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## IMPACT FOR ALL

### PROGRESS REPORT

The Impact for All initiative was created to provide small local public media organizations with customized insight into their organization and an actionable plan for increased growth and local impact. Public Media Company (PMC) established the initiative because small stations are typically located in smaller and/or low-income communities and face considerable challenges generating the resources needed to meet local needs, an issue frequently exacerbated by cuts in institutional support<sup>1</sup>. With the insight, context, and industry experience that Public Media Company consultants provide, Impact for All participants can identify the most promising opportunities, overcome challenges, gain the support of critical stakeholders, and chart an impactful way forward to increased growth and local impact.

#### GRANT-FUNDED ACTIVITY

Public Media Company believes that all organizations, regardless of size, deserve access to the insights and solutions they need to strengthen their services and succeed in their local communities. Thanks to the generous support of several philanthropic partners, we were able to work with 10 local public media organizations across the country in late 2021 and throughout 2022. The philanthropic funding, in combination with in-kind support from PMC and \$5,000 from each participating organization, enabled Public Media Company to provide participants with \$20,000 in strategic consulting services. This included continuous engagement with organization leaders and stakeholders (board members, university supervisors, etc.) throughout the several month process as well as a number of specific deliverables:

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<sup>1</sup> Revenue from institutional sources (colleges, universities, school boards, states) dropped by 32% for small public media stations between 2013 and 2021. By comparison, institutional revenue for large public media stations increased by 12% over the same period. This is especially challenging as small stations rely on institutional support for a much higher proportion of their overall revenue than their large station counterparts.

- Detailed analytical reports/insights:
  1. **Financial analysis report** to understand organizational trends over the past decade, identify revenue sources of promise/concern, analyze expense trends, and assess the overall sustainability of the enterprise
  2. **Peer comparison report** to compare organizational performance with peer organizations and better understand where there may be opportunities to learn and grow as a community-focused organization
  3. **Audience insights report** to review social media performance compared with peer organizations and, where available, assess the organization’s audience engagement across legacy and digital channels
  
- Comprehensive deck of materials for executive and lay leaders:
  1. **Insights into changing media/technology world and societal changes** to provide wider context and help decision makers better understand the environment they operate in
  2. **Summary of all findings** to help clearly communicate the most relevant takeaways from the in-depth analysis
  3. **Specific recommendations to grow local impact and sustainability** so that organization leaders know where to focus their resources to greatest effect

Impact for All has helped participants understand their financial performance, benchmark against peers, understand their audience, know their environment, uncover a path to future growth, and also create connections with other public media organizations facing similar challenges. **Without the philanthropic funding we received, none of this would have been possible.**

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT

The 10 organizations that participated in the initiative operate multiple public radio and television stations and provide a variety of services across different distribution platforms and through in-person events. Participating organizations’ broadcast signals reach 9 million people across the country, most of whom are unserved by any other public media entity. Additionally, nearly all the Impact for All organizations serve people that are significantly less wealthy and less educated than the U.S. overall – making their work both more challenging and more critical. Some participants are also operated by and/or serve unique and often underserved populations, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Indigenous American tribal communities.

## 10 IMPACT FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

**KAMU** (College Station, Texas). Radio & TV organization licensed to Texas A&M University. It serves a diverse and lower income population of nearly 300K via radio and nearly 400K via its TV signals. There is no other public media organization in the region

**KRCU Public Radio** (Cape Girardeau, Missouri). Radio organization licensed to Southeast Missouri State University. It reaches a low-income population of over 350K people via its radio signals and no other public radio organization is in the region

**KSUT/Tribal Radio** (Ignacio, Colorado). Radio organization licensed to the Southern Ute Tribe and one of the earliest pioneers of Native American radio. It reaches over 200K people in the Four Corners area of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, including the Southern Ute and other tribal communities

**KVNF Community Radio**, (Paonia, Colorado). 501c3 community radio organization reaching over 130K people across 10,000 square miles of the Western Slope of Colorado

**Troy Public Radio** (Troy, Alabama). Radio organization licensed to Troy University. It reaches a diverse/lower income population of over 1 million people via its radio signals

**WBST/WIPB**, (Muncie, Indiana). Radio and TV organization licensed to Ball State University. It serves a lower income population of nearly 400K people via its radio signal and nearly 3 million people via its television signal

**WCMU Public Media** (Mount Pleasant, Michigan). Radio and TV organization licensed to Central Michigan University. It serves a lower-income population of just over 1 million via its radio signals and nearly 1.5 million via its television signals

**WGLT/WCBU** (Normal & Peoria, Illinois). Radio organizations licensed to Illinois State University and Bradley University but managed by a single leadership team (a unique arrangement in public media). WGLT's signals reach over 300K people and WCBU reaches over 400K people

**WILL/Illinois Public Media** (Urbana, Illinois). Radio and TV organization licensed to the University of Illinois. It serves over 500K people via its radio signals and a little over 1 million people via its TV signals

**WNCU<sup>2</sup>** (Durham, North Carolina). Jazz radio station licensed to North Carolina Central University, a Historically Black College and University. It serves a population of nearly 600K people via its radio signal

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<sup>2</sup> WNCU's agreement and invoice is still working its way through North Carolina Central University's legal review process and we anticipate signature soon.

