How community broadcasting is funded – a useful resource for community broadcasters

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Abstract

This article is intended as a resource for community broadcasters and researchers. It draws on interviews and discussion with community broadcasters and activists to identify practical examples of funding methods. The seven common methods of funding a community station are detailed. These are: support from the station's own community; patronage from a larger organisation; commercial advertising and sponsorship; competitive grants; service contracts; support by NGOs; support by governmental agencies. The article points to resources where the reader can discover more fully how each funding method is used, and concludes that a prudent station may use several methods to help ensure economic sustainability.

This article details how broadcast community radio and television is currently being funded, with a stress on community radio, since, although many community television stations exist, they are less commonplace than community radio stations. Arguably, for exactly the reason under discussion, it is simply more expensive to run a community TV station. The article is intended as a resource and will be most useful for those endeavoring to keep their own community station financially stable and those researching community broadcasting sustainability. The methods of funding described may be considered more applicable in some situations or countries than in others. However each method will have some resonance with any community station and may prompt a rethinking of where funds might be sought by the community broadcaster.

Organising the cash to run the project is a duty for anyone seeking to lead a community media operation. It has been observed that financial matters are regarded somewhere between a responsibility, an inconvenience or a millstone to be dealt with by community station managers. But it has also been found that matters of economics have not always been fully considered before the licence application is made, the technical kit garnered or volunteers start broadcasting.

Community broadcasters may lament their lack of funding and their monetary problems but some may not fully understand or engage with the financial processes necessary to run the budget for a small station. Can they persuade their community to support them? If their own community is not affluent, where will funds come from? The not-for-profit egis that many stations adopt, or is a part of their licence, may become a defence for the deficiency in funds. Some stations may question if they should be "profitable"? And if they can raise funds, how "profitable" should they be?

In addition to finding resources, a further economic consideration is financial management. How will the station set itself up as an organisation to ensure financial stability along with suitable ethical behaviour? Should they be a trust, a charity, a company? Who are the officers? What is their commitment? The financial banner that the station decides to operate under may help or hinder the acquisition of financial support, but it is not in itself funding.

The evidence for this article follows interviews and discussion with community broadcasters during visits to stations and in forums with community media activists, where capital and sustainable finance is frequently discussed. Practical examples of funding methods from community stations in several different countries are detailed with links to websites wherever possible.

This piece is more discursive than the usual academic article and is endeavoring to be genuinely helpful to community broadcasters. If as you read it you have further experiences and ideas for the economic stability and sustainability of community broadcasting please get in touch.

Funding methods
There are seven common methods of funding a community radio or television station (see Gordon, 2015). These are:

·   support from the station's own community;
·   patronage from a larger organisation;
·   commercial advertising and sponsorship;
·   competitive grants;
·   service contracts;
·   support by NGOs;
·   support by governmental agencies.

These funding possibilities are not mutually exclusive and a prudent station may use several methods to help ensure sustainability. A funding method or event may also seem to fall into more than one of these areas or straddle two methods. Successful stations consider whose pocket the money is actually coming out of, since all funding sources are ultimately finite, in particular from the individuals who form the community the station is serving. The key point about these methods is that they are each distinct pots of money. The way stations increase financial provision is to look for inventive ways to provide services that people or organisations with money will wish to purchase or buy into in some way. A further point that savvy stations consider is to what extent the station serves its community audience of, hopefully, several thousand and to what extent it serves its, maybe a hundred, volunteers? Funding resources may be available to support broadcasting activities for each group, so stations find that it is worth being clear as to the focus of the station and the fundraising.

Each of the funding methods is discussed and its possibilities explored with examples from community stations.

Support from the station's own community
Running a community station needs the support from the station's own community, whether by taking part as a volunteer, listening or viewing the output as a member of the audience or by donating funds or in kind support to the station. This is essential; how else can a community broadcaster know that it is in fact running a station which anyone in the community is in the slightest bit interested in? There are well-established methods of gaining funds from the audience of a community station, including membership fees, fundraising activities and in-kind support such as gifts to the station and know-how freely given. Professional expertise, not least accountancy and financial advice, is of particular value, along with engineering and technical skills, fundraising and commercial sales of advertising and sponsorship.

