

**THE STUDY OF PUBLIC RADIO NEWS DIRECTORS, INCORPORATED:
ATTITUDES ABOUT ON-AIR FUNDRAISING, UNDERWRITING
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND EDITORIAL CONFLICTS.**

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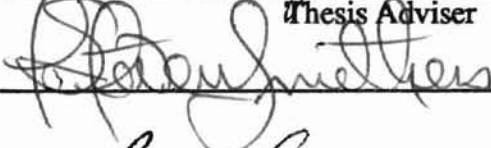
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PREFACE

A survey of 102 members of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated was conducted to determine their practices in and attitudes toward on-air fund-raising and underwriting productions. The study also asked whether PRNDI members had experienced pressure to cover stories they were not planning to cover or edit or kill stories they felt were journalistically sound. The questionnaire elicited responses about the size of the full-time news staff, the license classification of PRNDI members' stations and the market size of members' stations. The data collected during the course of the study were analyzed to determine how many public radio news directors participated in on-air pledge drives and announced funding credits, how frequently they participated in such activities and whether they thought it was an appropriate job function. The data also were analyzed to determine how many PRNDI members were pressured to cover stories they were not planning to cover, or alter or kill stories they felt were journalistically sound; the frequency of such requests; where the source of this pressure originated; and the response to such pressure. The findings were analyzed with a previous study of PRNDI members conducted in 1988.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General

Public radio news directors must wear many professional hats. In most cases, they define their station's news philosophy, produce and assign stories and anchor newscasts. However, some news directors are doing much more than that. For most public radio stations, on-air fund-raisers are a fact of life at least twice a year. Listener contributions and underwriting have become increasingly important ingredients for local public radio stations which rely heavily on an often unstable mix of federal and state financial support. As a result, a majority of local stations use staffing resources to raise money, tapping public radio news directors and reporters to cover on-air pitch shifts and record underwriting announcements. Also, because stations are concentrating more on private contributions from individuals and underwriters, news directors are facing the same pressures as their commercial counterparts to cover or alter news stories that may portray a sponsor in a positive or negative light.

This situation presents a dilemma for public radio news directors and reporters. Should they use their on-air skills to help their station raise money, perhaps ensuring their stations' futures, and perhaps their jobs? Or should they resist participation in such events to promote journalistic integrity? Also, do news directors and reporters agree to cover or avoid certain stories based on requests from general managers, license holders, underwriters, contributors and others, especially if such stories could be potentially harmful or beneficial to the entity making the request? Or do they reject such requests, leaving them to wonder whether such refusals could harm their careers in any

way. These are just a few of the questions that news directors are frequently confronted with amid the changing climate of financial support within public broadcasting.

Background

Most public radio stations reserve ten days in the fall and ten days in the spring to conduct direct financial appeals to their audiences. Station members, development directors and program directors are instrumental in developing the on-air sound of the fund-raiser, and they spend many hours in front of the microphone urging listeners to contribute. But because of the enormity of covering lengthy pitch schedules, many stations require their news directors and reporters to participate in pledge drives. This presents a potential conflict of interest for many public radio journalists who feel they may be compromising their objectivity and neutrality in the solicitation of private support.

The mechanism in place to fund public radio and television stations was ideally designed to eliminate undue influence on programming by advertisers. However, the system has weathered its share of such programming pressures from the public sector. The most recent criticism came in the mid 1990's. Republicans in the U.S. House and Senate, who were critical of programming such as Maupin's *Tales of the City*, which focused on gay life in San Francisco, threatened to eliminate all federal funding, or "zero out" public broadcasting's federal appropriation. Ultimately, public broadcasting would survive. Nonetheless, many stations are relying increasingly on individual contributors, corporate underwriting and planned giving campaigns to ensure their financial futures. Because the survival of local public radio stations rests increasingly with individual contributors and corporate underwriters, there is a danger that one or more of these entities could influence news policy, an ethical dilemma that commercial broadcasters have long encountered.

While most public radio news directors were responsible for editorial policy in a 1988 survey of the Public Radio News Directors Association, some were expected to make news-related decisions that would further the interests of the licensee.¹ Despite the uncertainty over federal funding since the PRNDA survey, this research is expected to find little change in news directors' participation in and attitudes toward on-air fund-raising. It is believed that news managers have been able to maintain their independence, both in the way they participate in on-air fund-raisers, and with how they handle the efforts of others to influence, or even dictate news policy.

Through this study, public radio news managers across the country will learn what fund-raising roles their counterparts are currently playing and whether they are facing outside pressure to cover or ignore selected news issues and events. Public radio news directors still act as gatekeepers to screen information and pass on items that would help others share their views.² However, it is unclear whether they exercise the same autonomy to decide what stories to air as their predecessors, raising a question of whether they are living up to their social responsibilities as journalists. When external constituencies such as contributors and underwriters succeed in putting editorial pressure on public radio news directors, they can no longer provide the kind of independent coverage that is a main component of the Social Responsibility of the Press. As a result, public radio news directors become the voice of the elite (i.e., sponsors) rather than a voice for all of the people.³

Statement of Problem

Public radio newsrooms are now experiencing a reality that is not unlike their commercial counterparts. Commercial news operations face shrinking staffing resources to maximize profits. Public stations face a similar problem because of budget cuts.

However, there has been one fundamental difference that has defined the two industries until now. Commercial broadcast stations historically operate to make a profit; public broadcast stations do not. As a result, commercial broadcasting is largely influenced out of a concern for advertising revenues which are driven by ratings points. A similar dilemma is surfacing for public radio stations, which must now meet minimum performance standards to be eligible for federal funding. Even though public radio is not designed to make money, private entities, in many cases, are playing larger roles in the overall mix of federal, state and private financial support for public radio and television stations, and may feel it is in their best interests to support or oppose news content. Even so, it is difficult to compare the duties of commercial and public radio news reporters because there are still many different facets of each industry.

Because of limited resources, many public radio stations use local public radio news directors in on-air fund-raisers. Also, because public radio stations are relying more on private sources of funding, some managers and external constituency groups (i.e., underwriters, licensees, individual contributors) are seeking editorial influence on stories that could cast them in a positive or negative light. News directors have few options for learning more about such problems. Most news managers face similar problems and may offer few if any solutions. There also are annual public radio conventions which allow professionals to gather and exchange ideas and solutions. However, not all stations can afford to send news directors to such events. To understand these problems systemwide, public radio news directors must rely on industry publications and on-line discussion groups. There has been no recent study by which news directors can determine what their colleagues are doing when addressing conflicts in fund raising and editorial control.

Purpose of Study

The problem detailed in the previous section may be better understood and possibly solved by gathering information from the membership of Public Radio News Directors, Incorporated nationwide and comparing it with a survey conducted a decade ago by the same organization (Public Radio News Directors Association). This can be accomplished with a questionnaire that addresses members' attitudes toward on-air fund-raising, underwriting announcements and editorial conflicts. The survey will answer several questions about PRNDI members' fundraising activities and editorial control.

- A) Are PRNDI members participating in on-air fund-raisers? If so, how frequently?
- B) Are PRNDI members producing underwriting credits. If so, how frequently?
- C) What do PRNDI members think about participating in such activities?
- D) Are PRNDI members being pressured to cover or avoid certain stories?
- E) How do they respond to such requests?
- F) Do PRNDI members feel they have compromised their careers because they refused to take actions they felt violated their journalistic ethics?

The methodology will be a mail survey of 102 members of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated who are news directors and reporters. Because this sample represents the entire PRNDI membership, it should provide an accurate reading of the population's fund-raising activities. Questionnaires will be addressed to each PRNDI member.

Significance of Study

The study will provide members of Public Radio News Directors, Incorporated with a concrete example of what their colleagues are doing in relation to on-air fundraising and whether they are experiencing editorial pressures. This study will be compared to the 1988 survey of PRNDA members to determine what changes in practice or attitude have occurred during the past 10 years.

A survey of PRNDI members could provide them with information to use in redefining their fund-raising functions. It could also help them learn what pressures other PRNDI members face from external constituency groups. Such research could also help public radio station managers and other staff members develop new strategies that maximize news directors' non-news roles without compromising their integrity. Overall, the study could be used as a planning and information tool for all public radio outlets.

Limitations and Assumptions

Because survey research rarely produces a 100 percent response rate, the study will be limited to those news directors who choose to respond. Therefore, the findings may not be completely representative of the population. The study is also limited to the time frame in which the survey was completed.

It was assumed that the appropriate personnel would respond to the survey and that they will be truthful in their responses. Subjects were informed that all responses would be kept strictly confidential. However, some respondents may have declined to answer questions they felt were too personal or could harm their careers.

Organization of the Study

The following is an outline of the remainder of the study:

Chapter 2: Review of Literature -- This will be an examination of previous studies relating to the research topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology -- This will be an explanation of the research technique employed.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data -- This will be a presentation and explanation of the research findings.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations -- This will be an overview of the research project with recommendations for further research to address the study problem.

Conclusions

Because of the ongoing uncertainty surrounding federal appropriations for public broadcasting, many Public Radio stations have either reduced staffs or are in search of new private sources of funding. As a result, many stations are placing more importance on their fund-raising functions. It is also assumed that stations are relying more on individual contributions and corporate underwriting to offset any future loss of federal funding. It is assumed that a majority of news directors are participating in such pledge drives and that they are working to preserve their independence from the pressures of donors who may feel they should have a louder voice in what goes on the air.

This study will determine whether these assumptions are appropriate.

Endnotes

1. Survey: Public Radio News Directors Association membership, PRNDA Practices and Rules Committee, 1988.

2. Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, Mass Communication Theory: Foundations Ferment and Future, (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.) 118.

3. Baran and Davis, 93.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

General

There has been substantial research conducted in the area of public radio. These studies focus on a variety of issues ranging from program content to local news coverage to the potential commercialization of the medium. However, there has been little research focusing specifically on the on-air fund-raising activities of local public radio news directors, nor has there been a thorough examination of what influence, if any, managers, underwriters and listener contributors have on news content. Because of the lack of previous research on those subjects, most of the literature in this chapter pertains to public broadcasting studies and data pertaining to public radio news and development, including recent research of public radio fund-raising conducted in conjunction with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

This research project covered a number of areas pertaining to on-air fund-raising by members of Public Radio News Directors, Incorporated, including frequency of and attitude toward on-air fund-raising and underwriting announcing. It also focuses on ethical issues involving editorial influence, particularly in the area of advertising pressures faced by public and commercial radio news managers. This chapter will examine previous research that exists in these areas.

