

**Connecticut Radio Information System
Building Evaluation Capacity
Program: CRIS Radio 24/7 Broadcasts
Evaluation Report
(2016-2017)**



Spring 2017

INTRODUCTION

Organizational Overview

Connecticut Radio Information System (CRIS)

CRIS is dedicated to improving the lives of people who are blind or print-challenged, providing them with access to the same printed information that their friends, family, classmates and colleagues enjoy through our high quality electronic audio recording service.

A nonprofit 501(c)(3) since 1978, CRIS services people with visual, physical, learning, emotional or intellectual disabilities that prevent them from reading print material.

The articles broadcast with human narration by CRIS Radio are not available from other media sources.

Program Overview: CRIS Radio

CRIS Radio broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week, articles featured in more than 50 general interest newspapers and magazines – local, state, regional and national publications. CRIS provides timely access to news and current events with recordings of human-narrated articles published in local and national publications, including front pages, opinion/editorial pages of newspapers, local obituaries with details on services, and store sales flyers.

CRIS Radio offers its broadcast service free of charge to more than 2,400 people with print disabilities who reside in private residences. CRIS Radio is just one of several audio programs produced by CRIS. Those receiving this service can listen to CRIS programs a number of different ways that include the following:

- Pre-tuned radio;
- Internet access at our web site, www.crisradio.org or a specially tuned Internet radio;
- Cable TV connected through the SAP (Second Audio Program) channel courtesy of the Connecticut Television Network and local cable TV carriers;
- Telephone Reader, allowing access with a toll-free telephone number; and
- Mobile devices through the CRIS Mobile App for both Apple and Android devices.

History

CRIS Radio is the first program established by CRIS, with broadcasts of newspaper articles beginning for two hours on weekdays that could only be heard in the Hartford area in 1979. CRIS Radio was also the only program produced by the organization for its first 32 years.

Based on a long-term strategic plan developed in 2010, CRIS expanded its service to include underserved populations with print disabilities. As a result, CRIS added children's and Spanish-language programming.

New technology enabled CRIS to expand and enhance service to schools, group homes, adults and seniors living in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. Combined with the advancement of broadcast technologies, new collaborations also enabled CRIS to expand service to include broadcast through hospital in-house television systems, as well as new initiatives, such as providing audio access to historical primary source documents with the Connecticut State Library.

These factors helped CRIS significantly increase the number of people it makes its service available to, growing from 4,000 people in 2010 to more than 54,000 people in 2017- a 1,250 percent increase.

Purpose of the Evaluation

CRIS Radio is a key component of our service and we have been unable to quantify the impact of our service with our listeners, with the exception of gathering listener testimony and anecdotal information. Historically we contact new listeners after they receive a special CRIS radio to ensure the radio is properly working and to solicit feedback.

It has been our organization's desire to verify the benefits of CRIS Radio on our listeners' quality of life. This evaluation process enabled CRIS to do just that by systematically collecting data, conducting quantitative analyses, and reporting verifiable information. It also enabled the organization to improve programming (content selection and program scheduling) based on the systematically collected survey results.

CRIS plans to leverage the survey results with stakeholders, including recipients and funders. We also intend to continue this systematic survey process to maintain up-to-date evaluation of our service.

Funding

CRIS has a number of funders, including 42 foundations, state and federal grants, donations, and a modest amount of fee-for-service earned revenue. The CRIS Radio budget requires about half of CRIS' FY 2016 annual operating budget of \$520,000.

Figure 1. Distribution of Revenue Sources for CRIS Radio (FY 2016)

