
Background

Public Television in Wyoming

Public Broadcasting

Non-Commercial Broadcasting was born in 1967 with the passage of Public Broadcasting Act.

With passage of the Public Broadcasting Act in 1967, Congress declared it to be in the public interest to encourage the use of public radio and television for instructional, educational, and cultural purposes. The Act established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) as a private, nonprofit corporation to provide a funding avenue for non-commercial television and radio. An intentional CPB feature is that by distributing federal funding, it insulates public broadcasting from government interference. Congress appropriates funds to the CPB and requires that 95 percent go to directly benefit the public through community service grants to public broadcasting stations.

Two years later, in 1969, CPB created the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) to provide regular national television program distribution. During this time, PBS created such popular shows as *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* for national distribution. Wyoming Public Television came into existence about 15 years later, in 1983.

Wyoming Public Television

CWC established WPTV in 1983 to provide distance education services to its service area.

Wyoming Public Television (WPTV) became operational in 1983, when Central Wyoming College (CWC) established the facilities on its campus to provide a non-commercial educational station. The college's purposes for the station were to provide distance education services within its service area, and to provide hands-on experience for students enrolled in its broadcasting program. CWC licensed the station with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as KCWC, under a university license.

FCC and CPB Play Roles in Licensing and Regulation

FCC issues licenses and oversees compliance with federal law and FCC policies.

As part of its regulatory function, the FCC issues operating licenses to non-commercial public television stations. The FCC issues construction permits, renewals, and transfers of all licenses and also oversees station compliance with federal law and FCC policies.

The type of non-commercial FCC license depends on what entity holds the license.

CPB has categorized four types of non-commercial licenses for both radio and television: state, university, community, and local authority. The type of license category is dependent on the entity holding the license. Public television stations operating in rural areas commonly hold university or state licenses because they entail some level of state support. Community licensed stations, in contrast, rely upon large population and business bases to sustain them with less state support. Most public television stations hold community licenses.

KCWC Grows into Wyoming Public Television

By 1988, WPTV had become a statewide service and CWC sought state support for it.

In response to public demand for KCWC, station managers expanded the service area to cover more of the state, eventually creating a statewide public television network that reaches most state residents (see Appendix B). By 1988, CWC had come to believe it should not bear the costs of providing a statewide service, and asked the Community College Commission (Commission) to become involved. In 1991, by enacting W.S. 21-18-105, the Legislature directed the Commission to make a separate budget request for the *public television project*. In 2000, the Legislature amended statute (see Appendix A), charging the Commission with requesting funding for *Wyoming Public Television* (WPTV). This is the extent of statutory authorization for WPTV.

WPTV's Mission Is Broad

The Commission and CWC jointly set the broad WPTV mission.

In requesting a separate budget for WPTV, the Commission has designated WPTV as a separate component of the community college system. Therefore, WPTV is included in the Commission's strategic plan. Together with CWC and WPTV, the Commission has set a broad mission for the station: *to provide statewide electronically delivered programming and services that educate, enrich and inform Wyoming citizens*. However, its objectives are more specific:

One of WPTV's primary objectives is to deliver instructional programming.

- To deliver instructional programming via distance education technology.
- To produce local programs by, for and about Wyoming people, issues and interests.
- To provide reliable statewide access.
- To provide a minimum of 3,000 hours per year of nationally produced programming.
- To increase funding from private citizens.

Nationally produced programs constitute the majority of WPTV's broadcast.

WPTV Broadcasts Primarily PBS Programming

The station broadcasts 365 days a year for approximately 18 hours per day. Nationally produced programming, which includes PBS programming, constitutes the majority of WPTV's broadcast. According to the Commission Annual Strategic Plan Report for FY '01, national programming ranged from 50 to 70 percent of the broadcast each month. WPTV viewers have access to the same national PBS programs as viewers of stations located in metropolitan areas.

WPTV offers credit and non-credit instructional programming.

WPTV also offers both credit and non-credit instructional programming. Credit programming is in the form of PBS-produced telecourses used by some Wyoming community colleges. Each semester, WPTV works with the colleges to determine which of these it will broadcast. Using PBS data, the Commission reports that more than 1,200 students enrolled in 46 telecourses broadcast over WPTV during FY '01. In the same period, telecourses made up about 13 percent of the WPTV broadcast schedule. Adult non-credit educational programs, such as cooking shows and business reports, were another 23 percent of the FY '01 WPTV broadcast.

A distinct, but small, component of WPTV's broadcast is its locally produced programming.

