



## **LPFM Startup Guide**

### **Local Community Radio Act Passes!**

The Prometheus Radio Project is happy to announce the passage of the Local Community Radio Act. President Obama signed the bill this January and it has officially become law. This law mandates the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to expand the Low Power FM (LPFM) Radio Program in the United States, meaning they will begin to accept applications for hundreds, if not thousands of new community radio stations across the country.

### **Why is Radio Important?**

We value radio because it is easy to produce, free to consume, and accessible to more people across the world than any other mass media. Radio does not require expensive equipment, literacy, or a broadband connection. We believe in participatory radio because it is a proven tool for movement-building and cultural expression.

### **Applying for an LPFM license.**

The period of time during which the FCC accepts applications for LPFM radio licenses is called a “licensing window”. The FCC only allocates non-commercial radio licenses during filing windows. In the past, licensing windows lasted five days for LPFMs and seven days for full power non-commercial educational stations. If you want to apply for a radio license, you need to have all most of your paperwork ready to go so that you can submit it during this filing window. Therefore, Prometheus recommends beginning the organizing process now in anticipation of an upcoming filing window. At this time, the FCC has not yet established a date for the LPFM licensing window. In order to apply for a license you must be a non-profit organization, have an available channel frequency, and a board of directors from the town of licensing.

### **Finding an Available Frequency for LPFM**

At the moment we are unable to locate available frequencies for LPFMs until the FCC has an official “rulemaking” in response to the legal requirements set forth by Local Community Radio Act. These rules will establish the system by which applicants can determine available frequencies in their communities. After the rulemaking occurs, groups can then begin to commission engineering studies to find available frequencies. The FCC has not yet set a date for a rulemaking, but we will be sure to keep you posted when that happens. A broadcast engineer, or someone else who is able to operate engineering software used to determine channel availability will have to conduct a study in your region to be able to tell you whether or not there is space left on the spectrum for an LPFM station. If a study shows channel availability then you can begin the process of organizing people to apply for the radio license.

## **Organizing your Community**

The best LPFM stations are led by a coalition of groups, strong leaders within the community, and/or have a dedicated group of volunteers. Even though a licensing window maybe less than a year away, there are many things you can do in the mean time to organize your community around this issue. Independent media centers, community access TV stations, community newspapers, community based organizations, schools, churches, neighborhood groups, and social justice organizations all make great collaborating partners. Prometheus suggests holding a meeting for interested parties to begin mapping out a plan for community involvement. With your groups assembled you can begin to make media, fundraise, and plan for the implementation of your project.

## **What do you need to start a station?**

You're probably wondering how much it will cost to put a radio station on the air. There's no easy answer to this - it depends entirely what services and equipment you already have or can get donated, as well as what you're willing to live without. Note that these numbers are tailored towards 100-watt LPFM stations. If you're starting a different class of station, the requirements will vary.

Below is a list of things that you will need to start a station:

### ***Application***

The good news is that there's no application fee for LPFMs! However, you may need an engineer's help to fill out the application. If you have a fairly good understanding of how radio allocations are made, and there's a clearly available frequency in your area, then you may be able to apply on your own. But if you want someone to double-check your work, or if you're having trouble finding an available frequency, you will probably need to hire an engineer.

### ***Nonprofit Status and Eligibility Requirements***

In order to apply for LPFM, you must be a nonprofit, school, church, or government entity. This means finding a nonprofit partner to apply for the license or starting your own nonprofit organization. The nonprofit must be within 10 miles of the transmission area and the 75% of the board members must live within 10 miles of the transmission area. The nonprofit's bylaws must also say that they will follow the FCC's rules on Radio Broadcasting. If you are planning to start your own nonprofit, keep in mind two things: In the past, the FCC gave preference points to applicants whose nonprofits existed for more than two years and secondly, you will eventually need to acquire 501©3 status in order to receive charitable donations, so its best to do that now.

### ***Space***

If you don't already have a building for a studio, or a site for your antenna, you may have to pay for space! Start looking for places that might have donated or low cost space for your radio station headquarters and survey your community for possible transmission sites that you could use to place transmitters, towers, and/or antennas.

### ***Studio Equipment***

A minimalist studio can run from \$3000-\$5,000 (not including furniture), depending on how much equipment is donated. A high-end studio can run upwards of \$100,000. You can get by with cheap equipment, but the higher-end equipment will be more durable and will sound better. If you have

funding available specifically for start-up costs, then you'll probably want to spring for higher quality equipment. If you don't have much start-up money but expect to do a lot of on-air fundraising, then you can start with low-end equipment and upgrade later.

Some stations have a second "production" studio in addition to their main studio. This allows one person to pre-record material while another person is doing a live broadcast. A production studio is by no means essential, but will make station operation much smoother. Production studios require a bit less equipment than on-air studios.

Please visit our [Studio](#) page for more information.

