

Grantee Information

ID	1370
Grantee Name	WBEZ-FM
City	Chicago
State	IL
Licensee Type	Community

6.1 Telling Public Radio's Story

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The purpose of this section is to give you an opportunity to tell us and your community about the activities you have engaged in to address community needs by outlining key services provided, and the local value and impact of those services. Please report on activities that occurred in Fiscal Year 2022. Responses may be shared with Congress or the public. Grantees are required to post a copy of this report (Section 6 only) to their website no later than ten (10) days after the submission of the report to CPB. CPB recommends placing the report in an "About" or similar section on your website. **This section had previously been optional. Response to this section of the SAS is now mandatory.**

Joint licensee Grantees that have filed a 2022 Local Content and Services Report as part of meeting the requirement for TV CSG funding may state they have done so in the corresponding questions below, so long as all of the questions below were addressed as they relate to radio operations in such report. You must include the date the report was submitted to CPB along with the TV Grantee ID under which it was submitted.

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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 is a nonprofit, mission-driven public media organization rooted in community and dedicated to serving our region across audio, digital, print, and events platforms. As home to WBEZ Chicago, Vocolo, and now the Chicago Sun-Times, we are one of the largest nonprofit news organizations in the nation with award-winning journalists dedicated to serving our community. We amplify the public conversation by telling the stories that matter—stories that provoke thought, entertain, capture emotion, and inspire action. Chicago Public Media is built upon a deep legacy of public service and innovation. WBEZ 91.5 FM was established as an extension service of the Chicago Board of Education in 1943 and became one of the first charter member stations of National Public Radio in 1970. Today, WBEZ's content team produces daily, enterprise, and investigative coverage, with an ongoing focus on Government & Politics; Criminal Justice, Education, and Race, Class & Communities. We also produce a variety of podcast and community engagement programming, both virtually and in person. Vocolo 91.1 FM launched in 2007 as a mission-based service designed to engage the next generation of Chicagoans in creating and defining a new sound and approach to public media. Throughout our history, we have been guided by an abiding commitment to serving our region as a leading source of news, storytelling, and cultural programming that connects Chicagoans to each other and to the world. Today, we are driving forward with a spirit of determination and innovation as we reimagine the future of local journalism in Chicago and beyond. In June 2021, Chicago Public Media's Board of Directors approved a three-year strategic plan to guide our work and focus our resources. Our strategy is to invest in local journalism and build addressable direct relationships via digital platforms to create daily habits and grow the diversity and engagement of our audience. To deliver on our strategy, we have identified priorities across four pillars: Content, Audience Growth, Funding, and People and Culture. In January 2022, Chicago Public Media acquired the Chicago Sun-Times to grow and strengthen

nonprofit, independent journalism in Chicago and serve as a new, national model for the future of local journalism. Our new partnership signifies a transformational moment for Chicago, one that is rooted in our aspiration to be the essential and most trusted news source that Chicago turns to each day for understanding the people, events, and ideas that shape our community. Across our combined print, broadcast, and digital platforms, we serve more than 2.5 million people each week. Our broad reach allows us to deepen the impact of its journalism and reach those whose lives are most affected by the reporting.

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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.

WBEZ provides programming for broadcast, digital platforms, and live events. Our broadcast schedule includes nationally revered programs, such as NPR's Morning Edition and All Things Considered, as well as a locally produced mid-day talk program, Reset with Sasha-Ann Simons. Reset offers listeners a compelling mix of news and culture through engaging conversations with local artists, experts, journalists, and community members. The show's format relies heavily on authentic engagement with listeners, who are encouraged to call in or join the conversation on social media. In the past year, as our community confronted significant challenges, from a nationwide baby formula shortage to the rise of the Omicron variant, Reset provided a reliable forum for critical information and community connection. To achieve our public service mission in the 21st century, we believe it is essential that we reliably show up with compelling stories on the platforms where audiences are seeking news and information. To that end, we are increasingly focused on digital innovation and transforming how we deliver our content in the digital space, including mobile apps, social media, e-newsletters, smart speakers, and podcasts. This year, for example, the Reset team began live-streaming its Friday News Recaps – a segment that breaks down the biggest news of the week with a panel of local reporters – on Facebook and YouTube to provide a new avenue to engage community members. In the podcast space, we launched new seasons of Motive, an investigative podcast, and Making, a bio-podcast series that explores how an icon is made. Finally, we made significant progress in expanding the reach of the Rundown, a daily e-newsletter that curates local and national. In fiscal year 2022, the Rundown reached more than 346,000 daily subscribers. Collaboration with other news entities and community organizations is critical to our work. Chicago is home to numerous local news organizations that we partner with through editorial collaborations, as described below. We also regularly use our platforms to amplify reporting from peer news organizations to help important stories reach a broader audience.

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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.

