The Listening Project 11

Listening to the Community and Looking for What Matters
It’s easier to keep talking once you know someone is listening.

- Participant in the first Listening Project Survey
In 2001, WVIZ/PBS and 90.3 WCPN joined forces to create ideastream, a multiple media public service organization with a mission to “strengthen our communities.” While disseminating content through broadcast channels, the Internet and other media are core services, from its inception ideastream has undertaken another role: that of dedicated listener. By devising and implementing an ongoing community engagement process called The Listening Project, ideastream gains input and direction for its programs, services and outreach initiatives.

In the process of “Listening to the Community and Looking for What Matters,” thousands have participated. People in the suburbs and the cities, from a variety of income, educational and ethnic backgrounds, have shared their thoughts about the region they call home.

“They are becoming much more than just community broadcasters, they are becoming community enablers.”

- Richard Somerset-Ward, an expert in public media and senior fellow at the Benton Foundation, commenting on ideastream.

Participants also use Listening Project surveys as a feedback mechanism. This input provides valuable information on the public’s perception of the role ideastream plays in the community and the value the public places on its service.

In this 11th annual Listening Project, ideastream once again surveyed participants about the region’s good points and where improvements are needed and drilled deeper into the topics of health, arts and culture, the environment and politics. Responses came from online and printed surveys and by convening small groups of corporate, foundation and civic leaders. Overall, the following list of assets and challenges rose to the top:

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On the following pages, you’ll see the results of the surveys and discover how ideastream, by embracing its role as active listener, has responded to the community by delivering programs and services relevant to the lives of Northeast Ohioans and to the success of the region.
Cleveland is a place of tremendous opportunity for innovative, community-based projects aimed at increasing our resilience and regional self-sufficiency.”
- From a Listening Project survey

What do residents of Northeast Ohio find as positive attributes of the region? Through surveys and community leader conversations, The Listening Project ascertained that residents appreciate Northeast Ohio and enjoy calling it home.

Interestingly, through all 11 years of The Listening Project, asset rankings have remained remarkably consistent. The notable difference this year found “Health Care” called out by respondents for the first time, perhaps reflecting the increasingly vocal debate on healthcare reform.

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<th>Regional Assets</th>
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| Cleveland is loaded with LOTS of culture—of all kinds. And it is easily accessible.”
- Listening Project participant |

- Listening Project participant

ideastream listened
- “The ability of many sectors to come together and work together with relative ease. I think that is something unique to Cleveland.”
- “This is a city that is full of parks... it is an incredibly beautiful place to live.”
Regional Challenges

What are the most pressing local challenges or problems for Northeast Ohio?

2011–2012 Responses (in order)
- Jobs/Economy
- Politics
- Education
- Community Identity
- Housing/Foreclosure
- Crime

ideastream listened
- “The number of political subdivisions...nobody would design a community like this... It is a very complicated way to run a community. It makes almost everything we have to do, something as simple as putting lights up, more difficult.”
- “One of the challenges is keeping the brightest here, and attracting the brightest from elsewhere.”

2001 Responses (in order)
- Jobs/Economy
- Education
- Environment/Pollution
- Population/Urban Sprawl
- Crime
- Politics

“There is a lack of coordinated vision and support for the future.”
- A respondent from The Listening Project

Listening Project respondents not only acknowledge the good things about living in Northeast Ohio, but are cognizant of the challenges facing the region. By surveying the community about perceived challenges, ideastream can respond appropriately with multiple media content that addresses a common civic agenda.

As with the ranking of assets, when queried through online and written surveys and community leader conversations, the list of regional challenges shows remarkable consistency. In fact, each year, jobs and the economy have topped the list of concerns.

