



COMMUNITY COUNTS

An initiative
of the National Federation
of Community Broadcasters



WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY COUNTS INITIATIVE?

CCI is a cohort-based learning program for community radio stations serving rural and underrepresented communities. The initial pilot provided training, mentorship and technical assistance for 10 stations over an 18-month span between 2018 and 2019.

The purpose of this first CCI cohort was not only to serve the participating stations, but to shape and strengthen the initiative for future cohorts, and to identify promising practices for the broader public radio community in support of long-term sustainability and enhanced public service.

Photo on this page: The shore of Lake Superior viewed from Grand Marais, Minnesota, WTIP.

On the front cover: Station volunteers from East Orland, Maine, WERU; Warm Springs, Oregon community members, KWSO; DJ Prince I Gwaan (Ryan Swanson), WERU.

On the back cover: Station volunteers from Talkeetna, Alaska, KTNA.

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Photo: WNCU Team photo, Durham, North Carolina.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**USING A BLEND
OF EXPERT
KNOWLEDGE
AND PEER
ENGAGEMENT, CCI
WAS DESIGNED TO
INFUSE NEW IDEAS
AND APPROACHES
IN BUILDING
RELEVANCY AND
SUSTAINABILITY
INTO LOCAL WORK.**

Two concepts were pivotal as anchors in the learning of the cohort participants. The first was NFCB's Circle of Engagement model, and the role the model played in understanding the interplay among relationships, content, fiscal strength, and capacity. The second was the importance of relevance, and empowering communities to shape future content and service.

The pilot included written assignments and tools, such as creating a strategic framework and action plan. These activities created clarity, focus, and, as one participant remarked, "something tangible; something to work towards." This, coupled with deadlines, kept the process moving.

Participants were encouraged to build strong connections with one another and among the broader national network of community broadcasters. Members of the cohort were also given time away from the challenges of daily work to use for reflection, renewal, and stepping back to see their work in a more objective frame. CCI proved to be a powerful vehicle for station leaders to access professional development that is historically hard to come by.

Throughout the program, NFCB sought to learn about the benefits of CCI's balance of knowledge, relationships, and reflection. In addition, NFCB developed toolkits and training approaches to share with their membership and other community broadcasters.

STATIONS ENGAGED

WTIP - Grand Marais, MN

WMMT - Whitesburg, KY

KBFT - Nett Lake, MN

WXPR - Rhinelander, WI

KZUM - Lincoln, NE

KWSO - Warm Springs, OR

WNCU - Durham, NC

KRTS - Marfa, TX

KTNA - Talkeetna, AK

WERU - East Orland, ME

FINDINGS

CCI was most successful in addressing the area of community engagement. All stations made headway in terms of developing stronger visibility within their service area, as evidenced by increased event participation, attracting youth, or developing partnerships with other community organizations.

There was also significant progress in content creation as five stations launched new areas of programming aimed at either reaching new audiences – and new demographics – or deepening local relationships. These included:

- WTIP's *Wavelengths* youth programming, a major new initiative to empower youth to report youth news and share their own stories and perspectives;
- WXPR's *We Live Up Here* and *Curious North* initiatives to capture and broadcast local stories and anchor the station as a creative outlet in the "north woods;"
- KTNA's *The Blue Tarp* podcast series to elevate and preserve the voices of local people, reiterating the station's role in building social capital;
- KZUM's *Flatwater Voices*, which offered podcast and broadcast time to immigrant groups to be the voice of their community and in their primary languages; and
- WMMT's *Restorative Radio*, a challenging and empowering platform to give voice to individuals incarcerated in the Appalachian region.

Among the remaining stations, new programming or programming approaches often came about from engagement efforts: KWSO's *Effective Connections* gave rise to *Community Talk*, a monthly talk show focused on mental health topics; WERU's *Share the Air* brought about new music and public affairs programs hosted by younger volunteers; and WNCU's *Jazz and Much More (JAMM)* led to the intentional broadening of the music mix to attract a new generation of listeners.

In the financial realm, three stations reported significant new dollars as a result of their efforts: KZUM, which has received new private funding as a result of their programming *Flatwater Voices*; WXPR, which attracted a new funder to underwrite a year of their *Waterways* initiative; and WTIP exceeded their year-end membership goals when they called on community members "to support the young volunteers."

Stations were exposed to financial forecasting through creating a three-year financial profile to drill down on revenue sources and potential opportunities. Four stations, KTNA, WERU, WTIP and WXPB, tracked membership and sustaining memberships separately and reported yearly gains in sustaining memberships (monthly giving) over the financial profile time period. The ability for these stations to grow sustaining memberships has helped them manage cash flow and is a critical first step in developing more targeted development practices.

