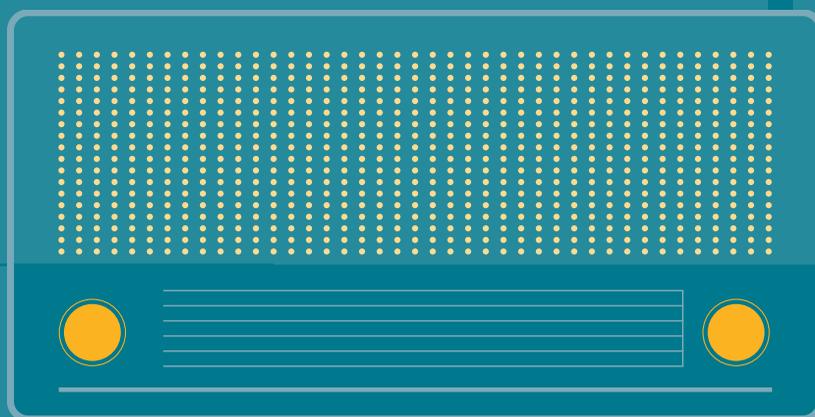


# THE HEALTHY COMMUNITY RADIO STATION

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# FOREWORD

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Several books, handbooks and ‘toolkits’ have been written on community radio in Africa since the liberalisation of the airwaves on the continent in the 1990s. Most of these have focused on mapping the rapid development of the community radio sector and the attendant challenges and opportunities, while a few have focused on policy and regulatory issues. This handbook is unique in the sense that it is designed as a one-stop-shop practitioner’s guide to setting up and maintaining – what the authors have defined as – healthy, well managed and sustainable community radio stations, which are deeply rooted in the communities where they operate.

With this handbook, one is able to understand the key ingredients for building a healthy community radio station from scratch. At the same time, it provides important troubleshooting information to existing community radio stations. The handbook outlines in detail the nature and form of healthy radio stations: how their governing structures should be set up; how they should be staffed and managed; what infrastructure and financial management systems have to be in place; how to produce quality programming; and how to ensure real community participation in all aspects of their daily work. A critical addition is the ‘health check tool,’ which allows one to conduct a diagnosis of the ‘fitness’ of a community radio station.

The authors of this handbook have a track record of working with community radio stations both in South Africa and across the region through the Wits Radio Academy (WRA) at the University of the Witwatersrand. This handbook is, in part, a culmination of the training programme that the WRA has been running with community radio stations over the past few years, with support from the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA). OSISA supports community radio as part of an effort to get rural and marginalised communities to dialogue among themselves on critical issues that affect their daily lives, as well as connecting them to discourses at the national level. These stations are conceived as critical vehicles for advancing community development, participation and access to information, particularly among communities that are excluded from the mainstream media.

This is clearly a very timely and important handbook, and one that will prove invaluable not only to new and existing community radio initiatives, but also to individuals and organisations involved in supporting community radio initiatives in Africa and elsewhere. I hope that funding organisations, too, will find it an important ‘check-list’ of what to look out for when conducting monitoring and evaluation of the community radio projects that they support.

# INTRODUCTION

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Community radio stations are an important part of the media landscape in many countries. They make up one part of a three-tier system of radio, the other parts being public and commercial radio. They were set up to provide a platform for communities to communicate between themselves and with their governments without interference. In many ways the sector entrenches the democratic process in which freedom of communication and speech plays a central role. Wealthy sectors of the society have many media choices but community stations often represent the only space where poorer communities can discuss the issues that affect them. Because community radio stations play such a critical role in society, their health should be an important matter and of concern to communities and to the broader society.

Over the years, a lot of effort and resources have been put into the development of the sector in many southern African countries. Initially, most of the effort was directed at providing technical equipment and developing the staff to operate the equipment and present programmes. Attention was also given to training the staff to understand the basics of journalism. The objective was to get the stations to go on air. In subsequent years, more focus was given to management, governance, finance and marketing issues. The overall objective of more recent interventions and support provided to community radio stations is to move the stations towards sustainability. Significant amounts of money have been spent on the sector, and there have been successes and failures. The most successful support has tended to be designed on the basis of a specific and concrete analysis of a particular station's situation, and support organisations have undertaken audits and assessments of various kinds to do this. However, a commonly accepted tool for this purpose has not been available until now.

This booklet will attempt to fill the gap – on the basis that a common tool of this kind would present many advantages. It makes it more feasible to compare different stations, as well as to analyse a particular station's development over time. The booklet first presents a detailed description of

what a healthy community radio station in the southern African context looks like. There is already considerable literature on community radio – much of it containing insights and advice that are very useful for people involved in building radio stations, or in supporting the sector. There are also many handbooks and we have been grateful to draw on some of these. What we have tried to do that is perhaps somewhat different is to organise this discussion on the basis of five distinct dimensions.

The five parameters we use are Mission and Governance; Management and Staffing; Infrastructure and Finances; Programming; and Community Involvement. These are the five pillars of health, and it should be obvious that they are interlinked: the issue of community involvement needs to run through all aspects of a radio station's functioning, for instance. One could argue that the divisions are somewhat artificial but they are introduced here to give some structure to the analysis. It should be noted that we prefer the term 'health' to the more common 'sustainability' for reasons we will explain below.

These dimensions then form the basis for a diagnostic tool, the Station Health Check, which uses a series of detailed checklists to develop a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular station. The Health Check is intended to be cost-effective and can be applied in different contexts. It is also based on verifiable data: too many analyses are based on a single optimistic interview with the station manager. Real understanding needs more than this, and we insist on a set of interviews with specific people and groups, document analysis and listening to station output. A detailed description of the Station Health Check takes up the second part of this booklet.

At the Wits Radio Academy, the diagnosis is used to deliver a set of priorities for a programme of organisational support, the Station Advisory and Mentoring Service (SAMS). This involves setting clear and achievable goals, and an experienced mentor then works with the station to achieve them, generally over six months. The emphasis is



on supporting the organisation's efforts to address areas of weakness, drawing on local resources wherever possible. Once we have more experience with implementing this approach, we will look for an opportunity to write it up.

These documents are being made available so that they can be tested by others in the field in order to refine and improve them. We would welcome feedback from anybody who applies them. We would love to hear about any experiences you may have, and to hear of any problems and gaps that need to be fixed.

Our thanks go to the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA), which supported elements of the work, and to colleagues Jacob Ntshangase, Kanyi Mkonza, Sue Valentine and Franklin Huizies, whose involvement in developing these ideas has been of critical importance. Your wise input has been invaluable. Our thanks also go to Nepal's Community Radio Support Centre and the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists, whose approach to assessing community radio performance was a major influence on this project. (Mainali et al, 2009; CRSC/ NEFEJ: 2012) Above all, our thanks go to community stations that have been willing to work with us in many different contexts over the years, and whose experiences have shaped this project.

In countries like South Africa, the sector has grown enormously. Despite the frustration often felt and expressed at the problems and challenges confronting these stations, the fact is that audiences and the numbers of stations continue to grow, and the sector's contribution to skills development is substantial. The challenge is to enhance the health of community stations, and their ability to serve their communities with independent and interesting programming. We present the following as a contribution to the long-term project of creating new platforms for people and communities often ignored by the mainstream media. Involving many groups and individuals, the project is difficult and can be frustrating – but it is enormously valuable.

# Chapter One

## The Search for Health and Sustainability in Community Radio

*“(Community) radio stations (are ones) that practice radio broadcasting as a community service and see communication as a universal right. That seek to build a common path to support one another and strengthen our people’s communication. Radio stations that see themselves as an integral part of the community in which they participate. As media, they develop pluralistic and participatory communication that is open to the need for expression of the social and cultural sectors with less access to exclusively commercial media. That exercise the right to communication and, particularly, the right to information. That exercise radio broadcasting as a service, and not simply as a commercially profitable activity.”*

*Federacion Argentina de Radios Comunitarias, FARCO.*

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On its website, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) presents a series of definitions from members and supporters, among them the one above. In often poetic language, statements from Senegal, India, France, Argentina and other countries describe the uniqueness of these stations. For some, the emphasis falls on the fact that they are different to the mainstream; for others, it is the fact that they are not run for private profit. While others emphasise the political: "They are characterized by their political objectives of social change, their search for a fair system that takes into account human rights, and makes power accessible to the masses and open to their participation," write Claudia Villamayor and Ernesto Lamas (1998). Almost all emphasise the involvement of the community, however conceived. According to Tambuli, a communications project in the Philippines, "community radio means radio in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community" (nd).

Stations of this kind share several common characteristics. According to Girard (2007: 4), they are community-based, focus on community service, participatory, not-for-profit and independent.

**Community-based:** They are owned by a community, and are answerable to it. These communities are often geographic, but they may also be communities of interest, such as religious or ethnic groups<sup>1</sup>. Some countries have a legal framework, which sets out how they should be structured. In South Africa, for instance, community stations must be controlled by a board that represents the community, which means in practice that it is elected at a general meeting, held every year or so. In order to ensure real accountability, stations should be transparent, making financial information, key documents and the like available as well as being available to explain key decisions.

**Community service:** The purpose of a community radio station is public service. It will offer programming that answers to the needs of its community, often through the familiar trio of education, information and entertainment – to which one should really add interactivity. According to Fairbairn (2009: 9), this includes validating and strengthening communities; covering topics that are relevant; encouraging discussion and debate; providing platforms for marginalised voices; and others.

**Participative:** Community stations should encourage participation. They do this by providing opportunities

#### SOUTH AFRICAN LAW SAYS...

"'Community broadcasting service' means a broadcasting service which –

- a) is fully controlled by a non-profit entity and carried on for non-profitable purposes;
- b) serves a particular community;
- c) encourages members of the community served by it or persons associated with or promoting the interests of such community to participate in the selection and provision of programmes to be broadcast in the course of such broadcasting service; and
- d) may be funded by donations, grants, sponsorships or advertising or membership fees, or by any combination of the aforementioned."

- *South Africa's Broadcasting Act, No 4 of 1999*

for listeners to speak, by listening closely to their community to ensure that programming reflects real community concerns, by involving community members in the design and production of programmes, and in many other ways. "Participatory processes generate a strong sense of community ownership; media are demystified, and by participating, communities learn valuable communications and media literacy skills and understandings," writes Fairbairn (2009: 9).

**Non-profit:** Community radio stations generally operate on a non-profit basis. This does not mean they have to be poor, nor does it mean they cannot look for sources of income. It simply means that any surplus is ploughed back into the station.

**Independent:** A station needs to have relationships with a range of groups and individuals, but it should protect itself against anybody trying to exercise undue influence. The station must always be in a position to take programming and other decisions in the best interests of the community as a whole, rather than the interests or agendas of sponsors, funders or other interest groups. That is what it means to be independent.

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1. The use of the term 'community' is often simplistic, assuming a homogeneous group without gender, class and other divisions or internal power dynamics. The term will be used here without further reference to these issues, although it is hoped that the discussion of issues facing community radio will take into account some of these complexities. A useful discussion of the difficulties with the term can be found in Hadland and Thorne (2004: 15–17).

These characteristics are common, but are not meant to be rigid definitions. Real radio stations resist easy cataloguing, and take a wide range of forms. For instance, Breeze FM, in Chipata, Zambia, is a private company run on commercial lines, but has a strong ethos of community service. It has programming that is strongly focused on issues of local development and regularly invites community members in to take over the studios. On its third birthday in 2005, for instance, around 50 volunteers took over every aspect of the station – and many of them came with presents (Fairbairn and Siemering, 2006: 46 – 63).

There is little benefit in searching for an abstract purity in the sector, which would exclude stations on the basis that they fail to measure up to one standard or the other. It is far more productive, and makes a better contribution to real diversity of voices, to be inclusive, allowing for inventiveness and initiative in responding to different circumstances.

In introducing this booklet, the following section will discuss the issue of sustainability, which is never far from the surface in any discussion of community radio, and some of the complexities that need to be considered.

## 1. Staying alive: the issue of sustainability

As much as community radio stations share the positive and hopeful characteristics outlined above, they share challenges, too. Chief of these is often the simple battle for survival, particularly for stations in the global south. Sustainability has become a major preoccupation: for the stations, people's livelihoods are at stake, while funders naturally want to see projects survive and prosper independently. The search for solutions is conducted through research projects, conferences, seminars and the like, but a magic formula has not yet been found.

Fairbairn and Siemering define sustainability as being “the ability of a radio station to maintain a good quality developmental broadcasting service over a period of time” (2006: 5). Lush and Urgoiti make the point that this cannot just be about money, as important as that is. The

challenge of generating an income needs to be connected to “democratic principles of community broadcasting.” They write that: “(S)ustainability has been seen to be a much broader and more complex concept, and should be seen in the context of a concerted, ongoing effort to make any community media initiative viable and functional” (2011: 10).

Gumucio-Dagron describes survival as being like the “art of aerialists”, or circus tightrope walkers: “They sometimes fall on the net and they ascend to begin again. The difference is that in community media most of the time there is not a net to cushion the fall. Therefore many projects were frustrated just after they began, and so they were not able to settle down inside the community.” (2003: 1). He identifies three elements of sustainability – a ‘tripod’ model that has been adopted by several other writers.

**Social sustainability** refers to community support, both by feeling a sense of ownership and in practical ways. Gumucio-Dagron writes: “Without community participation, the communication experience becomes an island amid the human universe in which it operates” (2003: 4). Support is expressed in many different ways, through voluntary work, donations, participation in activities and constructive criticism. For the radio station, it means making sure that there are ample opportunities for participation and that it is in tune with its community, in terms of the issues focused on, language used and other aspects.

**Institutional sustainability** refers to organisational frameworks within which the station operates. These include external factors, like the legal framework, government policy and the licensing regime. In some countries, government has defined a special space for community radio and even formulated policy to support stations, while in others the government remains uninterested or even hostile. Internal factors that play a major role include the infrastructure and technology available and organisational structures.

**Financial sustainability:** Community radio stations need funds to be able to pay salaries, produce programmes, buy

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“(Like tightrope walkers), they sometimes fall on the net and they ascend to begin again. The difference is that in community media most of the time there is not a net to cushion the fall.”

– Gumucio-Dagron

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equipment, repair it when necessary, meet operational expenses, pay transmission costs etc. With seemingly ever-growing demands, the struggle to earn enough money is unending. In addressing this challenge, the first task is good budgeting and financial management so as to keep costs under control. When it comes to generating an income, it is important to target the income opportunities that are relevant to the station's particular situation. (See Appendix 1 for a grid that sets out the types of income that may be available from a range of sources.)

The challenges of generating enough income are particularly acute for stations serving poor, rural communities, and can easily overshadow other concerns. In a major review of the impact of community radio, AMARC notes that the struggle for money often distracts practitioners from the tasks of improving community involvement, programme quality and relevance (2007). A review of the Namibian community radio sector finds this pattern, too: "Over time, community broadcasters have become pre-occupied with financial sustainability, and seem to have lost sight of key issues such as community ownership and participation, and the independence of their stations" (Lush and Urgoiti 2012: 16).

Certainly, money is critically important, like the fuel that keeps an engine running. But it is the other two aspects of sustainability that keep the tap open: they lay the basis for financial sustainability in a very real and practical way. Community support enables donations, voluntary work and other practical assistance, while a loyal listenership is what attracts advertisers. A stable, well-run organisation can offer donors and others a reliable partnership. In the pointed phrase used by Lush and Urgoiti as the title of their review of Namibian community radio, participation pays.

## 2. The challenge of achieving sustainability with independence

The common fixation with generating income can often threaten a station's independence, since money often comes with strings attached. It is easy to be tempted by a large contract but it is essential to make sure that it does not jeopardise the station's relationship with the community – a relationship that is built on trust and which can be lost if the community sees a station as simply a vehicle that can be bought by any interest group to further its particular interests. Once lost, trust is hard to restore.

There are also pitfalls in excessive dependence on any single source of income. Southern African stations tend to

accept advertising, unlike some countries where community stations are forbidden to do so (Girard: 2007: 43). Accurate figures for the overall significance of advertising flowing into the community radio sector are hard to come by. Some effort has been made by South Africa's state-backed Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), which suggests in its 2010/11 annual report that almost R40 million in advertising spending might have gone to some 130 community radio stations in that year (2011: 75)<sup>2</sup>. The amounts are still far below the share of the audience that community radio achieves: while 25 percent of the potential adult audience are now listening to these stations every week, the sector's share of the total adspend on radio is estimated at just 1–2 percent (Milne interview, 2012). Nevertheless, it is a significant amount of money, partly boosted by deliberate government policy to direct significant parts of its advertising spending into community radio, which also influences decisions at parastatal entities. On the other hand, these figures exclude local income. Advertising in other southern African countries is unlikely to amount to even a fraction of these amounts. However, the issue is not so much the amount, but the extent of dependence on advertising, and whether it influences the station unduly, as shown by the experience of Jozi FM, which serves the giant Johannesburg township of Soweto (see box).

### CHALLENGES OF WEALTH

Probably the largest community station in South Africa is Jozi FM, which serves the giant Johannesburg township of Soweto. Its huge potential audience, with increasing levels of wealth, has allowed the station to build an audience that stood at over 500,000 at its peak, although recent figures show that it has dropped back to 289,000 (Rams October 2012). Although it is structured as a non-profit entity and is governed by a board elected by the community, it has adopted a resolutely commercial approach. It is able to generate some R5 million, which amounts to 70 percent of total income (2007 figures). However, it has been criticised for losing touch with its mission of community service, and has had to face demonstrations by disgruntled community members.