It is time to stop talking and coming up with catchy slogans and continue to do the work we are doing, which is growing our city neighborhoods, taking care of each other, coming up with ways to improve—really improve—our education, create jobs and get on with it.”
- Response from The Listening Project’s survey on regional challenges

ideastream convened small groups of community leaders to listen to their thoughts on regional assets and challenges.
We’re starting to really understand that the health of our community at large and every person in the community is important. If we leave populations behind, it really impacts the well-being of the entire community.”
- From a Listening Project small-group session on health

This year, ideastream convened a panel of regional healthcare leaders to identify community assets and challenges in the context of health, a subject that has been a focus of ideastream’s multiple media for over three years. Participants noted that they consider ideastream to be an important resource in the effort to create better and healthier lives, thereby strengthening the communities of Northeast Ohio.

In comparing healthcare leader response to information from the larger universe of Listening Project participants, the health group spoke of the positive impact that the industry has on jobs and the economy, while the larger group of participants continued to identify jobs and the economy as the region’s number-one challenge.

ideastream listened

- “The healthcare industry has the opportunity to be a huge driver of talent development and workforce development as the region transitions from being predominantly focused on manufacturing to going into the service industry.”

- “People are willing to come to the table to communicate and discuss ideas.”

“The biggest challenge, and it’s pretty basic, is how is healthcare funded?”
- A response to The Listening Project

Health

Assets

Positive impact on the region’s economy
Quality of available health care
Collaborative environment advances innovation

Challenges

Funding of healthcare
Inequality of coverage
Strained resources

■ “Even with the great institutions that we have in our area, there are still communities, neighborhoods, that are basically being left behind.”

ideastream opened the phone lines for a health outreach broadcast called Be Well.
Arts & Culture

I think of the arts as one of the pillars of our economy in Northeast Ohio.

- Listening Project participant

Assets

Contributes to regional economy

Diverse artistic organizations and presentations

Supported by the public

Affordable

Challenges

Aging audience and contributor base

Attracting younger audiences

Lack of arts education in public schools

Funding problems created by downturn in economy

ideastream listened

- “I’m awestruck that there is so much talent in Cleveland...There is incredible depth of talent and richness, and I think it’s pretty extraordinary.”

- “One of the biggest challenges that I see for us is how to connect kids to arts given the cutbacks that are taking place in schools today.”

- “We need to engage the younger audiences...We need to go where they are, we’ve got to talk their language, we’ve got to feel their culture and address their needs.”

The arts touch not only the heart and mind, but have an important impact on the region’s economy.

Since the first year of The Listening Project, participants have ranked Arts and Culture as the region’s number one asset. Given this consistency, it seemed appropriate to delve deeper.

ideastream convened leaders from arts organizations both large and small. By listening, a better, more nuanced understanding of the impact arts and culture has on our hearts and minds was revealed. But participants underscored that the impact made by these intangible assets is matched by those that can be measured in dollars and cents.
While I know our area needs jobs and economic growth, the idea of the damage fracking can do to the environment and to our property values is unsettling.”

- Participant from The Listening Project survey on the environment

Respondents to The Listening Project have consistently related that Northeast Ohio's rich environmental assets make the region a better place to live. They often mention that easy access to parks and green space, close proximity to Lake Erie and the area's natural beauty add value to their lives. While hailing Northeast Ohio's natural wonders, participants in The Listening Project are also vocal about the environmental challenges facing the region.

The Listening Project concentrated its questions in one survey on the development of Utica Shale Gas, an issue with local and global implications and a subject with both environmental and economic consequences. While the majority of respondents reported concern over the environmental ramifications related to fracking, many also reported mixed feelings and a desire for more information, especially in the categories of the environment, health and safety issues and drilling and land issues.

One Listening Project survey focused specifically on the divisive regional issue of Utica Shale gas development.

“[Fracking] is both a very local issue and a global issue.”

“[If we do it] Utica Shale Gas development] right...it could bring generational wealth to the state.”

Participants rank ideastream coverage as:

Among the top four resources used to find information on environmental subjects

Among the most trusted sources for reliable and accurate information on Utica Shale Gas field development issues

A motivator for seeking additional information on a specific topic

(After hearing, seeing or reading ideastream reports and programs, a full 60% of respondents reported that they were inspired to learn more about the subject.)

“One Listening Project survey focused specifically on the divisive regional issue of Utica Shale gas development.