Public Radio: An Historical Overview

Non-commercial broadcasting originated as educational radio in the early 1920s, and later educational television, largely because the first stations were owned by academic institutions which used them for instructional purposes.⁴ Non-commercial broadcasting did not evolve into public broadcasting until after federal funding was made available in the 1960s. Until that time, these stations were unevenly distributed across the country and were almost always underfunded, relying largely on nurturing by the Ford Foundation and other philanthropies for survival.⁵

The modern era of public broadcasting began when President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. The legislation, which was a result of the landmark Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, resulted in the creation of a non-profit, non-governmental Corporation for Public Broadcasting.⁶ CPB was mandated to facilitate the full development of educational broadcasting in which high quality, diverse programs would be made available to non-commercial educational television and radio broadcast stations. CPB was authorized to fulfill this mandate by assisting in the establishment and development of one or more systems of interconnection to be used for the distribution of educational television or radio programs so that all non-commercial education television and radio broadcast stations that wish to may broadcast the programs at times chosen by the stations.⁷

Roughly a quarter of a century later, an impressive broadcasting infrastructure was in place. National Public Radio boasted a nationwide system of more than 500 affiliate, associate and auxiliary stations. PBS' network embraced nearly 350 stations in every state, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa.⁸ The basic programming concept of public radio and television was alternative service, providing viewers and listeners with quality programs of various types that were unavailable from

commercial media.⁹ That formula has resulted in a sizable and loyal audience who have been drawn to this unique alternative. By the mid 1990s, more than 100 million people watched public television each week while seven million people listened to NPR news magazine programs.¹⁰ Many of these listeners, particularly those who support local stations through contributions, might agree with PBS president Erving Duggan, who characterized public broadcasting as a great national asset, “a treasure not unlike our national parks or the Smithsonian Institution.”¹¹ Despite Duggan’s view, financial support for Public Broadcasting has been tenuous at best. Because of its newness and dependence on federal funding, public broadcasting was particularly vulnerable to attack from the Nixon administration, which attempted to squelch public affairs programming in the early 1970s thought to be anti-Nixon.¹² In the 1980s, budget pressures on Congress and the Reagan Administration’s lack of support led to a renewed threat - recisions of money previously allocated. This situation made a hash of advance program financial commitments and other long-range planning - and effectively undid the whole rationale of three-year funding cycles.¹³ State contributions to public stations, once a major factor in overall funding levels, also declined under similar budgetary pressures. On the local level, stations had little choice but to undertake “membership” pledge weeks and “begathons” to increase viewers’ and listeners’ participation in the financial support of their stations, which managers hoped would increase audiences, despite the threat that such intrusions would alienate much of their audiences during such campaigns.¹⁴

In the mid 1990s, public broadcasting faced new threats from conservative politicians, highlighted by the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress. The new leaders of the United States House and Senate called for the total elimination of federal funding for public broadcasting. House Speaker Newt Gingrich endorsed a crusade of the radical right to question the legitimacy of public broadcasting as an American institution and to liquidate the CPB.¹⁵

The criticism, however, did not go unnoticed. Barsamian argued the assault on public broadcasting was part of the Republicans' long-term effort to dismantle the New Deal. Barsamian surveyed key programs that evoked enmity from conservatives, which in turn caused public broadcasting to turn increasingly timid and to reject controversial programs such as the *Panama Deception*, *Deadly Decision*, and *Manufacturing Consent*. Underlying the Republican attack was corporate desire to control the frequencies occupied by PBS and National Public Radio.¹⁶

Meanwhile, independent producer Schecter argued that the combination of political constraints and corporate underwriting contributed to a climate within public broadcasting comparable to that within the commercial networks of the 1950s.

The chilling effect today is more subtle but just as real. There are no loyalty oaths to swear to, or congressional investigators to placate. Yet a fusion of conservative political ideology and conventional market-driven wisdom continues to guide media gatekeepers in decisions about what to buy, fund, commission and broadcast. Only no one talks about the political effects of the process. It is largely invisible...A Red Scare without the Reds.¹⁷

The conservative attack on public broadcasting, however, was largely baseless according to Croteau. His study cast considerable doubt on claims concerning the liberal or left-wing bias of public television programming. In contrast to the views of conservative critics, Croteau argued traditional news sources still comprise the majority of voices heard in public television's public affairs programming. Public television tends to draw upon a narrow range of sources similar to those used by commercial television...with Republicans granted more access than Democrats to public television's programming.¹⁸ Croteau contended that PBS makes only a limited contribution to the development of a vibrant public sphere, which he said, was of added import given the commercial news media's sensationalism of reporting, abandonment of the long-form documentary, diminished length of news stories in both print and broadcast journalism, increased use of news consultants and market analysis to shape a news product that is

economically viable, and decreased attention given to international and national politics.¹⁹

Stavitsky echoed Croteau's view by saying that National Public Radio and Pacifica, despite their alternative origins, produce news programming that is largely grounded in the same journalistic values and routines as "mainstream" commercial broadcast journalism.²⁰ Stavitsky concluded by asking:

Does alternative simply indicate a longer story form and a somewhat different mix of story types and sources? Or should we be thinking of alternative media as providing a different definition of news and a different form of presentation?²¹

Initially, the conservatives appeared to have the upper hand in the debate, meaning the prospects for continued federal funding looked bleak. However, the major movement in Congress to privatize public broadcasting failed thanks in large part to a massive grass-roots campaign in which viewers and listeners flooded their Congressional representatives with letters and phone calls of support. In the end, CPB was not zeroed out, but it was not completely spared either. Its 281 million dollar operating budget for fiscal 1996 was cut 16 million dollars, or 5.6 percent, from the FY 1995 spending plan. As a result, operating grants to more than 400 public radio grantees decreased by about four percent.²²

Besides the funding cut, the FY 1996 budget also included provisions that stressed self-reliance. The principal means to that end was a 4.6 million dollar Public Radio Future Fund, which provided incentives to stations that found new non-tax revenue streams. The so-called "Future Fund" provided strategic assistance to the public broadcasting system by increasing its efficiency and reducing its dependency on federal tax dollars. The Future Fund gave incentives to stations to raise money that did not come from taxes and to streamline operations within each station, and within areas served by more than one station. The Future Fund reflected a national trend toward revamped station operations.²³ Also, beginning in 1998, public radio stations receiving

funds from CPB were required to meet one of two new performance standards that measure audience size and community financial support. The performance standard was added to existing grant eligibility criteria, which required stations to employ a minimum of five full-time members, operate with at least 200 watts of power 18 hours per day, seven days per week, provide daily broadcast schedules of general audience programming of good quality which serve the demonstrated needs of the community and generate non-federal support.²⁴

With new standards in place for stations to continue receiving federal funding, local public stations re-examined their staff sizes, programming schedules and delivery systems, while increasingly considering entrepreneurial projects to raise new money. In 1996, stations launched four new ventures, enabling listeners and viewers to purchase books, design web sites, conduct teleconferences and learn about the latest advancements in technology. Carlson wrote in *Boosting the Signal* that the individual efforts of stations to increase their competitive edge and improve their services are not glamorous. But as a strategy, they are the most important trend in public broadcasting -- the trend toward self-reliance.²⁵

Beyond the aforementioned changes in public broadcasting funding, it is unclear what the future holds for local public radio news programming. While the National Public Radio network provides in-depth national and international news coverage, it fails to provide news on a state and local level. In a 1992 study by Sund, a majority of public radio news directors said local news is considered an important part of their station's daily programming by both staff and listeners. Also, they think public radio stations have a duty to present the news, in some shape or form to their listeners. Many NPR affiliates, however, suffered from a lack of resources, direction and commitment, even before the talk of budget cuts began.²⁶ If that trend continues, it could present a dilemma for news managers who must decide whether to produce local news programming, or concentrate on raising funds for the station's survival. John Sutton, a

public radio station consultant and former director of on-air promotion and on-air fund-raising for National Public Radio, suggested that station managers hire development directors first and let them generate the non-tax revenue to hire news personnel.²⁷

On-Air Fund-raising and Editorial Pressure

The budgets of most public radio stations are derived from some combination of federal and state appropriations, corporate underwriting and listener support. For example, KOSU, the public radio affiliate at Oklahoma State University, receives 25 percent of the station's annual operating budget of 800,000 dollars from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and 25 percent from the state. The rest comes from listener contributions, underwriting, in-kind donations and other fund-raising.²⁸ As a result, on-air fund-raisers are a vital activity for the station to maintain its level of service.

KOSU, however, is not alone. On-air fund-raisers have been long recognized within public broadcasting as an important ingredient in the financial structure of most public radio stations. In fact, 320 public radio stations, or 93 percent of 345 total stations, reported engaging in on-air pledge activity during Fiscal Year 1995.²⁹ The biggest determinant of on-air pledge activity is license type; 98 percent of community licensees and 100 percent of community licensees with small operating budgets, held on-air pledge drives in FY 95. That compares with 90 percent of institutional licensees. Of those stations that did engage in on-air pledge activity, the median number of days on-air was 19. While many public radio listeners would prefer no on-air fund-raisers, they tend to understand the reasons why such drives are necessary.³⁰

On-air fund-raising is not the only controversial activity in public broadcasting. There also has been much debate over commercial ventures in public television and

radio. In October 1995, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting commissioned a public opinion study to gauge attitudes of various groups towards a variety of commercial activities in public radio and television. Among other things, the survey found remarkably low levels of awareness that local public broadcasting stations receive federal funds. Most people in the study, however, were aware of the Congressional debate about federal funding for public broadcasting, and tended to be sympathetic with public broadcasting's need to air "enhanced" sponsorship announcements.³¹

But is commercial underwriting a sellout for public broadcasting? A purist might consider the values of independence from any commercial interests whatsoever to be primary. Other, more compromising observers might consider commercial underwriting as the best possible compromise: financial support that is acknowledged but without any "hype" or "hucksterism," as might be found in commercial advertising. In some philosophical approaches, namely Aristotle's Golden Mean, compromises such as commercial underwriting, might be regarded as ideal.³²

Public Radio and the New Millennium

The financial news has improved for public broadcasting since the mid 1990s, highlighted by President Clinton's decision in 1997 to sign a bill that boosted funding for public broadcasting, restoring much of what had been taken away earlier by the Republican Congress. The Fiscal Year 1998 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Related Agencies Appropriations bill (H.R. 2264) contained a 300 million dollar appropriation for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for Fiscal Year 2000. This represents an increase of 50 million over FY 1999 in current dollars. However, in Fiscal Year 1990 constant dollars, it is 11 million less than CPB's Fiscal Year 1990 appropriation.³³ (By long-standing practice, CPB is forward-funded, meaning that Congress allocates funds to CPB two years ahead of the normal budget cycle.) Despite

the positive reversal of fortune, many local stations have already taken steps to prepare for a future without federal funding by reducing staff sizes, eliminating expensive programming and installing automated operations systems.

