

PRIMA

Public Radio in Mid-America

Chicago Fall Conference

September 30- October 2, 2009

Strategies for Critical Challenges Facing Public Media

Context and Introduction:

In San Antonio (Prima Winter Conference 2009) we identified the challenges facing public media and how we can address them. In Chicago we focused on strategy. This “summit” of leaders and managers was an informed discussion of critical topics involving everyone in all sessions. Portions of each session were facilitated. We wanted to leave the conference with ideas and strategies to share with managers in the system.

Process Description and Documentation:

The facilitated summary highlights **key ideas** each topic, identifies **vision and obstacles to vision**, and articulates a **strategy** in each arena. Following the discussions of the first day and the early morning of the second day, we divided into small groups to generate a **scenario** for each topic (in box).

DIALOGUE 1

IDENTIFYING THE DIGITAL STRATEGY

Info Update was presented by Kinsey Wilson

In San Antonio we agreed that to be a media leader public broadcasting needs to occupy a strong position in the new emerging public media space. To do this we need to agree on and execute a strategic vision. Are we doing this? Who is formulating this vision?

Key ideas – highlights from discussion

- First we need to define ourselves. As public broadcasters we refer to ourselves as “we.” **But who are “we?”** What defines us? Who acts on behalf of the “we?” Is “we” a coherent entity? This question was posed in San Antonio, but not clearly answered. In addition, the proliferation of other entities calling themselves “public media” blurs lines even further.
- We speak of a **digital “strategy” but we have not articulated it fully.** It seems to reside in various places in bits and pieces – at NPR, CPB, PBS, APM, PRI, and elsewhere. In addition, we need to identify this strategy in an environment that is constantly in flux. How do we create innovation flexibility within a structure that needs to be cohesive?
- We **lack a clearly defined digital leadership structure.** Many stations formulate strategy in their own shops; most stations have a web presence or are involved in web development. But we don’t have a clearly defined coordinating structure that involves all current public broadcasting players and is entrusted to lead our efforts. This lack of cohesiveness can be a handicap in the fast-paced digital world; it doesn’t let us react quickly to new opportunities; it doesn’t allow us to develop an online brand effectively.
- A positive shift in the past year is that we are becoming more confident on two levels: as independent stations, and as independent stations that also work collectively without sacrificing individuality. This shift will be helpful as we formulate a common strategy.
- What is the **unique selling proposition that we collectively share** and how do we define it?
- Audio content – this sets our digital experience apart from others. It’s a core strength -- a defining characteristic.
- Can there be levels of participation developed -- so all can be on board? Stations are not resourced equally; not everyone can move into the digital future at the same pace. We need to develop a step process that allows stations to develop along benchmarks.

- Public service is another defining characteristic. Though it is practiced differently at stations according to size and abilities, all stations can agree on a similar definition of “service” and practice this service on various levels.
- Funding will follow community engagement.
- Reverse the experience: use digital platforms to introduce audience to existing radio programs.
- Journalism is another defining characteristic, and perhaps our foremost core strength. Planting our journalism in different platform environments is one strategic pathway to success.
- What defines “success?” How do we know we’re successful?

Vision *for the digital arena:*

- Be THE high-quality content aggregators and disseminators for the nation.
- Achieve brand superiority -- Be the CNN in journalism – command the top-of-mind-awareness position.
- Develop a public broadcasting organizational model that serves all partners, streamlines decision-making, and increases our ability to compete effectively.

Blocks and obstacles

- Fear of losing local branding/identity.
- We often see digital as a threat or time-waster rather than a possibility/opportunity.
- We see no benefit in digital; we don’t know how to monetize the digital service.
- Many stations under-resourced in staff and technology equipment.
- Lack of a step progressive structure that allows stations to build up digital capacity.
- Leadership hole: who is defining the digital strategy, leading it, monitoring its progress?
- There is no societal agreement on the definition of journalism – lack of agreement on value of new idioms such as blogging. Is it of value to us?
- Internal cultural inhibitions: we don’t do breaking news; we are NPR – an in-depth story news source only.

Significant actions

- Integrate and aggregate local and national content in a more compelling way that attracts online consumption.
- Let NPR lead in the national journalism realm. They are the journalism center for many stations.
- Standardize measurement for on line value; explore revenue-sharing business plan.

