

# NCME ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

## for producers

Moving your project  
from idea to impact  
through public media.



## Louder Than A Bomb Teen Poetry Festival

Jump to Section:

- [Defining Outcomes](#)
- [Creating a Plan](#)
- [Implementing the Plan](#)
- [Sustaining Engagement](#)

**ABOUT WBEZ**  
CHICAGO PUBLIC MEDIA  
Radio  
Community licensee  
WBEZ 91.5, news talk format  
Vocalo 89.5, eclectic format  
Appx 120 full time-staff members

**PEOPLE:**  
Population: 2,707,120  
Population white: 45%  
Population black: 32.9%  
Population Hispanic/Latino: 28.9%  
Foreign born persons: 21%  
Language other than English  
spoken at home: 35.5%

**INCOME:**  
Median household income: \$47,371  
Persons below poverty level: 21.4%

[GLOSSARY](#) [SITE MAP](#) [SITE CREDITS](#)

ShareThis



### Introduction

*Public radio's roots are in culture and education. Thanks to those early days of broadcasting concerts and lectures, public media has become a significant cultural and intellectual resource for communities.*

*Today public media is taking a strategic approach to reaching communities atypical to public media audiences through culture and education. By partnering with organizations that reach youth and diverse communities, public media is pioneering a collaborative content creation model that is community reflective, relevant, AND efficient.*

*One of the best examples of this model occurs every winter in Chicago at the [Louder Than A Bomb Youth Poetry Festival](#). In 2005 Chicago Public Media began a partnership with Young Chicago Authors (YCA) to support Louder Than A Bomb (LTAB). This friendly competition emphasizes self-expression and community via poetry, oral storytelling, and hip hop spoken word. Today LTAB has expanded to over ten cities and states across the nation – as well as South Africa. It has been featured in a globally acclaimed documentary and given thousands of youth the opportunity to share their voices on stage.*

### DEFINE

#### Identifying community needs through partnership

It's often tempting in public media to start with a great idea, secure funding, and lead an initiative from scratch. For Chicago Public Media it made more sense to support and amplify an initiative that already existed: Louder Than A Bomb Youth Poetry Festival.

Founded in 2001 by Young Chicago Authors, the festival was a platform for teenagers of all races, socioeconomic statuses and cultures coming together to better understand each other through hip hop and spoken word. In multicultural Chicago, schools are often on the frontlines of youth violence. Gangs offer a haven for youth struggling with issues at home – and experiencing violence at home. The festival was named after a line from one of the performances, describing the sound of a gunshot as "louder than a bomb."

"We like to provide a place for youth who feel disenfranchised by the public school system to channel their emotions," says YCA's Director of Publications and Communications, Demetrius Amparan. He's also a former participant of LTAB. "It's created bridges for students. A kid from Oak Park [a Chicago suburb] would never have met a kid from the south side of Chicago. Their stories might be different, but they might be able to find common ground through Louder Than A Bomb."

In 2011 YCA needed a strong partner to help coordinate and organize the festival. They turned to Chicago Public Media, who had first started recording the work of LTAB poets in 2005.

## CREATE

### Setting clear goals and expectations with the partner

Compared to Young Chicago Authors, Chicago Public Media is a large organization. It was critical to establish the expectations up front with significant differences in resources and capacity. Chicago Public Media stepped in to provide much needed infrastructure, such as ticketing for the events, recording expertise and promotion. But even though YCA was a much smaller organization, they offered an asset critical to maintaining Chicago Public Media's relevance: access to diverse youth and a reservoir of untold Chicago stories. It was exactly the type of community work the station wanted to promote, according to Breeze Richardson, Director of Strategic Partnerships at Chicago Public Media.

"It's 100% mission," she says. "The purpose of LTAB is to create a space where stories can be told, and amazingly it has never had an incidence of violence in its history – in a city where youth violence is a serious issue – while bringing in youth who have experienced and been affected by violence."

By partnering with YCA, Chicago Public Media was addressing a community need: stability in creating this space for a diverse youth to come together peacefully speaking the same cultural language of performance.

"We complement them very well by providing different sides of the city and different societal issues," says Demetrius Amparan at YCA. "It's a two way street."