CCI encouraged frank conversations about weaknesses and dialogue exploring potential solutions. One participant remarked that it was gratifying to be welcomed “warts and all.” Cohort participants reported that they had made progress in key areas of capacity such as governance and leadership, engagement orientation, strategy and planning and resource allocation by the end of the cohort. However, the role of boards, the relationships between boards and staff leadership, and maintaining an organizational strategic focus still continue to be areas of primary concern.

The strength of the program rests in the cohort model and the intentional reevaluation of the role of community radio in a context of rapid change in the industry. Through mentoring, coaching, peer support, and shared commitment to challenging assumptions, stations cut through old ideas to form new paths, practices, and priorities.

While it is difficult to gauge the long-term impact of CCI due to the 18-month time frame, participants have been sparked to make changes to become more relevant in the lives of the people in their service areas, as communities change and methods of engagement with media change. Particularly striking was the adoption of strategic frameworks and the use of new language – multiplatform, local voices, next generation, cultural relevance, change management – across the cohort participants and within their station communities.

Based on the positive outcomes from the first cohort, a second CCI cohort is planned for 2020-2021 with a broader base of knowledge experts and improved curriculum. There will be a continued emphasis on financial sustainability, leadership training and capacity building. Alumni from the first cohort will have a role in mentoring participants in the second cohort, and progress will be closely tracked for both current and alumni stations with a goal of continued improvement and sharing insights with the NFCB membership and greater public media community.

CIRCLE OF ENGAGEMENT



Engagement drives content

Content drives relevancy and value

Increased **Revenue** expands innovation

Organizational Capacity sustains progress in all areas over time

Success requires balanced attention to the four critical areas articulated in the model.

STATION PROJECTS

- WTIP's *Wavelengths* welcomed a Youth Community Advisory Board ages 8-18, and enabled youth focused content production and delivery.
- WMMT's *Restorative Radio* developed strong relationships inside and outside the prison system, and created seven hour-long episodes with regular incarcerated contributors.
- KBFT increased event participation by elevating program planning and promotion, and also raised awareness and garnered support from their tribal council.
- WXPR's *We Live Up Here* aired 56 features from over a dozen contributors, and led to a new *Waterways* feature with year-long funding for an additional journalist.

- KZUM's *Flatwater Voices* developed five partnerships with local immigrant organizations to create monthly broadcast and podcast programs, and significantly strengthened financial support.

- KWSO's *Effective Connections* kicked off a collaboration with Health, Mental Health & Prevention partners

on six community events, increased understanding of issues and protective factors, and gave rise to *Community Talk*, a monthly, hour-long talk show.

- WNCU's *Jazz and Much More (JAMM)* increased engagement with faculty, staff, students and community members, and began diversifying programming to appeal to a younger audience.
- KRTS navigated management and operational challenges, including filling a long-term vacancy for a development director, and positioned the station for future content development.
- KTNA created an editorial board, started production of a broadcast and podcast series, *The Blue Tarp*, and completed a strategic plan.
- WERU's *Share the Air* attracted younger volunteers (20's-40's) for board service, music and public affairs programming, and a mobile app was launched to appeal to a new generation.



Photo: Many of the cohort participants at the NFCB conference in San Diego, California, June 2019.

STATION STORIES

WTIP

In 2019 we launched an open-ended initiative called *Wavelengths* – engaging youth in our area to participate in making local radio, through spoken word, musical performances and content creation, with the intent of broadening our listener demographic. The priority development of a school-age youth community advisory board (YCAB) has incorporated a new level of membership diversity. Based on the YCAB experience and recommendations, WTIP will work to identify relevant new content and share the work of young radio performers and programmers with our community of listener members. Using the Circle of Engagement model to guide us into new areas of growth and organizational change, we have already experienced an influx of fresh views on content production and delivery and have welcomed new voices, ages 8 to 18, to sit at the leadership table (not the “kids’ table”).

WMMT

The phone board in WMMT’s Studio B begins to light up. As soon as the receiver is lifted a voice starts, “You are receiving a call from Russell Banks, an inmate at Red Onion State Prison. Press one (1) to accept.” The voice of the automated operator contrasts sharply with Russell’s voice stating his name.

He’s calling in to chat with Rachel Garringer, the lead producer of the community radio station’s *Restorative Radio* program. *Restorative Radio*, aims to build upon WMMT’s prison justice work by producing and airing a program that is primarily of, by, and for those incarcerated in WMMT’s listening area. WMMT, located in the Appalachian foothills of southeast Kentucky, reaches several state and federal prisons. Russell has been one of the primary contributors during the first season of *Restorative Radio*, which has just wrapped.

KBFT

The CCI call for applications seemed like an opportunity to be involved with other stations, to learn about their operations, and to add to my personal knowledge as a manager in the community radio side of broadcasting.

