

National Public Radio's Original Mission Statement, circa 1969

National Public Radio will serve the individual, it will promote personal growth, it will regard the individual differences with respect and joy, rather than derision and hate. It will celebrate the human experience as infinitely varied, rather than vacuous and banal. It will encourage a sense of active, constructive participation, rather than apathetic helplessness.

National Public Radio, through live interconnection and other distribution systems, will be the primary national non-commercial program service. Public radio stations will be a source for programming input as well as program dissemination. The potentials of live interconnection will be exploited; the art and enjoyment of the sound medium will be advanced.

In its cultural mode, National Public Radio will preserve and transmit the cultural past, will encourage and broadcast the work of contemporary artists, and provide listeners with an aural aesthetic experience, which enriches and gives meaning to the human spirit.

In its journalistic mode, National Public Radio will actively explore, investigate and interpret issues of national and international import. The programs will enable the individual to better understand himself, his government, his institutions, and his natural and social environment, so he can intelligently participate in affecting the process of change.

The total service should be trustworthy, enhance intellectual development, expand knowledge, deepen aural aesthetic enjoyment, increase the pleasure of living in a pluralistic society, and result in a service to listeners which makes them more responsive, informed human beings and intelligent, responsible citizens of their communities and the world.

Such statements of purpose are only platitudes and good intentions, unless there's a strong commitment, creative energy, and specific strategy to implement them. The detailed implementation of National Public Radio is the responsibility of the president and his staff, but some priorities and suggested approaches are necessary to help answer the how and why of NPR.

The priorities of NPR program development are to:

1. Provide an identifiable daily product, which is consistent and reflects the highest standards of broadcast journalism.
2. Provide extended coverage of public events, issues, and ideas, and acquire and produce special public affairs programs.
3. Acquire and produce cultural programs, which can be scheduled individually by stations.

4. Provide access to the intellectual and cultural resources of cities, universities and rural districts through a system of cooperative program development with member public radio stations.
5. Develop and distribute programs to specific groups, adult education and structural modular units for local productions, which meet the needs of individual regions or groups.
6. Establish liaison with foreign broadcasters for a program exchange service.
7. Produce materials specifically intended to develop the art, and technical potential of radio.

Because National Public Radio begins with no identity of its own, it is essential that a daily product of excellence be developed. This may contain some hard news, but the primary emphasis would be on interpretation, investigative reporting on public affairs, the world of ideas, and the arts. The program would be well-paced, flexible, and a service primarily for a general audience.

It would not, however, substitute superficial blandness for genuine diversity of regions, values, and cultural and ethnic minorities, which comprise American society. It would speak with many voices and many dialects. The editorial attitude would be that of inquiry, curiosity, concern for the quality of life, critical problem solving, and life loving. The listener should come to rely upon it as a source of information of consequence, of having listened as having made a difference in his attitude toward his environment and himself.

There may be regular features on consumer information, views of the world from the poets, men and women of ideas, and interpretive comments from scholars, using inputs from affiliate stations; for the first time the intellectual resources of colleges and universities will be applied to daily affairs on a national scale.

Philosophically, time is measured by the intensity of experience. Waiting for a bus and walking through an art gallery may occupy the same time duration, but not the same time experience. Listeners should feel that the time spent with NPR was among their most rewarding in media contact. National Public Radio will not regard its audience as a market, or in terms of its disposable income, but as curious, complex individuals who are looking for some understanding, meaning, and joy in the human experience.