“This [fracking] is the most urgent issue of our time.”

- Listening Project participant
Politics

Assets

Personal involvement, especially locally, does have an impact

Participating is a civic duty and a benefit

Most respondents believe Northeast Ohio will be a better place to live in 2020

Challenges

Lack of bipartisan cooperation

Lack of sound, effective leadership

Corruption

Listening Project respondents reported

■ 62% believe that they can have a “large or moderate” impact on their community by becoming engaged in the political process

■ 75% participate in the political process

■ 78% belong to clubs/organizations or participate as individuals in activities that benefit the community

“It takes more than a slogan to get this work done. We need real bipartisan cooperation.”
- Response to The Listening Project

We have to work together to get anything done, but we need the support of our elected officials to pull it off.”
- Comment from The Listening Project survey on politics

In Northeastern Ohio, politics is always top of mind. That interest is reflected in the responses of Listening Project participants who, in each year’s survey, have identified the subject as a top regional challenge.

In the summer of 2012, politics became part of daily life for the residents of Northeast Ohio, brought about by months of news about corruption in Cuyahoga County, speculation about how state budget cuts could impact local cities and school districts and an early onslaught of campaign commercials.

The Listening Project took politics to the people, surveying thoughts about the impact politicians can have on local issues. Among the results, respondents reported that local political leaders have twice the impact on regional assets and challenges than national leaders.

ideastream listened

■ “As much as the national politicians want our votes, I can’t see where they’ve done all that much for this area.”

■ “I believe our individual impact depends on motivation and literacy on issues.”

Community leaders connected with the PBS series Washington Week with Gwen Ifill to share viewpoints on the region’s economy.
Conclusion

The Listening Project provides direct access to residents’ thinking about what is important to them, not only as individuals, but also as members of the Northeastern Ohio community. This information creates a blueprint around which ideastream programs and services are built.

The Listening Project also provides a forum for participants to relay their thoughts about the role ideastream can and should play in the community. Their comments provide a clear understanding that people look to WVIZ/PBS and 90.3 WCPN to address regional challenges and celebrate our many assets.

The process of listening continues. Because by asking the questions, hearing the answers, and then responding, ideastream can come closer still to fulfilling its mission:

To strengthen our communities...

“The way I look at ideastream and media outlets are as partners...able to elevate those issues that need to be elevated...and shine a spotlight on what is possible.”

- Karen Butler, Cleveland Department of Public Health

“...ideastream is an example of how other not-for-profits can work together, maybe from what they learned.”

- Tom Schorgl, Community Partnership for Arts and Culture

“The thing that I really enjoy about [ideastream] is the hyperlocal connectivity to what is going on in the region. And then it seems seamlessly integrated to what is going on nationally/internationally....There is the sense that we are really connected with what we do here to that broader whole—and that broader whole is brought back to us. I think that is the magic of public broadcasting.”

- Chris Diehl, URS Corporation

Hyperlocal connectivity

Partners

Work together

Listening to the Community...
“I think ideastream is, if not uniquely, then unusually well situated to be both an example and a means of collaboration to make sure that limited resources are being used as effectively as possible. So, its very existence as an unusual collaboration enables it to do that with some credibility and legitimacy, but also by the collaborations it has fostered.”

- David Goodman, Squire Sanders

“I think ideastream is a convener in a sense that when ideastream works together with local foundations, we can inspire transformation by showing some of the best examples of where it works, where things work.”

- Thom Craig, The Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation

“ideastream is a place where they can help connect the links of the chain. To show us how community safety is related to public health, is related to education, is related to workforce development.”

- Dan Flannery, Case Western Reserve University

“When we have a person on [an ideastream program], we can show that tickets have sold and we’ve got a dynamic that has been immediately affected by your programming.”

- Cindy Barber, Beachland Ballroom

“I think it’s important that ideastream promotes the accountability for our own health care as individuals and also provides resources to individuals of the general public that identifies where information can be sought...”

- Bob Zakrajsek, Health Action Council