

# "More Fact, Less Opinion"

## Report of the CAB to the Board of Directors March 7, 2011

The diversity of our listeners makes summarizing their input a challenge. On only one issue does the community speak with one voice: people want more local news and information.

### Background

KZYX&Z formed the Community Advisory Board in early 2010, with the charge to gather information about how the station could improve its service to the community. Over that year, the CAB met as a group, held meetings, listened to individuals, and conducted a survey.

The CAB held open public meetings in Willits and Ft. Bragg. They were announced on the air, through press releases and listserves. Total attendance was about twenty.

Individual CAB members had many private conversations with community members. Paper surveys were done in person at the Mendocino County Fair in Boonville, at the Solfest in Hopland, and on an individual basis by CAB members. The same survey was offered on-line, through the KZYX website.

### General Findings

KZYX is a highly valued community asset. Many of its listeners are tuned in for hours a day.

In particular, KZYX's music programming is very high quality. Some music programmers have a depth and breadth of knowledge that is seldom heard on other broadcasts.

A sense of ownership among listeners is strong. Many bring their passions around political and cultural issues to bear on what they consider 'their' radio station. Many listeners say their membership entitles them to choose what programs the station airs. In fact, the Mission Statement says, "*Its programming and operational philosophy is controlled by its membership, which is open to all.*"

The Mission Statement also says, "*Through its dedication to balanced, excellent programming . . . The station seeks to foster increased communication among all groups in the county and makes access available to all points of view.*"

This internal conflict in the Mission Statement is at the heart of some tension in the community about the identity of KZYX. Station staff refers to the “target demographic,” which implies that the station chooses to cultivate a section of the community. And yet the CPB charges the Community Advisory Board to help the station address the diverse needs and interests of the whole community.

Does KZYX serve the community’s needs? The answer depends on how we define “the community.” If it’s a cross section of people in Mendocino County, the answer is no. KZYX doesn’t serve Spanish speakers, young people, or culturally/politically moderate and conservative residents. Does it meet the needs of progressive listeners? If their needs are met by one-sided and uncritical treatment of liberal issues, then yes.

Personal conversations with a variety of residents reveal that the findings of the on-line survey understate the depth of the sentiment among many people that KZYX caters to a bloc of left-wing listeners. These more conservative community members, some of whom have stopped listening to KZYX, appear to be less vocal than the station’s fiercest fault-finders on the left.

Representative statements from several viewpoints:

*“. . . but you don't have enough good right programs, hard to find non-ranters, I admit. But too many programs have an automatic left bent, even when they think they are just reporting.”*

*“NPR = National Pentagon Radio*

*“Most (are biased to the left)! Which agrees with my views, but perhaps there should be some perspectives from both sides in a single show. I know that I personally would not tune in to a completely conservative right-wing show.”*

*“KZYX is the Fox News of the left.”*

*“While I am progressive, I almost never hear anything from conservative folks on the show and I think community radio has this obligation.”*

*“Biased to the left, and that's o.k.”*

*“In depth programming sometimes is misinterpreted in my opinion as 'leftwing'.”*

*“Basically an NPR station. Corporate propaganda.”*

*“. . . apolitical entertainment dominates, which serves 'foes' of a truly progressive interpretation and use of nonprofit community radio.”*

Some say KZYX offers the only alternative to “mainstream” radio stations in the area. In fact, other Mendocino stations, with the exception of KMEC, are music stations with

headline news reports. KZYX is often compared to KMUD in southern Humboldt County, but that area also has other community-supported stations with less partisan bias. In its broadcast footprint, KZYX has no real alternatives.

Listeners are often confused about the difference of NPR-produced programming with the programs of other producers. KZYX is often called “our NPR station.”

Many listeners find some locally-produced talk-shows stale.

Some misunderstandings and lack of support for on-air fundraising, underwriting and PSAs lead to criticisms from listeners. The high costs of purchasing shows isn't known by many of the station's critics.

The diversity of music programming attracts some strong opinions on many music offerings. Fans and detractors of individual shows tend to balance.

### Survey Findings

Our survey wasn't scientific or thorough. People without computers were under-represented. In the case of paper surveys, the demographics of the venues influenced the outcomes. About 190 people took the survey.

Location of respondents who gave County zip codes:

Ukiah, 46  
Anderson Valley, 40  
Other coastal, 24  
Ft Bragg, 21  
Willits, 18  
Other inland, 18

Fifty percent of respondents list KZYX among their sources of local news. Thirty seven percent list the station as the first place they go for local news.

A large majority of respondents (64%) list local news and current affairs as the most important programming on KZYX. A very large majority (83%) list local news as very important. Seventy-seven percent of respondents want KZYX to air more local news and current affairs. A smaller but significant majority asks for more state, national and int'l news and current affairs.

A majority of respondents say KZYX programming is generally well balanced politically. One third of respondents say it is biased to the left. Among programming most frequently criticized as leftist are *Democracy Now*, *Takes on the World* and *Corporations and Democracy*. These most-criticized programs are also among the most beloved. A very small percentage of the audience finds KZYX too far right, with NPR's “corporate/conservative” voice most frequently mentioned.

A majority of people agree that KZYX leaves out segments of the community. The most frequently mentioned is political moderates and conservatives, followed by Spanish-speakers and youth. Many people say the station leaves out centrist and conservative views, and that is fine with them.

