

Grantee Information

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| 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 2023. 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 2023 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 – home to WBEZ and the Chicago Sun-Times – is a mission-driven public media organization rooted in community and dedicated to serving our region across audio, digital, print, and events platforms. We believe independent, fact-based journalism is at the heart of a well-functioning society, and we are committed to serving our community as a leading source of news, storytelling, and cultural programming that connects Chicagoans to each other—and to the world. Today, Chicago Public Media is the largest local nonprofit newsroom in the country. The breadth and depth of our award-winning journalism spans nearly every major topic with nuanced storytelling, explanation, data, visuals, and solutions to some of the most intractable issues facing our community. Each week, we reach more than 3.5 million Chicagoans, representing about half of all adults in the region. Our audience reflects the full racial and ethnic diversity of the region: approximately 48% of our audience is white, 23% Hispanic, 18% Black, 4% Asian, 2% multiracial, and 4% other races or ethnicities. Reliable daily reporting from WBEZ and the Sun-Times informs public discourse, and our dogged investigative journalism promotes greater transparency and accountability in the halls of power. We're proud to have earned the trust of countless Chicagoans as defenders of the truth in the face of deeply entrenched corruption and systemic inequities, as we tell human-centered stories and elevate a range of potential solutions. Chicago is also a city brimming with creativity and goodness. Its awe-inspiring architecture, diversified economy, flourishing arts and culture scene, and vibrant civic life make it an unparalleled place to live and thrive. These stories need to be told, too. WBEZ and the Sun-Times are dedicated to capturing moments of connection and joy, amplifying the voices of community leaders and activists, and inspiring residents to immerse themselves in our city's diverse neighborhoods. We do all this free of charge because we believe public media is a public good. Just as public parks, schools, and libraries exist to benefit local communities, public media exists to serve the good of our

communities. We are deeply committed to making high-quality local journalism accessible to all, and we rely on our community to make that possible. This year, WBEZ and the Sun-Times articulated a new vision and mission that captures our shared purpose and direction as a combined organization. These statements will guide our work over the years to come and affirm our commitment to you – our community. Our new mission is to strengthen the well-being of our local communities and our democracy through independent local journalism. We produce accessible, trusted news, information, and programming that helps all Chicago area residents make informed decisions every day, participate in our diverse communities, and make the most of our region.

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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. As an NPR station, our broadcast schedule includes nationally revered programs, such as 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, providing an opportunity for all of us to hear from and connect with one another. We frequently collaborate across the WBEZ and Sun-Times newsrooms and with other news entities and community organizations to produce the highest quality local reporting and extend its impact. For example, in August of 2022, WBEZ produced a special broadcast called Prisoncast, a program created with and for people impacted by the carceral system. We partnered with public radio stations throughout Illinois to ensure the two-hour special reached people in and out of prisons statewide, and we also collaborated with organizations working most closely with incarcerated people and their families. The broadcast provided practical, actionable information that incarcerated people told us they needed. We also wanted to entertain and offer a connection to the outside. Through targeted outreach and help from a dozen organizations working inside prisons, we received more than 80 letters and messages requesting songs and sounds that people inside prison missed hearing: the sounds of Chicago's L train passing by, roller coasters, babies laughing, and rain on a tin roof in Puerto Rico. We wove these sounds between songs and practical advice. The show sparked an outpouring of positive responses from people in prison, their loved ones, and other listeners. Later, audio excerpts were featured in a Milwaukee art show featuring works by people in prison, and the show also aired on a BBC podcast. In January of 2023, we launched the People's Agenda in partnership with the University of Chicago's Institute of Politics to collect input from community members on the questions and topics most to them. We received more than 2,500 responses to our survey. The survey result's dominant themes helped set priorities for our reporting leading up to Election Day. The survey was available in both English and Spanish. We made deliberate efforts to hear from people all over the city, especially in areas that have had historically low voter turnout. To reduce barriers between our reporters and the people they serve, we published an analysis of the survey responses and an explanation of how we intended to use them. We also published information and tools, such as a mayoral candidates questionnaire and an interactive quiz, to help people sort through a vast amount of information in the crowded mayor's race and identify candidates most closely aligned with their personal views. Notably, the Sun-Times also distributed 350,000 free voter guides to residents in zip codes with historically low turnout to help Chicagoans learn about the election's top issues. In May 2023, we launched the Democracy Solutions Project, a partnership between WBEZ, the Sun-Times, and the University of Chicago's Center for Effective Government. With an eye toward the 2024 general election, we are producing news stories, editorials, interviews, and events focused on themes that play a central role in our democracy: the state of the judiciary; extremist factions in Illinois politics and government; corruption and money in politics; the impact of political polarization; election integrity and security; our two-party system; and the impact of grassroots organizing. During this 18-month project, we aim not just to sound alarms, but to explore solutions that can empower governments and individuals to make a difference. Our goal is to help our readers and listeners better understand how our democracy works, the threats facing it, and how Americans can become more civically engaged.

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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.