Along with their commercial and Public Service Broadcaster counterparts, community broadcasters sell merchandising to their supporters, for example a T-shirt or coffee mug. Selling other products, such as CDs of music played on the station, may be a way of raising revenue, which goes outside the immediate community geographically (see Cross Rhythms http://direct.crossrhythms.co.uk/). Other resourceful stations run a commercial activity alongside their broadcasting operation and which also draws in members of their community. For example

- A cafe at the front of the station may prove valuable as a means of support and to encourage participation (see South Holland Radio http://www.shradio.co.uk/?page_id=9699).
- Register the station with a fundraising website, where a supporter can make a small contribution to the station each time they shop online (see Seahaven FM http://www.seahavenfm.com/easyfundraising.php).
- Sell Bingo cards to the audience and play Bingo on air (see Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations cactus.independentmedia.ca).
- Use crowd funding for startup capital. Sheffield Live TV gained its startup funds using a crowd funding initiative, in which supporters bought shares in the company (See SLTV http://web.sheffieldlive.org/home/shares/).

All these methods require the community that the station serves to have disposable funds to be able to do this. If they do not, the station needs to look to other areas or other local communities not directly being served by the station who may be able to provide funds either tacitly or upfront. For example, a station serving a particular new migrant group may feel that these people do not have sufficient disposable income to support the station, but that the wider local community might be willing to buy drinks in a community cafe or take part in a raffle and so help to fund the station.

Patronage from a larger organisation
The patron of a community broadcaster will typically be a larger organisation in terms of affluence, influence, expertise, or premises who can support the community broadcasting organisation. The broadcaster will benefit directly from their support, for example in gaining premises shared with the patron. They may also gain the cost of utilities such as electricity, key staff and support staff. The support from the patron organisation in terms of their influence and actual protection may be also be valuable (Brooten, 2012).

Examples of patrons include educational establishments, universities being some of the oldest community broadcasting patrons. The University of Adelaide has been the patron of Radio Adelaide since 1972 (see https://radio.adelaide.edu.au/), but more recently schools and many smaller educational organisations have hosted community stations. Saint FM is based at St Peter's Secondary School (see http://www.saintfm.co.uk/). Community broadcasters hosted by educational establishments will often be able to call on the students as volunteers. Indeed, the patron may see the benefits to their students as paramount to their patronage. However, the relationship between the patron and the station needs to be clear. Is the station's main activity providing work experience or similar for the student broadcasters or is it providing broadcast content for the local community? Well-established university-based stations have occasionally found that their long-term volunteers and content has grown more mature over time and outgrown the youthful student body, a situation that may not be favoured by the university itself.

Other common patrons include community centres, communication centres, libraries and religious organisations. It is also possible for commercial centres such as a shopping

mall or a commercial company to host a community broadcaster on its premises. All of these organisations are likely to expect some kind of favourable terms on air.

A commercial company providing substantial funds for a community broadcaster to, for example, buy studio kit, starts to look more like a sponsor than a patron. This may not be problematic so long as the relationship is clear and abides by the terms of the licence. In London, Reprezent Radio has opened new studios with the support of Adidas, the sportswear manufacturer (see http://www.popbrixton.org/#!Adidas-X-Pop-Brixton-#keepitcommunity/ctyd/55bf44780cf267673a814b4e).

There are also examples of stations being a part of a larger concern. For example, a charity may run a variety of services for its local area and include a community station on its premises as a part of those services. The station may then support the charity by training volunteers, but it also provides publicity and support for the overarching aims of the charity, as well as broadcasting content for the local area. Future Radio is a part of Future Projects, set up to promote community development and cohesion (http://www.futureprojects.org.uk/). Insight Radio is based in Glasgow but available nationally on a Freeview TV channel (see http://www.insightradio.co.uk/how-to-listen.html#.Vg6xNs64tUQ). It is a part of the Royal National Institute for the Blind and is possibly the only community radio station to operate under Royal Charter (see http://www.rnib.org.uk/about-rnib-who-we-are/how-we-are-governed).

Of specific financial benefit to the community station is when the patron can host the transmitter mast, which saves the station having to rent space on a mast elsewhere. Once in place other companies may be able to rent space on the mast. It should be clear who will benefit from this financially.

