

KWSO Information Ecosystem Assessment



Warm Springs Oregon - 2025

Executive Summary

In 2025, KWSO 91.9 FM participated in an Information Ecosystem Assessment to better understand how residents of the Warm Springs Reservation access news and information, what content they value, and where significant communication gaps exist. The findings consistently demonstrate that KWSO remains one of the most trusted and effective sources of local news, cultural content, and emergency information; however, community members rely on a broad, mixed ecosystem that includes digital platforms, printed flyers, interpersonal networks, and tribal government communications.

Community members across all age groups identified a strong desire for more timely updates, more consistent event postings, expanded cultural and language content, and increased transparency from tribal leadership. The assessment also highlighted the role KWSO can play in strengthening partnerships, improving information flow, elevating community voices, and filling long-standing gaps in access to reliable local information.

As part of the assessment, KWSO created *Reservation Information – a Warm Springs History*, a book designed to provide historical context and deepen community understanding of how information has been shared across generations.

Overall, the assessment affirms KWSO's foundational role in the Warm Springs Information Ecosystem and points toward opportunities to expand platforms, strengthen reporting, and continue building culturally centered, community-driven communication systems.

1. Overview

KWSO's mission is to provide high-quality radio and online content that delivers local news and information; promotes education, cultural knowledge, and language preservation; and raises awareness of social, health, and safety issues. As part of the National Emergency Alert System, KWSO plays a critical role in ensuring community safety during wildfires, outages, floods, and other emergencies.

KWSO is owned and operated by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and functions as a department of the Tribal Government's Health and Human Services Branch. The station receives an annual tribal budget allocation and supplements funding through program underwriting, sustaining memberships, donations, fundraisers, tower leases, and service fees. Until recently, KWSO

received support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's Community Service Grant Program; however, federal funding for stations has been eliminated.

KWSO 91.9 FM began broadcasting in 1986 with a non-commercial educational license. Its signal reaches approximately 50,000 people across Jefferson County and into Wasco, Crook, and Deschutes Counties, though its primary service area is the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. Since 2009, KWSO has been housed in the Warm Springs Media Center alongside the *Spilyay Tymoo* newspaper.

The station currently employs 6 full-time and 5 part-time staff members, including 2 student interns. In addition to 24-hour radio programming, KWSO posts daily to its website, Facebook, and X, and maintains additional content on Instagram, YouTube, and SoundCloud. The KWSO mobile app is available on both Apple and Android platforms.

2. Background

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs—comprising the Warm Springs, Wasco, and Paiute Tribes—occupy a 640,000-acre Reservation in north-central Oregon. The Reservation extends from the Cascade Mountains through forests, river canyons, and high desert terrain, with its population center located in the Warm Springs Agency Area.

In 2025, the Reservation's estimated population is approximately 4,500, with over 5,000 Tribal Members overall (some living off-Reservation). U.S. Census data lists the Warm Springs community at roughly 3,080 residents with a median age of 31.2 and a median household income of around \$26,297. The population is approximately 91% American Indian/Alaska Native according to the 2020 Census.

However, Warm Springs has historically been undercounted due to systemic barriers, including lack of broadband access, limited mail delivery, geographical challenges, COVID-19 disruptions, mistrust of government processes, and lack of public understanding of Census benefits.

The Reservation is a rural-remote community with a diverse information landscape shaped by geography, culture, languages, traditions, and differences in digital access.

3. Purpose of the Assessment

KWSO conducted the Information Ecosystem Assessment to:

- Understand how people receive news and information.
- Identify which communication methods are effective—and which are not.
- Document the types of information community members want most.
- Highlight gaps in access to consistent, reliable information.
- Strengthen partnerships with programs that serve the community.
- Expand KWSO's capacity to meet emerging needs through culturally grounded reporting, improved platforms, and responsive communication strategies.

This project recognizes that a healthy information ecosystem is essential for community safety, cultural continuity, civic engagement, and overall well-being.



4. Methodology

A multi-method approach was used to capture perspectives from across the community. Total Participation = 502 individuals (with minor possible overlap). Tools included:

Paper Surveys

Distributed at major community events and targeted gatherings:

- Point in Time Homeless Count (61)
- Family Easter Egg Hunt (8)
- Native Aspirations community partners meeting (24)
- Warm Springs K-8 Academy Career Day (17)
- Pi-Ume-Sha Health Fair (181)

Total paper surveys: 291 participants

Focus Groups

Five small group conversations were held during the weekly Thursday Market event throughout the summer, with 21 participants.

