusted information and a voice for the arts. Our listeners expect nothing less.

Most of our locally-produced programming is focused on providing that voice for the arts. Our long-form syndicated radio series “Living American Composers: New Music from Bowling Green” is produced in partnership with Bowling Green State University, and continues to cement the school's place as one of the top destinations for contemporary music in the nation.

Our weekly series “Toledo SymphonyLAB™” provides an outlet for the Toledo Symphony to engage with their audience – and reach new audiences – with its unique blend of serious conversation and light-hearted humor. Toledo SymphonyLAB™ is offered both for on-air destination listening and as a podcast, which can be downloaded and listened to on-demand.

Another program which is offered both on-air and as a podcast is “The Rough Draft Diaries,” which takes a short-form approach to profiling community-minded organizations and individuals from the local area, with an emphasis on arts and artists.

All three of these programs have been repeatedly honored by the Press Club of Toledo for their excellent service to the arts community in Toledo, and as the pandemic took hold, all three programs took on an essential role by allowing these organizations and individuals to stay connected to their audiences.

In addition to our many classical offerings, WGTE-FM provides a home for underserved yet important musical genres including jazz, folk, new age, and EDM (electronic dance music). We also partner with the Statehouse news Bureau and our local Toledo newspaper, The Blade, to provide hourly local news breaks during “Morning Edition.”

In response to the growing pandemic and as the national election was forthcoming, WGTE-FM made adjustments to the schedule in order to provide our listening audience with vital information to keep themselves and their families safe and informed. We expanded our news programming from NPR, and we also began broadcasting regular Covid-19 press conferences from Ohio Governor Mike DeWine. We repeatedly heard from listeners that these programs were essential in keeping them informed during the early stages of the pandemic.

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.

During the first several months of the fiscal year, WGTE-FM continued to engage with the community through our “On the Road” initiative, broadcasting from various remote locations around the community and, when appropriate, raising awareness of those organization’s activities. The broadcast events were also a form of community outreach, as listeners were invited to attend and mingle with staff on site. There were nine of these events held before the pandemic began, including special broadcasts from the Croswell Opera House, the Great Lakes Museum, The 577 Foundation, the Toledo Zoo, and Fort Meigs. We also held a special “MacBeth Day” in partnership with the Toledo Opera and the Toledo Lucas County Public Library, which involved live performance from professional opera singers as well as the Woodward High School Choir. Students from Ottawa Hills High School also read excerpts from Shakespeare. Our day-long Christmas season broadcast from the iconic Manor House (part of Toledo Metroparks) drew our largest crowd to date, with over 200 people in attendance.

We continued our partnership with Bowling Green State University by producing season seven of our syndicated radio series “Living American Composers: New Music from Bowling Green.” This award-winning program not only draws attention to BGSU as one of the country’s top schools for contemporary music, but is also curated in part by Pulitzer and Grammy Award-winning composer Jennifer Higdon, who hosted a feature called “Living Women Composers” which features music by her female composing colleagues. The program is heard by 100,000 listeners on average per episode, reaching several markets from San Francisco to St. Louis and even New Zealand – where it is broadcast nationwide on Radio New Zealand's Concert station.

Our weekly program “Toledo SymphonyLAB™” (produced in collaboration with the Toledo Symphony) celebrated its 100th episode during FY20, providing not only an informative presence for the Toledo Symphony to dig deeper into their mission and repertoire, but also to serve as a gateway for potential new concert audiences who are attracted by the show’s informal aesthetic and pop-culture approach to classical music. As the pandemic forced the Toledo Symphony to cancel concerts and re-think their season, “Toledo SymphonyLAB™”

became an absolutely essential tool for getting the word out and keeping the audience engaged. WGTE-FM also continued to keep both the Toledo Symphony and the Lima Symphony in front of the public by broadcasting their concerts every week as part of our program “WGTE in Concert.”

“The Rough Draft Diaries” also provided an essential pandemic response, with a series of features that examined how members of the community were dealing with quarantine. Profiles included members of the food industry, the church, nurses, and teachers. Subsequent to that, the program revisited former subjects to hear how they were adapting to the ongoing pandemic, allowing nonprofit organizations and initiatives to stay connected to the community.

FY20 also saw the first part of our short-form series “Women of Northwest Ohio,” which profiles prominent women across local history. The program is produced in collaboration with the local chapter of the League of Women Voters to mark the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 18th amendment to the Constitution.

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.

“The program has facilitated a continuing dialogue about live performance across our community and beyond. It’s wildly funny at times and deeply sincere at others. Toledo SymphonyLab™ is emblematic of the warm and decades-long relationship between the Toledo Symphony and WGTE.” – Zak Vassar, president and CEO, The Toledo Symphony.

Our flagship local programming has been addressed above, but it’s worth going into some more detail as to how important these offerings became to our partners as the Covid-19 pandemic began to re-shape how they operate.