*Ntshangase, 2009: 48 – 50.*

2. There is some uncertainty about how this figure was arrived at, and it is included here just as a general indicator.

Government support, both at local and at national level, can – and should – be an important source of funding. “(R)adio stations and community telecentres should receive the same support as public schools, libraries or national cultural projects. This does not mean that the State should intervene in the political and communicative project of community media, but should support their development as autonomous and decentralized entities,” writes Gumucio-Dagron (2003: 18). This support may come in various forms, including direct funding, subsidised transmission costs, tax concessions, paid-for public interest campaigns and advertising. Local governments may make office space available, sometimes with free services. These contributions have become a significant factor for community radio in South Africa, as pointed out above.

Unfortunately, there have been instances where government entities have used their position in an attempt to influence content. South African municipalities in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, and in Hartswater, Northern Cape, have mounted advertising boycotts of community media over critical reportage (Parliamentary communications committee, 2011). And the Alfred Nzo community station, also in the Eastern Cape, had its electricity supply summarily cut when the District Council heard things it did not like (personal communication). A recent discussion paper by the Independent Communications Authority of SA (ICASA) notes that some stations “have been presented with challenges from local government representatives who seek to have undue influence on the administration of the stations. If not regulated and managed properly by community broadcasters, local government funding might exacerbate such a trend” (2012: 42). In a different way, the practice of provincial governments buying swathes of airtime for the live broadcast of entire speeches by prominent politicians can also be seen to undermine independence, in that it disrupts programming. And when the speech is delayed, leaving stations with dead air for long periods, this shows deep disrespect for the audience and community.

A different set of challenges arises in relation to funding by international donors. Organisations like the Open Society family of foundations, PANOS, UNESCO, national development foundations from the Nordic countries, Germany, Switzerland, Britain, the US and many others have been attracted to community radio because of the contribution that local, participatory communication can play

in furthering the development agenda. Many stations would not exist if it were not for this kind of international support.

However, case studies from Kenya and elsewhere demonstrate the dangers of excessive dependence on foreign funding. Da Costa warns “communities and their leadership to beware of strangers bearing gifts.” He writes: “(I)n the absence of entrepreneurial and innovative leaders who are able to subvert the agendas of others to community purpose, top-down approaches to building community radio stations will at best lead to the development of a sector whose incentives are distorted and whose purpose will ultimately move away from the accepted definition and understanding of ‘community radio’. At worst, the emerging model of community radio stations that routinely fail will continue to be replicated throughout the continent” (2012: 11). Essentially, he argues that it is critically important to make sure that initiatives of this kind are built from the roots up. Top-down initiatives tend to fail.

Fundamentally, the challenge is for donors to nurture local initiatives, but not to overwhelm them. Donors need to see their limits, while community initiatives need to defend their rights and agency. An example of a successful strategy to grow community radio involved a consortium of funders, including UNESCO, co-operating in support of eight stations in Mozambique (details at [www.mediamoz.com](http://www.mediamoz.com)). The project involved a very thorough preparatory phase: “It was believed that only when the community feels that ‘this is our station’ to which we provide producers and stories, where we assist in overcoming financial problems, and where we prevent theft by all being alert and protective, only then would a station in rural Mozambique have a chance of survival. Creating ownership feeling takes time. Therefore, it was decided to plan for a one to two year mobilization and capacitation phase before the arrival of the equipment, which would absorb all interest once in place,” says Birgitte Jallo, chief technical adviser (quoted in Fairbairn and Siemering, 2006: 31).

A critical element for a successful project of this kind is a timeframe that will allow a station to establish itself: a year is not enough. A clear and realistic exit strategy is also necessary. A community radio station must develop realistic ideas for generating income to replace donor support. This may well include support for public interest programming, even if it comes from the same funder. Experience has shown that this is a major source of support for African community radio, and is likely to remain so for some time.

Some more specific concerns around relationships with donors include:

- Funding agendas change from time to time, according to changes in domestic and international politics, and these shifts can leave a project high and dry;
- The relationship between the giver and receiver of a large cheque is always complicated, and there can be a strong temptation by community station initiatives to tell donors what they want to hear;
- Sometimes funding arrangements create patterns that make long-term sustainability more difficult, such as Open Society funding that often includes generous salaries, costs that become very difficult to meet independently (personal communication); and,
- Reporting requirements can be very onerous, demanding significant time and resources from the station, which may sometimes exceed the capacity of community groups.

But funding is not the only potential threat to independence. Interest groups in the community itself – parties, factions, churches or even an individual businessman – may try to exercise undue influence or even try to ‘capture’ the station. Radio Atlantis FM, outside Cape Town, has seen conflict between two community groupings over the years: churches and trade unions. Both have tried to bus in enough supporters to take over the board at an AGM, even though this would pose a direct threat to the station’s licence, which in terms of South African law must be non-partisan. Factional battles have also affected staff, who have on occasion used the airwaves to attempt to muster community support (this description based on Fairbairn and Siemering, 2006: 77 – 90). In another South African case, both the management and board at Phalaborwa FM were alarmed when they received complaints from a local faction of the SA National Civics Organisation (SANCO). They saw the move as an attempt to take control of the station, together with some presenters who had been disciplined, and were initially unwilling even to talk to the group on the basis that it was “not recognised by the community”. A meeting was held, but ended inconclusively (Lepedi, 2012). At the time of writing, the issue remains unresolved.

These concerns highlight the difficulty of maintaining productive relationships with funders of various kinds and a range of interest groups, without jeopardising the station’s

independence. The solutions include clear set of principles and policy, strong leadership and transparency.

### 3. Contextual issues

It was argued above that stations need to be judged in context and that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is inappropriate. A simple model for stations, which will suit every circumstance, is probably an unrealistic aim. Contextual factors will offer different advantages and challenges, but none determine success or failure. What matters is for the station and its supporters to develop clear strategies, which exploit the advantages and counter the disadvantages in the best way possible.

**The socio-economic environment:** It goes without saying that a station’s sustainability is strongly influenced by the kind of community it serves. On the one hand, there are simply fewer resources in poor communities. In many countries, donations from listeners form an important income stream – annual drives for pledges are a feature of public radio stations in the US. Attempts were made in the early years of community radio in South Africa to generate some income from listeners but met with little success. Fairbairn writes: “Partly because of poverty in the communities served, and partly because of difficulties of collecting money from a mass base, this income never materialised” (2004: 20). Also, local businesses in these areas run on small margins and often do not see the benefit of advertising since everyone knows where they are anyway.

At the same time, a station serving a disadvantaged community may be particularly strongly valued as a source of local identity and pride, and as a communication platform. It is an important local institution, and association with it can become a source of prestige and power. It should not be overlooked that this dynamic plays a role in creating the kinds of conflicts that have arisen at some community stations. So bitter can these conflicts become that stations have been physically occupied by one or other faction, and there have been claims of physical violence, even murder.

A station also has value as a training ground and opportunity for employment; a volunteer position represents a step towards a formal job for many. This sometimes causes significant instability. The Zambian Community Media Forum (ZaCoMeF) writes: “When these community volunteers have been trained by the community media, they are easily poached by the mainstream media.

This has created a cycle of community media being trainers for the mainstream media” (2006). Some stations fight endlessly to prevent people leaving, but it should be accepted as a fact of life. Of course, turnover needs to be managed to minimise the disruption it can cause. A simple contract that insists on the station being given enough notice about a staffer’s intention to move on may not be a complete guarantee, but is a good start (the issue will be discussed further in Chapter 2, on Management and Staffing). More generally, one of the community radio sector’s contributions to the broader environment is that it provides young people with some training and experience in the field of media. This fact should be used: since mainstream media benefit from the pool of skilled staff, they should make a contribution in return.

The urban/rural divide affects community radio too. A station based in a remote rural area of Malawi will have a very different cost structure and income opportunities than one in the heart of Johannesburg: an urban station is likely to find it easier to attract advertising, and may have easier access to technical support. On the other hand,

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“This has created a cycle of community media being trainers for the mainstream media.”

– ZaCoMef, 2006

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stations outside urban areas seem to have greater stability of staffing. Whether situated in a city or in the countryside, opportunities may arise from the presence of major companies or institutions nearby. Large companies in the neighbourhood may fund a station through their corporate social investment programmes: a mine in Phalaborwa made a R2m contribution to the local community radio station (personal communication). On the other hand, the presence of a tertiary institution may make it possible for a station to create arrangements for student internships.

The legal, licensing and policy environment is a major contextual factor. At the one extreme, Zimbabwe does not yet allow community radio stations. Several community radio initiatives have spent years preparing to go on air, building studios and developing some very innovative ‘non-radio’ approaches in the meantime. For instance, they produce programmes that are burnt onto CDs and distributed in that form, work on community

projects, run training courses and the like. Zambian law, on the other hand, allows community media, although the relevant legislation – the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act of 2002 – does not say much about the particular needs of the sector. According to ZaCoMef, the licensing fee of around US\$1000 is a significant obstacle to the establishment of stations (2006). Another challenge is that stations are initially given only a test license for a year, during which time their activities are severely limited. The most enabling framework for community radio in southern Africa is probably in South Africa, where the law sets out clear requirements, where the regulator has relatively simple processes to follow in relation to the issuing of licenses, and where the government has a policy of direct and practical support.

**The type of organisation:** We can distinguish two basic types (there are many other ways of describing different kinds of community stations but this approach seems useful for present purposes):

When people think of community radio, they usually think of the model that takes the form of a community association or trust, led by an elected board. This kind of station – sometimes seen as ‘real’ community radio – often serves the community of a geographic area (a rural area or township), which often has significant development and poverty challenges. It can also apply to communities of interest. An example is Radio Zibonele, which was licensed in 1995 after two years of illegal broadcasting in the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha – initially from under a clinic bed in a shipping container. Despite many challenges – such as ruinous local violence in the years of the South African transition – it has strong community involvement, both through structures of accountability and, for instance, workshopping the contents of health programmes (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001: 139 – 142). When it is well run, such a station can be strong in achieving social sustainability – although this should not be taken for granted. However, building freestanding institutions can be challenging, and it is often hard to generate sufficient income in disadvantaged communities.

A different form of community radio grows out of existing institutions, such as a church, NGO or university. The Catholic Church has been very involved in establishing stations in some countries, like Zambia. According to a 2006 summary by ZaCoMef, eight of the 15 community stations then in existence were started by the Catholic Church, while two others were supported

by Pentecostal churches and two others belonged to educational institutions. Radio Dom Bosco, a Catholic station broadcasting from the outskirts of Antananarivo, Madagascar, has well-maintained facilities and a large and loyal listenership (personal visit, 2012). Another example is Orkonerei FM Radio Service (ORS), which broadcasts to Maasai pastoralists from a village near Arusha, Tanzania. It is a project of an NGO, the Institute for Orkonerei Pastoralist Advancement, and is closely integrated into its parent organisation. Nevertheless, the station is well rooted in its community, according to an assessment by Fairbairn and Siemering (2006: 14 – 27). Stations of this kind undoubtedly benefit from the relationship with their parent, both institutionally and financially, but they need to ensure that they look after their social sustainability. A degree of institutional loyalty to the parent is probably natural and inevitable, but it should not be seen too narrowly.

In some countries, like Mozambique, the state has set up local stations they regard as community stations, while there are examples of commercial stations that play the role of community stations. The intention here is not to develop a comprehensive set of categories, but to use the two most common forms to make the point that institutional form will affect the quest for sustainability.

#### 4. From sustainability to health

We have referred to 'sustainability' so far because this is the term generally used in the literature dealing with the challenges faced by community radio. However, the word points in some directions, which are not helpful to clear thinking. It suggests sustainability is a happy state of prosperity and stability that can be reached by a station, and which will then endure. The concrete – and understandable – expectation from funders is that after a certain period of time, stations will be able to stand on their own two feet. In reality, stations have their ups and downs: many have failed after seeming secure, while others have fallen apart and then picked themselves up again. The struggle for survival is an on-going one. We prefer to refer to a station's health, since health is understood as something that is not fixed, but can change from time to time. It also helps us reduce the excessive concentration on financial issues, in favour of a more holistic approach that gives due weight to social and institutional factors. In the following chapters, we aim to describe the key factors that impact the health of community radio stations.

#### THE FIVE PILLARS OF HEALTH

##### 1.

##### **Mission and Governance:**

This deals with the broad purpose and mission of the station, the organisational structure, compliance and the way in which it is governed.

##### 2.

##### **Management and Staffing:**

The management of a station and its human resources are critical success factors. This deals with skills and training, structure and routines, policies and related issues.

##### 3.

##### **Infrastructure and Finances:**

This covers studios, transmission and other infrastructure, as well as financial health, which includes income, marketing, financial planning and management etc.

##### 4.

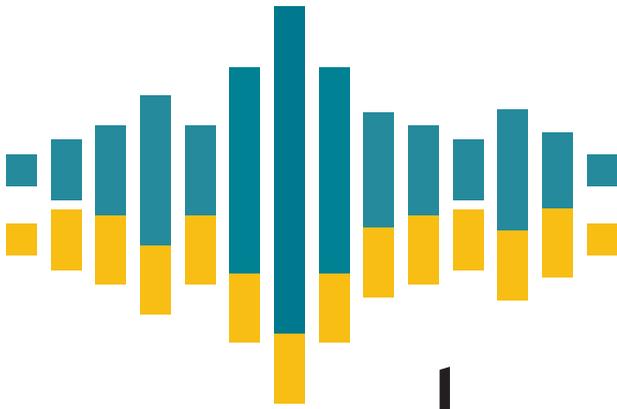
##### **Programming:**

This parameter deals with what is actually put out on air, including the appropriateness of the schedule, technical and content quality, news, the balance of talk and music, approaches to language etc.

##### 5.

##### **Community Involvement:**

We consider the depth of community involvement in the station, in decision-making, programming and other aspects.



# I.

## Mission and Governance

*A community radio station needs to have a clear sense of purpose, often expressed in a mission statement, and should be owned by the community. In concrete terms, this means that the station should be overseen by a board of directors elected by the community. Whether a community effectively owns the station and uses it for its benefit will depend on how functional and effective the board of directors is. A major indicator of a healthy community<sup>3</sup> radio station should therefore be its governance structure.*

*This chapter looks at the question of governance. We will discuss elements that make for good governance, including a clear statement of the mission and vision of the station, the legal framework and founding documents, the composition and structure of the board, guiding policies, and the performance of the board of directors. We intend to provide a standard against which the effective governance of a community radio station can be measured.*

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### **The essentials**

- A clear mission, or purpose, which shapes decisions and operations
  - A board that is representative, competent and plays its role
  - Legal compliance, in terms of formal registration, licences etc
  - A set of foundational documents, including a constitution and policies
- 

3. We have argued previously that stations can serve the community if they take other forms, too. However, the model of a station constituted as an independent community association is at the centre of this discussion as it is the most commonly used one.

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## 1. The mission and vision of the station

Early on during the life of a community radio station, the founding members should define its mission: a statement of what the station is about, defining its purpose and objectives. A mission statement should be formulated to ensure that everybody involved has the same understanding and to provide a basis for the station's development.

Therefore, a good mission statement should define the purpose of the radio station, inspire and motivate, be easy to understand and be shared by everybody involved. An example of a mission statement may be:

**“To promote increased participation of communities in the democratic process of the country by providing a forum and a vehicle through which communities can freely communicate between themselves and with their elected government representatives about issues that are critical to them without interference or fear of intimidation while adhering to the values of the communities in which the station is located.”**

The founders of a community radio station should have aspirations and dreams for it. Right at the inception stage or immediately after registration, the founders – as an interim board – should define what the station is going to look like when it is fully developed: they should have a vision of the community radio station. A vision statement is therefore about the future – about defining a picture of the radio station and the direction it is heading. A good vision statement should inspire those involved in the station, indicate where it is headed and be shared by everybody in the radio station. An example of a vision statement for a community radio station may be:

**“To be an institutionally and economically sustainable community radio station that is professionally managed, provides value to its communities and is able to respond to, and keep up with, the changing world of technology.”**

Statements of mission and vision are of little use if they remain words on paper, forgotten in a dusty filing cabinet. They need to live in the thoughts and actions of everybody associated with the station. Also, they should not be cast in stone, but be reviewed periodically and adjusted if conditions change. When a radio station undertakes a strategic planning session, the mission and vision should also be examined to determine their relevance in view of the changed environment.

## 2. The legal framework and founding documents

A radio station needs to have a licence to broadcast and the issuing authority, requirements and regulations differ in various countries. Often, two distinct licences are needed: permission to broadcast and permission to use a particular frequency. If the station is 'self-providing' (erecting its own transmission infrastructure rather than renting space on a national carrier like South Africa's Sentech), it will also need permission to do this. It goes without saying that a station needs to obtain the relevant licences from the authorities.

In addition, an effective and sustainable community radio station has to be legally registered. This can be done in different ways, and indeed southern African community radio stations have a number of different legal forms. These include registration as a stand-alone organisation owned by the community or as part of a bigger organisation such as a trust, a cooperative or a special interest development group, e.g. a women's group.

If the radio station is owned by the community as whole, a few individuals in the community on behalf of the community lead the process of getting the radio station registered. On the other hand, if the station is under an existing organisation, that organisation will take the lead. If this is the case, it is ideal in the long run to register the radio station as a separate entity. This will allow it to have its own guiding constitution and set up a governance structure that focuses on the radio station. As a legal entity, a community radio station can be registered as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) or Non-Profit Organisation (NPO), depending on the laws of the country. In both cases, the main characteristic is that it is run on a non-profit basis.

Whatever the legal form, a community radio station needs a constitution, which forms the starting point of effective governance. A healthy community radio station should have an effective constitution, one that complies with legal requirements and that is able to serve as a reference and give direction on how to resolve challenges when they occur. It provides guidance on how things should be organised and done at the community radio station.