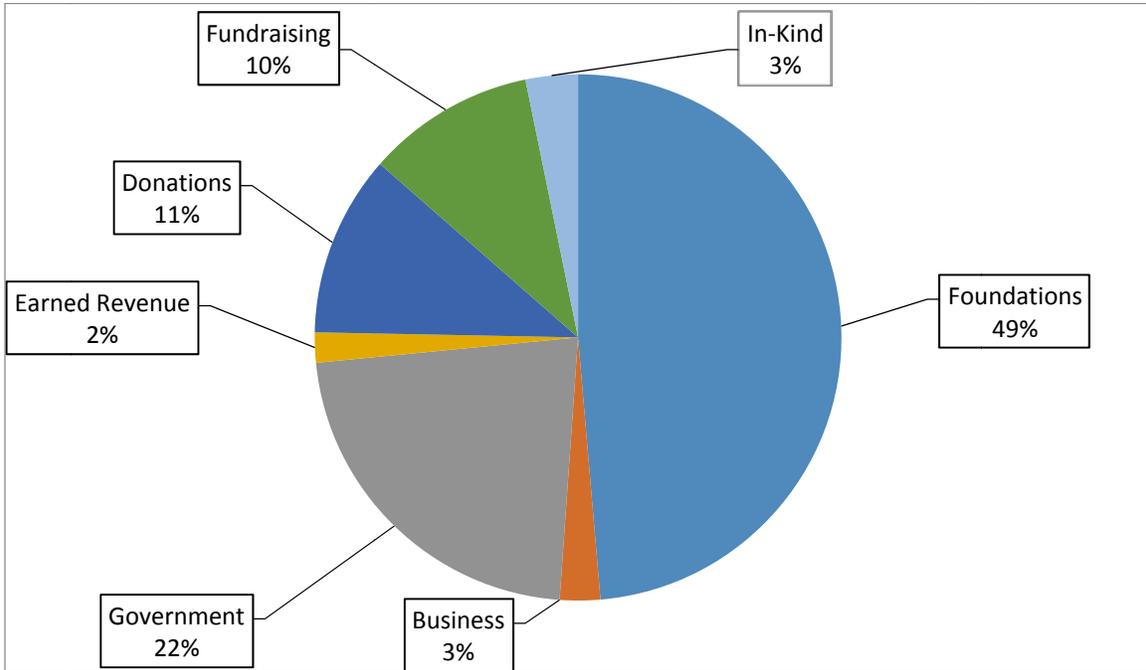
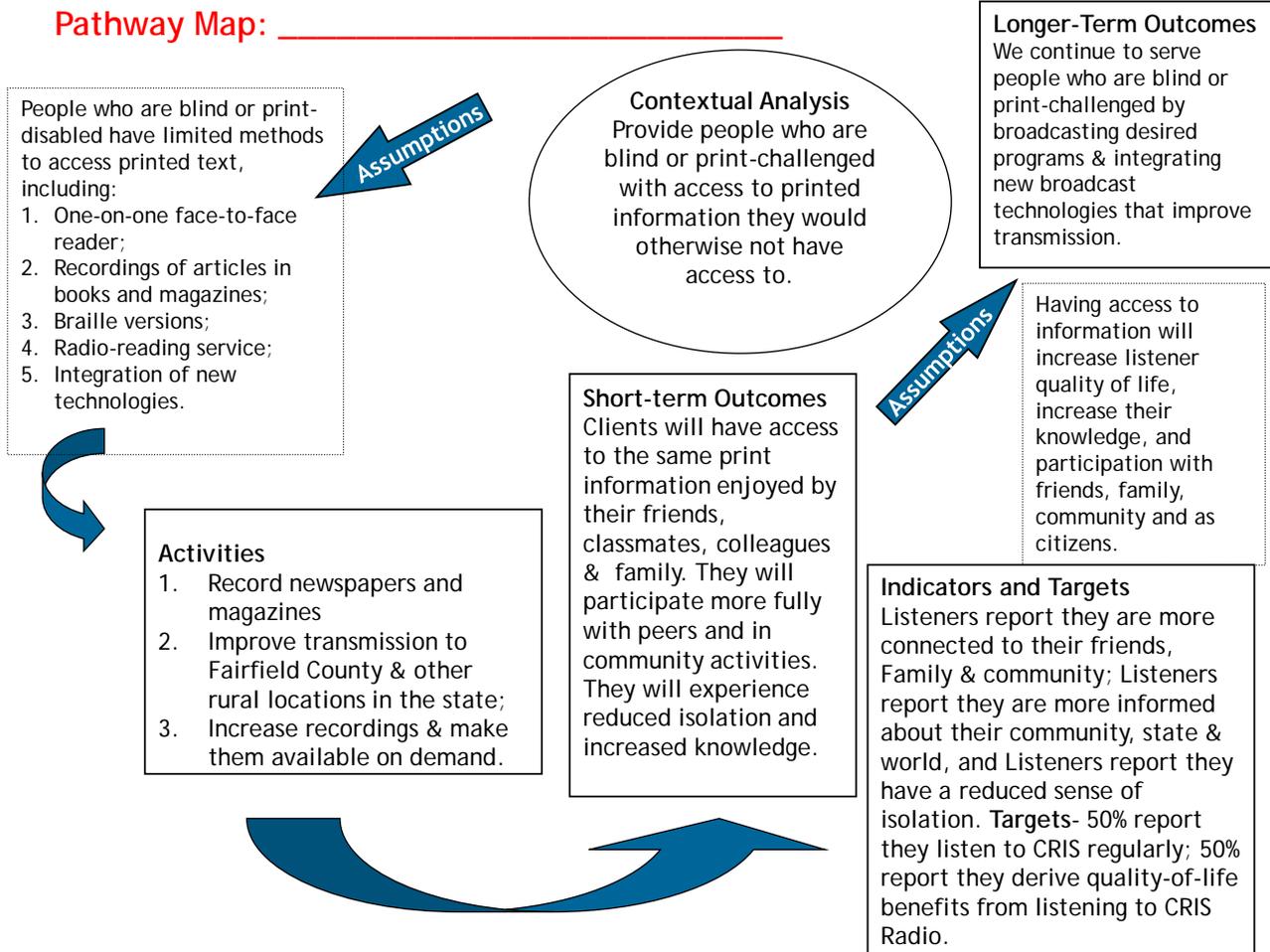


