

**THE LOCAL NEWS  
PROJECT II**

**National Research  
Report**

**Peter Dominowski  
Market Trends Research, Inc.  
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Peter Dominowski  
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## **THE LOCAL NEWS PROJECT II INTRODUCTION**

The Local News Project II [LNP II] is Market Trends Research second national study specifically designed to examine reporting produced by stations. **The Local News Project I** research of 1998 and 1999 was the first national research study to focus primarily on listener reactions to station-produced reporting. The **PRPD Core Values of Local Programming** study of 2001 also provided valuable insights in the construction of this research.

The primary objectives of LNP II are to:

- **increase understanding of how listeners perceive station-produced news programming**
- **provide specific information to help stations make decisions to increase the audience service of the news programming they produce**

## **THE STATIONS**

The research partners in LNP II are:

### **Focus Groups**

- WKSU, Northeast Ohio
- KJZZ, Phoenix
- WEKU, Richmond/Lexington
- KWMU, St. Louis
- WFAE, Charlotte

### **Telephone Surveys**

- KJZZ, Phoenix
- KQED, San Francisco
- WEKU, Richmond/Lexington
- WFAE, Charlotte

### **Online Surveys**

- WKSU, Northeast Ohio
- WEKU, Richmond/Lexington
- KWMU, St. Louis

LNP II would not have been possible without the support of the stations who participated in the project. Market Trends Research appreciates their commitment to making this research possible, and their generosity in permitting the research data to be shared with all stations.

## USE OF TERMS

While the terms 'local news,' and 'state news,' are used throughout the report, these terms, especially 'local news,' have a negative connotation among most listeners. **The term 'local news' was not used with listeners during the focus groups or survey research, and it is recommended that stations do not use the term 'local news' on air or in promotional materials to describe the reporting they produce!**

## THE RESEARCH

Market Trends Research conducted:

- 14 focus groups in six different markets
- a telephone survey including 534 public radio news listeners
- an Internet survey including 631 public radio news listeners

for The Local News Project II. The focus groups were conducted in Summer and Fall 2002, the telephone survey in early December 2002, and the Internet surveys in early 2003.

**Standard error for the telephone survey results** is approximately plus or minus 4.5% at the 95% confidence level. Survey percentage totals may not add exactly to 100% due to rounding.

## SURVEY COMPOSITION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

These are the characteristics of the national telephone survey sample.

**Current givers – 51%**

**Non-givers – 49%**

**Core news listeners – 64%**

**Dual imperative listeners – 36%**

**Male - 39%**

**Female - 61%**

<i>Age</i>							
	<b>&lt;24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65-74</b>	<b>75+</b>
<b>NATIONAL TOTAL</b>	3%	8%	17%	31%	22%	10%	7%

***National Mean: about 47***

These age data are in line with typical audience profile of listeners to news programs on public radio.



## THE LOCAL NEWS PROJECT II THE RESEARCH RESULTS

*"I don't really separate the local from the national. When I listen to public radio I really don't care that much where it comes from as long as it's a good report."*

### The Primary Characteristics of Public Radio News Reporting

In the focus groups, listeners discussed the primary characteristics they associate with public radio news reporting. Most often mentioned were:

- Balanced and/or relatively unbiased reporting
- In-depth reporting
- Comprehensive/Broad Scope/Breadth of coverage
- Information not available on other media
- A variety of subjects and eclectic stories
- International news
- Represents different perspectives and respects all people and different viewpoints
- Reporting that is not sensational or alarmist
- Significant, not trivial, superficial, or fluff news

While none of these descriptions is surprising, the key point is that **listeners have the same expectations, and desire these same characteristics, for news reports produced by stations. When listeners discuss their expectations for 'NPR News,' they really mean any news and information programming that appears on their NPR station, regardless of its source.**

State, local, and regional news remains a secondary reason that most tune in to public radio. In LNP I, this attitude appeared to be more a backhanded compliment, or a damning of station-produced reporting with faint praise. We know now, in most cases, reporting produced by stations is appreciated, but also sometimes suffers from lack of listener awareness.

One analogy describing how many listeners think of station-produced news might be *The Wall Street Journal*. The *Journal* provides a 'Personal Journal' section, with lifestyle 'news you can use' information, and the front page 'middle column,' with a story about an interesting person or idea. Most readers probably appreciate these offerings and would opt for them to be retained in the *Journal*.

Nevertheless, these are probably **not** the primary reasons that most people read this newspaper. Business reporting is perceived as the *Journal's* core competency and primary reason for being. Few readers would likely subscribe just for the information in the *'Personal Journal.'* Few would suggest that the *Journal* drop or significantly reduce business coverage in favor of other subjects. Conversely, **they find these other offerings useful as long as they do not fundamentally alter what they perceive as the primary focus of the publication.**

Another example is comparing races for local and state offices to Presidential elections. Few listeners would deny the importance of elections for state, county, and local offices, but nevertheless, Presidential elections generate considerably more attention and are generally felt to have a greater impact on the future of the country and the world.

Most listeners have been coming to public radio for years to hear national and international reporting. This is the market position and core competency that public radio has established. While other services can be offered successfully [i.e. station-produced news, intelligent entertainment programs], national and international reporting remain the essential service, particularly for core news listeners.

## **RATING THE QUALITY OF NEWS**

The quality of station-produced news was measured in LNP II by two distinct methods. One was through the rating and discussion of specific station-produced reports in the focus groups, the other, through questions about general aspects and attributes of news in the survey.

## THE SURVEY RESULTS

### THE QUALITY OF NEWS REPORTING

The first series of questions in the survey asked listeners to **rate the quality** of various types of news coverage on public radio, commercial radio, and newspapers. The coverage options were:

- *In-depth coverage of national & international news*
- *National and international headlines*
- *In-depth coverage of local & state news*
- *Local & state headlines*
- *Local & state headlines on commercial radio stations*
- *In-depth coverage of local & state news on commercial radio stations*
- *National and international headlines on commercial radio stations*
- *Coverage of local & state news in the local newspaper*

***[Note that the terms ‘local’ and ‘state’ news were not actually used in any of the questions to listeners. Terms appropriate to each participating station, such as ‘Valley & Arizona news’ for KJZZ in Phoenix, or ‘Charlotte/Mecklenburg and the Carolinas’ for WFAE, were used in the survey questions.]***

**UNDERSTANDING THE RESULTS:** All averages in this section are on a 1 to 4 scale, with ‘1’ equaling “excellent,” and ‘4’ equaling “poor.” **The lower the mean and median figures, the more positive the results.** Results are listed from the highest to lowest, based on mean data.

These questions provide relative perceptions of quality of a variety of types of reporting in different media.

**The quality of the coverage of national and international news on public radio ranked highest of all the options**

#### *In-depth coverage of national & international news*

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	61%	36%	2%	1%

***National Mean: 1.43***

***National Median: 1.00***

### ***National and international headlines***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	60%	36%	4%	<1%

***National Mean: 1.44***

***National Median: 1.00***

The quality of national and international headlines and in-depth news coverage are rated virtually identically.

The high quality rating of national and international news compared with station-produced reporting is not a surprise. The skill, experience, and persona of many network reporters and commentators set a very high standard, which is difficult, but not impossible, for stations to equal:

***“I would say that [station] is at least 20-25% more deficient than NPR as far as the quality goes. On their writing, stories, and their programming and interviewing skills. But that’s got to be natural. You can’t compare Daniel Shorr with some of these kids.”***

Next in the ranking of quality was in-depth and headline news produced by stations. This data contain several positive indicators:

- Station-produced news was rated more positively than any other local source of news
- More than 80% of listeners considered the quality of station produced in-depth and headline news to be either ‘excellent’ or ‘good,’ and nearly one in three considered its quality to be ‘excellent’

### ***Local & state headlines***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	30%	52%	13%	4%

***National Mean: 1.92***

***National Median: 2.00***

### ***In-depth coverage of local & state news***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	30%	51%	14%	5%

***National Mean: 1.95***

***National Median: 2.00***

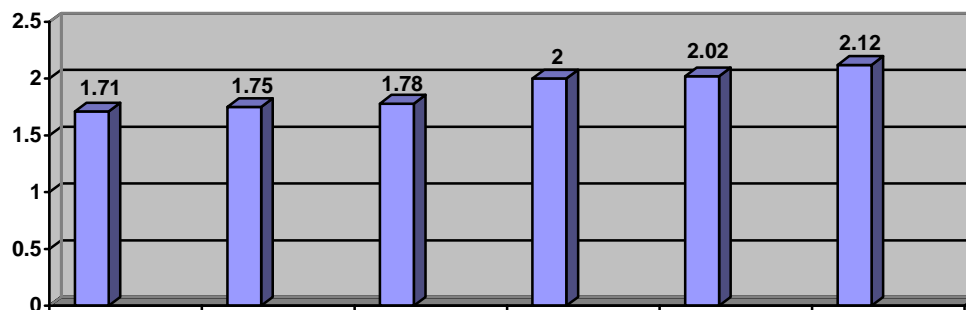
The news here is not that national and international reporting is rated higher – that would be expected - it's the perceived difference in quality between national and station reporting that is significant. The differences in the average results are very comparable to those for similar questions in LNP I.

While station-produced news was rated highly overall, some areas of interest include:

- The continued perception of a quality gap between national and international and station-produced news. While news produced by stations was well regarded, twice as many listeners rated international and national news as 'excellent.'
- Headline news was rated slightly higher than in-depth news; another potential indication of the relative lack of awareness of station-produced in-depth reporting apparent during the focus groups. This lack of awareness is not a new issue; it was identified in LNP I.

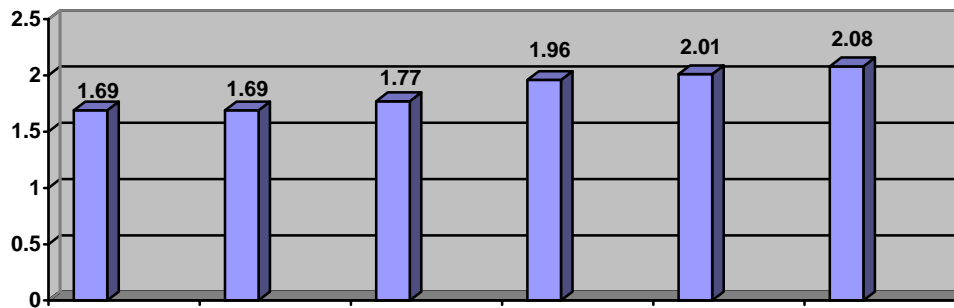
The following charts show how the average responses from listeners to compare from station to station. The six stations in the survey are each represented in these graphs.

#### ***In-depth coverage of state & local news***



On a 1 to 4 scale, with '1' equaling "excellent," and '4' equaling "poor," the best average result for the perceived quality of station-produced in-depth news was 1.71, the least-favorable result was 2.12.

### Local & state headlines



On a 1 to 4 scale, with '1' equaling "excellent," and '4' equaling "poor," the best average result for the quality of station-produced headline news was 1.69, the least-favorable result was 2.08.

As with listener ratings of national and international news quality, there was little difference between perceptions of the quality of headline news and in-depth reporting. While it cannot be proved quantitatively, focus group discussions indicated that listeners often do not actively differentiate between different types of news, or where the report originates. They perceive and judge news programming as a whole, regardless of the source or type of information presented.

One listener in a focus group summed up their perception of the difference between network and station-produced news this way:

***"I have heard stories on NPR that kept me from getting out of the car when I pull into the driveway. If you asked me if I have heard stories by [station] that kept me glued to the radio, then I would have to say no. I think they have the potential to do that, I think there is stuff here locally...that could keep you glued to the radio."***

Another explains that stations may have difficulty attaining the consistently high standards set by NPR news.

***"I think our expectations are just higher for [station]. Out there we have our [commercial] media pool. And the bar is pretty low. We have the newspaper. Most of us don't read it. Then we set [station] to this standard and we are used to hearing all these wonderful reports, and locally when they don't hit the mark, we say, oh they are just not doing their job. Maybe the expectation gap is tough to fill. Maybe we are hearing such wonderful stories [from NPR] and we just can't bring the bar that high."***

Another listener used a colorful analogy to describe the differences in expectation between public radio news and other sources.

***“[I expect NPR & local station to] describe the rainbow differently than the other people [commercial media] are. I think NPR does a good job of that, I don’t necessarily think [local station] always does a good job of it.”***

These data provide overall positive feedback on station-produced reporting. But approaching the quality ratings to network news will require many years of consistent reporting.

The following data indicate that **the media source rated most similarly in quality to news produced by public radio stations are local newspapers.**

***Coverage of state & local news in the local newspaper***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	19%	53%	21%	7%

***National Mean: 2.15***

***National Median: 2.00***

While stations may perceive their local newspaper differently than listeners, the audience perceives the quality of most station’s news to be only slightly superior to newspapers. Depending upon the market, stations may consider this to be a compliment, or an incentive to improve!

The remaining data in this section concerns news coverage on commercial radio stations. The perceptions are that news quality on commercial media is considerably lower than on NPR news, station-produced news, or newspaper coverage. **The combined perceptions of ‘excellent’ and ‘good’ quality news coverage on commercial radio were less than half that than for station-produced news, and fewer than 10% of listeners rated any aspect of commercial radio news as ‘excellent.’**

***State & local headlines on commercial radio stations***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	7%	25%	31%	36%

***National Mean: 2.96******National Median: 3.00******In-depth coverage of state & local news on commercial radio stations***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	7%	20%	35%	38%

***National Mean: 3.05******National Median: 3.00******National and international news headlines on commercial radio stations***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	5%	22%	34%	39%

***National Mean: 3.08******National Median: 3.00***

More than one in three listeners rate the quality of news on commercial radio as 'poor.'

While some public radio listeners tune to news on commercial stations, **most respondents to the LNP II survey consider the overall quality of their product to be far inferior to that provided by NPR and public radio stations.**

## NEWS CHARACTERISTICS

The next section of survey data **measures listener reaction to statements about characteristics of international, national, state, and local news reporting on public radio.** The survey questions were:

- *It is important that [public radio station] be the first station to report on breaking news events in our area*
- *[Public radio station] should broadcast at least one in-depth report every day about an issue or event in the area*
- *[Public radio station] should not broadcast any in-depth reports about local & state issues or events*
- *The in-depth news reports produced by [public radio station] generally have the same quality and interest level as in-depth reporting on NPR*
- *In-depth coverage of local & state issues and events on [public radio station] should be broadcast at the same time every day*
- *I expect news on [public radio station] to provide information I would generally not receive from any other media*
- *I am usually interested in in-depth reporting about national and international news and issues*
- *I am usually interested in in-depth reporting about local & state news and issues*
- *Since September 11, 2001, I am less interested in hearing in-depth reports about state & local news and issues*
- *Compared to national and international issues and events, most local & state issues and events are not very important or significant*
- *Coverage of local & state news on commercial radio, TV, and in newspapers generally tells me all I need to know*
- *Local & state news on [public radio station] often duplicates the coverage on TV, in the newspaper, or on commercial radio*

**UNDERSTANDING THE DATA:** All averages in this section are on a 1 to 4 scale, with '1' equaling "Strongly agree," and '4' equaling "Strongly disagree." **The lower the total of the mean and median, the more positive the result.** Results are listed from greatest to least agreement, based on mean data.

