

**WNCW COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES OF 8 MARCH 2003 STAFF-CAB RETREAT**

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Carl Beason, Doug Beatty, Bill Clay, Ray Guenther, Lea Pritchard, Robert Seiler, and Morgan Smith. WNCW/ICC staff members present: Martin Anderson, Kate Barkschat, Roger Crawford, Ele Ellis, David Gordon, Amy Jones, Dennis Jones, Martha Jones, Mark Keefe, and Michelle Smith. Retreat facilitator: John Sutton.

Agenda: Discussion of communication between WNCW staff and the WNCW Community Advisory Board. No formal action was proposed or taken, but there was general consensus to work on the issues and timetable documented by the facilitator (see Attachment A, Meeting Summary, prepared by facilitator John Sutton).

Follow-Up:

Attachments:

A. Meeting Summary

Respectfully submitted,

William B. Clay,
Secretary

Approved,

Robert Seiler,
Chair

John Sutton & Associates

WNCW Staff and CAB Retreat March 7-8, 2003

WNCW hired John Sutton & Associates (JSA) to help staff and management clarify its goals and to facilitate better communications with the station's Community Advisory Board (CAB). To accomplish this, JSA led a two-day process that included an all staff meeting, one-on-one meetings with staff and management, and an all day communications workshop with staff, management and members of the CAB.

All Staff Meeting

All staff members were present at either the all staff meeting or the CAB meeting. The staff reviewed WNCW's mission statement, including the five points on how the mission is implemented. The outcome of that review was a series of goals, adopted by staff, to help the WNCW meet its mission. In addition to the goals, the staff agreed that the language in the mission statement could be refined.

The Mission

It is the mission of WNCW to advance the broadest educational goals of Isothermal Community College (ICC) through the operation of a full service, professional public radio service that encourages its audience to pursue a quest for lifelong learning.

Much of the discussion focused on defining two specific phrases in the mission statement; *a full service, professional public radio service* and *encourages its audience to pursue a quest for lifelong learning*.

Being a full service, professional public radio service includes offering a range of programs that fit the mission, whether local or syndicated, live or recorded. While the station primarily is a provider of music, it also makes available breaking news and information relevant to the listeners and the communities in which they live. Full service also means being available across delivery platforms (radio, Internet, CD). The radio and Internet services must be 24/7.

The second part of this phrase deals with professionalism. The group believes that a professional public radio service starts with programming to the listeners' needs and interests. It is responsible, but not a slave, to the bottom-line. A professional public service includes a professional staff that provides consistently good service on the air and off the air to anyone with whom the station has contact. Staff is open and responsive. They are knowledgeable and have a desire to evolve as information and technology present opportunities for professional and personal growth.

Where professionalism is largely about the staff and operations of WNCW, encouraging the audience to pursue a quest for lifelong learning is about the listeners and communities served by WNCW. It is not sufficient to put programming on the air and assume it fulfills this aspect of the mission.

To that end, the staff feels it important to know that listeners actively respond to the programming. Such actions might include participating in community events promoted or mentioned by the station or seeking out music, performances, books, and films discussed on WNCW. Active response also includes keeping an open mind about the music and ideas presented on the station. In short, WNCW seeks listeners who want more out of their radio station than background music.

Implementing the Mission

In addition to the mission statement, staff discussed five points it had previously articulated as ways to implement the mission. They are:

- Broadcasting distinctive programming that will inform, enlighten, inspire and entertain audiences from diverse cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Providing programming to listeners interested in contemporary society that is anchored in popular music, art and culture and the traditions that have inspired them; and creating an identity as an authority on the indigenous music of the Appalachian region, both recorded and live.
- Distributing programming in a non-commercial setting through traditional radio technologies and through electronic media such the Internet and direct broadcast satellite.
- Maintaining financial independence, attracting necessary financial resources from listeners and organizations that value WNCW's programming.
- Maintaining a creative, knowledgeable and talented staff that will provide quality programming, attracting necessary financial resources and using them judiciously, and gathering information and knowledge resulting from a relationship with our listeners.

During this phase of the discussion, the staff came up with specific, measurable goals for the next few years that will help ensure that the mission is being implemented as described.

The goals, while not a comprehensive list of everything the station must accomplish to fulfill its mission, provide new focus for the daily operations of WNCW. They were also the focal point of the discussion with the community advisory board.

WNCW GOALS

Each goal is in service of providing a professional public radio service and/or encouraging listeners to pursue lifelong learning. Goals with an asterisk next to them represent areas in which the staff is seeking direct help from the CAB.