- Stations need to use NPR and local to replace Google? Instead of going to Google – they should go NPR. People go to NPR, find station material, and land on station sites.

Name for the strategy: Build a centralized strategic center that allows for “flexible cohesion” and creates a strong national brand.

Strategic Scenario: Claiming the Digital and New Platforms		
Current Reality What are our challenges; What is working for us in our current situation?	Measurable Accomplishments Significant actions programs or projects to start this year towards multi year projected outcomes	Success indicators Outcomes within the next three years which we intend to generate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited and stretched resource\$ • Usage is low & disparate • Integration of local and national info is hit or miss at best • Fear about NPR cooptation • People do not look at the NPR web site in ways we hope they will • Organization has national presence with local output • High Quality of content • Increased Diversity of funding • Highly Recognized brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmark the local & national system • Seamless integration of NPR content with local content, i.e., agreement by –‘we will give you access to meaningful content • Website generates X?% of income • System wide recognition of digital mindset shift (more stations streaming) increased amount of mobile usefulness • Increase full time digital employees at stations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurable increase in on-line donation and audience • Integrated usable local & national content • “Go to “ locations for news and cultural information • Creation of an on-line community • Donations going back to local stations

DIALOGUE 2

DEFINING OUR PLACE IN THE PUBLIC MEDIA UNIVERSE

Resource person Mike Riksen and Bruce Theriault

When veteran CBS newsman Dan Rather called for a Presidential Commission on the Future of Journalism and Public Media, his idea received mixed reviews. It resonated with public broadcasters, though. We were reminded that we are no longer alone in the public media universe. There are other entities moving into the “public media” space who are vying for public and legislative attention. How do we react to this?

Key points and Highlights

- Unless we act, our position as the public media could slip away from us.
- Education is a key to differentiating the public media audience.
- Local engagement is the fundamental shift.
- Follow public TV’s lead – not just push our content onto new platforms.
- Public is doing it anyway, do we want to be a leader in it?
- Position for reauthorization. Defining our place in the public media world is key to reauthorization.

Vision *for this arena*

- Vision is who we are – What does it take to declare ourselves public media?
- We are the place for serious national political discussion.
- The good news is that the underlying values that we hold dear haven’t changed even though the platforms may be changing. We need to act those values forward.
- Players in the “public media” space emphasize public participation – we need to open some doors for move participatory journalism.

Blocks and Obstacles: *to moving forward on our vision*

- We need a plan what services can we provide to justify the title – Public Media.
- Platform proliferation is happening...we need to define our participation in it.
- Web translators, HD radio –we already are public media in a platforms sense.

Significant Action

- Fundamental shift from being a broadcaster to being more engaged in your community. You go beyond providing information to being a problem solver, a "community media center". We need to steer the discussion; be prepared to lead or someone else will lead it for us.

- We need to re-invent ourselves – don’t just send out the information – convene and lead.
- We need to be included to make good on congressional investment. We have to show the evolution of public broadcasting into public media.

Name of the Strategy:

- We are not there yet – hard to name.
- Personalize a mass media experience (how?).
- Re-frame what we are/do/and call ourselves.
- How do we engage the deciders so it goes our way?
- We need to be prepared to lead the discussion.
- Reposition yourself before someone else does it for you

Strategic Scenario: “Positioning Ourselves in the Public Media Universe”		
Current Reality What are our challenges; What is working for us in our current situation?	Measurable Accomplishments Significant actions programs or projects We intend towards our three year projected outcomes	Success indicators Outcomes within the next three years which we intend to generate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are public media in practice but not in name. • We are “NPR” • Other people beyond us use the term • No reauthorization • Do not have SCNF X resource for mass media push • Current 10% awareness • Public service mandate • Not universal agreement on relevance of the concern” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We standardize the term • Come to agreement on industry marketing plan • Articulate position for reauthorization • Define “Public Media” – not just the term but the goal and outcome • Establish baseline of public awareness – survey, etc. • Clarify public services vs. advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We own the term National media and the public sees us as first of mind • Establish the name • Gain reauthorization • Definition – Hear it back from the public • Draw trajectory • Agreed upon differentiation

DIALOGUE 3

FUNDRAISING IN THE NEW PUBLIC UNIVERSE

Resource persons: Doug Eichten, Ron Schiller

The focus of this session was changed. Ron Schiller was introduced to the group to talk about his plans for NPR fundraising initiatives.