### A CONSTITUTION COULD INCLUDE:

- **The overall mission and vision**
- **The broadcast/coverage area**
- **Language(s) of broadcast**
- **The Annual General Meeting (AGM – as the highest authority)**
  - Defining who can attend the AGM
  - When the AGM will take place
  - When special AGMs can take place
  - The conduct of the AGM
- **Membership**
  - Definition of different categories of members of the station
  - Who qualifies to be a member of the station
  - Roles of communities in the station
  - Benefits and responsibilities of members
- **The Board of Directors**
  - Indication of the size of the board and term of office
  - Conditions for board membership
  - Process of election of board members
  - The structure of the board and its committees
  - Board conduct regulated/guided by a board procedures manual
  - Dissolution of the board (conditions leading to the dissolution and process)
- **Management**
  - Definition of the management structure
    - Requirements for management positions
    - Responsibilities of the management
- **Finances**
  - The non-profit status of the community radio station (and implications)
  - Sources of income for the station
  - Statement on accounting for resources generated
  - Statement on the appointment of an auditor, getting the accounts audited annually
  - How the constitution can be amended
  - Dissolution of the community radio station

Another important document is the board procedures manual, which regulates the board's conduct. The board should develop this document early on in its term of office. The procedures manual may include the following elements:

- The structure of the board (i.e. its committees);
- Membership of committees (may include non-board members);
- Powers of the executive committee of the board;
- Functions of the committees;
- Meeting quorum;
- The conduct of meetings and the decision-making process;
- The casting vote of the chairperson;
- Board member sanctions and disqualification;
- Process of co-opting skilled people onto the board;
- Dealing with conflicts of interest;
- Remuneration of board members; and
- Process of adjusting the procedures manual.

### 3. Policies

A key role for the board is to develop policies, which are an important part of the foundation of a community radio station and are critical in ensuring effective performance. Effective policies should provide a guide on how the station should operate and ensure consistency in operation. They also promote efficiency within the radio station and help the radio station to comply with legal requirements.

An effective policy should be based on need, covering an area where guidance is necessary on an ongoing basis. It should be comprehensive, covering the full range of relevant issues and situations, and should take its impact into account. It should also be in line with the law, including the country's constitutional framework. Policies must always be approved by the board to ensure they have legitimacy. They should be written in simple language, so that they are understood by all community stakeholders. To allow for changing circumstances, there should be a mechanism for review and amendment.

The Human Resources Policy aims to guide the conduct of the radio station on human resources issues. Elements should include:

- Definition of work day;
- Employment contract and particulars of employment;

- Leave issues (annual leave, sick leave, study leave, compassionate leave, maternity leave);
- Protection against discrimination;
- Grievances and disciplinary procedures; and
- Sexual harassment policy.

The Finance and Budget Policy aims to give directions on how the station will manage its finances to ensure transparency and accountability. Elements should include:

- Managing the income of the station;
- Preparing annual budgets;
- Managing payments;
- Capital expenditure;
- Petty cash management;
- Staff payments;
- Financial reporting;
- Auditing of the books of accounts; and
- Fraud and misuse of funds.

The Programme and News Policy guides the station on programming and the provision of news and should include the etiquette of the presenters. More discussion will follow in Chapter 4, but elements should include:

- Programme content;
- Use of language on air;
- Broadcasting material containing violence and hate speech;
- Cultural sensitivity in broadcasting;
- The right to privacy and dignity;
- Role of community in programming;
- Programme review committee;
- Process of managing complaints;
- Studio etiquette;
- Structure of the news bulletin;
- Sources of news; and
- Ethics in news and the right to reply.

The Marketing and Promotion Policy guides the radio station on how to market and promote itself to stakeholders and defines the roles and responsibilities of the marketing team. Elements should include:

- Marketing and promotion channels;
- Roles and responsibilities of the marketing department (as distinct from the finance department);
- Limits and rules for advertisements, sponsorship, sale of airtime, barter etc.;

- Community announcements;
- Community outreach programmes;
- Marketing and promotional goods;
- Rate card;
- Code of conduct in marketing; and
- Dispute resolution.

The Volunteer Policy sets out how to manage volunteers, who are an important part of most stations' operations. Elements should include:

- Definition and categories of volunteers;
- Who may be accepted as a volunteer;
- Roles and responsibilities of volunteers;
- Remuneration of volunteers, if any;
- Other contractual obligations; and
- Termination of contracts.

#### 4. Composition of the board

The effectiveness of the board will depend on its composition. For one thing, it needs to be representative of the communities served by the radio station. If the station serves geographically diverse communities, the board should – as far as possible – be drawn from all the major geographic areas. However, this should not result in an unmanageably large board. There should also be representation of marginalised social groups in the community: women, young people, and people with disabilities.

The second important element is the qualification of board members. Ideally, a board should include members with skills in areas like finance, business management, marketing and promotion, legal skills, human resources, community development, journalism and information technology. Ideally, the community should elect community members with skills in the above areas to be board members rather than people who are opinion leaders.

It has to be acknowledged though that the small towns and rural areas where community radio stations mostly operate often do not have many people with those skills. Even in urban areas, people with those skills are often not keen to get involved in public service such as community radio. In the absence of people with the requisite skills, the community should elect individuals who are dedicated, willing to learn and prepared to give their time to the community radio station. The individuals must be committed to the development of the community in

general and of the radio station in particular. They must be individuals of good standing in the community.

The station should hold regular general meetings of community members at which the board of directors is elected, often annually. This ensures that the composition of the board changes regularly, although it is advisable to retain a third of the outgoing board members in the new board to allow for continuity.

## 5. The structure and functions of the board

Good governance also depends on how the board of directors is organised. An effective and functional board should have committees, including the executive committee and those dealing with various subjects or portfolios. Members of the Executive Committee should include the chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The functions of each office should be clearly defined.

The chairperson of the board presides over board meetings, executive committee meetings and annual general meetings. The chair also speaks on behalf of the station to the public and to the media, ensures the board functions effectively and smoothly, and provides overall leadership to the community radio station. The vice chairperson assists in managing the board and takes over the chair when the chairperson is unavailable.

The secretary keeps accurate minutes of all board meetings, documents all board decisions and distributes notices of meetings, minutes, agendas and any documents for meetings. S/he prepares annual board reports for the AGM and prepares minutes of the annual general meeting.

The treasurer ensures proper financial control systems, chairs financial and budget sub-committees of the board, and leads the board in discussions of financial reports and budgets. S/he leads the board in the appointment of an auditor, ensures the books of the station are audited annually, and prepares and presents financial reports to the AGM and other meetings.

The executive committee of the board is a decision-making committee. It can make operational decisions to facilitate day-to-day operations of the board. However, it should be clearly indicated in the board procedures manual that the

executive committee cannot make policy decisions or decisions that have legal implications.

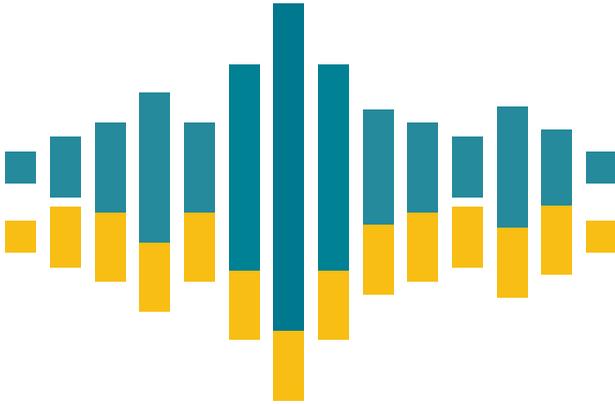
Apart from the executive committee, other committees should include: Finance and Budget, Programme and Production, Human Resources, and Marketing and Promotion. Committee members should include a board member, a line manager and co-opted community members who have skills in the area of that committee.

Subject area committees of the board are advisory committees to the board. They do not make any decisions. The functions and limitations of subject area committees should be spelled out in the procedures manual of the board.

An effective board must understand and carry out its functions, which include:

- Developing the mission of the station and its long-term vision;
- Working with management to develop a long term strategic plan for the station;
- Approving policies for the station;
- Approving the annual plan and operational budget submitted by management;
- Monitoring the performance of the station through management reports;
- Appointing an auditor and receiving audit reports;
- Developing the terms of reference for, appointing and supervising the station manager;
- Approving the appointment of other senior management of the station;
- Acting as the court of final appeal for staff of the station;
- Providing technical support to station management as needed; and
- Supporting the station management in fundraising activities through its networks.

Just as important as understanding what it needs to do is for the board to understand the limits of its role. The directors should not get involved in the day-to-day activities of the radio station, which would interfere with the operations of the station and would lead to a dysfunctional relationship between the board and station management. Conflicts between board and management – often due to a confusion of roles – have caused difficulties at many community radio stations.



## 2. Management and Staff

*Management performs a crucial day-to-day role in the organisation and has a major impact on the success of the station. The management team is ultimately responsible for implementing the station's strategic plan and vision as well as ensuring that its daily operations are successful. A strong management team is essential to ensure that the station is able to fulfil its obligations as a broadcaster and that it remains viable. In this chapter, we will unpack some of the key elements required for successful management, including positions, roles and how it all comes together. We will also look at other issues of staffing, particularly with regard to volunteers.*

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### **The essentials**

- A small, competent management team with clear roles
  - Key roles are manager, programming, sales & marketing, technical and administration
  - Sufficient skilled staff, paid and voluntary, to fill various roles
-

## 1. Structure, accountability and recruitment

A station requires some core capacity to enable it to be functional and operationally solid – a management team. The team should cover various departments and areas of the station's operations. It is the core capacity that ensures effective training and skills transfer to the station's volunteers and staff as well as its year-on-year development and the transfer of its organisational culture. It is critical that the station is able to grow and build on what went before and the management team is the core capacity that ensures that this is able to happen.

It is important to ensure that there are clear lines of accountability. The management team is accountable to the board for the day-to-day operations of the station. However, this does not mean that the board should involve itself in micro-management. The board should measure productivity, and ensure that performance targets are met and that strategic plans are implemented (further details of board role and function are discussed in Chapter 1.) There should be a disciplinary policy that dictates how non-performing managers can be held accountable. Managers should refer to the board only for major policy or strategic decisions. Management should submit quarterly reports to the board and these should be reviewed against the annual plan.

As the representatives of the community, the station's board should be ultimately responsible for the recruitment and appointment of the management team. Usually, they will handle the appointment of the station manager directly, but may delegate the appointment of the rest of the management team to the station manager. If this is done, those appointments should be subject to board ratification. It is important that a clear and transparent recruitment and appointment process is set up and followed, and that documents which outline the recruitment procedures should be created, followed and made available. It damages the community's confidence if somebody is simply placed in a position, leading to suspicions of favouritism. In concrete terms, this means advertising vacancies with clear deadlines and criteria. Job descriptions, including the key performance areas of each job, should be advertised and made available. All applications must be reviewed against the criteria and shortlists compiled in a fair and objective manner. Successful candidates should be contracted to the station by a clearly defined contract that sets out the scope of the position and expectations of performance.

A station in Gauteng, South Africa, went on air in early 2012 after long preparations: it was a major achievement, and generated much excitement. Once broadcasting actually began, everyone wanted to have a title and a role, and the station ended up with a staff of around 44, and a two-tier management structure with at least 12 people in 'top management' alone. "These people were there when days were dark, when founding members were trying to put things together for the station," was the justification. The arrangement led to a confusion of roles and other difficulties. Pressure for payment caused conflict and work stoppages, and a year after launch, the station had no signage and lacked other important items because so much income was spent on staff through transport allowances among other things.

– Based on SAMS reports

## 2. Management roles

Different organisations may structure their management teams differently. The size of the management team will depend on the size of the organisation as a whole, as well as the finances available. The overall number should never be so large as to make the organisation top heavy: there should generally not be more than ten managers. In all cases, the management should be competent and skilled with clear guidelines as to roles and responsibilities.

In the following section, we will briefly describe the roles we believe to be crucial to the successful operation of a community radio station. Obviously, other approaches are available. For instance, Jallof identifies four key roles. Besides the station manager/coordinator, she lists a 'community mobiliser', who leads a series of editorial groups that are responsible for various theme areas, an 'administration and partnership co-ordinator', and a 'technician' (2012: 73 – 76). However, we follow a structural approach that is more closely in line with mainstream radio stations.

The station manager is ultimately responsible for the effective management of the entire station. The person must ensure that the station is a functional and sustainable broadcaster, driven by a common vision and based on the principles of community ownership and participation. S/he does this through effective professional management. The station manager is responsible for all areas: infrastructure, programming, liaising with partners, finances and staffing.

It is particularly important to ensure ongoing training and support for staff, both volunteer and paid. The station manager should possess excellent communication and people skills. The person should have strong leadership skills, diplomacy and patience as well as an ability to work with people from a diverse range of backgrounds. It is important that the station manager is able to take the initiative and work independently.

The programme manager is responsible for what goes out on air, and has to ensure the development, implementation, maintenance and evaluation of the station's programming strategy. The programming content should be relevant and reflective of the community it serves, allow maximum room for community involvement and be editorially independent. Responsibilities include overseeing programming strategy, and managing programming resources and the programme teams, producers and presenters. The programme manager should have knowledge of broadcast rules, regulations and guidelines, programming techniques, procedures and standards. This person should also possess excellent communication skills, people skills, leadership, diplomacy and patience. It is essential that the person is able to take the initiative and work independently as well as work under pressure and meet deadlines. Time management is essential.

The technical manager has to ensure high professional standards in broadcasting as well as the effective development, maintenance and management of the station's technical resources. This means maintaining and managing the studios and other technical resources, managing technical production, and ensuring the station has strategic plans around technical needs. The technical manager should have knowledge of the legal framework of broadcasting.

The marketing and sales manager's role is twofold. Firstly, s/he must represent, promote and sell the station, its activities and opportunities to existing and potential clients in order to attract advertising or sponsorships, while building and maintaining relationships. And secondly, the person must protect, promote and develop the station's brand in order to support the station's strategic objectives. Responsibilities include developing sales and promotional strategies, selling advertising, and preparing and implementing promotional plans. It is important to protect the station's name and brand in the

public domain. The marketing and sales manager must be creative and possess artistic flair as well as having excellent communications, people and leadership skills. S/he must be able to work under pressure and meet deadlines and be an active problem solver.

The finance/administration manager is ultimately responsible for accurate record keeping and ensuring that the station operates according to its procedures and structures. This will include ensuring that the station complies with various reporting requirements, such as around music rights usage and payments, the regulator's requirements and others. It also ensures running an efficient billing system to ensure that money owed is actually collected. This person should have knowledge of bookkeeping or accountancy, financial systems, financial regulations and record keeping. The finance/administration manager must demonstrate attention to detail coupled with a good head for numbers, systems and processes.

There are other positions that can be created, depending on the particular station. This can include a music manager, who ensures the management, development and implementation of the music strategy for the station. This person will ensure that music played takes into account the range of tastes and interests among the community of listeners, and should have wide knowledge of music regulations, rules and guidelines, music and programming techniques, procedures and standards. Stations may also have a deputy station manager, or deputies for other management positions. They usually have a news editor, who oversees the news operation. The news editor may report to the programme manager or be part of the senior management team.

### 3. Other staff

It is important that the station's resources are operated by staff who are able to maximise their potential and enable the station to produce a quality product that is relevant to its community. Leadership at the station is very important to its success as it defines the direction the station takes. Good leadership also breeds good staff.

Staff should be recruited from the community and be representative of the community. Staff members are critical to the development of good programming and to ensuring that the station's resources are maintained and operated

correctly. The staff define the sound a station will have and how well it will work. They also influence the perception and image of the station through their association with the station within the community, and can make the difference between success and failure. The station should have strong recruitment and selection procedures to ensure that recruitment is fair, transparent and unbiased.

Newcomers to radio often think of radio stations only in terms of the voices behind the microphone, but in fact there are many other important roles that are needed to keep the station on air. In general, these jobs tend to be clustered around the managers mentioned above. Content producers work with the presenters to prepare material for a particular show, generating ideas for inserts, setting up interviews and researching background information. Technical producers are the wizards of the production studio, creating magic in jingles, advertisements and pre-produced elements. Bigger radio stations, or more complicated shows, may require their assistance during a live show, too, but this is not common any more. (More detail on how production teams may work can be found in Chapter 4 on Programming.)

The news team will need both reporters, who go out to gather news stories, and newsreaders, who present the bulletins on air. In many stations, there is no clear distinction between these two roles, partly because so much news is simply lifted from the Internet or other media. There may also be stringers or correspondents, people who are based in particular areas and send information through to the station. Within the news team, there may be specialist reporters in areas like sport.

Members of the sales and marketing team work with the relevant manager to sell airtime to advertisers and sponsors, and are therefore crucial to generating the income needed for the station to stay viable. They also develop and implement innovative plans to promote the station among its community and other groups. They are the people who organise outside broadcasts, fun walks, blanket collections in winter and the like.

If music plays an important role on the station, there is likely to be a music team, whose members are constantly listening to new releases, liaising with distributors, compiling playlists, and working out how to meet the musical interests and tastes of the audience. There may be roles for IT specialists and technicians, who look

after the technical infrastructure, although these roles are often played by the technical producers. Finally, the finance and administrative team ensures that the station complies with all the various legal reporting requirements, runs the financial systems, acts as the reception, keeps records and much else.

This is not intended to be a full list, and should be read mainly as an indication of the kinds of roles commonly needed. There are many variations possible, and the reality is that stations will not always be able to find people with all the skills they would ideally like to have. In all cases, though, it is good to give staff some kind of contract (some suggestions about an HR policy were given in Chapter 1). It becomes very difficult to maintain discipline when practices become loose and informal, and a lack of clear expectations on issues like working hours can lead to major problems and disputes. There should also be a disciplinary policy to ensure that staff can be held accountable.

