

## 6.1 Telling Public Radio's Story

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.

Chicago Public Media (CPM) is mission-driven public media organization rooted in community and dedicated to serving our region's more than 9 million people across audio, digital and events platforms. We believe robust local journalism is at the heart of a well-functioning society, and we are committed to serving our region as a leading source of news, storytelling, and cultural programming that connects Chicagoans to each other — and to the world. Through two branded services, WBEZ 91.5 and Vocalo 91.1, we nourish the public conversation by telling the stories that matter—stories that provoke thought, entertain, capture emotion, and inspire action. For more than 25 years, WBEZ 91.5 FM has been a leader and innovator within the public media system, developing path-breaking original programs and podcasts such as This American Life, Serial, Sound Opinions, Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me, and more recently, 16 Shots, the Making series, and Motive. Now, we are building on our legacy by reinventing public radio for the next generation through world-class reporting, dynamic innovation, and community engagement. As a core part of our strategic investments, we have doubled the size of WBEZ's content and programming team in the past three years. We established topic desks thematically focused on some of the most important subjects affecting our city: Education, Criminal Justice, Politics and Government, and Race, Class and Communities. In FY20, CPM had 141 full-time employees and 14 part-time employees, which included eight interns and two temporary employees. WBEZ's robust broadcast schedule includes nationally revered programs, such as NPR's Morning Edition and All Things Considered, and a locally produced talk program, Reset. Reset, which airs every weekday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., debuted in October 2019 as a daily conversation intended to keep Chicagoans connected to each other, to newsmakers, and to the top stories of the day during midday listening hours. The voices of listeners have taken a new and more important place in the program. There were many memorable moments in Reset's first nine months, including powerful conversations with the President of the Chicago Police union, deep discussions of equity, access, changing neighborhoods, and passionate and joy-filled interviews with musicians, artists, writers, and more. Each day, the news got context, humanity, and nuance. WBEZ ended FY20 with an average of 478,000 weekly broadcast listeners, plus an additional 110,653 weekly digital stream users (up from 58,985, an 86% increase in weekly digital stream users from June 2019 to June 2020). In addition to radio programming, WBEZ also has a proven track-record of finding, nurturing, and developing great stories through podcasts. This past fiscal year the CDU created new shows and re-envisioned existing ones, including Motive, Making Beyoncé, South Side Stories, Curious City, and Nerdette. At the end of FY20, WBEZ had 693,020 active podcast downloads per month. We also engage community members online via [wbez.org](http://wbez.org), with more than 1 million monthly web users, social media platforms, and e-newsletters with 180,700 daily subscribers. Our broad reach — whether through traditional broadcast or emerging digital technologies -- provides an enormous opportunity to foster dialogue and connect people

across lines of difference.

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.

CPM actively collaborates with a broad array of local newsrooms, artists, community leaders, and other organizations to create content and to produce events. These collaborations allow us to deepen and expand our work, amplify the work of others, and extend our collective reach and impact. Collaborations also enable us to support those making an impact in our community, learning from their experiences, and creating an environment in which positive, widespread change is possible. In the last 12 months, WBEZ and Vocolo have embarked on collaborations with AirGo Radio, Better Government Association, City Bureau, Chicago Sun Times, Chicago Reporter, Comedy Central, Enchufate, Make-Believe Association, ProPublica Illinois, the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, South Side Weekly, Univision, WTTW, and Young Chicago Authors, to name but a few. In the FY20, WBEZ and the theatrical company Make-Believe Association (MBA) collaborated to create an original docu-drama, *City on Fire*, that recreates events surrounding Chicago's 1919 riots. The production transports listeners back 100 years to a summer when racial tensions exploded into violence. This close collaboration fused WBEZ's journalism and storytelling expertise with the MBA's production and audio drama abilities to create a moving experience with strong ties to today's world. In the months that followed, WBEZ hosted listening sessions to foster community dialogue, including a session held exclusively for educators to discuss methods for bringing history to life for students, gaps in current curriculum, and ways of drawing the connection between historical events to students' daily experience. WBEZ also joined a collaboration called *Solving for Chicago: The Essentials*. The collaborative includes 20 print, digital, and broadcast newsrooms working cooperatively to cover pressing issues facing the public. The collaborative's current focus is coverage of the workers deemed "essential" during the pandemic, examining questions about our workforce and what is essential for a functioning economy. Ongoing reporting also reveals racial divisions that still exist within our work force. In the events space, CPM often partners with other organizations to help extend the reach of our work and to help connect diverse groups together from across the region. For example, prior to the pandemic, Vocolo held its annual Winter Block Party, a daylong celebration of hip-hop, arts, and culture, in collaboration with Young Chicago Authors. The event was titled *2020: We the People* and was thematically focused around civic engagement. Attendees could, for example, register to vote and be counted with the U.S Census. Nearly 1,500 people attended the Winter Block Party, 76 percent of whom attended for the very first time. Live broadcasts and music performances, including an evening concert celebrating the 25th anniversary of Chicago's Blue Groove Lounge, capped the festivities.

