

EDITORIAL INTEGRITY for PUBLIC MEDIA

Principles, Policies, & Practices

A Working Group Report from the Editorial Integrity Project **Editorial Partnerships**

Background

Public broadcasters have long partnered with federal agencies and corporate and foundation underwriters in ways that have preserved editorial independence. But with the advent of 21st century information technology, where the news cycle has become a round the clock phenomenon and information sources and perspectives are increasingly far-ranging, editorial content is being shaped by more independent and community-based platforms and opinions than ever before. This presents both important opportunities as well as challenges for public station decision makers.

Public broadcasting entities can now better serve the news and information interests of their evolving audiences and stakeholders by partnering in appropriate ways with increasingly diverse editorial sources and commentators within the larger community. Such partners can include other news organizations (both in the established and emerging commercial space), independent bloggers, universities or colleges, governmental entities, non-profit organizations, and an increasing array of non-commercial sources such as PEG-TV, LinkTV and BAVC. Through editorial partnerships with such entities, public broadcasters can vastly expand the reporting reach and perspectives they can share with their core constituents, increase audience share, and enhance the timeliness and relevance of their reporting.

The Editorial Integrity Project is a collaboration of
public television's Affinity Group Coalition and public radio's Station Resource Group.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting provided funding.
The National Educational Telecommunications Association provided organizational support.



At the same time, editorial partnerships with entities extending beyond the public broadcasting system can expose public station leaders to unprecedented risks and dangers. The inherently unregulated nature of much of the new media and the biased interests of stakeholders operating within the broader public space can skew the values of objectivity and independence that have been and must remain the hallmarks of public broadcasting integrity.

Objectives

The materials herein are intended to identify key considerations, exemplary best practices and helpful tools that can assist public broadcasting managers to achieve an optimal balance between opportunities and risks in their particular circumstances, given the fast moving field of new media and the changing cultural landscape in which it is taking shape.

By utilizing these materials, public broadcasting leaders will be empowered to take an affirmative and proactive stance relative to editorial partnerships, rather than a cautious and defensive one. Indeed a core objective here is to encourage such partnerships where they can meaningfully advance news access, perspective and public education on the key issues of the day.

Emphasis on Local Adaptability and Lesson Sharing

Because each public broadcasting entity faces unique circumstances related to its history, culture, audience interests and institutional capacity, the contents that follow are intended to offer guidance, rather than suggest any imposition of standards. Accordingly, readers and users of this material should feel encouraged to adopt (or adapt) its contents as needed to achieve their particular purposes and needs. In addition, where readers, users or others with interest in this subject matter are able to identify allied lessons and strategies, they should feel encouraged to post their thoughts and suggestions at: <http://pmintegrity.org/forum.cfm>

Content

The pages that follow build on three major aspects of editorial partnership in the current and evolving public media environment. These treatments, in turn, are backed up by three allied attachments that offer important background information and practical tools for dealing with the issues.

The first substantive section deals with editorial partnership ***definitions and typologies*** that leading public broadcasting entities have come to adopt in recent years.

A second section offers a general overview of ***recommended best practices*** that have emerged from past and current editorial partnership experiences in the field.

A final substantive section deals with **emerging issues** (both in the form of evolving challenges and opportunities) that are increasingly facing public broadcasting entities in the context of forging partnerships with new media players and independent opinion leaders. This section also includes recommended response strategies for practitioner consideration and implementation.

The allied attachments appearing at the end of the document deal, respectively, with:

- 1) a **fuller treatment of partnership typologies** that stations are currently involved in; 2) important editorial partnership **decision making considerations and an associated check list**; and
- 3) a model **Document of Understanding** that public station leaders can employ to ensure mutual accountability and success in the editorial partnerships they pursue.

Each attachment is intended to help interested public station leaders better understand, develop, and codify agreements with prospective partners whose interests bear on editorial concerns.

Editorial Partnership Definitions and Typologies

In the world of public media, the term “partnership” can have various meanings. Here, we use the term to mean an agreement between or among organizations to produce a program or event that includes – or implicates – editorial content.

A recent survey of stations identified five major types of partnership in this space that are currently in use by public media organizations, each presenting varying organizing properties and dynamics. (Attachment 1 below provides a more comprehensive description of the main properties of each of these partnership typologies.) These include the following:

Partnerships with Other Media Organizations

Most often for election debates and coverage at the city, regional or statewide level.