U.S. public radio stations have also accepted audience research as an integral function. As station managers in the 1980s were forced to depend more on listener and underwriter dollars, audience research became increasingly valuable as a means of assessing the appeal of programming to listeners, and of pitching audiences to potential underwriters. However, Stavitsky said the rise of audience research in public radio has served as a lightning rod for critics, a symbol of the changing nature of public broadcasting. Some critics argued the increased emphasis upon audience research reflected the transformation of public radio from its education, service-based origins to an audience-driven orientation, in which public stations target those listeners most likely to offer financial support.³⁴

Although audience research is another example of Public Radio's drive toward self-sufficiency, some public radio news directors are getting caught in the middle. They are often asked or required to perform fund-raising and underwriting announcement duties. But such requests may represent a conflict of interest for many public radio news personnel. The Public Radio News Directors Code of Ethics, adopted July 27, 1991, specifically addressed issues related to fund-raising and editorial responsibility. Among other things, the PRNDI code asks news managers to "maintain a separation of duty during station pledge drives and other fund-raising efforts. If possible, this separation should include all news-related personnel."³⁵ It also states that news directors should "responsibly evaluate the newsworthiness of all broadcast items and guard against undue pressure from non-news personnel," and to "make no promises or guarantees to report, promote or advance materials without true news value."³⁶

The PRNDI ethics codes were drafted as listener contributions and corporate giving secured its place in public broadcasting. Giovannoni wrote that public radio

relies more heavily on listener and underwriting support each year. The more listeners are served and the better they are served, the more revenues are generated. In other words, programming decisions are fast becoming 'investment' decisions.³⁷

For station managers, there is an added concern about the impact of programming on private contributions. News directors also must decide whether to pursue stories that could potentially harm donors, and in turn, threaten the bottom line. This fear is defined in the resource dependence perspective, which emphasizes the tendency of organizations to alter their structures and goals in order to obtain the resources needed to survive. In an analysis of the relationship between donors and public broadcasting, when resources shrink and only a few resources provide the bulk of money, donors gain a much greater say in programming content.³⁸

Public broadcasters are beginning to feel some of the pressures which their commercial counterparts have faced for years. The news media have become so dependent on advertising revenue that today as much as 80 percent of a newspaper's revenue and nearly all of a television station's come from advertisers.³⁹ Because of that dependence, advertising boycotts are taken seriously by many media owners. Editors and TV news directors say this kind of pressure is increasing; a few even consider it their top ethical concern. Examples of editors and television news directors bravely battling advertisers may become less frequent as managers scramble to meet the profit expectations of their corporate owners. Reports in *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Washington Journalism Review*, various regional journalism reviews and *The Wall Street Journal* have exposed apparent special treatment given to advertisers and other influential groups.⁴⁰ A survey by professors at Marquette University found that more than 90 percent of the newspapers had been pressured by advertisers to change or kill a story and about a third of the editors admitted they had caved in and complied with advertisers' wishes.⁴¹ The ethics committee of the ASNE reported in the past five years that advertisers canceled ads in about 90 percent of the nation's largest 100 newspapers

because they were upset by news stories.⁴² Also, a 1992 study of selected members of the Society of American Business Writers, which represents print and broadcast media, found that 83 percent consider advertising encroachment a growing threat to editorial integrity.⁴³

The “economics” of news was further detailed in a study conducted by McManus, who examined three network affiliate television stations in the western United States. The stations’ newsrooms were observed on 12 “typical” days to determine whether a story’s value was based more on its economic cost or its journalistic value. The study concluded that “the economic model based on maximizing station profit explained more news decisions at all three stations than the model based on journalistic norms.”⁴⁴

Despite that conclusion, Hadley cited an RTNDA study 10 years ago in which 86 percent of responding commercial radio and television news directors said they found coverage of business corruption by a major station advertiser very acceptable. This indicates the news department’s eagerness to pursue its watchdog function free from economic conflicts of interest, perhaps the ultimate expression of objectivity.⁴⁵ The same survey showed an overwhelming support for the ethical principle of stewardship. First, on the issue of established newsroom policies, 83 percent said it was very acceptable or somewhat acceptable to require newsroom personnel to review ethical standards yearly. Second, more than 92 percent said it was very acceptable or somewhat acceptable to dismiss or suspend a newsroom employee for violation of published ethical policy.⁴⁶

Public radio stations, which have not traditionally been driven by the same profit motives, have nonetheless felt external pressures. At the Public Radio Conference in 1990, a special seminar was held to discuss this dilemma. Some panelists believed it was easy to go about the business of structuring a daily newscast without concern for

underwriters' feelings. However, others indicated there would always be some underwriter pressure on the daily news process, whether seen or unseen.⁴⁷

Engleman, meanwhile, argued the financial dependency of public broadcasting on corporate underwriting should be seen in perspective. According to CPB statistics, corporations supplied about 16 percent of public television's total budget and about 27 percent of PBS' national programming costs by 1990. About 40 percent of public television funds were provided by local, state and federal governments from tax revenues, while viewer contributions amounted to about 25 percent. However, a considerable portion of taxpayer and viewer funds were used for fixed expenses and station operations, whereas corporate funds were earmarked to produce and promote specific programs. Hence, corporate funds had a disproportionate impact on creating and sustaining as well as publicizing programs.⁴⁸ Some underwriters spend millions of dollars to promote public awareness of programming they have underwritten.

Aufderheide stressed the significance of underwriting transcended corporate support for specific programs. "More important, corporate funding conditions what does not get made - or even imagined."⁴⁹ The preoccupation with "cumes" and demographics came at the expense of the original goal of addressing the diversity of American society. So-called enhanced underwriting, permitted since 1984, had the ring of advertisements.⁵⁰ Former CBS broadcast news executive Richard Salant quit the NPR board in protest over underwriting influence on NPR's news coverage.⁵¹ Meanwhile, public radio programmer Josephson charged:

In our financial panic, we've abandoned the ideals and original purpose of public radio. We've become drunk on numbers, buzzwords and simplistic formulas. And we are well on our way to becoming commercial radio, but without the ideals.⁵²

A coalition of broadcasters is taking enhanced underwriting one step further, advocating additional underwriting options for stations to allow what KUHT's station

manager called “super-enhanced underwriting” spots. Most people would call them commercials, and they are already running on more than a dozen public stations.⁵³

Ledbetter harshly criticized such trends in public broadcasting, saying that nothing about commercialism is alien to public broadcasting today, including its scramble to merge with shopping and marketing, in which the very assets of public broadcasting -- its logos, its airtime, its facilities -- are for sale or rent, and its embrace of commercial media conglomerates, in which supposedly noncommercial programming is being developed and distributed by commercial media firms.⁵⁴ Ledbetter blamed Congress for encouraging PBS and NPR to go further in the direction of “mallings” public broadcasting. Congress, Ledbetter said, has yet to agree on a specific recipe for eliminating federal funding, but public broadcasters do not need Big Bird to help them read the writing on the wall.⁵⁵

While Ledbetter is critical of the move toward privatization, Sutton said it is not necessarily a bad thing. In an interview for this study, the former head of fund-raising for National Public Radio and current public radio consultant argued the heat is still on for stations to become financially self-reliant, adding the largest share of station budgets should come from listener contributions, not federal and state appropriations. He said that leads to the greatest amount of financial and editorial independence for public radio stations.⁵⁶

Sutton said the performance standards mentioned earlier have had no impact on stations’ programming and fund-raising decisions because most stations easily meet the minimum requirements. To help individual stations improve their performances, Sutton worked in 1998 with both individual stations as clients and a project for Public Radio International, funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, called the Public Radio Underwriting Partnership. Under this program, 11 stations began the task of raising enough money over a two-year period to replace their CPB grants.⁵⁷

Sutton contended that the healthy public radio station today raises more money off-air than on-air, through such activities as telemarketing, direct mail, and special events. He said the healthy station gets at least 50 percent of new pledges during its on-air drive. He also said many public radio stations rely on on-air fund-raising to bail them out when their budgets come up short in other areas. Sutton argued that station managers who sit back and say the federal funding threat is over view their world as one of expenses rather than investments:

In other words, managers must ask themselves how they can invest the money they receive to ensure their station's future rather than simply worrying about how they can spend it. That's a paradigm shift many stations are currently going through.⁵⁸

On potential conflicts between news departments and development personnel or station management related to on-air fund-raisers, Sutton cited the focus groups that NPR conducted in which it asked listeners, some contributors and some not, to listen to a series of fund-raising tapes. Afterward, they were asked if it was appropriate for NPR journalists such as Bob Edwards, Nina Totenberg, Noah Adams, and Scott Simon to ask for money. From listeners, givers and non-givers alike, the answer was a resounding "yes." Sutton said listeners perceive public radio as a community of people; people who make public radio and people who listen to it, pulling together to come up with the money to survive.⁵⁹

Respondents, however, said there must still be a separation of news stories from fund-raising efforts. There was a struggle within NPR when Bob Edwards said he would do all of the fund-raising the network wanted him to do, as long as the spots did not run during *Morning Edition*. However, Sutton avoids that dilemma when working with stations, recommending they use other news personalities during that time slot.⁶⁰

When it came to local news people, Sutton said listeners did not feel that their journalistic standards had been compromised when they pitched, unless those standards were perceived to be higher than their network counterparts. To maintain a separation

between fund-raising and news reporting, reporters are encouraged to use “case-and-close” messages, where news personnel deliver facts about the fund-raisers and others talk about challenge grants, premiums, or pledge levels.⁶¹

While on-air fund-raising is an issue, Sutton said the greater threat to public radio is underwriting. He said a fundamental conflict among stations focused on the length of funding credits. He said 20 to 30 second credits sound more like commercials but may be more appealing to underwriters. Stations that run 10 second credits run into fewer problems with controversial underwriting language because they have less time to get into trouble, but because the credits are run more frequently, it may sound cluttered.⁶²

Summary

The review of literature has established that public broadcasting’s funding mechanism is undergoing a metamorphosis from public support to self-reliance. This study identified the major works devoted to the reasons for this shift, which have historically focused on a political call for change born out of opposition to particular programs. As a result, U.S. public broadcasting stations are relying increasingly on listener contributions and corporate underwriting. While federal funding is still available, there are additional requirements in place for eligibility, as well as new incentives to generate non-tax revenues for the medium.

