

Native American Radio Assessment Project

Executive Summary

“Providing cutting edge equipment and infrastructure is not a solution, in and of itself, for the development needs of American Indian media and telecommunications. Equipment and infrastructure are merely tools. They are only effective when they are applied in a manner that provides for - and advances - the social, civic and cultural needs of respective Indian communities. ... Furthermore, it is also critical for stakeholders to pay close attention to capacity building and sustainability issues.”¹

It is quite clear that Native radio stations are providing important service to their communities and that these communities value this service highly. Native stations are often considered essential institutions in their communities. They are a critical means of communication, and in many places, the only source of hard news and information about health, public safety, and community events. Often stations provide extensive coverage of tribal meetings and tribal issues.

Native stations are also key cultural assets. They have played a significant role in keeping Native languages alive and, in some cases, led to resurgence in Native language use. For many communities, the Native station is an important holder of culture and history, and communicates a sense of “home” to those who live under the station’s signal.

CPB funding investments in national programming and infrastructure have clearly paid off. *Native America Calling*, a daily call-in talk program about issues relevant to Native Americans, has almost universal live carriage by Native stations and provides a daily national conversation among Native people about important issues. AIROS’ 24-hour service allows stations to extend their broadcast day longer and/or enables limited staff to perform other essential work by automating some parts of their broadcast schedule. The 2001 Native Radio Summit was instrumental in moving Native stations, producers, and organizations closer to a sense of a Native Radio system. Nevertheless, the Native Radio system is relatively new, fragile and still needs help building its capacity at this time in its development.

There is no question that Native Radio faces enormous challenges and operates in very difficult environments. The circumstances, environments, resources and history are quite different than “mainstream” public radio and its model of listener-based financial support. Native Radio requires new financial, structural, and other models.

¹ Native Media and Telecommunications Project, prepared for the Ford Foundation, Kade L. Twist, May 2003. p.6.

The Native American Radio Assessment Project (Phase 1) was a team effort of Bruce R. Theriault Consulting and Teleos Leadership Institute. The team examined and analyzed the needs, aspirations, financial, and operational models of Native American public radio stations, producers, and national organizations. The goal was to assess and recommend the best course of action to ensure Native Radio's future growth and continued development, and to advise CPB on future funding investments in these services.

Major activities of this project included meetings and in-depth interviews with key Native leaders, station and system leaders, and on-site station visits with a dozen stations from Alaska to Arizona to Wisconsin. We also visited AIROS in Lincoln, NB and Koahnic Broadcasting Corporation's production operation in Albuquerque, NM.

Financial, operational, and other analyses were conducted for the Native Radio system. This data was presented at a Feedback Meeting (aka Discovery Session) held in Scottsdale, AZ in early December with Native American leaders, stations, and organizations that were interviewed.

Key Findings and Recommendations

1. There are important partnerships that need to be forged with other institutions working with and for Native communities. For example, there are governmental and other entities working in or with Native communities that rely on the stations to achieve their missions, however, most of these entities currently do not provide support to the stations. These entities are potential resources that could provide financial and other support to stations. This needs to be explored and developed. Even a modest return of \$3-5 million would more than double what CPB currently invests in Native stations - and that would be very significant.
2. The Native Radio system needs a coordinating office to provide leadership, fundraising, and centralized resources to help with functions now performed on a station-by-station basis (e.g., financial reporting and engineering support). This will provide a strategic and coordinated approach for key functions that will enhance the prospects for building organizational capacity over the long haul. Phase 2: An Initiative to Develop and Advance Native Radio, contained in the body of this report, offers specific suggestions for setting up such an office. Phase 2 also proposes allocating funds for a major consulting firm to identify sources, analyze the potential, and develop specific tactics to bring new revenue resources to Native Radio.
3. Some current CPB policies and procedures appear to make it difficult for Native stations to receive and/or make best use of CPB funding. For example, some financial reporting requirements might not make sense in Native station operating environments. Also, allowing stations to use CPB

- funding to pay for core staff could be very helpful. Minor policy changes alone could make it possible for additional funds to flow to these stations. CPB should review and evaluate current policies to better align them with operating realities at Native stations. CPB should also review all Native stations' Community Service Grant (CSG) level to determine if any Native station is incorrectly classified and eligible for a larger CSG or other grant.
4. During the Project we became aware of other Native owned and operated stations² that could be part of the CPB system and eligible for CPB funding. CPB should review all non-commercial Native stations (both currently eligible and non-eligible) to assess what steps could be taken to qualify non-eligible stations and to maximize funding for currently eligible stations.
 5. The national programming for the Native Radio system has become an essential element in the program service offered by stations in their communities. CPB's support of the core programming, most importantly *Native America Calling/National Native News*, has been critical to its development and survival. Also, AIROS' 24-hour schedule has allowed stations to remain on air longer. CPB needs to continue supporting Native Radio's major national programming for the next few years while other funding sources are identified.

This final report describes the assessment process, resulting findings of this process, and our recommendations³. There is additionally important background information on the Native Radio system in this report. Phase 1 was a good beginning. It allowed stakeholders to reflect on where they have been, where they are today, and created some momentum for going forward. We are optimistic that Native Radio can grow and prosper with a focused and concerted effort as outlined in the Phase 2 initiative. The Native Radio community is ready, willing, and eager for the challenge.

² For example, KWSO, Warm Springs, OR & KWRR, Ft. Washakie, WY.

³ Recommendations from Bruce R. Theriault Consulting and Teleos Leadership Institute