Figure 2. Logic Model



Tools Used in the Evaluation

CRIS utilized the following tools to conduct this evaluation: telephone survey with five questions (Attachment I) to be administered by CRIS staff to a randomly selected group of listeners; and a record review protocol designed to identify desired data elements compiled in our organization’s database.

Evaluation Data Collection

To complete the evaluation, we conducted a record review of current CRIS Radio listeners and a telephone survey with a randomly selected sample of listeners (see Survey Tool Attachment 1). The record review involved identifying current users and recording information about their

background characteristics. The phone survey was conducted from December 2016 – February 2017 to determine the benefits derived from listening to CRIS programs and to solicit feedback pertaining to suggestions to improving programming and listener program preferences. Following the phone survey we also solicited input from three advisory councils: the State Rehabilitation Council; the Advisory Council for the State Library for the Blind and Print Handicapped; and the BESB (Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind) Consumer Advisory Council.

To prepare for the telephone survey administration, we populated an Excel spreadsheet alphabetically with names from our organizational database. We eliminated individuals who were board members from the list to ensure we did not skew the data. The Excel list of 2,500 CRIS Radio listeners who received specially tuned CRIS radios at their private residences was electronically randomized and then a sample group was identified to ensure broad representation of our listening population.¹

The randomly selected sample group of CRIS listeners (n=93) broadly represents those who listen to CRIS programming at their private residences (our user group is comprised primarily of senior citizens, 65 years or older). We successfully surveyed about 47 of the selected 93 listeners (48%) as of Feb. 28, 2017; however, we plan to continue to conduct surveys through FY 2017.

As we worked to reach all of our originally identified 93 listeners, we discovered that just one in every four CRIS listeners whom we telephoned either answered the telephone or agreed to participate in the five- to 10-minute survey. We also found that very few CRIS listeners returned voice messages asking them to contact us to conduct the phone interview.

As a strategy to improve the number of survey respondents, we began to broadcast Public Service Announcements (PSAs) alerting CRIS listeners that they might receive a telephone call from CRIS to help us complete our survey. Following the broadcasts, an increased number of listeners answered their telephone and agreed to participate. We also replaced those on our randomized list with other listeners who called in to inquire about programming and agreed to participate in the survey.

The record review was conducted by CRIS outreach coordinator Louis Morando. Specifically, we collected data about listeners' gender, age, and, location.

The purpose of the telephone survey was to identify the following:

¹ CRIS listeners are listed in our Donor Perfect database, which was exported into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet listings of approximately 2,500 names was then electronically randomized to identify a sample group that broadly represents CRIS Radio listeners.

