

PRIMA Training Materials

Developed by:

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**University
Station
Alliance**

A grassroots initiative for
university-licensed stations

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*University is a generic title that includes colleges, school systems, and state agencies.

To Whom Should a Station Report?

Will your station survive in its present university reporting structure with the ever-increasing need to raise dollars to sustain and grow a public station? Since two-thirds of the public radio stations are owned by universities, it is important to review the strengths and weaknesses of each of the possible reporting structures. Where does a station fit within a university structure in a way that benefits both the university and the station?

Survey

In USA's 2008 - 2009 survey sent to university-licensed stations, **71% of station managers said they report to a "Vice President" or higher (Chancellor or Provost)**. Those station managers reporting to a "Vice President" or higher included **57% reporting to a "Vice President"** with varied titles (Sr. VP, Associate VP, Assistant VP, and Executive VP), **7% reporting to a Chancellor** (Vice Chancellor, Assistant Vice Chancellor), and **7% reporting to a Provost** (Associate Provost). Of the remaining managers responding to the USA survey, 18% said they reported to a Dean, 9% reported to a Director (School), and 4% reported to a Department Chair.

University Office Titles

Although it is important to keep in mind that job titles can have varied definitions and responsibilities, here are examples of university office titles to which a station may report and examples of ways in which these title-holders may view the value and measurement on a station. Included are the percentages of station managers reporting to each university office.

- **Chancellor - Sometimes called a President or Rector. (7%)** The head administrator of the university. Usually his or her primary function is to raise money and if state-funded, to lobby for tax-based support. This reporting structure moves the station closest to the power within the university – the

Trustees or the Board of Regents. **This reporting structure reflects the university's recognition of the importance of public stations.** The average tenure of the head university administrator is about five years. When the top administrator changes, reporting structure modifications often follow. New top administrators often bring their upper administrative personnel with them, so when there is a President or Chancellor change, the VP's and Provost often change within the next two years. In contemporary hiring practices, the university trend is to move away from academicians and move toward individuals with political, fundraising, and CEO experience. Therefore, this position is usually highly political. Like other top administrators, the Chancellor's **measurement is more outward-focused** and is usually more likely to value public service, life-long learning, and arts and cultural awareness.

- **Provost or Executive Vice President (7%)** – Often second in command behind the Chancellor or President and the person actually running the internal affairs of the university. This reporting structure moves the station closer to the power within the university – the Trustees or the Board of Regents. **This reporting structure reflects the university's recognition of the importance of public stations.** Again, the Provost's **measurement is more outward-focused** and therefore more likely to value public service, life-long learning, and arts cultural awareness.
- **Vice President (57%)** – *Examples Academic Affairs, Outreach and Public Service, or Budget & Planning* - **The majority of public stations report to a person at the VP level. This reporting structure reflects the university's recognition of the importance of public stations.** Reporting to the VP of budget and finance is often advantageous as he or she is in better control of university money and budgets. Also, if you are doing any expansion, your proposals will have to go through them for approval anyway. The Vice President's **measurement is more outward-focused** and is usually more likely to value public service, life-long learning, and arts cultural awareness.

- **Dean (18%)** – Reporting to a Dean is usually better than reporting to a department or school. In particular the Dean of Arts and Science is often excellent at protecting firewall issues such as “freedom of speech” and buffering against upper administration attempts at influencing programming content. Of course, practically speaking, if a station must report to a Dean, it is probably best to report to the Dean with the largest fiscal budget. During budget-cut times, the university is less likely to cut an academic Dean’s budget. It will be protected more than other areas because STUDENTS and student training are a university priority. The academic areas are usually the first to receive new moneys in better times. A Deans’ **measurement is inward focused** and is usually not centered on public service, but more likely to place value on life-long learning, and the arts and culture especially if it is the Dean of Arts & Sciences.
- **School (9%)** – *Example Journalism & Broadcasting & Public Relations* – This reporting level is slightly broader than a department but is still defined by training and educating students. One positive for this structure is that there is usually an understanding of news integrity and firewall issues and more appreciation for public service programming. Still, the school’s **measurement is inward-focused** and is usually more centered on student training than on public service and arts and cultural awareness.
- **Department Head (4%) - Example #1 - Communications Department** - Generically speaking, a station’s primary focus is public service, and public service is not usually the primary concern of a department. The department’s main concern is usually focused on TRAINING STUDENTS, so a department’s performance **measurement of success focuses on how many students are involved** with the station and how many hours of training students received? (Prior to 1970, university-licensed public stations were called “educational stations” and were primarily used as training laboratories for students. Most stations then were under a department structure.) **Example #2 - University Public Relations (PR) Department** – Though the PR department usually has a

broader licensee interest, this reporting structure tends to lead to more station news firewall breach attempts. Often, the primary question by administrators from PR departments is what has the station done for the university lately? The PR department is paid to promote the university, so their station measurement will focus on how often the station has promoted the university. Again, this department's **measurement is inward-focused** and is usually not centered on public service, life-long learning, or the arts and cultural awareness.

