

Peer Review Assessment Tool For University-Licensed Public Radio Stations

Developed by:

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USA Peer Review

The University Station Alliance Peer Review is a **VOLUNTARY** confidential, consultative process involving a review team of station managers* that a public radio station requests for the purposes of sharing information, testing assumptions, and exploring potential new methods of operation that might improve performance drawing from best practices in the field. The Peer Review Team may focus on one or more aspects of a station's operations, depending upon need. The process can also provide the station's staff, board, and listener support groups as well as the university's administration, faculty, and students with ideas to address current challenges and suggested resources to aid in the effort.

Peer reviews will involve the station staff and all the important players at each respective university. Peer reviews require the work to be conducted by the station staff and the respective stake-holders. In fact, the more work accomplished by the local stake-holders, the more successful the peer review will be.

The materials and topics reviewed will include: **Strategic Management Review** (University Mission & Goals pertaining to the station, Station Mission Statement, Goals & Objectives, Mission in relation to University Mission, Student involvement), **Physical Plant Structure, Advisory Board/Groups, Financial Performance, Market Information/Audience Data, Public Service, Services Provided to the University, Staffing Structure, Unique Challenges, Unique Opportunities, Barriers to Reaching Potential, Digital Transmission Status, and Web and On-line Status.** The Peer Review Team will work with the station and the university to provide feedback, consultation, and a written report.

The Review Process

The station will receive the Peer Review Assessment tool prior to the Peer Review team's arrival. The station will provide the requested information to the USA two weeks prior to an on-site visit. The Peer Review Team will visit the station facilities in a full-day cycle. The typical on-site review will begin at noon on day one and conclude at noon on day two. The Peer Review Team will examine the operation of the station and distribute a written report to the station and the university licensee within 40 days of the on-site visit. A wrap-up conference call will be conducted within 21 days to address any questions and/or to clarify the report.

 * The reviewer pool includes many of the USA Board members plus other successful public radio managers across the country. To maintain consistency and to control the quality of reviews, one person will hold the position of coordinator of the process. The Team will consist of the lead reviewer/editor, and coordinator, Craig Beeby, USA Executive Director. The two other reviewers are chosen by the requesting station from a pre-approved pool of managers.

Planning for a Peer Review

Prior to the Peer Review team visit, the duration of a station assessment using the seven templates is three weeks. However, the time needed can vary depending on the number of people involved in the assessment process, the size of the station, and the amount of university and/or board involvement. The process is most valuable when all stakeholders are involved (staff, board members, university administrators and faculty, and other appropriate stakeholders). Including these stakeholders in the assessment gives a more balanced approach to the process and will lead to discussion at various points regarding whether, and most importantly why your station is viewed differently by different constituents.

Answer each of the following questions before starting an assessment:

- What do you wish to gain from the review process? What are your goals?
- Whom do you want to involve and when?
- Which assessment templates are appropriate for your station to complete?
- Are there any additional statements that should be added/edited to personalize the templates for your station?
- What's your timeline for conducting the assessment and reporting the results?
- How do you plan to use and share the results of the assessment?

Using the Assessment Templates

The seven assessment area templates are organized according to the functional areas of station management and operations. Each assessment template includes:

- benchmark(s)
- a list of assessment statements that can be ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being “this is never the case” to 5 being “this is always the case,” and
- a list of supporting documents to be compiled in a notebook or file

The templates can be used as a whole or individually.

Definition of Board

A Board can be defined in several ways. The clarity of the word “Board” can be more complicated in University environments than for community licensed stations. It could mean a Board of Regents, an advisory board, an advisory committee and/or a friends' board or friends' support group. The station will define it.

Some university-licensed stations do not have a board or advisory group. Therefore, the Governance template may not relate to some university stations due to the complexities of the environment. In some university environments a Board or even an advisory group is restricted by the licensee or by statute from engaging in some activities (such as fiduciary control or oversight). In this case, the Governance template will not be used. A station can select and complete the templates that most appropriately match areas needed to be addressed.

Mission and Planning

Benchmarks:

- The station has a clear sense of mission around which its staff, board, university licensee, financial resources, and activities are focused.
- The station’s programs, underwriting, fundraising, and other services effectively advance its mission and that of its university licensee.
- There is current and appropriate evidence of planning for the station and university licensee’s future.

Assessment Statements:

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
Staff, university, and board have a clear, shared understanding of the station’s and university’s mission.			
Policies, procedures and resource allocations focus on fulfilling the mission.			
Staff and board members engage in effective planning processes for the station’s future.			
The station and the university jointly plan activities with the potential to affect their mutual missions.			
Procedures are in place to regularly review and evaluate operations, goals and objectives.			
The station consistently gathers information about listeners and uses it to evaluate their planning.			
The station’s staff, board members, and university have a clear understanding of forces affecting, or with potential to affect, the station’s ability to succeed.			