- Frequency of listening to CRIS Radio;
- Benefits listeners derive from listening to CRIS Radio;
- Information about preferred programming; and
- Feedback on ways to improve CRIS Radio programming.

KEY FINDINGS

Phone Survey Results

Key results of the phone survey are shown in Table 1, and it is clear that substantial proportions of CRIS Radio listeners (80% or more) derive many quality-of-life benefits from listening to CRIS programs and a similar number (83%) regularly listen to CRIS Radio.

Highlights of the survey include the following:

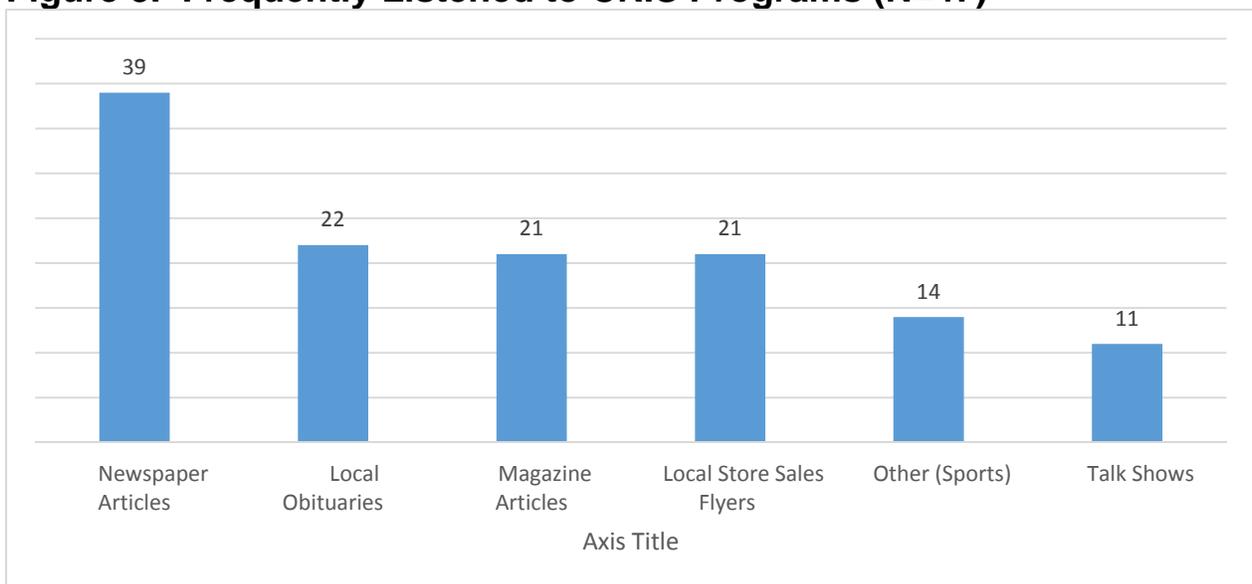
- 83% listen to CRIS **regularly**;
- 89% *agreed or strongly agreed* that listening to CRIS Radio helps **reduce their feelings of isolation**;
- 88% *agreed or strongly agreed* that listening to CRIS Radio helps **inform** them about their community, state and country;
- 86% *agreed or strongly agreed* that listening to CRIS Radio helps them **better participate in conversations** with friends and family;
- 85% *agreed or strongly agreed* that listening to CRIS Radio helps them **feel connected** to their community; and
- 80% said that CRIS Radio is **important or very important** to them.

Other key findings highlighted preferred programs based on frequency of listening (see figure 3). The most frequently listened to programs are Front Pages and Regional Roundup (newspaper articles, 83%). Magazine articles, store shoppers and obituaries were listened to by nearly half (47%) of those surveyed and about one-quarter (23%) listen to CRIS Radio-produced talk shows.

