

**WXXI Imagining
Year 2012
Norm Silverstein**

Perspective #1: From the Viewer's Living Room:

Imagine that in the year 2012, you are sitting, invisibly, in the living room of a family that is an avid user of programs and services your station provides. What types of content does the family value and how do they access that content? What values conveyed by the station have led each person to be a viewer/ supporter of the station?

In the living room of this large family I see many people taking advantage of the content that WXXI provides to the community.

Mom is listening to Classical 91.5 on her new portable digital radio while she pays the household bills on-line. One of the bills is for a personal enrichment course that has taught her how to cook with local ingredients and how to pair dishes with New York wines (thanks to a partnership between WXXI and the New York Wine and Culinary Center that opened in 2006).

Mom makes a note to herself to check WXXI's playlist on-line for more information about a beautiful piece she just heard (she'll click through to purchase the download of the song later that evening, taking satisfaction in knowing that WXXI will receive a percentage of the sale price).

The kids are fighting over the video iPod, since they downloaded some of their favorite shows earlier in the day. Mom comes over and reminds them they can go upstairs and see what's on WXXI's 24 hour kids channel. And she prompts them to check the station's digital education channel because it's "New York History" night and they can download some clips for their project about the history of the Erie Canal – due next week! The kids remind mom that they already finished their project in school that day, utilizing video clips from the free educational Video on-Demand service that WXXI provides to area schools.

Dad is sitting in his easy chair with the remote (some things never change) and he's clicking back and forth among the many stations that WXXI television offers. He loves the high definition programming from PBS and WXXI, but he keeps flipping back to the WXXI talk show that was heard live on the radio earlier that day and taped for presentation on a digital channel that evening.

Dad heard about the interview, a debate over plans for a new performing arts center downtown, but was tied up at work. He knew he could catch it later, because he received a reminder about the program from WXXI on his PDA (he had listed the performing arts center as a topic he was interested in). He's glad that the station is making its programming available so many different ways, because it keeps him in

touch with what's happening in the community – the newspaper hardly ever covers any local news anymore.

As he finally settles on the talk show, he picks up his Blackberry and weighs in on the topic by taking part in an on-line survey about the arts center at the WXXI web site. He'll check back tomorrow to see the results and to find out how many people agreed with him. As he thinks about how many dinner conversations start off with "I heard the most interesting story on WXXI today," he makes a mental note to send the station an additional gift (he'll click on the "Pledge Here" icon after he weighs in with his opinion at WXXI.org).

Perspective # 2: From the Board Room of a Local Foundation:

Imagine that you are the proverbial fly on the wall in the Board room of a major foundation in your community, and the President is going to address the Board to convince them to give you a major, multi-year grant—what would she say? What case would she be making that would land a multi-million dollar grant? What station strengths and assets would she describe? How would she describe the unique role of the station in addressing important community needs?

The President begins her talk by noting that when people in Rochester think about media, WXXI is always top of mind. She notes that it's not just because WXXI is the only locally owned and operated media in the region – but because WXXI has remained steadfast in its mission of being "the essential media gateway in the area of arts, education and citizenship for the Greater Rochester area," something that's been part of the station's strategic plan for over a decade.

The President knows the plan well, because she shares a number of board members with WXXI. The Foundation and WXXI are among the most prestigious organizations in the community and the community's most influential leaders vie to serve as Trustees for each organization. Both organizations are considered models for good governance and places where serving as a Trustee is a rewarding experience.

She goes on to describe the many successful partnerships that WXXI has pursued in recent years – a coproduction agreement with the University of Rochester Medical Center that resulted in a national television series on PBS; radio, television and on-line activities that support the goal of Rochester being "the healthiest community in America" by the year 2020; the rich offering of radio, television and on-line programming that highlights the best our community has to offer (including programming done in partnership with local arts and cultural organizations that is often cited as a national model); the support that WXXI has given to education in the region, especially for children and families in need in the inner city and in rural areas.

The President remembers with pride an initiative to eliminate lead poisoning in children that the Foundation helped fund and for which WXXI was the key media

partner (and she notes the subsequent reduction in lead poisoning cases in our region). She recites the impressive number of initiatives undertaken as part of a *Community Rochester* initiative by WXXI that made media more accessible to many organizations. She says that many non-profit and educational organizations in the community were able to expand their missions by being able to take advantage of the production and distribution capacity of the station at an affordable price.

A Trustee points out that WXXI is an essential part of the area's public safety network. The work that WXXI pioneered in 2005 with the Rochester City Fire Department (an Emergency Training and Information Network) has grown into on-demand digital channels for all local public safety agencies. First responders in the region count on having access to information they need through a dedicated portion of WXXI's digital television stream.

After the President sums up, the Board decides to *double the proposed grant* to WXXI, with the stipulation that the station investment in more programs and services that make a difference in the community. They are comfortable in taking this action, because they know that WXXI is guided by the top priorities identified in surveys by United Way and other community service organizations. As one Trustee states, "an investment in WXXI always pays dividends to our community."

Perspective # 3: From inside the Station

It is 2012 and you walk through the doors of your station. Describe how it looks and feels. What types of activities occur at the station? Who might you see? What is the most effective change you've made to your organizational strategy in the past 5-10 years? How is the station supported, and how has your financial model changed since 2006?

When you walk through the doors of WXXI, you immediately feel a sense of ownership... that WXXI is a real community institution. This is reinforced when you see the sign, "*Welcome to YOUR station,*" by the open glass enclosure of the edit station and technical area, and by the flat screen high definition television at the receptionist's desk. As you walk through the station, you notice a live radio talk show with a community leader that is also being taped for later play on a digital channel (the radio producer is controlling the cameras right from the studio using the latest technology).

On every floor, WXXI hums with activity. With digital radio, WXXI now provides seven different program streams to the Greater Rochester area and the Southern tier of New York (three multi-cast FM stations and a digital AM). Our classical music station continues to support arts and culture in the community and our arts programming continues to generate support from major donors. A live performance studio has proved to be a hit with stars coming to town for appearances at the RPO, the Eastman

School of Music and other venues. This helps drive ticket sales and support for other cultural organizations.

It's a bit jarring to see so many staff members listening to iPods and other MP3 players. However, it's our radio and television news and public affairs staff. They're checking on stories they've made available for podcasts and listening to national podcasts for story ideas.

The on-line Auction that WXXI pioneered at the turn of the century is now a staple of fundraising and is nearly a year-round activity. On air fundraising still takes place, but it is limited and focuses on being a cost-efficient way to bring in new members. The quasi-endowment has more than doubled since 2006 and is a more significant part of the funding mix. Major donor fundraising is a fixture at the station, with Trustees taking a much more active role – by example and by advocacy for the station.

There are many familiar faces at the station because upward mobility was always encouraged. Succession planning, begun in 2005, helped keep talented staff at WXXI (especially in the executive ranks). The pride that people take in their jobs is evident and WXXI continues to be cited as a “model public broadcasting” station. In 2006 the President said WXXI exemplified the term “a small giant.” It continues to be that in 2012 and it still ranks as “a cultural gem” of the community that needs to be preserved and cherished for the future.