Supporting Documents:

- Station mission statement, goals and objectives, date last reviewed
- University mission statement and goals pertaining to the station
- Student involvement if any

Fundraising

Benchmarks:

- Fundraising provides a means for listeners, underwriters, major donors and grant providers to become involved and express their support of public radio.
- Fundraising practices adhere to nationally accepted standards.
- Fundraising provides revenue for identified needs and advances the mission of public radio.

Assessment Statements:

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
Station agreements and fundraising plans are in place and appropriate to the scope of fundraising efforts.			
There is a case for support (case statement for the station and for major projects and programs).			
A financial plan predicts income and expense requirements, and the plan identifies dollar amounts which must be raised annually for identified needs.			
The budget adequately supports an effective fundraising program.			
Board members contribute as well as engage in fundraising endeavors.			
Funds raised for programs are consistent with the station's mission and plan.			
The station demonstrates accountability to donors through communications, i.e. annual and periodic reports.			
Adequate donor database, management, and accounting systems are in place to maintain communications, donor history, and financial records.			
Fundraising materials provide informative, accurate, and truthful information.			
Donor's rights and confidentiality are observed.			
Contributions/grant funds are used for the purposes for which they were contributed (restricted funds are not used for operating expenses or other purposes).			

Fundraising Continued

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
A gift acceptance policy exists that clearly defines the types of gifts and assets the station will accept.			
Online contributions are processed through a secure site.			
Gifts are acknowledged in a timely and appropriate manner and receipts include the required IRS and state disclosure information.			
Donors are recognized appropriately for their support.			
Benefits of membership programs are appropriate, cost effective and valued by constituents.			
A feasibility study is conducted before major capital campaigns are initiated.			
Overall costs of fundraising are measured and monitored, with a goal of maintaining fundraising costs at 30% or less of funds raised.			
Gifts are not accepted if the donor's intention is to influence the programming content produced by the station.			

Supporting Documents:

- Case statement
- Gift acceptance policy
- Membership statistics (number of members, membership dues and income)
- Total amount of revenue from fundraising over the last three years and total spent conducting fundraising activities
- Website
- Unique Challenges
- Unique Opportunities
- Barriers to reaching Potential

Finance and Regulation

Benchmarks:

- The station follows generally accepted accounting procedures and complies with all applicable laws, regulations, and Federal Communications Commission requirements.
- Resources are developed, managed, and allocated in a manner that advances the station’s mission and sustains its financial viability.

Assessment Statements:

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
The station complies with applicable local, state and federal regulations.			
The station’s financial position and planning meet its current and future needs.			
The budget process is linked to station and university goals and planning.			
Financial reports are prepared on a timely basis.			
The board has an identified finance committee.			
The station is supported by diversified sources of revenue.			
The station possesses 4 – 6 months of reserves that are invested and obtaining a fair market rate.			
Expense growth is commensurate with revenue growth (i.e. if revenue grows by 5%, expenses should compare favorably unless other circumstances apply).			
Available cash is greater than or equal to the total of temporarily restricted, permanently restricted, and custodial accounts (the station is not using restricted money for operating costs).			
Financial records are saved for at least seven years or as directed by the auditor.			
The station has three-year financial projections and explores new sources of income as appropriate.			
The accounting system provides an understandable, up-to-date financial picture of the station and meets Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.			
Internal controls on financial transactions exist which prevent people in the station and the university from misusing funds.			

Finance and Regulation Continued

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
Methods for employees to report financial misconduct are in place, and investigations follow.			
All required reports and filings are completed and up-to-date.			
The station has adequate insurance coverage including general liability and Directors and Officers liability.			
An annual report that includes financial accounting and reporting of programming services is prepared for the public and made available on the station website.			

Supporting Documents:

- Audited financial statements “AFR’s” from the three most recently completed fiscal years
- Un-audited financial statements for period from last audit to present
- Approved budget for current year
- Three-year projections
- Annual Report

Human Resources

Benchmarks:

- The station’s staff and volunteers have the appropriate education, training, experience, and support to accomplish their work
- Staffing is adequate to meet work expectations and needs.
- Responsibilities and reporting lines are clearly defined and understood.

