

# **State of Alaska FY2022 Governor's Operating Budget**

## **Department of Administration Public Communications Services Results Delivery Unit Budget Summary**

## Public Communications Services Results Delivery Unit

### Contribution to Department's Mission

To provide critical programs, local information, public telecommunication and new media services that inform and educate radio listeners throughout bush, rural and urban Alaska; to ensure the infrastructure for the dissemination of non-commercial public radio and related services to un-served and underserved audiences.

### Core Services

- See Components.

### Major RDU Accomplishments in 2020

- As a State Satellite Relay Network, participated in and distributed all of the State of Alaska Emergency Alert System emergency alerts including tsunami, wildfire and severe storm warnings, as well as all monthly and annual exercises. Coastal stations alerted residents during the January 2018 tsunami warning and broadcast live up-to-date information about local community evacuation mandates.
- *Alaska's Energy Desk*, a collaborative journalism unit, expanded to include new partners and contributed significant content for state and national news programs. Producing high-quality coverage of energy issues, including the impact of oil and gas development on Alaska's economy, the federal-state relationship and the high cost of energy in rural Alaska. The unit produces coverage for radio, TV and the Internet. The Energy Desk Podcast *Midnight Oil* was downloaded over a million times, spawning a second season to focus on climate change issues facing Alaska.
- Improved government access programming on all digital platforms. 360 North, a year-round Alaska public affairs channel, provided Gavel Alaska during Legislative sessions, and original Alaska content including Supreme Court proceedings, coverage of Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, Alaska Weather, Debate for the State, AARP Alaska, Evening at Egan, Talk of Alaska, Indie Alaska as well as Alaska history, science and public affairs programs.
- Identified performance problems in the Alaska Rural Communications Service (ARCS) Digital Conversion Project, which involved the conversion of more than 105 village sites to digital multichannel television service, including ongoing management of early component failure resolution. The problems included complaints about and evidence of lack of testing, deployment, installation, and service on equipment.
- Managed and coordinated statewide ARCS television program service without any major system-wide shutdowns, failures or outages.
- Realized significant cost savings by successfully negotiating deeply discounted program prices with national networks for all stations. Negotiated group health insurance plan for stations.
- Provided cost effective rural engineering service and in-state training for station personnel.
- Encouraged partnerships, collaborations and strategic restructuring between licensees as a means to consolidate further common services and functions in order to maintain program delivery while reducing expenses.
- Increased broadband capacity and connectivity between the four TV stations, which allowed for cost effective content sharing, distribution, and application on all digital platforms.

### Key RDU Challenges

**Satellite Uplink Equipment Replacement** – This core piece of infrastructure is past its 11-year service mark and is in need of replacement. This system is no longer supported by the manufacturer. As components of the system fail, they are being repaired or replaced with spare parts acquired from the used equipment marketplace. Continued service is now dependent upon these secondhand components and in-place backup systems.

**Community Service** – Providing daily local news, public safety information, civic engagement programming and community-based services to residents across the state despite the impact of constrained resources/funding.

**Alaska Emergency Alert System** – The collaboration between ARCS, public radio and television broadcasters, and the state's Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management produces a multi-layered diverse emergency

alert system (EAS) serving all Alaska with distribution of critical alerts and warnings. A Satellite Relay Network, ARCS, plays a central role in the state's EAS plan as a "designated monitoring assignment" for Alaska broadcasters required to maintain compliance with FCC regulations, including new national level alerting protocols. ARCS television signals in rural communities provide year-round 24/7 access to emergency information for viewers in their homes.

**Engineering Support for Underserved Areas** – Centrally managed engineering emphasizes service to small and rural stations with the greatest need. Staffing constraints impact wait time for the 18 stations highly dependent upon this service.

**Expansion of Local News Content** – Public media must increase production of local, regional and statewide content for distribution across digital platforms to remain relevant in the changing media environment. This challenge requires new expertise and new financial resources. The improved service level will deepen community engagement and translate into increased private sector support.

**Administrative Support** – The Alaska Public Broadcasting Commission's (APBC) ability to effectively administer and monitor the APBC's obligations is diminished, resulting in less oversight of grantee eligibility and compliance and a less prepared and informed APBC.

