

RadioActive Community Radio Station Development Proposal

This document is an outline of RadioActive's three phase proposal for the establishment of new rural community radio stations.

There are four main criteria that need to be present to run a successful community radio station:

1. Equipment

Equipment refers to all of the physical requirements needed to be able to produce and broadcast radio, including the studio, transmission system, antenna tower and electrical supply.

2. Content

This refers to the programming being aired on the station. The content needs to be produced regularly and appeal and be relevant to the target audience.

3. Financial sustainability

Investment in the form of grants or loans is normally needed for the initial period, but a strategy aimed at self-sustainability is essential for long term success of the station.

4. Community Investment and Participation

Wider community investment and participation are important for the station's effectiveness as a catalyst for change and for its integration into the community.

RadioActive provides equipment, installation, technical and logistical advice and training aimed at achieving and securing these four criteria, to establish community radio stations and get them up and running successfully within their local community.

We have worked on community radio in many countries around the world, where the conditions and needs for community radio are very different. In order to find appropriate solutions for each situation, we have separated the process into three phases:

Phase 1: Feasibility Study and Initial Workshops

Phase 2: Installation and Preparing to Broadcast

Phase 3: Extended Hand-Holding and Additional Equipment

Details of these phases are described on the following pages.

Phase 1: Feasibility Study and Initial Workshops

Phase 1 involves an engineer / trainer spending 1 - 2 weeks with the community to conduct a feasibility study and give initial radio workshops.

Feasibility Study

The feasibility study is used to determine where to put the antenna, what work needs to be done to the studios and exactly what equipment will be needed for the project. What equipment to choose depends on the budget, the expected capacity of the station (how many studios to build), the size of the space available, the distance between the studio and proposed antenna location and other local conditions such as the stability of electricity supply.

The feasibility study involves meeting with local representatives of the community, visiting the proposed studio and antenna locations, studying the topography of the local area and in some cases researching the availability of certain resources locally (eg. studio construction materials, antenna towers etc.).

Initial Workshops

Initial workshops are held with members of the community to help them prepare for their station, encourage interest and involve the community in the station. Workshops include:

- defining goals for the station
- discussing different models of organisation for the station (management structure)
- developing a community involvement strategy (including as many population groups within the target area of the station as possible)
- working on simple radio program formats that can be practised once the trainer has gone (eg. a panel discussion show, one to one interviews, basic radio drama)
- setting up regular meetings between local stakeholders to continue building towards the establishment of the station

If electricity is available locally, basic studio equipment is used as part of the initial workshops. If there is no electricity available, portable recording equipment can also be used. The workshops can also work without any equipment.

Phase 1 Recommendations

The goals of phase 1 are:

- to determine suitable equipment and development strategies for the station
- to leave the community in the process for preparing for their station.

Phase 1 is concluded with the submission of a detailed report of our recommendations on how to proceed in Phases 2 and 3. The site visit to conduct the feasibility study and give initial workshops should last 1 – 2 weeks. The report can take up to 5 additional days to write.

Phase 2: Installation and Preparing to Broadcast

Phase 2 involves two stages: installation of the equipment and preparing the team to start broadcasting..

Installation

The recommendations from Phase 1 are used to establish what equipment should be installed. We have several standard packages, but these are often modified to suit the needs of a particular project. Once the equipment has been agreed upon, it is sent out along with an engineer to install it. Depending on the state of the studio building and antenna tower, the engineer will also participate in and supervise the construction of the studios and installation of the tower.

After the studios are built and the equipment is installed, the engineer will test everything to make sure it is all working. If the station has a broadcast licence at this stage, the engineer can also do a basic survey to ensure that the signal reaches the areas that the transmission system has been designed to reach.

Preparing the Team to Start Broadcasting

Installing the station equipment is a lot simpler than training up a good working team to run the station. Preparing to start broadcasting with a full schedule of programming usually takes about six months, though it can vary depending on the individuals involved and the size and scope of the project.

Training the team can be split into three broad areas:

- technical (studio and transmission engineering)
- radio production and broadcasting
- station management.

Technical Training

It is normal practice to bring on board at least two members of the community who have been chosen as technicians to learn from our engineer as the equipment is installed. This allows the technicians to take advantage of the presence of our engineer for as much time as possible, to learn how to use, install and maintain all of the radio equipment. At the end of the training the technicians will be tested on their practical knowledge to make sure that they are able to run the technical side of the station.

Production Training

Basic radio production training will be given to all members of the radio team. The goal is to train up a team of staff to produce the station's core programming. Training involves practising all the elements of producing and presenting simple radio programmes: how to write a script, how to record your voice, how to hold a microphone, how to speak on air, how to do basic interviews and how to use the studio equipment.

The structure of the training is determined by factors such as the size of the team and availability of staff members. Production training can be separated by type of programming (news, radio drama, talk show, music show, advertising, jingles etc.) or focus on the production of one of type of programming. Some stations require additional training, focused on a particular area such as translation of the news into various languages (for stations aimed at more than one language group). A station may also benefit from community participation workshops, to train up members of the wider community to be able to produce programming for the station.

Station Management Training

Station management is a vital part of a successful station. A station will not succeed even if it has a team of trained radio producers and technicians but lacks a process in place for managing the station.

Station management training looks at:

- building up the station management and personnel structure (staff and volunteers)
- developing the processes for the daily operation of the station (operation and administration)
- designing a programming schedule
- developing station rules, regulations and protocols
- initiating a model for revenue generation (eg. local advertising and other services the station can provide for the community)
- developing a strategy for integration of the station into the community (eg creating listener groups, community outreach, community participation and community investment in the station)

A dedicated community radio trainer will be in the field to provide the training in production and station management throughout Phase 2. At the end of this phase a report will be submitted describing the journey up to that point and giving recommendations for the future.

Phase 3: Extended Hand-Holding and Additional Equipment

The longer term goal of this proposal is to secure the presence of the 4 criteria described at the beginning: working studios and a transmission system reaching the target areas; production of quality programming; financial sustainability and community investment and participation in the station. The first two of these should be in place by the end of Phase 2. Processes for establishing the latter two should have started to be implemented, but will most likely need more work. This is the focus of Phase 3. In addition it is used to address any areas that need more attention, such as installing more equipment or providing additional training in production and / or station management.

The duration of Phase 3 varies from six months to two years. The length and nature of the support given during this period is dependent on the station team's ability to take on the responsibilities of running the station. It is not always necessary to send someone for the duration of the period. Sometimes short-term consultancies will suffice, focused on particular areas that need attention, such as revenue generation. Recommendations for this phase will be outlined in the report from phase 2. The overall goal is to leave the station up and running without outside support.