



Office of the Inspector General

August 6, 2025

To: Donna Joe, Deputy General Counsel and Vice President, Compliance
Kathy Merritt, Senior Vice President, Radio, Journalism and CSG Services

From: Kimberly A. Howell, Inspector General


Digitally signed by
Kimberly Howell
Date: 2025.08.06
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Subject: Evaluation of WETS-FM, Licensed to East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, Compliance with Selected Communications Act and General Provisions Transparency Requirements, Report No. ECR2509-2512

We have completed an unannounced evaluation of compliance with selected requirements of the 2025 Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) Community Service Grant (CSG) awarded to WETS-FM, licensed to East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee. Our specific objectives were to verify compliance with 11 requirements of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (Act) for open and closed meetings and open financial records, as well as the 2025 Radio CSG General Provisions and Eligibility Criteria (General Provisions) for transparency as presented in Exhibit A. Background information on the station and CSG program can be found in Exhibit B.

Based on our review of WETS-FM's website on April 11, 2025, and the station's response to our preliminary observations, we found the station was compliant with seven of the seven applicable requirements. The remaining four requirements were not applicable because the station was not required to have a Community Advisory Board (CAB) and there were no closed meetings of the governing board or board committees in 2025 involving public broadcasting business. The station's response to the draft report is presented in Exhibit D.

We initiated this evaluation to address station accountability as identified in our Annual Plan. We conducted our evaluation in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. Our scope and methodology are discussed in Exhibit C.

cc: Ruby Calvert, Chair, CPB Board of Directors
Elizabeth Sembler, CPB Board of Directors, Audit and Finance Committee
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Accountability
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee

Exhibit A

**Summary of WETS-FM Website Review
as of April 11, 2025**

Requirements	Met	Not Met
1) Seven-day advance notice of governing body meeting:		
a) available on website	X	
b) available by other means		
2) Seven-day advance notice of board committee meetings:	X	
a) available on website		
b) available by other means		
3) Seven-day advance notice of CAB meetings:	N/A	
a) available on website		
b) available by other means		
4) If closed meetings were held, was documentation prepared explaining the basis for closing meeting in accordance with the Act:	N/A	
a) available on website		
b) available at central office		
5) If closed meeting documentation was prepared, was it available within 10-days of the closed meeting	N/A	
6) Most recent AFR or FSR available on website	X	
7) Most recent audited financial statements on website	X	
8) Senior/executive management information on website	X	
9) Governing body members on website	X	
10) CAB members on website	N/A	
11) Grantee's annual report on local content and services included in the grantee's current 2024 SAS on its content and services that serve local needs; and analysis about the reach and impact of the local services in its community.		
a) available on website		
b) available at central office	X	

Background

According to its website, “WETS-FM is a public radio station operated as a partnership between East Tennessee State University and the station’s listeners. Operating 24-hours a day at 89.5 MHz in the Tri-Cities Tennessee/Virginia region, the station is also heard online.” The station’s mission is to “provide high-quality news and information programming for, and about, the region [they] serve roughly a 120-mile radius from our tower on Holston Mountain.” WETS-FM features local and regional news in addition to news from National Public Radio. Its online presence allows for an expansion of its service beyond the limits of broadcast technology.

CPB’s Community Service Grant Program

The Communications Act of 1934 (Act) provides that specific percentages of the appropriated funds CPB receives annually from the United States Treasury must be allocated and distributed to licensees and permittees of public TV and radio stations. Each year CPB awards CSG grants to public TV and radio stations based in part on the amount of Non-Federal Financial Support (revenues) claimed by all stations on their Annual Financial Report (AFR) or Financial Summary Report (FSR) submitted to CPB. The CSG calculation process starts with separate amounts appropriated for the TV and radio CSG pools, adjusted by base grants and supplemental grants. The funds that remain are called Incentive Grant Pools; one is for TV and the other for radio.

In addition to the annual filing of the station’s AFR or FSR for radio, the chief executive of the station and a licensee official certify to CPB the station’s compliance with Act requirements and selected General Provisions requirements in the legal agreement awarding the station CSG funds. These certifications specifically address open and closed meetings; open financial records; CPB Employment Statistical Report; and donor information requirements under Section IV Communications Act Compliance of the agreement. Station officials responsible for closed meetings and the CPB Employment Statistical Report requirements are identified in the grant agreement. Additionally, the certification also addresses Website Postings Required under Section V. Selected General Provisions Requirements of the agreement.

Scope and Methodology

We performed an evaluation of WETS-FM's compliance with selected provisions of the Act and grant certification requirements. Our specific objectives were to verify compliance with selected Act requirements for open and closed meetings and open financial records, as well as 2025 Radio Community Service Grants General Provisions and Eligibility Criteria for Transparency. The scope of the evaluation included reviews of the information posted on the station's website as of April 11, 2025, as well as information provided in response to our Preliminary Observations issued on May 16, 2025.

We reviewed documents supporting the station's compliance with the Act requirements to provide advance notice of public meetings, notice of closed meeting reasons, and make financial information available to the public. We also reviewed the station's website and processes to determine its compliance with CPB's transparency requirements for eligibility. We informed station management of our evaluation on May 16, 2025, and we requested additional information to support the station's compliance, including as applicable transparency information maintained at its central office for documents that was required to be made available to the public at its central office if not posted on its website.

We also reviewed CPB's Integrated Station Information System (ISIS) to determine if the evaluated information made available to the public was the most recent information submitted to CPB. In addition, we verified with station management that board and management listings posted to its website were current.

We conducted our fieldwork from April 11 through May 23, 2025 and performed our evaluation in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*.

**WETS 89.5**

July 16, 2025

William J. Richardson III
Deputy Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
401 Ninth Street, NW Washington, DC 20004-2129

Dear Mr. Richardson:

I would like to thank you and your colleagues for providing the draft evaluation report of WETS-FM's compliance with the Communications Act and General Provisions requirements for transparency. I have read the draft report and appreciate the conciseness and clarity provided by you and your team throughout the document.

WETS remains committed to maintaining public transparency and compliance with all CPB regulations and guidelines. We are proud to have our efforts acknowledged by being found to have met all requirements. We will continue to uphold these standards and think of any ways that our documentation processes may be improved.

We welcome any guidance or recommendations for further improvements in our compliance. We truly appreciate the multiple ways that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting provides assistance to stations all across the country.

Should further discussion or meetings in regards to this report be warranted, please let me know the date and time that would be convenient.

Sincerely,

Chad Barrett
Station Director, WETS