

KUGS Operations Manager Position

Grant Proposal

Overview

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Summary of Proposal: The KUGS Operations Manager position would create a more manageable and sustainable staffing model for the radio station and would enhance the on-boarding and accessibility of the student positions by alleviating burdens that have created a sense of overwhelm for the student and full-time staff.

Total Fiscal Impact: \$145,000

Duration: 2-year grant, July 1, 2023-June 30, 2025

Information

Grant Objectives:

This grant will provide for the hiring of a full-time Operations Manager for KUGS, supervised by the current KUGS General Manager. The station has recently hired an Engineering & Operations Support Specialist that is a temporary (6-month) position which is set to end at the end of the current academic year (June 2023). The Operations Manager position would continue the important work begun by this temporary position as well as fulfilling duties that are more aligned with on-going and day-to-day functions of the station.

CONTEXT:

It is rare to find radio stations of our size that work with as many student staff and volunteers as KUGS does while only having a single full-time staff member, our General Manager (Jamie Hoover). The three most common full-time positions at most stations tend to be General Manager, Operations Manager, and Maintenance Engineer (with varying titles and sets of responsibilities). Our station currently has 8 student staff and coordinates approximately 80+ volunteers per year. KUGS' model has always been one of "students-first, student-operated," and that will not change. In fact, the addition of a full-time Operations Manager will make the entry point for new student staff and volunteers an easier transition with more consistent training and on-boarding and better integration of available technology to maximize efficiency for student workers.

In 2012 and 2016, the AS Board reviewed and approved the KUGS strategic recommendations as a part of the every-4-year assessment process facilitated by the AS SPAC (Structure & Programming Advisory Committee). These approved recommendations included exploring ways to create an Operations Manager position and to bring about digitization innovations. The request in this

proposal is in direct alignment with these former recommendations which have been an identified need for many years.

THE NEEDS & BENEFITS:

Addressing Overburdened Workloads

Both the General Manager, Jamie Hoover, and the student staff (for multiple years) have expressed difficulty keeping up with the demands of the station in a healthy and sustainable way. The effort required to keep a radio station on-air at all hours of the day and night is huge even in the best of circumstances. There seems to always be an urgent issue that needs the immediate attention of the single full-time manager, be it power or internet outages, flooding workspaces, inclement weather, short notice of new FCC requirements, or simply no one available to work a shift on the air, usually due to illness.

During the lockdown and staff shortages of the pandemic, Jamie was able to keep the station on-air with a small, dedicated student crew and with heavy use of our relatively new automation system that allows for pre-programming and deploying content. However, Jamie was the only person with the access and understanding to operate the automation system which meant that nearly all of her time went into loading programming into that system. Now that staff can again work in shared spaces and we have the new temp position to assist in developing training tools, we will soon get the student staff trained to use the automation system to alleviate this burden from being solely placed on the General Manager.

The other major area of overburden for the General Manager occurs when students are away during intersession, holidays, and much-deserved breaks during the end of summer. The General Manager is often the sole coverage of the station and cannot take leave during these periods, and there are many instances when it is impossible for Jamie to attend VU staff meetings or retreats in person. This has improved somewhat since our implementation of automation, but we want to be cautious to not over-rely on automation so the programming isn't all syndicated and produced elsewhere and so we keep the WWU student perspective evident in the programming choices.

Having a full-time Operations Manager on staff would address all of these concerns by adding capacity to train student staff on automation and other systems and by splitting the load of station coverage with the General Manager when students staff and volunteers aren't able to be present.

Creating Capacity for Innovation

As stated above, having only one full-time staff manager has made it difficult to fully implement systems that would enhance the station's flexibility and create efficiencies for everyone's workflow.

KUGS student staff members have expressed a strong desire to update the ways cataloging and programming are done, including developing a digital music library and expanding the number of staff trained to use the automation system, along with setting up guidelines for when and how the automation system is used. The student staff and General Manager agree that these are positive directions. We just simply need the added staff capacity to bring these developments to fruition. Instituting new systems that will be sustainable and easy to learn take ample planning and close

work with the Viking Union IT staff. Building a digital library will help KUGS' music catalog stay relevant and reduce the amount of time spent on converting tracks to hardcopy CDs for play in the studio.

The addition of an Operations Manager will also allow the General Manager to focus on areas that need further development and that are especially suited to the role of GM at a college station. We anticipate being able to do more with assessment (analyzing our successes and areas for improvement), outreach (greater station awareness and partnership on and off campus), and alumni relations (strengthening connections between former and current students and maximizing fundraising opportunities).

Additional impact has been the inability of the General Manager attending Radio/Broadcasting conferences to meet with colleagues doing similar work and to be introduced to the latest advancements in equipment and technology to better serve the students, campus, and community.

Details: This grant will pay the Operations Manager salary and benefits for two years.

Fiscal Impact

\$51,045 = July 2023- June 2024 annual salary

\$18,065 = 23-24 fringe benefits

\$53,626 = July 2024- June 2025 annual salary

\$18,272 = 24-25 fringe benefits

\$141,008 = total compensation for two years of grant

\$3,992 = additional wiggle room for step increases, hours over appointment, or Overtime as needed

Total Request = \$145,000

Justification

- **How will the grant benefit WWU students at large?**

Directly – this position will partner with the KUGS Program Director (student role) to enhance the training and tools available to students who are newly on-boarding with KUGS as volunteers, which is a role open to all students-at-large.