Staff may be paid a salary, a stipend or work on a completely voluntary basis. In some cases, sales staff may earn a commission, while some contributors may be paid per contribution. Stations will decide on these arrangements largely on the basis of their financial means: there will always be pressure, and a desire, to put as many people as possible on a salary, but this has to be done within budgetary constraints. In making these decisions, stations should be fair and transparent – perceptions of unfair practice can cause huge unhappiness and jealousy among staff, and be very disruptive.

#### 4. Volunteerism

Volunteers, or people who work without payment, play a crucial role in community radio stations. They are often the core of the staff complement, working long hours and contributing enthusiasm and skills to the project of building a community radio station. However, dealing

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Community radio stations need to be training organisations. Skills must be valued as the station's payment for young volunteers' time!

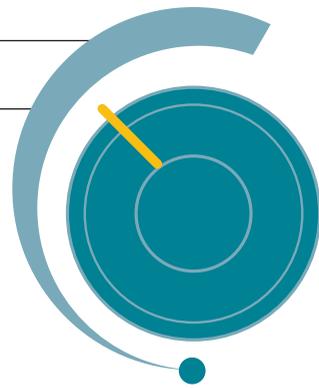
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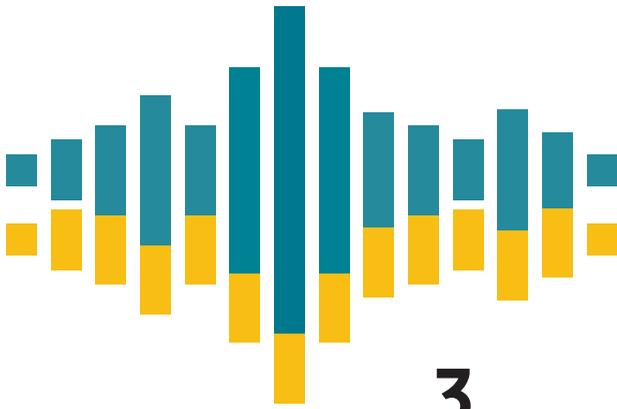
with volunteers can sometimes pose real challenges. Because they are working voluntarily, they may not feel as much of a sense of obligation to the station as paid staff, and may easily take time off for various reasons. Maintaining discipline becomes very difficult under these circumstances. Many volunteers are young people, for whom the station represents an opportunity to learn skills and then move on to a 'real' job. This means they may disappear with minimal notice if a better opportunity presents itself. This can be very disruptive: a show may collapse when the presenter disappears, while a crucial invoice may remain unsent because the administrator has accepted work elsewhere. Under the circumstances, stations struggle to find the stability and the skills base they need for viability. Often, community stations complain that they are caught in a vicious circle, constantly training people who then abandon them for mainstream jobs. In some discussions in South Africa, there have been calls for volunteerism to be abolished.

It is unlikely that community radio stations will be able to put all volunteers onto full salaries any time soon. But healthy approaches to volunteerism should be developed. Essentially, it means making clear and fair arrangements: volunteers should not be exploited, and expectations should be clearly set out. This includes issues like hours of work and the kind and standard of work the volunteer will be expected to carry out. It is perfectly reasonable to draft a contract, even if it is brief, which could also insist on reasonable notice being given if the volunteer decides to leave.

It is also important to identify the non-cash benefits available for volunteers, which could be something as simple as a word of appreciation or an occasional party. Radio stations are sometimes offered opportunities for staff to travel to an event or conference, and this could be used as a reward for a volunteer who has been working well. Training needs to be an ongoing activity, both because of the fact that there will be turnover of people, and because it represents a tangible benefit that volunteers will appreciate. Community radio stations need to be training organisations.

In general, it is important to recognise that the opportunity to learn and work is a significant benefit for young people, and also benefits the society more broadly. It is better to manage the turnover of volunteers in a way that minimises disruption rather than to try to prevent it.





### 3.

## Infrastructure and Finance

*Essential for the long-term health of any radio station are the physical infrastructure – the studios, transmitters, offices etc – and financial issues. When considering resources, it is also important to take into account the resources within the community that can contribute to the success of the station and its staff. In this section, we will describe the basic elements that a radio station needs to provide a broadcasting service that is audible and sustainable in the long term.*

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#### **The essentials**

- Transmission facilities that can deliver clear, audible programming to the listener
  - Suitable broadcast facilities to make programming: two studios, a reading booth and a main control room
  - Sensible, efficient and accountable financial systems, including realistic budgeting
  - An ability to tap into a diverse range of income sources
- 

#### **1. Technical infrastructure**

The resources at the disposal of any station determine what it is able to do as a broadcaster within its particular broadcast environment. Good quality infrastructure is the foundation on which everything else is built; without it, a radio station cannot exist. Great programming requires great transmission or it cannot be heard. In turn, excellent capacity and equipment is needed to create excellent programming.

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Transmission is critically important: if the station cannot be heard and easily received on a radio set, the station might as well not exist. In some countries, a station is able to contract with a signal distributor, like South Africa's Sentech, to take care of transmission. In other countries, such a possibility does not exist, and stations always have to own and manage their own transmission system. However, even where a signal distribution service is available, the station is likely to save costs if it owns and controls its own transmission equipment. It does mean taking care of regular maintenance so that the station's broadcast is not interrupted through transmission failures and problems.

The transmitter should be located on a high site that is easily accessible and not too far from the station. The site should be secure in order to prevent theft or damage by criminals or animals. The transmission equipment should be located in easily accessible racks inside a secure building that is air-conditioned. The site should have lightning protection. If the site is located some distance from the station, the station should possess a vehicle. Equipment needs to be appropriate to the transmission power set out in the licence conditions and requirements for effective coverage.

Normally one requires an antenna on a mast at a high site. This is connected to an FM exciter set to the frequency and power of the specific station. The FM exciter receives the station output from an audio processor, which ensures that the station maintains a good audio level and does not over modulate. Some stations may also have an RDS encoder linked to the FM exciter, which transmits the station's identity to the listener, who can then see it on a screen on the radio set. If the transmission site is located away from the station, the station should possess an STL transmitter and receiver to enable the station to send the signal to the high site.

Ideally the station should possess a hot swap transmitter and, if applicable, STL transmitter and receivers, so that if the main unit goes down, broadcast can continue on the other. The station should also possess a toolkit, which should contain correct tools to enable maintenance, repair and systems testing as well as manuals to help solve transmission and technical problems.

Broadcast facilities (studios) are what enable the magic of radio to be created for transmission. A station could transmit without a studio by simply plugging an mp3 player or suitable device loaded with content into their transmitter – but this is not radio, simply a jukebox. People cannot

interact with the mp3 player or device nor connect with other members of their community. To make the programming that the audience desires and that can bring in revenue, there needs to be some appropriate infrastructure.

A healthy station needs a minimum of:

- Two studios;
- A voice booth; and
- A main control room, where equipment is housed, which links the studios and sends the signal to the transmitter.

While the configuration of these facilities can vary, the basic requirements are the same.

The station should be able to use either studio to broadcast from for two reasons: it must be possible to carry out maintenance on the main studio, and there may be situations where the main studio fails. The studios, the voice booth and their entrances should be soundproofed. The studios should be on a separate electrical circuit to the general office plugs and lights (if a kettle trips the plugs, you do not want the studio to go offline), and this should be linked to the main control room. The studios should also be connected to a UPS and backup generator in case of power failures and to protect the equipment.

The equipment should be installed in such a way that no one can easily unplug or change the configuration. Provision should be made for inputs and outputs so that staff do not go looking to change the setup to plug in devices. The playout system should be connected to a server (located in the main control room). This server must be isolated for exclusive use with the playout system and not be used as document server or linked to the office network, except to a compiling

**EACH STUDIO SHOULD BE EQUIPPED WITH AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING:**

- a broadcast console of at least 12 channels;
- a telephone hybrid
- 2 CD players;
- a PC with playout system;
- 4 microphones;
- monitor speakers;
- headphones;
- clocks; and
- rag lights.

machine/content loading machine. Ideally, the two studios should exist on their own network.

The voice booth should be configured for use with either studio. Studio B should be configured primarily for production purposes but be easily usable as a broadcast studio should the need arise.

The main control room is the brains of the station. It links the two studios and houses all equipment that is not in the studios or at the transmission site: computer towers, CODECS, distribution amplifiers, block mountings, patchbays etc. The main control room should be secure and air-conditioned. It should contain troubleshooting manuals, fire extinguishers (CO2 not water), emergency numbers and a toolbox.

The studios should be properly secured to monitor use, prevent abuse and guard against theft. If money allows, there should be a station security monitoring system, also housed in the main control room.

The station should also possess a PC with appropriate software to record its broadcasts. This is necessary for archiving and recordkeeping, and may become necessary as legal protection if complaints are laid against certain content. This should be accessible on the office network so that staff can access previous broadcasts for feedback, production etc.

An OB (outside broadcast) system allows the station to broadcast from outside the studio, bringing the station to the community. A station would require a portable, more compact version of their main studio. They would either need to use an STL transmitter (if in line of site) or ISDN or Ethernet (if a reliable and fast enough connection exists) to get the broadcast from the OB point to the transmitter.

Field recording equipment is important as it enables the station's staff to record material in various locations within the community and bring it back to the station for editing, packaging and broadcast. From news to opinions to simple music requests, the station can collect the voices of its community. The station should ideally own several field recorders, which should be equipped with rechargeable batteries, memory cards and be easy to use.

## 2. Station offices

The station premises are where the community and partners of the station come to visit or directly interact with

the station. These should look professional and contain some basic capacity besides the studios. The premises should be accessible to, and within reach of, the community. Ideally there should be an entrance area with a reception where guests, clients and visitors can be welcomed and where they can be attended to. These areas should be welcoming with the station's brand clearly visible.

There should be a meeting/boardroom that can be used for station, client and small community meetings. In addition, there should be a newsroom, equipped with a hybrid for local telephone interviews, PCs with editing capacity and access to a drop folder for audio uploads to the playout system (there should be no direct access to prevent viruses). There should be one or two offices for management and administration. It is important that the station premises are secure. If installed, the security system mentioned above should extend to the offices and entrance area. A small kitchen and toilet should be on site.

The offices should be neat, tidy, clean and painted. The station should have a local area network that links all office PCs to a central server. There should be one machine reserved for scheduling and compiling that connects to the studio network. An Internet connection is very useful, both for email and for online research. If the station maintains a website and a presence on social networks, the necessary computer equipment to do so needs to be available.

## 3. Financial sustainability

Long term viability and growth depends on the ability of the station to balance its books: to generate enough revenue to support its operations. Attention needs to be paid to both sides of the equation, to generating income and controlling spending.

Financial policies are needed to make sure that spending is controlled. They should outline how financial decisions are taken, and set out procedures to be followed, levels of authority and the like. Expenditure should be subject to at least two approvals from different structures, such as management and the board. All financial decisions for major expenditure should be signed off and recorded in the minutes at the relevant meetings. Financial records must be kept, and it is very helpful if the station has somebody with financial knowledge to do so. All invoices, cash slips, etc should be stored and recorded. (Details of the kinds of issues usually covered in a financial policy are provided in Chapter one.) Management must get regular reports to ensure that they can

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keep an eye on the station's financial health, and watch out for positive or worrying trends.

Financial planning begins with an annual budget based on actual predicted costs and income. Costs need to be necessities not luxuries, while the income prediction should be realistic, based on income patterns of the previous year. There is no point in budgeting for a huge increase in income without a realistic hope that it will actually come in. It is generally better to be cautious in making income predictions and it is essential to make sure that planned expenditure does not exceed income. The budget should provide detailed information as to the nature of the expenditure and should take into account cash flow. An important cost driver is usually spending on staff and it is particularly important to make sure staff costs are kept in check. The management and board should approve the budget, and staff should be aware of the proposed and approved budgets.

Revenue usually comes from advertising, sponsorships, donations and grants. Stations need to have a good look at their environment when planning their income strategy: there may be a major mine nearby, which could be asked for support, or there might be a powerful NGO, which could partner with the station. In general, stations should try to diversify their sources of revenue as much as possible to ensure that the station is not dependent on a single source, such as government funds or a foreign donor. It is also important to look at a wide range of possible forms of support – subsidised or free office space can be as valuable as an advertising contract. Appendix 1 provides a grid of the kinds of support typically available from a range of sources.

Advertising is one of the major sources of revenue for many stations and stations should look to maximise this source of income. To do so the station should have sales material that can be used to sell the station and promote its services to the community and businesses. Accurate records of all advertising sales, meetings and invoicing should be kept. All advertising sales should be coupled with contracts that bind

the station and advertisers. Sponsorships of programming or events should also have contracts as well as terms and conditions to protect both parties. It is important that sponsorships should not control the station and its activities.

Stations should look to develop programmes that can be sponsored by government departments or NGOs with an interest in a particular area. These programmes should be themed to suit the needs of their community and many topics are possible, including water and sanitation, health, finance, etc. Partnering with local organisations and the government on programmes about education or other key activities can not only create good radio content and further assist the community but also generate revenue. However, it is important to retain editorial control.

Unlike community stations in wealthier countries, southern African stations have not found it easy to get donations from communities directly, although there are some exceptions. Some stations charge a small amount for particular kinds of personal announcements, and generate some income in this way. Most communities have resources that can be used by the station to grow its operations and help achieve sustainability. For instance, a printing shop may be prepared to print some material for the station in return for airtime. Or the station may be able to contract a local electrician to do some needed work at the station in exchange for promoting his/her business. The station has airtime at its disposal and it should look to use this to leverage resources from people, organisations and businesses. The art of the trade exchange can be very beneficial to a station. Care must be made to ensure that these relationships are subject to a contract and professional standards are maintained.

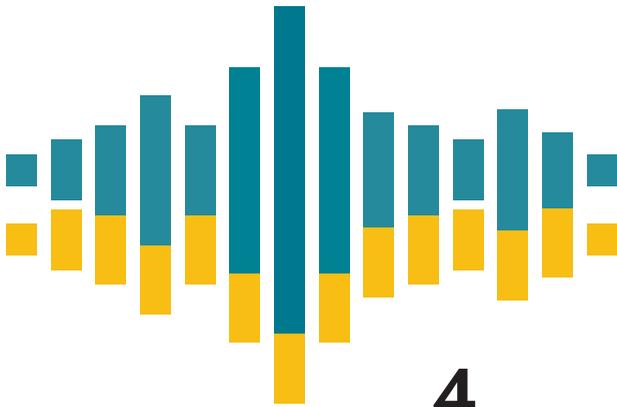
Some stations have been able to generate income through offering services to the community, ranging from producing music or advertisements in the station's facilities, to running a shop or Internet café, or arranging a concert. While these can be helpful to the station, it is important that they do not begin to overshadow the station's core business, which is broadcasting.

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A station in Zambia placed their transmitter on a hill outside town, and established the studio facilities next to the transmitter. It made sense from a transmission point of view, but it meant the studio was not within easy reach of the audience: it took a long steep walk from town to reach the station, which then had to establish a separate office in town.

- From SAMS records

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## 4. Programming

*A radio station's programming is where all the other elements come together: a community radio station needs to offer programming that is appealing to its audience, and that is distinct from commercial and public offerings. Its greatest strengths are a clear, strong focus on the interests and concerns of the community it serves, and plenty of opportunity for participation by community members. In describing the function of community radio (and, in fact, other forms of media), people often refer to information, education and entertainment. We would add interaction to that list as a fourth essential component. As a medium, radio is particularly well suited to facilitating discussions between people, and to bringing the audience into the debate. In 1932, when the medium was still young, the German playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote: "The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him." Over the years, radio has developed ways of doing just that.*

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### **The essentials**

- Programming should be focused on the community and its interests
  - It should allow for maximum participation by community members
  - It should be high quality, both in content and technically
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Mainstream stations, particularly commercial ones in urban areas, tend to focus only on one audience segment. In the USA, audience segmentation has been taken so far that audiences in many cities can choose between a long list of stations broadcasting in a particular format: country music, news/talk, adult contemporary music, Top 40, rock, sport, gospel and many others (a detailed description of the various formats is in Keith, 2007: Ch 3). Community stations, on the other hand, tend to adopt an approach that speaks to all sections of the audience, on the basis of their shared membership of the community – a strong bond with much common ground. But one should not lose sight of the fact that there are differences within the community. Older workers have different interests and tastes in music to the youth, for instance. Stations need to craft programming that speaks to the various interests within their communities. This is often known as a ‘full service’ approach, offering material of interest to various sectors at different times. But it is also good to find shared interests, the areas where different groups can meet.

Programming needs to aim for quality – it needs to work as radio, to engage the listener. When we talk about quality, we refer both to technical and content issues. The former includes even levels, no distortion, smooth presentation style and others. Content should be well considered and researched with a strong focus on local voices and concerns. This chapter will discuss what should be understood as healthy programming.

## 1. Schedules and policies

Considerable thought needs to go into drawing up a station’s programme schedule. On any radio station, this needs to be designed to draw in as many listeners as possible, and it needs to balance predictability with surprise. Listeners need to know when to tune in if they want to catch a favourite programme but there must also be enough new material to keep their interest. The programme schedule cannot be based on a particular presenter’s availability: it needs to be carefully designed to achieve the station’s purposes. A healthy station will be able to explain the logic behind its schedule, and will be open to suggestions for improvements and change. Of course, the schedule must be followed carefully. Occasional disruptions for special events are fine but these should be the exception.

In designing a programme schedule, it is critical to take into account the daily and weekly habits of listeners,

allowing for changes of pace to fit in with the routines of daily life. There is little point in scheduling a programme aimed at youth of school-going age in the mornings, when they should be in class. The kinds of questions that need to be considered include: how much listening is likely to take place at home? How much in commuter transport? When do workers get up in the mornings?

