Grantee Information

ID
1370

Grantee Name
WEBZ-PM

City
Chicago

State
IL

Licensee Type
Community

6.1 Telling Public Radio's Story

The purpose of this section is to give you an opportunity to tell us and your community about the activities that you've engaged in to address community needs by outlining key services provided, and the local value and impact of those services. Please use a report on your work from Fiscal Year 2021. Responses may be shared with Congress or the public. Grantees are required to post a copy of this report by April 1 of the year following the submission of the report to CPB. CPB recommends placing the report on the grantees’ website for public access. If this section had previously been optional, Response to this section of the SBA is now mandatory.

1. Describe your overall goals and approach to address identified community issues, needs, and interests through your station's local services, such as multilingual long and short-form content, digital and in-person engagement, education services, community information, partnership support, and outreach. Are you reaching or new audiences you engaged?

Chicago Public Media (CPM) is a nonprofit, mission-driven public media organization rooted in community and dedicated to serving our region 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, WEBZ 91.5FM and WEBZ 91.1FM, we nourish the public conversation by telling the stories that matter, stories that inspire, and stories that inform. For more than 25 years, PRE 91.5FM has been a leader and innovator within the public media system, developing path-breaking original and programmatic podcasts as This American Life, Serial, Sound Opinions, Wait, Wait... Don't Tell Me, and more recently, Art of Power. Consider This, and Motive.

In FY21, we continued our in-depth look at coverage with stories of reports and editions focused on specific arenas of particular importance to civic life, Government & Politics, Criminal Justice, Education, and Race & Communities. These topics are also profoundly interrelated and centering these distinct themes not only allowed us to find synergies for deeper coverage. WEBZ 91.1FM launched in 2017 as a mission-driven service designed to engage the next generation of Chicagoans in creating and defining a new sound and approach to public media. In the years that followed, we've integrated it into one of the most unique and engaging programming models in public media, prompting stations in many other communities to follow our lead. True to its founding principles, WEBZ continues to reflect Chicago's distinct cultural and creative fabric with an emphasis on the Chicago experience. At CPB, we aspire to become the essential and must-listened news source that Chicago turns to each day for understanding the people, events, and ideas that shape our community.

CPM's Board of Directors approved a three-year strategic plan in June 2021 following a thorough strategic planning process. The plan's four pillars [Invest in journalism 2] Grow and engage a more diverse audience 3) Connect relationships to funding, and 4) Invest in talent and culture, will guide our work and focus our resources.

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've connected across the community and engaged with other important organizations in the area.

Public radio has long played a critical role in the public issues of our time and in framing a shared sense of community. CPM's work over the last year is a demonstration of the unique role we play in our community. Among our greatest accomplishments were projects that built lasting trust and centered community voices and issues.

For example, WEBZ tracked COVID-19 related radio distribution throughout the Chicagoland area to see whether the groups that were disproportionately hit by the coronavirus received their share of vaccines. Coverage was driven by our community's information needs and focused primarily on two facets: detailing what our listeners and readers need to know about the local distribution of the vaccine and focusing on an on-air equity in vaccine distribution. More recently, in a series called Re-Imagine Chicago we partnered with the Center for Effective Government to investigate how institutions and systems operate in Chicago, and how they might work better to serve residents in the future. The series was solutions-oriented, emphasizing ways our city can lift up residents, improve civic engagement, and enhance quality of life. Daily and weekly segments featured in-depth discussions with academics, innovators, and public servants to explore four core topic areas for Chicago's city government, financial investment, public safety, and schools. We also highlighted community members into open dialogue on issues that directly impact their lives.

WEBZ continued to amplify community voices through projects such as OH! Sounds Like, an initiative that captures the stories of people who give their all to Chicago and enrich us socially and culturally by virtue of their artistry, social justice work, and community building. These stories are shared throughout CPM's platforms and targeted to local communities. We are committed to nurturing and expanding this effort in our own newsrooms and in partnership with many of the other news outlets in Chicago, especially independent, local news outlets, which serve the diverse communities.

WEBZ regularly runs initiatives reaching out to follow Chicago news organizations through our channels, for example, as curated links in our Daily Rundown newsletter, where we invite fellow journalists to appear on our programming such as our midterm show, Reset, and when digging other channels, we share our own personal examples of recent collaborations include WEBZ participating in a collaborative workforce development event that focused on the most vulnerable workers and their jobs during the pandemic.

WEBZ Criminal Justice reporter Shannon Hoffman covered Illinois prison systems as part of Public Media's Local Reporting Network (LRN) for 2020.

This year, Shannon continued investigating into Illinois' prisons, which will be featured in a forthcoming season of our investigative podcast, Motive. WEBZ partnered with the nonprofit journalism outlet The Trice, which is devoted to covering gun violence in the U.S., stories focused on services of Chicago gun víctimes, and the growth these they need to recover. WEBZ partnered with local news organizations City Bureau.

For an investigation called "Where Banks Don't Lend" a report on mortgage lending and modern-day redlining. WEBZ partners with Craig's Chicago every week for a news segment reporting on the city's big news.

WEBZ partnered with the Broderick Friedman Institute for the University of Chicago to produce The Pa, a multi-crediting platform that featured leading economics from the University of Chicago and other experts talking about the latest economic stories of the day. Through a collaboration with StoryCorps Chicago, WEBZ was able to bring the stories of Black Chicago to life. Hosted by Anaconda Contreras, WEBZ produced two public listening parties that highlighted the overlooked voices of the Black residents of Chicago.