## IMPLEMENT

### Partnership in motion

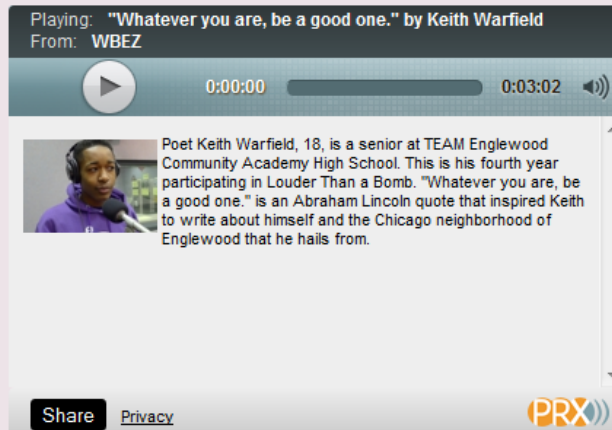
The partnership works well for a few different reasons.

Chicago Public Media has institutionalized its partnership program by creating an agreement that spells out in detail the expectation of each party. Chicago Public Media gets vetted, reliable content from a diverse cross section of Chicago youth. Chicago Public Media has never censored a poet's work as part of their agreement with Young Chicago Authors. Young Chicago Authors agrees to manage individual and team participation in the competition and coordinate the judging of the poems (which is done publicly through live bouts); Chicago Public Media agrees to record the top four teams at their studios. Production work is turned around within 24 hours to coincide with the final performance of the Festival.

Additionally, Chicago Public Media has been clear about what works for their broadcast. The pieces are around 3 minutes – the amount of time for a full-length feature report. After recording nearly 200 pieces, it has incorporated the content into the sound of the station, reflecting youth voices and perspectives in a creative style that is consistent with public radio's standards of quality and mission. Demetrius Amparan at YCA says listeners can tell how much Chicago Public Media cares about the festival.

"They put a lot of value and care into the stories of the students. What better way to write the story of Chicago than with these students?"

Another critical piece is the digital real estate. Chicago Public Media shares the content online year-round and archives audio from previous festivals through its flagship event broadcast vehicle, *Chicago Amplified*. It also shares the content for other stations to use on PRX, the Public Radio Exchange. Most of the hits on the site occur during the festival when the station heavily promotes the site, but it also generates a steady number of page views throughout the year.



## SUSTAIN

### Understanding the metrics

LTAB has always been a part of the station's operations budget, and it makes economic sense for the station to invest in this type of production model. Chicago Public Media has over 60 partners. The partnership with LTAB yields at least 25 pieces of original content for a week's worth of production. To Breeze Richardson, that is a high return on investment and a high return on community impact.

The combination of partnering, coordinating an in-person event and providing a broadcast and virtual platform highlighting young Chicago poets has translated into a growing audience of young writers for WBEZ. Each year the event attracts more people and the analytics for the website are impressive. In 2012, LTAB garnered over 60,000 views to its page on WBEZ.org. Creating this platform has increased access to the work of these poets and their stories throughout the year.

And in the midst of its second decade, LTAB continues to grow. Amparan expects over 2,000 people to attend the final performances at the end of the festival and well over 6,000 to attend throughout the entire festival.

### What Success Looks Like

The page views and festival attendance aside, LTAB has also expanded around the globe. There are 8 expansion sites, including one in South Africa.

There's also the difference LTAB has made in the lives of individual poets. Many students have earned scholarships or been inspired to stay in school because of the competition and writing programs YCA conducts year-round in conjunction with the Festival. And Richardson says these relationships will be good for WBEZ in the long run as well.

"Nate Marshall has been called one of the best writers in Chicago – not best young writers, best writers – he is remarkably talented, smart, and will go far in this world. But given his background and life experience, he may have never found public radio if WBEZ hadn't been involved in this project. We are building the next generation of public radio listeners. And it does happen one at a time."

Chicago Public Media demonstrates how public media can take its strengths and fuse them with another organization's assets. It has complemented Young Chicago Authors in a productive partnership that meets both organizations' needs. More importantly, the two are working together to address the needs and aspirations of Chicago youth. By bringing youth from across Chicago together in the common cultural language of spoken word performance, they are achieving their greatest impact: overcoming the stereotypes youth have about each other in peaceful expression.



NCME is funded by the  
Corporation for  
Public Broadcasting  
and affiliated with the University  
of Wisconsin-Extension

| [Contact NCME](#) | [Home](#) | [Station Directory](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Employment](#) |

The National Center for Media Engagement supports public media organizations nationwide in engaging their communities. We provide resources that engage and educate citizens, build sustainable community relationships and stimulate civic participation.

© 2013 National Center for Media Engagement. All rights reserved.