By 7/1/03: Develop a system to regularly demonstrate that WNCW broadcasts distinctive programming that will inform, enlighten, inspire and entertain audiences from diverse cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds.*

By 7/1/03: Create a system of tracking programming-hours and listener-hours to the indigenous music of the Appalachian region, both recorded and live.

Ongoing: Meet translator filing deadlines.

By 10/1/03: Ensure power supplies at the transmitter site.

By 7/1/03: Have the complete freedom and the means to pay competitive salaries and reward staff for exceptional performance.*

By 7/1/03: Begin implementing a grass roots networking and marketing plan.*

By 4/1/04: Have another planning session such as this one.

By 7/1/04: Have a telecommuting policy and system in place that enhances productivity for staff in all departments.*

By 7/1/05: Day-to-day operations do not depend on state funding.*

By 7/1/05: Available state funding is used for program innovation, new projects, and improving infrastructure.

By 7/1/06: Day-to-day operations do not depend on CPB funding.*

By 7/1/06: Available CPB funding is used for program innovation, new projects, and improving infrastructure.

*WNCW staff requests help from the CAB in meeting this goal, if possible, by bringing resources, time, and expertise to the effort.

Details Behind the Goals

Each goal was discussed with the CAB. The details behind each goal and how the CAB might help is provided below.

By 7/1/03: Develop a system to regularly demonstrate that WNCW broadcasts distinctive programming that will inform, enlighten, inspire and entertain audiences from diverse cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds.*

How does WNCW know it is accomplishing this goal? Arbitron provides a piece of the information, but the station needs to develop additional systems to track this. In some cases, that entails formal surveys and in other cases it is the systematic aggregation of anecdotal information.

CAB members offered several ideas as to how they could help such as distributing surveys at music venues and local businesses, helping with e-mail surveys, targeting public meetings to draw more and different people, systematically tracking phone calls and e-mails, providing more formal feedback on existing programs, and engaging in a structured dialogue with listeners.

The structured dialogue was of particular interest to the CAB. This would occur monthly on specific topics. CAB members would be provided open-ended questions about programming and other services. Questions will be directly related to the stated goals and mission of the station. The answers to these questions will help staff and the CAB stay on top of listeners' perceptions about the station and its programs.

By 7/1/03: Create a system of tracking programming-hours and listener-hours to the indigenous music of the Appalachian region, both recorded and live.

The staff can track this with existing systems. What is lacking is a mechanism for tracking it regularly and using the information to demonstrate that this aspect of the mission is being fulfilled. CAB members felt such information would be helpful to have when talking with their constituents.

Ongoing: Meet translator filing deadlines.

Increases in public service are important to WNCW. The station must meet FCC deadlines for translator applications if it hopes to preserve and expand its coverage area.

By 10/1/03: Ensure power supplies at the transmitter site.

The station does not have sufficient back-ups in place to deliver on the promise of a 24/7 service.

By 7/1/03: Have the complete freedom and the means to pay competitive salaries and reward staff for exceptional performance.*

Station manager David Gordon plans to work with the licensee (ICC) on this issue. He believes the station can have more flexibility in this area. He sought assistance from anyone on the CAB with experience in this area. It appears the CAB is not a resource in this area at this time.

By 7/1/03: Begin implementing a grass roots networking and marketing plan.*

During the one-on-one staff meetings, additional objectives were added to this goal.

By 5/1/03, further develop an ambassador program and street teams to get WNCW promotional materials in venues, stores, etc. Carl Beason and Doug Beatty volunteered to help develop and implement this plan. One additional idea was to recruit a representative at each college in the area to help spread the word about the station and its services.

By 7/1/03, create a database of professional marketing, advertising, and promotion specialists who are fans of the station. The objective is to have a pool of people for WNCW to draw on for marketing, advertising, and promotion support. Board members agreed to e-mail names, phones numbers, and e-mail addresses of people who they know meet the above criteria. WNCW might hold a get-to-know-you event for these folks at some point.

By 4/1/04: Have another planning session such as this one.

Staff, management, and the CAB agree that this process should continue in order to receive the full value of this effort.

By 7/1/04: Have a telecommuting policy and system in place that enhances productivity for staff in all departments.*

Staff felt that productivity could be enhanced if certain work could be done through telecommuting. This is especially important when someone is required to be at a CAB meeting or event that is not close to the station. Commuting time is believed to be cutting into productivity. Everyone agreed that any such plan must clearly enhance productivity and that policies should be in place to ensure fairness and to prevent abuse. The CAB was asked to provide assistance with developing the policy and technical capacity to meet this goal. It appears that the CAB is not a resource in this area at this time.