The past year has been a time of exploration, investigation, and growth. Despite the hardships of 2021, we produced meaningful journalism that resulted in real policy change, brought communities together through the power of story telling, and grew our audience through innovative new programming. We are proud of what we have accomplished this year and excited about all that is to come in Fiscal Year 2022.

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 ties across diverse neighborhoods. Did a partner see an increase in requests for related resources?

CPM's initiatives continued to be a more informed, engaged, and empathetic Chicago. These qualitative principles informed our work from start to finish, from deciding what stories to cover, to the dissemination of a story after it has been published. An empathetic community is key to a healthy democracy and we seek to address local issues through several factors including reach and feedback. CPM and WEBZ FY21 with an average of 317,400 weekday broadcasts, plus an additional 18,581 weekday digital streams.

We also engage community members online via social media platforms with 205,938 daily subscribers. WEBZ has grown our social media footprint by more than 5,000 members resulting in 90,907 community members. Finally, in FY21 our community engagement events reached more than 13,000 individuals.

WEBZ continues to build on its editorial strategy, which includes creating content that serves as a vehicle for community development, and now that the real world is becoming a bit more normal, we're focusing on creating a more inclusive and diverse audience.

CPM has a vital role to play in this process. We tell the stories of our time, expanding perspectives, amplifying diverse voices, ask difficult questions, provide context, and connect people across a diversity of differences. As a part of this work, we regularly solicit feedback from members, event attendees, and casual listeners.

Below are some examples of the feedback we received in FY21.

"I'm glad there was a Spanish translation available. Otherwise, it is far too long. I have been an immigrant in this country for almost 15 years. For the first 5 years, I was really poor and had a job requiring 40 hours. WEBZ was the only station I enjoyed listening to that also helped pay my bills and improve my status, and I felt that WEBZ has played a huge part in my story. I absolutely love listening to WEBZ on a daily basis. This show momentarily made me realize that I have a home and a family."
Underpinning all of CPM’s work is a theory of change and intended impact centered around empathy. We aim to create a more informed, connected, and empathetic Chicagoland. We believe that inclusive storytelling can serve as a pathway toward understanding and that audio storytelling, in particular, has a unique power to connect people through the magnetic sound of the human voice and the ability to imagine and inhabit a story heard. Community involvement is critical to our ability to carry out that change, and we continue to improve our programming to create opportunities for more authentic involvement. In 2019, we launched a Community Conversations program that sought to bring conversations about our city’s systemic challenges to communities most impacted by them. In Fiscal Year 21, CPM held more than 25 community engagement activities with 13,654 participants over 12 highlights included: Citizen’s Agenda: Little Village Town Hall November 16, 2020 3,000 unique views Asian Pacific Women Only 2420 views, a moderated question-and-answer session with three elected officials who serve the Little Village community. Congressman Jesus "Chuy" Garcia (Rep Garcia was only able to join us for the first half-hour). State Senator Celina Villanueva, and Alderman Michael Rodriques. The Citizen’s Agenda team narrowed the topical focus for the evening by looking at the survey responses from Little Village area zip codes. COVID-19 both as a public health concern and its economic impact, public safety and education were the subjects that residents identified as their top concerns. Significantly, this was WBEZ’s first foray into providing Spanish-language interpretation for a virtual event. Latino Communities and the COVID-19 Vaccines January 21, 2021 1,688 registrants WBEZ’s Accel Gomez-Aldana led a discussion about COVID-19 vaccines with Nupur D. Sahni, MD, Director of Illinois Department of Public Health, Archana Chatterjee, MD, PhD, Dean, Chicago Medical School, and Member, FDA Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, and Janeth Mora, MD, Allergy and Immunology, Chicago Allergy Center, and national spokeswoman for the American Lung Association. The event featured live Spanish-language translation via a dedicated phone line. Re-Imagine Chicago Ideas Forum: Community Investment June 3, 2021 1,757 registrants On June 3, WBEZ hosted our first event of the Re-Imagine Chicago series. This event, moderated by Reimagine Chicago’s chief executive officer, featured discussions about reinvesting in neighborhoods and creating an equitable future for Chicagoland. The conversation was centered around three segments: the history of Chicago investment in innovation, exploration of investment in SouthWest, and bold ideas for community investment. The event started with an interview with WBEZ reporter Nastassie Moore covering a brief history of community and economic development in Chicago. Viewers learned about former mayor’s approaches to community investment and compared them to present mayor Lori Lightfoot. After every event we conduct audience surveys, both qualitative and quantitative, to understand the overall success and impact of an event. In FY21 we saw an average satisfaction score of 4.22 out of 5 and we engaged over 5,000 new audience members. The success of our virtual community engagement events, despite the hardships of the past year, has helped us identify the desire for connection among our audience. In the coming fiscal year, we will continue to learn and listen so our events best serve our community and community voices continue to inform our work.

5. Please assess the impact that your CFP 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?

Support from CFP has enabled the organization to provide in-depth, human-centered reporting that reflects the complexities of our region. In FY21, CPM delivered on our mission to serve as a cornerstone of public conversation. More than ever, journalism is vital to the wellbeing of our community and to American democracy. This is the moment when CPM and our flagship stations WBEZ Chicago and Vocativ can and will serve as the essential and trusted source that a diverse Chicago turns to each day for news, learning, information, community connection, and human-centered storytelling that leads to solutions. It is only with support from CFP and dedication to our mission that we can continue to deliver high-quality news every day and sustain the future of WBEZ and Vocativ, and grow our reach and impact in service to the people of Chicagoland and our region. On behalf of all of us at CPM, thank you for your support.

Comments

Question

Comment

No Comments for this section