**Strategic Restructuring** – Public radio and television in Alaska is recognized nationally for strategic restructuring and resource realignment initiatives that attain more cost-effective scale while improving service. Alaska stations must continue to pursue strategic restructuring and effective partnerships as a means to sustain and improve local service while gaining cost savings and operational efficiencies.

**ARCS Maintenance** – Though owned and operated by the State of Alaska, it is rural communities that fund ongoing local maintenance while individuals at remote sites provide labor on a volunteer basis. Community organizations provide space and power for antennas and electronics. Costs of maintenance of satellite dish antennas, cables, transmission towers and antennas, and the electronics that support ARCS distribution remain the responsibility of local communities. The fleet of satellite dish antennas, some of which have been in service for 30 years, continue to serve as the distribution backbone of public communications services in rural Alaska.

**Digital Conversion** – Capital budget funds launched the ARCS Digital Conversion project in 2013 to address the federally-mandated conversion of television transmitters from analog to digital, and to significantly expand public service programming for rural residents. The state holds over 200 FCC television broadcast station licenses of which digital upgrades have been deployed to about 90. Major benefits of converting ARCS to digital include increased and improved programming and the replacement of obsolete analog electronics infrastructure with new digital systems. However, the State has contracted with three contractors, spent millions of dollars, has received multiple complaints that deployed digital systems are not functioning and the contractor, Alaska Public Broadcasting Inc. (APBI) is unresponsive. APBI cannot confirm which rural communities have functioning ARCS digital systems. APBI has advised that the remaining ARCS sites will be more difficult and costly to upgrade to digital. In the summer of 2021, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) will require all analog television transmitters to cease transmission and has announced that no extensions of this deadline will be granted.

**Closed Captions for the Deaf Community** – Much of the television programming produced in Alaska is not closed captioned for people with hearing disabilities, limiting access to televised government coverage of Gavel Alaska, as well as important news, information and public affairs programming. The federal requirement for captioning television programming is becoming more stringent.

**Facilities Maintenance & Repair** – For public broadcasters, almost all sources of federal funding for basic broadcast infrastructure have been eliminated, leaving stations with little ability to replace obsolete equipment and keep up with changing technology.

## **Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2022**

Managers and local governing boards implemented a range of decisions due to budget reductions, and despite efforts to increase revenue from the community, cuts to operating expenses and services occurred at all stations. The effects of budget reductions on the stations ability to leverage federal funding is just now developing due to a three-year

implementation timeline. Changes in digital delivery of content to Alaskans remains an important and challenging sphere of work within public media.

**ARCS Digital Conversion Project** – This project seeks to replace all analog transmitters at remote ARCS broadcast sites with new generation digital equipment. As sites are converted to digital, the full set of video services on the satellite carrier are broadcast through the new transmitters to viewers in their homes representing a 300% increase in service, going from one channel to four, with no increase in operating costs. The State will be determining how to move forward with this project, since it does not have an assessment of the status of conversion for over 100 rural communities.

**Satellite Downlink Equipment Replacement** – Refurbishment work at satellite downlink facilities continues to improve service. Additional improvements to maintain the rural satellite downlink sites require additional funding. Deflecting costs of maintaining this set of equipment onto individual communities as they become affected by service outages may delay and/or prevent repairs from continuing.

Contact Information
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**Public Communications Services  
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

*All dollars shown in thousands*

	FY2020 Actuals				FY2021 Management Plan				FY2022 Governor			
	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds
<b>Formula Expenditures</b> None.												
<b>Non-Formula Expenditures</b>												
Public Broadcasting - Radio	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Public Broadcasting - T.V.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Satellite Infrastructure	779.5	200.0	0.0	979.5	779.5	100.0	0.0	879.5	779.5	100.0	0.0	879.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>779.5</b>	<b>200.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>979.5</b>	<b>779.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>879.5</b>	<b>779.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>879.5</b>

**Public Communications Services  
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component  
From FY2021 Management Plan to FY2022 Governor**

*All dollars shown in thousands*

	<u>Unrestricted Gen (UGF)</u>	<u>Designated Gen (DGF)</u>	<u>Other Funds</u>	<u>Federal Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
<b>FY2021 Management Plan</b>	<b>779.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>879.5</b>
<b>FY2022 Governor</b>	<b>779.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>879.5</b>