Commercial advertising and sponsorship
The national and legislative background that the community broadcaster is operating under will decide the extent to which they can take commercial advertising and sponsorship. Interestingly, where community broadcasters have been prevented from taking commercial advertising and sponsorship they sometimes feel that given the opportunity to do so, it would fulfill all their financial needs. However, stations who are quite legally able to take a substantial amount of commercial advertising and sponsorship find that for community broadcasters this is not necessarily an easy or simple method of financing a station, although once set up it can be profitable and support the community aims of the station well. For example, Express FM are proud of their commercial activities and professional sound, as well as their clear community goals (see http://www.expressfm.com/about-us/radio-advertising-in-portsmouth/).

It should be noted that even larger commercial broadcasters and other media outlets, such as newspapers, are finding it difficult to maintain the level of commercial advertising support that they once had. Companies who wish to promote their brands and activities are using other methods to do so, particularly online. In the last few years, small regional newspapers that have relied heavily on local advertising as their main source of income have been under threat as this source has declined. The community broadcaster who believes they can enter this market may find grave difficulties. In addition, broadcasters who have sought funding in this way, have found that small local commercial companies can be very fussy as to the way that relatively low sums are spent. Advertising can also be time-consuming to programme and administer in terms of its on-air presence. Sponsorship of a full programme or a time-of-day, such as breakfast or

drive-time, may be simpler and more cost-effective for a community broadcaster. In Australia, where community broadcasters may only take sponsorship, a number of stations have found this very effective. The companies involved not only can have their name broadcast to the local community but they also show that they care about that community by sponsoring the station.

In order to sell sponsorship and advertising, a community broadcaster will need to show that it has an audience. The potential advertisers or sponsors will not fund the station for the benefit of the station volunteers; they will only do so because they believe that their customers or potential customers will be listening or viewing as a member of the audience. The station will need audience research to demonstrate that an audience exists (see http://www.slideshare.net/CMA_Slides/measuring-audiences-cma-conference-2014). Australian Community broadcasters have the benefit of regular audience research conducted by McNair Ingenuity for the CBAA. This gives an excellent overview of the listenership with which to approach a potential sponsor (https://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets).

It should also be noted that some community broadcasters do not wish to take commercial advertising or sponsorship, particularly from large national or multinational companies, as they feel this goes against their aims and ethos. Others will refuse commercial funding from companies whose areas of activity may harm the wellbeing of the audience, for example in promoting gambling or the consumption of alcohol.

Service contracts
Service contracts are a method of selling broadcast services that are not simply commercial advertising or sponsorship. For example, a service contract could be for a public service announcement for an organisation such as a health centre, or a fire safety week or another public body that wants to draw attention to its services or a particular campaign that it is running. A unique selling point for the community broadcaster is that frequently their audience may be regarded as niche or hard to reach for other bodies using conventional media. The audience may be closely defined by language or culture. Desi Radio, an AM station in west London, serves the Punjabi community in that area, and via a satellite channel to the rest of the UK and Europe. It is well placed to provide specialist promotions to its community (see http://www.desiradio.org.uk/market.php#testimonials).

Community broadcasters can also sell services that involve what they are doing anyway. For example, they can use the technical equipment they own for broadcasting purposes and adapt this to provide music at a public event in the local park. They can run educational courses in broadcasting techniques, either for children and young people as part of the curriculum for their examinations or to make them more media literate generally. They can also run taster days in broadcasting as a bonding activity for an employer to undertake with their staff. East London Radio, an online community station, does both to benefit and support the station (see http://eastlondonradio.org.uk/).

Another service that stations have found profitable is where they own their transmitter mast. Assuming the mast is suitable, secure and appropriately placed, there are a number of other organisations who need to rent space on a transmitter mast. These range from cellphone operators, emergency services or taxi companies, to other broadcasting organisations.

The importance of these activities is that any money obtained is not coming from the community being served by the station. It is from another pot of funds.