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.

CPM's intended impact is to create a more informed, engaged, and empathetic Chicago. We have identified the following quantitative and qualitative metrics that we use to help inform our progress on impact. • Quantitative measures include audience size and engagement on each of our services and platforms, including but not limited to: weekly audience size broadcast/streaming, visitors to wbez.org, newsletter subscribers, social media followers/sharing, event attendees/participants. Every three years we conduct external research audience scan to measure our audience related to the broader environment. • Qualitative measures include but are not limited to: longitudinal (annual) audience surveys, when content is shared by other media, when content is cited by local civic leaders and policy makers, when our content is cited in policy decisions, when our content/journalists receive awards for their work and anecdotal examples from those personally impacted by our work. Among the most important achievements of the last year has been our team's tireless dedication to serving our community during a time when all of us have needed timely, accurate reporting, essential context, and meaningful human connection like never before. Throughout the historic and tumultuous events of 2020, the WBEZ and Vocalo teams have worked around the clock to bring original reporting and programming to Chicago communities when it mattered most. This includes expansive coverage of the novel coronavirus, including the region's first map tracking the spread of documented cases (in partnership with local nonprofit newsroom the Chicago Reporter), as well as our path breaking stories that revealed stark racial disparities among COVID-19 cases. This on-going reporting established WBEZ as among the first newsrooms in the world to uncover the disproportionate impact of this public health crisis in the United States. Through it all, we have worked hard to keep community voices and issues centerstage in our coverage. From the legalization of marijuana to the primary elections to COVID-19, we have asked residents to share their questions about these complex and important issues with us – and we, in turn, have used their questions to guide our coverage and to provide timely answers.



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.

Beyond merely reporting on facts and updates as they emerge, CPM seeks to shine a light on the people who call this region home across all of our program areas. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been laser focused on amplifying the voices and experiences of disproportionately impacted communities, in many cases highlighting long standing racial inequities exacerbated by COVID-19. As previously stated, WBEZ was

among the first to report on the disproportionate number of Black Chicagoans who were dying from COVID-19. Since then, the team has continued to put a human lens on COVID-19 and its effects on individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities. In June, the WBEZ investigation *Where Banks Don't Lend*, which was a collaboration with the nonprofit newsroom City Bureau, exposed disparities in the amount of money lent in Chicago's white neighborhoods compared to Black and Latino areas — a pattern that locks residents out of home ownership, deprives communities of capital investment, and threatens to exacerbate racial inequities between neighborhoods. Following the investigation, Chicago's top equity and housing officials called the investigation's findings "alarming" and "a call to action," activists called on Chase Bank to pay billions of dollars in reparations to Black neighborhoods, and the Chicago City Treasurer and Illinois State Treasurer have used their leverage to talk with banking leaders on how to eliminate systemic racism in banking and direct more money to the state's Black communities. Since then, Chase Bank vowed to do better on lending in Black neighborhoods. In FY20, our team also began preparing for the November election cycle, making plans to put community at the center of our reporting, including people for whom English is a second language. WBEZ's Citizens' Agenda project combined the expertise of the Government and Politics Desk with an increased ambition to engage the Chicago community more directly and expansively. To get started, we asked our audiences (and people outside our typical audiences) what they wanted Illinois elected officials to be talking about as they compete for votes in November. Our aim was to cover government and politics based on the issues that matter most to constituents. We sent out a digital survey and also went in-person to Chicago communities hit hardest by the pandemic. We also forged partnerships with community organizations that serve them in order to expand our reach and learn more about residents' concerns. Based on survey responses, we focused reporting resources on several areas: the pandemic's public health and economic fallout; racial inequity; public safety and police reform; education equity; and health care availability. At a time when public trust in media is fractured, WBEZ worked hard to keep community voices and issues center-stage in our coverage.

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?

As an influential source of news in Chicago, WBEZ produces reliable news and connects the dots between government actions and real people and experiences in our region. Our newsroom has always sought to provide in-depth, dimensional reporting that reflects the complexities of region and the forces that drive decisions and policies. But in this moment, as uncertainty looms and public health guidelines continue to impact our daily lives, we have an enormous responsibility to respond. CPB funding has been vital to our organization's ability to meet the needs of our community. We could not do this work without the generosity of our community members and supports like CPB, and we are deeply grateful.