While looking at some of these news characteristics side by side may be like comparing oranges and tangerines, it is interesting to contrast the levels of agreement among listeners with these statements about various types of news reporting.

We know that public radio listeners expect in-depth news. **How does interest in in-depth reporting vary between national and international, and state and local news?**

***I am usually interested in in-depth reporting about national and international news and issues***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	34%	62%	3%	0%

***National Mean: 1.69***

***National Median: 2.00***

***I am usually interested in in-depth reporting about local & state news and issues***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	22%	69%	8%	0%

***National Mean: 1.87***

***National Median: 2.00***

The relatively similar results of these two questions indicate that while **there is a slightly greater overall interest in national and international stores, the interest in local and state in-depth news is still very strong.**

***[Public radio station] should broadcast at least one in-depth report every day about a state or local issue or event***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	26%	59%	13%	1%

***National Mean: 1.89***

***National Median: 2.00***

This result provides additional convincing evidence that most listeners want to hear consistent in-depth reporting about issues and events in their area and state. Only 14% of surveyed listeners disagreed with this statement. Many stations do not produce even one in-depth news report every day. This provides a tangible reason for stations to provide this service.

While newscasts are aired at a consistent time, the inconsistency of hearing in-depth reporting leaves many listeners unaware of the amount presented by stations:

*“These [station] reporters receive a lot of awards. I have the sense that they don’t have that much air time. It’s amazing, I think it’s wonderful that they are as award winning, but when do they come on ?”*

***I expect news on [public radio station] to provide information I would generally not receive from any other media***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	20%	57%	22%	1%

***National Mean: 2.04***

***National Median: 2.00***

The focus group and survey results agree that one of the main attractions of public radio news is that it provides information listeners would generally not receive from any other media. This does not only mean reporting on entirely different subjects, but also includes different ways of covering stories that will be reported by other media.

***In-depth coverage of local & state issues and events on [public radio station] should be broadcast at the same time every day***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	14%	70%	16%	<1%

***National Mean: 2.03***

***National Median: 2.00***

LNP I emphasized the importance of reach and frequency through scheduling consistency to increase awareness of station-produced news reporting. Listeners are accustomed to the rhythm and format of NPR news programs and 84% favor a regular slot for in-depth coverage of local and state issues and events, just as local and state headline news typically enjoys a regular, consistent time slot. Particularly in drive times, most listeners prefer a dependable format.

A consistent broadcast time for station produced in-depth news would likely raise awareness of the product. Many listeners underestimate the amount of in-depth reporting produced by stations, and would prefer a regular broadcast time.

***“They need to have a time slot, because if they are going to do it with Morning Edition and they don’t have the time slot in which they are going to do their 5 or 10 minute story, it blends in together for me.”***

Since LNP II indicated a continued lack of awareness of in-depth local and state reporting on stations, scheduling consistency and promotion remain important issues for stations who believe it important that listeners be aware of the resources they devote to state and local reporting.

The reasons behind the sometimes-erratic scheduling of station-produced reports are many – tradition, format, lack of consistent availability of reports, and more. But a provocative way of looking at the consistency issue is this: **would stations consider scheduling newscasts at different times each hour? If not, why do they often have an inconsistently broadcast time for their in-depth news reporting?**

***The in-depth news reports produced by [public radio station] generally have the same quality and interest as in-depth reporting on NPR***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	15%	61%	22%	1%

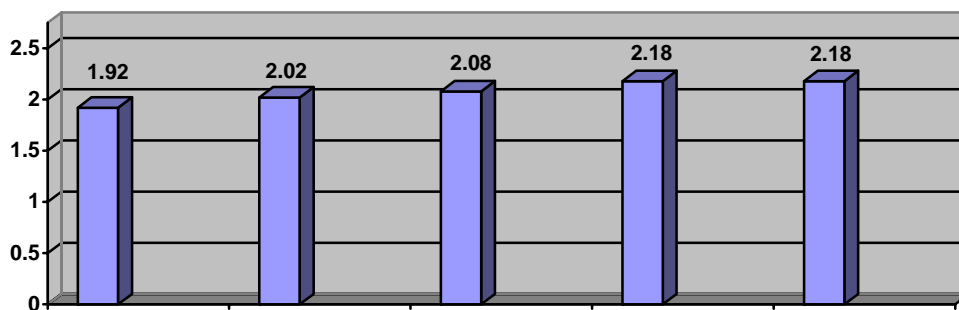
***National Mean: 2.10***

***National Median: 2.00***

This is another good result for station-produced news – 76% agree that in-depth reporting on stations is comparable in quality and interest as in-depth reporting on NPR. The agreement is solid but not definitive—only 15% “strongly agree” that network and station in-depth reporting are comparable in quality and interest.

It cannot be proven – but this result suggests – that at least some of the disparity in quality ratings between national and station-produced news is attributable to lack of awareness. If more listeners were consciously aware of the excellent reporting they hear was produced by stations, it is likely that the overall quality of that reporting would be rated more highly.

Here are the average responses for all LNP II stations in rating interest in station-produced reporting.



On a 1 to 4 scale, with '1' equaling "strongly agree," and '4' "strongly disagree," the best average result was 1.92, the least-favorable result was 2.18, all relatively similar averages.

***It is important that [local station] be the first station to report on breaking news events in our area***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	19%	46%	33%	1%

***National Mean: 2.18***

***National Median: 2.00***

Breaking news is not the main priority for listeners, when compared to other tested news characteristics; nevertheless, two in three agreed that timely coverage of breaking news is important. While in-depth news and analysis will always be the primary listener service, other survey results reinforce the growing listener expectation of public radio as a source for up-to-the-minute news. Over time, many listeners have begun to use NPR stations as primary, full-service sources of news, particularly for national and international issues and events. This trend is likely to continue and expand.

***Local & state news on [local station] often duplicates the coverage on TV, in the newspaper, or on commercial radio***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	4%	42%	48%	6%

***National Mean: 2.55***

***National Median: 3.00***

Station duplication of news headlines from commercial media was a concern raised by many listeners during focus groups. Many perceived that much of the local and state news on public stations was headline news, which duplicated the content of newspapers and/or commercial radio stations. Awareness of newscasts was often greater than that of in-depth reporting produced by stations.

Slightly less than half of the surveyed listeners agreed that stations often duplicate commercial media reporting. Some of these perceptions may be harmful, but the intensity of these feelings in the survey do not match those expressed in the groups. Nevertheless, it adds another reason to pay careful attention to the content of newscasts, which will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion of this report.

***Coverage of local & state news on commercial radio, TV, and in newspapers generally tells me all I need to know***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	3%	29%	55%	14%

***National Mean: 2.80***

***National Median: 3.00***

The results of this question are very illuminating in terms of overall interest in local and state news. Only about one in three listeners indicated that commercial media provides most of the state and local information they require. **Two thirds of listeners desired more area coverage than commercial media provides.** This result is yet another indication of the need for consistent coverage of local and state issues and events that meet public radio standards of quality and interest.

Responses to the next question reinforce this position even further.

***Compared to national and international issues and events, most local & state issues and events are not very important or significant***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	1%	11%	68%	19%

***National Mean: 3.04***

***National Median: 3.00***

Despite the obvious interest of listeners in national and international news, only 12% of listeners agreed that most state & local issues and events are not very important or significant. This means that more than 85% of listeners are not inherently 'turned off' by reporting on locally-originated subjects. Based on this data, the argument cannot be made that "not enough interesting things happen in our community that are worth reporting on."

Furthermore, it is clear that few negatives raised about station-produced news are likely to be related to lack of interest in issues and events in the community and state. Most listeners are interested in reporting about state and local issues and events, if stations report with the style and substance similar to what they have become accustomed to on network information programs.

***Since September 11, 2001, I am less interested in hearing in-depth reports about state & local news and issues***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	1%	10%	70%	18%

***National Mean: 3.04***

***National Median: 3.00***

LNP II demonstrates that the overall balance of international, national, and station-produced news need not change significantly after 9/11. Only 11% of listeners indicated that they were less interested in hearing in-depth reports about local & state news and issues since 9/11. Focus group reactions corroborated these results.

***[Local station] should not broadcast any in-depth reports about local & state issues or events***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	1%	4%	66%	29%

***National Mean: 3.22***

***National Median: 3.00***

Significantly, this question provided the largest disagreement of any in this section of the survey. **Only 5% of listeners would do away with in-depth reports about state and local issues or events.**

This is a definitive result - few listeners would confine in-depth news reporting to national and international news alone. This confirms that virtually all listeners prefer stations to provide reporting on community and state issues and events. The next section of data provides substantial information about **how** this reporting can be made most useful to listeners.

## THE VALUES of PUBLIC RADIO NEWS LISTENERS

The Core Values of Local News study sponsored by PRPD provided many valuable insights into the attitudes of listeners, but the research did not contain a quantitative component. LNP II clarifies and expands this knowledge by quantifying some of the key core values questions, and adding several other values-related questions that did not appear in the Core Values study.

The values questions in LNP II asked listeners to rate the importance of:

- *Hearing how an issue or event affects you*
- *Hearing how an issue or event affects the U.S. & the world*
- *Hearing several reports on similar subjects on consecutive days*
- *Examining a national or international issue from the viewpoint of the community or state*
- *Explaining how an issue or event has a unique meaning to the community or state*
- *Explaining how an issue or event connects the community or state to the nation or the world*
- *Explaining how an issue or event in the community or state is part of a pattern or a trend*
- *Exploring how another city or state handled an issue or event that is occurring in the community or state*

**UNDERSTANDING THE DATA:** All averages in this section are on a 1 to 4 scale, with '1' equaling "Strongly agree," and '4' equaling "Strongly disagree." **The lower the total, the more positive the result.** Results are listed from greatest to least agreement, based on mean [average] data.

***Hearing how an issue or event affects the U.S. & the world***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	53%	44%	2%	<1%

***National Mean: 1.49***

***National Median: 1.00***

This is the only values question where the 'strongly agree' responses are over 50%! This is an overwhelming endorsement and demonstration of the world view that most listeners bring to, and expect from, public radio. It must be emphasized that this interest in how an event affects the US and the world is **not** limited to national and international news, it applies equally to local and state coverage.

Not every story produced by stations is appropriately approached through a wide-angle lens. But **all things being equal, a story that casts a wide net in sources, viewpoint, and implications will nearly always hold greater interest for listeners.**

***Hearing how an issue or event affects you***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	34%	55%	10%	1%

***National Mean: 1.79***

***National Median: 2.00***

Commercial media often applies the 'news you can use' approach to make events and issues more relevant to consumers. While public radio listeners are very interested in knowing how issues and events affect them, they are even more interested in how these affect their country and the world.

The next series of questions address the connections listeners may expect stations to make in reporting local or state news. Listeners provided their opinions about the importance of the following types of relationships in reports about state and local issues and events.

***Explaining how an issue or event connects the community or state to the nation or the world***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	26%	63%	10%	1%

***National Mean: 1.85***

***National Median: 2.00***

***Exploring how another city or state handled an issue or event that is occurring in the community or state***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	23%	67%	9%	0%

***National Mean: 1.86***

***National Median: 2.00***

***Explaining how an issue or event has a unique meaning to the community or state***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	22%	66%	11%	1%

***National Mean: 1.91***

***National Median: 2.00***

Each of these options was considered similarly important by listeners.

Incorporating a broad approach to local issues and events, and connecting other parts of the nation or world to happenings in a station's coverage area clearly has considerable support. It makes reports more interesting, comprehensive, and consistent with the content and values of most reporting produced by national sources.

***Explaining how an issue or event in the community or state is part of a pattern or a trend***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	20%	69%	11%	0%

***National Mean: 1.92***

***National Median: 2.00***

***Examining a national or international issue from the viewpoint of the community or state***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	20%	62%	17%	1%

***National Mean: 1.99***

***National Median: 2.00***

**Making connections between national and local issues is clearly of interest to 80% or more of listeners.** The average responses to these questions remain at less than two on a four point scale, indicating **significant agreement with each of these core values.**

Again, not every story produced by a station is appropriately approached through each of these filters. But news directors and reporters would be wise to use these values guidelines as a part of their story selection and evaluation process.

***Hearing several reports on similar subjects  
on consecutive days***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	16%	59%	23%	1%

***National Mean: 2.27***

***National Median: 2.00***

While multi-part reports rank lowest among these questions, three in four listeners still agree that they are of value. Focus groups also provided strong validation of the concept of multi-part reports, which allow a subject to be covered in-depth from different angles, and to increase awareness of in-depth local reporting through promotion, reach, and frequency.

**Most stations would agree that there are far more potential news stories in their community and state than there are time and staff resources to cover them. Since this is the case, why not select stories that have the broadest implications and incorporate the values most important to listeners? The results indicate that this is a clear pathway to increasing listener service with station-produced news, while fulfilling the expectations of public radio news listeners.**

## TRAFFIC REPORTING

Many stations have mixed emotions about traffic reporting. It can be difficult to decide whether the content and sound of these reports are compatible with public radio, and whether other programming might provide a more significant listener service, especially during drive time, when the demand for broadcast time is at a premium. LNP II provides strong listener opinions about the efficacy of traffic reports on public radio.

**UNDERSTANDING THE DATA:** All averages in this section are on a 1 to 4 scale, with '1' equaling "Strongly agree," and '4' equaling "Strongly disagree." **The lower the total, the more positive the result.**

### *The sound of traffic reports on [local station] fits in well with the station*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	10%	74%	15%	1%
<b>National Mean: 2.07</b>		<b>National Median: 2.00</b>		

The reasons that stations are concerned about how traffic reports fit into their overall sound are well-known and documented. Nonetheless, only 16% of listeners did not think that the sound of the reports fit in well with the station. The disparities between the presentation of traffic reports and other information on public radio may be more bothersome to programmers than to most listeners! It is not unprecedented for listeners to have different perceptions than programmers about programming, and this result apparently illustrates one of those cases.