Competitive grants

A number of community activists have pointed out that it is easier to obtain capital funding than funding to sustain broadcasting organisations. Many community broadcasters have found that they can get small grants from various organisations as startup money. However the key to sustainability is to keep money coming in regularly and to avoid too much onerous administration to support it. A competitive grant, that is a grant from a large organisation, often national, seems very attractive until the application form is studied! Even then should the bid be successful, the money may be some time in coming and will also require supporting in terms of meetings and reports. Community broadcasters have been successful in gaining funds in this way, but it is not for the fainthearted. One method of applying for competitive grants may be to cut down on the competition and join with a consortium of community broadcasters, and apply to the grant agency as one group. Organisations giving grants often prefer this type of application. It means that their money is going further and will benefit a larger group of people. The Transnational Radio Project in Europe is a good example of this. It is a major academic project involving six universities and with funding from the Humanities Educational Research Association. Although not a broadcaster, the project's outputs are likely to have considerable impact on community media (see http://www.transnationalradio.org/). It would be possible for a group of smaller community media organisations to undertake a more limited project.

Support by NGOs

Stations supported by NGOs have frequently been set up by the NGO in the first place. Bangladesh offers some good examples of this. Indeed, community radio in that country has been set up to favor stations run by NGOs (see http://www.bnnrc.net/). The problem that the stations run by NGOs have is that the NGO will have its own agenda that it wishes to promote on the station. The agenda may not include sustaining that station at the end of the NGO's project period. There is a risk that the organisation involved may not see broadcasting as more than a means to an end to promote their own project and so will not train volunteer staff or broadcasters to continue the work when they leave. The station equipment may not even be left or the building may belong to another group that is not interested in continuing with the station. Paravela has pointed to what he calls "NGOization", when he feels that the on air broadcasts of these community services is not particularly targeting the audience they are designed for in the long term (Paravala, 2013).

NGO workers have been surprised on occasions to find that the local community did not wish to work with them on a community broadcasting initiative and preferred to listen to their own local commercial music broadcaster. However, the NGOs involved are well-meaning and committed and one could see the possibility that if community broadcasters wish to start a station in an area that NGOs are already working in, they might be able to obtain startup capital, expertise and even some sustainable funding to instigate a community station.

Support by governmental agencies

Generally, community broadcasters feel that they should be isolated from government and government agencies. This is one of the tenets of a community broadcaster. In

addition, a community broadcaster may be providing an alternative view to the mainstream and does not wish to be associated with government policy. However, to some community broadcasters government agencies appear to have plenty of funds to support all sorts of activities, why not theirs?

It is a concern when community activists suggest that the government or an associated body should simply give them money to exist. In the UK there has been criticism of the Department of Culture Media and Sport Community Radio Fund, which is about 500,000 pounds sterling, and any on-air licensed community radio station can make an application for small amounts, usually £10,000-£15,000, as seed funding for a particular project. However, it is not, nor ever has been, a method of complete funding for the 200 community radio stations in the UK (see Ofcom, http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/radio-ops/crf/crfguidancenotes.pdf).

There is also discussion that other, more affluent, broadcasters, whether commercial or public service broadcasters, should be obliged to give a percentage of their own profits or income to fund community broadcasting. In the UK, the BBC is required to give £25 million worth of support to the development of a local digital TV network and also purchase content from the newly formed local digital television stations (see BBC, 2013 http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/strategy/licence_fee/local_tv_contribution. html). This use of the public broadcaster's licence funds has not been without issue, and the plan had to be cleared by the European Union as it was felt that these funds could be considered to be state aid and anticompetitive. It should be noted that many of the new local TV stations are not strictly community stations, but some, for example SLTV, do regard themselves as community TV, not-for-profit providers and will benefit from both the share of the BBC capital funds and also the purchase of content (SLTV, http://sltv.sheffieldlive.org/about).

The Republic of Ireland has a broadcasting Sound and Vision fund, which is a 7 per cent top slice taken from the TV licence. However, although at first the fund seemed to offer community stations money to make suitable programming, it was found that the fund was open to any broadcaster and that commercial and independent production houses were extremely good and successful at applying to it, so reducing the likelihood of small community stations using it as a regular funding stream. A report on the fund stated,

> The community broadcasting sector would like to see a portion of the funding ring-fenced for the community sector specifically. They argue that the nature and process of community broadcasting differs significantly from that in the commercial independent sector, and that applying for funding within the same rounds as the other sectors puts them at a disadvantage, even in terms of the professionalism with which they can develop applications. This is actually supported by some in the commercial sector also, who feel that the low cost of community programme-making, often involving volunteer elements, artificially lowers the average costs and makes independent programme-making look expensive by comparison (Crowe Haworth 2013 :17-18).