The final distinct component of the WPTV broadcast schedule is locally produced programming focused upon Wyoming people, issues, and interests (see Appendix C). With a production staff of one, plus contractors, WPTV is limited in the amount of programming it can produce. In 2001, the station aired nearly 90 hours of locally produced programming, which translates to a little more than one percent of its total schedule. This does not include programming such as public service and community calendar announcements and pledge drive broadcasts.

WPTV is instituting an Internet-based professional development program for teachers — TeacherLine.

WPTV Also Offers An On-Line Service

In 2001, through a PBS grant, WPTV began offering an Internet-based service, TeacherLine, as well as its broadcast. The U. S. Department of Education, PBS, and 25 participating public television stations nationwide are collaborating to develop and implement TeacherLine. The program is a self-directed professional development opportunity for teachers, focused upon math, science, and integrating technology into the classroom. WPTV has hired a part-time coordinator to assist teachers, schools, and colleges in using TeacherLine. At this point, the program is in pilot status and is available only to a limited number of educators.

WPTV receives approximately \$1 million in state support per biennium.

State, Federal and Private Dollars Fund WPTV

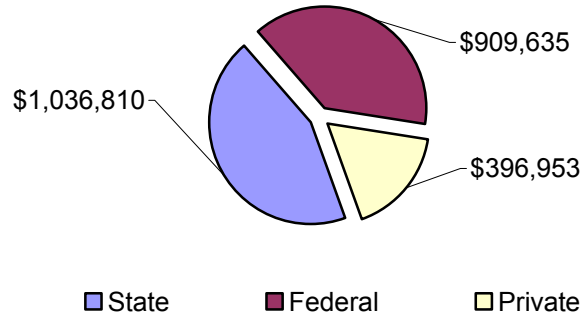
WPTV receives approximately \$1 million in state support each biennium in the form of a block grant appropriation (see Appendix D). Historically, station managers have directed state money from standard budgets into support of personnel costs and facility insurance and utilities, and not into equipment and infrastructure. Since 1992, the Legislature has made additional appropriations of approximately \$300,000 for equipment. WPTV also receives approximately \$400,000 per biennium through in-kind support from CWC.

Combined, WPTV's private and federal funding also equals about \$1 million per biennium.

Along with state funding, WPTV also seeks federal money from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Over the last three biennia, CPB funding has increased from 29 percent to 39 percent of WPTV's budget. In addition to federal and state funding, WPTV seeks private donations from members and has created a WPTV foundation. The sole purpose of the foundation is to increase private donations to WPTV. Combined, WPTV private and federal funds equal approximately \$1 million per biennium.

WPTV 1999- 2000 Funding by Source¹

Approximately one-sixth of WPTV funding comes from private donations.



Source: LSO Analysis of WPTV Audits for 1999, 2000

¹ Graph does not include the annual CWC in-kind contribution

Staffing levels are essentially what they were in 1983.

Even as WPTV continues to expand its coverage to new areas of the state, its expenditures remain fairly constant. Further, with 11 full-time employees, the staffing level is essentially the same as it was in 1983 when the station had 10 full-time employees.

Digital Conversion Places WPTV in Spotlight

In the 2001 Session, WPTV received a \$1 million legislative appropriation to begin the digital conversion .

Through the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Congress determined that all broadcast television service must convert from analog to digital transmission. FCC has set a 2003 deadline for all non-commercial stations to begin broadcasting in digital. By 2006, stations must cease broadcasting analog signals, thus completing the digital conversion. To comply with this requirement, WPTV sought and received a \$1 million legislative appropriation to begin digital conversion during the 2001 Session. By making this initial appropriation for digital conversion, the Legislature tripled what had been the total state contribution to WPTV infrastructure.

In its 2003-2004 budget request, WPTV seeks an additional \$1.8 million to continue the conversion.

In the 2002 Budget Session, WPTV requests an additional \$1.8 million to continue its digital conversion (see Appendix F). However, funding the 2002 request will not ensure that all of the state can receive a digital signal from WPTV; additional funding will be needed to reach that goal. Thus, the potential for even greater state investment in WPTV infrastructure emphasizes an

underlying policy decision: will Wyoming continue to have a state-supported public television station?

As background for larger policy issues, the Management Audit Committee identified a number of questions about WPTV that affect decision-making. This report discusses these areas of Committee interest, which include WPTV governance, its conversion to digital, its ability to fulfill its mission, and finally, the extent to which it coordinates infrastructure and services with other entities.