### *[Local station] traffic reports provide a valuable service to me*

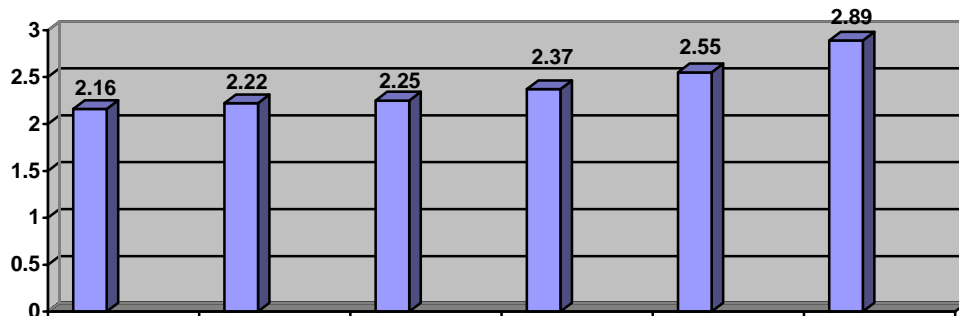
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	15%	46%	34%	4%
<b>National Mean: 2.26</b>		<b>National Median: 2.00</b>		

This data may be one of the major surprises of LNP II – **nearly two in three listeners agree that traffic reports are a valuable service.**

These totals include listeners who are retired, or otherwise do not drive to a workplace on a regular basis.

While each station must make their own decision based on market and competitive conditions, the LNP II research results endorse the overall utility of drive-time traffic reporting, despite its flaws.

***Traffic reports provide a valuable service to me***



This chart indicated the differing response to the value of traffic reporting from market to market. On a 1 to 4 scale, with '1' equaling "strongly agree," and '4' "strongly disagree," the best average result for traffic reporting was 2.16, the least-favorable result was 2.89.

***[Local station] should broadcast more frequent traffic reports during rush hours***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	6%	37%	54%	3%

***National Mean: 2.55***

***National Median: 3.00***

Although the vast majority of listeners valued traffic reports, most would be against airing reports more frequently – the status quo seems to be the right amount and frequency for most listeners.

***[Local station] should not offer any traffic reports***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
NATIONAL TOTAL	1%	13%	69%	17%

***National Mean: 3.02***

***National Median: 3.00***

Given the opportunity to jettison traffic reports altogether, only 14% of listeners would do so. This is another strong endorsement to continue existing levels of traffic reporting.

## EVENTS COVERAGE OPTIONS

Public radio's early history was distinguished by gavel-to-gavel coverage of major congressional hearings, such as Iran-Contra, or confirmation hearings for Supreme Court vacancies. Much in the media has changed since those events - do listeners still perceive a need for the same service? When a significant national event occurs – such as a Senate debate on war in Iraq, or a Supreme Court confirmation hearing, listeners were asked which one of the following types of coverage they preferred:

- 19% of listeners believed that stations should provide **live gavel-to gavel coverage** of these types of events
- 50% of listeners preferred that stations provide edited **highlights** of these types of events
- 31% of listeners felt **stations should produce a news report** about these events

Most listeners did not favor gavel-to-gavel coverage of events on public radio. Half felt the best coverage was in edited highlights of these events, with about one-third desiring a news report to be produced about these events.

In general, older listeners were most likely to support traditional gavel-to-gavel coverage.

## NEWS PRIORITIES

Most of the conversation in both LNP I and LNP II about international and national versus state and local news has been general. These questions provide increased specificity about the relative importance of different types of reporting to listeners.

Listeners were asked to indicate how important the following types of news reporting were to them:

- *Coverage of national & international breaking news*
- *Coverage of local or state breaking news*
- *In-depth national or international news*
- *In-depth local or state news*
- *Local or state news headlines*
- *National or international news headlines*
- *Human interest stories from the US or other countries*
- *Human interest stories from the community or state*
- *Arts & cultural stories from the US or other countries*
- *Arts & cultural stories from the community or state*

All averages in this section are on a 1 to 7 scale, with '1' equaling "Very important," and '7' equaling "Unimportant." **The lower the total, the more positive the result.**

It will come as no surprise that listeners considered national and international news coverage as most important.

### Most important

### Least important

<i>Coverage of national &amp; international breaking news</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	71%	15%	7%	3%	1%	1%	2%

**National Mean: 1.61**

**National Median: 1.00**

### Most important

### Least important

<i>In-depth national or international news</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	52%	24%	14%	3%	3%	1%	2%

**National Mean: 1.92**

**National Median: 1.00**

**Most important****Least important**

<i>National or international news headlines</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	43%	25%	15%	7%	3%	3%	4%

**National Mean: 2.26****National Median: 2.00**

Interestingly, **breaking international news coverage was ranked as the most important type of news [on average]**. Some of this attitude may be reflective of the uncertainties of a post-9/11 world, and the events leading up to the war in Iraq, which occurred while this research was being conducted.

Hard news produced by stations was rated as the next-most important priority.

**Most important****Least important**

<i>Coverage of state or local breaking news</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	41%	22%	16%	8%	8%	4%	2%

**National Mean: 2.36****National Median: 2.00****Most important****Least important**

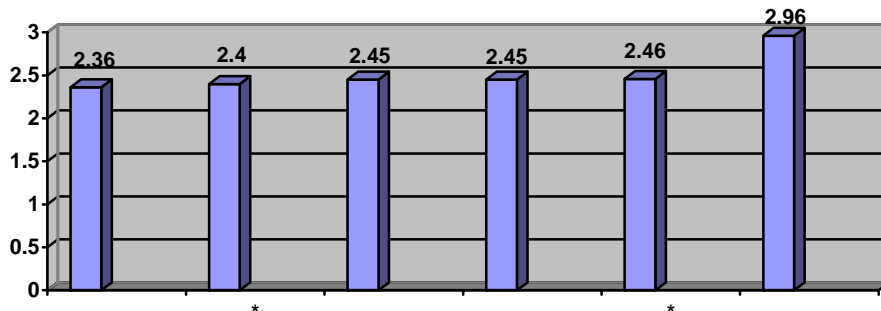
<i>In-depth local or state news</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	30%	29%	20%	8%	9%	4%	1%

**National Mean: 2.53****National Median: 2.00**

As with national and international reporting, breaking and in-depth news were the two most important categories of reporting produced by stations.

How did the totals for the importance of in-depth state and local news on all LNP II stations compare?

***In-depth state or local news***



This chart shows the differing response to the perceived importance of in-depth local and state news from market to market. On a 1 to 7 scale, with '1' equaling "most important," and '7' "least important," the best average result for the importance of local and state news was 2.36, the least-favorable result was 2.96. Even the least favorable response for this type of reporting averages above the midpoint.

**Most important**

**Least important**

<i>Local or state news headlines</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL	25%	24%	24%	12%	7%	4%	4%
TOTAL							

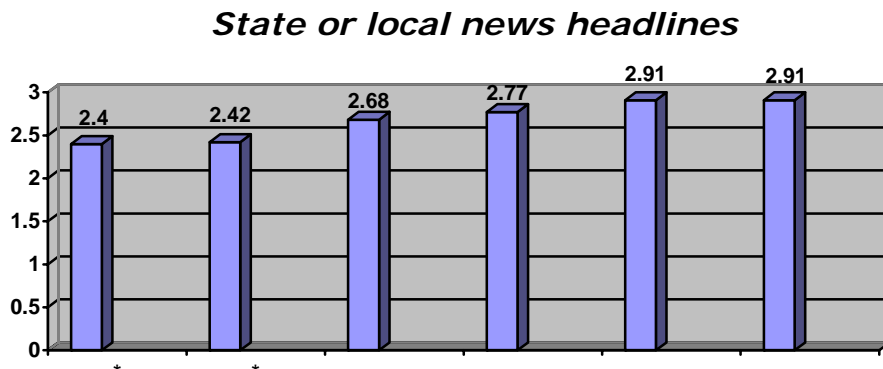
***National Mean: 2.82***

***National Median: 3.00***

Slightly less important than breaking and in-depth news, but still rated very highly, were news headlines. These categories of news were ranked in the same order of importance, for both local and national reporting.

It is important to note that the survey indicates the relatively moderate importance of news headlines compared to in-depth reporting and breaking news. The focus groups revealed that news headlines generally enjoy the highest awareness of station-produced news among listeners. The relative lack of awareness of in-depth reporting means that headlines, which are the type of hard news reporting that ranks lowest in importance [although still considered somewhat important] are highest in listener awareness. This should be a concern for stations.

This chart compares the totals of the importance of state and local news headlines on all LNP II stations.



On a 1 to 7 scale, with '1' equaling "most important," and '7' "least important," the best average result for the importance of local and state news headlines was 2.40, the least-favorable result was 2.99. The totals are not dissimilar to the average perceived importance of state and local in-depth news.

The new information provides the opportunity to quantify and compare the importance ratings of national and local reporting:

	<b><u>AVERAGE</u></b>
National & international breaking news	1.61
State & local breaking news	2.36
National & international in-depth news	1.92
State & local in-depth news	2.53
National & international news headlines	2.26
State & local news headlines	2.82

All of these types of news are rated as important, but listeners rate national and international news on public radio as extremely important, and similar state and local news as very important.

After the three different types of hard news, next in importance rank the 'softer' types of stories, both those produced by stations and networks.

	Most important			Least important			
<i>Arts &amp; cultural stories from the US or other countries</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	20%	18%	26%	17%	12%	4%	3%

**National Mean: 3.06** **National Median: 3.00**

	Most important			Least important			
<i>Arts &amp; cultural stories from the community or state</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	19%	20%	26%	16%	10%	6%	4%

**National Mean: 3.09** **National Median: 3.00**

Arts and cultural stories, whether from the US, other countries, state or local sources, rate virtually identically in importance to listeners. This is one area where local and national reporting operate on a relatively level playing field, in terms of listener interest.

**Most important****Least important**

<i>Human interest stories from the US or other countries</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	16%	16%	27%	19%	11%	6%	4%

**National Mean: 3.28****National Median: 3.00****Most important****Least important**

<i>Human interest stories from the community or state</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	14%	17%	26%	18%	12%	7%	6%

**National Mean: 3.40****National Median: 3.00**

As with arts and cultural stories, local, state, national, and international human interest stories are of almost identical importance to listeners.

Even these stories, which ranked least important among these questions – still had an average importance rating of 3.40, slightly below the midpoint of the 1 to 7 scale. This indicates that **all of these different types of reports have their place on stations.**

These results do not suggest that stations should only produce the types of stories that listeners deem most important. As long as stations maintain standards of quality and interest that listeners have come to expect, variety is not only appreciated, but expected, on public radio. Think of these different types of stories as colors on an artist's palette – two or three of the colors may dominate a picture, but the judicious use and combination of other colors make the painting striking and memorable. All the colors work together. The same is true for different types of news stories - all play a role in a successful public radio news service.

## ELECTION COVERAGE

With limited time and resources, it is important for stations to maximize their service to listeners when covering state and local elections. One goal of LNP II was to provide guidance to stations in allocating their resources in covering election issues, before, during, and after the voting. These data provide guidance about listener priorities.

Listeners were asked to rate the importance of four different types of election coverage.

- *Reports about local or state campaign issues BEFORE the election*
- *Interviews or profiles of specific local or state candidates BEFORE the election*
- *Breaking news and results of local or state races on election night*
- *Analysis and implications of local or state results in the days AFTER the election*

**UNDERSTANDING THE DATA:** All averages in this section are on a 1 to 7 scale, with '1' equaling "Very important," and '7' equaling "Unimportant." **The lower the total, the more positive the result.**

**Most important**

**Least important**

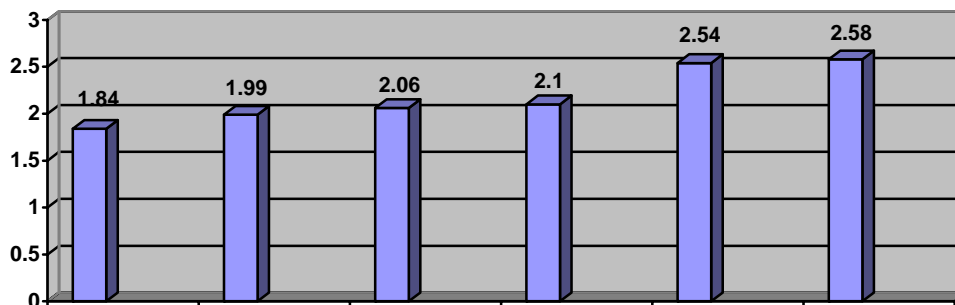
<i>Reports about local or state campaign issues BEFORE the election</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	43%	25%	15%	6%	5%	3%	3%

**National Mean: 2.24**

**National Median: 2.00**

It is a truism that listeners come to public radio for detail and analysis. This research confirms that this knowledge also applies to coverage of election-related issues. Listeners indicated that **issue-oriented reports prior to an election are the most important service that stations can provide.**

**Reports about state or local campaign issues  
BEFORE the election**



This chart shows the response to the perceived importance of reporting on local and state campaign issues BEFORE an election, from market to market. On a 1 to 7 scale, with '1' equaling "most important," and '7' "least important," the best average result for the importance of this type of coverage was 1.84, the least-favorable result was 2.58. This is not dissimilar to the average perceived importance of state and local breaking and in-depth news.

**Most important**

**Least important**

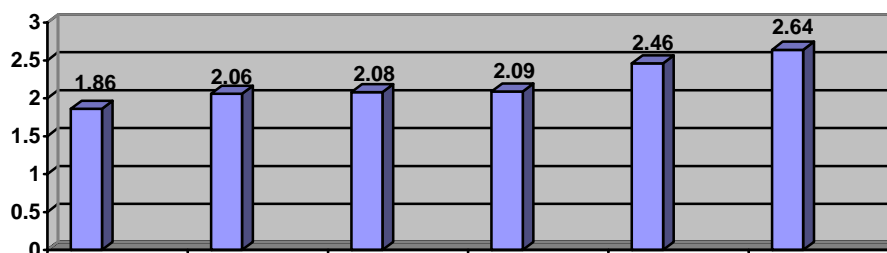
<i>Interviews or profiles of specific local or state BEFORE the election</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL	42%	27%	14%	6%	6%	3%	3%
TOTAL							

**National Mean: 2.28**

**National Median: 2.00**

Once again coverage BEFORE the voting, in this case candidate interviews or profiles, were the most important types of election coverage stations can provide. **Out of the four choices of coverage, the top two were for reporting on issues and events before the election.**

**Interviews or profiles of specific state or local candidates  
BEFORE the election**



This chart shows the differing response to the perceived importance of profiles of local and state candidates BEFORE an election, from market to market. On a 1 to 7 scale, with '1' equaling "most important," and '7' "least important," the best average result for the importance of this type of coverage was 1.86, the least-favorable result was 2.64. This is also similar to the average perceived importance of state and local breaking and in-depth news.

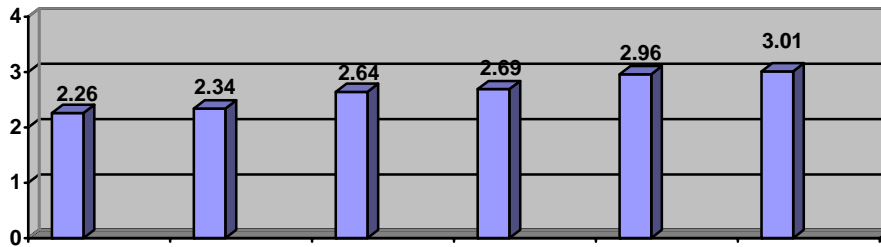
<b>Most important</b>							<b>Least important</b>
<i>Analysis and implications of local or state results in the days AFTER the election</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	27%	28%	19%	12%	6%	4%	4%

**National Mean: 2.73**

**National Median: 2.00**

Post-election analysis is important to listeners, although not quite as crucial as information provided before the voting.