At the beginning of March 2020, the Toledo Symphony was forced to cancel many of their concerts, opting to live-stream some performances while performing to an empty hall. WGTE responded with a series of televised concerts drawn from the TSO archives, and our FM staff provided the hosting and scripting for a televised special broadcast.

“Toledo SymphonyLab™” began focusing on how the symphony was adapting – not only in regard to their concert season but also for their peripheral activities such as the music school and educational offerings. We also broadcast musicians performing from home (and in-studio when possible), in order to keep the music front and center. The overall effect was to inform and reassure their audience that while the arts were suffering, the music lived on.

We continued to offer a spotlight to local musicians through our monthly program “Live from FM 91,” which became “Virtual Live from FM 91” when quarantine took hold. We were able to offer rebroadcasts of student musicians from Bowling Green State University, when their scheduled appearances were cancelled due to covid-19 restrictions. Additionally, our syndicated radio program produced in partnership with BGSU (“New Music from Bowling Green”) continued to bring national (and international) attention to their College of Musical Arts, thus augmenting their recruitment efforts (an even more important factor during the uncertainty caused by the pandemic).

In addition to partners mentioned previously, we offered conversations with local arts organizations and academic organizations, including the University of Toledo Choir, the Masterworks Chorale, and Toledo Opera. We also continued to bring informal conversations with internationally-recognized musicians to the WGTE-FM airwaves, offered both as downloadable podcasts and on-air.

WGTE-FM is the only radio station in Northwest Ohio dedicated to the arts and classical music in particular. This area enjoys a vibrant cultural presence, and WGTE-FM plays a leadership role in developing content that reaches their audiences. We also help develop potential new audiences for them, while enhancing our own listeners’ appreciation and interest in what’s going on right here in our area. This is a service that has become even more valuable in the midst of the global pandemic.

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 2020, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2021. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

As the George Floyd protests began in May 2020, WGTE-FM responded with a series of specials that addressed issues of racial inequality and police brutality. These included “Throughline: American Police” and “Talking to White Kids about Race and Racism” (these programs were produced by APM and Safe Space Radio).

Our locally-produced program “The Rough Draft Diaries” addressed the local immigrant community in multiple episodes, including a two-part profile of the refugee resettlement agency US Together, and an in-depth look at Water for Ishmael, a nonprofit that provides essential services to the immigrant community in Toledo.

Some other episodes of programs mentioned previously centered on minority interests, including an episode of “New Music from Bowling Green” called “Dead White Man Music.” That episode focused on the young African-American composer Evan Williams, a BGSU graduate who has faced adversity in claiming his stake in the world of European white male-

dominated classical music. In October 2019 “Dead White Man Music” was honored by the Press Club of Toledo with an award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism.

Our locally-hosted music shifts also featured programming reflective of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Black History Month, and Juneteenth. During the month of May 2020 we featured Jennifer Higdon’s “Living Women Composers,” a subset of our program “New Music from Bowling Green.”

WGTE-FM continues to program our classical offerings with a healthy dose of music from minority composers and works that represent a diverse world view. Unlike many other radio stations that broadcast only the “top 40” classical hits over and over, WGTE-FM populates its playlists with a wide variety of works that educate and entertain our listening audience, while opening their ears and minds to the vast cultural tapestry of music with classical connections.

In FY21, we are committed to addressing minority interests with a series of specials examining racial inequality and also celebrating minority culture. These programs, both local and national, serve our audience on both the informational front as well as the arts front.

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?

CPB's Community Services Grant (CSG) provided to WGTE-FM is mission critical for the operation of WGTE-FM's four radio stations.

The loss or even a relatively modest reduction of the CSG would adversely affect our ability to operate a four station radio service, which serves a predominately rural area composed of small towns and villages with a relatively low population density. The CSG provides approximately 16% of the revenues needed to cover expenses for program purchases from NPR, PRI and other sources. If the CSG was eliminated or reduced, WGTE-FM would not be able to make up for its loss by generating increased support from local supporters, underwriting, the State of Ohio, foundations, etc. If we could be generating more revenues from the aforementioned sources, we would be doing so.

If is fair to say that WGTE-FM would not be able to remain on-air, with four stations, let alone one, without the continuation of the CSG at its current appropriation level.

In the alternative, an increase in CSG support would enable WGTE-FM to increase existing services and create new services that would greatly benefit the arts and cultural community and our audiences. Among new services desired would be the start of a public affairs news reporting operation, which would help address the reduction in coverage by traditional print journalism outlets.

Additionally, we would like to add more community voices to our air and stream by training and engaging interested people across our large broadcast area to share information and insights about their communities and their lives. By doing this, we would engage people where they live and how they live, which would drive a greater sense of community and shared experience, while driving listenership.

On a final note, increased funding would enable us to do much more to support the arts and cultural community, which is challenged to make their own media investments given their unfortunate financial challenges. By supporting and boosting local artists, arts and cultural organizations, we can further enrich the region.