We asked the question “How can KZYX improve how it serves the community?” There was a wide range of answers. A desire for greater political and cultural diversity was often mentioned. A large number of people want more, wider and deeper coverage of local news, issues and events, free from opinion or judgment. Many people feel that KZYX is Anderson Valley-centric, and neglects the Ukiah and inland areas.

## Recommendations to Board

### **Music programming**

The diversity of music offerings represents the diverse tastes of the community. Keep up the good work.

### **Local news and current affairs programming**

#### **News:**

Existing coverage, as far as it goes, is good. We recommend that KZYX expand its News Department, so that it can broaden reporting on local subjects. Continue emergency alerts and hard breaking news stories. Air more stories of county-wide issues. Don't ignore any sectors of the community, and produce stories that go deeper than other local media. Cover them all: political; business; industry; health; education; spiritual life; entertainment and environment. A wider range of coverage will bring a wider audience and a wider range of donors and underwriters.

We believe the community craves information about a broad variety of people, places and events. KZYX should respond to this public desire by finding more qualified reporters to supplement material generated by its limited one-person news staff. To gather news and feature stories, edit them, and then report on the air every day, and do them all well, is a superhuman effort for one person (and a thankless job in this polarized community). We recommend KZYX figure out a way of extending Paul Hansen's reach.

Unless immediate public safety is a concern, KZYX News can and should leave violent crime and sensational stories, reported elsewhere, to those outlets.

#### **Current Affairs:**

On locally produced current events or talk shows, the community would be served by more objective, fact-based information, and less opinion. Programmers should make greater use of primary sources, and the station must clearly distinguish between fact-based reporting and editorial programming. At the least, a disclaimer framing all opinion shows such as “The opinions expressed are this programmer's own, and do not represent KZYX” should be used.

On programs that largely feature opinion, it's our conclusion that greater balance would better serve the community.

The CAB recommends that KZYX try to produce live coverage and colorful field and feature reporting. Add live performances to the program schedule – music, poetry, dramatic readings, stories for kids.

Reduce the use of telephone interviews, and enforce technical standards for phone interviews. Encourage all programmers to persuade local interview subjects into a studio for better audio quality.

Balance highly-charged opinion. For example, Jeff Blankfort's heavily pro-Palestinian bias should be offset with other views, including Israeli, of the conflict. His inflammatory statements, such as "The United States is an occupied territory of Israel" discredit the objectivity of KZYX, particularly if no other voices are heard on that subject. If no programmer comes forward with a program to balance Blankfort, KZYX shouldn't hide behind "nobody else came forward." It's their duty to find alternative voices, otherwise Blankfort's voice is, by default, the voice of KZYX.

### **Station policies, transparency, and community relations**

KZYX should resolve its identity crisis and state clearly to its listeners, and the wider community, about who and what it is. Is it, as stated in the mission statement, balanced programming reflecting the diversity of the county? Or is it the mouthpiece of the progressives?

Many people in the community say they would like more transparency from station management about how decisions are made and policies carried out. KZYX should reach out to the community to explain station policies and decisions. KZYX needs to "sell" the rationale of on-air underwriting.

We recommend a web-site with an active conversation between station staff and listeners about how the station serves the community. The station staff can increase respect if they clarify station cash flow, and explain to their critics how financial issues affect programming. This can also be done on-air, during pledge drives. Perhaps with the understanding that the programs they enjoy are expensive, people who have withheld membership contributions might be appeased and return to the fold.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Caviglia  
Frank Green  
Wallace Stahle

# Addendum

What is the CAB?

*“The purpose of the advisory board is to provide a vehicle for effective community input to the station's governing body about station programming, community service and impact on the community from the station's major policy decisions. Congress believed that the establishment of community advisory boards would assist the stations to develop programs and policies that address the specific needs of the communities that they endeavor to serve.”*

*“The advisory board is intended to provide the public the opportunity to be heard on station programming, community service and impact on the community of major policy decisions. All stations are encouraged to establish whatever mechanisms will be most effective, under local circumstances, to accomplish this congressionally established goal.”*

*“Specifically, section 396 (K)(8) provides that the purpose of the CAB is to assist public broadcasting in being more responsive to community needs by providing for effective public participation in planning and decision making. The CAB shall be a mechanism for effective public input into planning and decision making to assist the station in developing programs and policies that address the diverse needs and interests of the communities that it endeavors to serve.”*

. . . from CPB website

KZYY Mission Statement

*KZYY&Z, 90.7, 91.5 and 88.1, is the community non-commercial radio station of Mendocino County, serving several counties in Northern California. Its programming and operational philosophy is controlled by its membership, which is open to all. Through its dedication to balanced, excellent programming, Mendocino County Public Broadcasting reflects the rich diversity of the county, while promoting a sense of community across a large and varied area. The finest in national public radio programs is made available, as well as local programs that are creatively and professionally produced, responding to the needs of the community.*

*KZYY&Z pledges to be a responsible and responsive county-wide medium for news, information, music, performing arts, entertainment, and local features. KZYY&Z sees its programming as a complement to the work of Mendocino's commercial media. The station seeks to foster increased communication among all groups in the county and makes access available to all points of view.*

. . . from KZYY website