Online Survey

A Survey Monkey questionnaire mirrored the general paper version and was shared through KWSO's website, social media platforms, and by text during Thursday Market.

Online participants: 105

Direct Messages

Text, email, and Messenger conversations with off-Reservation Tribal Members yielded 7 additional responses.

Student Survey

Following the data collection planned for this Assessment, a KWSO high school student intern, who had helped to administer surveys over the summer, conducted a survey of peers about "Journalism." There were 78 responses. We decided the information collected was a good fit to add to our report, for a demographic we lacked significant data on.

5. Key Findings

5.1 How People Get Information

Residents rely on a layered ecosystem that blends traditional and digital sources:

- **KWSO Radio** – most trusted, culturally rooted, broadly accessible
- **Facebook** – fast but unreliable; major source of misinformation
- **Word of mouth** – family networks, store/post office conversations, bulletin boards
- **Flyers** – still highly effective when posted consistently
- **Tribal websites and email** – useful but not updated often enough
- **Television and mainstream media** – for regional/national content
- **Youth** rely more heavily on TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat

5.2 Information People Want Most

Recurring themes across all data sources:

- Local events and announcements
- Weather forecasts
- School and community sports
- Tribal government news and voting information
- Emergency updates (fires, outages, water quality, safety alerts)
- Resource and service information
- Cultural teachings and language content
- Indigenous news beyond Warm Springs
- Positive local stories
- Funeral and memorial information
- Youth programs, opportunities, scholarships

5.3 Hard-to-Find Information

- Late or last-minute event notices
- Inconsistency in Tribal government communication
- Limited clarity about elections and decision-making
- Sporadic emergency notifications including water outage/boil water
- Lack of a centralized community resource directory
- Cultural event announcements
- Sports scores, schedules, and results

5.4 Barriers in the Current System

Community concerns highlight:

- High levels of misinformation on Facebook
- Fragmented communication systems across departments
- Inconsistent flyer posting
- Limited information delivered via snail mail
- Limited internet access
- Lack of transparency in Tribal government processes
- Low voter participation tied to unclear communication
- Community feeling “kept in the dark” about decisions

Many believe key meetings happen without adequate public notice.

There is a digital gap for Elders as they tend to rely on non-digital formats for information.

Off-Reservation Tribal Members don't know how to access the [Spilyay Tymoo](#) newspaper.

Students report low-to-moderate trust in news overall, citing:

- bias
- sensationalism
- incomplete stories
- conflicting facts
- AI-manipulated content

5.5 Cultural & Language Needs

Community members strongly desire:

- Increased Native language programming
- More cultural education (protocols, stories, seasonal knowledge)
- Recordings of elders for preservation
- Youth-centered cultural opportunities
- Respectful, appropriate sharing of lifeways knowledge

There is deep care around how cultural information is taught and communicated.

5.6 Strengths in the Information Ecosystem

Positives identified:

- KWSO's credibility and reliability
- Strong interpersonal networks and word-of-mouth traditions
- Flyers and physical postings remain important tools
- Facebook's speed when used responsibly
- Emerging interest in video, archiving, and improved online platforms
- Strong cultural pride and desire for community connection

5.7 Solutions Repeated Most Often

Improve Communication Infrastructure

- Create a centralized resource directory—printed and digital.
- Post events earlier and maintain consistent updates.
- Increase availability of biweekly or monthly newsletters (physical + digital).
- Implement real-time emergency text alerts.
- Provide video/livestream access to Tribal Council & key public meetings.
- Improve flyer distribution at reliable locations.
- Install information kiosks at community hubs.

Strengthen KWSO's Role

- Expand Native language programming and cultural storytelling.
- Increase reporting on Tribal Council activity and governance.
- Add more youth programming, interviews, and sports coverage.
- Include wellness, recovery-focused content, and regional Indigenous news.
- Create more audio/video archives for cultural preservation.

