

**New York Public Radio
Future of Media
Response to GN Docket No. 10-25
May 7, 2010**

Financial Health

For local noncommercial television and radio stations, what have been the trends for staffing, the amount of local news and information aired, audience ratings for such programming and local station financial health? If there have been news staff contractions, what type of programming has been cut back or changed? What have been the trends in funding from governmental, private sources and viewer/listener donations? What has been the role of government regulation?

WNYC, like many public media organizations on the local and national levels, has not been immune to the economic pressures faced by its peers during the past two years, having to eliminate unnecessary spending and delay major expenditures for new news initiatives. Modest staff contractions, while unfortunate, meanwhile have not impacted WNYC's output across news and programming. At the same time, WNYC was able to take advantage of an opportunity to acquire the classical music station of the New York Times, WQXR, converting it to a non-commercial venue for classical music. WNYC felt that it was imperative, as a provider of important arts and cultural coverage to local and national audiences, to take this move in order to save classical music on the radio in New York City. As a result, WNYC has embarked on a \$15 million campaign to cover the acquisition and transition costs for the new station as well as for new initiatives in programming and cultural partnerships.

In terms of philanthropy, similar to other public media agencies, overall institutional support for WNYC has been down. The number of donations from individuals to WNYC continues to increase, however, as listeners demonstrate the need for public media now more than ever. In fact, during WNYC's most recent pledge drive in March, the station raised \$1,964,161 (against a goal of \$1,800,000) from 16,000 listeners for WNYC, which represents 10% higher than the same pledge drive last year. Having launched as a public media station in October 2009, WQXR has since gained more than 17,000 individual members, an untested revenue model for classical music radio in New York that is already proving itself.

At the same time, city and state government funding has declined approximately 15%-20% over the past several years.

Mobile Technology and Interactive

What has been the impact of competition for audience from the Internet or other information sources? How are public broadcasters using the Internet, mobile applications, their multicast channels/additional program streams, or other new technologies to provide local news and information? How are they collaborating with non-broadcasters? How have these changes affected the availability of informational and educational programming for children and other informational and educational material? In general, how, if at all, should noncommercial television and radio licensees change to meet the challenges and opportunities of the digital era? How does the role of public media differ from that of commercial media? If there is a greater role for public media in meeting the information needs of local communities, how should that be financed? What role, if any, should government subsidies play? Should legal requirements regarding underwriting and advertising be changed?

The role and position of WNYC is inherently different than that of commercial media in New York because of the station's expressed mission to serve and reflect our public. Rather than respond to the pressures of the marketplace, WNYC's programming is based upon what listeners want

and need, not what advertisers demand. Similar to public media in general, and further demonstrated by the growth in contributions from individual listeners, WNYC's audience is also on the rise. In fact, the total audience for public radio has grown more than 150 percent over the course of the last 20 years (1989-2009), while in the past five years (2004-2009) alone the weekly audience of National Public Radio stations has increased by 9 percent¹ and today totals more than the combined circulation of the top 52 national newspapers, which includes *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. This growth in audience service is in contrast to trends elsewhere in media. Over the same period, newspapers audiences have declined by 29 percent, nightly network news by 24 percent and commercial radio news by 29 percent.²

Rather than compete with Internet, mobile technologies, and interactive tools, WNYC has adapted to and integrated these platforms to reach and better serve our listeners and to bring new audiences to public broadcasting. The use of interactive technology is not an either/or proposition for WNYC since it has never relied on the revenue models that are now being threatened at commercial media organizations. As the Pew Foundation commented in its recent report on the state of the news media, "Radio is well on its way to becoming something altogether new – a medium called audio...To a greater degree than some other media, radio is unusually well suited to the digital transition. Voice and music are mobile and move easily among new platforms. And audio has done better as a medium of holding its audience than some other sectors."³

WNYC embraces this distinction and sees itself not only as a *radio station*, but as a *content provider*. Through national programs such as *Radiolab*, *On the Media*, and *The Takeaway*, WNYC has seamlessly integrated tools such as podcasting, social media, and mobile applications into its regular operations and sees these platforms as additional ways to reach audiences and share that content. Further, programs such as *Radiolab* have taken full advantage of this shift, developing a suite of audio-based, but not audio-delimited, programming that has transformed these programs into complex multi-platform brands that bring new audiences to public media. Programs of this kind have taken particularly well to podcasting; in the past year, for instance, *Radiolab*, the podcast, was downloaded more than 10 million times and continues to be downloaded more than 1 million times per month.