Assessment Statements:

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
Staffing meets the needs of the station and university in terms of the number of staff, responsibilities and training.			
The station and university provide training opportunities to help build staff capacity and expertise.			
The station has comprehensive personnel policies addressing compliance with major employment laws.			
Salaries and benefits are comparable to similar job positions and markets.			
Current written job descriptions exist for employee and volunteer positions.			
If any workers are paid as independent contractors, the station complies with federal standards that govern how to distinguish between contractors and employees.			
Volunteers adequately meet the needs of the station in terms of number, diversity, and responsibilities and training.			
Positive employee/volunteer relationships are nurtured and problems are dealt with quickly.			
Systems exist to recognize and evaluate staff and volunteers.			
Systems are in place for employees/volunteers to address grievances and problems.			
Volunteers demonstrate a clear understanding of the organization and the station’s mission.			
Staff and volunteers who interact with the public receive customer service training and evaluation.			

Human Resources Continued

Supporting Documents:

- Organizational chart
- Staff list
- Position descriptions
- Resumes or bios of executive staff
- Staff handbook or policy manual
- Sample performance evaluation form
- Volunteer policies

Programming & Public Service

Benchmarks:

- Public service and programs extend the station’s capacity to provide quality life-long learning experience for the public.
- Continuous evaluation ensures the relevancy and viability of all program offerings serving the public interests and needs.

Assessment Statements:

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
Program goals are clearly articulated and appropriate to the mission, audience and resources.			
Information about audience interests and use is effectively gathered and included in the station’s planning efforts.			
Programs are regularly evaluated and adjusted based upon results.			
Programs generated contributions or are subsidized according to plan by other resource generating activities (i.e. underwriting and/or grants).			
Programs maximize the commitment, skills and resources for the station, university, listeners and other financial supporters.			
Free programming meets the station’s standards, and staff or volunteers receive appropriate training and evaluation.			
Marketing plans exist for all programs and are updated regularly based upon new information.			

Supporting Documents:

- Market Information/Audience Data – Arbitron/RRC, Audigraphics (if available) for the past three years
- Services provided to the University
- 60 dBu Coverage Map
- Digital Transmission Status
- Program Schedule

Public Communications and Outreach

Benchmarks:

- The station responsively and proactively reaches out to its constituents with relevant information and public service.

Assessment Statements:

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
The station understands and values the role of marketing and has identified distinctive groups or segments that make up its listenership.			
The station’s stakeholders and target audiences are well informed about its work.			
The station receives sufficient media coverage that reaches its target audiences. It tracks this coverage.			
The station has a clear understanding of its image in the community(ies) it serves.			
The station uses technology, including a Web site and email to streamline communications.			
The station asks for feedback from the people it works with, and then acts upon that feedback.			
The station participates in alliances and collaborative groups which advance the organization’s goals and expand its influence.			
The Web site is updated on a regular basis.			
The station has designated an individual to deal with questions from the media and all media requests are referred to that person.			
Procedures exist for use of station’s name and logo.			

Supporting Documents:

- Promotional materials, brochures, flyers
- Web site address
- Marketing plan
- Most recent newsletter

Governance

Benchmarks:

- The station operates from a firm foundation of carefully conceived and regularly revisited bylaws and related core documents.
- The governance structure and processes effectively advance the station’s mission.
- The board and staff have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and a commitment to the mission of the station and university.

Assessment Statements:

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
The station’s documentation adequately establishes its structure, function and delegation of authority.			
Bylaws and other policy documents are reviewed frequently and updated as necessary.			
The station periodically conducts a comprehensive assessment of its operations.			
Board members are personally committed to the mission of the station.			
The composition of the board represents the diversity of constituencies served by the station and also a diversity of perspectives, skills, and resources that meets the needs of the station.			
The board has an effective process to select, recruit, and provide orientation for new members.			
Term limits for board members are established and observed.			
The number of current board members is consistent with what is required in the bylaws or state statutes.			
The board’s committee structure addresses major aspects of governance. Committees have and fulfill clear descriptions and goals.			
The director and chair of the board work effectively together.			
The board meets on a regular basis, at least three times per year. Meetings are well-planned, with the agenda and information for decision-making sent to members in advance.			

Governance Continued

Rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 = This is never the case. 5 = This is always the case.	Staff	Board	University
The decisions of the board give the station a solid basis to move forward.			
Decisions are recorded in the minutes.			
The station maintains a conflict of interest policy that all board members and staff review and sign to acknowledge compliance.			
The board evaluates its own performance and makes improvements based on its evaluation process.			
The board has a systematic, fair, and supportive process for evaluating the executive director on a regular basis.			
Board members help raise significant resources for the station and make contributions themselves.			
The board exercises prudent fiscal oversight of the station.			

Supporting Documents:

- Bylaws
- List of board members, with their terms and officer positions and committee assignments indicated
- Board orientation materials, including terms, position descriptions and committee structure
- Code of ethics/ethics policy
- Conflict of interest policy/statements
- Minutes from past year's meetings