It will take time to see the impact of Public Media Company’s work in participating organizations’ financial and community engagement results. However, feedback from participating leaders clearly shows that their involvement in Impact for All has helped to increase internal understanding of where precious resources need to be focused for growth and increased community impact. For 501c3 organizations, the initiative findings and recommendations have also helped board members understand the realities of the operating environment, build trust in the executive team, and provide support for impactful changes. Similar results have also been seen at university-licensed organizations. This includes understanding the value of the university’s investment, how that compares with peer institutions, and recognizing that cutting funding can lead to increased university dependence in the future<sup>3</sup>.

Quotes from Impact for All participants underscore the value that the initiative has provided:



*The findings and recommendations helped me and my board understand how we’re doing and where we need to focus to grow. As a small community radio station, it’s difficult to get information about how we’re performing and how that compares with peers – and Impact for All gave us that for the first time.*

*The \$5,000 cost was definitely a stretch for us, but the value provided goes far beyond the cost. The insight and recommendations provided were very helpful, but the initiative also gave me, my team, and my board confidence in what we’re doing and how to have even more impact in the future. I’ve been lobbying for more of my community radio peers to follow our lead and be part of the initiative!*

**- Ashley Krest, General Manager, KVNF Community Radio**

*We got great insight from the reports and discussions but PMC’s industry knowledge and connections were also invaluable. We now have new relationships to help us strengthen as a community resource for Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute tribal members and everyone in the Four Corners.*

**- Tami Graham, Executive Director, KSUT & Tribal Radio**

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<sup>3</sup> University funding cuts ultimately lead to reduced investment in individual giving and other community-based fundraising activities. This then leads to reductions in individual giving and sponsorship revenue and increased need for institutional support. In 2020, the average public radio station raised \$3.29 in individual giving revenue for every \$1 of expense. The figure was \$2.68 for the average public television station.

*Impact for all enabled me to clearly communicate with my university leadership that we're value for money, very effectively serve the community, and are not exceptional in the level of institutional support that we receive. Our station licenses are held by two different universities and it helps to know where we stand in comparison to our peers. Institutional support will be critical to our growth and ability to serve the community as we continue to try to seek additional revenue, and Impact for All enables me to clearly communicate to both universities the importance of their investment now and for the future.*

- **R.C. McBride**, General Manager, WCBU & WGLT

*We're a small university station in a rural and low-income part of Missouri. We serve a very large geographic area and only have a small staff and so making good decisions with our limited resources is critical. The insight that PMC provided really helped us understand where we need to focus and also gave us clear evidence of our value to the university and community – something that is critical for helping the university understand the impact and importance of their investment in us.*

- **Dan Woods**, General Manager, KRCU Public Radio



## **CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED**

As a result of working with 10 organizations over the past several months, we've learned that small station leaders are an extremely entrepreneurial group of people that achieve a great deal with very limited resources (money, staff, information, and time). They also face a number of structural challenges that are often not faced by their larger public media counterparts. This includes serving rural communities with fewer people and lower incomes, limited numbers of local foundations and major donors, cuts in institutional support, and the expense of operating a large broadcast network while also needing to invest and evolve to meet the needs of the community in a digital world.

These challenges make all forms of revenue generation more difficult than in large, urban markets and often result in cuts to content and fundraising budgets to break even. Impact for All has helped shine a light on these challenges and highlighted potential ways to overcome them.

But we also see potential opportunities to be more helpful to public media organizations should the initiative continue. Lessons learned include:

- **More organizations** – Working with organizations that reach 9 million people is impressive but there are significantly more small stations in the public media ecosystem that serve rural and underserved communities across the country. Ideally, the benefits of Impact for All could be spread more broadly to provide more reach and value across a larger part of the country.
- **Lowering in the bar** – Philanthropic and in-kind support helped significantly lower the cost of participation, but \$5,000 was still too much for many organizations. Going forward, having a track record and advocates will help us communicate the value of participation more clearly but, to increase the influence of the initiative, we should consider lower cost alternatives and improve our overall marketing and communications.
- **Actionable solutions** – The initiative provided participants with practical recommendations for increased impact and sustainability but making the recommendations actionable can still be a challenge, especially for organizations with few resources. Ideally, we would also be able to point participants to actionable solutions that can be implemented with limited resources and not just leave it up to the small stations to implement recommendations alone.
- **More data** – As they operate in small markets, most Impact for All stations don't have access to reliable or, in many cases, any Nielsen audience data. Additionally, participants don't have the staff capacity or capability to analyze data more generally and so are unable to benefit from the insights that data can provide. We also received a lot of interest from non-Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) qualified stations and were unable to help as we relied on CPB data for much of the peer analyses. Going forward, it would be good to identify potential data solutions that would increase access to the initiative and find ways for small organizations to benefit from data insights on an ongoing basis.

Over the past year, we have demonstrated that there is considerable interest and value in the services that we have provided and would welcome the opportunity to continue the initiative in 2023 and beyond. With the benefit of input from our 2021/22 participants, our own insights, and guidance/support from philanthropic partners that share our desire to help underserved communities, we believe that we can make Impact for All even stronger in the future. We thank you for your support and look forward to the prospect of working together again soon.