



We tell stories about the issues that matter to the region, from the Pacific Coast to the Northern Rockies, and the places “in between.”

N3 Long Range Vision – June 2009

FINAL

OVERVIEW

N3's job is to report the news that's significant to the people of the entire Pacific Northwest. Our aim is also to give voice to the people who aren't usually heard in the news media. Our reporters are determined to tell the stories of everyday people, their interests, their lives, their problems and their successes. Historically, public radio stations serve the places where they are located. Yet many of the issues that affect the lives of listeners are shared across the region. People in remote areas of the Northwest have stories to tell that are just as important as those in the cities where major media outlets are often focused. We measure every element of N3's long range vision by our guiding principle: We tell stories about the issues that matter to the region, from the Pacific Coast to the Northern Rockies, and the places "in between."

This plan is a snapshot of a moment in time, divided into two parts: where we are now and where we hope to go in the next five years.

WHERE WE ARE

Geographic affinity

The Northwest is a tableau of geographic and cultural characteristics. Trees, abundant water and population density are some of the signature features of western Oregon and Washington. But high deserts, farms and sparse population tend to characterize life east of the Cascades. The rolling hills of eastern Washington would seem to have little to do with the rain-soaked trails of the southern Oregon coast. But we live on common ground. People living in all parts of our region are linked together by commerce, culture, climate, politics and a common sensibility. It is our geographic affinity. That's not to say that regional interests end at the borders of Oregon, Washington and Idaho. We cover issues that span the entire west, indeed the globe. But our listeners are in the Northwest and so are the stations we serve. The legal boundaries of our states' borders provide sharp lines that define the scope of our issues, public policies and the range of our laws. As a result, N3's region is Oregon, Washington and Idaho. That's the place we cover.

Structure

As this plan is written, N3 has four bureau reporters spread throughout the region and a roving correspondent who covers issues and stories that encompass all three states. One editor manages N3 activities and coordinates the work of all five reporters. The reporters are based at statehouse bureaus in Salem and Olympia and two bureaus located in strategic locations in Richland, Washington and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

The statehouse reporters are located as they are for three reasons:

- Issues and problems that confront the region and the nation naturally flow through state legislatures. So, it makes sense for at least one reporter in each state to keep up with the power brokers, everyday citizens and active interest groups that convene in state capitols. Note: The absence of an Idaho statehouse bureau will be addressed later in this plan.
- It is logistically difficult and expensive for public radio stations to cover statewide legislative issues and maintain their own local news, particularly when the Washington and Oregon stations we serve, do not have offices or studios in their respective capitals. Having N3 cover statehouses spreads the costs among stations that share the same legislature.
- People need news about their state capitols, where key decisions that affect them are made every day, but statehouse coverage by newspapers and commercial television news is on the decline nationally due to competitive pressures and a faltering economy. Public radio stations have a commitment to maintain strong news operations where commercial news organizations fail.

Yet, not all news is political. And not all issues spring up in state legislatures. That is why N3 maintains bureaus in locations that are strategically important to the stations we serve. These are places stations find it difficult to cover, but remain significant to the region and home to many listeners:

- In Washington, N3's Richland bureau covers the Mid-Columbia farm country of southeastern Washington and northeastern Oregon. It's also near the always-newsworthy Hanford Nuclear Reservation, which stations have expressed a commitment to cover.
- Our bureau in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho covers the often overlooked area of north Idaho, the city of Spokane and the wider inland Northwest.

Note: The absence of a second Oregon bureau will be addressed later in this plan.

Station "hosting"

N3 has no employees. Instead, each member of our staff is "hosted" by a member station. Technically, they are employees of those stations, which provide administrative assistance, paychecks and health coverage. In turn, N3 reimburses the stations for those costs. This structure saves N3 and its member stations the significant overhead costs of developing a business office, HR, IT support, engineering, etc. The host stations provide these services as part of their contribution to this joint effort.

Areas of specialty

Many news organizations assign beats to reporters. Such a structure gives the journalist the task of keeping up with certain contacts and story developments. When a story breaks, the beat reporter is expected to be on top of it. But that approach presents several problems for N3. First, we have neither the capacity nor the desire to be the outlet “of record” for each and every story related to a beat. Second, regional beats take away from the bureau obligations that stations expect, in which each of our reporters maintain expertise on a given geographic area. Third, N3 beats could interfere and overlap with member station reporter beats. Instead, we have a different way.

Our reporters maintain areas of specialty within a regional focus. These are subjects on which reporters are expected to be experts. For example, our Tri-Cities correspondent has a specialty in agriculture. That may mean she produces a story on cranberries on the southern Oregon coast, even though that’s far from the arid farmland of eastern Washington. On the other hand, she could suggest that same story to another N3 reporter in Oregon or to a member station reporter. The point is that the area of specialty developed by each reporter gives him or her ownership of the subject matter while creating the flexibility needed to manage assignments. At the same time, our regional bureaus allow N3 to be in many locations at once in all three states.

