

NFCB PRESENTATION – PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Nathan Moore, March 2008

Three broad categories of Program Development for new stations:

1. Broadcast Skills Training
2. Program Evaluation & Improvement
3. Designing Program Grid

Broadcast Skills Training

- Helping People to find their voice and make connection with their audience.

A. *Skill sets* that have to be developed by volunteers

For *music programmers*: (most also apply to news/public affairs)

- Comfort on-mic; voicing
- Mechanics: legal IDs, logs, start/end on-time, etc
- Board operating
- Putting together music set & break
- FCC compliance: language regs, many other regs

For *news & public affairs programmers*:

- Interviewing
- Writing for radio
- Digital editing
- Producing – planning & pulling together pieces
- Community journalism ethics & philosophy

(Point to resources for training)

B. *Processes for training* new volunteers:

- Emphasize the importance of having designated people to train others and handle volunteer relations – could be paid staff, a set of veteran volunteers, etc.
- After training, there needs to be a clear way for people to be involved with station.
- You'll come up with a system that works for you and your local situation, but here's a suggested three-step process for bringing new people into your station:
 - 1st contact: tour, talk up station, talk with volunteer and see what they're into
 - 2nd visit: 45-60 minute training one-on-one in the basics
 - 3rd step: Peer training, supplemented by occasional group workshops

Program Evaluation and Improvement

- Periodically reviewing what we're doing so we can do it better

-- What axes do we review?

- Mission fulfillment
- Radio mechanics
- Content selection
- Genre-specific skills

(Point to some sample evaluation tools.)

-- Who does the reviewing?

- Program Committee or Director? – People entrusted by the station to think about and make decisions about programming...
- Programmers themselves? – self-review often the toughest

- Peers? – they know the genre and broadcast issues best
 - Community? – those who are/could be listeners
- ALL OF THE ABOVE – bring in all these groups for a well-rounded review. That said, limited resources early on – self- and peer-eval would be easiest to begin with and get people into the habit of doing program reviews from the beginning.

-- Why do reviews?

- NOT to kick programmers off the air.
- INSTEAD, to improve skills, get more listeners, and increase listener loyalty

-- When to add Program Director or staff equivalent? Three factors that should be met:

1. When you're encountering mutually exclusive programming options that both seem to fulfill the mission.
2. When training/recruitment/maintaining traffic get to be too much for volunteers, even committed ones
3. When you can afford it.

-- A word on structures –

- Typical arrangement at stations is a Program Director with clear authority. The wise PD is consultative, but doesn't necessarily have to be.
- Some stations are more horizontal, usually via Program Committees. Democratic input is perhaps more likely if codified in process, but decisions are quite slow to make.

Designing Program Grid

- Arranging our program schedules to be of best service to our communities and to reach lots of listeners.

-- You know your communities –

- Who do you want to reach?
- What goals do you have for your station?

---- How you answer these questions has direct bearing on how you design your grid.

-- But some things are likely consistent for all of us:

- We want people to tune in each week (Cume)
- We want them to tune in a lot (AQH)
- We want them to stay tuned in (TSL)

(Explain terms Cume, AQH, TSL – borrowed from radio biz, but still relevant goals for us.)

How to get people to tune in, come back, and stay tuned in?

1. Know when people tend to use radio and internet.

Radio: Peaks 6-9am and 4-7pm

Internet: Peaks 10am-12n and 4-9pm

--- That'll change in certain markets or if you're trying to reach certain communities; e.g. farmworkers (early risers), college students (late risers), etc.

2. Employ vertical flow – a fancy word for one program leading into another in order to keep listeners tuned in. Examples: WORT's Saturdays, KPFK's weekday mornings.

Vertical flow, on a basic level, includes minimizing music-public affairs transitions,

especially during peak hours. Shows need not be identical, but there is some connection – enough to develop an overlap in audience

3. Employ horizontal flow – people tend to listen to radio at the same times each day, and most of those people don't radically shift their tastes from one day to the next. Best if we don't. Strip programming (e.g. Dem. Now) vs. “Stratified block” programming (e.g. WORT's weekday morning folk/bluegrass). Latter can be thought of as riffs on a theme.

4. Complement local & national programming – The temptation may be to do all local DJs & hosts, but listeners also want to know about national issues. And very few local stations have the resources to cover those issues thoroughly. National & local programs can complement each other and build both. Pacifica national and Archives programs available.

5. Balance the various genres that you're likely to include in your grid. But don't fool yourself – one hour in Spanish won't pull Latino listeners from the all-Spanish station; one hour of hip-hop won't pull many listeners from the “urban” station. (This assumes a market with this sort of competition.)

6. Find the right time of day for a genre or format.

Charge and benediction

- Experiment as you go
- Encourage flexibility among programmers
- See what works, and have fun making radio!