Government Transparency

- More consistent public updates
- Livestreamed or recorded Tribal Council meetings
- Clear, early communication about elections

Youth & Community Engagement

- Expanded sports reporting
- Culture camps and school presentations
- More uplifting and positive community stories



6. Overall Takeaways

- KWSO is a highly trusted, widely used, and critically important local information source.
- The community wants KWSO to continue its current work and expand into additional platforms and content areas.
- There is strong demand for more Tribal Council news, weather, sports, and cultural coverage.
- Significant opportunities exist to strengthen partnerships—particularly with Tribal programs focused on health, wellness, safety, and youth development.
- To maximize impact, community events require strong attendance, and KWSO plays a valuable role in building awareness and participation.
- Cultural content must be shared in ways that respect traditional protocols and family differences.

Youth Suggestions:

- ❖ **Short, visual, accessible content via social platforms**
- ❖ **News that is factual, unbiased, and relevant**
- ❖ **Less celebrity content and more coverage of issues that matter**

7. Conclusion

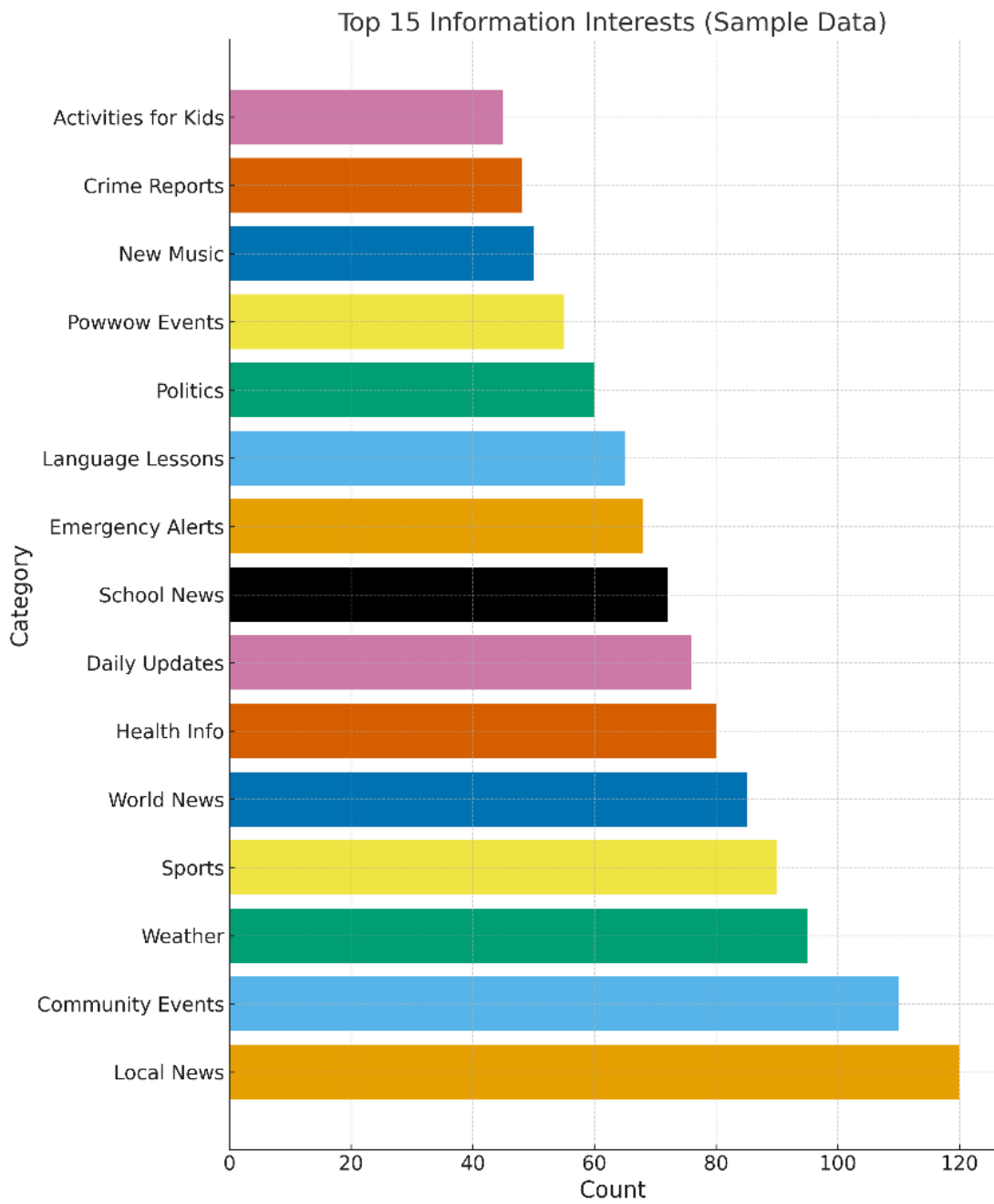
The Information Ecosystem Assessment reinforces that KWSO is a cornerstone of communication in Warm Springs—reliable, trusted, and deeply connected to the community’s cultural identity. The findings highlight meaningful opportunities to broaden coverage, strengthen transparency, support youth and elders, and improve the overall flow of information across the Reservation.