The review of literature has cited works that discuss the political pressures public broadcasters have endured in the debate over federal funding and whether conservatives’ criticism of public broadcasting is justified. Also, public broadcasters may face more pressure from underwriters in the future as the medium becomes more commercialized. Corporate underwriters may attempt to influence public radio news policy in much the same way that advertisers pressure commercial radio journalists. This study seeks to

determine how frequently public radio news directors experience such pressures, and how they respond. It also seeks to determine how frequently public radio news directors participate in on-air fund-raisers and produce underwriting announcements given the amount of time stations devote to on-air pledge drives and the importance they place on underwriting. Unquestionably, local public radio news directors in the United States must address many of the same issues that prevail in the commercial domain. It is the resolution of these conflicts that will ultimately determine whether stations remove the “public” from public broadcasting.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

General

In this chapter, the research strategy and process for conducting the study will be discussed. The discussion will include methodology, variables, hypotheses, the study population, the data collection instrument, and statistical tests. Also, there will be an explanation of a 1988 survey of the same organization. Portions of that questionnaire were replicated for this study. Finally, study assumptions and limitations will be explained.

Methodology

The research methodology is a mail survey and was chosen because it is an efficient means of gathering information from large groups of people.⁶³ Mail surveys are also an excellent instrument to collect information from highly specialized audiences.⁶⁴ The survey seeks to describe the attitudes and practices of the respondents to a series of questions on underwriting credit production, on-air fund-raising and editorial pressure to cover stories or to alter or kill them. A copy of the questionnaire and accompanying cover letter are contained in the Appendix.

The cover letter emphasized the need for an examination of on-air fund-raising activities of local public radio news directors. It also stressed the possible benefits of gathering such information (i.e., possible reference material for local news directors and station managers).

The questionnaire contained 21 multiple choice, dichotomous and open-ended questions that asked news directors about their involvement in on-air fund-raising and whether they had been pressured to cover, alter or kill certain stories by the station manager or someone else. The multiple choice questions included all possible responses, while the dichotomous questions provided enough information in regard to the purpose of the research project.⁶⁵ The open-ended questions were used to allow respondents freedom in answering questions and an opportunity to provide in-depth responses.⁶⁶ Local news directors were asked about the size of their staff and audience and who holds the station's license. They were also asked how frequently they produce underwriting announcements, participate in on-air fundraising and their willingness to cooperate in such activities. The survey also contained an open-ended question asking subjects who had refused to participate in on-air fund-raisers and why such decisions were made. Finally, the survey asked participants whether they had been pressured to cover or kill stories by the station manager or someone else, and whether their career as a public radio journalist has ever suffered because they refused to take actions that violated their journalistic ethic. The questionnaire was administered to several staff members at KOSU in Stillwater, Oklahoma, as a pre-test.

The survey was mailed to 102 public radio news directors in the United States who are members of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated, or PRNDI. Because the entire population of this organization received the survey, there is no need to select a sample.

Respondents were given three weeks to return the completed surveys to a common address. The first mailing was sent on December 21, 1997 with a deadline of January 9, 1998. The second mailing was sent electronically February 18, 1998, with a deadline of February 27, 1998. Because of the high costs associated with the survey, a third mailing was not conducted regardless of the return rate.

In keeping with the recommended tracking procedures, each survey contained a removable identifying number in the right hand corner so the researcher could keep track of the respondents. The responses to each survey question were recorded and coded by the researcher. The results of this study will be compared with a survey of the same organization conducted in 1988 by the PRNDI Practices in Rules Committee as part of its work to develop a code of ethics for the organization. The 1988 survey was conducted during the organization's summer conference. The current study replicated a series of questions from the 1988 survey that asked news directors about their practices in and attitudes toward on-air fund-raising and underwriting credit announcements.⁶⁷ This study also replicated questions that asked news directors whether they had been pressured to cover or edit stories and whether they felt their careers had suffered because they refused to take actions that violated their journalistic ethic. Other questions in the 1988 survey that were not replicated in the current study asked respondents about their working relationships with National Public Radio and whether they felt the organization should adopt an ethics code.⁶⁸ The primary focus of this study is to determine what changes in practices and attitudes have occurred within the organization on the issues of fund-raising, credit announcements and editorial conflict management.

Information for this study was gathered by a self-administered questionnaire that was mailed to 102 members of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated. The survey packet included the questionnaire, a cover letter, and a return envelope. A second mailing was conducted electronically (E-mail) to improve response rates. A total of 60 PRNDI members responded to the survey (59 percent).

Research Design

The study consisted of several dependent variables and independent variables.

The independent variables were:

1. The radio stations' license type.
2. The radio stations' market size.

The dependent variables are the responding public radio news directors. It assumed that all the responses were truthful.

The responses were analyzed with descriptive statistics. The data were analyzed to answer several research questions.

1. How many public radio news directors participate in on-air fund-raising?
2. How many public radio news directors participate in producing underwriting announcements?
3. How frequently do public radio news directors participate in on-air fundraising
4. How frequently do public radio news directors produce underwriting announcements.
5. How frequently have public radio news directors been asked to cover, edit or kill stories?
6. Where did the requests originate?
7. How did public radio news directors respond to such requests?
8. Do public radio news directors feel their careers have suffered because they failed to take action that violated their journalistic ethic?

The study attempted to determine the amount of participation in fund-raising activities by local news directors and whether they had been asked to cover or kill certain

stories by station managers or others. The hypothesis is that public radio news directors are participating in on-air fund-raising and underwriting productions more frequently than they were 10 years ago and that they are facing editorial pressures similar to their commercial counterparts because of the increasing emphasis on self-reliance in public broadcasting.

Limitations

This study contains several limitations. First, there is the low response rate that is usually found in mail survey research.⁶⁹ In this case, 59 percent of the PRNDI membership responded to the survey. It is impossible to determine the attitudes of the other 41 percent of PRNDI members. Those attitudes could be similar to or different from those who responded. Questionnaire respondents are also limited by the data collection instrument in the answers they can provide.⁷⁰ Further, completing a questionnaire is an artificial situation and responses may not represent “real” attitudes.⁷¹

Summary

The study consisted of a mail survey that was sent to the approximately 102 members of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated, or PRNDI in the United States. Respondents were asked about their roles in station pledge drive activities and whether they had been pressured by station managers or others to pursue or ignore certain stories. Their responses were analyzed with descriptive statistics and compared with a previous study of the same organization. This study provided more insight into the fund-raising and credit announcing activities of local public radio news departments, as

well their responses to editorial pressures and the sources of those pressures. The study, like all research projects, was not perfect and had some inherent limitations.

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CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

General

This study asked members of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated about their roles in on-air fund-raising and underwriting announcing. It asked whether they participated in such activities, and if so, how frequently. They also were asked whether they felt such activities were appropriate. The questionnaire also asked PRNDI members whether they were pressured by station managers, underwriters, listener contributors or others to cover or kill stories and how they responded to such requests. This study asked PRNDI members whether they felt their careers had suffered because they failed to take actions that violated their journalistic ethic. Also, this study requested data about the size of the local news staff, and the size of the local audience.

Demographic Data

Respondents were asked to provide some demographic data on the size of their full-time news staff, the size of the audience that they serve and the type of license held by their public radio station. This information was sought to determine what differences, if any, exist in the responses between news directors at larger and smaller market stations, between large staffs and small staffs and between their stations' license types.

News Staff Size

Respondents were asked how many full-time professionals were employed in their news departments. Information was sought for full-time professionals only because they are the ones who would likely be involved in on-air fund-raising and editorial decision making. Part-time employees and interns generally do not participate in such activities. See Tables I, II and III.

TABLE I
SIZE OF PRNDI MEMBERS' FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

	Percent	N=60	Number
1-2 full time	45%		27
3-4 full time	35		21
5-6 full time	8		5
7 or more	12		7
Total	100%		60

The main finding from Table I is that nearly half of the respondents work in a newsroom with one to two full-time radio journalists. More than one-third of respondents worked with two or three other full-time reporters. Also, one-third of stations had large news staffs of five or more full-time radio journalists. The responses indicate that most public radio station news rooms have no more than four-time reporters. That is smaller than the staffs of most commercial radio newsrooms located in mid-sized markets. For example, at KRMG in Tulsa, there are six full-time reporters

on staff, while at KTOK in Oklahoma City, has room for as many as nine full-time radio journalists.⁷²

Market Size and License Classification

On audience size, respondents were asked to choose one of six population ranges that stations serve from “less than five thousand” to as high as “more than one million.” See Table II.

TABLE II
MARKET SIZES SERVED BY PRNDI MEMBERS’ STATIONS

N=60		
	Percent	Number
Less than 5,000	0%	0
5,000 to 50,000	17	10
50,001 to 200,000	45	27
200,001 to 500,000	22	13
500,001 to 1-million	6	4
More than 1-million	10	6
Total	100%	60

The main finding in Table II is that most respondents’ stations serve audiences in small markets of 50,000 or less to mid market sizes of 500,000 or less. This may be reflective of the station’s signal reach or the fact that many

public stations are located in smaller university communities. As Table III indicates, a majority of respondents work for university-licensed stations, reflective of the educational roots of non-commercial radio.

TABLE III
LICENSE CLASSIFICATION OF PRNDI MEMBERS' STATIONS

N=60		
	Percent	Number
1. University	70%	42
2. Community	15	9
3. Other	15	9
Total	100%	60

Frequency In Which Underwriting Announcements Are Read

The frequency in which news directors produce underwriting announcements was of interest in this study. Most of the survey respondents said they did not participate in the production of underwriting announcements. A majority of those who do produce underwriting announcements tend to do so frequently, at least five times per week.

TABLE IV
FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PRNDI MEMBERS PRODUCE
UNDERWRITING ANNOUNCEMENTS

N=60		
	Percent	Total
0 Times per week	73%	44
1-2 Times per week	12	7
3-4 Times per week	3	2
5 Times per week	12	7
Total	100%	60

The main finding in this table is that most public radio news directors are not involved in the underwriting productions, which include writing or announcing credits. Those who participate in such activities either do so occasionally (1-2 times per week) or frequently (5-6 times per week). This study also is interested in determining if there are any differences in the responses from public radio news directors who oversee large staffs and those who work in a one or two person shop. See Table V.

TABLE Va.
FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PRNDI MEMBERS PRODUCE UNDERWRITING
ANNOUNCEMENTS BY FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

N=60					
	1-2 Full Time	3-4 Full Time	5-6 Full Time	7/more Full Time	Total
0 Times/week	19	14	4	7	44
1-2 Times/wk	3	4	0	0	7
3-4 Times/wk	1	1	0	0	2
5 Times/wk	4	2	1	0	7
Total	27	21	5	7	60

TABLE Vb.
PERCENTAGE WITH WHICH PRNDI MEMBERS PRODUCE UNDERWRITING
ANNOUNCEMENTS BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

N=60					
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/more Full time	Total
0 Times/wk	70%	66%	80%	100%	44
1-2 Times/wk	11	19	0	0	7
3-4 Times/wk	4	5	0	0	2
5 Times/wk	15	10	20	0	7
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	60

The main finding in this table is that public radio news directors in smaller shops generally produce underwriting announcements more frequently than their counterparts who have larger staffs. This could be a reflection of the stations' resources. Smaller news staffs may be indicative of smaller overall staffs; thus news directors are more likely to produce underwriting announcements because there is nobody else to produce such credits.

