

Local Service Initiatives

Name of Initiative: WOSU@COSI

Station: WOSU

Contact Person: Tom Rieland, General Manager, WOSU Public Media

Contact Information: rieland@wosu.org 614-247-6109 (direct)

Briefly describe the initiative and be as specific as you can be about the products or services that the initiative includes.

We believe strongly geography matters. In fact, location and access to our public broadcast facilities matters more now than ever before. We are seeking to greatly enhance the local advantage by building studios in the heart of downtown Columbus. Working with another non-profit, public service oriented organization, WOSU is building new studios, interactive areas, a media training facility and community space within COSI (The Center for Science and Industry), a major children's science and education museum. Our organization will offer visitors an opportunity to see public broadcasting in action, offering "viewable" studios and interactive exhibits, while developing community outreach activities within this unique space such as civic forums, town meetings, film screenings, educational programs, and concerts. The media training facility will provide children and adults a means to produce and understand media. Addressing community needs by partnering with community organizations to host programs will result in broadcast and non-broadcast initiatives. When completed in September 2006, this will be a 12,000 square foot facility with interactive exhibits at the heart of the space surrounded by the two studios/control areas, edit suites and technical facilities. The space flexibility involves a retractable wall with glass that will divide the exhibit and primary studio space as needed, but allow for audiences to be part of programming when retracted.

How does this initiative fit into your "portfolio" of other Local Service Initiatives? Is it one of many initiatives and projects, or does it take the bulk of your "Local" resources?

WOSU has always been committed to local programming and outreach, a fact that our community has long recognized. By moving our main studios to a downtown location, we are giving the community more access to a long-standing tradition. Our new public venue becomes the foundation of service activities which will result from innovative use of our space. The core of WOSU@COSI is community outreach activities that will address local issues and will facilitate the initiatives and projects related to our strategic planning initiative around public engagement. The flexible space will also allow WOSU to continue to reconnect with its licensee Ohio State through hosting seminars and discussions in partnership with academic and service areas related to OSU.

What station assets, competencies and/or relationships does the initiative build upon?

WOSU@COSI builds upon our reputation as a trusted asset in the community, our partnerships with various community organizations (i.e., Greater Columbus Arts Council, Ohio Humanities Council, Columbus Metropolitan Library, Columbus Medical Association and The Ohio Departments of Aging and Education), our history with the local community, and our strong ties to The Ohio State University, a major economic and cultural entity in central Ohio.

How would you describe the community benefit of this work? What needs are being addressed?

WOSU@COSI extends the reach of public broadcasting into the community. WOSU, as a University licensee in a major metropolitan area, has had to fight the impression of Ohio State support covering all expenses. The location of our primary offices and broadcast center on the edge of campus has not effectively tied WOSU to either the campus or the community. These new facilities will allow incredible expansion for forums and seminars to discuss community needs such as economic, education and health care issues. Our venue will be a platform from which public debate can take place (i.e., Gubernatorial debates, referendums, etc.). Live performances which entertain and engage will find a home within WOSU@COSI. In addition, WOSU will make its facilities available for public non-profit use. In part, the value of this facility to the public lies in the fact that it is centrally located and easily

accessible -- specifically to underserved communities within central Ohio such as African American, Hispanic, and Somalian communities. The community has also been concerned about the viability of the COSI science center and this partnership makes the center more economically sound. This effort has attracted major contributors, in part, because they are assisting two major cultural institutions with their support.

Who is the “customer?”

WOSU considers the entire community our customer, specifically but not limited to: our viewers and listeners, our fellow citizens, and local businesses and institutions.

How do you know or measure if the customer’s needs are being met?

We plan to ask the community through a variety of means: surveys, focus groups, and face-to-face meetings. The degree to which our facilities are used will be an indication of our success. The number of people who we have engagement with through the facility will be an important metric, but also the diversity of the groups we have contact with. For instance, we are planning to support local Somali and Latino media within the space, allowing them to produce programming for their growing community.

Who benefits from the initiative?

The ultimate beneficiary must be our community. Without their support, this project will not be sustainable. The other beneficiaries include: WOSU as it establishes us as a visible and relevant player in the community; Ohio State because of it holds our license and because it is a shining example of their outreach and engagement initiative; COSI because it diversifies the facility and provides another income stream from a mission driven partner; our major contributors will receive recognition within the facility; the educational community because a major part of this project focuses on building media literacy into the curriculum and media training (i.e. the space will serve as a community learning pod for the new Metro School being built in Columbus); cultural and civic non-profit organizations will have access to the space for their activities and projects, which may or may not include our capturing those activities for broadcast.

How do you measure the benefits?

We will measure the success though public response and attendance as well as resulting community benefit as it relates to the topic (i.e., music education is lacking and as a result of our music appreciation activities with the Columbus Symphony, a larger percentage of students are playing musical instruments and attend local symphony performances). We will measure our expansion of local program offerings via the production partnerships we develop. We will also measure success in terms of substantive partnerships developed with a variety of community non-profits.

Describe the financial model for the initiative, being as specific as possible. How much does it cost? What are the sources and amount of revenue? How does it fit into your station's overall economic model?

The entire build-out and equipment infrastructure will cost about \$6 million. We expect our capital campaign for WOSU@COSI to be successful, as we are at 61% of goal with a year left in our campaign fundraising. Beyond the construction, the operational costs include about \$200,000 per year in rental, utilities, etc. Since we are moving 14 staff out of part of an OSU building, we will save \$50,000 in rental we previously paid OSU. The other funding will come from revenue generation (rental of the space for events, activities, etc.) and an endowment tied to all the major gifts contributed to support the facility. We expect by FY09 to be self sufficient through those two sources and actually make a "profit." We also expect to grow revenue through grant proposals enhanced by the location, visibility and flexibility of the space.

Could other stations use this idea or model? Would it work for any size station or licensee type?

We believe that facilities such as ours are the emerging face of 21st century public broadcasting. The philosophy behind WOSU@COSI would fit any size station or licensee type, however, the scope of the project may differ according to community size and need. Other operations considering a major move might consider first an extension into a high visibility location with a partner of like mission. Milwaukee PBS has visited to review our plans as they are looking at a somewhat similar complementary relationship with their local science center. Many science centers face the same funding issues that public broadcasting faces – building new revenue streams, reduction in memberships, tentative governmental funding, etc. – and the most progressive centers are seeking strategic partners.

***Please send this information to Brian Edstrom: bedstrom@tpt.org**