Key points and highlights

- Importance of believing we have something important to accomplish and we can do it.
- NPR raising money with the stations.
- Put givers needs and our needs together – real partnership
- How do we articulate the news/info mission into operational support?
- What is the 100 million dollar idea for us? We need a truly compelling idea or vision to excite a truly major giver.
- Need new paradigm thinking
- what does it do to our “We” thinking
- We are relevant to our donors
- Need to think beyond sustainable \fundraising of “funding for survival”
- We’ve done a good job of being relevant in the lives of our donors at least 4 times a year. We need to become more relevant to those who can afford to share a vision with us.
- But even more so we are there every day

Vision

- Define what does it mean for us to have a big Idea, a concept that is transformational and captivates the donor.
- Bring down giving silos within stations, regions, national.
- Fund a piece of our big play in journalism.

Blocks:

- Do we harm ourselves with on air fundraising? Too small?
- On the other hand, don’t lose community energy of having 3.5 million donors. We need to show the groundswell of support is important.
- Stop implying that \$365 per year is huge.
- NPR has half the key; the local stations have the other half – the people are the sizzle – collaboration.
- We still need to articulate the \$100 million idea – we are too focused on the day to day cash flow needs to think big together.
- Articulate a 100 million idea. For example, becoming the public media “go to”

- Givers want their gift to work they will want to know we've thought our winning concept through in detail and together.
- The more we work together the more we will succeed.

Significant actions:

- Clear articulation of what we are going forward; this includes our self-definition of public media
- Get out of giving silos
- What is the platform for this? Shouldn't the community and its needs be included in formulating the 100 million idea?
- How to use Advisory Boards to help define this idea; but be careful – don't gather an Advisory Board if

- Donors love the concept of leverage —a great opportunity for us.
- We have strategized several times before, but there is a new set of players at national organizations. Different environment.

you have no defined direction or need for it

- Create an Advisory Board to identify those you are not serving?
- NPR-DEI could facilitate – when will we know we have gotten to a place that works for the entire System as a whole.

Strategy name: Engage Philanthropic Partnership

Strategic Scenario: Engaging with Philanthropic Partners		
Current Reality What are our challenges; What is working for us in our current situation?	Measurable Accomplishments Significant actions programs or projects intended this year towards our three year projected outcomes	Success indicators Outcomes within the next three years which we intend to generate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1000 is considered a major gift • CPB recognizes the problem • Uncoordinated pursuit of major givers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating larger first gifts • CPB's proof of performance with leadership for philanthropy • Coordinated relationship between NPR foundation and key system advocates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift image to \$10,000 = major gift • Expanded training for system by licensee type • \$100,000,000 gift with station and network coordinated effort

DIALOGUE 4

TAKING THE LEAD IN JOURNALISM

Dialogue Resource Person: Vivian Schiller President of NPR

In San Antonio we recognized that the void in commercial media opens an opportunity for public media. We articulated steps that could strengthen our journalistic public service. Now we ask: What have the latest Pew survey results about journalism taught us? How can public broadcasting become THE pre-eminent journalistic entity in America? What's our strategy?

Key ideas and Highlights

- We reach the people where they are.
- Select areas of coverage -- especially vital in areas where our citizens need the most
- What makes our Journalism good and trusted (Pew study)-- is the standards of NPR:
 - *Fairness, factual, edited, vetted etc; those practices are what makes NPR journalism the best
 - *Also funded by its users -- not trying to sell something; Independent from commercial influences
- *Relevant material covered
- *Intentional skepticism
- These things are important because our society is based on a free press.
- It is a calling – to serve – to make peoples lives well and democracy stronger...
- Public broadcasting – media – is the last locally owned station which is based on a membership who pays for it to keep it independent. We need to do a better job of telling that story

Vision

- More users of what we provide -- 3 million givers to 6 million givers.
- We need to engage more of America. Diversity is key.
- We need to better articulate our unique story.
- Fox is not a bigger patriot than NPR, we need to be a bigger patriot that looks after Americans
- Our value to Americans needs to be created—recreated -- in every generation.
- We need strong “J” centers across the country
- We need more dialogue on more levels
- Culture feeds the spirit; journalism feeds the mind/intellect
- We need to broaden our cultural perspective so as not to be perceived as elitist.
- We need to raise the level of civic discourse – increasing civility of self governance in the USA for generations to come