CCI and the knowledge shared has definitely inspired me to up my game and meet the standards our team wants to achieve and create an organization that serves and is supported by our community. CCI has helped our Tribal Council understand their role in supporting KBFT. KBFT has now been placed under the direction of the Information Technology – IT Department and its Commissioner/Director, Randy Long who has championed key issues that were not addressed under KBFT’s past leadership. With simple hurdles removed, KBFT’s team is energized and ready to push forward to meet our Circle of Engagement potential.

Photo: *Wavelengths* initiative at WTIP, Grand Marais, Minnesota.





Photo: KWSO volunteers ride through their community parade.

WXPR

WXPR has experienced a steady decline in membership over the past ten years. Regrettably, we were busy making radio that we thought the community wanted, but we were not adequately involving them in the process. This led to the launch of WXPR's *We Live Up Here* series, with the intent to create a project that was reflective of our community, co-created by our community, and welcoming for our community.

Citizen contributors were recruited from across the region and trained on how to use broadcast equipment, produce a story and interview. The response from contributors was slow at first, but once the community features started to air, the response from listeners was extremely positive.

Over the past year WXPR has grown. We've made staff changes that allow for increased community engagement

and will open up our studios for a student journalism and community podcast program in 2020. WXPR is anticipating improved engagement with listeners, fresh content, and increased membership. It's hard to top 2019, but 2020 is going to be a big year!

KZUM

When the Community Counts Initiative started, all I knew was that we needed a refocus. Our organization needed to change the way that we thought about how we engage with our community.

Through the year-long process of working with the CCI cohort, we were able to nail down the type of content that supports these engagement goals, navigate discussion with potential community partners and discuss ways to communicate the need to our board, volunteers and funders. Communicating this change in multiple groups throughout our organization has

been difficult. I have found that, while your organization can say that they've bought into the plan, realizing the change is another challenge.

Community partnership growing into content is the culmination of KZUM's work with CCI. Handing over the power in knowledge of content and production to organizations and individuals who can represent their community's values and needs has reaffirmed my vision of engaging with the community in a profound, inclusive and supportive way. If it wasn't for my experience in CCI, I would still be scratching my head on how our organization can truly serve our whole community. This experience has been a truly transformative experience in my leadership and our organization's vision.

KWSO

Warm Springs Community statistics for things like unemployment, drug

and alcohol use, and poverty are high. 2019 saw the literal breakdown of water infrastructure resulting in a three-month boil water order for the population center of the Reservation. But, there are good things happening too. Tribal Languages are being taught at a school operated by the local state school district. There is a Wellbriety movement with young adults and high school students who are being recruited and mentored to work in health and science careers.

KWSO radio is part of the Tribal Government's Health & Human Services Branch. We collaborated with Health, Mental Health & Prevention partners to focus on six community events with enhanced efforts to provide education and awareness utilizing audio and video content. Events were well promoted across broadcast and online platforms, but more importantly we connected the events to a greater understanding of

issues, some of which can be difficult to navigate.

All these events are annual activities where community convenes. We didn't invent them – but we extended ourselves to strengthen our relationships with partners to create more robust collaborations and *Effective Connections* for positive impact in our community and in coming together to learn and heal.

WERU

The unsettling notion of “aging out” had been on the minds of the WERU Community Radio faithful for a number of years. By the fall of 2018, it was apparent that attracting and serving people in their 20s-40s required special attention. Enter the Community Counts Initiative.

We surveyed and conversed with people in their 20s-40s about their

media needs and interests. We worked with developers to create a new smartphone app and fresh logo. Grant funds were used to pay for events designed to engage younger audiences. We welcomed younger people to get involved as volunteers, to *Share the Air* with the older folks at the station. And more timely, flexible and individualized training was offered for new volunteers.

By reaching out both individually and collectively, providing training and opportunities to contribute immediately, and incorporating new media technology like a WERU app, we were able to attract younger people. As for the older volunteers, two years ago Phil Norris, one of our founders, expressed hope that the passion that existed at the beginning of the station could somehow be transferred to a new generation of volunteers. He was prophetic in that wish and we think it has actually begun happening. *Share the Air* is becoming a reality!

BY THE NUMBERS

CCI offered a multi-pronged approach to learning and organizational development and included the following activities:

2 Multi-day conferences with training sessions and networking opportunities

7 Webinars

4 Small group meetings

10 Station visits

Individual coaching and mentorship

Station assignments included:

100-Word description exercise

2 Narrative reports

2 Surveys at the beginning and end of the study time period

1 Action plan with draft and final versions

MISSION

NFCB provides customized and innovative services that optimize community media's capacity to serve their communities and engage them in their service.