Partnerships with Non-Media Organizations to Enhance News/Information Content

Usually involving mission-based non-profits with content expertise on the issues.

Partnerships with Digital Media Organizations

Typically to deepen or broaden news coverage of community issues or arts and culture trends.

Partnerships Outside of the News/Information Industries

Customarily to present concerts or performances, to stage events for families and children, and to offer educational content for children and adults.

Partnerships to Support the Success of other Non-profits

Generally to demonstrate stations’ broader commitment to the communities they serve.

Recommended Best Practices

Recent leadership surveys of the field revealed a series of best practices that tend to help public stations preserve their editorial integrity while advancing value added partnerships of all types. Following are the leading ones identified with references throughout to specific examples reflecting some real life applications of each.

Establish Written Policies and/or Guidelines

Still remarkably few stations have formal written policies or documents regulating partnerships. There is, nevertheless, no shortage of partnership projects to be found in public broadcasting, and many appear to work just fine. While it is difficult to conclude, therefore, that a written policy is absolutely necessary, common sense suggests it would be prudent for a station to have one to provide a clear reference point and quality control for all partners. At its best, a written partnership policy would help to identify significant parameters and principles, yet be flexible enough to permit fruitful partnerships that improve constituent services by allowing the station to expand content or extend its impact in new and creative ways. The policy should also be consistent with the station's mission and vision statements.

TPT's Minnesota Channel is a somewhat unorthodox initiative that *does* have written editorial guidelines. It is unorthodox because the content produced is provided and owned by the partner, always a nonprofit organization. But TPT shares distribution rights and the content does adhere to the station's "editorial guidelines and broadcast standards." Among the key guidelines is that the program "must never be largely self-promotional" and that "it must never be used for one-sided advocacy."

Ensure the Partner's Editorial Policies Match Yours

When stations partner with other providers that have their own editorial policies (e.g., other media), it is possible that some practices or policies may not be consistent. The best practice is to discuss possible contention points thoroughly with the other partner(s) from the outset and to reach an understanding before deciding to move forward. Public stations have a fundamental interest in controlling editorial content decisions to ensure their unbiased fairness and accuracy. Accordingly, the operative tradition among public broadcasters is to hold the line on editorial control, particularly when it comes to broadcast content. Kelly McCullough of KAET, Phoenix, says his station cites its strongly written editorial policy in all potential partnership meetings: "KAET is mandated to certify that editorial control is guaranteed in every locally produced program.... KAET will not relinquish or compromise the editorial control of any production by request or suggestion of sponsors, funders, donors, lobbyists or special interest groups." There is a little more flexibility on projects in which the station is a non-producing

partner, but not much, according to McCullough: “If we are not producing...the content is subject to our review.”

Deploy Experienced Staff Members and Secure Institutional Buy In

With or without formal policies in place, leading stations typically look to a seasoned team to evaluate partnership prospects and oversee implementation. At Rocky Mountain PBS, partnerships requiring internal collaboration of departments are evaluated by a committee that includes the chief content officer, executive producer, and communications director, in consultation with senior managers. Involving such expertise throughout is an important way to speed organizational response should unanticipated opportunities arise and quick decision making be required. It is also an essential way to safeguard against unanticipated risks that may more likely arise in the course of partnerships left to lower level oversight.

The best partnerships, moreover, have buy-in from the partner *institution* – not just well placed and experienced individuals on the staff, says Nancy Dobbs of KRCB in Rohnert Park, California. She observes that partnerships are most likely to endure when all parties are assured “the rug isn’t pulled out from under a project merely because of a change in staff.”

Choose Trusted Partners and Clarify Roles

An essential best practice, in place at Rocky Mountain PBS, is to work with “highly vetted, highly respected partners of community prominence.” RMPBS’ Elizabeth Mayer cites long-standing editorial partnerships, with the Rocky Mountain Investigative Network and Education News Colorado, for example, that “complement our brand and reaffirm the level of trust we receive from our community.” Additionally, partnerships work well, in the words of Jack Galmiche of Nine Network of Public Media, St. Louis, when they are based on “shared values, resources, and trust.” Kurt Mische, of KNPB, Reno, says the “guiding principle is that the relationship must be win-win, substantive, [and] quality [-driven].”