With thoughtful investment, expanded partnerships, and continued focus on culturally rooted content, KWSO can help build a more informed, connected, and empowered community for future generations.

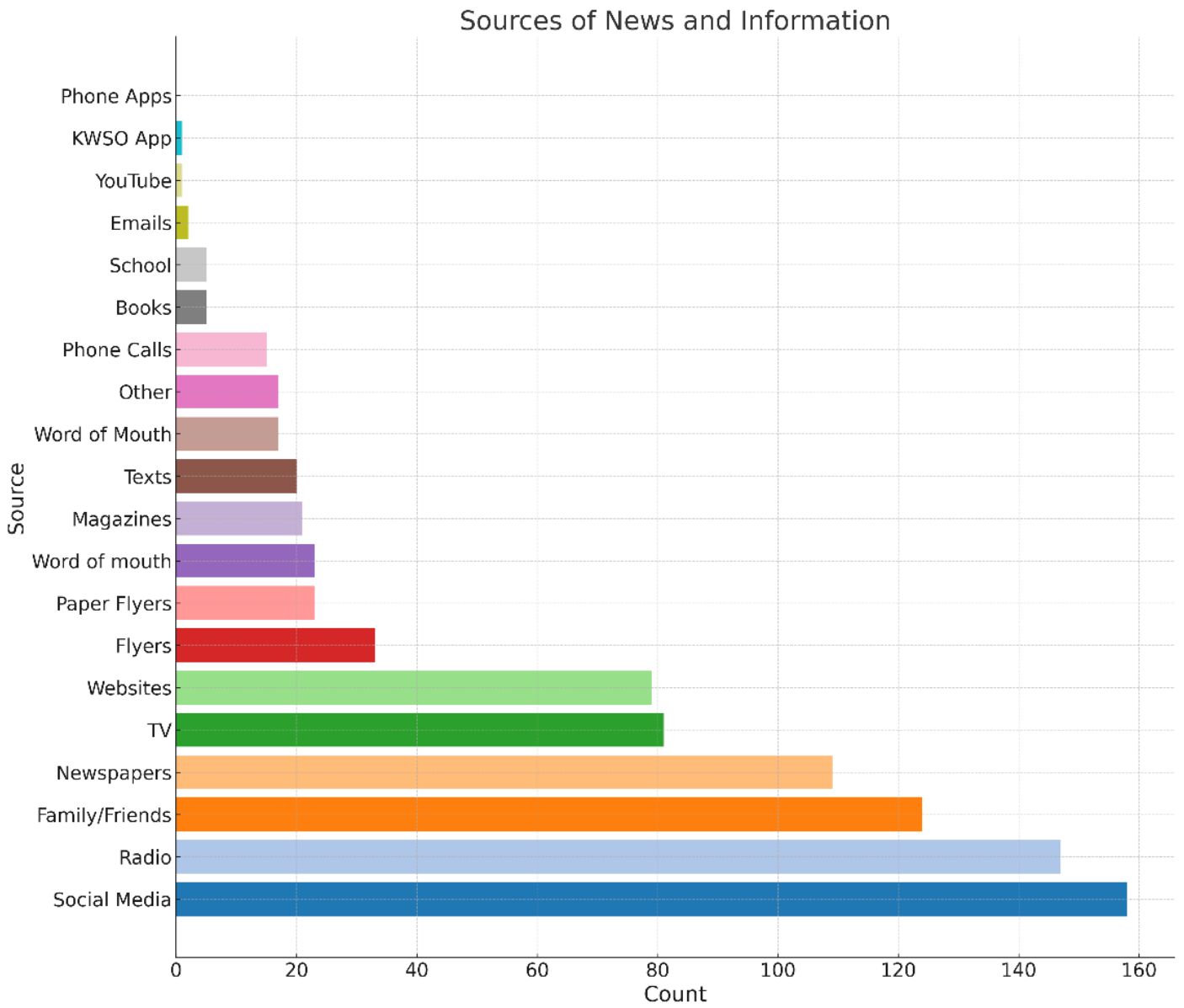
Appendices

Appendix A - Surveys

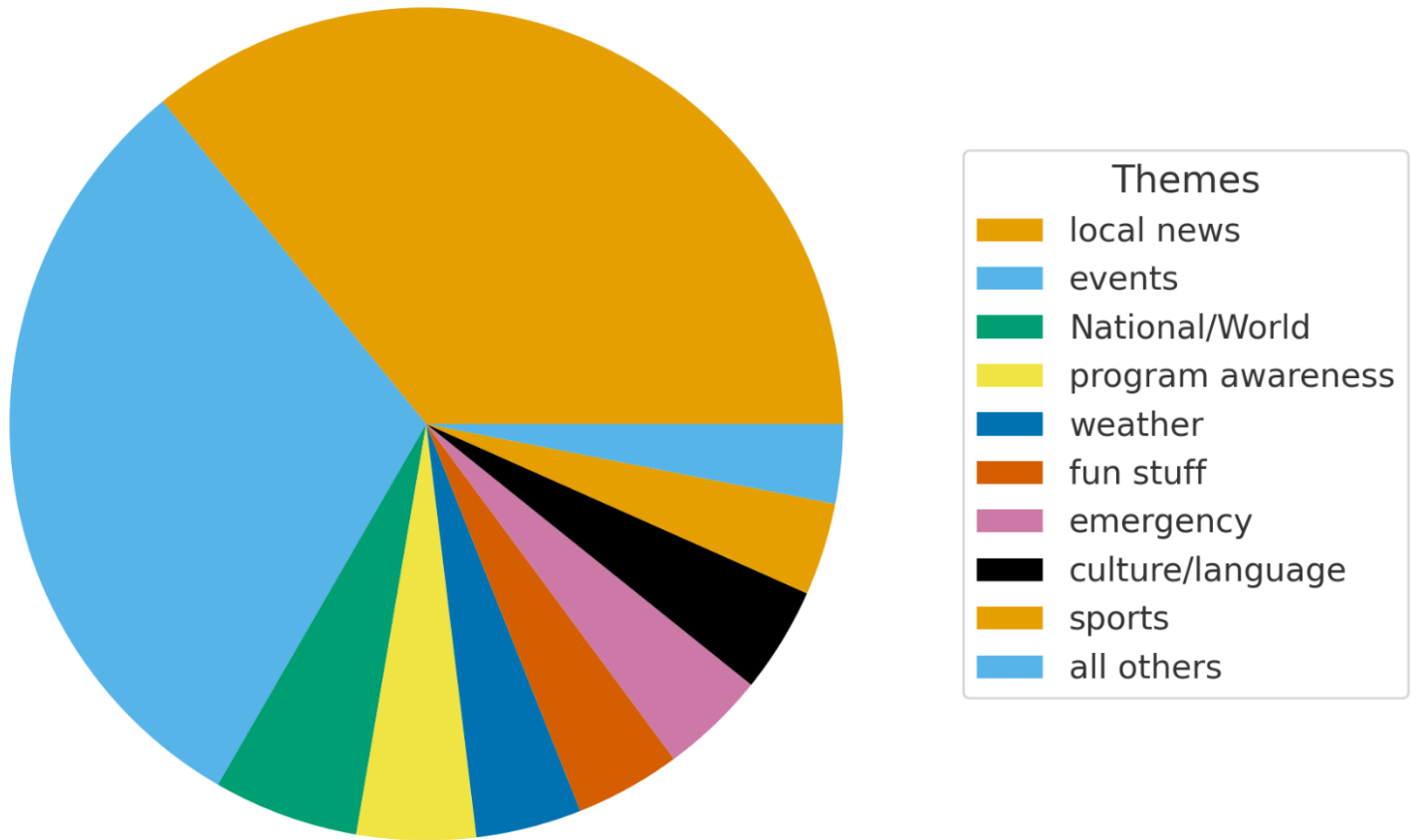
From Paper/In-Person Surveys



From Paper / In-Person Surveys



From the Online Survey Monkey – what information are people seeking



From the Online Survey Monkey - where folks get information

KWSO Information Ecosystem Assessment
Q6 Where do you get news and information from?