VISION

A nation informed and entertained by a robust local media service that values the citizen above the consumer, strengthens our democracy, supports creative expression, and contributes to the health of the communities it serves.

VALUES

Localism

Leadership

Collective Impact

Equity

Inclusion



NFCB AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Founded in 1978, NFCB is the oldest and largest national organization dedicated to community stations within the public media system. NFCB provides customized services that optimize organizational capacity and help stations navigate change. CCI is built on NFCB's commitment to strategically invest in community media beyond core membership services.

CCI is NFCB's call to action for community station leaders to demonstrate the essential contributions they make to the public media system and the American public. NFCB is committed to enhancing collective impact in the field of community media and leading initiatives that contribute to innovation in public media's service.

By the end of 2021, CCI will include 20 community stations that have moved through a comprehensive curriculum based on the Circle of Engagement model and are using it to make strategic decisions while navigating change. Toolkits corresponding to each of the four areas of the model will be accessible to all NFCB member stations no matter their size or location.

With a combination of providing reliable core services and strategic initiatives, NFCB continues to carry the torch for strengthening local media and ensuring its role in the fabric of resilient communities nationwide.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Community Counts Initiative was funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting with additional support from Wyncote Foundation.

Special thanks to Kathy Merritt, Jacquie Gales Webb and Erika Pulley-Hayes from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for their oversight, support and thoughtful input into CCI. They not only added to the success of the cohort, but actively stewarded the program into 2020-2021.

The cohort portion of the CCI initiative would never have come to fruition without the support of Wyncote Foundation. Wyncote's support from 2015 through 2019 allowed NFCB to visit stations in the field, develop service strategies, and reposition the organization as a thought leader.

The NFCB team that implemented CCI included CEO, Sally Kane, COO Gretchen Aston-Puckett, Program Director, Ernesto Aguilar and CCI Project Manager, Sally Hardy.

NFCB engaged 8 Bridges Workshop, a St. Paul, Minnesota-based consulting firm, with Sarah Lutman, principal and Sharon Rodning Bash, lead consultant, as outside evaluators for the CCI pilot. Sharon Rodning Bash also provided invaluable input regarding cohort study management, and adult learning.

This report draws extensively from the 8 Bridges Workshop Community Counts Initiative Final Evaluation Report written by Sharon Rodning Bash. Members of the NFCB team organized, edited and added additional content. The final narrative reports submitted by the stations were excerpted for the Station Stories and some were edited for flow and clarity. Photographs were provided by the cohort stations and CCI Project Manager, Sally Hardy. Design and formatting for this report and other project materials were provided by NFCB Program Director, Ernesto Aguilar.

Thanks to Amanda Eichstaedt, NFCB board member liaison and General Manager of KWMR, Point Reyes Station, California, for auditing the cohort and providing real-time feedback as a liaison to the board. Also, thanks to NFCB

board members, Sonya Green Ayears and Marcellus Shepard for participating in the WNCU station visit.

Nina Simon, author and a visionary leader of the participatory museum movement made a tremendous contribution to our curriculum with her articulation of the OF/BY/FOR/ALL community engagement model and her book *The Art of Relevance*.

Glyn Northington, Senior Program Director at Propel Nonprofits, provided great insight into financial forecasting as a webinar presenter.

The following individuals comprised the cohort:

WTIP - Matthew Brown, Executive Director and Staci Drouillard, Development Director

WMMT - Elizabeth Sanders, General Manager and Rachel Garringer, Public Affairs Director

KBFT - George Strong, General Manager, Darren Landgren, Communications Coordinator and Charles Wagner, Legacy Project Manager

WXPR - Jessie Dick, Station Manager, and Mackenzie Martin, Features Reporter

KZUM - Kerry Semrad, General Manager and Ryan Evans, Program Director

KWSO - Sue Matters, Station Manager and Brutis Baez, Operations Manager

WNCU - Lackisha Freeman, General Manager and Uchenna Owens, Development Director

KRTS - Elise Pepple, General Manager and Lisa Kettyle, Office Manager

KTNA - Corinne Smith, General Manager and Phillip Manning, News Producer

WERU - Matt Murphy, General Manager and Heather Andrews, Development Director



"Handing over the power in knowledge of content and production to organizations and individuals who can represent their community's values and needs has reaffirmed my vision of engaging with the community in a profound, inclusive, and supportive way."
- KZUM

"You have inspired us to re-position and grow by working together to better serve our community."
- WNCU

"Over the past year WXPR has grown, we now strive for a WXPR that's reflective of our community, co-created by our community, and welcoming for our community."
- WXPR

"Using the Circle of Engagement model to guide us into new areas of growth and organizational change, we have already experienced an influx of fresh views on content production and delivery and have welcomed new voices ages 8 to 18 to sit at the leadership table (not the kids' table)."
- WTIP



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