Here is a list of our reporters and their areas of specialty:

Tom Banse, Roving Regional Correspondent

- Regional environment
- Energy & climate change
- Northwest culture

Austin Jenkins, Olympia Correspondent

- Washington statehouse
- Military

Chris Lehman, Salem Correspondent

- Oregon statehouse
- International trade

Anna King, Richland Correspondent

- Agriculture
- Hanford Nuclear Reservation
- Umatilla Chemical Weapons Depot
- Native American issues

Doug Nadvornick, Inland Northwest Correspondent

- Changing rural economy
- Distinctive culture of the Inland Northwest
- Wolves

Issues of regional significance

Even as we collaborate with, and in many cases defer to, member station reporters, our news directors have identified issues of clear regional importance that they are unable to cover adequately. This is one of N3's key roles: to step back and see the forest in the trees (in the case of some stories, literally). These issues can be extremely specific, such as the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. In other cases, the story is so broad it has elements that are both regional and local. Take, for example, the environment. N3 focuses on the regional and leaves the local discussion of this issue to local stations. We cover these issues in constant consultation with our stations' news directors and reporters so that we manage all of our assignments as efficiently and as logically as possible. We are NOT defining them as N3's exclusive domain, rather they are the areas where we concentrate in close collaboration with our stations.

Below are some issues identified as regional in scope and therefore part of N3's focus in collaboration and consultation with the stations we serve. This list is a sample of the many possibilities and is not intended to indicate the only subjects for N3 consideration.

- Changing Demographics
- Federal Courts
- International Trade
- Immigration
- Hanford Nuclear Reservation
- Military
- Mount St. Helens
- Poverty
- Regional Economy
- Regional Weather
- Criminal Justice
- Salmon
- Tsunamis
- Umatilla Chemical Weapons Depot
- Wolves
- Natural Resource Industries

Productivity expectations

Our aim is for reporters to maintain a pace of work that keeps them on top of developing news and meets stations' need for material. At the same time, the key to preserving the high quality of work that listeners expect is to give reporters the time they need to research, write and produce their pieces. That pace varies considerably depending on what's happening in the news and what story reporters are developing. It also varies among bureaus. Statehouse reporters naturally end up doing more breaking news while their strategically located colleagues spend more time developing enterprise pieces. Generally, we have found this expectation to strike the right balance:

- Features (about 3:30 minutes or 5 minutes): 4 to 6 per month
- Superspots (1:15 to 2:15 minutes): 1 to 4 per month
- Spots/cuts and copy (about :55 sec.): 10 to 25 per month

On the web

N3 reporters have worked hard to consistently provide pictures, extra data and web links with our stories. This allows station web sites to extend the impact and experience of our work. Web content was once seen as something extra but is now integrated into our everyday routines. We go to great lengths to make our copy web friendly, so that station personnel don't have to spend much time converting our stories into web features.

We've also been developing a key specialty – audio slideshows. The medium combines the best elements of public radio – high quality production and inviting soundscapes – with the power of still photos. These have proven popular with listeners and stations are finding audio slideshows relatively simple to post. This medium also fits in well with NPR's expanded use of the web.

Recently, N3 began a Twitter feed and a Facebook page as experiments, in anticipation of possible endeavors outlined in the New Media section later in this plan.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

Growth

Our current structure has a regional imbalance. Three reporters are located in Washington state, while Oregon and Idaho have one each. Adding two more bureaus would spread our resources more equitably. This growth would also better position public radio stations in the region to fill the gap being left by shrinking newspapers and television news stations.

- Idaho does not have a regional correspondent to cover the legislature and the state's business and population center in the Treasure Valley. As soon as it becomes financially feasible, N3 will create a statehouse bureau in Boise to cover the legislature there in the same way that our Olympia and Salem correspondents cover their state capitols. The further advantage of a Boise Bureau is that it is relatively close to eastern Oregon, which is currently underserved by the region's news outlets.
- Oregon has one N3 correspondent to cover the statehouse, but lacks a reporter at a strategically located bureau. When it becomes financially feasible, N3 will create a new bureau in Oregon, the location of which has yet to be determined. Oregon stations will need to discuss that question to decide collectively what makes financial and geographic sense.
- N3 remains interested in having a Spanish-speaking reporter to cover Latino affairs. NPAN's original proposal to CPB in 2003 specifically cited the region's Latino population as an underserved group that N3 would attempt to cover. Currently, N3 has five capable correspondents, but none speak Spanish. This is a

barrier to covering a community that is not necessarily comfortable with the dominant white culture. Latinos represent the fastest growing population group in the Northwest. They face difficult social and economic challenges. With this reporter, N3 would be able to shine a spotlight on racial disparities in the region and highlight attempts to bridge cultural and economic divides. This will be a grant-funded position.

