

## WORDS THAT WORK

### A Major Giving Toolkit to Make the Case for Classical Music Radio

*Classical music public radio stations aspire to the next levels of giving – major philanthropic support to power growth in capacity, engagement, and new digital services. The case for such support must also move to new levels – speaking to larger interests, opportunities, and concerns that are commensurate with larger requests.*

*Deborah Lein, a long-time leader in public media fundraising and marketing, consulted with major gifts officers at leading Classical Music Rising partner stations to surface concepts, examples, and activities that make our case. Their suggestions, along with Deborah's philanthropic experience, produced this document.*

*There is, of course, no single case for prospective donors to classical music stations – an effective presentation must be an authentic reflection of the station doing the asking, the community it seeks to serve, and the donors being asked to make a major commitment.*

*This “toolkit” offers building blocks for your proposals: themes, topics, and talking points designed to be excerpted, adapted, personalized, and re-ordered to tell your story.*

*The language is aimed at prospects and funders known to support classical music and is grouped under three broad themes:*

- *Power, Reach, and Relevance*
- *The Craft of Excellence*
- *Sustainability and High-Level Support*

## Power, Reach & Relevance

### Our importance nationally and locally

The lion's share of listening to classical music in the United States happens on public radio.

**Each week** some 10 million people listen to a local public station that presents classical music, with an average of approximately 200,000 people tuned in nationwide at any given moment.

While the business models for classical music concerts and the classical recording industry have seen dramatic disruption, classical public radio's audience and community support have remained notably stable.

Years of media articles have bemoaned the "imminent death" of classical music, but public radio's steady numbers tell a powerful story of audience loyalty and continued relevance across America. [Station] is proud to be part of this classical public radio family.

[Station] serves the largest classical music audience in our region by audience with more than [##] listeners every week. No other local organization provides the sheer variety of classical music experiences that we offer with our broadcasts, on-line content, and live events. No other organization does more to make classical music accessible to all music lovers, regardless of background or income, or to encourage regular classical music listening as a part of everyday life.

Our large and loyal listenership attests to the importance of this music to our community. This is a strong vote of confidence not only to us as a station, but to all classical artists and ensembles in our region.

## **The enduring relevance of classical music**

Though its repertoire spans some seven hundred years, classical music continues to speak to us, for us, and through us in the twenty-first century. Classical music provides depth and substance that is treasured by millions of listeners and performers the world over.

To the casual listener, classical music offers beauty, tranquility, and a sense of timelessness – rare qualities in our fast-paced culture. To the engaged listener, classical music offers an immersive interior experience like no other.

Fully composed, long-form, and richly complex with a vocabulary of its own, classical music is relevant in a modern-day setting not because it reflects the times but because it reflects the human condition in unique ways. The emotions it explores and evokes are both universal and intensely personal, taking us out of ourselves and further into ourselves at the same time.

[Station] is dedicated to preserving this extraordinary art form by curating and sharing its finest recorded and live performances and by inviting our community to engage deeply with the music itself, with the musicians who bring it to life, and with each other as music lovers.

## **Our station and local performing arts organizations**

Showcasing the breadth and excellence of local music-making is an important part of our mission. As a community-based institution and passionate ambassador for the art form, [Station] champions the region's classical scene and actively promotes it as a vibrant creative force in our community.

Through our concert broadcasts, in-studio interviews, live co-sponsored events, blog and social media posts, and arts calendars, we shine a light on local performances as exciting destinations for music discovery and as points of great civic pride.

[Station] is a powerful amplifier of our finest regional organizations large and small. In the past decade, we have aired more than [###] live concerts by local and regional ensembles such as [examples]. Our [local showcase program] profiles over [##] local artists each year, and currently reaches a weekly audience of more than [##] listeners.

## **Access!**

[Station]'s goal is to open doors, remove barriers, and create access to classical music for *all* members of our community, regardless of where they are on the continuum of classical music exposure. With no tickets to buy and no formal concert etiquette to remember, new listeners can sample classical music on [Station]'s airwaves and digital platforms wherever they are, whenever they like, for as much or as little time as they prefer. Whether they want to dip a toe in or dive in deep, classical newcomers can explore the music among friends, welcomed and guided by our knowledgeable hosts and following the leads that populate [Station]'s website.

Longtime classical music lovers with extensive personal music collections of their own also count on [Station]'s airwaves and website as a “classical pathfinder” pointing them to new recorded music, upcoming local performances, and news of the classical world.

Our live concert broadcasts from [national examples] provide local classical aficionados with virtual season tickets to the world's finest orchestras and ensembles. [Station] takes our listeners behind the scenes and into the concert hall, and showcases the best new classical recordings “hot off the press,” [Station] invites our local community into the larger classical world.

[Station]'s orientation is toward community rather than commodity. As a staff, we bring our collective passion, insatiable curiosity, and eagle eyes on the local and international music scenes to the music curation process and to our engagement with [community of service]. Our goal is to surprise and captivate listeners and enthusiastically encourage music exploration through and beyond [Station].

