

California Data Snapshot: Local News Initiative Special Survey

Station Response for California NPR Member Stations

This summary report includes some comparisons on how the California NPR member stations compare to those across the rest of the country in terms of news resource and production capacity.

Also included on pages 2, 3 and 4 are the topline findings from the recent special survey for the California NPR member stations.

News Resources Capacity of California Public Stations

Here are some key points taken from the two national surveys for the Local News Initiative¹.

Nearly half (40%) of California NPR member stations do not have a News Director. In comparison, the national average is 20%.

More than half (55%) of university licensee NPR member stations in California do not have students working in the news department. In comparison, nationally, nearly two out of three member stations do employ students.

Less than half (40%) of California NPR member stations do not have a full-time news reporter. In comparison across the country, two out of three (67%) member stations do have a full-time reporter.

Station Production capacity of California Public Stations

Almost half (47%) of California NPR member stations do not share stories with other public stations or a state/regional news network. Nationally, one out of four (26%) stations does not share their news stories.

California NPR member stations are less likely to insert non-newscast stories into the weekday newsmagazines. However, for those California stations that do insert news stories, they are more likely to add five or more stories each week.

Nearly half (46%) of California NPR member stations produce their own newsmagazine show. Nationally, only one out of three (34%) public stations produce their own newsmagazine program.

¹ NPR Member station responses for The Local News Survey for News Directors and the Local News Survey for General Managers were collected from June 2005-March 2006.

Nearly three out of four (73%) California NPR member stations produce their own talk show. Nationally, only half (51%) of all NPR member stations produce their own talk programming.

Topline Results from the California Public Station Survey

News Management Skills

When asked which of the following skills (Editorial Planning, Hiring, and Airchecking/Critiques) would most strengthen the operation of your station’s news department, slightly more than half (54%) of the responses from California NPR member stations ranked Editorial Planning with the highest importance.

Stations were fairly evenly split for their second choice (medium importance) between the three skills listed. Again, slightly more than half (54%) of the responses said that hiring had the lowest importance. However, again response was mixed as the remaining twelve responses said that hiring was either the first or second most important skill set in strengthening their news department.

Q. Which of the following skills would most strengthen the operation of your station’s news department? Please rank each of the following high, medium, or low in terms of importance to your station.

	High importance	Medium importance	Low importance
Editorial Planning	54% (14)	38% (10)	8% (2)
Airchecking/Critiques	27% (7)	38% (10)	35% (9)
Hiring	19% (5)	27% (7)	54% (14)

Based on 26 responses

When asked what other skills would also be critical to strengthening the operation of your station’s news department, stations highlighted the need for training and new equipment, and stronger news reporting:

Training/New equipment:

- “new technology training, digital recording/editing/mixing equipment, etc.”
- “multi-media skills for reporters”
- “Online skills”
- “technical skills - field and studio”
- “technical skills: e.g. field reporting, editing”

Stronger news reporting

- “how to develop news contacts throughout coverage area”
- “new media gathering/reporting”
- “News writing, audio production”
- “Stronger beat reporting”

Topline Results from the California Public Station Survey (continued)

News Production Skills

When asked which skills would most strengthen the listener service of your station’s news programming, stations selected Story selection/framing, Writing, and Interviewing as their top three skills.

Exactly half (50%) of the responses said that story selection/framing was the most important skill. Half of the responses ranked *Writing* as either the first or second most important skill. Interviewing was also rated highly by station staff. Finally, *News programming promotion* was ranked either 1st or 2nd by more than two out of five (42%) stations.

For this question, all stations provided their top three selections, but a handful of stations ranked more than three skills, hence responses to 1st, 2nd and 3rd exceed 100%.

Q. Which of the following skills would most strengthen the listener service of your station’s news programming? Please select and rank the top three skills that would benefit your station.

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
Story selection/framing	50% (13)	19% (5)	19% (5)
Writing	31% (8)	19% (5)	27% (7)
Interviewing	12% (3)	31% (8)	31% (8)
Editing	8% (2)	12% (3)	23% (6)
Use of sound	8% (2)	12% (3)	8% (2)
News programming promotion	15% (4)	27% (7)	4% (1)

Based on 26 responses

When asked what other skills would also benefit your station’s news programming, there were only a handful of suggestions of which a couple of comments on improving on-air delivery.

Topline Results from the California Public Station Survey (continued)

News Coverage Priorities

When asked to identify the top five topics that your station considers most important to cover, the majority of responses chose local & state politics, school & education issues, and environmental issues.

This question is similar to a question used in the 2005/6 News Director survey which asked stations to identify the top three topics that they devote their most regular coverage too. The top three choices in that survey were the same as shown on the table below. Arts & Cultural issues received a slightly lower ranking than shown in the previous survey.

Compared to the rest of the country, California NPR member stations still rank news coverage on Environmental and Health issues slightly higher than the national average.

Q. Please identify the top five topics your station considers most important to cover in your community.

	%	# of stations
Local & State Politics	92%	23
School & Education Issues	84%	21
Environmental Issues	84%	21
Health issues	64%	16
Local stories tied to national breaking news stories	52%	13
Arts & Cultural events	48%	12
Business issues	48%	12

Based on 25 responses

And the rest: Human Interest (2 stations), Personality & People profiles (1). Two topics did not get a mention: Historical Perspectives and Sports. There were 4 "others" (Immigration/Diversity (2), Crime (1), and Demographics/Race (1).

Methodology

Questions for the survey were developed by Marcia Alvar, Dana Davis Rehm, Joyce Macdonald, and Ben Robins.

The survey was sent to 16 NPR member stations in California via a link in an email to 1-3 representatives at each station (typically the General Manager (10 responses), Program Director (7 responses), and News Director (8 responses) and 1 "other"). Each station provided at least one response to the survey. In total, the survey had a 70% response rate (26 responses and 11 non-responses).

Survey responses were collected over a 2-week period from February 14th-28th, 2007.