From politics to education, entertainment to the environment, our local journalism allows individuals to engage with news and stories that are relevant to their daily lives. We believe storytelling can serve as a pathway toward understanding and, in many cases, spur meaningful action. In an annual audience survey, we asked audience members what, if any, actions they have taken as a result of hearing or reading a WBEZ story. We learned that 78% of respondents were motivated to learn more about a story, 73% felt they were more informed when they voted, 69% reconsidered or broadened their perspective on an issue, and 49% were inspired to take a more active role in their community. In one stand-out, collaborative partnership between WBEZ, the Chicago Sun-Times, and MuckRock, we analyzed the findings of an eight month-data collection effort by Microsoft and Chicago's Environmental Law and Policy Center that was designed to compare levels of air pollution by neighborhood. Using air quality sensors from a nonprofit called FieldKit, our reporters supplemented existing sensors with their own set, targeting neighborhoods that were previously overlooked near recently-opened Amazon and Ford plants on the South Side. Leveraging local partnerships, we teamed up with residents of Chicago's South Side and equipped them with air quality sensors to conduct daily readings. The investigation found that Chicagoans who live near heavy-traffic corridors breathe the most polluted air. Those corridors include Little Village, Austin, Englewood, and Irving Park. To help ensure that the findings were useful to our audience, the team transformed complex data sets into digestible visualizations depicting pollution levels across Chicagoland. With reporting partners in both newsrooms, the team worked with sources and experts on the ground to produce compelling narratives that cut through the data and noise to explore the real-world health impact of increasingly poor air quality. Vocalo also played an important role as a catalyst for discovery, expression, and participation. This year, Vocalo reintroduced Storyteller Workshops, a quarterly series that offers hands-on audio production experience to people who want to tell the stories of those making change in our community through creativity. The workshop is a free, eight-week program that equips participants with little to no audio experience with the technical skills necessary to produce, track, mix, design, and execute their audio story. This year, the workshops brought together a cohort of engaged community members across a diverse range of ages, backgrounds, and stories to tell. From the story of a Black bicycling group that builds connections across the city to a powerful Latinx community activist and elder who recently returned to her love of photography, this year's inaugural storytelling cohort created a wide spectrum of compelling stories that amplified the voices of individuals making an impact from all over the city. We also regularly receive feedback and comments from community members. Examples include: I started listening to WBEZ and immediately was intrigued by the content and quality of programs offered throughout the day. It started as my morning commute station however quickly became my favorite. Programs are intellectually stimulating and I love it! I listen to WBEZ every day. It's my go-to for honest and responsible journalism. I have a better understanding of the

world each time I listen. WBEZ gives me hope that the more people understand the better our country and world will be. I've listened to WBEZ ever since I was a kid in the car with my parents. It's been a staple in my life, and an important part in shaping who I am as an adult.

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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 2022, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2023. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

Fulfilling our public service mandate to address the needs of unserved and underserved audiences is a great responsibility that we strive to live up to every day. Our journalists and editors amplify community voices and produce stories that reflect the needs, interests, and hopes of our region. In the past year, voices from across the Chicagoland area were represented throughout our programming, from WBEZ's Curious City podcasts to Vocalo's public music submissions. We found new, innovative ways to connect with our community and produce journalism and storytelling that better reflects the experiences and perspectives of diverse communities. We began to build new teams and reimagine existing ones to help us to show up for, listen to, and engage our community. These growing areas present a meaningful opportunity to bring community members into the conversation more deeply and to engage with our reporting in new ways. One team that we reimaged was our community engagement team. The team is now dedicated to increasing community involvement in our reporting, earning public trust, and reaching communities that have been underserved or stigmatized by media. The central work of the team is not to serve our existing core audience. Rather, we seek to build new audiences by producing journalism with and for our communities, focusing on building relationships with young Black and Latino residents. Our approach requires continual listening and healthy feedback loops that are embedded in our editorial process. We applied this framework to a WBEZ investigation that documented how the City of Chicago turned water into a revenue stream, tracing a decade-long trend to reveal how water debt is crushing low-income Chicagoans and disproportionately affecting Black residents. The story was rich with data visualizations to help illustrate the skyrocketing cost of water over time. To help reach people most impacted by the reporting, WBEZ published the story in English and Spanish and mailed targeted flyers to every community member listed in water debt collections, totaling approximately 18,000 people, in partnership with the Pulitzer Center. In addition, the story was published on the Sun-Times website and on the front page of the paper's "bulldog" Sunday print edition. Shortly after the investigation's publication, Governor JB Pritzker announced a new \$42 million water assistance program for homeowners who cannot afford their water and sewer bills. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot also made the Utility Billing Relief program permanent and allocated \$12 million for the program to help struggling homeowners with water debt. To help connect people to resources, WBEZ partnered with the community organization Blacks in Green to host a series of community workshops designed to present and explain the options that delinquent account holders have to rectify their debt. We also published a guide to answer common questions and outline available resources.

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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?

Support from CPB has enabled Chicago Public Media to provide in-depth, human-centered reporting that reflects the complexities of our region. Declining capacity in local journalism, increasing partisan divide in national media, and the alarming rise of disinformation and misinformation pose a serious threat to democracy, civic engagement, and society at large. At Chicago Public Media, we firmly believe that access to fact-based, objective news and information is a right of every person, and we are determined to make high-quality, reliable journalism more widely available. Our work would not be possible without the combined support of members, foundations, corporations, and government support such as CPB funding. On behalf of the entire team at Chicago Public Media, thank you for your support.

Comments

Question

Comment

No Comments for this section