

CAPITAL REQUEST FY 2021

Background

Iowa Public Radio (IPR) was created in 2004 by the Iowa Board of Regents to manage the public radio groups owned by Iowa State University, the University of Iowa, and the University of Northern Iowa. Pursuant to a Public Service Operating Agreement with the Board of Regents and the Universities, IPR manages 26 stations and serves 220,000 listeners statewide with three programming services: News, Classical, and Studio One. IPR's board of directors is appointed by the Board of Regents and includes one representative from each Regent university. IPR's combined radio groups serve rural and urban Iowa, touching all of Iowa's 99 counties. The history of public radio in Iowa is long and proud: Iowa State University and the University of Iowa each have public radio stations that are almost a century old, with licenses that were among the first 100 radio licenses granted by the FCC. IPR's statewide network is seen as a model by other states.

FY 2021 Capital Request

IPR requests \$1.2M for two high priority capital projects required for WOI-FM (flagship station for ISU's radio group), KSUI-FM (flagship station for U of I's radio group). These stations are two of the IPR network's largest signals. Without timely attention, there is growing danger of significant failure. Iowa Public Radio and the Iowa Board of Regents respectfully request state support for these capital needs, which are explained in detail below.

WOI-FM Antenna, Transmitter and Transmission Line

Request: \$875,000 for replacing WOI-FM antenna, transmission line, transmitter and studio-to-transmitter link

This project would replace the antenna and transmission system for WOI-FM, owned by, and licensed to, Iowa State University. WOI-FM is the main signal for the Iowa Public Radio network in the Des Moines/Ames area, and is an essential hub for our statewide network. Originating in Ames, the signal serves 60,600 listeners in 15 counties in central Iowa with news, information and cultural programming. WOI-FM is very popular, averaging in the top 10 stations in the Des Moines metro market. In addition, the Iowa Radio Reading Information Service, (IRIS), Iowa's reading service for the blind, is carried on a sub-carrier of WOI, and WOI-FM is the secondary State Relay station in Iowa's Emergency Alert System (EAS) plan. Should WHO, the State's Primary Relay station, fail to send emergency alerts to the public, WOI-FM is the designated backup station. IPR also serves as a statewide distribution network for emergency alerts. If an Iowa radio station (commercial or non-commercial) cannot pick-up the primary WHO-AM signal, stations are instructed to pick up announcements from one of IPR's 26 stations statewide. This distribution role was once provided by ICN.

On the state level, the system is used for Amber Alerts, Tornado Warnings, and Flash Flood Warnings, with WHO-AM as a primary and IPR stations serve as a conduit for statewide distribution.

Portions of WOI's main transmitter system are 25 years old, and the analog-only backup transmitter is 40 years old. The WOI transmission line and antenna are also over 20 years old, and the transmission line 20' segments are connected by obsolete clamps. A failure in any of the segments would likely necessitate replacement of the entire transmission line. The usual life of transmission systems is 15-20 years, so the current equipment is living on borrowed time. At the completion of this project, WOI will move the current transmission system into a back-up role, replacing our current back-up system. This move will also ensure that both the main transmission system and back-up system are HD (digital) radio-capable. IPR HD signals serve HD radio listeners, and also provide an effective system for delivering programming to other stations in the 26-station IPR network. We have developed an audience of listeners to our HD radio service, so redundancy is needed to maintain HD radio coverage.

This project has been on our capital needs list since FY 2017. The need for this technology support becomes more urgent by the day.

KSUI Transmission Line and Studio-to-Transmitter Link

Request: \$325,000 for replacing KSUI transmission line, studio-to-transmitter link

Replace transmission line, studio-to-transmitter link and remote control system for KSUI-FM, owned by, and licensed to, the University of Iowa. KSUI is IPR's largest classical signal, serving 48,000 listeners in 13 counties in eastern Iowa each week. IPR's classical service – with 10 stations statewide -- is the only classical music radio service in the state. In addition to providing listeners with the very best in classical programming from the around the world, IPR classical also extends the reach of Iowa's most respected cultural institutions, bringing performances from Iowa's symphonies and opera companies to audiences far beyond the symphony hall.

The transmission line, which connects the transmitter on the ground to the antenna on the tower, failed in late 2015. Although many person hours were spent to repair the failure, the line is old and compromised, subjecting it to potential failure again without warning. KSUI is IPR's primary classical signal, serving Iowa City, Cedar Rapids and the Quad Cities, making it a high priority project. This project was on IPR's capital needs list for FY 2019 and 2020, making this the third year we have requested support for this project.