KWSO Information Ecosystem Assessment

1. What is your age?
 - Under 18
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65+

2. What is your gender? ____

3. What is the zip code where you live? ____

4. What type of news or information do you routinely look for? ____

5. What type of news or information do you look for but can't find? ____

6. Where do you get news and information from? If multiple places - please include in "other".
 - Family / Friends
 - Websites
 - Newspapers
 - Magazines
 - Radio
 - TV
 - Social Media
 - Flyers
 - Other (please specify)

7. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group to further share your input and ideas for information sharing in our community?
 - Yes
 - No

8. If you answered "yes" to question 7 - please give us your name and a phone number where you can be reached. ____

From the Paper/In-Person Surveys – information content interest

Journalism Survey – Madras High School

1. In the future would you take interest in being a journalist/ being involved in journalism?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Where do you get your news from?
 - Social Media
 - News Articles
 - Television
 - Radio
 - Other:

3. Do you think news articles or broadcasts are important in modern day society?
 - Yes
 - No

4. Do you trust the information published through news sources? (News Articles, News Broadcasts, etc.)
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes

5. What are your overall feelings on journalism/news media?

6. Do you believe there are any flaws in news media/journalism? Please explain.

7. Have you ever had either positive/negative experiences with news media that impacted the way you view news now? Please explain.

8. Besides social media, are there any specific news media platforms you trust to find reliable information? If so, where?

9. What could some news media platforms do to improve the way they run/ spread information?

Appendix B – Focus Group Quotes

Community Reliance on KWSO

“Every morning I listen to KWSO.. a lot of my information actually comes from you, from the app.”

“KWSO does very good on getting the word out as soon as you know.. your social media is up to date, your website’s up to date.”

Information Gaps & Late Notices

“Sometimes the community events might be up last minute and I miss them.”

“It’s not advertised soon enough.. by the time it comes, it’s already too late.”

“Maybe the people organizing the event already know the people they want to have go.. maybe that’s not me.”

“You see bulletin boards get out of control with layers of information or outdated stuff.”

Cultural Knowledge & Approachable Teaching

“Not everybody comes from the longhouse tradition.. even some of those practices are nice to learn about.”

“There are teachers out there willing to teach.. they just don’t know how to put it out there.”

“There are people who want to learn but don’t know how to approach it.”

“Every family is different.. communication and support just isn’t there.”

“My family is like, ‘I’ll show you once, you better pay attention.’ Not everyone teaches like that.”

Recommendations From Community Members

“Electronic kiosks would be neat.. bulletin boards get outdated.”

On where people get information

“I prefer to listen to the radio.. social media is big, but radio still reaches everywhere.”

“Newspapers feel like they’re dying out. Mostly it’s social media, the internet, your phone.”

On barriers to finding reliable information

“What am I looking for in the news? Truth. Always truth.”

“Sometimes I click a Facebook article and hit a paywall. Happens all the time.”

“I heard they were paying electricity bills—one day only—and I didn’t hear about it until the day after.”

“You make twenty phone calls to get someone on the line, and sometimes you still never hear back.”

On elders and community communication

“If you want somebody to know something, there should be a flyer at the post office—and if it’s on the radio, it’s playing in grandma’s kitchen.”

“We have a large population of elders, and resources are available, but we don’t get the communication.”

“The radio is on in my house twenty-four seven while I’m doing my chores.”

On the need for digital access and training

“I saw classes for elders—how to use your iPhone, how to use your PC. We don’t have that down here.”

On community stories and identity

“We are so interrelated on the reservation. Our stories go back generations—Celilo, Wasco, the code talkers. We all know each other.”

“People don’t know who we are unless they come see it—our ceremonies, our longhouses, our river.”

On the importance of archiving stories

“We interviewed elders about where they grew up, what life was like. Those stories don’t change—they’re timeless.”

On government communications

“No minutes, no details—people have to call around to figure out what’s going on.”

“Ballots were supposed to go out, but nobody knows. And now there’s silence again.”

Appendix C – “Reservation Information – a Warm Springs History” book

A video version of the book is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRa5FxaQRtc>