## **Our stations and individual artists**

Classical public radio provides vital, career-making exposure for classical soloists. Disruption in the music industry has placed more and more responsibility for marketing on the shoulders of performers. Emerging and established artists alike seek the opportunity to be heard by public radio's sizeable classical audiences.

[Station] regularly produces in-studio interviews and performances by both homegrown and visiting luminaries, such as [examples]. We make a point of including newly released recorded music by classical soloists and small ensembles in our playlists. Syndicated programs such as [examples] showcase leading lights among soloists on the international circuit. Both our national

programs and our locally produced features give a promotional boost to outstanding classical musicians. [Station] introduces our listeners to rising stars and provides an intimate window on the creative life.

## **Classical music in the current climate**

We live in turbulent times. Deep fissures in our culture, concerns about the “dark side” of the digital age, and a relentless 24/7 news cycle have left many Americans feeling angry, worried, and isolated. As a society, we have an urgent and immediate need for shared experiences that bridge divides and invite calm reflection.

Classical music creates time and space for emotional recalibration. It transports us out of the agitation and intensity of the world around us and serves as a “decompression zone” for untangling nerves and processing thoughts and feelings. Making this exceptional music freely available to all in our community is an antidote to stress and divisiveness and, we believe, is an essential public service in the current moment.

## **The Craft of Excellence**

### **The listening context**

We know that there is ever increasing competition for our listeners’ attention. At [Station], we approach and respect music programming as an art and a science in its own right. As our community’s classical companion, [Station] accompanies our listeners as they go about their daily lives: on their commutes, at their desks at work, as they provide care to children and elders, and as they run errands, celebrate with friends, relax with family, and enjoy moments of solitude.

At any given moment, [Station] is heard simultaneously by an average of over [##] listeners through a combination of car radios, home sound systems, PA systems, desktop speakers, and earbuds. This audience complexity is specific to radio’s significant reach and numerous modes of access to the music – programming classical music for the airwaves differs substantially from programming for the concert hall or performance venue.

### **Selecting great music for radio**

[Station] has compiled and maintains a music library of more than [##] CDs and albums and more than [##] individual pieces of recorded music. An extensive music database and evolving record-keeping systems enable us to assemble an ever-widening range of composers, pieces, periods, performers, and moods. But while technology helps us identify options for our playlists, it cannot replace the knowledge, experience, and intuition of skilled professionals in creating the truly hand-crafted classical listening experience [Station] provides to our community. Substantial behind-the-scenes work from our dedicated and knowledgeable team brings [Station]’s

distinctive “voice” to life on the airwaves.

## People, creativity, and memorable moments

Our daily hosted shifts are the centerpiece of our presence on-air. For each shift, our programming staff curate and sequence pieces that are right for the time of day and that accommodate a wide range of listening situations. Our playlists balance continuity with variety, feature a range of classical styles and ensemble types, explore themes across multiple works, and occasionally reference current events . . . or intentionally help listeners escape from them.

Our programmers carefully select repertoire that can move seamlessly between foreground and background listening as needed, while still prioritizing exquisite, insightful performances that invite and reward close listening. We hear regularly about “driveway moments” in which an inspired performance on our air is so riveting that – even in the midst of errands and family duties – listeners are reluctant to break the spell by turning off the car engine.

## Our on-air hosts and music companions

Our hosts bring a specific, critically important set of skills to the listening experience. Their warm, expert, and welcoming presence truly sets our on-air sound apart from algorithm-driven digital streaming services: the quality and character of our hosting is arguably the hallmark of classical public radio. They provide just enough information about the music to set the scene and to spark listeners’ curiosity and imaginations.

[Station] hosts also give the music local resonance by drawing connections to local experiences, responding to weather or other conditions, and acknowledging the support of our community sponsors. The live human voice reassures audiences that they are not alone in listening or in loving this music, and reminds them that what they hear has been chosen with care for all as a *community*. Our hosts’ skill in “helping the music meet the moment” builds trust and passionate loyalty to [Station] among listeners, and transforms a potentially impersonal listening experience into an intimate and engaging conversation.

## Our program mix

[Station]’s Content Director balances our live-hosted daily shifts with other types of classical listening experiences elsewhere on our schedule: live concert broadcasts from our region and beyond like [local example] and [other example], nationally syndicated programs that explore specific styles and themes in greater depth, such as [example], and profiles of regional artists and musicians in our own flagship programs like [local example]. Across our full schedule, we accommodate and delight both casual and committed classical listeners through these opportunities for discovery, exploration, and shared listening.

## Our production quality

The unsung heroes of [Station] are our production and engineering staff. These professionals are responsible for our overall production values and they pay extraordinary attention to detail that is largely hidden from the listener, but crucial to a satisfying listening experience. From

ensuring a consistent on-air style to producing live broadcasts of regional performances to maintaining the transmitters that enable a clear signal to reach every corner of our community, our behind-the-scenes team “polishes” the [Station] sound to a world-class standard.