An Efficient Reporting Structure

An efficient university reporting structure is one that results in an effective line of communications between station management and the FCC broadcast license holder. The license holder is usually the governing body (board of regents, board of trustees, or school board). **The university's administration and governing body should recognize that the FCC licenses the station to serve the community's interests and needs** on a daily basis and therefore utilize broad outward-focused performance measurement criteria that define the station's importance and influence its success within the university and throughout the community.

The reporting structure should allow the station management, the university administration, and the governing body to have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities and a commitment to the mission of the station and university. The reporting structure should effectively enhance cooperation between the station and the university as both strive to fulfill their mutual as well as separate missions.

By placing a station high on the administrative reporting ladder, the university is broadening the station's focus which improves the station's ability to surpass university performance measurements. Since top-level administrators are more likely to embrace public service as an important station focus, they are also more likely to understand the importance of the station to the university.

A station's performance can be measured by several university focuses (Academics, Research, Outreach, & Public Service) and **it is the responsibility of the station management to interpret the station's mission and accomplishments into paradigms valued by the university.** Also, it is the responsibility of university administrators to be cognizant of the broad contributions the station provides to the different areas of university importance.

It is useful to compare your station's reporting chain of command to those of the Athletic Department, the Alumni Association, and/or the University Foundation. These university entities are usually recognized as broad-based outward-focused units representing the university as a whole and providing outreach and services to external communities. Your station should be recognized equally with these entities and in many cases the outreach your station provides far exceeds the external contacts resulting from the others.

Is It Time for a Change in Your Reporting Structure?

During my three-decade tenure at the helm of a public station, each time I felt the station was not meeting its potential, I could trace it in-part to the university reporting structure. **The message of the station's importance was not getting to the people in the power positions within the university structure.** Because the university's success measurements for the station were too narrowly defined due to the reporting structure, the station's potential was stifled.

I began my tenure at a station reporting to a department which was part of a school. I took a student-run station considered an ancillary training laboratory reporting to a broadcasting department and transformed it into a statewide public radio network. **The internal university reporting structures were critical to the success of the station.** After my first three years, the station reported to a Dean. My goal for the station in year two was to have the station reporting to the VP level, and by the fifth year, that goal became a reality.

Each upgrade was a step closer to gaining recognition from the university that the station's importance and success were critical to the university and that the station's success would reflect positively upon the university. Each move carried the station closer to the Governing board, and each move helped remove another internal layer of station message filtering. In addition, the moves were followed by winning more regional and national awards for journalism including the duPont Columbia Award for Broadcast Journalism Excellence (considered the equivalent of the Pulitzer) in year five. It also was reflected in the additional revenues generated because of the increased performance in programming designed to meet the community's needs. The community valued the station more due to increased local programming and in turn, the listeners contributed more reflecting the added value of the local programming.

If your university's reporting structure is interfering with the success of the station, you have options. The first (and by far the easiest) is to leave the station, which does not help promote public broadcasting. The second is to attempt to make a change, and if you are successful, you and the station will enjoy the rewards. This process can be a difficult and time consuming process with a lot of politics involved. But if you are successful the rewards and gains for public service far outstrip the struggle.

Steps to Changing the Reporting Structure

Making a reporting structure change is difficult, time consuming, and political, especially if all factions are not in agreement. Each university setting will require tweaking the process. Here are some steps to follow and, not necessarily in chronological order.

- **Universities like to compare their performance with other universities.**
Use the information in the USA paper *To Whom Should a Station Report Within a University Structure?* to help demonstrate where other universities are placing their stations.
- **Create a business plan.** Universities are becoming more sophisticated and business-minded. Any plans for changes should be justified by a supportive business plan.
- **If you do not already have one create a station advisory group, a friends' board or a friends' support group for the station.** The clarity of the word "Board" can be complicated in University environments. This is not the University Board or University Trustees. The station will define it. Note: In some university environments a Board or even an advisory group is restricted by the licensee or by statute from engaging in some activities
- **If the station does not already have planning documents, develop them and include a mission statement, goals, and objectives.** Review the

university's mission statement and their goals and translate how the station fits into those plans.

