

Executive Summary
The Cost of Doing Business in Public Radio
Report on Governance

Fourteen stations representing the full range of licensee types and relationships engaged in an extensive examination of governance issues affecting university licensed public radio stations. Participants were generally satisfied with their relationship with their licensee, but they assumed other managers were less satisfied. The group discussed issues common to most university licensees: reporting structure, limited governing board contact, university support, and bureaucratic processes. Participants expressed frustration with a range of workflow processes at their institutions, but also realized the value and protection those same processes afforded the station. Common to successful licensee relationships were open communications, mutual respect, and connection through mission. A key finding was that there is no apparent inherent barrier to success that exists in the traditional university governance structure. For every university station faced with a specific governance issue there is another that has successfully addressed the issue. Managers must realize that universities are political, as well as educational, entities.

There exists a need within the university radio station cohort for more information and support which will enhance effective management. Managers would be well served to better understand the political and financial dynamics which exist on today's university campuses. Participants were especially interested in training that would better prepare them for basic business planning functions. Managers also would benefit from engaging in scenario planning in order to be prepared for sudden changes in finances, governance

structure, or mission. Participants would like to see mechanisms developed that would provide access to mentoring and/or consulting relationships that would assist them in confronting governance issues on their campuses. They also support renewed efforts to connect with the higher education community on their campuses and at the national level.

Participants discussed various alternative governance structures such as the establishment of a separate 501(c)3 organization, responsibilities of which can be single purpose, such as receiving and spending money on behalf of the station, to multipurpose with financial, policy, and management oversight responsibilities. There are several variations of hybrid governance structures which specific stations have found useful. Participants concluded that governance issues in the university setting are highly situational and there is no “one size fits all” solution. Rather, the appropriate question which must be addressed is “what governance structure for which stations under what conditions.” Regardless of governance structure, today’s university radio station manager must be entrepreneurial, proactive, and politically savvy. #