- Interviews with editors and reporters at NPR and elsewhere indicate that the maximum number of reporters that one editor can manage is five. Beyond that, the editor's time tends to be stretched so thin, he or she does not have the focus to make measured news judgments or the time to give each individual story the care it deserves. As N3 grows, we will hire a second part-time editor. As indicated below, this second editor will also share the increased duties created by N3's new media plan.

This growth will be a gradual process as stations become financially able and willing to expand the service that N3 provides (See Table 1). We envision this growth beginning in 2011, after the current economic slowdown, and continuing through 2014. If stations find this to be too slow and feel comfortable speeding up the growth, the board can revisit this schedule.

N3's first new position will be a part-time or contract web producer to coordinate our new media strategy and enhance N3's web activities. As our reporting capacity grows, this web position will expand over time to also include radio editing duties. The Boise Bureau, the Second Oregon Bureau and the Latino Affairs Correspondent will come on board over a period of three years beginning in 2012. As that occurs, the editing responsibilities of the web producer will grow too. It is also possible to designate one of our new or existing correspondent positions as a part-time editor. That means one of the bureaus would produce fewer radio stories.

The cost of these new bureaus will be divided among the stations that benefit most from them:

- The Boise Bureau will be funded primarily by BSR, with help from NWPR, OPB, SPR, KPLU and KUOW.
- The second Oregon Bureau will be funded primarily by OPB and KLCC, with help from KMUN, JPR and KUOW.
- The cost of Part-Time/Contract Web Producer and Second Regional Editor will be funded by all of the stations we serve.
- The Latino Affairs Correspondent will be funded entirely by grants.

Table 1: Schedule of N3 Growth

Position	Year of start
Part-Time/Contract Web Producer	2011
Boise Bureau Correspondent	2012
Second Oregon Bureau Correspondent	2013
Part-Time/Contract Web Producer takes on additional duties as Second Regional Editor	2012-14
Latino Affairs Correspondent	2011-14 (depending on grant availability)

New media

We can no longer think of ourselves exclusively as a radio service. We are a content provider that specializes in radio, but our material can appear in many forms and venues.

This plan comes at a time of profound change in how public radio positions itself on the web. The choice of Vivian Schiller as NPR’s new president is one sign of the growing recognition that public radio has failed to achieve its potential in online media and that a new direction is required. NPR is moving to find a way to integrate station and network content into some sort of shared on-line and mobile presence. Schiller has outlined a vision of “public radio stations with NPR becoming one large digital network to serve communities on a local level so *that* becomes how they will consume NPR and public radio on a digital level.” Public radio listeners are increasingly getting their news from many sources, including mobile media. Even as we dream big, a recent memo on the issue, titled “Integrated Online Public Media Journalism” from public broadcasting executives said, “we need to be realistic about our current capacities, at both the national and local levels, and focused in our aspirations to be something more.”

N3 and its member stations must be ready to quickly follow NPR’s direction and forge its own regional path. But that path is not clear. Therefore, over the next year, N3 will convene a working group of station web managers and other interested station representatives to discuss and develop a common strategy. This group’s task will be to explore ways that collaboration can allow the stations we serve to set goals they are better able to achieve together than on their own. Just as the NPAN Advisory Committee is a forum for news directors to set the direction of N3, this work group could influence the direction of new media strategies throughout the Northwest.

At the same time, it is already clear than there are near-term ways regional collaboration can save the stations we serve time and money. This is as true on the web as it is on the radio. Right now, stations take the text and audio of our stories and format them to individual web sites. Several people across the region are doing nearly the exact same work. Technology is available to make this an automatic process, so that N3 stories appear on station web sites without stations having to do much, if anything, at all. These feeds can be tailored and branded to meet station needs. They can also be integrated with

station-generated stories, in the same way our radio stories are mixed into the airwaves. The options include API, RSS, widgets or a kind of “grab and go” web sites stations can easily post. PRX is making a great deal of progress on this front. We will explore the possibilities for collaborating with PRX or creating an N3 area on its site, accessible only by N3 partners.

The work group of web managers and other station representatives is an ideal forum to develop and coordinate this kind of system (See Table 2). This process will also be closely linked with the new FTP story-posting interface developed for us by NWPR and WSU. A centralized posting feed to station web sites will also require at least one web producer, a position to be combined with the second editor. This person would be responsible for various on-line functions, including “webifying” our radio stories or writing them in a way that’s tailored for on-line consumption. The web producer can also help reporters strategize about making their stories more appealing on the web.