***Analysis and implications about state or local results  
AFTER the election***



This chart shows the differing response to the perceived importance of analysis of local and state results AFTER an election, from market to market. On a 1 to 7 scale, with '1' equaling "most important," and '7' "least important," the best average result for the importance of this type of coverage was 2.26, the least-favorable result was 3.01. This is slightly less favorable than the average response to coverage before the election.

**The lowest priority in election coverage for listeners is breaking news on election night.** There are many other sources for this type of news, that generally have resources more appropriate to providing timely election results.

**Most important**

**Least important**

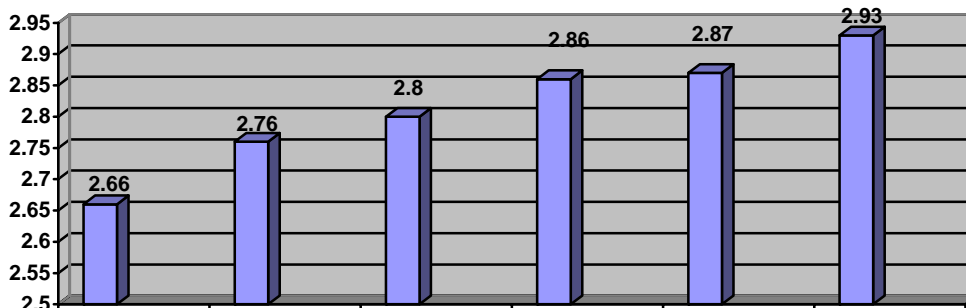
<i>Breaking news and results of local or state races on election night</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NATIONAL TOTAL	32%	19%	20%	10%	7%	4%	7%

**National Mean: 2.84**

**National Median: 2.00**

This does not necessarily mean that stations should ignore all state and local issues on election night. But it does suggest that if resources are limited, pre- and post-election reporting provides a greater listener service, and that any election night coverage provided by stations should reflect the in-depth reporting that characterizes public radio. In most cases, trying to compete with commercial media to be the first to report on the results of local races is not the best use of public radio station resources.

***Breaking news and results of races on election night***



This chart shows the differing response to the perceived importance of breaking news on election night, from market to market. On a 1 to 7 scale, with '1' equaling "most important," and '7' "least important," the best average result for the importance of this type of coverage was 2.66, the least-favorable result was 2.93.

Listeners agree that public radio can provide the most value through in-depth reporting and analysis before and after elections. This data should help stations focus their attention and make informed decisions in allocating resources before, during, and after elections.



## LISTENER FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS REACTIONS TO SPECIFIC NEWS REPORTS

*“The people reporting from Rome and from Washington are major-leaguers. And we’ve got the minor-leaguers here. It’s the difference between going to a major league ball game and a minor league ball game.”*

*“I would differentiate between quality and style. I think the style is the same. I would expect the style to be the same. But I would not expect the quality to be the same. Not because the people are any less good, it’s the fact that you’ve got generalists on the local level as opposed to specialists at the national/international level.”*

*“My sense is there is very little local stuff, and I don’t know if I am missing it, but definitely not the in-depth stories. I had not thought about it until this evening, about what percent of the news is done by NPR versus local. Do they even do local?”*

During the focus groups, each station provided several reports they had produced, to be rated and discussed. Each report tested in the focus groups was discussed, and ranked statistically on four different scales:

- *How likely would you be to listen to this entire report if you heard it while listening to public radio?*
- *Rate your overall interest in this report*
- *Rate the overall quality of this report*
- *This is the type of report I would expect to hear on programs like Morning Edition and All Things Considered*

**UNDERSTANDING THE DATA:** The average ratings are based on a scale of 1 – 7; **the lower the score, the more positive the result.**

The following are select reports produced by stations that were tested in the LNP II focus groups. The participating LNP II stations have been kind enough to allow us to present both positive and negative comments about their reporting in order to illustrate the findings of LNP II.

Most of these reports can be heard on the accompanying audio CD.

LNP II demonstrated definitively that stations can and do produce reporting that listeners consider equal in quality and interest to network news.

**KJZZ - Guest Workers  
TRACK 17 ON CD**

*How likely would you be to listen to this entire report if you heard it while listening to public radio?*

Very likely	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all likely
43%	35%	11%	5%	3%	3%	0%

*Rate your overall interest in this report*

Very interesting	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all interesting
40%	35%	16%	3%	3%	3%	0%

*Rate the overall quality of this report*

Very high quality	2	3	4	5	6	Very poor quality
35%	27%	24%	11%	3%	0%	0%

*This is the type of report I would expect to hear on programs like Morning Edition and All Things Considered*

Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly disagree
59%	24%	8%	3%	5%	0%	0%

*All statistics based on 37 responses*

Although aired only on KJZZ, this report with national implications was rated equally to another report that KJZZ produced specifically for NPR.

Listeners strongly endorsed this story produced by KJZZ, and felt it concerned a subject of broad interest. **The theme of broad interest coupled with high listener approval of station-produced reporting is a theme seen again and again in this study.**

- *"I like that it was something happening on Capitol Hill about immigration issues so let's put a human spin on it. The border states all have illegal immigration issues but they chose to focus on Phoenix, so it's personal. They talked to some of these illegal immigrants, so it ties in what goes on person by person to the legislation issues in Washington. You can identify with what they are talking about rather than just congressional blah blah."*
- *"It was more in-depth and it had different perspectives."*
- *"There is a human element to it, which on NPR a lot of their stories have something to do with people. Typical NPR, whether they are in Sarajevo, they often talk to a person that is involved."*
- *"I think it was a kind of like a local report with a national focus."*
- *"I think it probably had something to do with the fact that they took something that living in Arizona, we seem to feel because we are so close to the border, that this is unique to us sometimes. And it isn't at all. It took something of a much larger scope. I love that they go to the sources to get facts and figures. I always like that. I always appreciate the percentages and the numbers given, to really beef up a report."*
- *"I felt the quality, the dialogue, the issues that were discussed were of a national interest. Sure, the local people here in Arizona would pick up on the pros and cons of what they were trying to get at, but I thought this was the highest quality report we have heard."*
- *"It had a lot of key elements, it was topical and current, it wasn't just opinion, there were supported opinions. There were propositions that were put out that you could think about and chew on. And it was a complex issue that after the report's over you can think about for a half hour and go over what was said."*
- *"My feeling is that [this report] would apply for an award. I think he did an excellent job for that segment. That was top-notch, quality, programming."*

While producing a local report with national implications is not a guarantee of listener acceptance, **stories with broader appeal increase the chance that listeners will respond favorably to any station-produced news report.**

KJZZ has established a franchise of sorts with Arizona Week, an ongoing series which examines people and places important to the history of the state. Here is an Arizona Week report heard in the focus groups. While KJZZ executes the story successfully, and this is a concept that many stations may want to adopt, the feature aspect of this report demonstrates how interest levels among listeners begin to vary when a topic is not a hard news story.

**KJZZ - Arizona Week  
TRACK 13 ON CD**

***How likely would you be to listen to this entire report if you heard it while listening to public radio?***

Very likely	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all likely
39%	22%	11%	11%	6%	6%	6%

***Rate your overall interest in this report***

Very interesting	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all interesting
28%	11%	17%	11%	22%	6%	6%

***Rate the overall quality of this report***

Very high quality	2	3	4	5	6	Very poor quality
28%	11%	28%	0%	11%	16%	6%

***This is the type of report I would expect to hear on programs like Morning Edition and All Things Considered***

Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly disagree
33%	6%	22%	6%	0%	11%	22%

*All statistics based on 18 responses*

KJZZ has produced "Arizona Week" reports consistently enough that it has established some brand awareness in many of the group participants. This increased awareness [at least with aided recall], of station-produced news other than headlines is an exception to the relative lack of knowledge of in-depth reports produced by most stations. Developing any brand awareness of station-produced news is a significant challenge.

This report engendered a wide variety of reactions.

Positive:

- *"It was funny and informative."*
- *"I liked it because I've always wanted to go to Oatman, I have heard so much about it. So I was listening to it, how to get there, what is there to see."*
- *"I have been there, I have been in that mine, and he captured what life is like there and he did an excellent job of interviewing the two main attractions there. Most people would never go to Oatman and he captured the essence of the environment."*

...and negative

- *"I think it was extremely meandering. It didn't have a point. It talked about the town and then it goes into a history of the gold mine, and the tours, then they talked to the miner. They talked to that guy, they quoted him for too long. They let him just ramble on. Then they talked about the population and the mayor. If that was real, I can't believe it. The exposition of the story, I still don't know what the main crux of that story was."*
- *"They should have done this in about 30 seconds, and it would have been a really great story."*

**Most listeners expect these kinds of unusual, off-the-wall reports from public radio. Along with in-depth news, this variety and unexpectedness is part of the public radio information identity.**

And, since Arizona Week has a relatively high awareness level, and has succeeded in establishing a KJZZ news 'brand,' it is a place to start in increasing awareness of other reporting produced by KJZZ, as well as an excellent example of local service to cite during pledge drives!

**WEKU – Jews in Lexington on Middle East Policy  
TRACK 19 ON CD**

WEKU produced a two part series that took a major international issue – Middle East politics – and localized it by talking to persons with a connection to Israel or Palestine who live in Lexington area. This is an excellent example of station-produced reporting that takes an important subject of broad interest and localizes it with a multi-part report.

***How likely would you be to listen to this entire report if you heard it while listening to public radio?***

Very likely	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all likely
55%	25%	10%	0%	10%	0%	0%

***Rate your overall interest in this report***

Very interesting	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all interesting
45%	40%	5%	5%	5%	0%	0%

***Rate the overall quality of this report***

Very high quality	2	3	4	5	6	Very poor quality
10%	35%	20%	25%	10%	0%	0%

***This is the type of report I would expect to hear on programs like Morning Edition and All Things Considered***

Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly disagree
30%	25%	25%	5%	10%	5%	0%

*All statistics based on 20 responses*

Statistically, this report was the top rated of all those heard in the WEKU focus groups. Much of was due to the subject matter, and that it was perceived as a local story with broader implications. **These types of stories, if well produced, will almost always be well-received by listeners.**

The combination of:

- A local story related to a national issue
- A different slant on a current issue in the news
- Using a variety of sound and voices
- A story with broad interest

contributed to making this story a success with listeners.

The same positive aspects that applied to the companion Palestinian report, also apply to this report.

- *"It was nice to regionalize a national issue; it was nice to put it in perspective locally."*
- *"It was letting us know that there are people here that this vitally concerns."*

This is an example of a report all stations can successfully emulate. Many of the stories that will be most appreciated by listeners will follow this advice provided in the group:

- *"WEKU can tie in news stories to NPR stories. They can make that international story live, doing a local angle on a national story."*

Of course, the connections do not need to be confined to international stories. A local story that is inclusive of broader state issues, or a state story that is inclusive of national issues will accomplish the same objectives.

**WEKU - Palestinians in Lexington  
THIS TRACK NOT HEARD ON CD**

This was the companion piece to the report on Jews in Lexington.

***How likely would you be to listen to this entire report if you heard it while listening to public radio?***

Very likely	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all likely
55%	25%	10%	0%	5%	5%	0%

***Rate your overall interest in this report***

Very interesting	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all interesting
40%	35%	15%	5%	5%	0%	0%

***Rate the overall quality of this report***

Very high quality	2	3	4	5	6	Very poor quality
5%	25%	35%	20%	10%	5%	0%

***This is the type of report I would expect to hear on programs like Morning Edition and All Things Considered***

Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly disagree
25%	40%	10%	0%	20%	5%	0%

*All statistics based on 20 responses*

The positive aspects of the report included:

- Localization of an international story – if done well, this will almost always be a plus to listeners
- The perception of balance – that both the Jewish and Palestinian sides were represented
- The story had gravity – it was about a serious, important issue facing not only Kentuckians, but the entire world.

Any stories stations produce which meet the above criteria are likely to be received in the same positive fashion.

How did this report fall short? It suffered from poor audio quality during the first several minutes when a Palestinian with a thick accent was being interviewed in a setting with considerable background noise, which made the words very difficult to understand. The selection of this spokesperson, both for his accent and anonymity in the community, was also questioned. Participants felt that a more prominent, well-known Palestinian in the area would have made a better interview subject. **Although all appreciated the fact that WEKU did its best to achieve balance in the reports on Jews and Palestinians, most participants felt that balance was not actually achieved.** This is because of the Palestinian spokesperson being more difficult to understand, and not having the same stature in the community as some of the individuals representing the Israeli point of view.

This demonstrates the level of detail that must often be considered in conceiving and producing news reports, even with an otherwise interesting subject and presentation.

There were also suggestions that additional background information about the history of the Israel/Palestinian conflict could have been provided.

- *“The commentator made it worse because there was so much background noise; the interview process was faulty, the Jews came across as rational, the Palestinians came across as irrational.”*
- *“We often hear that we’re biased toward the Jews; here we didn’t have people of equal status being interviewed.”*
- *“I thought it was a good angle to bring the story home, it caught my interest to hear an American Jews’ point of view and a Palestinian’s as well. I can appreciate the way he tries to make the story cohesive. The disjointedness would be when you hear the Jewish story one day and the Palestinian the next; the background noise made it hard to understand the man with the accent.”*
- *“It was nice to regionalize a national issue; it was nice to put it in perspective locally.”*

Despite these criticisms, WEKU’s localization of an important international issue is praiseworthy.

**WKSU - School Vouchers  
TRACK 16 ON CD**

*How likely would you be to listen to this entire report if you heard it while listening to public radio?*

Very likely	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all likely
65%	20%	10%	5%	0%	0%	0%

*Rate your overall interest in this report*

Very interesting	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all interesting
55%	35%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%

*Rate the overall quality of this report*

Very high quality	2	3	4	5	6	Very poor quality
40%	25%	20%	10%	5%	0%	0%

*This is the type of report I would expect to hear on programs like Morning Edition and All Things Considered*

Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly disagree
65%	15%	5%	10%	0%	5%	0%

*All statistics based on 20 responses*

The reaction to this report was very interesting. The report was produced by a WKSU reporter, in a similar style to the Supreme Court reporting of Nina Totenberg. The exception is that the WKSU report used several sound bites, whereas Totenberg usually relies on pure narrative. In a rare exception to the norm, some of the criticism of this report was because of the additional audio sources used!