Rather than guess at the answers, some research should be carried out even if it is informal. UNESCO’s Community Radio Handbook includes a ‘Time Availability Chart’, which shows when particular audience groups are available to listen (2001: 58). Typically, radio’s peak time is in the mornings, and stations tend to programme their most popular presenters at this time. Their shows tend to suit the start of the day: often upbeat and fast-paced, with significant time devoted to information that is immediately useful, like weather and traffic. Scheduling also needs to take the competition into account. There are few, if any, communities where listeners do not have at least some other choices. Even community stations need to have some awareness of what those might be, and develop a competitive strategy. This also means other media: depending on the penetration of television, for instance, evenings may be dominated by that medium.

Community stations tend to accommodate both talk and music, but a balance should be found. The 60/40 formula is often used and in countries like South Africa, the promise of performance in the licence application in this regard is then written into the licence conditions.

In addition, a station needs a programming policy, which sets out its basic approach to issues of local content, standards, music choices and the like. It should set out the station’s approach to accepting programmes from outside the community: since sponsored public interest programmes have become such an important source of income for many stations, it is important to have clear guidelines on how to deal with them. A station might want to set limits on the kinds of material it will accept, set standards and take steps to safeguard its independence. It should also include an outline of editorial standards, such as fairness and accuracy, and establish how controversies should be handled etc.

Stations broadcasting to communities where several languages are spoken need to think through the best way to accommodate them, and formulate a policy on the issue. This can be part of the programming policy, and needs to take into account the relative sizes of the various groups,

the extent to which they understand each other, whether a particular language functions as a link language, any tensions that may exist between the different groups etc. The policy should go beyond setting out percentages for various groups – apart from anything else, these tend to be very difficult to stick to and monitor. Solutions that stations have found to the challenge of broadcasting in multilingual communities include scheduling separate shows for different languages, using multilingual presenters in mixed language shows, allowing callers to use their language of choice, translation and others. The issue of language can be complex, since it is often closely linked to a group's sense of cultural identity, and can therefore lead to strong feelings, even conflict.

A language policy should also address how formal the language used by presenters should be. Often, this is a key difference between older and younger members of the audience. Older people like to hear 'pure' language, while the youth develop their own slang, and often do not mind mixing languages to a greater degree.

The policies need not be long and complicated, but they should be clear, and it is important for producers, presenters and other staff to know what they say. There is little point in having documents that gather dust in a filing cabinet.

Individual programmes should each have a clear mandate or mission, and a 'hot clock', which sets out the structure of every edition of the show. Shows that are invented anew from day to day may pretty soon confuse listeners who will not know what to expect. They will lose their identity as a separate element in the programming schedule and will end up not being able to make their particular contribution to the station as a whole. They may all end up sounding pretty much the same, and there are dangers of overlap, with different shows choosing similar topics on a given day.

## 2. Programme types

The following are some of the types of show and programme elements that are common on community radio. There is an almost infinite range of possibilities for creating new approaches – and inventiveness by programme producers should be encouraged. The following are just intended as a selection of typical examples, which can easily be mixed in different ways to engage with audiences. An afternoon show, for instance, could easily combine music with interviews and news in a way that suits the audience's desire for a more laid-back yet still informative tone.

Music is relatively easy to programme; it tends to be popular and easily fills time. In fact, it is often a fall back option: when nothing else is available, it is easy to play a popular track. But there are complexities since musical tastes vary greatly between different audience segments. Listeners are strongly drawn to music that is to their taste – and can be put off by music that is not. The popularity of music also changes fairly quickly. On commercial music stations, a very strict playlist and clear rules of rotation are usually enforced, based on research into what is popular at a particular time. Community stations can, and probably should, allow more latitude for flexibility in music choices, not least because they appeal to communities that include people with different tastes in music. But they will also benefit from giving some thought to the music they play – a possible solution would be to allocate specific genres their own timeslots. Of course, it is also important to accommodate local -talent in a station's music programming. There are always gospel groups or hopeful school bands that are worth recording or bringing into the studio for live performances (space permitting).

Talk is, in a sense, everything that is not music, from a DJ's chat to an in-depth documentary. A typical discussion programme brings in a guest (or several) for a debate on a controversial issue or to explain an issue of public health, for instance. To be successful, the guest needs to be interesting and engaging, the host needs to be knowledgeable, and the topic must be clear and interesting. It is important to do some preparatory research to ensure that the important aspects of the issue are dealt with. Talk shows of this kind offer a fantastic opportunity to draw in listeners. They can call in, send SMS's, or contribute via social media. They can be offered advice and explanation, or given an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

Community stations inevitably promise to cover local news in hourly bulletins and longer current affairs programmes. But many struggle to meet their promises, since producing local news is not easy and needs dedicated resources. In fact, if capacity is limited, it may be better to concentrate on fewer bulletins, or perhaps just a regular current affairs show, but to make sure they are filled with original, local news reports. If some news is lifted, the source should at least be credited.

Some more ambitious formats need much more preparation and production than basic talk and music formats. While they can add a great deal of value to the programming schedule, it is advisable to attempt them only if the

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resources exist to do them well. Magazines are shows that usually focus on a particular topic, and deal with it through a combination of different kinds of items, including pre-packaged reports, which bring audio and voices from the real world into the studio, interviews, studio discussions, some music and others. To work well, each individual item must be carefully prepared and produced, and the whole magazine needs to hang together and flow smoothly. Radio dramas can be enormously popular, but they do take significant resources and preparation, needing scripting, sound effects, actors and competent technical production.

### 3. Organisational issues

Stations usually appoint a programme manager, who is given responsibility for ensuring the schedule continues to meet listeners' expectations and the station's mandate, the programmes do not become stale, and the producers and presenters deliver quality work.

If possible, it is good to have a producer work with each presenter to prepare every edition of the show, set up interviews, do background research etc. However, the reality is that presenters often produce themselves. Either way, the key to good programmes is a regular planning and production cycle. Too often, people arrive badly prepared, only just in time to take their seat in the studio. Birgitte Jallof describes an approach implemented at some stations in Mozambique, where small teams look after a particular topic area, working together to research the area, go out to find community stories to broadcast and generally prepare the show (2012: 91 – 94). She argues that this approach ensures that the station reports from inside the community, helps it become the centre of community development and action, and can help heal divisions.

News, as we have seen, needs a dedicated team, with some resources like field recorders, and access to transport, the Internet and telephones. The set-up does not have to be

expensive but it is almost impossible to produce local news of value without some resources.

Depending on the applicable legal frameworks, stations need to keep records of what goes out on air. Among other requirements, this is essential for royalty payments for any music played and for advertising. Generating advertising income requires an ability to prove that an ad spot has actually gone to air. In addition, the licensing authority in some jurisdictions requires regular submission of recordings and logs.

### 4. Participation, research and review

The point has been made that stations should keep the door wide open to community involvement. This is fundamental to community radio: in programming terms, it means bringing the community into the studio, and taking the station out as much as possible. Mechanisms include the use of phone-in programmes (which should also take comments and questions via SMS, social media and other means). Stations need to develop deliberate strategies around the use of outside broadcasts, partnerships and broadcasting at events. They should encourage individual volunteers as well as local groups and organisations to participate in identifying issues and topics, developing programme concepts and producing the shows themselves. A particular effort should be made to encourage the participation of groups like refugees and children, who are not easily heard.

Programming decisions should not simply be guesses, but should be based on research. This does not mean expensive, formal efforts (although if a tertiary institution is within reach, it may be possible to request them to conduct a more ambitious research project). Quantitative methods – which deliver data on audience size – tend to be too expensive for community radio stations. In South Africa, the SA Advertising Research Foundation produces listenership information six times a year through the use of listener

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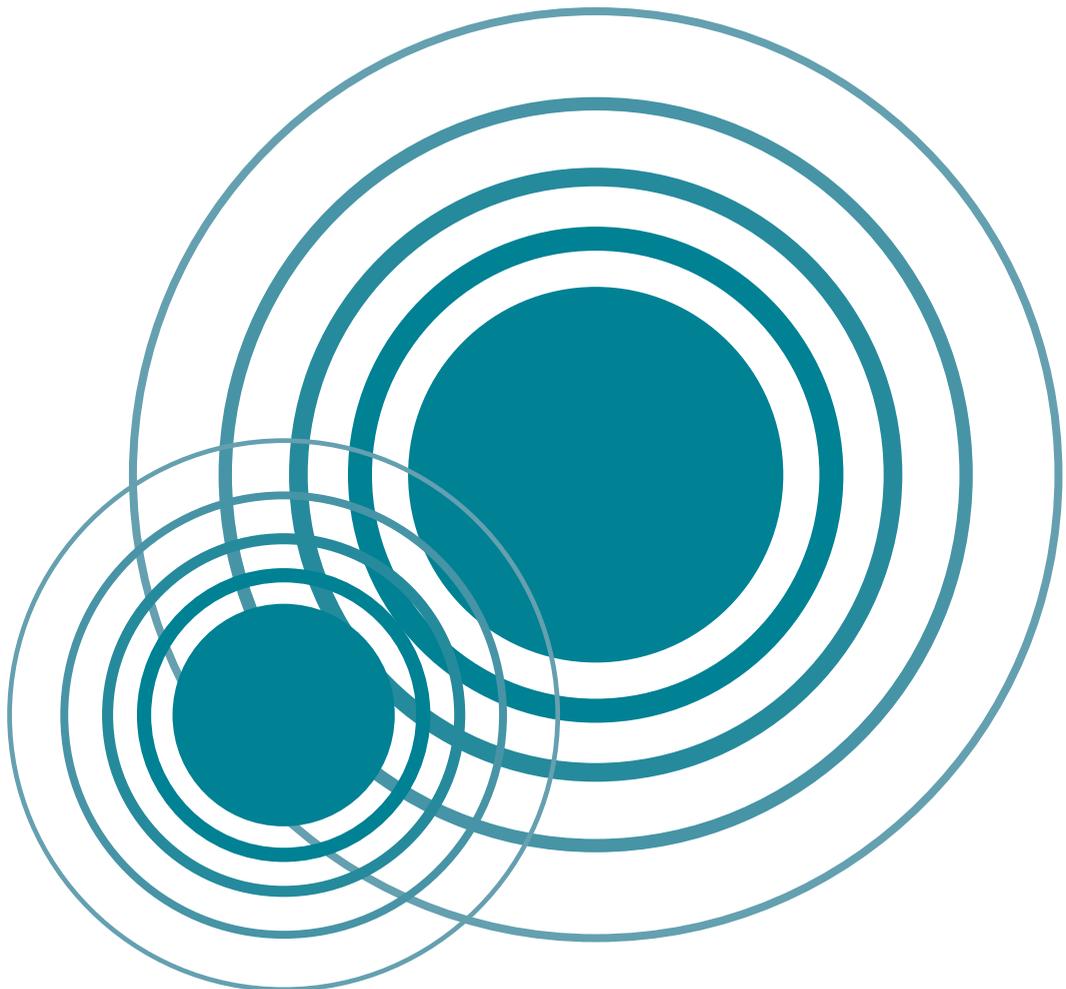
“The most significant change since our Maasai radio went on air? That is the fact that we have our own radio, are updated in our own language and can communicate. You can say that: It has given us our identity back!”

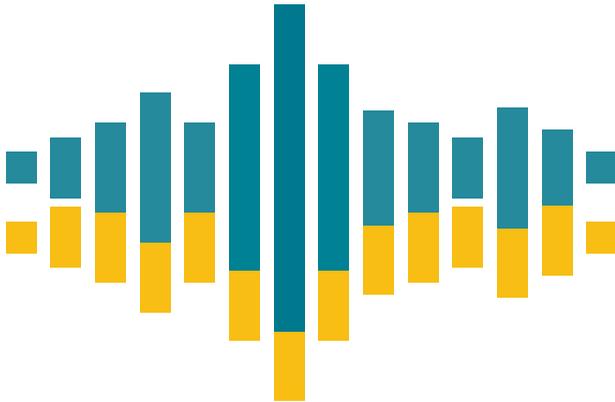
– Elders of Sukuru village, Kenya, quoted in Jallof (2012): 95

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diaries. But margins of error for smaller stations tend to be substantial, and community radio stations do not generally trust the results. But even a smaller local station can gather qualitative research, which gives insights into the opinions of the community and the audience. Research can be as simple as listening carefully to what people are discussing, or it can involve gauging the feedback that comes in to particular shows. A useful, simple mechanism is the use of focus groups, where a few listeners are brought together to discuss a particular show or issue.

Similarly, stations need systems to review programmes regularly. Using feedback from listeners or conducting a 'listen-back' session with the programme manager and/or a group of colleagues can provide important insights into a programme's strengths and weaknesses. Good programme making also requires a constant search for improvement.





## 5. Community Involvement

*A community radio station is defined as a ‘radio station that is owned and controlled by the community’ but how can this community involvement be seen? This chapter looks at community ownership of the radio station, what could be defined as effective community participation in the activities of the radio station and what it means for a community radio station to serve the needs of communities. On the basis of these discussions, one can hopefully derive a standard against which the effective participation of communities in a particular radio station can be measured. The need for a community radio station to belong to the community has underpinned much of the discussion so far. As a result, a certain amount of repetition is inevitable in this chapter but the matter is so fundamental to the concept of healthy community radio that we cannot do without a specific section on it*

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### **The essentials**

- Real community ownership and control
  - Community service by the station
  - Effective community participation
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## 1. Community ownership and control

A community radio station is owned and controlled by the community, whether it is defined by geography or interest. Perhaps it would be useful to point out that while the license to broadcast may have been given to an NGO registered for the purpose of holding the broadcast licence, the licence in effect belongs to the community.

In a well-run and managed community radio station, the board of directors is in control, acting on behalf of the community. In order to be able to claim to represent the community, they need to be elected in a well-attended annual general meeting. The board also has to be representative, including women, young people, people with disabilities and other groups. If the radio station serves geographically distinct communities, then the board should also have geographic representation. Therefore, holding a successful AGM is critical and depends on proper notice being given well in advance through a number of channels to make sure that anyone who is interested can attend.

Control is also exercised through the appointment and supervision of the management team, particularly the station manager. In a healthy community radio station, the manager is an appointee of the board, and should have a contract with specific terms of reference and deliverables. The board should also periodically evaluate the performance of the manager.

## 2. Relevant to the community

The material going out on air must be relevant to the community, meeting their needs and interests. The radio station should provide information and a forum for discussion of the issues that the communities consider important to their social and economic welfare. In many rural communities in southern Africa, for example, issues of agricultural production, income generation, education, health and communicable diseases, safety and security, cultural preservation, religion, delivery by government of social services, and environmental degradation are critical. A community radio station that is driven by the need to meet the needs of communities should have substantive programmes on such issues on air.

If the station broadcasts to a diverse group of communities, the station should have programmes that

meet the needs of the various sub-groups. Programmes specially aimed at addressing the needs of women, children and people with disabilities should be put on air and discussed by communities.

The relevance of the community radio station should also be reflected in the news that the station covers. In its news bulletins, most of the stories should be about things and events that happen in the community. This also means that the concept of news should be fundamentally different from the way commercial and public media defines news. In a community radio station, significant day-to-day events that contribute to the social and economic welfare of the community should be as newsworthy as tragic or dramatic events. To facilitate the collection and reporting of news, community radio stations should have stringers or reporters located in communities.

A distinctive feature of community radio stations is the language they use. They should use the local language or languages, roughly in proportion to the sizes of the various language communities.

## 3. Community participation

A healthy community radio station utilises a variety of mechanisms that encourage the effective participation of communities in its activities.

**Participation in governance:** Participation in the election of the governing board at the AGM has already been mentioned. The station should promote and encourage the participation of communities in the AGM, and community members should see it as something of a duty to play their role. If the radio station is considered as belonging to them, then community members should feel the social responsibility of providing participation and support.

The station requires people with skills in areas such as finance, human resources, marketing and promotion, law, IT and media to be on the board. These can only come from the communities the radio station serves. Therefore, community members who have these technical skills should offer to stand for election to the board. Members of the community who cannot be board members because of commitments elsewhere should offer to be members of committees or subcommittees of the board. Skilled committee members can make invaluable contributions to the community radio station. Generally,

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an effective community radio station located in an urban area should not struggle to get skilled individuals to offer their services. If it struggles to attract skilled people to serve, it should consider whether its communities consider it an effective and useful asset.

Participation in programmes: An important indicator of the health of a community radio station and one that makes a significant contribution to its sustainability is effective community participation in programmes. Communities can participate in a number of different ways. They can provide reviews and feedback on programmes that are being flighted, such as through call-ins. The station should set up a system of capturing call-ins for detailed off-air processing. Written reviews of programmes should also be encouraged. In this regard, the station can set up deposit boxes or, by working with local postal services, get mail delivered to the station. Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are fast becoming the norm especially in urban and peri-urban areas, and should be used to solicit feedback.

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“I first experienced the value of community radio in the ALX FM studios just after it had begun broadcasting in 1996. It was 1 o’clock in the afternoon, just after the news. Suddenly the door to the studio was flung open and a distraught woman rushed in. “My little boy! I lost him at the corner of Selborne Street and 6th Avenue...Please help me find him!” The presenter immediately interrupted the music and broadcast the emergency message. Less than 10 minutes later a lady from a spaza shop brought him in. She had been listening to ALX FM and her shop was on Selborne. She looked out of her door and saw the little boy at once and quickly brought him to the station. That reminded me of the ‘extended family’ of a community radio station.”