Clarifying roles and related responsibilities for all partners is also essential. Mary Anne Alhadeff of KERA, Dallas, cites her station’s long-running production *The Texas Debates* as a good example: “Although the media partners have changed from time-to-time, KERA arranges individual partnerships that assign in-kind contributions for all partners, including remote location origination, newspaper ads, on-air spots, hiring Spanish translators and establishing an on-site media center.” The key “assignment” for KERA, she says, is editorial control: “As the executive producer...KERA makes all final editorial decisions although we involve all the partners when discussing which questions will be posed during the debate.”

For its *Facing the Mortgage Crisis* initiative, Milwaukee Public Television partnered with 17 regional agencies, none of which supplied funding; the agencies met with key station staff on a regular basis to recommend topics and interviewees for the programs produced (i.e., “guiding” the staff to certain options); but it was understood from the start that the station retained editorial control, deciding which of the leads to follow up on.

Be Transparent About Partner Interests

One of the editorial guidelines of TPT’s Minnesota Channel is to “always provide full disclosure of partner interests.” This is an emerging inclination in the public broadcasting context that suggests yet another “best practice” – to be as transparent as possible with the audience, sharing not just each partner’s name but also its role and responsibilities on a given project. These could be described on air where feasible; more generally, they could easily be broadcast to the interested public on the station’s website and in allied news releases.

Emerging Issues

In today's fast-changing world it is especially incumbent on public media to anticipate emerging issues and their implications for the field's role and continuing relevance. While there seems to be no end to the amount and pace of change afoot, three major trends especially encompass the major transformations facing public media today:

1. America's demographics are changing dramatically;
2. Technology continues to evolve at a breath-taking pace; and.
3. New public expectations are rapidly affecting journalism's role and charge in society.

Each trend implies challenges, opportunities and response strategies for public media partnerships bearing on editorial content that can be loosely described as follows:

Trend 1: U.S. population dynamics are changing dramatically, resulting in a wider diversity of perspectives and attitudes in our communities.

Challenges

1. The nation's growing multiplicity of diverse perspectives brings a wider range of prospective partners, most of whom have their own ideas concerning what constitutes editorial fairness, accuracy, transparency and appropriate dialogue.
2. At times, new collaborators may stretch our thinking with overt points of view and advocacy positions on public issues. Allowing for this is not tantamount to surrendering public broadcasting's independence; but it can be highly challenging to accommodate.
3. At the same time, avoiding relationships because of inherent challenges or fear of association denies the opportunity to reflect a broader range of community views and risks the appearance of station elitism, aloofness or irrelevance (or all three).
4. Balancing these multiple considerations is inherently difficult for station managers that are already facing unprecedented pressures from public and private funding sources related to often mutually exclusive editorial and coverage pressures.

Opportunity

Changing demographics present an enormous opportunity to broaden our community networks, better reflect the communities we serve, and deliver more relevant content and essential local service to a wider swath of consumers. The potential upside to these new relationships outweighs the risk, as long as that risk is responsibly managed.

Recommended Response Strategies

1. **Engage in an ongoing process of relationship building that deepens station leadership's knowledge of the community and the available well of social capital to draw on when a particular project requires.** Often, field personnel (reporters, producers, bookers) can help station management see the nuances more clearly.
2. **Invest the time and effort to understand the motivation and goals of potential collaborators and clearly articulate to them station values, needs and expectations.**
3. **Learn to distinguish core values and practices from differences in style or tone.** The latter can be appreciated for adding to and enriching editorial content.
4. **Diversify the range of community perspectives the station represents over time.** A broader diversity of partners can help do that. Keep in mind the diversity within diversity (for example, Latino and Asian American communities are not monolithic, but rather comprised of multiple national and ethnic population cohorts).
5. **Accept that everybody has a point of view and a vested interest in something.** It is not reasonable to only choose collaborators with no vested interest in the given topic or issue to be covered. In fact, a local organization's interest in the issue may be precisely what makes it a valuable collaborator – its knowledge and related social networks can actually enhance the station's own core mission interests.
6. **Seek to distinguish between the unaccustomed and the unacceptable.** Protect editorial independence through program framing, language and disclaimers, if needed, so as to avoid owning a collaborator's biases.
7. **Develop affirmative strategies for using public broadcasting's convening authority to build balanced coalitions** that take up community issues with clearly established roles, rules and outcomes.

