

NETA Training Materials

Developed by:

**Craig Beeby, USA Executive Director
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**University
Station
Alliance**

A grassroots initiative for
university-licensed stations

1017 W Brooke Hollow Ct
Stillwater, OK 74075
Phone/Fax: 405 624 1192
www.us-alliance.net
E-mail: craig.u-sa@sbcglobal.net

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

Public Radio Local Economic Impact – An Update

NOVEMBER 2008

The University Station Alliance (USA) was the first to ask the public radio system how the volatile economy will impact stations. In November 2008 stations responded to a USA survey giving the system a first look at the potential economic effects on their operations. There was a promise of a second survey in 2009 when stations had a better understanding of the real impact.

JUNE 2009

Here are the results from the second survey. What is learned from the 2009 survey is that the managers in 2008 were fairly good predictors. Here are the responses to the June, 2009 USA Local Economic Impact Survey with 164 stations responding. Like the first survey, the second was sent to multiple listservs and all licensee types. Here are the results:

(*The numbers in red with an asterisk are the 2008 responses)

JUNE 2009 SURVEY – 164 (*160) STATIONS RESPONDING

46% (*42%) of station managers anticipate and/or already have received notification of cash support reductions from their university, college, school system, or state licensees. **54% (*58%)** of the stations said they have not received notification or this question was not applicable to their licensees.

There has been a **7% (*<1%)** increase in stations experiencing significant licensee cash support reductions at levels of \$200,000 and over. Other cash support reduction amounts were similar between the 2009 and 2008 surveys. **26% (*28%)** say their cash support will be reduced by their licensee by up to \$49,999, and **12% (*10%)** say their anticipated cash support reduction would range from \$50,000 to \$199,999. Another **6% (*6%)** do not know what the reductions, if any, will be.

How does the economy affect programming and public service? The most dramatic economic impact change reported by stations is in national programming. More stations **24% (*9%)** in 2009 than in 2008 say their national programming services will be affected. Fewer stations **52% (*67%)** say they anticipate no changes in their programming or public service offerings. The effect of the economy on local programming and website services remain about the same with **19% (*20%)** responding that local programming services will be reduced or eliminated, and **7% (*4%)** say website services will have to be reduced or eliminated.

NETA 2010 University 20-Second Manager Station Addressing the Economic Challenges Alliance

As has been observed by the down turn in attendance at the national and regional conferences, the economy is affecting meeting attendance and resources for the national and regional organizations. **20% (*12%)** say travel, memberships in organizations, phones, temporary student staffing, and various other reductions were also anticipated.

The technical and equipment reductions or eliminations have been slightly higher than anticipated. **24% (*17%)** report reductions in technical upgrades, **29% (*25%)** in equipment purchases, **10% (*6%)** on service area expansion, and **15% (*13%)** on planned HD upgrades.

In the area of personnel, **32% (*29%)** report staffing reductions with **23 (*22)** stations eliminating one or two full-time-staff (FTE). **4 (*5)** stations eliminating three to six FTE, and **4 (*0)** eliminating six or more FTE.

In regards to imposed service fees or administration overhead charges paid by the station to the licensee, **75% (*73%)** anticipate no change, **18% (*19%)** anticipate an increase and/or new charges, and about **7% (*8%)** are “waiting to see” what new charges may be imposed upon the station.

When managers were asked to project changes in audience support, business support, and/or foundation support, a variety of responses were given. For this question, multiple choices were allowed. **15% (*27%)** expect no changes. **29% (*33%)** anticipate less audience support. **64% (*49%)** anticipate reductions in business support, and **36% (*23%)** anticipate reductions in foundation support.

On the positive side of the projections, **28% (*18%)** of stations anticipate an increase in audience support, **13% (*11%)** in business support, and **5% (*5%)** in foundation support.

When asked to project changes in cash support excluding cash support from the CSG, university, college, school system, and/or state but including support from listeners, business and foundations, about **28% (*31%)** of station managers anticipate no change or an increase in support, **51% (*57%)** foresee a reduction of up to \$139,999, and **13% (*6%)** expect a cash support reduction of over \$200,000.