– John van Zyl (2005: 7)

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A powerful way of getting feedback is to go to communities and hold feedback meetings in town halls, community centres, schools etc. Similarly, outreach programmes by the station should be used to solicit feedback on programmes. Where feasible, reporters, presenters and other staff should carry out surveys of listeners in shopping centres, taxi ranks, market places etc. to get feedback on the programmes and the performance of the community radio station in general.

Feedback needs to be processed, and the results used in programming decisions and shared with communities. If community members are not informed of the outcome of the reviews, or do not see changes in the programme line up and no explanation is offered by the radio station, they might become despondent and not participate in reviews next time around.

Community participation should be reflected in the general orientation of programmes, and in the choices of particular programmes. This function can be carried out in a number of ways. The radio station should form a programme committee, led by community members, to review programmes and make recommendations to station management. Where a radio station has formed a listeners’ club, representatives of the club should be part of the programme committee. In communities where community-based organisations are active, their involvement in the programme committee is especially valuable.

Community members should also be actively involved in the production of programmes. They should be the source of information used to prepare programme and they should be interviewed on issues that the community and radio station are dealing with. Voices of community members should be heard on the radio, and their views should be used to balance the views of, for example, government officials on issues of service delivery.

Where resources allow, social media should also be used to enhance the participation of communities in producing programmes. Community members can record events that take place in their communities and transmit the recorded clips to the radio station for broadcasting.

Community radio stations depend to a large extent on community volunteers as on-air presenters and in all other roles. Professionals from the community constitute an important category of volunteers, and individuals with skills should volunteer to present programmes and

lead on-air discussions. Retired teachers should lead programmes on education; health professionals should prepare and present programmes on health; agricultural extension officers should present and facilitate discussions on basic agriculture.

**Participation in general activities:** An active community radio station should have a variety of events taking place throughout its coverage area. While the main aim of these events is to promote the station, events should also be used to promote and encourage the participation of the community in its activities. Fun events such as fun runs, football competitions, music concerts, performances organised by the community radio station are good ways to get all segments of the community involved. By sponsoring the events, businesses can also get involved in the activities and can promote themselves at the same time. Fun events should also provide civil society organisations with an opportunity and platform to send messages to community members.

The participation of communities in fun events brings in a 'feel-good' factor that is invaluable in communities that are troubled by a variety of social ills. Often the unintended benefit of fun events is that communities slowly begin to build a culture of being active and participatory in community activities. This activism can be channelled appropriately into issues that promote the socio-economic development of the communities.

**Providing financial support:** One of the major challenges facing community radio stations is the lack of money. One of the ways a community radio station can generate money is through contributions from its listeners, and this can be a major indicator of community participation and support. Other sources of income – such as advertising, government funds and donors – often come with strings attached. For a station to remain truly 'community owned and controlled', a significant part of its income has to come from the community.

It is sometimes argued that community radio stations cannot obtain financial contributions from their communities because of poverty. But others have argued that stations have not been able to show the communities why they should provide financial support, and the stations have also not put in place ways in which communities can regularly contribute. Those stations that have succeeded in generating income in this way

have done so because they are truly valued by their communities, and because they have set up systems to collect small, affordable contributions on a regular basis. They have also been scrupulously accountable for all the money generated and used.

A number of methods can be used to elicit financial contributions from communities. These include the formation of membership/listeners clubs with each member of the club pledging to contribute an affordable amount of money annually, fundraising events, contributions from local small businesses and corporates in the coverage area, and donations from individuals associated with the station even though they do not live in the area.

The ability of the radio station to effectively tap into these sources of income is a measure of how well the radio station is connected to its communities (broadly defined) and how the communities are involved in the activities of the community radio station.

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A community station in rural South Africa has a listeners' club that has close to 30,000 loyal members. But the station does not consider this group as a possible source of revenue.  
- *From the SAMS records*

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## PART 2: STATION HEALTH CHECK

# INTRODUCTION

Over the decade and half that community radio stations have been in existence, a substantial amount of resources have been used to support and develop them, with significant results. In several countries in southern Africa, the number of stations has continued to grow over the years and the number of listeners has also increased suggesting that “something good is happening in the sector”. The community radio sector is now playing an important role in providing information to communities, a platform for communities to communicate between themselves, and a communication bridge between communities and government, especially at local government level.

Largely because of the important role that community radio stations play in communities, there are a number of stakeholders who have an interest in the health of community radio stations, including the board and management of community radio stations, communities and civil society organisations in the places where the stations are located, government and support agencies, service providers to the sector, and donor organisations. All these stakeholders may find this tool, the Station Health Check, useful.

The board of directors and station management can use it to identify areas that need attention to improve the station’s performance. Undertaking the Health Check regularly should provide management and the board with an indication of progress over time. Targeted measures to deal with any problem areas can then be put in place.

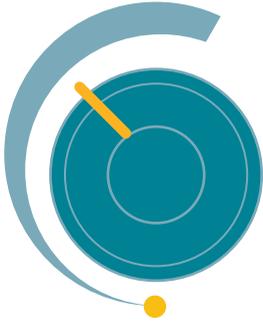
Support groups can use the tool to determine whether the resources and support provided are having the desired impact. It can be used to design a targeted intervention, and would indicate the degree of success after the intervention is complete – this is the intention of the Wits Radio Academy’s Station Advisory and Mentoring Service.

If the tool is used at a number of stations, it can deliver a picture of comparative strengths and weaknesses, and identify areas where support for the sector as a whole would most effectively be directed. This holds true for government agencies, like South Africa’s Media Development and Diversity Agency, local service providers, such as the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism in Johannesburg, and international funders, like UNESCO or the Open Society foundations.

A licensing authority, like the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), might have a slightly different use for the Station Health Check tool, allowing it to determine whether a particular station complies with its licensing conditions since areas where the community radio station is not compliant will stand out.

Groupings of community radio stations, such as Mozambique’s Forum of Community Radio (FORCOM) or South Africa’s National Community Radio Forum (NCRF), would also have an interest in the tool: they could use it to monitor performance against standards they may have set or to define areas where support is needed. It could provide a basis and justification for lobbying activities that the forum can undertake for the sector.





# Chapter One

## Method and Process

*In this section, we will first describe some fundamental features of the method involved in the Station Health Check, and then provide a step-by-step outline of the process as it should ideally unfold.*

### 1. Who carries out the assessment?

The health assessment of a community radio station can be done by the station using its own staff or by somebody from outside the station, or by a combination of the two. An insider has the advantage of much better insight into the station's strengths and weaknesses, but may be swayed by personal interests, status or other considerations to skew the assessment. For obvious reasons, the assessment has to be as impartial as possible. It may end up highlighting weaknesses in the structure and performance of the station, its board, management, its technical capacity or the interaction with its communities. This may be uncomfortable, but the assessment can only lay the basis for real improvement and supportive action if it identifies weaknesses clearly.

### 2. Buy-in by all relevant stakeholders

The Health Check can only be carried out effectively with the support of all stakeholders: primarily board, management and staff, but also others in the community. It will only succeed when the assessors have full access to relevant information and the honest perspectives and views of all stakeholders.

### 3. Verifiable information: access to documents

While interviews with station management are a crucial part of the exercise, we believe strongly that an assessment needs to verify information as much as possible. Too often, station managers make optimistic claims that do not stand up to scrutiny. For example, South African community stations routinely claim much greater coverage of local news than can be detected in the actual bulletins (Krüger: 2011). This is simply a reflection of the very human tendency to present the best side of one's work. Therefore, it is important for an assessment to look for evidence as far as possible: this includes actual station output, documents of various kinds and the like. It is critical for assessors to be given full access to information and documents that are both published and internal.

#### 4. Scoring and narrative

The Health Check is based on a system of scoring each of the five 'pillars of health', or assessment dimensions. These variables are equally important in our view: it is only when all the elements are in place that a community radio station can be considered truly healthy. Although some other systems of scoring we have seen weigh variables differently, we prefer to give them equal importance.

There are two kinds of assessment that need to be done. First, there is a checklist of things to examine, which require a simple yes/no answer, scoring either 1 or 0. For instance, the station is either a non-profit entity or it is not. In some cases, an assessor may choose to award half a point under a particular heading of this kind. Secondly, the assessor will be required to make a judgement on the quality of the station's health under a particular heading and assign a score accordingly. For each dimension, the overall score is made up of a combination of checklist scores (50 percent) and judgment scores (50 percent).

With all policies and documents, the existence of a piece of paper is not enough: the station will only score a yes if the policy or similar is known by staff and observed.

Of course, the use of a scoring system has some real disadvantages since it forces the assessor to reduce a complex set of circumstances to numbers. Inevitably, a score cannot capture the full reality of a station's situation. In order to deal with this problem, we insist that a brief narrative account is also written about each variable, as well as an overall summary. We believe that the advantage

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	RELATIVE WEIGHT
Mission and governance	20%
Management and staff	20%
Infrastructure and finances	20%
Programming	20%
Community participation	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1:  
Weights of Assessment Variables

of coming up with a score is significant, in that it allows for comparison between stations and can show progress over time. We believe that taken together, the score and the narrative account provide a tool that can deliver a clear and nuanced account of a station's position.

#### 5. How long will it take?

The more time is spent on an assessment, the more depth can be achieved and the more valuable the outcome will be. However, this has to be balanced with practical considerations of time and cost. A thorough assessment of a station could take between three and four days, and might be useful if it is the first time a station is investigated. A quicker assessment may be conducted to check progress. In our experience, the minimum amount of time that should be allocated to an assessment is two days. If they are set up beforehand, the necessary interviews, observations and focus group discussions can be conducted in the course of a day's visit on site, and documents can be picked up at the same time. A thorough review of the documents and other evidence can be done on a second day, off site, and then the report can be written.

#### 6. Understanding of the Health Check tool and assessment process

To use the Health Check tool effectively one needs to understand it well. While much of the tool is written up and can be followed easily, a significant part of the assessment will not follow the script. Interviews with stakeholders may take the assessment in unexpected directions. Unless the assessor has a good understanding of the Health Check process and its intended objectives, he or she may not be able to steer an interview back to the desired objective. Focus can be lost, especially during focus group discussions.

#### 7. The process

It is perhaps easier to view the assessment process as a step-by-step process.

##### Step One: Reviewing the terms of reference

The assessor first needs to clarify the terms of reference. If the assessment is being undertaken at the request of a funder or other outside agency, it means agreeing the terms of reference with whoever is commissioning the exercise. The terms of reference should define the objectives of the review, spell out how the results will be used and establish the time frame.

### Step Two: Getting the buy-in of the station

Secondly, the station's management and board need to buy into the exercise. The Health Check is intended to support station management to run the station well, and so they have to agree to participate. The assessment also has to be approved by the board. To gain acceptance by management and the board, the assessor has to clearly explain the purpose of the Health Check and the benefits to the station. The assessor should indicate among other things:

- When the review will take place;
- Who the assessor needs to interview;
- The documents the assessor will need to review;
- Arrangements for listening to programmes; and
- Focus group discussions that the assessor will hold.

### Step Three: Appointment of a contact person

The station manager should appoint a senior staff member as a contact person, who will support the process. The contact person should:

- Act as the link between the station and the assessor and facilitate the Health Check;
- Set up interviews for the assessor;
- Collect the required documents;
- Set up meetings with board members, station management and staff for the assessor; and
- Set up focus group discussions.

### Step Four: Gathering the evidence

The assessor should budget at least one day on site to gather all the evidence needed. In the next section, we outline the evidence that is required. More depth can be achieved if more time can be allocated, but this is the minimum we feel is possible.

### Step Five: Writing the assessment report

The assessor should budget a day to review documents and other evidence and prepare a report. We provide a suggested structure of a Health Check report below.

### Step Six: Review of the report with the station

It is important to review the draft Health Check report with the station, whether the report was commissioned by the station or an outside agency. It is important to allow the station to discuss the findings and to have an opportunity to point out mistakes or areas where the station has a

different view. These points should be taken into account when finalising the report. Management, board, staff and stakeholders should attend the meeting, whose aims include:

- Acknowledging the support from role players;
- Presenting the preliminary findings of the analysis;
- Getting feedback from the station on the analysis and recommendations; and
- Securing buy-in of the assessment by board, station management and staff.

If the assessment could lead to a supportive intervention of some kind, a preliminary discussion about the outline of the potential support should take place at this stage.

### Step Seven: Finalising the report

Feedback from stakeholders needs to be taken into account in finalising the report.

## 8. The evidence

The assessor needs to gather as much evidence as possible to conduct the assessment. In many cases, some elements may not be obtainable - it is up to the assessor to determine whether enough evidence has been gathered to make a judgment.

**Meetings and interviews:** The assessor should hold meetings with various stakeholders. These meetings should draw out general views of the station's health. It is desirable to hold meetings with the various groups separately, as it will allow for a more honest exchange of views. Meetings need to be conducted with station management, staff and the board.

Additional meetings, if possible, could be held with groups including local NGOs, local government officials, local businesses and major sponsors of programmes.

**Document review:** Any station documents can be useful, although the assessor needs to be aware that a policy, for instance, might exist but not be applied. There are often gaps in documentation: the assessor will need to gather as much as possible, and to judge what to make of the absence of particular documents. Necessary documents include:

- Founding documents (licence, registration documents, constitution and board procedures);

- 
- Operational procedures and policies, particularly financial, HR and volunteering, programming and editorial, and sales and marketing;
  - Strategic planning documents;
  - Job descriptions and contracts of senior staff members, and examples of other staff contracts;
  - Board minutes and files;
  - Station management reports to the AGM, board, regulatory authorities and funders;
  - Reports of staff meetings;
  - Financial statements/reports;
  - Budgets;
  - Audited financial statements; and
  - Marketing plans and marketing materials and tools.

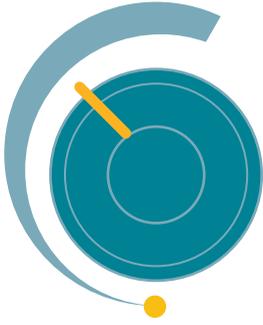
**Listen to programmes:** The assessor should gain a sense of what is actually broadcast. Even if such an impression cannot be more than partial, it is an important element. If possible, the assessor should listen to a sample of programmes that the station has broadcast. These should include those shows which have high listenership or which could be expected to include significant local content. The assessor could be guided by the station in identifying the particular shows, but they may include morning shows; afternoon and drive-time shows; current affairs shows; news bulletins or any other show which focuses on community issues. If there are practical difficulties, the assessor could ask somebody local to listen to the shows and fill in a grid like the one provided in Appendix 2. The assessor can then form a judgment after analysing the grid.

**Inspect facilities and equipment:** The assessor should have a good look around the offices, transmission arrangements and studios, and look at the state of the infrastructure and equipment.

**Focus group discussions with community members:**

At least one focus group discussion should be held to get a sense of community perceptions of the station. Participants in the focus group discussion should be as diverse as possible so as to represent all groups of listeners. It should include young people, representation of women, the local business community, civil society organisations active in the area, government officials and a traditional authority where active. If the station has a listeners' club, a representative of the club should also attend. See Appendix 3 for some notes about holding focus group discussions.





# Chapter Two

## Checking for Health in Five Dimensions

*We now turn to a discussion of the five dimensions. In each case, we will briefly summarise the dimension – more detailed discussion was provided in Part I. We then touch on the kind of evidence that may be relevant, and provide a set of questions that need to be considered and scored.*

### **DIMENSION 1: Mission and governance**

The Health Check first looks at the station's foundations. This involves asking about the station's fundamental purpose, as expressed in founding documents like the constitution. We assume that a community station needs to be constituted as a non-profit entity, and to express a sense of purpose that involves service to the community. Here, we also inquire into the effectiveness of governance, generally through the functioning of a board of directors. We are concerned with how the board is elected, how it works, and whether board members have the necessary skills. The station also needs to be legally compliant, and it is up to the assessor to establish what those requirements are in the particular country. They may include licence requirements; duties to report regularly to the licensing authority; music royalty payments; tax registration and others.

**(a) Maximum score:** 20 points

**(b) Evidence:** This may include the constitution; registration documents; board code of conduct, operational procedures and other documents; minutes of board meetings, AGMs and other reports. Interviews with all the role players will throw light on the questions.

### (c) Checklist questions

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		NO	YES
		0	1
<b>1</b>	<b>Mission and governance</b>		
1.1	The station has a comprehensive constitution that guides its operations		
1.2	The station is a non-profit entity		
1.3	The station has a clearly expressed mission of community service		
1.4	The board's members were constitutionally elected in an AGM that was open to all community members		
1.5	No board members have political or other affiliations that represent a conflict of interest, or have served more than two terms		
1.6	The board has functional subcommittees - executive, finance, HR, marketing & promotion, and programming		
1.7	The board has a code of conduct and/or bylaws that govern its conduct		
1.8	The board functions effectively with regular meetings as per constitution, making decisions that are followed through		
1.9	Board responsibilities are clearly defined and understood, and they exclude operational roles		
1.10	The station is legally compliant, including meeting all reporting requirements		
<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>			

Table 2

### (d) Overall judgment

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		SCORE 1-5
<b>1</b>	<b>Mission and governance</b>	
1.1	As a whole, the station has, and pursues, a mission of community service. It maintains its independence in relation to political, business and other interest groups.	
1.2	The station's governance is competent and effective. This includes clear, comprehensive founding documents that are observed in practice, a properly constituted board that provides effective leadership and guidance, and a clear division of roles between board and management.	
<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

Table 3

**(e) Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

#### DIMENSION 2: Management and staff

A healthy station relies strongly on competent, motivated and disciplined staff and management, and this is the focus of this dimension. We are interested in the competence of the management team, the recruitment of its members, whether their roles are clearly defined, and whether there is some method of managing their performance and holding them to account. Similar questions arise for the general staff.