Trend 2: Technology continues to evolve at a breath-taking pace, resulting in disaggregated content delivery, dissolving lines between delivery platforms, and changing expectations about participation and collaboration.

Challenges

1. As more people access IP-delivered content from their living room TV and stream video and audio from devices of all sizes and mobility, the line between platforms is not just blurring, it is completely dissolving. Millennial users, for example, already see no distinction between video and audio distributed via broadcast or by other means. It is increasingly not tenable, therefore, to employ different editorial standards for different platforms or media.
2. As social media tools evolve to better suit private needs and contexts, they will also become more pervasive and integral to the public dialogue. The public now expects to engage all types of institutions, including public stations, on social media. Except for style and tone,

they do not necessarily see a difference between content on Facebook or Twitter and content on any other platform.

3. Digital disruption means content is portable. Anyone can distribute open space content or post links to otherwise publicly accessible sites with whatever framing or context they want. In many cases, the only context will be your brand-supporting platform and what it stands for in the public mindset.
4. As more stations engage their communities online and off, organizational identity is more vulnerable to the words and actions of individual employees, as well as those of partner organizations and their employees. (Whether an employee's Facebook account is strictly personal, professional, or both remains an open legal and practical question as of this writing.)

Opportunity

New technologies and platforms present huge opportunities to widen public broadcasting's reach, deepen value added relationships, invite new voices into the conversation, and strengthen civic life.

Recommended Response Strategies

1. ***Deal proactively and uniformly with respect to editorial standards whenever partnering with external entities.*** Station editorial standards travel with station content and brands wherever they go, regardless of technology or context of use. Therefore, stations must consistently apply the same high standards to all of their work, whether on-air, online or on the ground. Hosting, curating or facilitating a community discussion, town hall or forum requires editorial judgment that honors the same high reporting standards as have always guided public station leaders. The presence or absence of a microphone or camera should not affect these standards. Stations cannot expect end users to parse the platform or context to discern which standard applies.
2. ***Embrace and learn to effectively leverage social media as tools for building relationships and for public dialogue rather than solely for promoting content.*** Learn how to navigate social media and its nuances without surrendering station independence or undermining public broadcasting's role as an impartial facilitator of public conversation.
3. ***Develop social media guidelines for staff and ensure partner organizations have done the same.***

Trend 3: New public expectations are rapidly affecting journalism's role and charge in society and, therefore, what constitutes news, objectivity, standards, and credibility.

Challenges

1. For better or worse, long-standing definitions of news, analysis and opinion have all but disappeared. Public perceptions of what constitutes “news” have changed dramatically. As a result, there are less clear lines about which partnerships are appropriate in connection with which kinds of content – virtually every partnership is an editorial partnership of some kind.
2. There are significant generational differences in views about objectivity. Boomers tend to equate the idea of objectivity with credibility. Millennials, however, tend to believe everyone has a bias and they want to know what yours is. They tend to equate claims of objectivity as a lack of transparency about bias, thereby undermining the source’s credibility.

Opportunity

Public station leaders have an opportunity to further differentiate public media by re-affirming public broadcasting’s unique position in local communities as a trusted information source, convener, and collaborator that maintains the highest standards of editorial integrity in all of its work.

Recommended Response Strategies

1. ***Establish a newly defined sense of the station’s editorial role in the community space, and its unique value beyond distributing content.*** Aggressively assume that space and position the station more fully as a trusted, nonpartisan community asset on the issues people care most deeply about.
2. ***Identify and lift up the standards and practices that are core to public broadcasting’s mission and which cannot be compromised.*** Articulate them clearly and often to all stakeholders and partners. Require them to commit to the same standards when collaborating. Some might misinterpret impartiality for timidity, but those that understand public media’s core interest in maintaining credibility more often than not will partner to achieve common aims.
3. ***Reflect carefully about which content definitions remain relevant (news, analysis, opinion, etc.) and how to articulate them to a range of audiences*** (each with very different points of view).
4. ***Take time to define relational and editorial boundaries*** for the partnership activities your station is interested to pursue. Discuss these boundaries with the relevant stakeholders and make sure they understand and concur with the rationale for establishing such boundaries.
5. ***Develop and execute an exit strategy*** for concluding the relationship if partners are in any way compromising mutually agreed standards or practices.