By 7/1/05: Day-to-day operations do not depend on state funding.*

By 7/1/05: Available state funding is used for program innovation, new projects, and improving infrastructure.

By 7/1/06: Day-to-day operations do not depend on CPB funding.*

By 7/1/06: Available CPB funding is used for program innovation, new projects, and improving infrastructure

These four goals go together. In order to ensure the continuous delivery of a professional public radio service, staff and management believe WNCW's core service should be supported by the listeners and communities served by the station. State and federal funding is shrinking and is subject to the politics of the day. As the station becomes less reliant on subsidies, government funds can be used for innovation and technical upgrades.

To that end, there are several objectives associated with these goals.

By 7/1/03, assess membership performance and develop plan to retain members more efficiently.

By 9/1/03, institute a plan to attract major donors of \$1,000 or more annually. Robert Seiler volunteered to help with this objective.

By 7/1/04, be capable of launching capital campaign. Mr. Seiler volunteered to help with this objective.

By 5/1/03, develop underwriting ambassadors/street teams to identify prospective new underwriters. Carl Beason and Doug Beatty agreed to help with this objective.

By 5/1/03, develop a staffing and resources plan to raise \$650,000 or more in underwriting revenue annually beginning in July 2005.

State of the Station

A state of the station presentation, prepared by JSA, was delivered at the staff meeting and at the CAB meeting. To summarize, WNCW is performing well. The station is primarily a music station. Even when WNCW was broadcasting Morning Edition, at least two-thirds of all listening to the station was to music programming. All audience indicators suggest that listening to the station will increase now that it is providing music in the mornings.

The membership program is performing well, but could improve at retaining contributors. Looking at industry benchmarks, there is reason to believe the station could increase membership revenue by 20 to 30 percent without a corresponding increase in audience.

The underwriting program is performing well but would be doing even better if more people were selling. The \$650,000 goal is based on the station increasing the size of the sales staff, improvements in the traffic and logging systems that are already underway, and industry benchmarks.

The CAB/Staff Retreat

The goal of the CAB/Staff Retreat was to help the CAB define its role in supporting WNCW as management and staff works to meet their goals. The following CAB members were present along with WNCW staff; Robert Seiler, Carl Beason, Morgan Smith, Doug Beatty, Lea Pritchard, Bill Clay, and Ray Guenther.

As previously noted, the CAB reviewed goals set by the staff and discussed ways in which the CAB might help the station meet those goals. The CAB also saw the state of the station presentation and discussed the mission of the CAB and its role in decision-making and station support.

The Mission of the CAB

The purpose of the Community Advisory Board is to ensure that WNCW is meeting the specialized educational and cultural needs of the communities served by the station as follows:

- Provide advice to station management in shaping the programming goals to be established by WNCW.
- Provide advice regarding WNCW community service.
- Provide advice regarding the significant policy decisions to be made by WNCW.
- Provide advice to the station management with respect to the programming and other policies of WNCW and make such recommendations as it considers appropriate.
- Assist in obtaining resources and financial support for WNCW, including identifying and approaching potential WNCW donors.

Discussion

The CAB was unanimous in this opinion -- its primary role is to seek input from the communities served by WNCW and to help staff and management fully consider that feedback when making decisions.

This is an area in which the board felt that staff and management have fallen short. Many board members expressed frustration that their role was limited to nothing more than feedback after critical decisions were made. This topic was addressed later in the meeting.

A discussion followed about what constitutes "programming goals." The board agreed it was important to think about "programming goals" in terms of the *outcome* of programming decisions. That is, simply putting programming on the air isn't sufficient. The impact of that programming is what matters.

CAB members felt that WNCW programming goals should include serving listeners with music that is not available elsewhere, new music, and indigenous music. WNCW should fill a leadership role beyond the musical mission of the station. Specifically, the station should provide information about the culture and history of the western North Carolina communities served by WNCW. It was noted by the board that this is something WNCW already does well, but could build upon.

The conversation about community service focused on station activities such as media sponsorships, promotion of community events, and raising awareness of the role of other non-profits in the WNCW coverage area – whether culturally-based or not. WNCW should serve its geographical communities as well as it serves its communities of interest (musicians, artists, etc). The board can support the station by making staff aware of what is going on in their communities.

