



THE SPACE YOU OCCUPY

The KNPR Story, Part 1

88.9 KNPR is the flagship radio station of Nevada Public Radio, a National Public Radio affiliate. General Manager Florence Rogers first encountered the Harwood Institute in 2004 when the Institute released *On the American Frontier*, a report prepared for the Nevada Community Foundation examining what it would take for the voice of the community's citizens to be heard.

On the American Frontier found that Las Vegas enjoyed an abundance of what many American communities lacked—"a can-do spirit, confidence, a proven track record of growth and an innate sense of vibrancy." But it also found a city with mounting challenges, where people had tenuous connections and often felt isolated. The report said, "In Las Vegas the central dilemma is about how people can be connected and work together in this fast-paced, rapidly growing community that is inherently focused on the individual. While all communities face this dilemma it is especially pronounced here." The report said that Las Vegasans saw leadership in the community as limited, mistrusted and misunderstood. It suggested that a central question for Las Vegasans was, "What does it mean to be a Las Vegan?" Asking the question, the report said, would stir discussion that would examine the way the community worked.

Flo Rogers says that *On the American Frontier* caused KNPR to pause and ask, "What is it that we do that is most important to the community?" An opportunity to explore this question came in 2006 when KNPR became a part of a two-year project known as the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) sponsored by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Harwood Institute. In CEI, stations would discover how they could become even more vital to their communities by developing competencies that allowed them to better engage and understand their communities.

KNPR initially found that engaging the community was a daunting task. It required stations to have kitchen-table style conversations that focused on people's aspirations, the challenges they saw, and ways they could envision moving forward together. "The radio universe is populated by people who would like to work in small rooms on their own," Rogers said. "That is not a way of working that is going to help us be a community institution."

"For the first 25 years of this organization, we grew by growing audiences listening to transmitters," said Rogers. "Our measure of how big the organization got was about how much radio content ... we deliver through our system of transmitters." KNPR came out of CEI looking at their role in the community in a very different way. They saw public radio as being much more than an organization that generates content, audiences and donors.

Ask yourself:

- What needs to be done to create change in this community?
- What is the most pressing Public Capital Factor to work on?



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The KNPR Story, Part 2

By Florence Rodgers, General Manager, KNPR Las Vegas

Public broadcasters are licensed to operate a national asset, the public airwaves, protected from commercial pressures. This gives us a particular obligation to serve the communities to which we are licensed. Faced with a proliferation of media choices the role of providing "alternative" or "not commercially viable" media content is diminished. The role that emerges is one that commercial broadcasters will not or cannot meet: that of reflecting the identity and issues of concern to the communities they serve.

The one renewable resource we have generated (particularly in the last two decades) is trust. We are the curators of thoughtful news and discussion, fine arts programming, and resources for children and for print-impaired with our radio reading sub-channel services. The trust our audience has in our organizations and our content provides us with an opportunity to orient ourselves more centrally in the role of community builder.

We can provide airtime and online resources to create content that reflects our community and its challenges. We can provide broadcast resources to others to raise awareness for the work they do in the community. We can partner with other organizations in awareness campaigns, host online discussions and resources, and use the power of our broadcast signals to drive interested citizens to the web for interaction with each other. We can bring to the table our network of news resources, our listeners, donors and governing boards to **convene and connect people together in the work of community building.**

Public broadcasting is uniquely placed for this role since we are trusted and we have a means to disseminate information. We have a culture of collaboration through our associations with educational licensees, volunteer activities and the model of listeners who voluntarily financially contribute to the success of the organizations.

In return for this trust we need to be transparent in our operations at every level. We must be beyond reproach in our actions and expect the same from those with whom we partner.

This opportunity has the potential to successfully position public broadcasting in a new media environment. It also has the potential to positively impact the health of communities. The combination of our network collaborations in providing an independent news service and cultural expressions AND its role as community convener may prove to be the most accurate expression of the intent of public broadcasting in its history. Let us begin!!!

Ask yourself:

- What space has KNPR decided to occupy in the community?
- What additional Public Capital Factors are they working on?