Editorial Partnership Typologies

Partnerships with Other Media Organizations: These are the most common partnerships in the field, and are most often used for election debates and coverage at the city, regional or statewide level. In these arrangements, public stations and one or more commercial or noncommercial counterparts typically agree to co-sponsor debates, jointly offer election-night coverage, exchange video, and cross-promote or otherwise share the burden of coverage. Although it is possible that editorial policies may vary among partners, these agreements are generally simpler than others because the entities are accustomed to news/journalistic decision-making. Some public stations explicitly retain editorial control; others operate on the understanding that the organizations' values are sufficiently similar that shared control is appropriate. Funding is usually not an issue as each organization pays its own expenses.

Partnerships with Non-Media Organizations to Enhance News/Information Content: An increasing number of stations are partnering with non-media organizations (usually mission-based non-profits) to enhance the content of programming on public issues. Stations have partnered with community foundations, colleges (university licensees may regard their licensee institution as a partner), museums or health systems to address issues ranging from the mortgage crisis, to arts education, to senior health and wellness, among others. These arrangements differ in that the partners are not journalistic organizations, though they may have experience in making editorial judgments (e.g., museum exhibitions, public health education programs). Although some stations explicitly state that they retain editorial control, what's different about these partnerships is that public stations do not view their partners as merely "news sources," but also as trusted fellow content creators. Funding may come in cash or in-kind support from the non-profit partner, and/or from third-party donors.

Partnerships with Digital Media Organizations: In this rapidly emerging arena, stations are increasingly partnering with existing hyper-local websites, bloggers and other digital media entities to deepen or broaden news coverage of community issues or arts and culture trends. WHYY's Newsworks is one example. These partnerships are quite new and some have not worked out (for example, recently Minnesota Public Radio stopped using content from a blogger's site when it became clear that their editorial standards did not match). Other digital media partners (such as Pro Publica) have missions and editorial visions in close alignment with public stations.

Partnerships Outside of the News/Information Industries: Stations regularly engage in partnerships to present concerts or performances, to stage events for families and children, and

to offer educational content for children and adults. Such partnerships may be based on accessing quality content (partnering with an early childhood education group, for example, to present a “get your child ready for kindergarten” day), or it may be oriented toward promotional efficiency (featuring performers on an FM station who will be on stage at a local college later that evening). While these arrangements and the resulting content are generally uncomplicated, occasionally surrounding issues can surface that ultimately have an editorial impact (such as when controversial artistic work, points of view or personalities are involved). Such partnerships are usually privately supported.

Partnerships to Support the Success of other Non-profits: Stations are developing new partnership models that demonstrate their broader commitment to the communities they serve, including the success of other non-profits. At Twin Cities Public Television, non-profits produce their own content for broadcast on TPT’s Minnesota Channel within broad guidelines that prohibit one-sided advocacy and single-minded self-promotion. In another model, the public station offers production services and airtime for a community foundation to educate the public about community needs. Funding often comes from the non-profits as well as from third-party donors.

Decision Making Considerations and Checklist

When public stations pursue editorial partnerships the first big question is whether or not the partnership helps to solve a problem or accomplish a goal that is core to the station's mission. The closer to the mission and the more pressing the problem or goal, the more likely the case should be for partnering. This first level consideration implicates the station's substantive priorities and interests.

An important secondary question, if a partnership rises to a high level of mission-related station interest, is how to organize and implement it tactically. This second question implicates the practicality and logistics of making the partnership of interest actually work.

The following allied considerations and checklist can assist station decision makers to undertake partnership discussions and commitments with a greater likelihood of success in their formulation and implementation.

How Should You Make Your Decision?

Step 1: What Are Your Goals?

Q: Why do you want to partner?

- *Rationale*: What is it that makes a partnership editorially desirable?
- *Goal*: What is it that you hope to achieve through partnering?

Q: How do your partnership rationale and goal match up with your editorial policy (which should stress independent editorial judgment, accuracy, and meeting a genuine public need for information and the civil exchange of ideas)?

Q: What kind of input/resources would a partner offer to meet the following station imperatives?