Attitudes Toward Underwriting Announcements

Respondents were also asked what they thought about the involvement of news departments in the production of underwriting announcements. The survey asked subjects whether such activities were appropriate or inappropriate. See Table VI.

TABLE VI
PRNDI MEMBERS' ATTITUDES
TOWARD UNDERWRITING ANNOUNCEMENTS

	N=60	
	Percent	Number
Appropriate	22%	13
Inappropriate	66	40
No response	12	7
Total	100%	60

The main finding in this table is that there is a general feeling among respondents that news personnel should not be involved in the production of underwriting announcements. According to the survey, two thirds of respondents felt that such activity was inappropriate.

Public radio news directors' attitudes toward the production of underwriting credits were again examined by news staff size to determine what, if any, differences existed between attitudes of news directors in large shops and those managing public radio news shops. See Table VII.

TABLE VIIa
PRNDI MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD UNDERWRITING
ANNOUNCEMENTS BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

N=60					
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/more Full time	Total
Appropriate	7	5	0	1	13
Inappropriate	15	14	5	6	40
No Response	5	2	0	0	7
Total	27	21	5	7	60

TABLE VIIb.
PRNDI MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD UNDERWRITING
ANNOUNCEMENTS BY PERCENTAGE

	N=60				
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/more Full time	Total
Appropriate	26%	24%	0%	14%	13
Inappropriate	56	67	100	86	40
No Response	18	9	0	0	7
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	60

The main finding in Table VII is that most news directors who work in larger newsrooms disapproved of public radio credit productions. News directors at smaller stations appear more willing to agree that such activities are appropriate. Five respondents who said it was inappropriate to produce underwriting credits were engaged in such activities, with two of them producing at least five underwriting announcements per week.

Participation In On-Air Pledge Drives

On-air fund-raisers are a fact of life for most public radio stations, and participation in such pledge drives is just as much a fact of life for most public radio news directors. Respondents were asked how frequently they "pitched" during a pledge drive. the amount of participation is measured per fund-raiser. See Table VIII.

TABLE VIII
FREQUENCY OF PRNDI MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION
IN ON-AIR PLEDGE DRIVES

	Percent	N=60	Number
0 Times per drive	8%		5
1-5 Times per drive	32		19
6-10 Times per drive	28		17
11-15 Times per drive	30		18
No Answer	2		1
Total	100%		60

The main finding in Table VIII is that a minority of respondents said they did not participate in on-air fund-raisers. Those who do participate in pledge drives tend to do so frequently. More than half of the respondents said they participated in pledge drives at least 6 times during the course of the pledge drive. On average, public radio news directors pitch 6 to 10 times during a typical fund-raiser. The study also is interested in determining the frequency in which news directors participate in pledge drives according to news staff size. See Table IX.

TABLE IXa.
FREQUENCY OF PRNDI MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION IN ON-AIR PLEDGE
DRIVES BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

	N=60				
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/More Full time	Total
0 Times	5	0	0	0	5
1-5 Times	4	7	2	7	20
6-10 Times	7	7	2	0	16
11-15 Times	11	5	1	0	17
No Answer	0	2	0	0	2
Total	27	21	5	7	60

TABLE IXb.
FREQUENCY OF PRNDI MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION IN ON-AIR PLEDGE
DRIVES BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

	N=60				Total
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/More Full time	
0 Times	18%	0%	0%	0%	5
1-5 Times	15	33	40	100	20
6-10 Times	26	33	40	0	16
11-15 Times	41	24	20	0	17
No Answer	0	10	0	0	2
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	60

The main finding in Table IX is that public radio news directors in small shops tend to fund raise more frequently than their counterparts in larger newsrooms. Conversely, the news directors who reported that they did not participate in such activities were also found in smaller newsrooms.

Attitudes Toward Participation in Fund-Drives

Respondents were also asked whether they felt it was appropriate for radio journalists to participate in on-air pledge drives. While the PRNDI Code of Ethics urges news directors to keep separate their news duties from on-air fund-raising, most seem comfortable with "pitching" public radio during pledge drives. See Table X.

TABLE X
PRNDI MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD
PARTICIPATION IN PLEDGE DRIVES

	Percent	N=60	Number
Appropriate	77%		46
Inappropriate	18		11
No Answer	5		3
Total	100%		60

The main finding in Table X is that a majority of respondents felt that participation in on-air pledge drives is appropriate. Even so, a slightly higher percentage of respondents in Table X said it was inappropriate than the percentage of respondents in Table IX who said they did not participate in such activities. As a result, there are several respondents who are participating in such events who feel it is inappropriate. The attitudes of public radio news directors on the subject of on-air pledge drives was also examined by newsroom staff size. See Table XI.

TABLE XIa.

PRNDI MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD PARTICIPATION IN ON-AIR
PLEDGE DRIVES BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

	N=60				
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7 or More Full time	Total
Appropriate	19	11	4	6	40
Inappropriate	4	9	1	1	15
No Response	4	1	0	0	5
Total	27	21	5	7	60

TABLE XIb.

PERCENTAGE OF PRNDI MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD PARTICIPATION
IN ON-AIR PLEDGE DRIVES

	N=60				
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7 or More Full time	Total
Appropriate	70%	52%	80%	86%	40
Inappropriate	15	43	20	14	15
No Response	15	5	0	0	5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	60

The main finding in Table XI is that a majority of news directors in each staff size category said news staff participation in on-air pledge drives is appropriate. However, seven of the subjects who reported they were engaged in fund-raising activities felt it was inappropriate.

There were occasions when public radio news directors felt it was necessary to refuse to participate in on-air fund-raisers. But a majority of PRNDI respondents have never taken such action. Table XII identifies news directors who have refused based on news department size.

TABLE XIIa.
PERCENTAGE OF PRNDI MEMBERS WHO REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN
PLEDGE DRIVES BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

N=60					
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/More Full time	Total
Refused	3	3	0	1	7
Complied	20	18	5	6	49
N/A	4	0	0	0	4
Total	27	21	5	7	60

TABLE XIIb.
PRNDI MEMBERS WHO REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN
PLEDGE DRIVES BY PERCENTAGE

N=60					
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full Time	5-6 Full time	7/More Full time	Total
Refused	11%	11%	0%	14%	7
Complied	74	86	100	86	49
N/A	15	0	0	0	4
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	60

The main finding of this table is that only a few news directors had ever refused a request to participate in on-air pledge drives and that a majority of the refusals came from news directors in shops with fewer than five reporters. Respondents who refused to participate in on-air fund-raisers were asked to explain why they refused. Most said they did not have the time to participate. Others said they refused to “pitch” around their local news. Still others, who said they had never refused a request to participate in on-air pledge drives, responded to this question, saying they promote only the news product and let others “beg” for money. See Table XIII.

TABLE XIII
REASONS PRNDI MEMBERS REFUSED REQUESTS TO
PARTICIPATE IN ON-AIR FUND-RAISERS

	Percent	N=07	Number
1. Time Constraints	29%		2
2. Before/After Newscast	43		3
3. Both	14		1
3. No Response	14		1
Total	100%		7

Several respondents who said they had not refused requests to pitch answered the previous question anyway. One respondent said there is tremendous pressure to pitch on-air, but he said he is holding his ground. However, the respondent said it will probably be an issue during the interview for his eventual successor, who according to the respondent, will probably be forced to participate in on-air fund-raising from the beginning. Another respondent said such activities should be used to promote the value of NPR programming, although radio journalists at that station do not talk about the local news product during pitch breaks.

Editorial Pressure To Cover A Story

The PRNDI Code of Ethics includes a recommendation for news directors to maintain their independence in deciding what news stories to cover. With that

in mind, respondents were also asked whether they had been pressured to cover an event they were not planning to cover.

TABLE XIV
PRNDI MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN PRESSURED TO COVER A STORY

N=60		
	Percent	Number
Yes	50%	30
No	50	30
Total		
	100%	60

The main finding in Table XIV is that exactly half of the respondents said they had been pressured to cover an event. Public radio news directors in all news staff size categories reported they had been pressured to cover an event, but such pressure was more prevalent in shops with no more than four reporters. Even so, the highest percentage of news directors who reported such pressure were those who worked in news departments with five to six employees. See Table XV.

TABLE XVa.
PRNDI MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN PRESSURED
TO COVER A STORY BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

N=60						
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7 or More Full time	Total	
Yes	12	12	3	3	30	
No	15	9	2	4	30	
Total	27	21	5	7	60	

TABLE XVb.
PERCENTAGE OF PRNDI MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN PRESSURED
TO COVER A STORY BY FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF SIZE

N=60						
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7 or More Full time	Total	
Yes	44%	57%	60%	43%	30	
No	56	43	40	57	30	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	60	

Several follow-up questions were asked of those respondents who had experienced pressure to cover an event: 1) How often has this

happened?; 2) Generally speaking, who applied this pressure?; 3) How did news directors respond to such requests? See Tables XVI, XVII, XVIII.

TABLE XVI
 FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PRNDI MEMBERS
 HAVE BEEN PRESSURED TO COVER A STORY

	Percent	N=30	Number
1-2 Times	27%		8
3-4 Times	33		10
5-6 Times	3		1
7 or more times	30		9
No Answer	7		2
Total	100%		30

The main finding in Table XVI is that nearly one third of those who experienced pressure to cover a story in their current position said it occurred at least seven times, while more than half had been pressured to cover a story from one to four times. This indicates that generally speaking, a majority of PRNDI news directors who faced pressure to cover certain stories experienced that pressure more than once in their current position.

Table XVII illustrates the frequency of pressure between public radio news managers based on the size of the news department.

TABLE XVIIa.

FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PRNDI MEMBERS HAVE BEEN PRESSURED
TO COVER A STORY BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

N=30					
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/more Full time	Total
1-2 Times	4	2	0	2	8
3-4 Times	1	5	3	1	10
5-6 Times	0	1	0	0	1
7/more Times	6	3	0	0	9
No Answer	1	1	0	0	2
Total	12	12	3	3	30

TABLE XVIIb.

FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PRNDI MEMBERS HAVE BEEN
PRESSURED TO COVER A STORY BY PERCENTAGE

N=30					
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/more Full time	Total
1-2 Times	34%	17%	0%	67%	8
3-4 Times	8	42	100	33	10
5-6 Times	0	8	0	0	1
7/more Times	50	25	0	0	9
No Answer	8	8	0	0	2
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	30

The main finding in this Table is that most of the repeated pressure to cover stories is experienced by public radio news directors with small news staffs. The respondents who indicated that they had been pressured to cover a story they were not planning to cover were asked where the source of that pressure originated. Respondents were asked to check from a list that included the general manager, program director and development director. There also was a category for "other," which could include university officials, underwriters, licensees or other external constituency. See Table XVIII.

TABLE XVIII
SOURCES OF PRESSURE TO COVER A STORY

	N=30	
	Percent	Number
General Manager	27%	9
Program Director	6	2
Development Director	12	4
Other (University official, underwriter, licensee, etc.)	21	7
GM and Program Director	9	3
GM and Development Director	6	2
GM and Other	12	4
GM/PD and Other	3	1
GM/DD and Other	3	1
Total	100%	33

The main finding in this table is that general managers pressure news directors to cover events more than any other source. More than one third of the respondents said general managers were either the sole source of pressure or among more than one source of pressure. A few said they faced pressure to cover stories by either the program director or the development director. Interestingly, nearly one quarter of the respondents experienced pressure from outside the station staff. The sources of external pressure included business managers, news sources, underwriters, university public information offices, marketing, listeners, and public relations specialists. Some respondents indicated they have received editorial pressure from more than one source. As a result, there are of 33 sources in table XVIII.

News directors who experience pressure to cover a story they were not planning to cover are faced with a decision to either comply with the request or refuse it. In this case, respondents were given three choices: 1) Agree to do the story because it would not compromise the integrity of the news department; 2) Agree to do the story knowing the respondent does not have the power to refuse; 3) Refuse to comply with the demand. See Tables XIX.

TABLE XIX
RESPONSES TO SOURCES OF EDITORIAL PRESSURE

	Percent	N=30 Number
Agreed to do story	47%	14
Agreed reluctantly	14	4
Refused to comply	30	9
Reluctantly agreed and Refused	3	1
Agreed and Refused	6	2
Total	100%	30

The main finding from this table is that is that a majority of news directors agreed to comply with requests to cover stories, feeling such requests would not compromise the integrity of their news. Some of those who agreed did so reluctantly, believing they did not have the power to do refuse. Nearly one-third of the respondents, however, said they did refuse to comply with such demands, indicating that some news directors still believe such requests from outside the newsroom should not be honored. Several respondents indicated that they had both agreed and refused such requests, indicating that such decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

Editorial Pressure to Alter or Kill a Story

The respondents were also asked whether they had been pressured to kill or edit a story. The main finding from Table XX is that only a few responding news directors had experienced such a demand. Also, more news directors had been asked to cover a story than had been asked to kill or edit a story.

TABLE XX
PRNDI MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN PRESSURED
TO ALTER OR KILL A STORY

	Percent	N=60	Number
Yes	12%		7
No	88		53
Total	100%		60

The findings in Table XX indicate that the sources of pressure (i.e. station managers, underwriters, licensees, etc.) are more willing to pressure public radio journalists to cover a story than they are willing to ask them to kill or edit a story. Table XX seeks to discover whether any differences exist between large staff managers and smaller news staff managers.

TABLE XXIa.

PRNDI MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN PRESSURED
TO ALTER OR KILL A STORY BY FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF SIZE

N=60					
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/More Full time	Total
Yes	2	4	1	0	7
No	25	17	4	7	53
Total	27	21	5	7	60

TABLE XXIb.

PRNDI MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN PRESSURED
TO KILL OR EDIT A STORY BY SIZE OF FULL-TIME NEWS STAFF

N=60					
	1-2 Full time	3-4 Full time	5-6 Full time	7/More Full time	Total
Yes	7%	19%	20%	0%	7
No	93	81	80	100	53
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	60

The main finding in this table is that news directors who manage newsrooms with one to four reporters bore the brunt of requests to kill or edit stories. This study also asked respondents to list the frequency in which they had been told to kill or edit a story. See Table XXII.

TABLE XXII
FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PRNDI MEMBERS HAVE BEEN PRESSURED
TO ALTER OR KILL A STORY

	Percent	N=7	Number
1-2 times	86%		6
3-4 times	14		1
5-6 times	0		0
7 or more times	0		0
Total	100%		07

The main finding from this table is that in their current position, news directors were rarely told kill or edit a story. Even when such requests were made, respondents reported that they occurred only once or twice. Respondents also were asked to indicate where the source of pressure to kill or edit a story originated. The list of sources included the general manager, program director, development director or someone else, such as a licensee or underwriter. See Table XXIII.

TABLE XXIII
SOURCES OF PRESSURE TO ALTER OR KILL A STORY

N=7		
	Percent	Number
General Manager	57%	4
Program Director	29	2
Development Director	14	1
Total	100%	7

The main finding in this table is that general managers are the ones most likely to request that a story be killed or edited. Program directors were named as the source for such pressure from nearly one-third of the responses. News directors who had been told to kill or edit a story were asked how they responded to such requests. See Table XXIV.

TABLE XXIV
PRNDI MEMBERS' RESPONSES TO SOURCES OF PRESSURE
TO ALTER OR KILL A STORY

N=07		
	Percent	Number
Agreed to change or kill	14%	1
Reluctantly agreed	72	5
Refused to comply	14	1
Total	100%	7

Only one of the seven respondents in Table XXIV who had been told to kill or edit a story refused. The rest either agreed, saying the decision would not compromise the integrity of their news, or reluctantly agreed, believing they did not have the power to do anything about it.

Solicitation of Underwriting

While many news directors in public radio are charged with defining their station's news philosophy, producing and assigning stories and anchoring newscasts, some are asked to do even more. Several news directors are also involved in the solicitation of underwriting separate from on-air fund-raisers. See Table XXV.

TABLE XXV
PRNDI MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SOLICIT UNDERWRITING

	Percent	N=60	Number
Yes	12%		7
No	88		53
Total	100%		60

The main finding from this table is that public radio news directors are rarely asked to solicit underwriting separate from their on-air pledge drive and underwriting production duties. The reasons why news directors were asked to solicit underwriting were beyond the scope of this study. Meanwhile, the frequency in which news directors were asked to solicit

underwriting was divided among those who had been asked only once or twice, and those who were asked seven or more times. See Table XXVI.

TABLE XXVI
 FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PRNDI MEMBERS HAVE BEEN ASKED
 TO SOLICIT UNDERWRITING

	Percent	N=07	Number
1-2 times	43%		3
3-4 times	0		0
5-6 times	14		1
7 times or more	43		3
Total	100%		7

The main finding from Table XXVI is that more than half of those who participate in underwriting solicitation have done so at least five times. The remainder had been asked to participate in such activities at least once.

This research focused on the practices in and attitudes toward on-air underwriting announcements, on-air fund-raisers and editorial pressures. Public radio news directors' responses to these issues may raise questions about how such decisions have impacted their careers. See Table XXVII.

TABLE XXVII
PRNDI MEMBERS WHO SAY THEIR CAREERS WERE HURT
BECAUSE THEY FAILED TO COMPLY WITH ACTIONS
THAT VIOLATED THEIR JOURNALISTIC ETHIC.

	Percent	N=60	Number
Yes	5%		3
No	85		51
Unsure	10		6
Total	100%		60

The main finding from this survey is that few news directors believed their careers had suffered because they refused to comply with actions that violated their journalistic ethic. A few more news directors said they were unsure whether their career had suffered because of such decisions.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study sought to answer several basic questions about practices and attitudes pertaining to on-air fund-raising, underwriting announcements, and editorial pressures encountered by the membership of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated.

1. How many PRNDI members produce underwriting credits?
2. How many PRNDI members participate in pledge drives?
3. What do PRNDI members think about participate in the production of underwriting credits and pledge drives?
4. How many public radio news directors have been pressured to cover or kill a story?
5. How do the answers to these questions compare with a 1988 study of the same news organization?

This study also asked news directors to identify the source or sources of pressure to cover or kill a story and their responses to such requests. It also asked whether news directors felt their careers had suffered because they failed to comply with actions they felt violated their journalistic ethics. PRNDI members were sent a mail questionnaire and asked to respond to a series of questions. The questions included requests for information on the size of their news departments, the station's license type and their audience size.

The survey was mailed to 102 members of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated around the United States. Of those contacted, 60 PRNDI members, or almost 60 percent responded. All of the responses were judged to be useful and were employed in the survey.

Results were tabulated in the form of descriptive statistics. A comparison was made on one newsroom characteristic, the size of the respondents' full-time news staff.

The survey asked PRNDI members the following questions:

1. How many full-time professionals work in your news department?
- 2.. How large is your listening audience?
3. What is the license type of the your station?
4. How frequently do you produce underwriting credits?
5. Do you feel it is appropriate for news people to produce underwriting credits?
6. How frequently do you participate in on-air fund-raisers during a pledge drive?
7. Do you feel it is appropriate for news people to participate in on-air pledge drives?
8. Have you ever refused to participate in on-air pledge drives?
9. If yes, why?
10. Have you ever been pressured in your current position to cover an event or issue you were not planning to cover?
11. How often has this happened?
12. Generally speaking, who applied this pressure?
13. Most of the time when this occurred, how would you respond?
14. In your current position, has your supervisor or anyone else ever demanded that you kill or edit a story which you felt was journalistically sound?

15. How many times has this happened?
16. Generally speaking, who applied this pressure?
17. Most of the time when such a demand was made, how did you respond?
18. Have you ever been asked to solicit underwriting in a "development" capacity separate from on-air fund-raising?
19. If yes, how often has this occurred?
20. Do you feel your career has suffered because you refused to take actions that violated your journalistic ethic?
21. If yes, how?

The answers to these questions were compared with a similar survey of news personnel in 1988 who were members of the same organization, which was at that time known as Public Radio News Directors Association, or PRNDA.

Survey results indicated that a majority of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated members in 1998 did not produce underwriting credits. Two-thirds of respondents also said such participation is inappropriate, while nearly a quarter of respondents said it was appropriate. Those who participated in on-air funding credits reported that they did so at least seven times per week. The 1988 PRNDA survey indicated that nearly half of the respondents read underwriting credits on-air, although only six percent of respondents said it was appropriate.⁷³

Meanwhile, a majority of respondents in the 1998 survey said they participated in on-air fund-raisers and felt it was appropriate. That is comparable to the findings in the 1988 PRNDA study, in which a majority of respondents said they participated in on-air pledge drives while half of the respondents said it was appropriate. The remaining respondents said it was either inappropriate or depended on the circumstance.⁷⁴

Also, a comparison of the respondents' news staffs in the 1998 study indicated that a higher percentage of radio news departments with four or fewer reporters were engaged in underwriting and fund-raising activities and felt it was appropriate as

opposed to stations with five or more reporters, perhaps an indication that stations with smaller news staffs have fewer resources and must rely on help from the newsroom to meet fund-raising goals. A majority of those who had refused a request to participate in pledge drives said they did not have time for such activities. Others said they refused to pitch around their local news or that they would only promote the news product, leaving the "begging" to others.