- *"It wasn't as good as hers...I know there were a lot of references to local, as in Ohio, usually if she's reporting on the Supreme Court, she doesn't go out into the territory that the suit would come from."*
- *"When Nina Totenburg talks about the Supreme Court, there are no noises in the background. Sometimes it's nice to have those noises, it gives some flavor to the report, but somehow in this situation, it's distracting; when she gives a report, she's an authority. The children talking, the lawyers, you could hear all this ruckus in the background; that to me, gave it a slightly less..."*
- *"It sounded a little bit more like what a commercial station would put together."*
- *"The report...was divided in focus, the interviews were kind of competing with what she was saying the Justices said, and I was paying less attention to what the Justices said, but I really cared more about what they said than what the attorneys said, 'cause the attorneys...who cares what they said."*
- *"It was hard to listen to—it was hard to keep track of [who said what.]"*

The audience familiarity and credibility of a NPR reporter can be hard to compete with. Also, the theme of NPR reporters as 'specialists,' and WKSU reporters as 'generalists' was raised several times in the groups.

- *"This was an example over taking a generalist...this was a story done by the local people about something taking place at the Supreme Court. So we had a local person so we got the style that tends to be more broader general issue kinds of things and we're trying to compare that with the sharper legal analysis and legal expertise that Nina would bring to that issue, and therefore you don't get the same quality. The quality of the coverage was just not as good, not as sharp....Because of the expertise of the person doing the report was just not as good, they weren't able to focus in and sharply get at the issues and those defining factors in the same way that Nina does because of her legal background and expertise."*

It is very illustrative that a report can receive such criticism yet be rated so highly! Of course, not all listeners had a problem with the way the report was presented:

- *"I don't think it sounded commercial at all. AM radio doesn't spend more than a few seconds on sound bites."*
- *"Hers [Totenberg's report] would have just focused on the Supreme Court, this focused on the Supreme Court and the state issue of the vouchers. It's a different kind of report."*
- *"She quoted the justices, and that's fine, regarding the constitutionality of that and I thought that what she should do."*
- *"I was very satisfied with the coverage of that particular story, and I had a great deal of interest in it... my interest level was very high in wanting to know what is exactly the issue here. I felt it got that."*
- *"I remember hearing when that was originally broadcast, I liked it then and I liked it now."*

Some listeners suggested that this could have been produced [and implied that NPR would have done it this way] as two separate reports; one featuring the reaction of the Court including only reporter narrative, and the other with the reactions of the attorneys. Another opinion was that the typical Totenberg report contains analysis, and this was more of a straight report of a news event.

Despite some comments which compared it unfavorably to NPR coverage, the report averaged as the highest ranked in three of the four quantitative categories when rated by listeners. This both illustrates the difficulty of competing with the NPR 'halo effect,' and is an overall endorsement of the quality and interest of this reporting by WKSU.

**KJZZ - Forest Ranger Feature  
TRACK 20 ON CD**

This was the only feature-type report in the entire LNP II research that ranked similarly in quality and interest to station-produced hard news reporting.

***How likely would you be to listen to this entire report if you heard it while listening to public radio?***

Very likely	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all likely
58%	16%	16%	5%	0%	5%	0%

***Rate your overall interest in this report***

Very interesting	2	3	4	5	6	Not at all interesting
47%	21%	10%	16%	5%	0%	0%

***Rate the overall quality of this report***

Very high quality	2	3	4	5	6	Very poor quality
37%	26%	5%	16%	10%	5%	0%

***This is the type of report I would expect to hear on programs like Morning Edition and All Things Considered***

Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly disagree
50%	33%	11%	6%	0%	0%	0%

*All statistics based on 19 responses*

This report ranked in the top two or three in all four categories. Listeners did not make any direct comments about the 2-way format of the report. **It was the pacing of Dennis Lambert, the use of the music, and most importantly, the interesting people that were interviewed that gave this story value.**

- *"It worked in my mind, and I loved the music. I rated it the highest of anything we've done. I loved it the first time and I loved it again."*
- *"I loved it because I have been up that way, their description of lightning made it very real. Yet personable because they had people talking."*
- *"I really liked it. They immediately introduced the concept about the book and what drew people career wise into this. And they talked about they liked the view, and they liked the lightning. And they had no fear of lightening, and he segued the lightning from one person to the other. And then how do you do it? This woman explains how she scans. And then it was, I bet you are wondering what they do with their down time."*
- *"I thought that Dennis Lambert kept the questions short and concise. He brought out information on the people being interviewed in a way that didn't waste a lot of time with needless conversation, he got right to it. I will be honest, when I first heard the beginning of the report, I thought it was something that I wouldn't pay much attention to, maybe because I have my own image of what a watch tower person would be like. But as soon as I heard the first response, it kind of hooked you. So they did a good job of bringing your interest up real quick."*
- *"It's the type of thing I like to hear, maybe not everyday, but occasionally. It's a broadening type of piece, it's a spice of life, just something interesting to find out about."*
- *"But it's nice to read local authors and know what they've put out. It may pique your interest to go and pick up that book."*
- *"His [Lambert's] voice is interesting but sometimes it can be a little doldrum. A little boring. It's great when they go into their own words, you never thought of this before and why would you ever, we never would expect to hear this anywhere else."*

In this report, which was more human interest than hard news, the localness and folksiness of the interviewees was a definite asset. Combined with the production values, this made a soft news, human interest feature a success with listeners.

## NEWS PRIORITIES FOR LISTENERS

As part of the focus groups, listeners were asked to rank, in priority order, ten characteristics of public radio news reporting.

<b><u>Characteristic</u></b>	<b><u>AVG</u></b>
1. Fairness, balance, and objectivity	2.80
2. In-depth news reporting	3.47
3. Reporting on international issues	4.44
4. Reporting on stories not heard in other media	4.80
5. Reporting on national issues	5.15
6. Quality of presentation and production of reporting	5.35
7. Timely news headlines and newscasts	6.53
8. Reporting on breaking news stories	6.96
9. Reporting on state issues	7.15
10. Reporting on city or community issues	8.07

*[Lower average score indicates higher priority on 1 – 10 scale, where 1 = most important and 10 = least important] 124 responses in-tab.*

Responses about specific types of reporting and overall characteristics of news coverage were deliberately placed in this question. Most interesting is that overall characteristics – balance, depth, hearing stories not covered elsewhere – were ranked as the highest priorities.

Reporting on state, city or community issues had the lowest priority, nonetheless, most listeners regard station-produced information as a useful service, and not as a nuisance or tune-out.

## IMPRESSIONS OF STATION PRODUCED NEWS

In each focus group, listeners provided many opinions and perceptions about station-produced news. Below is a sampling of these listener observations. In each of these comments, station names are omitted to protect their anonymity.

## Broad Scope

Listeners consistently preferred reports that were inclusive, that localized a national issue, or that incorporated one or more of the values discussed earlier.

- *"It did seem when the story was a local twist to the national agenda, they did a much better job. With the bigger picture, they do a better job."*
- *"It might be the scope...maybe they could ratchet up the amount of work they do on national stories."*
- *"I would say widen the scope of the stories. NPR had been doing a specific focus on a topic and once a week, say Tuesday at 5:20, they would talk about such and such a topic. But it was once a week at a certain time. [I wish] we had more state focused stories, like once a week."*
- *"They came up with Arizona Week, I think they could be more creative and come up with different 'weeks.' For example, Arizona spends the least amount of money, with the exception of Louisiana and Mississippi on its education, kids and people in need. That is why there are thousands of registered non-profits in this state. They could have a non-profit week, where they talk about the needs in the community and how certain organizations are fulfilling those needs. They could do different issues that they tackle because history of Arizona is sort of interesting, but year after year?"*
- *"I think it's a situation where they should not try to go wide, they should go deep. I get the feeling because they have the pledge drives they are working on a limited budget. They don't have this big media budget that some of the television stations might have. Let's do one good story and do it in-depth and give it some background instead of doing these little tidbits that you read out of the newspaper."*
- *"What about something like Arizona week, [say] we are going to be concentrating on the budget crisis and they [could use the] two and a half minutes at the top of every hour. Those two and a half minutes this week are going to be about the budget crisis, and we are going to be interviewing people, and talking about history and challenging ideas."*
- *"If they are going to cover local issues, political or social or whatever, types of things I can get in other media, they ought to do it more in-depth than what I can get in other media, otherwise I have no reason to listen to them."*

- *“We wish there was a little more background on some of the stories.”*
- *“I am always interested in how it relates to other places, so for me I guess it's in the same in-depth category, but more tied in with the national and international related.”*
- *“I don't know if we get [in-depth] local stories like [NPR]. During those news hours, I don't think is much [in-depth local] news stories, there will be headlines. I assume that most of what I hear during that time is national.”*
- *“I would like to see them explain the connections in a larger sense. Factors that interconnect with other things [i.e. countries & government.]”*

### **Newscasts and News Headlines**

Along with their comments about specific news reports, listeners shared their perceptions and observations about other types of station-produced news on public radio during the focus groups.

A common topic for discussion were newscasts and news headlines produced by stations. While a mainstay for many years, especially during Morning Edition and All Things Considered, newscasts do not draw universal praise from listeners.

Many of these comments appear to be in contrast with the overall high rating that state and local news headlines received in the survey.

#### ***Local & state headlines***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
NATIONAL TOTAL	30%	52%	13%	4%

***National Mean: 1.92***

***National Median: 2.00***

But the discussion is more about the role played by newscasts, whether they provide new information or reinforce perceptions of repetition, and whether they somehow make station-produced in-depth reporting less prominent in the minds of listeners.

The amount of other media sources used appears to have a considerable influence on listener's perceptions of the usefulness of public radio newscasts:

- *"If I don't have time to get any other source of news, I probably would appreciate the quick, superficial treatment. The day I have time to read lots of sources I wish it was more in-depth. On the day when I am in a rush and have 5 minutes to listen to the news, I like the superficial treatment. So they can't entirely please me."*
- *"I think any station...would be remiss if they did not keep you abreast of the breaking news in a short and concise fashion. And certainly that was a concise grouping of factual statements to keep you updated."*
- *"I start work between 5 and 6 in the morning. I don't have time to watch the news on television. So I need it on the radio, otherwise I don't get it until noon. So if it wasn't on [local station], then I wouldn't have anywhere to go to get it."*
- *"I think [local headlines] are part of the overall service."*
- *"I like the local interest stories, but I also like to get news like that, to be concise and then to go onto another story, because I like a lot of news."*

The natural tendency to imitate network reporting, and having been a part of public radio format for so long may be a reason that the function of newscasts have not been carefully considered. It may be time to reconsider their optimum role and function. Listeners readily pointed out some of the potential drawbacks to newscasts and news headlines:

- newscasts are not distinctive to public radio
- newscasts are often perceived as duplicative of information on commercial radio, TV, and newspapers
- newscasts contribute to the perception of repetition, particularly in drive time news programming that is often rolled-over

While news headlines give an expectation and a necessary service, stations receive very little praise from listeners for providing them, especially compared to the kudos that they receive for in-depth reporting. One listener called headline news “a commodity.”

- *“It's something you hear on the nightly news.”*
- *“I think most of the local stuff is just regurgitation of the [local newspaper].”*
- *“We are not hearing anything new there [during local newscasts], but there is paucity of national and international news in the local press and on local media.”*
- *“This isn't one of the things that makes NPR what it is. You could've heard that on [any station]. Not that it wasn't well done, but you would likely hear that same tidbit on other regular stations.”*
- *“I think that we could find this anywhere, the short blurbs are the commodity news, it's all over.” [emphasis added]*
- *“This goes way down to the bottom [priority], this isn't why you listen to NPR. It might be a necessary thing to have, but it's not why you are there.”*
- *“It seems like the local news report is just a review of the stories in the local newspaper. If I read the front page of the [newspaper] I hear the same stories later on the radio.”*
- *“It's probably a necessary evil for them to do a little bit of this at the beginning of the hour so you don't automatically turn them off and go some place else for 5 minutes.”*

Many core listeners already perceive repetition in news programming, especially during *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. Newscast content often contributes to these perceptions.

- *“Sometimes they get repetitive and you tend to hear the same thing. It will happen every half hour on the morning news, and then in the afternoon, they haven't updated, but they still have that same little report.”*
- *“I can see that repetition being monotonous for people who listen to it a lot, but those who listen to it less frequently, it's good for them.”*
- *“Between a newspaper and a television and the prevalence of those, I sometimes feel bombarded by these types of things. And it's again and again, not necessarily on [local station], but if you add in every 5 minute spot on television and you flick it on looking for the weather report, it's almost like a barrage. That's what I don't like.”*

Some listeners also perceive that station-produced headlines are nothing more than a rehash of stories in the newspaper.

- *“I think our weakest area is local news. I have read the [local newspaper] as they are reading it to me word for word. They do read the headlines and sometimes the lead statement from the [newspaper]. But I don’t think they make any pretense of having any local reporters out gathering the news.”*
- *“Most of the local stuff, they are just repeating what is in the [newspaper]. Because they don’t have the people to do it, that’s my guess as to why.”*

LNP II provided additional confirmation that **no matter how well they are presented, and no matter what the value of the information they contain, newscasts as they are currently presented on most stations will not be memorable to listeners.** They are more of an expectation, than a service that adds value. At best, they provide quick information for listeners who have not yet encountered it in other media. They do not play to public radio’s strength of depth and analysis.

The memorability of NPR newscasts seems largely connected to the iconic status of Carl Kasell and other long-term presenters. But a significant difference in the perception of network versus station-produced newscasts is that **many of the stories heard in a national newscast will be reported on in-depth during the next hour, while the stories on local newscasts are rarely followed-up with in-depth reporting.**

Listeners were asked, “Why do the headlines of 5 minutes from Carl Kasell about national and international news serve a useful function, when those produced by stations often do not?” Some listeners had a rational answer. *[emphasis added below]*

- *“Because Carl Kasell’s 4 or 5 minutes are giving us the framework of what the day’s news is going to be about. He’s setting up the headlines and topics, most of which are going to be covered in-depth within the hour. As opposed to [local station], they throw out a little something and it’s gone.”*
- *“If they [station] were to pick a really hot issue, and if I knew they were going to do that once or twice a week, I would probably more satisfied with that superficial 3 minutes of local news. But I agree with what is being said about the national news. If I don’t have time to read the paper, I know I am going to get a basic overview.”*
- *“If you are going to deal with the local news, in local detail, you have to be prepared to discuss it with that kind of detail and attention. If you are going to summarize world events, you can get away with that at a high level to educate what is going on because there is a broad, general understanding of here’s how things work, internationally. There is paradigm and perspective. You get into the local stuff and so often people don’t have the context and don’t understand the relationships.”*

The well thought out, well crafted in-depth report remains the fundamental listener expectation of public radio news, whether produced by NPR or a station. This does not necessarily mean that stations should immediately drop newscasts, but it does call for additional investigation, thought, and an examination of the time and energy that is spent on this types of reporting, and consideration of new, alternate newscast and news headline formats.