- **Reach**: access to other audiences/networks, amplification through rebroadcast or cross-platform reuse, syndication, content-sharing
- **Relevance**: expertise on particular topics, newsworthiness of proposed partnership content, news cycle priority around a particular date (e.g., election, MLK day, etc.)
- **Inclusion**: connections to underserved audiences (e.g., via a special focus on topics of interest to such users, a town hall/grassroots event, a call-in show or community forum)

- **Engagement:** resources for users, interactive online space, prominent social media platforms and/or networks, opportunities for offline interaction, possibilities for crowdsourcing content, opportunities for culling local news sources (e.g., Public Insight Network)
- **Influence/"Zing":** access to influential people, potential for buzz-building, opening to settings and activities with a creative and/or opinion shaping spark (e.g., The Moth, StoryCorps)
- **Trust:** opportunity to enhance editorial credibility and authority via co-production/partnership with other trusted brands (e.g., The Takeaway)

Step 2: Who Will You Partner With?

Examples:

- University
- Other news outlets—commercial, hyperlocal, national
- Individual producers (own outlets/hyperlocal news, filmmakers)
- Community media outlets: PEG, radio, neighborhood papers, LPFM
- Nonprofits: Sierra Club, Girl Scouts of America, Stand for Children
- Local libraries
- Issue networks
- K-12 institutions
- Cultural spaces and institutions: clubs, coffee shops, theaters
- Hospitals, “health systems”
- Crisis responders
- Service/civic groups: Kiwanis, League of Women Voters, Chambers of Commerce, etc.
- Municipal governments

Q: Is there an appropriate partner available to match up with the station’s goal and interest?

Q: What concrete resources and assets do they bring to the table, and would they be sufficient to enable the partnership to succeed?

Q: If no available and sufficiently resourced partner is identifiable, is there another means to achieve the station’s editorial partnership goal and interest (e.g., via the addition of alternative or supplemental partners to the equation, or an acceptable modification of the envisioned partnership’s initial formulation)?

Q: If neither an optimal partner nor a compensating alternative is available, is it not most appropriate simply to abort the proposed partnership until such circumstances change?

Step 3: What Can You Do to Advance the Partnership?

Q: What are your partner's goals and how could your mutual engagement help to fulfill them?

Q: How might you align your philosophy and practice to the partner's as they relate to the partnership's stated goals without sacrificing your core values or interests, (e.g., as relates to:

- editorial philosophy?
- social media practice?
- commitment to transparency?)

Step 4: How Can You Build In Safeguards?

- Develop a written instrument of understanding covering key agreements, contingencies, roles and responsibilities, including:

- partner assumptions;
 - concrete goals and expected outcomes;
 - divisions of labor;
 - assignments of credit and product ownership/reproduction rights;
 - intended project duration from start to completion;
 - implementation strategy (or workplan) with specific enumerated deliverables and delivery timelines;
 - clarification of final decision making authority;
 - reporting relationships;
 - communications strategies (including social media and emerging network applications, as appropriate¹);
 - exchanges of money and in-kind resources (including the parties' respective and collective responsibilities for project fund development and fund management);
 - exit and conflict resolution provisions (if and as called for); and
 - A provision for an after-the-project meeting to jointly assess it and its results
- Share and align editorial policies for the purposes and duration of the partnership
- Build in structured, regularly scheduled partnership meetings, shared planning space, and specific performance benchmarks at key points throughout the partnership process
- Conduct periodic performance benchmark reviews with clear off-ramps for both sides and 'parking lot' options if things become problematic

Step 5: What Should You Watch Out For?

- Downward shifts in the public reputation or perception of potential (or current) partners owing to new developments not in play at the outset of your engagements with them

¹ See, e.g., <http://www.slideshare.net/tracyvs/beyond-the-echo-chamber-network-layer-slideshow>

- The unanticipated narrowing of coverage opportunities because of partnership dynamics
- Over-reaching efforts by partners to influence editorial content coverage of public media stations (e.g., asking for sign-off authority, withholding performance on prior agreements in exchange for added coverage influence, etc.)
- Lack of partner transparency on issues affecting public media partnership, such as funding from potentially interested or otherwise biased sources, partisan issue positions, and analogous potential compromises and/or conflicts of interest
- Partner efforts to repurpose editorial content beyond the partnership's scope and spirit
- Contrary partner perspectives on when, how and/or where collaborative content should be aired and/or distributed online

Public Station Editorial Partnership Model Document of Understanding

Statement of Purpose

Much of this document is common sense, but is an important exercise as you move through a potential editorial partnership. For instance, we suggest you work together to provide a brief narrative of the common purpose or goal shared by both organizations that is driving the relationship and a description of the sharing process.