Table 2: Timeline for implementing web distribution system

Task	Timeline
Investigate technical options	July to September, 2009
Develop code and uniform formats among stations	September to December, 2009
Test new centralized distribution system	January to March 2010
Launch	April 2010

Beyond the Northwest

To paraphrase Tip O’Neill’s old saw, all news is local. We have to look no further for proof of this axiom than our own N3 carriage reports. They have consistently shown that the closer a bureau is located to a station, the more likely that reporter’s stories are to be carried on that station. To wit: Spokane Public Radio plays just about every story produced by our Coeur d’Alene correspondent. KLCC in Eugene plays far fewer of his stories. On the other hand, KLCC plays just about every story produced by our Salem correspondent. This is to be expected in the hurly-burley of everyday news decisions. News directors and assignment editors look for what’s relevant to their listeners. The farther a field that gets, the less likely they are to play those stories.

That is why N3 reporters must continue to focus on Oregon, Washington and Idaho. But in the long run, we envision a network of networks that occupies the space between local public radio stations and NPR and PRI. These regional hubs would primarily serve their local stations, collaborating across regions when appropriate and necessary. Regional editors would maintain constant contact about stories and issues, looking for opportunities to share spots and features, but remaining focused on their own region’s news.

N3's role will be to foster the creation of other regional organizations across the country. We must advise other stations on the value of regional collaboration while continuing to serve the stations in our geographic area – Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

Conclusion

Dwight D. Eisenhower once said “plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.” This document is designed to change over time. The N3 board will revisit this long range vision once a year, at its first quarterly meeting, to decide how to update it.

This plan comes at a time of deep economic uncertainty across the nation. The stations we serve are feeling the pinch too. N3's daily operations and the additional staff contemplated here depend almost entirely on the financial health of the stations we serve (See Tables 3, 4 and 5). Nonetheless, the aim of strategic planning is to be able to move quickly when the time is right. That is why in the coming year, the stations we serve can begin creating these positions within their organizations, even if station managers mark a zero in that budget line item for the time being.

N3 proves the benefits of regional collaboration every day. We have become a model for stations across the country for how to share costs, bridge the divide among small and large stations, and develop the solid and thoughtful journalism public radio listeners expect...on a regional basis. As we grow, we must never lose sight of N3's guiding principle – covering the Northwest region and the places “in between.”

Table 3:

**Northwest News Network
FY2009 Revenue
\$471,730**

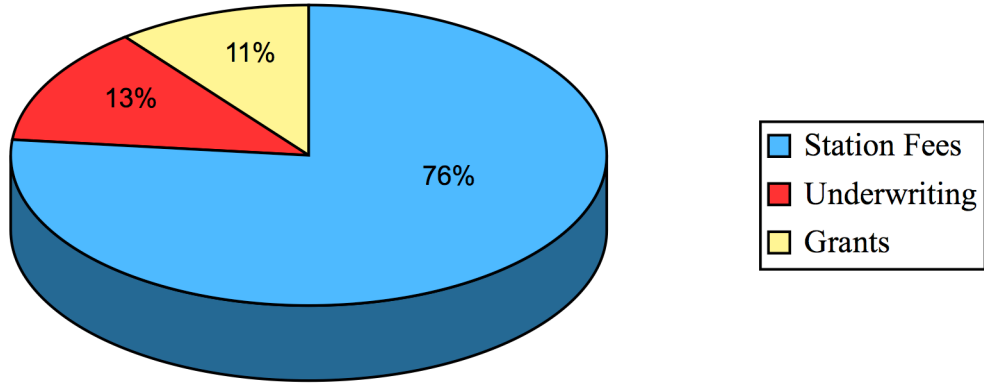


Table 4:

**Northwest News Network
FY2009 Direct Expense
\$471,730**

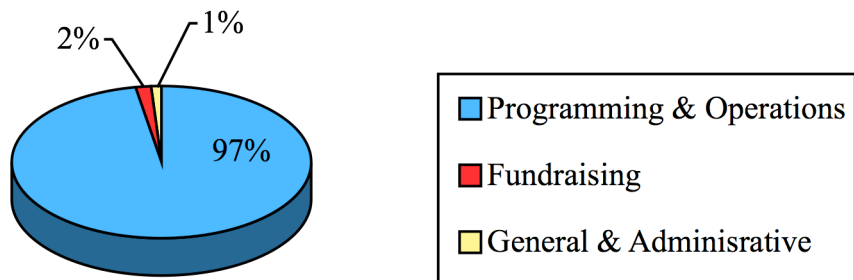


Table 5:

Stations' share of N3 fees in FY 2008-09