## **LNP II SUMMARY**

### **THE LNP II RESEARCH RESULTS IN-DEPTH**

Good research should accomplish multiple objectives – it should:

- Use previous research as a foundation of knowledge on which to build
- Factually confirm information that we assume we already know
- Inform us about the margin of information we assume we already know – for example, there may be little surprise in discovering that national news has a higher average quality rating than local news – but the value is in knowing whether that margin is miniscule or large
- Providing information that we did not know prior to the research
- Providing action items for stations to implement in their programming
- Raise new questions to pursue in future research and investigation

***Thanks to the participating stations, The Local News Project II research has accomplished each of these objectives.***

These are the primary conclusions of the Local News Project II research. In some cases, they quantify pre-existing knowledge, in others, they support and build upon previous studies, and several provide information on areas which have never previously been explored in national research.

Each point contains one or more action items; specifics that stations can implement and benefit from by using the information gained in LNP II.

## QUANTIFYING PRE-EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Several LNP II conclusions quantify or reinforce existing knowledge.

✦ The term 'local news' has negative connotations for most listeners. Public radio listeners often associate the term with the sensationalism of local television news shows. Additionally, localism, in and of itself, is not necessarily viewed as a virtue.

### A C T I O N I T E M

**It is recommended that stations not use the term 'local news' on air or in promotional materials to describe their reporting.**

✦ Listeners considered state and local news produced by public radio stations to be vastly superior to most of the news on commercial radio and television.

While this knowledge may fall into the category of "information we already think we know" LNP II demonstrated that the gap in quality listeners perceive between state and local news on public radio and commercial media is significant. One of the many ways this is reflected is in the median data for the quality of state and local reporting on public radio, which averages as 'good,' [2 on a 1-4 scale] while the same reporting from commercial sources averages as only 'fair' [3 on a 1-4 scale].

Of course, stations should never become complacent. Improvement in sound and service is always both possible and desirable. These lukewarm attitudes about commercial radio news are most prevalent among current core public radio news listeners. Many fringe listeners and non-listeners find value in commercial radio and TV news.

**A C T I O N I T E M**

**Some markets may always have significant sharing between public and commercial news stations, but commercial media are not generally significant competitors for the public radio core news audience.**

**In many respects, public radio is its own strongest competition.**

**The task of public radio news is not so much defeating the competition, but challenging ourselves. How interesting and compelling can news programming be, story by story, day by day. Getting stale, repetitive, overly predictable, and irrelevant are the major threats to news reporting, and these are very much within each station's control. Much of the future success of public radio news depends upon an unrelenting effort to increase the quality and interest of our service.**

**While remaining current is important, few listeners care if their public station has the 'scoop' on the top story of the day.**

**Reporting a story five minutes before other media outlets is not significant to most listeners [although stations should have an action plan to handle really significant local, national, or international events]. What IS significant is whether stations consistently provide thoughtful, balanced, in-depth, and credible reporting on significant issues and events, as well as cultural and human interest reporting that listeners may never encounter in other media.**

## EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE FROM PREVIOUS RESEARCH

These LNP II results use previous research as a foundation upon which to broaden and expand our knowledge and understanding.

✦ Listeners have similar expectations of quality and interest for all news reports, regardless of who produces them, or where they originate. They expect the same characteristics in news reports produced by stations and national networks. The source of a report has little bearing on how it is received by listeners, although familiar national reporters often have an additional, advantageous level of recognition and credibility [a so-called 'halo effect'] that station-produced reports have difficulty matching.

Although in-depth national and international news reporting remains the primary motivation for most public radio news listeners to tune in, stations should continue using the best reporting practices contained within network programming as a model in crafting their news stories. There are tangible and intangible characteristics present in most news reports on public radio, and core listeners instinctually recognize them, even if they cannot articulate each individual element.

### A C T I O N I T E M

**All producers and reporters should have a clear understanding of listener expectations for news, and the elements that make up the so-called NPR News sound and approach. A thorough grasp of the Core Values of Public Radio Programming, as articulated in this research and in studies conducted by PRPD, is an excellent method to ensure this understanding.**

**Station reporters and producers should aspire to create programming that incorporates these Core Values, and equals the levels of quality and interest already provided by network news programming.**

✦ There are few significant differences in the research results on a station-by-station basis. **Overall opinions about the relative quality and values of public radio news are similar across all tested markets.** This re-confirms the general similarity in attitudes and expectations among public radio news listeners that were identified in the LNP I research.

When comparing median statistical results, there are rarely any differences between station survey results.

While the overall trends are similar, they are not identical - there are some variations among individual station results. For example, when comparing mean [simple average] results, the differences are sometimes as great as 20% for the same question.

The overall statistical results indicate that **there is some degree of difference between stations** [for example, listeners at some stations value traffic reports or election night coverage a little more or less]; **these differences are generally not sufficiently significant to cause any change in the actionable items of this research.** For example, the result for one station may indicate 92% support for a certain type of programming, while another station's results may indicate only 72% support. While these results are statistically different, they are virtually identical in terms of action and implementation, as both indicate strong support for the programming in question.

## ACTION ITEM

**While there are some subtle variations in the results between markets, the LNP II research results are applicable and actionable for nearly all stations. Most markets, listeners, and/or programming are not somehow so unique and different that these results cannot be applied.**

**The results of LNP II, and other national studies conducted using generally-accepted research standards, are relevant and applicable to virtually all stations.**

✦ While listeners value many aspects of news reporting on public radio, fairness, balance, objectivity, and in-depth reporting are among the characteristics they value most. Listeners also value hearing stories, or different approaches to a story, that they are not likely to encounter in other media.

Another reason that news and information on public radio is appreciated is that it is perceived to be among the few sources not beholden to corporate media. The perceived independence and high ethical standards of reporting on public radio adds immeasurably to its attractiveness to listeners.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**As many other media sources are viewed as sensationalized, or beholden to corporate or political interests, the perceived fairness, balance, and objectivity of public radio news is an increasingly valuable asset for stations that uphold these high standards.**

**Reporting produced by stations should strive to go beyond the obvious, and provide information and perspectives that listeners are not likely to encounter in other media. These are the types of 'surprises' that listeners appreciate, and that add value to their listening experience.**

✦ In most cases, listeners underestimate the amount of in-depth reporting produced by stations. The problems of relatively low awareness and ineffective or nonexistent promotion of station-produced reporting discovered in LNP I still exist. Over the years, NPR has established a strong brand identity for news – during that time, most stations have not established an identity for the news they produce.

An awareness gap remains between the amount of in-depth reporting stations provide, and the amount listeners perceive. Adding to this problem is that newscasts are the station-produced news that is top-of-mind for most listeners – and that this type of headline news is not representative of the in-depth reporting stations would want listeners to associate with them the most.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**For stations to increase awareness of their in-depth reporting, improved promotion and branding, and greater consistency in airing reports at predictable times, will be required.**

**Stations will also benefit from producing [and promoting] an in-depth version of one or more stories heard during newscasts for broadcast later in the same program or day.**

✦ Most listeners still perceive the quality of in-depth reporting of national and international news to be superior to state and local news reports.

There is both good news and bad news here. The good news is that 81% of listeners would rate station produced news as either 'excellent' or 'good.'

The bad news is that more that twice as many listeners consider national and international reporting to be 'excellent' when compared to state and local news.

While both receive overall positive ratings, the perceived excellence of national and international news remains considerably greater.

In LNP I [1999], these results were similar – nearly twice as many listeners considered national/international news as 'excellent' rather than 'good.' And almost twice as many listeners considered local and state in-depth and headlines to be 'good' rather than 'excellent.'

The results are remarkably unchanged in the last four years. Despite asking the quality question in a slightly different manner, the data are almost identical.

The comparative quality ratings for in-depth national and international news are:

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>
<b>LNP I</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>LNP II</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>34%</b>

The comparative quality ratings for in-depth state and local news are:

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>
<b>LNP I</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>LNP II</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>51%</b>

Some encouragement may be found in the small positive increases in quality for state and local news since LNP I, but because these changes are within the margin of error of the data, they may not be statistically significant.

Despite trailing overall network perceptions of quality, positive reactions to station-produced reports heard in focus groups demonstrate that stations are already producing reports that listeners perceive as being of the same quality and interest as any heard on a national news program.

In the end, expectations greatly influence perceptions. In many ways, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more consistently stations produce – and listeners are aware of – news stories that match the quality and interest standards established by national news programs, the more station-produced reporting is likely to achieve quality ratings similar to national and international news.

**A C T I O N I T E M**

**Listeners perceive virtually all network reports as excellent, while station-produced reporting is less consistent; some of it is excellent, most is very good, and occasionally it is poor.**

**Consistency is one key – making each report more interesting and valuable to listeners. Station reporting already equals network standards in some cases, this must occur more frequently, combined with increased listener awareness, for these perceptions to change significantly.**

**The importance of promotion cannot be overemphasized - to restate LNP I, if an in-depth news report is worth the time and effort to produce, it is also worth the time and effort to promote.**

- ✦ Public radio listeners are very interested in understanding how issues and events affect them, but even more interested in how issues and events affect the country and the world. This applies equally to state and local news, and is not confined solely to national and international reporting. Listeners expect the big picture to be provided regardless of the source of the report.

In order for a well-produced report on a state or local issue or event to be interesting to most listeners, LNP II demonstrates an approach to greatly increase the chances of success:

- Connect the issue or event to a larger context
- Explain how another city or state has or is reacting to a similar situation
- Explain how this event impacts the nation or world
- Explain how the events or issue represents a larger trend
- Explain how the issue or event affects them or their community

Doing one or more of the above considerably increases the likelihood of enhancing listener service.

Looking at issues and events through a broader lens holds true for both the production and selection of news stories. Since there are generally more potential stories to cover than resources to cover them, stations should favor issues and events that contain the greatest potential for making larger, significant connections.

Because public radio listeners are interested in reports that make broader connections and include the 'big picture,' reports with broader appeal increase the chance that listeners will respond favorably to a station-produced news report. Examples of this approach that tested positively in focus groups were reports with subjects and treatments that used multiple sources and had broader implications beyond one portion of a station's coverage area.

**A C T I O N I T E M**

**There is no inherent value to listeners simply because reporting emanates from their community – localism for the sake of localism does not equal audience service or create value for listeners.**

**This may be the most important action item in all of LNP II. In LNP I, it was called 'scope.' The PRPD Core Values study warned not to define station-produced news as "of narrow range, merely local, provincial [or] restricted."**

**The reports receiving the most positive response took a national or international issue or event and brought it to the community level, or looked at an issue or event in the community through a wider lens. If anything in this research approaches being a 'formula,' this is it. This is the third national research study that has discussed, and in the case of LNP II, that has quantified this conclusion. This leaves little doubt about the effectiveness of this approach.**

**In selecting stories, consider how they might be connected to a larger context, show how another city or state is reacting to a similar situation, explain how the event impacts the nation or world, demonstrate how the event or issue represent a larger trend, or explain how the issue or event affects the listeners community, nation and/or world.**

**This does not mean it is impossible to provide a story of purely local interest that will be of value to listeners. But with virtually infinite story selection options, and finite time and talent, why not concentrate on reports that are most likely to provide the maximum in listener service?**

**If stations consistently selected stories that connected listeners to their community – and beyond - it would have a significant impact on listener service.**

## NEW INFORMATION FROM LNP II

LNP II provided much new information not studied or quantified by previous research.

- ✦ The events of 9/11 did not significantly change listener interest in state and local reporting.

While there is a slight increase in overall listener interest in international news reporting because of the 9/11 events, the results do not suggest that the 'portfolio' of news on public radio stations [international, national, state, local] needs to be rebalanced. This result was definitive in both the surveys and focus groups.

### A C T I O N I T E M

**While reporting that connects a community to different aspects of the 'war on terrorism' and related areas will be subjects of interest for a long time, these types of stories produced by stations can have the same level of interest as national or international reporting.**

**Additionally, [except in war or emergency situations] there is no need to reduce the amount of station-produced reporting in order to accommodate additional national or international news. While a war or major terrorist incident could alter this balance temporarily, listener needs for station-produced reporting have not changed significantly since 9/11/01, and there is no indication that it is likely to change in the future.**

- ✦ If given a choice, listeners would not eliminate state and local reporting. In fact, many listeners would even expand their station's current news service.

Nearly all listeners agreed that stations should broadcast at least one in-depth local or state news report per day. For many stations, this would actually represent an **increase** in their in-depth news reporting! Only 5% of listeners would eliminate all state and local news reporting from their public radio station.

This result suggests several other conclusions:

- Despite rating the quality of local news lower than national and international news, most listeners indicate that it meets or exceeds their minimum standards.
- State and local reporting on public radio serves a need. Most listeners realize that the quantity and quality of reporting on area issues or events on most commercial media is low. If produced and presented properly, reporting on state and local issues and events increase listener service and satisfaction.

One caveat in this data is the impact of the methodology on the results. In the survey, listeners responded positively to the **general concept of station-produced reporting**. In focus groups, listeners provided a mix of responses in reaction to **specific examples of stations-produced reporting**.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**A vast majority of listeners – 95% - support at least some station-produced news reporting.**

**To increase acceptance of station-produced reporting, focus on the importance of consistency, of quality, and listener awareness. Unless reports are clearly identified, promoted, and branded, listeners have a tendency not to distinguish well-produced station reports from national program content, and may remember only those that do not meet their standards.**

**Improving the quality of station reporting in the minds of listeners will require a combination of actual changes in quality and consistency, and increasing awareness.**

- ✦ The survey results demonstrate that listeners support the concept of station-produced reports. The focus groups indicate that although stations produce some stories that equal national reporting in quality and interest, there remains room for overall improvement in the quality and consistency of these reports.

When comparing the overall quality of state and local news on public radio to other media, station-produced reporting is generally considered to be similar in quality to newspapers. The LNP I research demonstrated a similar result.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**To better understand how most listeners view the quality of station-produced state and local news, remember that on average, listeners evaluate station coverage to be similar in quality to the newspaper reporting. Depending on the market and one's perception, this may be a positive or negative comparison!**

**Some stations have or will seek to form relationships with other news sources in their community. While each situation must be evaluated on a case by case basis, the data indicates that partnerships or alliances with newspapers might provide a compatible fit for public radio and its listeners.**

- ✦ While stations can surmise many of the topics that will be heard on national news programs, networks and producers of national programs could assist stations in serving listeners by providing advance notification of major issue reporting and multi-part series they are producing in the coming months. This would allow stations to produce companion pieces from the viewpoint of their communities. This would create a win-win situation for the networks, the stations, and most importantly, the listeners.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**The most appropriate way to initiate this sharing of information would be for stations to encourage a national organization [perhaps PRNDI or PRPD] to discuss a system through which the producers of major national news programs can share advance plans for special features or areas of concentration. Historically, many producers have been reticent to reveal their plans in advance [getting a fresh daily promo can be challenge enough for some!].**

**Producers and networks must realize that stations will understand if not all of their advance plans materialize.**

**Stations should match this understanding with the knowledge that having this information available, even if not 100% accurate, will be incredibly helpful in planning ways to provide local tie-ins with major national reports, and increasing the effectiveness of promoting these stories.**

✦ One of the surprises of LNP II – a solid majority of listeners - 70% - agree that traffic reports during drive times are a valuable service. This total includes listeners who are retired or are not regular commuters. Most listeners did not express a problem with how the sound of traffic reporting fits in with a station's overall sound. However, most listeners would not favor an increase in the frequency of traffic reports [most stations in LNP II ran 3-4 traffic reports per hour during drive time].