It is easy to see the attraction of government funding for a hard-pressed community broadcaster, who may argue that they are doing socially worthy work with their volunteers and for their audience and therefore deserve payment for it. They ask why

there is not provision from the taxpayer or an appropriate fund for community broadcasters.

Any funds coming from government or government schemes are likely to carry major constraints on how the money is used, what it is used for, who uses it and what reporting must be done to ensure the money is spent wisely. It is most unlikely that any government will simply take funds from the taxpayer and its own exchequer to run community broadcasting. In fact the Irish Community Television Association has been very critical of the Sound and Vision scheme, believing that the scheme has 'proved to be more damaging than helpful to the development of community media in Ireland' (CTA 2014:3).

Some countries do have particular funds allocated to community broadcasting for distinct sections of the national population. For example, in Australia the government supports the Indigenous Broadcasting Programme and provides funds to support the satellite service and stations for Australian Indigenous communities (see http://www.dpmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/grant/indigenous-broadcasting-programme).

Ironically, in some parts of the globe, it is more likely that an overseas government will provide funds to develop and sustain a community broadcaster. In particular, USAID supports a number of broadcasters that might be deemed community stations around the world. USAID appears to feel that community radio is an excellent way of reaching people in areas of recent conflict and civil unrest, as a brief examination of the reports from its recent projects shows (See https://www.usaid.gov/).

As with the NGOs there is a likelihood that as politics changes these stations may not continue to be given support, but certainly the initial infrastructure will be there. Many of the stations have trained volunteer broadcasters and had technical equipment provided. The broadcast content will undoubtedly be aiming to promote what the funder feels is necessary. However, the reports do suggest that local audiences and broadcast volunteers have benefited from the experience.

Conclusion
The methods and examples detailed in this article should be used as a resource for community media practitioners, and the author would be pleased to hear of innovative funding, good practice and even problems that stations experience.

Community stations are often very proud when they have found a funding stream that suits them well and are happy to discuss it with others. Occasionally, stations believe that they have a totally new method of funding, but examination often shows that it still comes under one of the income methods detailed above. For example, running a dance is a wonderful and enjoyable method of raising funds for a station. However, the money raised by admission tickets or the sale of refreshments will tend to be coming from the community the station serves. The event may use the expertise and facilities that the station owns already or, if it is being run as an event for the benefit of the station by another agency, it may be considered either a sponsored event or patronage.

It is most unusual for anyone to be given money to do something they thoroughly enjoy and is their passion or even obsession. And here lies one of the problems with finding funds for community media. Why should any funder give money to people who so

thoroughly enjoy themselves? No matter that they might be doing society some good in the end; that there may be social gain or other clear tangible benefits to both the volunteer broadcasters and their audiences. Convincing those with funds to use them for community broadcasting may take some imagination and persuasion!

In research over a number of years and in discussion with many community broadcasters and activists it is evident that what drives them first and foremost is their enthusiasm for radio and television. Finances and economic constraints undoubtedly come second. Community broadcasting has come of age, is well-established in many countries globally and serves small, local and often marginalised communities by providing social and cultural information and content. It is a serious media form, whether radio, television, online or on paper, and must take economic and financial matters as seriously as all other media.

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http://www.bnnrc.net/
Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA)
https://www.cbaa.org.au/
Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations, executive director
Cathy Edwards,
http://cactus.independentmedia.ca/node/11
Cross Rhythms http://direct.crossrhythms.co.uk/
Desi Radio http://www.desiradio.org.uk/
Easy Fund Raising www.easyfundraising.org.uk
East London Radio http://eastlondonradio.org.uk/
Express FM http://www.expressfm.com/
Future Projects, (http://www.futureprojects.org.uk/

Future Radio http://futureradio.co.uk/
Insight Radio http://www.insightradio.co.uk/
Radio Adelaide https://radio.adelaide.edu.au/
Reprezent Radio http://www.reprezent.org.uk/
Saint FM http://www.saintfm.co.uk/.
Seahaven FM http://www.seahavenfm.com
Sheffield Live TV, (SLTV) http://web.sheffieldlive.org/home/shares/
South Holland Radio http://www.shradio.co.uk/?page_id=9699
Transnational Radio Project (TRE) http://www.transnationalradio.org/
USAID https://www.usaid.gov/