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 recent years, Chicago Public Media has embarked on collaborations with news organizations across the region, including the Better Government Association, Borderless Magazine, City Bureau, Comedy Central, Crain's Chicago, Injustice Watch, NPR, ProPublica, the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, the South Side Weekly, Univision, and WTTW. Since the Sun-Times acquisition, there have also been hundreds of collaborations across the WBEZ and Sun-Times newsrooms, ranging from significant editorial collaborations to republishing stories on wbez.org or suntimes.com. Local accountability journalism has long served as a crucial antidote to systemic inequities, corruption, and mismanagement. WBEZ and Sun-Times reporters invest months, and sometimes even years, to delve deep into complex issues and expose hidden truths, from restrictive housing covenants to sprawling bribery schemes. This

past year, in response to input gathered through audience research, we increasingly focused on uplifting a range of potential solutions to the issues we expose. By empowering our audience with reliable reporting while presenting possible solutions, we aim to inform, inspire hope, catalyze action, and spur meaningful change. This past spring, reporters Sarah Karp, Lauren FitzPatrick, and Nader Issa, and editor Alden Loury spent six months investigating how fifty school closures impacted the city, the school system, and children and their families over the last decade. At the time of the closures, the largest mass closing in U.S. history, city and school district officials promised that students would be better off academically, their new schools transformed, and the shuttered schools would be reborn as community assets. Reporters spoke with dozens of neighbors and reviewed thousands of public documents, revealing that the promises officials made 10 years ago remain unfulfilled. The reporting showed that children are not better off as a result of moving to other schools, schools that welcomed the relocated students are now facing problems, and more than half of the buildings emptied in 2013 still are not in use today. As Chicago faces another severe decline in public school enrollment, we also explored alternatives to mass closings, such as sustainable community school models in which school leadership shares power with the community and consolidating multiple schools in new buildings that can attract students. In March, another WBEZ investigation found that Screening, Assessment and Support Services (SASS), the state program developed as a safety net for children from low-income families, is buckling under the weight of increased need and that Illinois is failing to deliver behavior health support and follow up care that many need. Following the investigation, Alex Keefe and Steven Arroyo from WBEZ's engagement team produced a guide to help parents find free and lower-cost mental health services for kids in Chicago. The team also invited community members to share experiences and questions to help guide future reporting. Finally, last year Frank Main, Tom Schuba, Matt Kiefer, and Chip Mitchell investigated the growing number of mass shootings involving handguns that are cheaply and easily converted into high-capacity machine guns using after-market auto sears, commonly known as "switches." The reporting, published across audio, digital, and print platforms with distinct story formats, reached over 10 million people in our region and across the country, including local and state government officials. Following the coverage, then-mayor Lori Lightfoot and Governor J. B. Pritzker individually announced support for a ban on switches at the city and state levels.

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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 2023, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2024. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

Our community is at the heart of all that we do. We strive to amplify community voices and produce stories that reflect the needs, interests, and hopes of our region. This year, we produced stories that help all of us better understand the diverse experiences and voices that make up the fabric of our community. In many cases, we handed over the microphone, providing a platform for you to tell your story in your own words. WBEZ contributor Elly Fishman and photographer Manuel Martinez spent months with families experiencing the joys and hardships of new parenthood. The reporting unfolded in a series called *The First 12 Weeks*, with intimate storytelling taking readers and listeners into private spaces to witness the joys, frustrations, and needs of three Chicago-area mothers in their babies' first weeks of life. The series addresses parts of the parenting experience not often represented in popular culture: cross-cultural headwinds in a mixed-race household; the legal and day-to-day struggles facing a queer couple; and the acute loneliness of a young immigrant navigating parenthood far from home and mostly alone. Following its initial publication, audio clips and photographs from *The First 12 Weeks* series were showcased in an exhibit at Navy Pier. In February, WBEZ launched two new podcasts that amplify stories and experiences that are often left out of mainstream media. Hosted by three Black women – Cheryl Jackson, Shea Love, and Taylor Coward – who represent three different generations, *When Magic Happens* shares weekly episodes that create space for vulnerability, curiosity, joy, and deep thought with conversations tackling topics ranging from maternal healthcare to entrepreneurship and wealth-building. Co-hosted by WBEZ reporters Esther Yoon-Ji Kang and Susie An, *Shoes Off: A Sexy Asians Podcast* celebrates Asian trailblazers in pop culture. Aiming to combat stereotypes and stigmas that ignore or fetishize Asian people, Esther and Susie talk with comedians, authors, directors, and others to reflect on their identities and redefine "sexy" on their own terms. Since its founding 15 years ago, *Vocalo* has served as a catalyst for local discovery, expression, and participation. *Vocalo* programming highlights storytellers, artists, and changemakers through interviews and showcase events. In one series called "This Is What Chicago Sounds Like" — or "Chi Sounds Like" for short — *Vocalo* profiled people who give their all to Chicago and make our community more vibrant, equitable, and inclusive. *Vocalo* invites members of the community to nominate people who embody the spirit of Chicago. From playwrights to social workers, stories of local artistry, passion, and resiliency reflected the true sounds, people, and communities that make Chicago unique. This year, WBEZ began airing *Vocalo's* "Chi Sounds Like" segments during our daily talk show, *Reset*, to reach a broader audience. In FY2023, *Vocalo* invited listeners to create a sonic ofrenda honoring loved ones who have passed during the previous year for *Día de Muertos*. *Día de Muertos* is a Mexican holiday that celebrates the relationship of life and death with ofrendas – or home altars – adorned in flowers, food items, and many other offerings to honor loved ones who have passed. To create the sonic ofrenda, callers left a voice message describing those they were honoring on the holiday and the memories they hold close to their heart. *Vocalo* producer Ari Mejia wove together messages to create the audio altar honoring those who still live with us in spirit, painting intimate pictures of loved ones, and connecting strangers around the city in remembrance and celebration.

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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?

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 critical government support such as CPB funding. In the past year in particular, as the macro-economic environment created uncertainty in some revenue areas, reliable support from CPB has been more critical than ever to help sustain our in-depth, human-centered reporting. On behalf of the entire team at Chicago Public Media, thank you for your generous support.

Comments

Question

Comment

No Comments for this section