A healthy station will need a clear HR policy, as well as job descriptions and contracts. Since community stations

rely on volunteers, there needs to be a clear framework for managing them, including a strong training policy and plan.

This dimension also looks at the day-to-day running of the station, including whether regular management meetings take place, whether decisions are taken and carried out, and whether records are kept.

**(a) Maximum score:** 20 points

**(b) Evidence:** Documents that need to be examined include strategic development plans; annual operational plans; HR files

of core staff; job descriptions; staff performance contracts and annual review reports; monthly station reports to the board; minutes of management meetings; HR policy and procedures, including volunteer and training policies. Discussions with various groups will give insight into management and staff issues.

**(c) Checklist questions**

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		NO	YES
		0	1
<b>2</b>	<b>Management and staff</b>		
2.1	The station has a long term development strategy with objectives, measurable goals and strategies to achieve its goals		
2.2	The station has an organisational structure with clear responsibilities		
2.3	Station management has the necessary skills		
2.4	Station management was recruited openly and transparently from the marketplace		
2.5	The management team functions effectively, including holding regular meetings, taking decisions and implementing them		
2.6	The station has a core of skilled general staff, who have clear job descriptions and whose performance is managed		
2.7	There are HR policy and procedures, including a policy on volunteering		
2.8	Station management prepares and submits regular operational reports to board		
2.9	The station has a staff development/training programme, which is being implemented		
2.10	Administrative systems are in place and run efficiently		
<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>			

Table 4

**(d) Overall judgment**

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		SCORE 0-5
<b>2</b>	<b>Management and staff</b>	
2.11	The station is on the whole professionally run. Most of the people know what they are supposed to do, and carry out their functions well. Things are working reasonably well.	
2.12	The station has its systems and documents in place, including well-written policies and clear operational guidelines. Management reports are comprehensive and reflect the performance of the station.	
<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

Table 5

**(e) Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

**DIMENSION 3: Infrastructure and finance**

This is where we investigate the nuts and bolts of the station: the physical facilities and the financial picture. Without functional, good quality equipment, the station will not be able to produce quality programming, and without good financial management – which means the capacity to control spending as

well as generate income from a range of sources – the operation will grind to a halt.

The assessment should look at the financial statements of the community radio station to determine the level of income generated by the station, the extent to which the station is able to meet its cost of operations, the stability of the income generated and the diversity of income sources.

The assessment should look for evidence of sound financial management systems, which deliver reports and control.

We also include here an investigation of the station's use of online and social media opportunities, and its marketing activities.

The assessor needs to look at the quality of the infrastructure. This includes transmission arrangements, which determine whether the station can reach its audience, studio facilities and office infrastructure. It is also necessary to check whether there is a system for maintenance, and whether there is adequate training for staff members.

**b) Evidence:** Key evidence for this dimension will come from simply looking around the station's premises. Interviews with management and others will also be helpful. Documents that may be useful include the finance policy and procedure; the station's budget and operational plan; regular management reports (which should include financial and marketing reports); management accounts; audits; marketing and sales policy; the rate card; marketing material; the station's online presence; equipment maintenance logs; equipment use and maintenance policy; stock records with check in and checkout system; and staff training manuals on the use of equipment.

**a) Maximum points:** 20 points

**(c) Checklist questions**

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		NO	YES
		0	1
<b>3. Infrastructure and finance</b>			
3.1	The station has a budget, finance policy and procedures that guide its financial conduct		
3.2	The station on average (over 12 months) generates sufficient income to meet its operating costs, including paying the staff		
3.3	The station has diverse sources of income (no more than 30 % of income comes from one source)		
3.4	Financial records are maintained, and there are regular financial reports and an annual audit		
3.5	A marketing and promotion policy is in place, guiding proactive marketing activities		
3.6	Marketing tools have been prepared and are being used to promote the station (brochures, pamphlets, cards)		
3.7	The station's transmission facilities deliver a clear signal to the target audiences		
3.8	The station has at least one on air studio, one production studio and a main control room, all fitted with functional equipment		
3.9	The station has a presence on the Internet and uses social media appropriately		
3.10	The station has sufficient office space and work stations for the staff, including phones and Internet access, and the premises are well maintained		
<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>			

Table 6

**(d) Overall judgment**

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		SCORE 0-5
<b>3. Infrastructure and finance</b>		
3.11	The station operates on a reasonably sound financial footing, meeting its bills. Financial management is sound.	
3.12	The station has good and well maintained equipment, good sound quality, the offices look professional and the general ambience of the office is pleasing	
<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

Table 7

**(e) Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

## DIMENSION 4: Programming

A critical assessment dimension for the Health Check is the quality of the programmes that are produced and broadcast. Obviously, the point of any station is to broadcast programmes that are interesting and engaging, and which appeal to listeners. The challenge for community radio is often to ensure sufficient local content, and to maintain a consistent quality. The assessment needs to look at the programming policy and schedule, and try to estimate the proportion of music to talk, and compare this to the requirements of the licence. A critical question centres on the proportion of good, local content – it is difficult to assess, but an attempt needs to be made. In this context, it is particularly important to look at news and current affairs programming. The technical quality is also an important consideration.

**a) Maximum points:** 20 points

**b) Evidence:** Key evidence for this dimension will come from listening to station output. As discussed above, if this poses challenges due to distance or language, a local listener should be commissioned to listen to a set of shows and provide the key information according to the grid supplied in Appendix 2. The focus group discussion will provide useful information, as will interviews with management and others. Documents that may be useful include the programme and editorial policy; the programme schedule; approved programme scripts; and any regular programming reports to the board and the regulatory authority.

**(c) Checklist questions**

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		NO	YES
		0	1
<b>4</b>	<b>Programming</b>		
4.1	Programmes are generally of good technical quality		
4.2	The station has programme and editorial policies, which are adhered to		
4.3	The station has a programme line-up that shows a variety of formats and approaches, matches audience interests and habits, and is regularly reviewed		
4.4	The station meets its licence conditions in terms of language		
4.5	Presenters are generally competent, and appropriate to their show		
4.6	Programmes have hot clocks and a planning cycle		
4.7	The news team has enough skills and resources to gather local news, and news and current affairs shows meet licence conditions on local content		
4.8	The station promotes local music and culture		
4.9	The station uses local professionals and civil society when dealing with issues of significance to the communities		
4.10	Music is well managed, with an organised library		
<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>			

Table 8

**(d) Overall judgment**

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		SCORE 0-5
<b>4</b>	<b>Programming</b>	
4.11	Programmes are of good quality: they are technically good, well presented, interesting and engaging. They meet editorial standards.	
4.12	Programmes focus strongly on issues of local interest, in news, announcements, discussions, through music and in every other way.	
<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

Table 9

**(e) Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

## DIMENSION 5: Community involvement

A healthy community radio station elicits the effective participation of the community to which it is broadcasting. This is a dimension that is threaded through the others, but it is of such importance that it deserves particular attention, even if this leads to some overlap. The assessment will need to consider the extent to which the station really 'belongs' to the community, in other words that there are mechanisms for community participation, through elections at AGMs, through ways to provide input on programming decisions and the like. It also involves looking at the extent to which programming is relevant to the community, and whether community members participate in programming and other station activities.

**a) Maximum points:** 20 points

b) Evidence: Key evidence for this dimension will come from the focus group discussions with community members, as well as various other discussions. Documents to be reviewed include AGM records and minutes; evidence of co-operation with civil society groups, such as MoUs or minutes of meetings with them; records of listener society meetings; records of community comments and feedback; comments made online; and records of programme committees where they exist.

**(c) Checklist questions**

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	NO	YES
		0	1
<b>5</b>	<b>Community involvement</b>		
5.1	Communities participate effectively in AGMs of the station		
5.2	A system is in place to allow communities to give feedback to the station on programmes, and the feedback is used to improve the programme line-up and content		
5.3	Professionals from the community volunteer to present programmes on air (teachers, businesspeople, traditional leaders etc)		
5.4	The station has listener associations or similar entities that are actively involved in its activities		
5.5	The station does outside broadcasts from different parts of the community		
5.6	The station uses stringers or similar to get news from all parts of its community		
5.7	The station has activities that involve communities such as fun runs, sports events etc.		
5.8	The station generates a percentage of its income from community activities such as pledges, dinner events, music events etc.		
5.9	The station has developed working relationships and networks with NGOs and CBOs in the area		
5.10	The station conducts charity events and programmes to address social needs as part of its social responsibility programme		
	<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

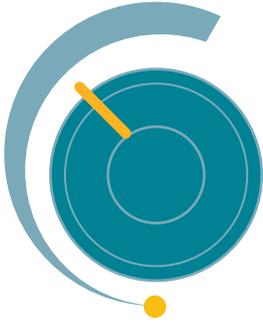
**(d) Overall judgment**

Table 10

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	SCORE 0-5
<b>5</b>	<b>Community involvement</b>	
5.1	Community control over the station is real, expressed through participation in AGMs, programming and other station activities, without undue domination by any interest group.	
5.2	The station's focus is clearly on the community, whose concerns, news, views etc dominate the content.	
	<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>	

Table 11

**(e) Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.



# Chapter Three

## Analysis and Action

*As indicated above, the Health Check can be used in a range of different ways, by the station itself and by various other role players, including licensing authorities, funders, community radio forums and others. It can be used to pinpoint difficulties at a particular station that need to be addressed, or if several sets of results are aggregated, overall patterns in a group of stations can be noted. In each case, the process begins with an analysis of the results.*

### 1) Analysis

With scores in all the various dimensions, the tool allows for analysis at three levels: it gives a sense of the station's overall health but also shows up its stronger and weaker dimensions and, finally, pinpoints particular issues within dimensions.

#### a) Overall health

To illustrate the way these results can be read, we provide a hypothetical example, whose overall scores are as follows

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	Score
Mission and governance	8
Management and staff	10
Infrastructure and finances	15
Programming	16
Community involvement	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>

Table 12

With an overall score of 56, the station can be classed as in "reasonable health", according to the following table.

#### b) Interpretation of overall scores

A station declared to be in excellent health has little work to do – except for sustaining that status, which is often a challenge in itself. Further down the scale, more and more action is required to improve the station's status. A station in

RANGE OF SCORE	HEALTH STATUS
0 - 39	Poor health
40 - 50	Not very healthy
51- 75	Reasonable health
76 - 90	Good health
91 - 100	Excellent health

Table 13

'good health' would need to attend to some issues, but drastic intervention is unnecessary. Stations at the bottom end of the scale have much more work to do: more strategic and long term actions would be required to move the station up the health status scale and towards sustainability.

### c) More detailed results

Our hypothetical station has scored 56 points. This means that the station is in reasonable health, but requires improvements. What the aggregate score does not show

are the elements that contributed to that score and what specific actions need to be taken to improve matters. For this, we need to look at the particular dimensions. In the above example, the station is doing very well in terms of its infrastructure and finance and the quality of its programming. However, the results show that the station is being pulled down by problems in governance, management and staff, and community participation. These clearly identify the areas that would need attention in any intervention programme.

### d) Results by assessment question

But the Health Check report allows us to go into even greater depth. In the above example, the station and assessor may want to understand what causes the board of directors to be non-functional? Why is the management just ok? And why is community participation so poor? To answer these questions, we would look at the specific scores, as in the following table.

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	NO	YES
		0	1
<b>1</b>	<b>Mission and governance</b>		
1.1	The station has a comprehensive constitution that guides its operations		1
1.2	The station is a non-profit entity		1
1.3	The station has a clearly expressed mission of community service		1
1.4	The board's members were constitutionally elected in an AGM that was open to all community members	0	
1.5	No board members have political or other affiliations that represent a conflict of interest, or have served more than two terms	0	
1.6	The board has functional subcommittees - executive, finance, HR, marketing & promotion and programming	0	
1.7	The board has a code of conduct and/or bylaws that govern its conduct	0	
1.8	The board functions effectively, with regular meetings as per the constitution, making decisions that are followed through	0	
1.9	Board responsibilities are clearly defined and understood, and they exclude operational roles	0	
1.10	The station is legally compliant, including meeting all reporting requirements		1
	<b>Checklist sub-total</b>		<b>4</b>
	As a whole, the station has, and pursues, a mission of community service. It maintains its independence in relation to political, business and other interest groups.		3
	The station's governance is competent and effective. This includes clear, comprehensive founding documents that are observed in practice, a properly constituted board that provides effective leadership and guidance, and a clear division of roles between board and management.		1
	<b>Overall judgment sub-total</b>		<b>4</b>
	<b>Total score (maximum of 20 points)</b>		<b>8</b>

Table 14

The responses to the questions indicate that the board is not functional, which is the main reason for the low score. However, what is critical here is that the analysis points out why the board is dysfunctional. Reasons include: (a) the board was not elected by community members as provided in the constitution; (b) board members probably have political links which should disqualify them from being on the board; (c) the board does not have a code of conduct which governs the way it operates; and (d) the board does not restrict itself to the core responsibilities of setting policy, approving operational plans, providing guidance and monitoring performance. The board gets involved in operational activities. From the analysis, inferences can be drawn as to what should be done to improve the health status of the station as far as this dimension is concerned.

## 2) Action

The point has been made repeatedly that the Health Check is intended as a diagnostic tool to assist support and action designed to improve the station's health. From an academic point of view, it may be of interest to analyse a station just for its own sake, but it is much more useful and interesting to assist stations to serve their communities better. This kind of support can take various forms.

The Wits Radio Academy is refining a method of support that is called the Station Advisory and Mentoring Service. It begins with the Health Check and then calls for the development of a series of specific, measurable goals for the station. These goals need to be negotiated with the station, and an experienced mentor (or team) works with the station to achieve those goals over something like six months. A programme of activities is planned and then undertaken to deliver those results, including training, planning, policy development, organisational development and other work. The approach looks at the station as a whole, trying to understand how different factors affect each other. It is designed to respond to the particular circumstances of a station, and to do so in concrete ways. In our view, it is not enough to simply run a training workshop or two and walk away. It is necessary to follow through, for the station and the mentor to make sure that specific improvements are achieved.

# CONCLUSION

Community radio matters. It can contribute significantly to the quality of life of poor communities, through information, education, entertainment and as a platform for discussion. These stations can be the electronic equivalent of a community meeting, giving voice to people usually ignored by the mainstream media. But they face enormous challenges: it is no easy task to keep an organisation running in a poor community, and to ensure that a team that tends to consist mostly of volunteers remains focused on a mission of independent community service. Many things can go wrong, from a breakdown of equipment to conflict between board and management, to the station being misused by some local power. The reality is that there are some community stations that do very well, and many that do not.

We need to celebrate the successes, and to support those that are struggling to meet these challenges. But we cannot do this without taking a hard, clear-sighted look at the real circumstances of particular radio stations. A lot of writing on community radio is driven by an essentially romantic approach that sees stations purely as heroic challengers of the media status quo. In many cases, this fails to make the distinction between the potential and the actual, and leads to real weaknesses and problems being glossed over. Just as unhelpful is an approach, sometimes heard in South Africa, which sees the sector as an unmitigated disaster. Such pessimism ignores the successes, as well as the real challenges that people at stations struggle with all the time.

This booklet has presented a new way of thinking about the health of community stations, based on a defined set of parameters. Our aim has been to develop a tool that can help develop a clearer sense of the health of a particular station, or, if used across a group of stations, provide a sense of wider patterns and trends. Importantly, it treats the station as a whole organisation, looking for the ways in which factors in one area may affect another.

The approach can be useful to any group with an interest in community radio. These would include the government, regulators, forums of community radio, donors of various kinds and service providers who may use it to check on the effectiveness of their support. Of course, it can also be useful to community stations themselves. The

first part of the booklet, which discusses the five pillars of health, could be useful to existing stations as well as groups starting a station, in describing some of the areas that need attention. The Health Check tool could be used regularly – perhaps annually – by a station to monitor its own progress. The assessment could be built into the management process and become routine, like a performance review for staff. Disseminating results among stations could also have value, allowing them to learn from each other's experiences. It can provide an incentive to individual stations to develop – the potential for networks to strengthen individual small businesses or organisations within them is substantial.

While the tool can be used for simple monitoring, we are much more interested in its use as a basis for action to improve a station's health. It should lead to a targeted, concrete plan that aims to achieve specific improvements in particular areas. The Wits Radio Academy is developing an approach of this kind, the Station Mentoring and Advisory Service, whose outline has been very briefly described above: in time, we hope to offer a more detailed discussion. There are many other organisations and people who have built up experience of this kind of support. Further work is needed to identify successful ways of working in this way, which goes beyond simple training workshops.

Of course, there are significant challenges in using the tool. Successful implementation will depend on the availability of competent assessors, and these will need to be developed, particularly at station level. In addition, we are sure that some will disagree with the way we have systematised the various issues and questions: perhaps some questions in our checklists need more emphasis, or less. We have been able to test the approach with a small number of stations, and refined it as a result. Inevitably more experience will provide greater insight. We hope the tool is used widely, and would be glad to receive feedback, so that adjustments can be made.

Our communities deserve great radio, and the people working against great odds to deliver it deserve admiration as well as practical support. If just one station's health improves as a result of this project, it will have been worthwhile.

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## APPENDIX I: SOURCES & TYPES OF INCOME

Please note that the breakdown below is not intended to name every possible situation. There are many variations and undoubtedly there are options not mentioned. It is meant to provide just some examples of the kinds of support that are available.