WNYC frequently collaborates with non-broadcasters in a variety of ways, such as through editorial and administrative partnerships and by sharing content and/or resources. For instance, WNYC frequently partners with independent investigative news agency ProPublica to produce comprehensive investigative reports on issues pertinent to the tri-state region. One such collaboration involved an exploration of the environmental consequences of natural gas drilling in upstate New York which then led to a state-wide investigation. These strategic partnerships make available to WNYC the resources and information that inevitably lead to more robust public service programming.

Sourcing and Dissemination of Local News/Information

How are foundations helping in the provision of local news and information? How much has been given toward local news and information experiments? What is the focus of the efforts? What is the likelihood of long-term commitments? In general, how much

¹ Arbitron Nationwide, Persons 12+, Monday-Sunday, 6a-midnight, Spring to Spring comparisons.

² Research Center for the People & the Press, 2008 survey; newspaper and radio results from 1993 represent 1994 survey results. Telephone survey of 3,612 adults from April 30 to June conducted by both landline and cell phones (as reported by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009 Editions, "News Consumption Trends" Chart.)

³ Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, State of the News Media 2009, http://www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2009/narrative_audio_intro.php?cat=0&media=10

journalism and other forms of information provision can be supported by private-sector non-profit sources? What role will and should user-generated journalism play? In what ways can it improve upon traditional journalism, and in what ways can it not substitute for traditional journalism? How can the quality and effectiveness of citizen journalism be further improved? What kinds of digital and media literacy programs are appropriate to help people both use new information and communication technologies effectively and to analyze and evaluate the news and information they are receiving?

In recent years, foundations have begun to take a very active role in the way that local news is carried out and disseminated and to look to non-profit news agencies to fill the gap left by the demise of many commercial news agencies. Foundations and government agencies such as the Knight Foundation and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) are encouraging new news models to be built, and supporting ideas such as Public Insight Journalism, new collaborative partnerships among public media organizations, and new partnerships between media agencies and journalism schools. The Knight Foundation, for instance, is investing in local news and information through projects such as the Knight News Challenge and the Knight Community Information Needs program. WNYC has been a recipient of both Knight News Challenge grant and various collaborative funding issued by CPB.

A major focus on these efforts has been creating a mechanism to deliver local and hyper-local news coverage while sourcing and better serving diverse news consumers that have heretofore been underserved by public media. User-generated journalism is a natural outgrowth of public service media/journalism and a means to achieve both of these goals. With audience call-in a central feature of our daily operations, WNYC has long leveraged the “wisdom of the crowd.” In recent years, WNYC has developed and used the new digital tools to launch sophisticated crowdsourcing projects that rely on members of its local communities to provide the on the ground knowledge and expertise that would be difficult to ascertain through its newsroom.

For example, WNYC projects produced by the station’s daily local/regional public affairs program *The Brian Lehrer Show* have included “Are You Being Gouged?” which measured the price of everyday consumer goods across boroughs to determine who is paying the most for groceries and “Your Uncommon Economic Indicators” – which is also now a national model - and asked listeners to provide information and data about the ways in which their local neighborhoods and economies were suffering due to the recession.

Crowdsourcing and user-generated content are a wonderful way to complement the work of our newsroom, helping to fill in gaps in our coverage, uncover new news stories, create stronger relationships between the station and our listeners, and potentially bring more diverse voices and perspectives into the public sphere. At the same time, there is no substitute for strong ethics, rigor, objectivity, and transparency – all hallmarks of traditional journalism – and public media is grappling somewhat with how to merge crowdsourcing into its reportorial DNA.