Considerable discussion has occurred about whether stations should provide traffic reports. Some claim that they are duplicative of other stations' programming, that the airtime can be used to provide content with greater listener service, or that their sound is incompatible and may repel listeners. The LNP II results disagree with these contentions.

While not a definitive conclusion, the LNP II data suggests that the need for traffic reporting generally increases with the size of the market.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**While stations should take steps to continually improve the accuracy, comprehensiveness, and sound of traffic reports, most listeners want traffic information to be provided as part of the morning and afternoon drive time news and information service, and throughout the day when conditions warrant.**

This result does not erase the fact that listeners find fault with many aspects of traffic reporting on most public and commercial stations. They cite reports that are inaccurate or untimely, that use odd or inappropriate lingo or phrases [i.e. 'crash' instead of 'accident', 'car vs. pedestrian,' 'we're working an accident,' etc.], or that discuss only one portion of a station's coverage area. These are roadblocks that stations need to continue to overcome. Despite these shortcomings, traffic reports received strong support from listeners.

✦ In-depth and headline news coverage remain the dominant listener service of both NPR and individual stations. For feature reporting, most listeners felt that arts and cultural stories were slightly more important than human interest stories. This held true for both the local and national level. This result is presented with the caveat that the terms 'human interest' and 'arts and cultural' represent different things to each listener.

Based on the options presented in the LNP II survey, listeners maintain a hierarchy of news priorities that apply equally to network and station productions.

- Breaking news
- In-depth news
- Headline news
- Arts & cultural news
- Human interest stories

Breaking news, in-depth news, and headline news reporting are the main focus. Arts & cultural news and human interest stories are the spice, and differentiate public radio from many other media information sources.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**This result emphasizes that public radio is no longer a news boutique for listeners. It is the primary source of information for many. While in-depth coverage remains the primary service and point of differentiation, listeners also expect to hear timely coverage of breaking news, even if the initial coverage is not in-depth. They want to know what's going on. Listeners also expect the extra dimension of [non-sensational and non-star-driven] cultural and human interest reporting that is rare in other media.**

**Most listeners would heartily agree that national and international news reporting is satisfying all of these needs. Is your station providing the same combination and consistency of reporting from your community and state?**

- ✦ Levels of listener interest in station-produced hard news reports are much more consistent and predictable than for human interest or arts and cultural reporting.

Throughout the focus groups, listener reaction to arts and cultural and human interest reports was much more inconsistent than reactions to hard reporting. Assuming a hard news story was well written and produced, it generally was considered interesting by most listeners. But many arts, cultural, and human interest reports that listeners found well-presented and produced were not considered to be as interesting, mostly due to their subject and lack of universal interest.

Listeners appreciate the variety and personal touch that human interest and arts and cultural reporting provides. They appreciate that this type of reporting is provided on public radio without chasing sensationalism or over-sentimentality often displayed in other media. Stations should continue to produce these stories. Nevertheless, predicting listener interest in softer feature-type stories is more problematic.

Other than reinforcing the power of core values, the LNP II research cannot provide a definitive answer on how to make human interest and arts and cultural reporting more consistently interesting to listeners. This is a subject, along with newscasts, for further research and examination.

**A C T I O N I T E M**

Stations should continue to produce arts, cultural, and human interest stories. These types of reports differentiate public radio from other media, and they appeal to the overall sensibilities of most listeners. While additional investigation into this area is warranted, stations can consider the following ideas, based on the LNP II research:

- In attempting to make human interest stories interesting to most listeners, audience demographics should be considered when choosing subjects for human interest stories. Until specific research on this subject becomes available, this is an excellent opportunity to utilize the Core Values articulated by PRPD to assist in story selection.
- Whenever possible, stations should report on arts or cultural events when it is still possible for listeners to attend. Listeners find it frustrating to become interested in an event, based on an interview or report, only to find that it is no longer possible to see the art exhibit or hear the concert.

✦ Many stations attempt to provide comprehensive coverage of state and local issues and candidates before, during, and after general elections. LNP II confirmed that these different types of coverage are not equally important to listeners. **Coverage before the election, focusing on issues and candidates, is most important to listeners.** Post-election analysis is their

second priority, with the lowest priority being breaking news and results on election night.

As societally-conscious individuals, many listeners use public radio as a primary source of information for deciding how to mark their ballots on Election Day. This important role, combined with the perception of many listeners that there are few other sources of in-depth and relatively unbiased political coverage, contribute to the vital role public radio can play prior to elections.

After the election, listeners perceive that some analysis is available [and perhaps over-saturated!] on a variety of media outlets, making public radio's role slightly less significant.

The area where many commercial media out-perform public radio is in reporting breaking news on election night. Few stations can match the election night staff or budget of commercial networks, and this type of coverage has become an event more closely associated with television than radio.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**This provides a clear picture of how most stations should allocate their time and resources in covering elections. In-depth coverage prior to the election provides the greatest listener service, with post-election analysis a close second. For most stations, local election night spot news coverage should be minimal. In many cases, the effort required for comprehensive local election night is not commensurate with the listener service that is provided.**

- ✦ Given a choice, most news listeners did not favor gavel-to-gavel coverage of events such as Senate hearings or Supreme Court confirmation hearings. This was true even on most news/talk formatted stations. Just over half of the listeners surveyed preferred edited highlights of hearings and similar events, with one third of listeners preferred that NPR and/or stations produce news stories containing the important points of the hearings.

This is not to say that stations should never carry gavel-to-gavel coverage. Each station must define its own vision of listener service. However, the data indicate that for many of these events, listeners prefer a condensed synopsis [by NPR or the station] rather than hearing the entire event itself. Based on listener reaction, gavel-to-gavel type coverage on public radio should generally be the exception, not the rule.

## **A C T I O N   I T E M**

**Gavel-to-gavel coverage can provide a valuable public service. But many listeners are unavailable to use radio, or to pay consistent attention to programming, between 9am and 4pm, the times this type of coverage is often heard.**

**The media landscape has changed, and this may be part of the reason for this result. Twenty years ago NPR stations were among the only outlets for this type of coverage. Continuing coverage is now often provided by cable news channels and internet sources. While there may be times when stations feel compelled to provide gavel-to-gavel coverage, regardless of potential duplication, listeners have suggested that this should be the exception, not the rule.**

## The Role of Newscasts

The role that newscasts play in listener perceptions about station-produced news is significant, and merits special attention. It was among the most interesting results of the research. The term 'newscasts' refers to 4-6 minute reports produced by stations within and adjacent to major national programs, such as Morning Edition, All Things Considered, and The World.

When listeners are asked about the kind of reporting their local station provides, newscasts [particularly those near the top and/or bottom of the hour on Morning Edition or All Things Considered] are almost always the first content that comes to mind.

Why are newscasts generally the most memorable local news programming?

Newscasts are heard every day and often every hour or half hour, at a consistent time. This consistency [and its 'fit' within the format of most national news programs] is a main reason that listeners identify a series of brief local and state stories, with or without sound, more easily as local than a longer, produced report embedded within a national news magazine.

When newscasts are the top-of-mind news product, this may be a problem for stations for several reasons:

- Newscasts often duplicate coverage provided by other media
- Newscasts do not typically include in-depth reporting
- Stories in newscasts are often repetitive from one hour to the next, and on some stations throughout the day – listeners are sensitive to repetition, particularly throughout rollovers within national programming
- Most of the content in newscasts is often not connected to other reporting by the station, i.e. many times the stories in the newscast are not followed by in-depth reporting on the same subjects

The ramifications of these problems include:

- Listeners are more likely to hear and remember stories that are provided on other media during newscasts. This contributes to the perception that the station is simply duplicating reporting available to them on other media
- When newscasts have the highest awareness among listeners, they are less likely to recall in-depth stories that stations give the most time and effort in producing, and which generally provide the greatest listener service, in-depth reporting is public radio's calling card and one of its greatest perceived strengths – a station's standing with listeners would certainly be enhanced by emphasizing its strengths – and how it is unique - not how it is similar to other media options
- Repetition [particularly during rollovers of Morning Edition] is already one of the major complaints of core news listeners – newscasts often include many of the same stories each hour, and this only adds to the negative perception of repetition
- Some listeners perceive that newscasts have lesser value if the stories in the headlines are not followed by in-depth reporting on the same subjects. It is commonly perceived that many stories on an NPR newscast during Morning Edition or All Things Considered will be followed up by an in-depth report later in the program. The same cannot be said about stories heard during a station-produced newscast.

## A C T I O N I T E M

**The research results should not be interpreted to indicate that newscasts are unnecessary or inherently damaging - or that stations should necessarily devote more time and resources to them. The results do suggest that the linkage between newscasts and in-depth reporting should be more closely examined. Listener perceptions might change if more stories reported in newscasts were followed-up [and promoted] as in-depth reports. The best case scenario for most stations would be a daily in-depth report about at least one of the topics presented in a newscast.**

LNP II does not indicate that newscasts are causing direct harm to stations. Most listeners prefer a mix of headlines, in-depth reporting, arts, cultural, and human interest stories. But it is clear that there is benefit to be gained by:

- Examining alternative formats for at least some newscasts
- Ensuring, and clearly promoting, any in-depth reports that are related to one or more of the stories in the newscast
- Finding ways to promote and brand station-produced in-depth reporting, without damaging the positive association with NPR news
- Considering a more dynamic approach in story selection that ensures a higher frequency of in-depth reports that are related to one or more of the stories in the newscast

## A C T I O N I T E M

**It comes down to this--if news headlines are the most memorable part of a station's news service, these will form the primary impression listeners will have of that station's coverage. This perception will not often include the in-depth news service that the station provides.**

## **AREAS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION FUTURE RESEARCH**

While the main function of research is to answer questions, or at least narrow the likely options, thoughtful research also opens the doors to new questions that would advance the collective knowledge.

Whether or not a Local News Project III will occur in the future is entirely up to public radio stations. Here are some of the areas that merit additional investigation, based on the results of LNP II.

### **Newscasts**

- Are there viable, alternative formats to the news headlines most stations produce?
- Are there alternative ideas for content of these traditional places for spot news?
- Will consistent promotion of in-depth coverage during a newscast change listener perceptions about station-produced news?
- Should the availability of in-depth news stories influence the selection of stories during newscasts; i.e. if a story is not ever likely to be covered in-depth by the station, should it ever appear in a newscast?

### **Softer News – Features & Arts & Cultural Reporting**

- Listeners want human interest and arts and cultural reporting on public radio. What are the principles that can will make this type of reporting as consistently valuable and interesting as reporting on breaking news, issues and events?

### **Promotion**

- How to best promote station-produced stories – which methods will work best to establish a station news identity without either damaging the NPR association, or lapsing into a commercial TV sound and mentality that would be inappropriate for public radio.

## Story Selection & Content

- Stations, and particularly news directors, may benefit from additional input from listeners on how best to broaden the scope of reports produced about community and state issues and events. One method would be to play examples of similar stories, produced in two different ways – one with a more narrow and one with a broader focus – to gauge the impact on listeners.

# ATTACHMENTS

**Index to LNP II CD**  
**Not for Broadcast**  
**For internal use only**

TRACK 1	Introduction
TRACK 2	WKSU Mission & Strategy Document
TRACK 3	KJZZ LNP II Research Summary
TRACK 4	KJZZ Newscast Repetition Analysis
TRACK 5	WEKU on the benefits of LNP II to their station
TRACK 6	WEKU on research for smaller market stations
TRACK 7	WFAE on the benefits of LNP II to their station
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TRACK 10	Eric Nuzum on the value of newscasts
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TRACK 21	Conclusion

## **KJZZ ACTION PLAN & ARBITRON ANALYSIS**

Research is an incredibly valuable resource for stations, but it accomplishes little if a plan for action is not implemented based on the results.

KJZZ-FM in Phoenix took several steps after receiving the LNP II research results. Program Director Scott Williams examined the report and isolated five main areas where he felt the results were particularly relevant to the station. As part of their regular news meeting, Scott, News Director Mark Moran, and the KJZZ news staff discussed the results, and devised a simple but effective action plan with specific objectives. Scott also used the LNP II data with other audience research [Arbitron] in order to answer some questions about repetition that had been raised in the LNP research.

Scott Williams & Mark Moran discuss this process in greater detail on the LNP II CD.

As you can see, these action plans and analyses need not be long or complex. The important step is deciding which parts of the research are most relevant to your station, then taking action!

## The Local News Project II - KJZZ Summary

1. Traffic: 70% of KJZZ listeners agree that traffic reports are a valuable service. This survey answered any questions about the importance of traffic reports for Phoenix public radio listeners, despite the fact that several public stations have dropped such reports in the last five years in other markets.

KJZZ listeners rated the value of traffic reports higher than any other LNP II station. Given the direct option to drop traffic reports from our drive time service and less than 12% said they should be jettisoned.

2. Election Coverage: In-depth coverage prior to the election provides the greatest listener service. Local election night coverage should be minimal. Compared to other LNP II stations, KJZZ listeners are among the least interested in local election night coverage.

3. Hearings: 87% of KJZZ listeners said they do not want us to air continuous coverage of Senate hearings, etc. Just over half felt the best coverage was edited highlights of these events.

4. Interest in Arizona news remains high: Except in war or emergency situations there is no need to reduce the amount of station-produced reporting in order to accommodate additional national or international news. The events of 9/11 did not significantly change listener interest in state and local reporting.

5. Newscasts: Listeners continue to say they are bothered about repetition. We do 20 newscasts every weekday, 114 every week.

How can we battle the perception of repetition?

Are we scheduling minis most effectively? What are the chances for hearing the same mini in both All Things Considered and Morning Edition? In Morning Edition should our best hard news features go at :06 rather than at 33:30? What should be the shelf life of a newscast story? What are some alternative ways to approach newscasts?