PRNDI members also responded to a series of questions which asked if they had been subjected to pressure to cover a story they were not planning to cover, or edit or kill a story they felt was journalistically sound. Additionally, respondents were asked how frequently this occurred and who originated the pressure.

Exactly half of the respondents in the 1998 questionnaire said they had been pressured to cover a story while serving in their current capacity and that general managers were the most likely source of such pressure. Pressure also originated from the program director, the development director, underwriters and listeners, or some combination of the aforementioned. A majority of the respondents agreed with the request, saying either it would not compromise the integrity of their news, or they did not have the power to refuse. Nearly half of those said they had experienced such pressure at least seven times. However, in the 1988 study, only one-third of the respondents said they had experienced pressure to cover a story or event they were not planning to cover, and when they did, it happened only once or twice.⁷⁵ The earlier study did not ask respondents to identify the source of the pressure. News directors who manage staffs of five to six reported the highest percentage of pressure in the 1998 study, followed by news directors who manage staffs of three to four and those who belong to a one or two person staff. The findings indicate that news directors face more pressure to cover stories today than they did 10 years ago. This could be attributed to the increasing emphasis on funding from underwriters and listeners, who may feel they have a legitimate right to make suggestions on the types of news events to

cover, and from general managers and other staffers who do not want to lose their support.

Only a few respondents in the 1998 study said they had been told to alter or kill a story in their current position. But again, general managers were the primary source of such requests. Most of the respondents reluctantly agreed to comply with pressure to cover or kill a story, although a few said they had refused. Also, PRNDI members reported that such requests were made only once or twice. A comparison based on the respondents' full-time news staff size indicated that pressure to alter or kill a story was more prevalent among news staffs with four or fewer reporters. In the 1988 PRNDI survey, only 12 percent of the respondents said they had been pressured to kill or edit a story they felt was journalistically sound and that such requests were made on only one or two occasions.⁷⁶ However, a difference was found between 1998 and 1988 in the way news directors responded to such requests. While the 1998 survey respondents agreed to comply with such requests a majority of the time, their predecessors in the earlier study refused to go along with such orders.⁷⁷

A majority of PRNDI members in this survey said they had not been asked to solicit underwriting in a "development" capacity separate from on-air underwriting credit production or pledge drive participation. However, nearly half of those who reported they had engaged in such activity had done so at least five times.

Most respondents in the 1998 survey said that the ethical decisions they have made in their careers have not haunted their careers. Only five percent of the respondents said they felt their career as public radio journalists had suffered because they refused to take action which violated their journalistic ethic. However, another 10 percent said they were not sure whether their careers had suffered. The findings mirror the results from the 1988 survey, in which two respondents said their careers had suffered.⁷⁸ However, those who said yes in both surveys may have had their careers harmed for other reasons beyond the scope of this survey.

On the demographic data in the 1998 survey, most PRNDI members' stations were located in a market of at least 50 thousand people. A majority of members' stations were licensed through state colleges and universities. The 1988 study found that most respondents broadcast to a medium size market of between 50-thousand and 200,000, worked for stations licensed through universities and worked with only one other full-time news persons.⁷⁹

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions can be made:

Underwriting Production (On-air Announcements)

The 1998 survey results indicate that most PRNDI members do not produce/read underwriting announcements for broadcast nor do they feel it is an appropriate function of news personnel. The study also found that more small news departments (four or fewer reporters) produce underwriting credits than their large staff counterparts (five or more). The findings differ from the organization's response 10 years ago, when more public radio news directors read underwriting credits on the air. While a majority of respondents in both surveys said it was inappropriate for news personnel to produce underwriting announcements, the number of respondents who say such activities are appropriate has increased during the past ten years. This could be the result of a combination of factors involving indication that news directors have accepted their role in announcing underwriting credits as a necessary station function given the shift in emphasis toward private financial resources.

On-Air Fund-Raising

The 1998 survey results indicated that most PRNDI members are active participants in their stations' on-air pledge drives and that they believe such activities are

appropriate. The findings were similar to the 1988 survey, in which a majority of respondents reported being involved in on-air fund-raisers. However, only half of the respondents in the earlier survey felt it was an appropriate function. The slight difference in attitude could indicate that public radio news directors are becoming more accustomed to their involvement in on-air fund-raising and that some of those who opposed on-air fund-raising have since left the system. Also, the 1998 study asked respondents if they had ever refused to participate in on-air fund-raisers. Only 18 percent said they had refused because it either took too much time away from their news duties or because they were asked to pitch around their news programming. The more favorable attitudes toward fund-raising in the 1998 study serves as an additional indication that news managers recognize that such events are necessary for their station's survival.

In both underwriting production and on-air fund-raising, there is an apparent shift in attitude among PRNDI members. In the 10 years between surveys, respondents appear more willing to participate in "pitching" and credit announcing. Historically, public radio news directors have opposed activities that would appear to compromise the integrity of their roles as journalists. The PRNDI ethics code adopted in 1991 urges stations to maintain a separation of duty during station pledge drives and other fund-raising efforts. This change in attitude owes itself to the theory of diffusion, in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a special kind of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas.⁸⁰ In this case, on-air fund-raising and underwriting productions, which had been widely rejected by news directors in public radio as an inappropriate function in the past, have become more accepting of such activities.⁸¹ Perhaps these changes in attitudes have come as the result of news directors communicating with station managers, consultants and one another in order to reach a mutual understanding that such activities are necessary for the survival of public radio.

Potential Conflicts Involving News Content

Half of the respondents in the 1998 survey said they had been pressured to cover a story or event they were not planning to cover. Their response a majority of the time was to comply with the request. The general manager was the principle source of such pressure, although the program director, development director, underwriters and listeners also were listed among those who applied pressure.

Nearly half of the respondents who experienced such pressure said it occurred frequently. The 1988 PRNDA survey indicated that one-third of respondents had been pressured to cover stories they were not planning to cover.⁸² Those who had experienced such pressure in the previous study said it happened only rarely. A comparison of the two studies indicates that news directors face more pressure to cover certain stories today than they did 10 years ago. Underwriters and listener supporters who exert pressure may feel they have the right to make suggestions on which stories to cover, while general managers, program directors and development personnel who exert pressure may be concerned about keeping private supporters (i.e. listener contributors and corporate underwriters) happy.

While more news directors are being pressured to cover stories, the number of news directors who have been pressured to edit or kill stories has remained virtually unchanged from 1988 to 1998.⁸³ General managers, station personnel, underwriters and others may not feel as comfortable in asking a news director to kill or edit stories as they would in asking that person to cover a story because they may feel they lack the knowledge or authority to make such demands.

Again, station managers and other station personnel (i.e. program directors; development directors) may be applying pressure to cover or kill stories in order to improve their station's image with particular listener contributors or underwriters. Meanwhile, underwriters may be applying pressure for the same reasons advertisers pressure commercial radio stations to cover certain stories. They may feel as sponsors

that they have a vested interest in what airs on the station and that such an investment should be protected if a story or stories are negatively perceived, or if they do not feel they have been able to tell their side of the story.

Public Broadcasting's original intent - to educate and inform in an inclusive, rather than exclusive cultural environment - perhaps best exemplifies the ultimate goal of Social Responsibility theory, which appealed to the idealism of individual media practitioners and tried to unite them in the service of cultural pluralism - even when this might reduce their profits or antagonize existing social elites.⁸⁴ The medium's non-commercial roots were designed to free it from the everyday pressures that advertisers brought to bear on commercial broadcasters. As a result, pubcasters would be free to reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and to rights of reply. However, Public broadcasting has undergone a paradigm shift in which the traditional source of financial support, namely federal appropriations, is threatened by legislators who talk about eliminating funding because they oppose certain programs that highlight diverse cultures. Even though the total elimination of federal support is unlikely in the near future, station managers are cultivating support from private sources, who as sponsors, may demand a voice in news and program content, which could ultimately suppress public radio journalists from fulfilling their responsibilities as socially responsible journalists.⁸⁵

Recommendations

Recommendations for PRNDI Members

The decision on whether news directors produce underwriting announcements and participate in on-air pledge drives ultimately rests with station management. If such activities are part of the job description, news directors may have little room to negotiate. At that point, they must decide whether to lend their talents to such activities or search for new employment.

As stations continue to stress financial self-reliance over government support, more news personnel may be asked to lend their talents to read underwriting credits and “pitch” during on-air fund-raisers. However, public radio station managers who ask their news personnel to pitch or read credits should not ask them to do so around their own news. Instead, station managers are encouraged to schedule news personnel to pitch or read underwriting credits during non-news programming. If that is not possible because of a lack of staffing resources, then pitch breaks and underwriting credits should be produced in such a way that does not compromise the integrity of the news department’s local product. News personnel should avoid reading underwriting announcements out of their newscasts and headline sets when possible to avoid possible confusion among listeners or a perception that underwriters influence the news product. Instead, such activities are better suited for weather breaks and other network cutaways.

For on-air pledge drives, news personnel should be prepared to participate, but from a distance. This can be accomplished if station managers allow news personnel to act as hosts, providing basic information on pledge drive totals, number of contributors, and hourly goals. Other station personnel and volunteer “pitchers” would then be responsible for persuading listeners to pledge. If they must pitch around their news, news personnel should focus on the news product, informing listeners about public radio news and why it is a unique service. These recommendations uphold the values of Aristotle’s Golden Mean, which promotes compromises for the benefit of all parties.⁸⁶ In this case, public radio news directors could play a crucial role in their station’s fund-raising functions while eliminating the perception that they are simply trying to save their jobs until the next fund-raiser, or favoring corporations who serve as underwriters.

Members of Public Radio News Directors Incorporated also face pressures to cover stories they are not planning to cover, and to alter or kill stories they feel are journalistically sound. PRNDI members are urged to weigh the merits of each request

individually, applying their knowledge of news and ethics and considering the motivation for the request, in reaching their final decision. Although people outside the newsroom can also be good sources for story ideas, managers, underwriters, licensees, listeners and other parties who attempt to influence news content are encouraged to yield to news directors, a majority of whom have the education and experience necessary to serve as gatekeepers, providing the information that their diverse audiences need to make informed decisions.⁸⁷

Recommendations for Further Study

There is room for additional study on the topic of public radio newsroom participation in on-air pledge drives and production of underwriting announcements. Additional study is also encouraged in the area of editorial pressures that public radio news directors face to cover or kill stories. For example, a similar study of public radio general managers would be helpful to compare their attitudes on these topics. Also, a study of competition between public radio and television stations and their commercial counterparts for the same sponsors could provide insight into how active public radio stations are searching for corporate support.