## Sustainability & High-Level Support

### Financial overview

[Station] is a resilient, healthy organization with a stable base of both listeners and donors. We receive an important but modest portion of our revenue from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, but (##) % of our revenue comes directly from our community [also sometimes expressed as 9 out of every 10 dollars]. We are grateful for the exceptional generosity of more than [##] individual listeners, who voluntarily contribute [##] % of our operating revenue. [Station] also enjoys strong support from local underwriters, especially the many cultural organizations who depend on our airwaves to promote their performances and events to [Station]’s arts-loving audience.

However, we don’t take our financial health for granted. Maintaining [Station] as a top-flight, relevant institution requires us to grow – not just maintain – our revenue streams. The landscape for classical music is evolving, and we must have the funds available to evolve in response.

### Our donor base and the need for larger investments

Our well-established membership program continues to grow. The great success of our Sustainer program – monthly gifts that automatically renew – has been especially encouraging. Sustainers make our membership revenue more stable and predictable *and* reduce some of the fundraising costs associated with renewing gifts. Our Sustainer program and our Leadership Circle together provide strong scaffolding to support a pipeline of givers from small first-time donations up through larger figure gifts.

Broad-based, membership-level support of our core service is critically important to us philosophically as well as financially. However we also actively seek larger gifts from donors who share our passion for extraordinary classical radio – not only as a personal benefit to themselves but as a public good for our entire community. With the help of significantly larger donations, [Station] can go beyond “keeping the lights on” to build critical capacity for the future.

### Examples of activities for special mention

**Growing the audience:** National research tells us that a sizeable number of Americans who identify themselves as classical music lovers or likers are unaware of their local classical radio station. We assume this to be true in our own community, and take it as an encouraging indication of “headroom” for further audience growth at [Station]. We also hold a deep-seated

conviction that there is untapped potential for listening among classical newcomers: young audiences and music-lovers of other genres.

As a free, nonprofit, 24/7 service that “meets people where they are,” [Station] can play an even more important role in serving as a beacon and trusted guide for new classical audiences. In the coming year we will make strategic investments in traditional and digital marketing to build public awareness of [Station]’s service and brand. By increasing our visibility, we will help ensure the sustainability of the station, expand awareness and audience for classical music generally throughout our community, and introduce new generations of listeners to the lifelong joys and rewards of the music that we love.

**Supporting kids and families:** The decline of music education in America’s public schools is well-documented and is considered a major contributor to decreases in classical concert ticket sales and sales of recorded music. This trend is not only harmful to the future of classical music, it is a tragic disservice to young people everywhere. The benefits of music education and music participation to children’s intellectual and social development have been well documented and are many.

For years [Station] has supported music education through our annual instrument drive [*or other example*], which last year contributed more than [##] gently used musical instruments to local public schools. Our Board and senior management have now identified children and families as a top priority for new community engagement efforts. We bring unique strengths to potential education initiatives, such as our in-house music knowledge, our live broadcast capability, our deep expertise in producing audio content, our special events experience, and our extraordinary reach and relationships throughout the music-loving community.

In the coming year, we will convene local music educators to better understand the on-the-ground needs of classroom and after-school teachers. We will also meet with other music organizations to explore innovative partnership ideas for reaching and delighting kids and young families, and plan our next steps toward deeper, more intentional engagement with our community’s youngest members.

**Building “bench strength” on air and behind the scenes:** Our announcers are the “face” of [Station], bringing humanity and expertise to our presentation of extraordinary music and building relationships with our listeners on-air and through our many live events. [Station]’s producers shape our on-air sound, advocate for the listener in creative decisions, and ensure that our collective vision results in a successful final product. Together, these team members represent decades of experience in making live broadcasts “sing.”

While our current team is at the top of its game, we must develop an active pipeline of younger talent to prepare for staff attrition and expansion over time. It is imperative that we create opportunities – through internships, fellowships, and entry-level positions – for new voices on our hosting and production teams so that our staffing reflects and brings value to the diverse communities we serve. We will offer professional training and mentoring in audio production and

on-air presentation by some of the best in the business, while actively seeking new skills in social media and fresh ideas for public service that an emerging generation of classical radio professionals can bring to our work.

**Mastering the digital space:** In our community, listening to music on the radio dwarfs listening to music on digital platforms. In fact, current research tells us that there continues to be more music listening on traditional broadcast radio than on all music streaming services, music podcasts, and satellite radio combined. At the same time, there is no denying that digital music listening is picking up speed across all generations of Americans, that digital streaming capability is becoming standard equipment in automobiles (where much of music listening happens), and that younger generations of music listeners often do not have access to AM/FM radios.

We enthusiastically embrace this future and trust in our ability to thrive in the digital environment – given sufficient resources. We currently stream our broadcast service at [Station].org and provide complete playlist information online. We maintain an active station blog and social media channels, and produce local podcasts such as [example]. And we are part of NPR's music alliance of nonprofit music broadcasters to achieve improvements in outdated U.S. copyright laws that create major obstacles to providing music content online.

If we succeed in removing all or key elements of these roadblocks, [Station] will have much greater freedom in curating and presenting classical music for a variety of online audiences outside the limitations of the 24-hour broadcast schedule and of our broadcast radio signal. We have many ideas for future exploration that require new funding to support this work. It will build on (rather than replace) our much-loved and healthy radio broadcast service for the foreseeable future.