### ***Transmitting Equipment***

The transmitting system includes all of the equipment that turns the sound from the studios into radio waves and sends it out to people. A transmitting system generally costs between \$3,000 and \$12,000, depending on what quality of equipment you want and whether you need a tower. The main equipment needed is a transmitter, an audio processor, an antenna, and a place to hang the antenna. If your transmitting system is not located at the same site as your studio, you will also need a system for sending a signal from the studio to the transmitter, known as a studio-to-transmitter link.

### **Fundraising**

There are many strategies that stations employ to raise the sufficient money to stay on the air, pay the bills, possibly pay some staff and more. These fundraising methods include underwriting, hosting events, pledge drives, grant writing, and many more things! What works well in one community might not work well in another and vice versa. Starting a community radio station means you will be fundraising all the time. Its never to early to start. Commission a fundraising committee of people willing to set a plan for raising money for the station. Invite people who have experience in fundraising and development to be on your committee. Ask folks who work for other nonprofits for advice on successful fundraising strategies. Set goals for the year and make a plan to reach them.

### **Locate Helpful People and Organizations in Your Neighborhood**

Your town or neighborhood is bound to be full of people who will be excited as heck about being involved with a new community radio station. You need people with many kinds of skills and strengths. Here are a few types of resource people you should start to seek out:

#### ***Radio broadcast engineers.***

There are many broadcast engineers who work at commercial stations who might be interested in volunteering their time to work with your group. There are many retired engineers floating around as well. Start asking around to see how you can connect with them. Radio engineers are helpful people who can explain basic technical things to you. Plus, they may be able to hook you up with used equipment from their studios, which will serve your station perfectly well.

### ***Radio/TV producers***

These people have the technical skills to make some good programming, and help you think about how to set up systems for recruiting programmers. Get them to start training other people in putting radio stories together, so by the time you get on the air, you will have a public affairs crew ready to do some quality reporting. Do not forget about your local college station, if you have one -- students sometimes have more time to work on these kinds of projects, and maybe you can even get a communications student to intern with your station. Also, check out the local public access tv station for producers.

### ***Nice lawyers***

It will be helpful to have a couple lawyers on hand to answer legal questions and help you draw up basic documents. If you can find lawyers who have experience working with the arts or community non-profit organizations they will be especially helpful in assisting your group with the license application and setting policies for the organization.

### ***Musicians, poets, DJs and other performers:***

These people will have a vested interest in helping you start a community radio station, since they will probably be performing on it. It is pretty easy to get the support of these artsy types. Throw a big party, set up some turntables and have people spin records all night long, or have a few local bands play, and pass out flyers explaining the idea for the station and giving people contact info. Have petitions out for people to sign, supporting the idea of a local station. This is a fun way to spread the word and will enable to you reach a lot of people at once.

### **Outreach to Organizations.**

It is important to reach out to people in general. But you also want to reach out to specific organizations that can help move your cause along. You will want the support of schools, community-based organizations, businesses, local government agencies, and churches. The more diverse array of groups you have supporting you, the better. A simple way to get support from local organizations is to first figure out all the organizations you and your group have personal contacts with. Then write up a sample letter of support that organizations can personalize and write on their letterhead and send to you. Part of the letter should be their ideas for programming on the new station. Thus, the letter serves two purposes: documenting their support for you, and getting input as to what the community wants on the station.

You should set up meetings with people at such organizations as: Elementary and high schools, colleges, churches, neighborhood associations, the city council, youth centers, community centers, music stores, cultural organizations, local businesses; arts organizations; and any other organization you can think of in your broadcast area. Plus, you can contact organizations that are located outside your broadcast area but want to reach people who live in your broadcast area. Finally, think about whether you want to have local businesses underwrite shows on your station, and if you decide to go

that route, ask businesses to include their willingness to support you financially in their letter of support to you.

### **Go to a lot of meetings**

One way of doing outreach to local organizations is to go their meetings. Its a good way to meet people, invite them to your events and find out what's going on in the community. Get a core group of people who can talk coherently about the station to divide up the meetings so one person does not end up doing it all. Always take literature about your station, including contact info, and the sample letters of support. You could also write up a simple survey asking people what they want to hear on the station and distribute it at the meetings as well.

### **Make Media Now!**

You don't have to wait for an LPFM license to start making media because there are many ways you can begin to share stories with your community before you get licensed. You can start independently producing podcasts, blogging, and social networking in order to create an online presence in your community as well as streaming online via internet radio. Also look into existing resources for making media such as nearby community radio stations, public access TV stations, community newspapers, and other local media projects. No matter what medium you choose, sharing stories now will almost certainly generate enthusiasm and support for your upcoming LPFM project.

### **Resources on Our Website**

We have many great resources on our website to help you get started. Simply log onto [www.prometheusradio.org](http://www.prometheusradio.org) and click on *Station Support* on the top navigation bar of the home page. There you will see many links to various topics related to community radio, including station support and technical issues. We encourage you to read and distribute these materials to others interested in learning more about radio.