Because mail questionnaires' elicit limited responses, other survey techniques such as focus groups could bring out more detailed information about attitudes toward on-air fund-raising, underwriting credits and editorial influence. Similar studies of public radio audiences would be helpful in determining listeners' perceptions on these topics.

A study of stations' hiring plans for the next year would also be interesting. Are stations planning to hire news personnel? Are they planning to hire development personnel? If yes to both, which would they hire first and why?

Also, a programming study would be interesting to determine whether stations are turning away from local news to save money. The findings from such studies could

provide an indication of whether public broadcasting is emphasizing the bottom-line over service. Another facet that was not covered in this survey was job satisfaction. Are news directors happy with the efforts to privatize public broadcasting? Are they considering other career choices because of the continual uncertainty surrounding the medium.

Another topic of interest is station resources. It would be interesting to learn how much of the budgets of PRNDI members' stations are devoted to local news and local development activities over the past five years. This might give an indication of where stations managers are focusing their resources.

Budget concerns will no doubt have great impact on local station personnel in the future. As this study indicated, most PRNDI members are employed by stations that are licensed through a state college or university. But many institutions of higher learning in the United States have been cutting budgets in recent years and may continue to do so in the future. As this process unfolds, it is unclear whether public radio stations will be considered a priority. If station budgets are cut, what will happen to local stations? These and other questions would be excellent topics for further study.

Concluding Remarks

This study indicates that more PRNDI members today are willing to participate in on-air fund-raisers, while fewer members are producing underwriting credits. In both cases, today's public radio news directors are more tolerant of such activities than were their counterparts a decade earlier. The study also found that many PRNDI members either face pressure to cover stories they are not planning to cover or pressure to edit or kill stories they feel are journalistically sound. Most of the time, PRNDI members are willing to go along, feeling either it would have little impact on the news product or that there is no choice but to comply with the request.

The findings come as public broadcasters continue to search for new sources of funding. The most recent attempt to eliminate the federal appropriation has many public broadcasters believing it is not a matter of if, but when, such appropriations will be “zeroed” out. As a result, many stations’ budgetary and staffing resources have shrunk, putting more pressure on remaining staff, including news personnel, to carry on public radio’s mission of alternative service. The ultimate goal then for public stations is to find new ways to become more financially independent while maintaining the autonomy of local public radio news personnel to make news decisions that are ethically sound.

Endnotes

71. Telephone interview with John Durkee, KRMG Radio, and Jerry Bonen, KTOK Radio, April 6, 1998.

72. Susan Lavery, Survey: Public Radio News Directors Association membership, PRNDA Practices and Rules Committee, 1988.

73. PRNDA Survey, 1988.

74. PRNDA Survey, 1988.

75. PRNDA Survey, 1988.

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81. Susan Lavery, Survey: Public Radio News Directors Association membership, PRNDA Practices and Rules Committee, 1988.

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83. Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment and Future, (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co. 1995), 96.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
FIRST COVER LETTER

Dear Colleague,

As a former news director of a public radio station, I know there are many demands on your time without the prospects of another survey to consider. However, before you pick up the phone for that next interview, please take a few minutes to participate in this unique national study of public radio news directors and their roles in station fund-raising activities. Help your counterparts learn more about some of the current trends related to this issue.

The survey will illustrate what other news directors are doing in markets similar to yours. The answers to this questionnaire will provide information that could help you determine your future relationship with station managers, development directors, licensees and other public radio supporters. After you complete this survey, please return it to the address listed above in an enclosed, stamped envelope. All responses will remain **strictly confidential**. The identifying number on each questionnaire helps me keep track of those who have returned them and will be removed when the survey is received.

I will attempt to publish the results in a variety of educational and professional publications so everyone can benefit from the findings. Please return the survey by Friday, January 9, 1998. If you have any questions, call me at 405/744-6804, or e-mail me at kelburl@okway.okstate.edu. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes in your continued efforts to provide listeners with the kind of in-depth, interpretive reporting they have come to expect from public radio stations like yours.

APPENDIX B
SECOND MAILING (E-MAIL)

Hello:

My name is Kelly Burley, a long-suffering graduate student at Oklahoma State University. I am writing to follow up on a survey I mailed you over the Christmas holiday. This questionnaire focused on PRNDI members' attitudes toward on-air fund-raising and undue influence from outside the newsroom. If you completed the survey, thank you very much. If you had every intention of completing the questionnaire but you either lost the survey or forgot about it, I need to hear from you now!

Please take a few minutes at your earliest convenience to fill out the survey and return it in the stamped envelope I provided. If you can't find the questionnaire/return envelope, please use the attached copy and return via e-mail. You can also e-mail me and request a second mail survey. Either way, it's important that I hear from you ASAP.

Thanks again for your cooperation.

Kelly Burley

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

Introduction: On-air fund-raisers are necessary for the survival of local public radio stations. However, there may be times when this function conflicts with your responsibilities as a news manager/reporter. This questionnaire seeks information about your role in on-air fund-raisers and other "development" activities and whether your superiors and/or others attempt to influence news content. Remember, all responses will be kept strictly confidential.

Part 1: Background Information

Please check the appropriate answer.

1. How many full time professionals, including yourself, work in the news department at your station?

- 1-2
 3-4
 5-6
 7 or more

2. Your station serves an audience of...

- Less than 5 thousand
 5 thousand to 50,000
 50,001 to 200,000
 200,001 to 500,000
 500,001 to 1 million
 More than 1 million

3. Your station is licensed through...

- University or college
 Community
 Other (Please
specify) _____

Part 2: This section seeks information about the extent of your involvement in on-air fundraising and on-air underwriting announcements.

4. How frequently do you produce underwriting announcements?

- 0 times per week
 1-2 times per week
 3-4 times per week
 5 or more times per week
(If you do not produce underwriting announcements, go to question 6)

5. Do you feel it is appropriate for news people to produce underwriting announcements?

- Yes
 No

6. How frequently do you participate in on-air fund-raisers during the course of the event?

- 0 times
 1-5 times
 6-10 times
 11-15 times

(If you do not participate in on-air fund-raisers, go to question 10)

7. Do you feel it is appropriate for news people to participate in on-air fund-raisers?

- Yes
 No

8. Have you ever refused to participate in on-air fund-raisers?

- Yes
 No

9. If yes to question 8, why?

Part 3: Potential Conflicts: This section seeks to determine the extent in which others attempt to influence news content at local public radio stations.

10. In your current position, have you ever been pressured to cover an event or issue you were not planning to cover?

- Yes
 No

(If no, go to question 14)

11. How often has this happened?

- 1-2 times
 3-4 times
 5-6 times
 7 or more times

12. Generally speaking, who applied this pressure?

- General manager
 Program director
 Development director
 Other (University official, Underwriter, Licensee, other)

Please list _____

13. Most of the time when this occurred, how would you respond?

- Agreed to do the story because I didn't think it would really compromise the integrity of our news.
 Agreed reluctantly knowing I didn't have the power to refuse.
 Refused to comply with the demand.

14. In your current position, has your supervisor or anyone else ever demanded that you kill or edit a story which you felt was journalistically sound?

Yes

No

(If no, go to question 18)

15. How many times has this happened?

1-2 times

3-4 times

5-6 times

7 or more times

16. Generally speaking, who applied this pressure?

General Manager

Program Director

Development Director

Other (Please specify: Licensee, University officials, Underwriters, Program Review Committee, etc.)

Please

list _____

17. Most of the time when such a demand was made, how did you respond?

Agreed to change or kill the story because I didn't think it would have that much effect

in the long run.

Reluctantly agreed to the demand knowing I didn't have the power to refuse.

Refused to comply with the demand.

18. Have you ever been asked to solicit underwriting in a "development" capacity separate from on-air fund-raisers?

Yes

No

(If no, go to question 20)

19. If yes, how often has this occurred?

a. 1-2 times

b. 3-4 times

c. 5-6 times

d. 7 times or more

20. Do you feel your career as a public radio journalist has ever suffered because you refused to take actions that violated your journalistic ethic?

Yes

No

Not sure

21. If yes to question 20, how has your career suffered?

APPENDIX D

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: January 7, 1998

IRB#: AS-98-035

Proposed Title: THE STUDY OF PUBLIC RADIO NEWS
DIRECTORS INCORPORATED: PRACTICES IN AND ATTITUDES
ABOUT ON-AIR FUND-RAISING, UNDERWRITING
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND EDITORIAL CONFLICTS.

Principal Investigator(s): Maureen Nemecek, Kelly J. Burley

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

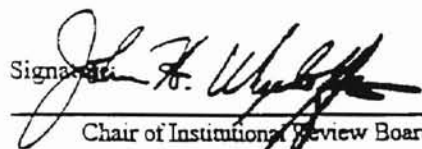
ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING, AS WELL AS ARE
SUBJECT TO MONITORING AT ANY TIME DURING THE APPROVAL
PERIOD.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR DATA COLLECTION FOR A ONE
CALENDAR YEAR PERIOD AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR
RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD
APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE
SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Disapproval
are as follows:

This looks like a good study.

Signature: 
Chair of Institutional Review Board
Cc: Kelly J. Burley

Date: January 8, 1998

2

VITA

Kelly J. Burley

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: THE STUDY OF PUBLIC RADIO NEWS DIRECTORS,
INCORPORATED: ATTITUDES ABOUT ON-AIR FUND-RAISING,
UNDERWRITING ANNOUNCEMENTS AND EDITORIAL CONFLICTS.

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Oklahoma City, July 28, 1964, the son of George and Carol Burley.

Education: Graduated from Thomas Edison High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma, in May 1982; received Bachelor of Science Degree in Radio, Television and Film, News and Public Affairs option, from Oklahoma State University at Stillwater in May, 1990; completed requirements for the Master of Science Degree at Oklahoma State University in May 1998.

Professional Experience: Reporter, KRMG Radio, Tulsa, Oklahoma, September 1988 to July 1990; Reporter and News Director, KOSU Radio, Oklahoma State University, August 1990 to April 1997; Corporate Communications Manager, TMS Sequoia, Stillwater, Oklahoma, April 1997 to August 1997; Adjunct Lecturer, School of Journalism and Broadcasting, Oklahoma State University, August 1997 to present.