**KJZZ LNP II Action Plan**

1. Repetition in newscasts:
  - a. In Morning Edition more theme newscasts with :04 option available
  - b. In middays, new versions of stories with rewritten copy and different tape, plus occasional single topic newscasts and some 2 ways.
  - c. In All Things Considered, minis sometime at top of hour, some 2 ways.
2. No longer will repeat All Things Considered minis in Morning Edition.
3. Morning Edition – some hours, have top story at top of hour with analysis at half hour.
4. Revitalize arts features.
5. Expand diversity of news stories and features.
6. Consider developing more drop-in features like “I am your teacher.”
7. Consider using a selected number of reporters from the Arizona Republic on air, i.e. business stories.
8. All stories need to be edited, seek another set of eyes and ears.
9. More advance planning needed for news coverage.
10. Series development needs a better process.
11. Need to expand information for daybook and develop a better contact file.
12. Need to be proactive on developing material for Monday morning.
13. Consider adopting a beat system.
14. Consider ending coverage of minor news conferences.

## SUMMARY OF KJZZ ARBITRON RESEARCH FOR LNP II

**1. If a mini-documentary is played at 3:30 pm and 5:30 pm, what percentage of the next day's Morning Edition will have already heard the piece?**

- 6:30 and 8:30 am – 48%
- 7:30 am – 39%

**2. What are the most listened to quarter hours in Morning Edition where local material is aired?**

<u>Time</u>	<u>Listener Hours</u>
(1) 7-7:15	36,800
(2) 8-8:15	35,300
(3) 6:30-6:45	34,300
(4) 7:30-7:45	32,200
(5) 6-6:15	28,300
(6) 8:30-8:45	26,600

**3. If a story in the 7:06 am newscast, how many people will have already heard it in subsequent newscasts that day?**

8 am	56%
9 am	39%
10 am	36%
11 am	33%
Noon	31%
1 pm	30%
2 pm	29%
3 pm	30%
4 pm	33%
5 pm	42%

**4. If a story in the 4:06 pm newscast, how many people will have already heard it in subsequent newscasts later that day and the next day?**

5 pm	52%
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6 am	21%
7 am	38%
8 am	37%
9 am	42%
10 am	38%
11 am	37%
Noon	38%
1 pm	40%
2 pm	38%
3 pm	50%

Source: Winter 2003 Metro Phoenix Arbitron data, RRC Listener PC crossover analysis



## **WKSU NEWS MISSION AND STRATEGY**

*by Eric Nuzum, WKSU Program Director*

*With the input and assistance of the WKSU News Department:  
Vincent Duffy (News Director), Michelle Chyatte, Vivian Goodman, Julie Grant, Kevin Niedermier, Mark Urycki, and Leonard Will*

WKSU-FM used the LNP II research results, and the results of PRPD's Core Values study to lay the foundation for an extensive series of news programming meetings, involving the entire news staff. Out of these conversations, WKSU devised an action plan with specific objectives.

Eric Nuzum & Vincent Duffy discuss this process in greater detail on the LNP II CD.

This is not a complex document. But the process that led to this mission and strategy paper used research and other factors to help WKSU define how it would best provide audience service through station-produced news programming.

***Mission:***

When searching for a mission and strategy, three key questions must be asked:

- What are we best at?
- What are we passionate about?
- What do our listeners want from us?

WKSU News has never suffered from a lack of initiatives. Rather, it is the overabundance of initiatives that often proves problematic. Even considering the scope of our abilities and interests, the answers to the above questions are fairly obvious. Framed as a statement:

WKSU News produces in-depth news features that illuminate and enlighten life in Northeast Ohio.

It is important to understand how we define “in-depth.” Regarding its application to WKSU News, in-depth is not synonymous with copious detail. *To us, in-depth means context.* Further, in-depth is not measured by the amount of time given to a story but by our unique and smart perspective on that story.

It is also important to understand the use of “illuminate” and “enlighten.” In this context, “illuminate” means to shed light upon, to draw attention to a subject, issue, or event. “Enlighten” means that something is changed in the process, different and more than it was previously. Generally, our work should have two simultaneous effects: “illuminate” our subjects and “enlighten” our listeners.

WKSU listeners expect WKSU News features to offer stories, perspectives, and ideas that are not available elsewhere. This does not necessarily mean that we do (or do not) report on stories simply because of the interest (or lack of interest) from other media. WKSU News can cover story subjects that are ubiquitous in other media *as long as our reporting offers something that other media are not offering or cannot offer to the story.* If what we offer in a feature is available elsewhere, then we have chosen poorly.

WKSU should be the place where listeners turn to hear the “smart” viewpoint or analysis of stories. WKSU News should present perspectives that are absent from other media.

***Pathways to context:***

WKSU News should be less concerned with exploring the “what” of a story than the “why.” While other area media are content to report that an event has occurred, we discuss what it means. The “what”—or factual journalism that comprises a story—is crucial and should be taken seriously; however, we distinguish ourselves with work that reaches beyond the basic telling of facts and happenings. In the PRPD *Core Values of Local News*, there are five sample questions that can be applied to a story in order to develop contextual perspective:

- Has it happened before?
- Has it happened elsewhere?
- Is it part of a pattern?
- What is the cause?
- What is the impact?

While these questions are not the only ways to bring context to a story (other examples are illustrated in the attached “PRPD Core Values Grid”), they do provide an illustrative starting point. Listeners place high value on our ability to see issues from a larger perspective, to illuminate emerging trends, and to spot an issue’s place on a spectrum.

***A Northeast Ohio perspective:***

In both features and newscasts, WKSU News should always keep in mind that we speak to a diverse geographic audience. WKSU listeners are located in some of the state’s most urbanized areas and in some of its most isolated rural communities. WKSU listeners are fairly narcissistic in regards to geography. Listeners in Cleveland have little interest in most Akron-oriented stories; Canton listeners are not interested in stories that only affect Clevelanders; Akron listeners are not interested in most stories that would garner a headline in the *Wooster Daily Record*. The way to serve this diverse audience is by offering stories that interest all listeners. If an event in Cleveland could impact a Canton listener’s life, we should let them know and let them know why.

***The word “Local”:***

WKSU research clearly demonstrates that the word “local” is a pejorative to our listeners. It has no positive contexts in their minds. They view the word “local” as small or limited in scope. “Local news” represents everything that is wrong with local media: sensational local TV news, news items that are small in perspective or interest, and journalism that is locally based because it is of inferior quality or scope.

To them, WKSU’s territory as a “local” station is more a distinction of interests than of geography. To listeners, the reference point of “local” is themselves, their lives, and their place in the world.

One helpful way to navigate the landmines of “local” is to think of WKSU as Northeast Ohio’s NPR bureau. In other words, how would a story have to be framed if pitched to the network? Does an Akron-based story have enough depth to be interesting to someone in Nebraska or Arizona? If not, how can we expect someone in Orrville to care? If a story cannot be set up this way, it is probably too small to be covered as a feature.

Another important role for WKSU News is almost the inverse: localizing national stories. What is the unique impact or effect of national and international events and issues on Northeast Ohio? Can we put a local face on a national or international issue, event, or trend?

The reverse is also important to listeners: what unique attributes of Northeast Ohio have the potential to influence the nation or world?

While these perspectives may initially seem to fly in the face of our understanding of the word “local”— contextual stories can provide a link between the listener, his or her community, and the larger world.

***Newscasts:***

Although WKSU News is focused on feature production, we should devote a small amount of our resources to producing materials for newscasts. These short reports should cover emerging stories and significant news of the day.

When vetting these stories for air, it is important that we keep the above-mentioned regional perspective in mind. While there is a bit more latitude to cover parochial stories in newscasts, we must still ensure that everything aired in WKSU newscasts is of wide interest throughout Northeast Ohio.

There is no need for a connection between newscast items and stories selected for a deeper treatment in features. A story can be covered quickly for newscasts. If appropriate, it can later be examined as an in-depth feature.

***Breaking news:***

WKSU News must be accurate and timely; however, it does not necessarily have to be first. Our listeners are very concerned with being well informed; they are far less concerned about being the first to know.

While we should not consider ourselves as a source for breaking news, listeners have an expectation and WKSU News has an obligation to report news of significance when it occurs. Once these stories emerge, our role should be the same: providing a larger perspective.

***Use of outside sources:***

We should not avoid using other sources to extend our news reporting abilities. In these instances, our role is largely editorial. Listeners want information but are not concerned that the information originates from a WKSU reporter. Reporting on items that appear in the newspapers or on the wire service does not diminish the value of the information to listeners. Further, when a WKSU reporter does not have time to get up to speed on a story, there is nothing wrong with interviewing/debriefing a reporter from another news source for air on WKSU. In using outside sources, we should look at NPR practices which routinely include reports on stories that appear in magazines and newspapers, interviews of reporters from other media, and news reports aired from the BBC. If it comes through a radio tuned to 89-7, the public service associated with the information is assigned to WKSU.

***Significant public service:***

WKSU News is focused on serving the core listeners of the station. While other news strategies and tactics may serve news interests of listeners that WKSU may or may not already serve, WKSU News is focused on the impact and significance of our public service. “Public service”—as defined in this context—is providing news programming that listeners value and will listen to. Little public service is provided by airing news content that does not interest listeners or that serves a smaller audience than the strategies outlined in this document.

***Editing:***

While story selection is paramount to WKSU's public service, so is ensuring that stories meet our high standards of journalistic excellence, production quality, and storytelling. No feature should air on WKSU without receiving at least one rigorous edit. Preferably, stories will receive significant editorial guidance at conception, then again as they near completion.

***Core Values:***

When approaching and editing stories, the Core Values of public radio should always be used as guide posts. The Core Values are the glue that holds together the most successful public radio programming. Using Core Values as a guide for WKSU-produced programming allows us to triangulate between the listener, the reason they initially tuned to the station, and our local news offerings.

The Core Values, and ways to apply them to story selection and production, are illustrated on the attached "PRPD Core Values Grid."

***Online:***

With the coming redesign of the WKSU web site, the way we offer news material online will change dramatically and become decentralized. We will no longer feature newscast material online. Rather, we will switch the news page around to focus on features. This will provide us with a new variety of tools for providing additional material about our stories to listeners. The best way to approach additional materials for online is to do so as the story is being researched and developed.



## Public Radio's Core Values

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	<b><i>Qualities of the Mind</i></b>	<b><i>Qualities of the Heart</i></b>	<b><i>Qualities of Craft</i></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love of lifelong learning</li> <li>• Substance</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Accuracy</li> <li>• Honesty</li> <li>• Respect for listener</li> <li>• Purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humor</li> <li>• Idealism</li> <li>• Inspired about public life and culture</li> <li>• Civility/belief in civil discourse</li> <li>• Generosity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniquely human voice</li> <li>• Pacing</li> <li>• Attention to detail</li> </ul>
<b>Telling the Story</b>	<i>Content Questions</i>	<i>Talent Questions</i>	<i>Production Questions</i>
<b>Selecting Stories and Topics</b>	Why is this story something we should cover?	Which reporter or program host will do the best job?	What form will best tell the story (newscast, production piece, interview, call-in, commentary)?
	Answer:	Answer:	Answer:
	Can we add depth, substance, and new perspectives?	What does he/she need to know to do this story well?	Can we re-version this story to reach more of our listeners?
	Answer:	Answer:	Answer:
<b>Framing &amp; Shaping Stories and Topics</b>	What are the key issues and how can we expand understanding of them?	What are the key questions we need to ask?	How can we write, structure and edit this story for the ear?
	Answer:	Answer:	Answer:
	How does this story impact our community?	Whose voices do we need to hear to have those questions answered?	Does it lend itself to added texture? (vox, music, movie clips, ambience, actualities)
	Answer:	Answer:	Answer:
<b>Evaluation</b>  <b>What did we do well?</b>  <b>What can we do better?</b>	Answer:	Answer:	Answer:

***What would be on the WKSU wallet card?***

- WKSU is less concerned with “what” happened than with “why” it happened.
- WKSU provides news context.
- “Local” is not a geographic reference.
- WKSU is not “local news.”
- WKSU News should be accurate and timely but not necessarily first.
- Public service is providing news programming that listeners value and will listen to.
- No WKSU feature should air without a rigorous edit.
- WKSU applies Core Values to our own offerings.

## Local News Project II Station Seminars

Few stations can send all of their news staff to a conference or offsite training. Now, **the knowledge from a major national news research study can be brought to the station.**

**Peter Dominowski & Market Trends Research are offering a limited number of one and two-day station seminars, explaining and discussing The Local News Project II and how stations can use the focus group and survey research results to increase audience service**

The seminar is personalized for each station, but typically includes:

- An in-depth discussion of the LNP I & II research findings, and what they mean to stations
- Discussing the significance of the research results from a management, programming, and news perspective
- Watching and listening to LNP II focus groups, to see and hear listener reactions to station-produced news reports
- Listening to and discussing comments from managers, programmers, and news directors involved in the LNP II research
- Discussing story selection, allocation of news resources, and promotion of news
- Integrating the LNP II results with other research, LNP I, PRPD Core Values Study, Arbitron and AudiGraphics
- Evaluating the quality and interest of station-produced news reporting
- Developing goals for station-produced reporting, and an action plan to attain them
- Other topics as requested by the station

**One and two day consultations are available**, as are consultations that include a News Director from an LNP II station. Telephone consultations are an additional option for stations with limited budgetary resources.

Market Trends Research can also conduct **customized focus group and survey research** for stations to augment the LNP results in their market, with their listeners.

**For more information,  
contact Market Trends Research:  
(727) 784-0967, or Online at:  
[www.MarketTrendsResearch.com/lnp2](http://www.MarketTrendsResearch.com/lnp2)**

# MARKET ● TRENDS ● RESEARCH

INCORPORATED

## AN INTRODUCTION

Market Trends Research is a full service research and consulting company serving public radio. Market Trends has provided qualitative research [focus groups], and quantitative research [surveys], for clients in thirty states and abroad. The company is a member of the Qualitative Research Consultant's Association [QRCA], the national organization for focus group professionals. Market Trends Research also consults public radio stations on issues involving programming, audience research, and fund raising.

Peter Dominowski, President of Market Trends Research, has been involved in public radio since 1975, in programming, fund raising, and management capacities. He was an award-winning programmer at WFMT, Chicago [NAB Marconi Award], and WMFE, Orlando [Ralph Award]. Dominowski was a founder of the Public Radio Program Director's Association [PRPD], and of the original "PD Bee" programming workshops. He served on the Board of Directors of the Radio Research Consortium for eleven years, and is a regular speaker and panelist at major public radio meetings.

This is Dominowski's sixth publication on public radio programming and research. Previously writings were: *Audience Ratings, A Primer* [with Tom and Joanne Church], *The PRPD Program Director's Handbook* [with Craig Oliver and Marcia Alvar], *Extended Focus Group Research* [with Al Bartholet], and *The Listener Survey Toolkit* [with Al Bartholet], and *The Local News Project I National Research Report*. He also contributed two segments to the **AUDIENCE '98** report, *Underwriting Anxiety* [with John Sutton], and *The Old Folks At Home; Public Radio's Older Audience*.

Dominowski is also a partner with Scott Williams and Tim Emmons in Strategic Programming Partners, a programming consulting company working with public radio stations.

He received his M.A. in Telecommunications from Kent State University and his B.S. in Communications from Illinois State University.