Table 1. Summary of Findings from the CRIS Phone Survey (N=47)

	Percentage
Percent of listeners who listen regularly (daily, several times per week, weekly)	83%
Percent of listeners who rated CRIS Radio as <i>Important</i> or <i>Very Important</i>	80%
Percent of listeners who agreed/strongly agreed that CRIS Radio benefitted them in the following ways:	
Helps reduce my feelings of isolation	89%
Helps inform me about my community, state and country	88%
Helps me better participate in conversations with friends and family	86%
Helps me feel connected to my community	85%

Figure 3. Frequently Listened to CRIS Programs (N=47)



Consumer Advice

In addition to the closed-ended questions we asked, we were very interested to hear comments from our listeners, hoping to find magic words that we could use to grab other people's attention. While the conversations were rich, they were sometimes difficult (due to age and hearing capacity) and open-ended comments were hard to come by. We did find that many were unaware of the newer ways they could listen to CRIS and that listening habits were a bit different than we had expected. Below is a sample of comments collected from CRIS listeners:

- *I look forward to listening every morning. CRIS is how I find out about the local news.*
- *CRIS helps me stay informed on what is going on in the world and allows me to speak on topics intelligently.*
- *I like to hear how the rest of the world is surviving and it is good to hear from different newspapers. A lot of people don't know it even exists.*
- *CRIS Radio is a big help.*
- *I'm so excited to find our CRIS app, I didn't know. I will also listen more from my computer*
- *I should listen more, but I love CRIS! I love the sports (Jim Stewart in particular).*
- *I'm very impressed with the service, (but tend more toward books).*
- *It's very helpful, very useful.*
- *I love listening to the sports.*
- *CRIS Radio is a wonderful station to listen to because they help people with limited vision stay connected to the world.*

In addition, we also collected data from advisory committee members and obtained the following advice/comments. They include the following:

- Use the "people-first" reference;
- Avoid using "handicapped" or "impaired;"
- Offer an accessible website that is compliant with World Wide Web Consortium – WCAG - Web Content Accessibility Guidelines;
- Be sure third-part website design vendors comply with accessibility guidelines;
- Describe photos when using PowerPoint Presentations;

- Provide large-print options when requested (16 Point Ariel);
- Offer assistance privately when asking for feedback or to fill out a survey – invite consumer into an office, not offer assistance in a waiting room;
- Do not speak to a listener's aide/friend/assistant as if the listener is not present;
- Know that people with disabilities are grateful to be asked their opinion;
- Understand that computer screen readers (software) cannot read PDFs;
- Provide and offer an alternative for people who are blind to access written information;
- Don't assume everyone who is blind or disabled has an assistant or is computer savvy;
- Understand that the common online registration processes that ask for verification that "I am not a robot" by requesting he/she to identify jumbled letters or pictures is often impossible for a person who is blind or legally blind to navigate;
- Online surveys work for a limited number of people who are blind or have low-vision;
- Keep the survey short and sweet;
- Ask the consumer how they would prefer to be surveyed.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Key Findings

Staff at CRIS Radio frequently receive testimony and feedback from CRIS listeners and their families about the importance of our service. There is a common message among those who reach out to us about the benefits and impact of CRIS service on listeners' lives. While the testimony certainly provides us with anecdotal information on the difference CRIS Radio makes on those we serve, it does not quantify the impact. Our survey of CRIS listeners allowed us to learn the following:

1. Testimony and feedback from CRIS listeners and their family members are consistent with the survey results;
2. Survey results quantify the importance of having access to print information – including the store sales flyers – on the quality of lives to those whom we serve; and
3. While newspapers, magazines, obituaries and store sales flyers are among the most preferred programming, the diverse

programming offered by CRIS is important to listeners and reflects the diverse preferences among the general population, supporting our efforts to broadcast articles from more than 50 newspapers and magazines.

Action Steps

CRIS staff intends to conduct listener surveys annually in an effort to solicit feedback from CRIS listeners. In addition, based on what we have learned on how to conduct surveys through the Hartford Foundation's BEC program, staff intends to transfer our survey skills to solicit information about the outcomes of other CRIS programs as a way to verify program benefits.

Collecting data through consumer surveys is an important method to measure program outcomes, as required by many CRIS stakeholders.

Although surveys were conducted in 1998 and again in 2008, we have learned through the BEC program how to conduct listener surveys that require less time while generating more informative data. As a result, our new survey skills will enable CRIS to commit to annual surveys of its two largest programs: CRIS Radio and CRISKids / CRISKids for Schools.