Indirectly – by making on-boarding better, by implementing a digital library that takes in new music at a faster rate, and by de-centralizing the use of automation in a thoughtful way, the student perspective in the programming will be amplified, hopefully also leading to even more diverse representation in the content that all students-at-large can benefit from.

- **How will the grant be successful in achieving its objectives?**

The grant will allow us to hire a full-time staff member who has the experience and knowledge to enhance the KUGS operations in all the ways mentioned above.

- **How does the grant fulfill a demonstrated need?**

KUGS still provides a very sought-after experience for students, maybe more than ever. For instance, this Fall the station had more volunteers apply than ever before! However, this great experience and awesome programming has been maintained on the shoulders of a very exhausted staff (both students and full-time). Without these changes and added staffing, it is very likely that it will be harder to recruit students into the station in the future because word will spread that the only way to keep the station going is through burnout-level work. We cannot keep demanding this much responsibility be carried by one full-time employee. The current structure would make it difficult to recruit a replacement into the General Manager role because most applicants would realize that the station is understaffed and would be apprehensive about taking the job.

- **How does the grant support marginalized students in a strong and sustainable manner?**

KUGS has a long history of excellent programming that reflects the experiences of those who are marginalized in this country, with programming like Democracy Now, Latino USA, National Native News, Native Hawaiian show, This Way Out (LGBTQ focus), and Civic Cipher: Empowering Black & Brown Voices, in addition to a wide diversity of music genres and artists.

But beyond the programming, the station has undergone a noticeable transformation in the staff make-up from an over-representation of white and male students to a much more diverse staff representing many intersecting marginalized identities.

KUGS is requesting this grant in order to be responsive to the concerns of underrepresented students and to try to increase access. It has primarily been student leaders from historically marginalized backgrounds who have expressed the need for innovation, less work burden on students, and greater and easier access to music and tech tools. Adding the Operations Manager position would address the concerns raised by student leaders at the station and hopefully reduce barriers for students from all backgrounds and lived experiences.

- **How is the grant aligned with the AS' values (equity, environmental sustainability, etc.)?**

As mentioned above, the program enhancements that come with this position support equity and access for students in that they will have a more supported and streamlined experience while working and volunteering at KUGS and will face less burnout. The AS values experiential learning opportunities for students and ensuring student voice is heard within the university. KUGS is a prime example of how that is played out with the large number of volunteers and student-generated programming. The Operations Manager position would make the whole station run more smoothly, lowering the challenge of the learning curve and widening the pathway for any student to participate.

- **How is the grant aligned with the WWU mission, AS mission, and your office mission?**

Because this grant and position would support the basic continuance of the station as a viable, healthy, and sustainable program for student involvement and leadership, and because so much of the KUGS programming centers diverse representation, current events, and student expression, all of the bolded and underlined sections below specifically relate to this grant proposal:

WWU Mission & Values:

Western Washington University is a public comprehensive institution dedicated to serving the people of the state of Washington. Together our students, staff, and faculty are committed to making a **positive impact** in the state and the world with a shared focus on academic excellence and **inclusive achievement**.

As a community, we uphold certain basic values. These include:

- Commitment to student success, **critical thought, creativity, and sustainability**
- Commitment to **equity and justice**, and respect for the rights and dignity of others
- Pursuit of excellence, in an environment characterized by principles of shared governance, academic freedom and effective engagement
- Integrity, responsibility and accountability in all our work

WWU Vision:

Western Washington University prepares and inspires individuals to **explore widely, think critically, communicate clearly, and connect ideas creatively to address our most challenging needs, problems, and questions**.

AS Objective:

The ASWWU exists to ensure student representation in decisions that impact students; **support leadership development**; provide resources, **activities, and information for students**; and provide **opportunities for students to organize themselves around their special interests**, in order to further achieve the mission of the university and complement classroom education.

KUGS Statement of Purpose:

The mission of KUGS-FM is to **serve the students of Western Washington University and the citizens of Whatcom County by providing a diverse program of music, news, and information consistent with student interests and public affairs programming that encourages a greater understanding of the human differences and cultural pluralism within the university community and the larger world we live in**. Through its programming, **KUGS will serve as a bridge from the University to the surrounding community**. KUGS is dedicated to **ensuring that its airwaves are used responsibly**.

- **What alternatives are available if funding is not awarded?**

Unfortunately, there is not a clear path toward achieving the goals named above without this funding. If the funding for this position isn't secured, we would likely see a stagnation of the progress we are starting to make toward technological innovation, and the overburdening of student and full-time staff would continue to jeopardize the future of the station. We would also have to continue putting on hold bigger picture work that benefits the station's long-term health, such as assessment, outreach, and fostering more partnerships and alumni connections. We would also lose the momentum that has been recently gained by the temporary Engineering & Operations Support Specialist after the end of that term in June.

If we were not able to employ the Operations Manager, we would still need to investigate other methods to create additional staffing capacity to more fully implement the use of automation and new digital tools. This might mean reassigning student position duties and/or contracting out on a temporary basis with recent staff who could do short-term trainings. However, this would not address the fundamental, long-term staff shortage concerns.