	In-kind support	Grants & donations	Project support	Buying services	Secondary projects
<b>Community</b>	Offer work, time	Make donations and pledges		Pay for announcements, greetings; hire presenters for special appearances	Attend concerts; use Internet café or other services
<b>Private business</b>	Make premises available; subsidise costs like electricity	Provide support as corporate social investment (CSI)		Advertising; hire production facilities & services	
<b>Local government</b>	Make premises available; subsidise costs like electricity			Advertising; hire production facilities & services	
<b>National government</b>	Equipment	Support start-up and/or running costs; subsidise transmission; tax breaks	Buy airtime for public interest programming; advertising; sponsor training	Advertising; hire production facilities & services	
<b>Donors</b>	Equipment	Support start-up and/or running costs	Airtime; public interest programming; sponsor training; sponsor networking		

**In-kind support:** donations of services or equipment

**Donations:** money made available for general use

**Project support:** funding for programming or other projects

**Buying services:** the purchase of broadcast-related services, like advertising, from the station

**Secondary projects:** some stations have an income stream from side projects such as concerts, shops or Internet cafes.



## APPENDIX 2: RADIO SHOW ANALYSIS

This grid is intended for use in analysing a radio show for purposes of conducting a health check. It is important to get a sense of what is actually broadcast by the station, and at least four hours of output should be monitored. It is useful to choose shows that are important to the station, or which are likely to contain local content, like the breakfast or current affairs shows.

### Notes:

#### Time check:

Record the start time of the item.

#### Length:

Calculate its length.

#### Item:

What kind of item is it – news, music, an interview, a shout-out, and advertisement etc.

#### Content:

Write a paragraph summarising the item. Identify the voices heard, note listener participation, and what is local and what is not.

#### Comments:

Provide an evaluation of the item, note anything that strikes you.

#### Music, jingles, adverts etc.:

Please also note them on the list.

#### Note the example below:

Start time check	Length	Item	Content	Comments
7am	4:30 min	News	1) Mandela in hospital 2) Car accident in W Cape 3) Malema plans new party 4) Mayor meets residents in section 3	One local story only, no audio.
7:04:30	3:30 min	Music	DJ Ganyani: Xigubu	Youth appeal
7:08	20 min	Interview	Police spokesperson in studio, outlines list of crime incidents in area over past week: one murder – unknown body found, two robberies, one rape. Presenter invites calls, one anonymous caller wants advice on how to deal with domestic abuse	Tech problems with mic, policeman not very clear
7:28	30 secs	Station ID		
7:28:30	1:30 min	Ad	PSA from Health department, encouraging men to go for circumcision	
7:30	5 min	Announcements	5 community events announced	

Station name: ..... Place of broadcast: ..... Name of show: .....

Date & time: ..... Language(s): ..... Name of host (presenters): .....

Start time check	Length	Item	Content	Comments



## APPENDIX 3: GUIDELINES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

### Introduction

An important part of the health assessment involves getting the views of stakeholders. A relatively efficient way of eliciting those views is to have focus group discussions on key subjects. However, for focus group discussions to be successful, the assessor has to prepare for the discussions very carefully. The following are simple guidelines for conducting focus group discussions, which are presented in the form of steps – further advice can be found in various publications and on the Internet.

### Step-by-step guidelines

**Step One:** Informing the station of the focus group discussion

i) Inform the station manager that one of the methods that will be used in looking at the health of the station will be a focus group discussion. Arrange a date and time for the exercise.

ii) Suggest to the station manager the type of people who should be invited. They should come from all stakeholder groups that have an interest in the station, including:

- A representative of the youth;
- A representative of women;
- A member of civil society;
- A representative of the business community;
- A representative of the general community, such as a leader of a listeners' club; and
- A government official.

The number of people invited to participate in the discussion should be between 10 and 15. It may be difficult to manage the group and the discussion if more than 15 people attend. Practicalities will influence the composition of the group, and the exercise should not be unduly delayed in an attempt 'to get everybody there'.

iii) Indicate to the station manager the objective of the focus group discussion, and that this objective should be explained to the invited people. The objective could be

stated as: "To discuss the how the community radio station is doing and suggest ways of improving it so that it better serves the needs of its listeners and communities".

iv) Request station management to provide a big enough room to hold the discussion (and tea/coffee).

v) Request station management to provide recording facilities to record the discussions.

**Step Two:** Preparing for the focus group discussions

The assessor needs to prepare questions to put to the group. These should be probing questions, which aim to elicit the views and opinions of the participants on the health of the radio station. They should be organised around the assessment dimensions.

The following are suggested questions that an assessor can consider and adjust as appropriate. It is important to treat these suggestions as a guide. They should not be followed rigidly: the assessor must listen for useful points and topics that s/he did not foresee, and be ready to encourage the group to pursue them further.

(i) Mission and governance

- How was the AGM promoted? And do you feel that the AGM was promoted sufficiently in the community?
- Was the AGM open to every member of the community who wanted to attend?
- What process was used to elect the board members? Was it open to community members?
- What is your opinion on how the board provides leadership to the station?
- Do you feel that the board is doing a good job?
- Does the board give feedback to the community on how the radio station is performing?
- Do you feel the board is representing the community well in leading and guiding the station?
- What can be done to improve the performance of the board of directors in all the above areas?

(ii) Management and staff

- Do you feel that the managers of the station are doing a good job of running the station on behalf of the community?
- Is the station well run?
- How are the presenters and other staff performing?
- Do you feel that presenters and staff are sufficiently skilled?
- What suggestions do you have to improve the performance of the staff?

(iv) Infrastructure and finance

- How do you feel about the maintenance of the building?
- Do you feel that the station is a professional place? And do the people there behave like it is a professional place?
- Do you know of an area where the station's signal does not reach?
- What would you suggest the station do to improve its infrastructure and image?
- How do local businesses participate in generating revenue for the station?
- Do you feel that the station is doing enough to reach out to local businesses?
- Give examples of activities the station has organised in the community? What did you think of them?
- What is the relationship like between the community radio station and the local government?
- How well known is the station in the community?
- What should the community do to support the sustainability of the community radio station?

(iii) Programming

- How clear is the sound of the station's programming when you listen to it?
- Do you feel that programmes provide information that is useful to you and the community?

- What is your view on the variety of programmes? Do they cover all the issues that are relevant to the community?
- How about news? Do you feel that the station gives you adequate news about the communities?
- Does the station promote local music and culture?
- What improvements would you suggest to make this community radio station really good for the community?

(vi) Community involvement

- What is the station doing to reach communities? Do you feel that is adequate?
- How do you as a listener and other community groups give feedback on its programmes and other activities?
- In your opinion, are the programmes, music, stories and news that the radio station is putting on air about the community?
- Describe the relationship between the station and NGOs and CBOs in the community. Are there examples of joint activities?
- What suggestions can you give to improve the station's outreach to communities?

**Step Three: Conducting the focus group discussion**

A number of things are critical in the process of conducting a focus group discussion. They include:

i) Establishing ground rules: After introducing the objectives of the discussion, and allowing the participants to introduce themselves, it will be useful to agree on a few ground rules. The rules should (hopefully) regulate the discussions. The rules may include:

- Not to interrupt other people when they are giving their views;
- One point of view is as valid as any other;
- Not to dominate discussions;
- Observing time;

- Keeping to the issues being discussed;
- Respecting other people and their points of view; and
- Confidentiality will be observed, and remarks will not be attributed to individuals in the report without particular agreement.

ii) The role of the assessor as the facilitator: The assessor will be the facilitator of each focus group discussion. This means listening to the discussion, keeping it on track and taking notes. The views of the facilitator are irrelevant. Active listening allows the facilitator to ask follow up questions and get clarity on the issues being raised. The facilitator should also be impartial to allow different point of views to be presented.

iii) Managing the discussions: Discussions on community radio stations may become emotional and get side-tracked. The role of the facilitator is to guide and steer the discussions so that they do not go off on a tangent. However, while guiding the discussions, the assessor/facilitator should be careful not to interfere and cut off the discussion.

A related aspect is dealing with people who dominate discussions. In rural community radio stations, men may easily dominate the discussions. It is important to ensure that the opinions of women and the less vocal are also heard. The assessor has to deliberately address questions to women and others who are not inclined to talk so as to get their views as well.

iv) Managing Time: The focus group discussion should not take more than two to three hours. To be able to discuss all the issues the assessor/facilitator has to manage time very well. While participants should be given adequate time to express their views in answering the questions, time should be managed to allow all participants to contribute to the discussions and get through all the issues. The challenge of managing time is to know when and how to cut off a speaker without being offensive.

v) Keeping to the question plan: It is important to ensure all topics are covered, while at the same time encouraging the discussion to flow and being open to other issues that come up. Getting this balance right is not always easy.

vi) Recording Discussions: If possible, it is good to record the discussion to back up the notes being taken. Recording will minimise the possibilities of misrepresentation of what participants say. The community radio station should provide the equipment needed.

vii) Thanking Participants: At the end of the discussion, the assessor should thank the participants for their contributions, indicating that while the views of the participants will be used in the report, individual contributions will not be identified.

#### **Step Four:** Collating and transcribing the discussions

Soon after a focus group discussion, the assessor should transcribe the discussion. The main points should be summarised under each assessment variable. This summary can then be used, together with information from other sources, to finalise the Health Check report.



## APPENDIX 4: THE FORMAT OF A REPORT

### **1. General introduction to the community radio station**

This should provide a background to the community radio station. Specific things that may be put in the introduction include:

- Basic facts, e.g. location and frequency;
- General programming format, use of languages etc.;
- The broadcast area and listenership;
- History and background of the station;
- The socio-economic profile of the communities served; and
- Issues that the station seems to be facing, and perceived health status.

### **2. Background to the health assessment**

This needs to explain who commissioned the assessment, what the timeframe and objectives are, and what it will be used for.

### **3. Methodology**

This should describe which specific activities were undertaken to gather the evidence, including dates of meetings and focus group discussions, who participated, a list of documents reviewed, shows listened to etc. Any gaps in the evidence and other challenges encountered should be outlined. This is also the section where the contribution of various individuals and organisations can be acknowledged.

### **4. The results**

The results should be provided. In each case, the scores should be given, followed by a short narrative discussion of the particular dimension. So that this outline can be easily used as a template, we are providing the grids again.

## a) Mission and Governance

### CHECKLIST

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		NO	YES
		0	1
<b>1</b>	<b>Mission and governance</b>		
1.1	The station has a comprehensive constitution that guides its operations		
1.2	The station is a non-profit entity		
1.3	The station has a clearly expressed mission of community service		
1.4	The board's members were constitutionally elected in an AGM that was open to all community members		
1.5	No board members have political or other affiliations that represent a conflict of interest, or have served more than two terms		
1.6	The board has functional subcommittees - executive, finance, HR, marketing & promotion, and programming		
1.7	The board has a code of conduct and/or bylaws that govern its conduct		
1.8	The board functions effectively with regular meetings as per constitution, making decisions that are followed through		
1.9	Board responsibilities are clearly defined and understood, and they exclude operational roles		
1.10	The station is legally compliant, including meeting all reporting requirements		
<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>			

### OVERALL JUDGMENT

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION		SCORE 1-5
<b>1</b>	<b>Mission and governance</b>	
1.1	As a whole, the station has, and pursues, a mission of community service. It maintains its independence in relation to political, business and other interest groups.	
1.2	The station's governance is competent and effective. This includes clear, comprehensive founding documents that are observed in practice, a properly constituted board that provides effective leadership and guidance, and a clear division of roles between board and management.	
<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

**Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

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## b) Management and Staff

### CHECKLIST

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	NO	YES
		0	1
<b>2</b>	<b>Management and staff</b>		
2.1	The station has a long term development strategy with objectives, measurable goals and strategies to achieve its goals		
2.2	The station has an organisational structure with clear responsibilities		
2.3	Station management has the necessary skills		
2.4	Station management was recruited openly and transparently from the marketplace		
2.5	The management team functions effectively, including holding regular meetings, taking decisions and implementing them		
2.6	The station has a core of skilled general staff, who have clear job descriptions and whose performance is managed		
2.7	There are HR policy and procedures, including a policy on volunteering		
2.8	Station management prepares and submits regular operational reports to board		
2.9	The station has a staff development/training programme, which is being implemented		
2.10	Administrative systems are in place and run efficiently		
	<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

### OVERALL JUDGMENT

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	SCORE 0-5
<b>2</b>	<b>Management and staff</b>	
2.11	The station is on the whole professionally run. Most of the people know what they are supposed to do, and carry out their functions well. Things are working reasonably well.	
2.12	The station has its systems and documents in place, including well-written policies and clear operational guidelines. Management reports are comprehensive and reflect the performance of the station.	
	<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>	

**Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

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## c) Infrastructure and Finance

### CHECKLIST

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	NO	YES
		0	1
<b>3.</b>	<b>Infrastructure and finance</b>		
3.1	The station has a budget, finance policy and procedures that guide its financial conduct		
3.2	The station on average (over 12 months) generates sufficient income to meet its operating costs, including paying the staff		
3.3	The station has diverse sources of income (no more than 30 % of income comes from one source)		
3.4	Financial records are maintained, and there are regular financial reports and an annual audit		
3.5	A marketing and promotion policy is in place, guiding proactive marketing activities		
3.6	Marketing tools have been prepared and are being used to promote the station (brochures, pamphlets, cards)		
3.7	The station's transmission facilities deliver a clear signal to the target audiences		
3.8	The station has at least one on air studio, one production studio and a main control room, all fitted with functional equipment		
3.9	The station has a presence on the Internet and uses social media appropriately		
3.10	The station has sufficient office space and work stations for the staff, including phones and Internet access, and the premises are well maintained		
	<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

### OVERALL JUDGMENT

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	SCORE 0-5
<b>3.</b>	<b>Infrastructure and finance</b>	
3.11	The station operates on a reasonably sound financial footing, meeting its bills. Financial management is sound.	
3.12	The station has good and well maintained equipment, good sound quality, the offices look professional and the general ambience of the office is pleasing	
	<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>	

**Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

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## d) Programming

### CHECKLIST

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	NO	YES
		0	1
<b>4</b>	<b>Programming</b>		
4.1	Programmes are generally of good technical quality		
4.2	The station has programme and editorial policies, which are adhered to		
4.3	The station has a programme line-up that shows a variety of formats and approaches, matches audience interests and habits, and is regularly reviewed		
4.4	The station meets its licence conditions in terms of language		
4.5	Presenters are generally competent, and appropriate to their show		
4.6	Programmes have hot clocks and a planning cycle		
4.7	The news team has enough skills and resources to gather local news, and news and current affairs shows meet licence conditions on local content		
4.8	The station promotes local music and culture		
4.9	The station uses local professionals and civil society when dealing with issues of significance to the communities		
4.10	Music is well managed, with an organised library		
	<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

### OVERALL JUDGMENT

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	SCORE 0-5
<b>4</b>	<b>Programming</b>	
4.11	Programmes are of good quality: they are technically good, well presented, interesting and engaging. They meet editorial standards.	
4.12	Programmes focus strongly on issues of local interest, in news, announcements, discussions, through music and in every other way.	
	<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>	

**Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

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## e) Community Involvement

### CHECKLIST

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	NO	YES
		0	1
<b>5</b>	<b>Community involvement</b>		
5.1	Communities participate effectively in AGMs of the station		
5.2	A system is in place to allow communities to give feedback to the station on programmes, and the feedback is used to improve the programme line-up and content		
5.3	Professionals from the community volunteer to present programmes on air (teachers, businesspeople, traditional leaders etc)		
5.4	The station has listener associations or similar entities that are actively involved in its activities		
5.5	The station does outside broadcasts from different parts of the community		
5.6	The station uses stringers or similar to get news from all parts of its community		
5.7	The station has activities that involve communities such as fun runs, sports events etc.		
5.8	The station generates a percentage of its income from community activities such as pledges, dinner events, music events etc.		
5.9	The station has developed working relationships and networks with NGOs and CBOs in the area		
5.10	The station conducts charity events and programmes to address social needs as part of its social responsibility programme		
	<b>Total points (maximum of 10 points)</b>		

### OVERALL JUDGMENT

	ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	SCORE 0-5
<b>5</b>	<b>Community involvement</b>	
5.1	Community control over the station is real, expressed through participation in AGMs, programming and other station activities, without undue domination by any interest group.	
5.2	The station's focus is clearly on the community, whose concerns, news, views etc dominate the content.	
	<b>Total Score (maximum of 10 points)</b>	

**Discussion:** A descriptive evaluation needs to be written to provide depth to the scores.

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## 5) Summary and recommendations

The overall assessment should be summarised, with the overall scores given in a table, as below, along with a narrative summary.

ASSESSMENT DIMENSION	Score
Mission and governance	
Management and staff	
Infrastructure and finance	
Programming	
Community involvement	
<b>Total</b>	

## 6) Annexures

Any attachments that add value to the report and recommendations can be included here.

## Notes

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## Notes

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[www.osisa.org](http://www.osisa.org)

The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) is a growing African institution committed to deepening democracy, protecting human rights and enhancing good governance in southern Africa. OSISA's vision is to promote and sustain the ideals, values, institutions and practice of open society, with the aim of establishing a vibrant southern African society, in which in which people, free from material and other deprivation, understand their rights and responsibilities and participate democratically in all spheres of life.



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<http://www.facebook.com/witsradioacademy>

The Wits Radio Academy is a centre of teaching, research and public engagement in the field of radio. Based in the journalism programme of the University of the Witwatersrand and working closely with the campus station Voice of Wits 90.5, the academy aims to make a special contribution to the development of radio in SA and beyond. Teaching focuses on thoughtful engagement with ideas and issues, while also emphasising the practical skills that practitioners need.

The academy offers postgraduate degrees specialising in radio, as well as an innovative Advanced Certificate in Radio (NQF6) whose content and structure make it particularly useful for community radio. It also offers support to community radio through its Station Mentoring and Advisory Service, and its Programming Hothouse develops new programming concepts for broadcast on partner stations. Every July, the academy organises a major international radio conference, Joburg Radio Days.