When asked for comments, here is a sampling of some of their responses. One manager states, “The federal stimulus money to the states has helped our state this year, and has ultimately helped us. However, a year from now we may still see further reductions once the stimulus money is gone.” Another manager indicated in 2008, “Obviously, this is just a projection. We hope we are wrong.” 2009 proves he was right. One manager says, “Business financial support has dried up. The audiences

continue to support but at lower levels and foundations are reducing giving due to severe losses in their endowments. Overall, it's threatening the existence of local media." The same manager also says, "You left out the category for matching gifts upon which MANY stations rely, and matching gifts are disappearing at an alarming rate." Another manager writes, "Membership has been flat, but underwriting has dropped about 50%. We have the same number of businesses, but many are reducing cash spent, or converting cash to trade."

Summary

- Nine out ten stations have not cut staff "yet".
- Universities are not targeting stations for cuts.
- Station spending cuts are in predictable areas.

This survey will be repeated again in 2010. We have a standard by which to monitor the downturn in the economy and the progressive effects upon the stations. Thanks to all the stations that participated in this survey.

The *University Station Alliance (USA) is a grassroots organization founded in 2001 to assist university-licensed stations with the challenges and opportunities associated with their licensees. University-licensed stations make-up 63-percent of the public radio system. *University is a generic title that includes colleges, school systems, and state agencies. More information about the USA can be found at www.us-alliance.org.

Budget Cuts & Overhead Increases

Your station is a microcosm of your licensee. The licensee receives funding from tuition, taxes (if not private), grants, contributions, contracts, etc. Your station receives funding from these same sources, except for tuition. Therefore, both institutions face the same challenges.

Avoid Being the Target

If your operation depends upon licensee subsidies, be prepared for a reduction. If there is a 10% licensee-wide reduction, make certain that your station is not tapped for more than the average because “you can raise money”. It is critical you articulate the reasons the support is important. Every other department, school, and unit on campus will be doing the same. You can’t expect special treatment but insist on fairness.

Be a Team Player

The best you can hope for is that your reduction will be the “average” of the licensee-wide reductions. If your unit does not take a hit, that means another unit will be hit harder and the reverse is true as well. Also, whether your station receives a subsidy or not, administrative overhead charges may appear for previously free services and/or the overhead charges may increase. Again, fairness is the bottom line.

Never Joke

These are serious times and jesting about laying someone off is not funny. Reassure staff that the integrity of the station is the primary focus. Some things will have to be trimmed but the protection of your primary mission and service should be the focus of your attention. Do not make extreme statements like “if our subsidy is cut, we will fail.” Instead, focus on the challenge at hand and work for solutions that keep your services going while meeting the tight budget restraint.

Helpful Resources

By comparing other stations’ overhead charges, one station manager successfully convinced the licensee to reduce charges from 16% to 10%. The CPB-funded **Quantitative Worth Worksheet** from the **USA Cost of Doing Business Project** is helpful in demonstrating the monetary value of public service and public relations the licensee receives in return for its investment in your station. By the way, using the word “subsidy” with your licensee is a bad idea. Instead, refer to their assistance as an investment returned multiple-folds as demonstrated by the **Quantitative Worth Worksheet**. The worksheet is on the USA website at www.us-alliance.org

Who Do You Let Go When a Layoff Is Necessary?

The hardest task a manager will ever perform is to lay off valuable staff members. Most valuable public radio employees I have known love their jobs and are in the profession for the “making a difference” factor. While obviously those who are losing their jobs suffer the most, those who are left behind and those that take part in making the decision feel the pain as well. Ultimately there is no easy formula for who gets laid off.

With the economy affecting all factors of our broadcast service areas, you must make the tough decisions that will preserve your public service for the long-term. To survive the economic challenges you may be forced to lay off employees to get back on solid financial ground.

As a public radio manager at a university, college, school district, or state licensee, your first step must be to contact your licensee’s personnel office. Specific legal procedures to follow will probably be in place. Once you know the procedure, here are some areas of thoughtful consideration:

- **SENIORITY**: Some stations must follow the rule of seniority. If your staff is unionized, the union may demand that you give preference to people with seniority. The thinking here is that senior employees have more job experience and more station training. Since the station has invested more time and money in these workers, it seems natural they should keep their jobs.
- **MONEY-GENERATING VS. PROGRAM SERVICE**: Rather than seniority, other stations may look at their money-generating vs. program service operations. Which is more valuable, positions generating income or positions generating public service programming? If a station wants to refocus on one area of service, it may eliminate a whole service segment. In this case, the station gets rid of all jobs associated with this area of service (eliminate news or eliminate music). The employees holding these positions are laid off.
- **ELIMINATE EXPENSIVE PROGRAMMING**: Stations may find the most expensive programming production and simply eliminate it. A full unit may not be generating enough audience or financial support to sustain the operation. In this example, the station eliminates all jobs associated with the program production.
- **ATTRITION**: Yet another way to reduce your staff size is through attrition. You may not replace positions vacated by retirement or resignation. Some licensees may even offer early retirement options if a financial exigency is declared by the institution or state.