Example

Org 1 and Org 2 are entering into a partnership with the shared goal of providing more extensive information on the topic of local business news to their respective audiences. Org 1 specializes in providing news coverage serving (indicate coverage area), while Org 2 has specific expertise in providing knowledgeable business news information of local and regional matters. The goal is to provide consistent business news to a community underserved by such coverage and build a loyal audience and support to sustain the service.

Assumptions

This section allows both organizations to document their assumptions about the partnership. Examples might include:

- This collaboration is built on trust and communication with “issues” discussed quickly and openly through the primary points of contact.
- This partnership does not result in the exchange of any financial compensation between parties (we’d suggest a more formal contract in that case).
- Typical business expenses will be paid by the respective organizations unless otherwise agreed on.
- Work location and facilities expectations will be clarified. *(Will there be shared space?)*
- Expectations for sharing documents or media as per format type will be outlined, including how content is provided and by what process.
- Expectations of partner time commitment related to content created will be discussed and agreed upon.
- Expectations concerning fundraising, promotion and marketing will be documented.

Editorial Process

You may wish to provide some standard editorial information such as:

If this agreement is intended to deliver broadcast or online content through (Station) or for other non-commercial broadcast, then, (Org) agrees to abide by all editorial guidelines applicable to the creation of content for broadcast on public television.

In recognition of (Station’s) responsibilities as a broadcaster subject to Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) regulations, (Station) shall have final editorial control over the Production

and the right to review and approve promotion and advertising of any collaborative product. (Station) will always tell its audience who is helping shape the content of the program and be transparent in revealing editorial partnerships and funding sources. Funding organizations will not play a vital role in shaping content of any programming. In matters of controversy, (Station) will assure that alternative viewpoints are acknowledged and fairly characterized.

It is highly recommend partners document the editorial review process. Aside from final editorial control issues, how will the content be shared among the partners? How could content be shared with third parties as appropriate? Is there a mediation process should there be disagreements about editorial content?

Roles & Responsibilities

This section can be general, but the more granular the description of individual roles the more clarity there will be between organizations. For instance a news sharing partnership might include delineation of specific staff involved from both parties and their responsibilities as per creating and nurturing the collaboration and/or creating and supervising the content and distribution. Who does what for each organization?

Output/Deliverables/Rights

- *This section should describe the expectations of any regular outputs (weekly series) or singular deliverable (documentary) provided by either party.*
- *You may also wish to delineate audience demographic expectations, audience measurement options, and the variety of distribution opportunities for content created.*
- *Outline rights and clearances issues. Each party may be responsible for obtaining rights, clearances, licenses and permissions necessary for their contribution to the final content; but if any “exclusive” rights apply, they should be specifically outlined.*
- *Describe the rights of any final products that are co-produced. Who has rights to distribute? Place online?*

Schedule

If the partnership is project based and involves a regular schedule or if there is a production schedule that the parties need to adhere to, it should be included.

Funding

While the DOU is not set up for an exchange of funds, editorial collaborations may include jointly seeking outside individual, corporate or foundation funding. The process should be clearly delineated and discussed. For instance, one organization may already receive substantial funds from a corporation that it would see as off-limits to another organization’s approach for a joint project. In general, creative collaborations between effective and trusted partners that provide new services are welcomed by funding organizations. Promotion and marketing agreements may also be clarified here.

Communication, Acceptance and Review Protocols

Both parties should agree to a communication process, such as each appointing a primary point of contact and regular joint status updates or whatever makes sense to ensure regular flow of communications.

Signatures should be included for responsible parties. This forces them to take it seriously.

Effective dates of the project and perhaps formal six month reviews (for instance) outlined in this section will allow parties to step back from the day to day and consider whether the collaboration is as effective as expected.

Appendix A: Terms

Sometimes language and acronyms can cause confusion. This may or may not be needed, but it can be helpful if the organizations are dissimilar.