

# Local Service Initiatives

**Name of Initiative:** Hometown Stories: African-Americans' Journey in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

**Station:** WTVI – Charlotte, NC

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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.

Hometown Stories is a series of television documentaries developed by WTVI that reflect the history and life of ethnic communities in the Charlotte area. The purpose is to share the details of one culture with the rest of the community. It aims to paint a richer picture of who lives here and why. The first installment in this series, *Push, Pluck & Perseverance: The Story of Judaism in Charlotte*, took viewers on a hunt for kosher foods, traveled through the historic Jewish temples in nearby cities of Gastonia and Statesville, NC and offered up a behind-the-scenes look at a bar mitzvah.

The second installment, *African-Americans' Journey in Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, is a one-of-a-kind documentary that reached deep into the local African-American community's culture and history, from the time of slavery through today, to document its vital role within the distinct community that is the Charlotte area.

Some of the products and services used were the broadcast itself and a DVD of the documentary with images, interviews and other materials. There were also opportunities to digitize other resources including pictures and images, some of which were used in the documentary.

## 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?

This project was one of many station initiatives and fits the station's mission of connecting people in the heart of the Carolinas. In keeping with WTVI's mission, the documentary served as a foundation for sparking community dialogue and the outreach efforts created a more inclusive community. WTVI used history and the documentary as a means of encouraging civic engagement. The station's educational effort in the schools included a partnership with The Charlotte Observer newspaper for developing a curriculum piece for area schools. The demand was so high that the Observer matched dollar for dollar to print more guides. The outreach component centered on a Town Hall meeting where WTVI brought insight to the emotionally charged topic of race relations and thereby increased cross-cultural awareness. Overall these two efforts were in keeping with the station's intent of being a source of lifelong learning.

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

This project made use of WTVI's High Definition production facilities and utilized staff from various departments including the production crew, outreach and communications. It took advantage of our ability to first of all produce the segment, our capability to broadcast it and our capacity to promote it. This initiative presented the station with an opportunity to nurture existing connections and build new relationships with the African-American community for support of the project and insight into its development and ultimately production.

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

It was a Social Capital survey conducted back in 2001 that jumpstarted this initiative. The survey focused on the distrust between whites and blacks and highlighted a real need to bridge the gap between races and ethnic communities. Today we still talk of "Race Relations" between blacks and whites. Seemingly strong, yet brittle at the same time. Perhaps no group in the area has a more compelling story than the African-American community. This documentary shared a history that touches everyday human experiences and not the stereotypical extremes. This project allowed those outside the African-American community to see, feel and hear the untold stories of their neighbors.

## Who is the "customer?"

The citizens and viewers of WTVI's 13-county area

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

A survey was conducted after the completion of the Town Hall meeting. More than half of those in attendance returned their results. Questions covered areas such as "What feelings/reactions did you have to the documentary?"; "What factors do you believe have the greatest impact on how African-Americans live in the Charlotte area?" to "Do race relations influence how people live in Charlotte today?". The overall opinion was the documentary and the Town Hall meeting were just the beginning but more was needed as far as exploring and sharing different races and cultures for understanding and connectivity in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area.

**Who benefits from the initiative?**

The entire community benefits, especially those persons truly interested in repairing the social gap between races; those individuals who are not African-American but who want to understand the livelihood of African-Americans.

**How do you measure the benefits?**

This might require another Social Capital survey which is not part of the Hometown Stories project.

**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?**

WTVI contributed 40% of the project's budget. The other 60% was generated by major grants (70% of cash contributions) and individuals (30% of cash contributions). Sources of the in-kind services were from viewers, underwriters and government grants. This project was 9% of the station's overall budget.

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

Yes. This concept, while time-consuming, is built around partnerships. It is those partnerships that are needed to generate the necessary funding. From there it is a case of working with local organizations and agencies to conduct outreach and community forums.

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