- **EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE:** Finally, you may use an employee rating system where all workers get regular feedback on their performance. If you have applied your system consistently across the workforce, you can use it to lay off a group of workers. For example, the manager can rate the employee on a performance scale where 5 is an excellent worker and 1 is a worker who is performing poorly. In this case, you could lay off all employees with a rating of 1 or 2. Here is where you suffer the consequences if you were lenient in giving performance appraisals. In other words, rather than being truthful during the evaluation process, you took the easy road by being too generous with your evaluations. Now it will be more difficult to lay off poorly performing staff because you rated them as if they were equal to a more productive employee.

However you decide to discharge employees, you must do it consistently. Be aware that selecting an entire group is less risky than cherry picking who gets a pink slip. Conducting layoffs this way also minimizes negative effects for the remaining workers. The layoff will feel less personal to those employees losing their jobs, and it immediately gives security to those who remain. That said, layoffs will still wreak emotional havoc on your workplace.

You must be fair to all workers, both to those who will lose their jobs and those who will remain. At the same time, you must maintain public service to your community with the least amount of interruption. Since a layoff will probably disrupt your daily operations, more work and responsibilities may transfer to remaining staff. To reduce the disruption and dissonance, you must systematically decide who to layoff and then effectively communicate this to all employees. The best way to get through layoffs is quickly. Be up-front, take responsibility and allow your workers some time to grieve. Only then can you move forward to full station recovery.

Here's wishing the best of luck to all that find themselves on either side of the layoff process. I hope your situation will soon become more positive.

Guidelines to Managing Stress

Many public broadcasting managers are anxious about the economic challenges facing them over the months ahead. How they have been conducting business in the past may not work in the future, and now more than ever they are being pulled in multiple directions. In most cases, the effect is doubly trying with station personnel already overworked and underfunded.

So how can one manager address all these pressures? How can she or he handle the situation?

Steps to dealing with stress:

- 1) **Take time to vent before thinking practically.** Talk with your friends and/or your support group about your frustrations, and let your anger out. Do NOT do this venting with staff.
- 2) **Reach out to other station managers and resource people for help.** Many times managers will isolate themselves, thinking this financial problem reflects poorly on their management style and business structure. Reach to others in spite of your insecurity and embarrassment and say, "I need help."
- 3) **Be direct with staff about the challenges and the changes ahead.** Outline how the choices will be made. Don't lie to them; be factual.
- 4) **Prioritize tasks.** Do the hard stuff first. Delaying a tough decision will only add to the stress. Get it over with and move on. Your stress factor will be reduced once the most difficult task is done.
- 5) **Take a timeout.** Get out of the office and walk. Hitting a tennis ball can be very therapeutic. Doing aerobic exercise, getting the heart rate elevated, can be a good release of negative energy. Finding a quiet place and listening to relaxing music can also be helpful.
- 6) **Have realistic expectations of yourself.** Yes, you can work longer hours, but there is a limit, and you cannot afford burnout. This is not a long-term strategy that will work.
- 7) **Perfection is draining.** Do not try to micromanage everything. Leave the small tasks for others, and focus your attention on the larger picture.
- 8) **Be positive.** Avoid the "nay sayers". Learn to reward yourself for small accomplishments even if others do not.
- 9) **Get some sleep.** Lack of sleep can make you more vulnerable to stress.

Management Etiquette – Serious Offenses

What makes an effective manager? One of the essential characteristics is sensitivity to the little things that can bring big results. Whether it is productivity, motivation, or just simple common courtesy, the little things add up to management success. Here are the top ten offenses managers commit and suggestions on how to avoid them.

