

Local Service Initiatives

Name of Initiative: *Local Public Affairs*

Station: Colorado Public Television, KBDI-TV/12

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

KBDI's motto is "World View, Community Voice," and it invests considerable financial and human resources in its Local Public Affairs (LPA) initiative as the key element of the community voice goal. Vigorous local community discourse was a founding theme for KBDI and the LPA became a core element of that community service approach. In time the LPA also helped further differentiate KBDI from the other PBS member station serving Colorado.

KBDI now provides nine weekly public affairs programs unique to its schedule, seven of which are produced or co-produced by it. One of those is a live, viewer call-in program. The remaining two are independently produced by representatives of the local Latino and Gay and Lesbian communities. Collectively, these nine public affairs programs represent a wide diversity of ethnic, social and political views among Colorado citizens. They reflect a spectrum of guests and experiences – left to right, of course, but also working class to the academy to corporate leaders, local activists to international experts, and panels of several to one-on-ones with articulate statespersons. These programs amount to about five hours a week of original production, and they earn KBDI its reputation for being the most locally inclusive television broadcaster in the state.

Building on this platform, KBDI also partners every election season with CBS-4/KCNC-TV, a major local commercial network O&O, and the Rocky Mountain News, one of the two largest Colorado daily newspapers, for the *Colorado Decides* election debate series. The series provides the most amount of candidate debate and ballot issue coverage of any television station in the state (45-50 original hours, about 100 hours with repeats), and it culminates each year in comprehensive coverage and on-going commentary on election night.

**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?**

The Local Public Affairs initiative constitutes the largest investment of KBDI's production staff and local programming resources, and most of the rest of the station's operational, fundraising and management resources are dedicated to sustaining it. Additionally, however, the station also realizes its goals of programming differentiation and local community representation through the airing of many independently produced documentaries. KBDI does not offer financial remuneration for these acquisitions, and staff impact is minimal. Meanwhile, as part of its new digital services, KBDI carries *The Documentary Channel*, a 24/7 programming feed comprised of top-flight, award-winning, documentaries from leading national and international independent producers.

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

KBDI primarily relies on its own producing and production staff for the seven internally produced weekly series. Two series hosts presented their program concepts to the station after already being engaged in KBDI's public affairs programming as viewers. For our nationally distributed *Latin View* series, KBDI built upon its new relationship with the Denver Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for securing the program host and for assistance in fundraising to offset the series' costs. For the *Global Agenda* series, KBDI's producer calls on her relationship with stringer video journalists, who provide captivating unsanitized footage at no cost to the station. The overall LPA initiative approach also relies heartily on the wide-ranging local, political and social affairs competency of the production staff and senior management.

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

Apart from the differentiated nature of this PTV service, the largest community benefit of the LPA is the ability of the citizen to engage in a wide-ranging discourse on issues of public concern and the associated involvement in the project by so many interested parties. The emphasis is on providing voice for and access to a diversity of viewpoints and engaging any and all subjects, no matter how controversial. Rather than being cultivated to sit safely on the sidelines and merely observe, the community is offered the opportunity to participate in the debate about and to come to better understand sensitive and difficult subject matter.

Who is the "customer?"

Primarily the citizenry of the state. That is, KBDI sees its viewers and audiences as collections of individuals and groups with a common civic purpose, seeking to learn about one another and issues, and who together are intent upon building the communities of Colorado. In line with the public service intent of public broadcasting, our programming is generated to recognize our viewers in that capacity, as opposed to a product/customer mindset better suited for commercial broadcasting concepts.

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

KBDI's work is regularly noted and periodically reviewed by the local television and media critics, and even political reporters and columnists. Its program hosts and guests represent a variety of lives and interests, and they are otherwise professionally involved in the media, politics and social issues. They and we (management, programmers and producers) hear about our work, frequently and vehemently.

The station also maintains a very interactive website that actively solicits viewer feedback on all its locally produced and acquired programming. Additionally, our weekly, live call-in program helps to ascertain which topics generate higher viewer interest or concern. KBDI places strong emphasis on casting a wide net when researching and selecting appropriate guest panelists for its many public affairs programs. We maintain a strong, publicly stated commitment to including all voices within our community, and our successes or failures in so doing are regularly noted by our viewers. They are not shy in letting us know about the perspectives and viewpoints they perceive to be missing in the broadcast media and about how well we're doing (or not) in living up to our self-imposed challenge to fill the gap.

Who benefits from the initiative?

Both KBDI and its viewers benefit from the Local Public Affairs initiative. Viewers benefit from having a station that seeks input on and engagement with our programming, and KBDI benefits by furthering its goal of programming differentiation.

Specifically, the Local Public Affairs initiative provides the following benefits to KBDI and its community:

- Programming distinction and strong differentiation from the other local PBS member station
- Diversity of public service television throughout the state.
- Wide engagement with and representation of diverse audiences
- Immediate and on-going viewer feedback via the weekly call-in program (from which we can gauge viewer interest in various subject matters, helpful to future programming choices)
- The primary television source for information on local community affairs and local perspectives on international issues
- Through the collection of contact information for the multitude of prominent community members who serve as guest panelists on the public affairs programs, KBDI has amassed a strong database from which to further engage these participants (future expert resources, individual and institutional program and service partners, and potential membership/major donor contacts)

How do you measure the benefits?

Similar to the responses above about “meeting customer needs.”

Also through a public forum and wide “open door” policy that encourages both solicited and unsolicited feedback from our viewers. Increasingly, through this approach we are provided with commentary that indicates how well our efforts toward programming differentiation are succeeding. Critics and viewers seem to have come to understand that they can turn to KBDI for the best regular local issues coverage and for the most election coverage each election season.

Management and staff are all expected to participate in the dialog with viewers and the community, by promptly answering all appropriate phone calls, correspondence and email inquiries or critiques. Many of those exchanges are posted on the website. That dialogue helps us calibrate subject matters, topics and host, panelist, and guest selection and quality.

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?

KBDI has limited financial resources, and, accordingly, has developed ways to realize its key goals (programming differentiation and strong local programming identity) at minimal cost. It is leanly staffed and its facilities are adequate, but modest. Most of the production budget is devoted to the LPA initiative, and in round terms fully half or more of the entire station budget and human resources is dedicated to producing or sustaining the initiative. The resources for that budget in turn derive from the typical mix of membership, underwriting, contract production, major giving and CSG support. There is no state funding in Colorado.

No cost:

- The Documentary Channel (24/7 programming feed, market exclusive arrangement)
- Independently-acquired documentaries (as KBDI has provided a broadcast venue to independent producers, we are now the “go to” place for several noted independent producers).

Our other public affairs programming is afforded in a variety of ways: two are submitted as ready for broadcast episodes, four have funding secured for the exclusive use of associated production costs, and three are entirely supported through KBDI’s internal budgets. KBDI creates efficiencies through the scheduling of double-tapings when possible, and through collective contract production scheduling.

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

Yes. But there’s a caveat. Stations developing this model will need to be truly dedicated to public affairs and willing to air the programming in weekday primetime. It won’t work as a weekend daytime ghetto service.

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