- **Communicate your station's value to multiple upper administration resources.** Send out monthly emails to all the campus administrators touting the station's accomplishments and the ways the station promotes the university. It may include the number of public service announcements about university events, the number of university faculty or staff sources used as experts in a news report, information about the broadcast of the university symphony, special features about university projects, etc. If students are used under the supervision of the station's professional staff, feature a student of the month and describe the duties performed by the student.
- **Never Surprise Your Boss.** If you are working on this process, get your boss involved early before contacting outside groups. You want to be considered a "team player" with solutions rather than a "trouble maker" with complaints. In fact, if the boss has early buy-in, he or she may help gain support both internally and externally for the change.
- **Get 100% agreement and buy-in among the station staff** and endorsements from the station advisory group, major funders, political connections, and other key individuals whom the university respects and trusts.
- **Sometimes you simply have to wait for university administrations to leave.**
- **Be patient** because it takes time and energy that will be added to all the other jobs and duties the GM has. The process to move my station from an ancillary training laboratory reporting to a broadcasting department to a Vice President took about five years and success came in incremental steps
- **Reporting structures and office space are two sacred areas for some within universities.** Be prepared to become a target. I survived firing threats due to proposing university structural changes, and I survived other internal unit's harassment after a structural change was made. The great rewards come in the long-run when those who first opposed the change came and

congratulated me on the station's successes. In effect they were saying you were right to do what you did and your vision of the future was correct.

- **Change is a negative word** – The typical first response to change of any kind is negative. Be prepared with a list of positives.
- **Don't give up.** I failed more times than I can count, but the successes eventually came. My stack of successes is tiny compared to the stack of failures. You only fail when you give-up. DON'T GIVE UP
- **Find strong allies within the university** – There were a few times that successful persuasions were as the result of a power within that I knew nothing about. Your station's friends have friends, too, and sometimes you will not know all of them.
- **Integrity is everything.** It takes years to build trust and integrity, but it can be lost quickly. Within the university, your trust factor is your strength. If you are trusted you will be heard. If you make a promise ... fulfill it. You provide the vision for the future of the station. If allowed to attempt your vision, do everything you can to fulfill it. In the mid 1980's, I envisioned a signal expansion that became a reality. It was a five-year process that resulted in a considerable station debt at the end. The expansion debts were paid-in-full a year sooner than promised. The vision was fulfilled, and the dollars were raised as promised. Actions speak louder than words, and the actions of the fulfilled dream allowed the university to trust other expansion visions down the road.
- **Do not get caught in the personality trap.** "I really like reporting to _____ because he or she is great!" What happens when this great person leaves? Unfortunately, personalities cause some decisions to be made in the short-run without a vision for the future. Do not be short-sighted. Unfortunately, even if you are not, structural decisions sometimes come down to personalities and politics rather than on common sense and public service. This is not a sound basis for decision making, but you will have to deal with it from time to time.

Conclusion

It is imperative the station manager have an on-going process that not only communicates the value and importance of the station to the person to whom they report but to others within the higher education community. **The top station administrator's job is to define and translate the station's value into terms and grids any administrator can understand.** It is likely this university administrator will eventually be in a position to recommend and/or review upper administrator replacements, and some of them may themselves be promoted into positions over the station.

The higher education community is fluid, and the fact that you have a great relationship with the licensee today does not necessarily translate into a good relationship in the future. It is common for a station manager's tenure to last through several university administration changes. Change is not the exception but the rule, so **have in place an on-going licensee education process that extends beyond the administrator to whom you commonly report.**

The suggestions above are a not a guarantee to success, but they are better than doing nothing and assuming the university understands your station's importance. If you have a great relationship, and the structure does not impede success, congratulations! Just remember, life is what happens when you are planning for it. Keep informing as many university administrators as possible about the value of your station and the impact it makes on your community and the culture in which you live. **Regardless of how much or how little financial resources the university supplies the station, they still own it and you are hired to protect it for them, and in some unfortunate instances, from them.**

USA

The USA is a grassroots non-profit 501(c)(3) founded in 2001 to assist noncommercial public radio stations licensed to universities, colleges, school systems, and state agencies representing two-thirds of the public radio system.

The USA continues to evolve as a national resource for the public radio and TV system and it is strong and growing in these tough economic times. The USA is positioned to meet the needs of stations with tightening resources. Since the USA is an Internet/Web-based national resource, receiving its services and resources does not depend on Affiliate travel. Without leaving the office, Affiliates can access tools that allow the free and accurate flow of information. The grassroots founders of the USA created a structure well-suited for the challenges of the 21st Century and for cost-efficient delivery of services. The USA will continue to develop tools and training to help stations during these tough economic times.

Executive Director

Craig Beeby became the founding President of the USA in 2001 and the USA E.D. in 2007. He has been involved in commercial and public broadcasting for four decades. Under Beeby's leadership as Director/GM, KOSU, a university-owned station, won 276 awards for news excellence and expanded into a statewide network. A broadcast consultant and trainer on the international and national levels, he has two degrees in Radio-TV-Film Sales and Management and Mass Communications.

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