1. **I care about what you have to say ... NO I DON'T.** What are you doing when you call an employee into your office? Are you talking on the phone? Are you working on the computer? If you want them to feel what they have to say is important, you should demonstrate that with your actions. Don't make it a second level "multi-tasked" experience when your attention is diverted from what they are saying.
2. **I am canceling our meeting ... FOR THE THIRD TIME.** Of course there are times when a meeting has to be canceled for unforeseen reasons but be cognizant that others are making their schedules convenient for you. You are belittling their importance if you repeatedly cancel on them. If they were more important, you would not do that.
3. **I am important ... YOU ARE NOT.** How often do you expect the return of phone calls or want confirmations on emails you send? Do you do that in return? As a courtesy, at least reply to an email with simple thanks or if you do not have time to return a call, get back with the person as soon as possible. **YOU WILL RECEIVE THE RESPECT YOU GIVE.**
4. **Speaker phones ... ARE FOR THOSE ABOVE IT ALL.** Using a speaker phone tells the person they do not deserve the simple action of picking up the phone. The biggest error many make is the use of a speaker phone during a conference call. The speaker phone adds room noise to the conference call and distorts all listeners' abilities to hear what is said. The only time to politely use a speaker phone is when conducting a meeting in which multiple users in a single room are participating in the call.
5. **Some jobs are too small ... I CAN'T BE BOTHERED.** When employees bring you problems, no matter however trivial the problems seem to you, they probably are big burdens to them. Give them your best efforts to find resolutions.

6. **My boss will not understand ...HE/SHE CAN'T GET IT.** Strive for clarity and brevity when communicating with your boss. Make certain she/he has no surprises. If you have a problem that needs attention, present it to her/him with suggestions for resolution. When presenting resolution options, it is always easier to present the positive aspects of a resolution option but the boss will also want to hear the negative aspects as well.
7. **I don't have staff favorites ... YES YOU DO BUT ADMIT IT ONLY TO YOURSELF.** Be careful how you demonstrate your support of staff. Who do you go to lunch with and who do you never go to lunch with? This seemingly simple action of staff friendship can cause jealousies and resentments.
8. **Volunteers are important ... ONLY IF THEY DO THE THINGS I DO NOT WANT TO DO.** How you treat volunteers will make or break you. Never have "in-house" conversations in front of volunteers. Never treat them as second-class individuals who are a burden to your workload. When dealing with outsiders, remember that you represent the station AND the university so be careful what you say.
9. **I will get my way no matter what ... EVEN IF I HAVE TO BYPASS MY BOSS.** Never direct a complaint to the top. Never "cc" a complaint to your boss's boss. That will be the first step toward a disastrous relationship with the person to whom you report.
10. **I like what I do and it is fun ... SAY IT AND MEAN IT.** Don't lose your sense of humor. Have fun at what you do. It will reflect in your work. No one likes a grump except another grump.

University Station Alliance Affiliation: Justifications for Renewal

Sole Source: Established in 2001 as the only national not-for-profit 501 (c)(3) support resource for University-Licensed* public media

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

Tools

Quantitative Worth Calculator	University Ownership Best Practices
Professional Surveys	Strategic Planning Models
Governance Examples & Guidelines	Marketing & Programming Advice
Personnel Performance Enhancement	Ideas for Improving Management Oversight

Services

Free Telephone Consultancy	National Representation
Fundraising Strategies Training	Community Volunteers Training
Internet-Based Services	Upon Request: Fee-Reduced Peer Reviews
Upon Request: Fee-Reduced On-Site Training	

Resources

Listserv & eNews Letters – Instant access to 323+ Managers and Leaders
20-Second Manager – Monthly Management Training
24/7 access to Website resources at www.us-alliance.org

Results: 650+ Station Consultations and/or Training in 2008 & 2009

Increased Listener Support	Reduced Overhead Costs
Improved University/Station Relations	Improved Personnel Performance
Editorial Integrity Protected	Governance Protocol Established
Strategic Planning Resulted in Efficient Operations & New Income	

USA Goals

- to strengthen the public broadcasting system through improving the relationship between broadcasters and universities;
- to focus on commonalities of purpose between a station and its university licensee; to integrate university/station missions and strategic plans so that stations have a place at the university table;
- to assist stations in managing licensee relations on a day-to-day basis;
- to establish “firewall” standards of editorial integrity;
- to test the assumption that it is in the best interest of all university stations to continue to be owned and operated by universities; and if not,
- to explore available options and help the station/licensee facilitate the transition

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.

Contact Information

Craig Beeby, Executive Director

University Station Alliance

1017 W Brooke Hollow Ct

Stillwater, OK 74075

(405) 624-1192

Craig.u-sa@sbcglobal.net

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