- Spirit, intellect, and heart – become the essence of the community

Blocks and obstacles

- Under resourced; under funded,
- No sustainable marketing strategy
- Distrust; turf protection.
- Unclear as to how to address diversity –Demographic and Psychographic

Significant Actions

- Communicate the values we hold dear.
- Tout awards- publicity!
- Think big ideas for big funds
 - Strengthen the individual station news departments

Strategic Scenario: Becoming the Journalistic and Cultural Center		
Current Reality What are our challenges; What is working for us in our current situation?	Measurable Accomplishments Significant actions or projects that can be taken towards our three year outcomes	Success indicators Outcomes we intend to generate within the next three years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We lack compelling presentation of our journalism on-line (local and national) • Disparity of resources in the system vs. on-line • Internal culture: “we don’t do breaking news” • Multiple internal agendas at the station level • Don’t know how to monetize on-line • Philanthropic fundraising still in infancy • Too few trained journalists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for stations (to catch up to Kinsey Wilson) • Funding for journalistic training. • Create training opportunities • Adjust culture in news-breaking news is doable • Prioritize station’s best products • Get ideas from outside the system – consultants? • Create a process for collaborative fundraising • Create training camps for graduating journalism students to learn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are the #1 “go to” on line and on air source for Journalism • Public service begets public support: –Number of donors at all levels – amount of income \$\$\$ -- Higher average gift\$ -- Donors in clued individuals, corporate, foundations, Etc. • Awards (local and national) • Recognition in other media for the “scoops”/enterprise reporting

DIALOGUE 5

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Resource Person; Tom Thomas, via speaker phone
Discussion followed presentation

Public radio growth resulted in many separate but duplicative entities, many licensees with broadcast-unfriendly agendas, and several program and service providers with competing agendas. Is this model allowing us to reach our full potential? Should there be a plan?

Key ideas and Highlights:

- Stations not following best practices, i.e. Boards, ROI, PRPD check list
- National fiscal collapse should lead stations to collaborations
- The use of Boards is not consistent – university/community licensees are structured differently
- Boards: if you don't need a board don't start one
- Rather get a "Leadership Council" for community involvement and to access fund raising "They want to help as expertise and as significant leaders"
- Gathering the significant leaders makes you significant and legitimate as well
- National organizations also have duplicative efforts; communication not as strong as it could be
- This is evident in the way we approach digital – many entities and stations going at it from different directions, but without a central core

Vision: *What is our vision in this arena? What do we want to see in place in three years?*

- Structure and development of resources we already have among stations; invest in the share model
- Address the difficulties university licensees are experiencing; fettered access to donors, collapsing campus budgets, aging facilities
- Coordinated discussions among all national public broadcasting players that lead to a serious and sustainable collaborations, identify and respect strengths, and combine resources

Obstacles:

- In the non profit world what is the incentive for 22 organizations to merge, collaborate, and consolidate?
- There are a finite amount of resources available to us

- Many organizations in the community have the same challenge and are our partners and competitors
- Don't have the stomach to say "You need to stop;" "You have to maintain at least this much or you are out". Are there too many stations? Are they sustainable?
- Our organizational structures have not kept up with the times
- CPB can be a resource for creating incentives to help make the transition, this is happening to a degree in through grants, but could be more focused
- Do not have meaningful performance standards for stations that encourage best practices

Significant Actions to take.

- Encourage stations to look for collaborative opportunities in their programming and backroom operations
- Encourage use of best practices; incentivize best practices through grants that allow stations to build cooperations
- Encourage national organizations (NPR, PRI, etc.) to collaborate in formulating common system-nourishing goals

Strategic name: Developing Standards and Channels for Organizational Development

Strategic Scenario

For the sake of time and focus a strategic scenario was not created for this Dialogue.

Design and facilitation of the product and document was provided by George Packard of

Bridging Futures, LLC 1300 Escalante Street, Santa Fe, NM 87505

Phone: 505 660-7070; *E-mail:* george.packard1@RCn.com

*Additional facilitation was provided by Dennis Jennings and Judy Weddle, with whom George is an Associate, in **Facilitation Services of Chicago**, 4750 North Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60640*

Phone: 773-769-9266; *E-mail:* dennisjennings1@gmail.com and Weddlehope@aol.com