There is little for the board to do in the area of station policy, except for some underwriting and membership policies that might have an impact on how the station is perceived in the community. Examples of where the board might have an advisory role are on the length and nature of underwriting credits and the types of community organizations the station might partner with on occasion. The board agreed it might have some input on such decisions but that most policy issues were best handled by station management and the ICC.

The Role of the Board: Decision-Making

Everyone on the CAB understood that its role is to provide advice to the station, but that ultimate responsibility for decision-making rested with station management.

As previously noted, however, the board is frustrated with how it is being used. CAB members are eager to use their contacts in advance of decisions being made, however, the board is usually asked to provide feedback only after a decision is made. This makes it difficult for the board to advocate for the station or defend the decision if it is questioned.

The CAB sees opportunities to help WNCW along the decision-making chain – initiating ideas or providing input to station-initiated ideas, providing feedback on plans as they develop, and providing feedback after plans are implemented.

A proposal was made to have a semi-annual review of possible programming changes. The process would occur before pledge drives and would allow the board to get feedback and provide input prior to programming change. The timing of such a process would also prevent problems with listeners who might pledge for programming just before it is taken off of the air.

The group agreed to a modified version of this proposal. WNCW will review new programming options with the advisory board prior to the beginning of each fiscal year (July). This is an ideal time because it is between pledge drives, and as budgets tend to determine priorities, management can get feedback and make fiscally responsible decisions. Also, the start of the fiscal year is when the station traditionally makes commitments to networks and other program suppliers.

Even if the station is not planning on making a change right away, getting regular board feedback on available programming is a good idea. This holds true for current programming as well.

The group agreed that board members should engage in structured dialogue with its constituents. JSA agreed to help WNCW and the board develop a formal feedback process, probably on a monthly basis, that explores how well current programming and services meet the needs of WNCW's listeners – whether or not management is considering change.

This is an important point. Now that the bulk of WNCW's programming is generated locally, programming change could mean that staff members or volunteers will be asked to change what they do. It might even mean that staff members or volunteers would be let go.

The sensitive nature of personnel issues dictates that the CAB does not seek community input *only* when the station is considering programming change. If that were the case, the process would rapidly deteriorate into a discussion about personnel rather than public service. That would not be fair to the staff member or volunteer and it would not be fair to the CAB.

An on-going process that touches on all programming and services over time allows the CAB to fulfill its role of seeking input and giving feedback without exposing the station to the types of problems listed above. The general process will be for board members to work off of the same set of open-ended questions at the same time. The questions, developed by management with board input, will address the goals adopted by staff during their retreat meeting.

CAB members felt this was an important outcome from the meeting. Many wondered what role they were supposed to fill outside of coming to meetings and responding to e-mails. Providing structure to the information-feedback process would be welcomed.

The Role of the Board: Support

The CAB already supports the station in many ways. In addition to being contributors, underwriters, and pledge drive volunteers, board members occasionally MC station events. Bill Clay and Lea Pritchard promote the station, and its well being, on the web. Bill Clay led a "friends of WNCW" effort that raised \$15,000 in support of preserving the Charlotte transmitter.

There was some discussion as to whether the board could help WNCW maintain its state or federal funding through letter writing and lobbying. This crosses over into the relationship between the station and the ICC and requires further information before any formal board activities can take place.

The group agreed that a “why things are” segment could be added to staff reports at CAB meetings. The goal of the report is to give the CAB the history and relevant intricacies of a specific practice or policy.

An example of this is the Welcome Calendar, which evolved as a mechanism to provide some structure and limits on the number of concert announcements on the air. In hearing the history of the calendar, and its purpose, CAB members became better prepared to respond inquiries from constituents. By listening to CAB feedback on the Calendar, staff learned there are perceptions about the station that are both harmful, and largely unnecessary.

This type of dialogue between the staff and the board is important to CAB members. Having more of it will improve the board-staff relationship. More important, it will help the station operate more effectively. To that end, CAB members and the staff agreed to generate a list of topics for discussion during upcoming meetings.

Next Steps

The meeting concluded with a discussion about what happens next. There were four significant points.

First, adding more structure to the communications process will focus everyone’s efforts. That should reduce the tension between the staff and the board. No one should have to feel defensive about questions related to the goals set during this process.

Second, the board should make action items from this retreat a regular part of upcoming CAB meetings and communications. Everyone is focused on a specific set of goals and it is important to keep that focus and to track the station’s progress.

Third, the board will be most effective if it focuses on macro issues such as WNCW programming goals, community service, and fundraising strategy.

Fourth, being on the board requires a certain amount of accountability, which in board terms, means being actively involved in helping WNCW achieve its goals.