

Executive Director's Report

March 2006

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As this report is being prepared, less than two months have passed since I assumed responsibilities as executive director. During this time, I've engaged in a six week transition (beginning Jan. 23) that involved visiting our five stations; meeting with and listening to community and governance groups in New York, Washington, Houston, Los Angeles, and Berkeley; sampling programs while on the road, as well as material provided by producers and the archives; convening staff and committee meetings; initiating several hiring processes; facilitating decisions about special broadcasts; developing recommendations on local disputes; promoting Pacifica through other media; and working toward productive relationships with the staff.

In the midst of all this, I also turned 59 and began to relocate from Vermont to the Bay Area. It has been quite a personal cultural revolution.

This report will summarize tasks completed and underway, and also provide some analysis of problems, challenges, and opportunities.

General administration: Effective transparency

The initial steps in this area have been to establish regular meeting schedules and begin redefining functions and relationships. The main message I've tried to convey has been a willingness to consider varying views and new approaches; and related to that, the idea that information ought to be shared broadly, with time for consultation and input. In other words, a culture of consultation.

WORK TEAMS: In early February, the former administrative council was reformed as the operations collective (OC), an informal management group that includes National Staff (Web, Affiliates, Finance, Archives, Programming), GMs, PDs, and others as needed. Thus far, it has met twice, discussing the implementation of special broadcasts, new network shows, budgeting, and planning. The objective is a dynamic working group that can balance the operational needs of stations, affiliates, and Pacifica as a whole.

Members of the national staff also hold regular meetings with business managers from various stations, a process handled by our CFO. In addition, I plan to develop teams for consultation between key programming personnel, as well as those involved in promotion and marketing efforts (see below). Both areas need improved coordination.

PROCESS: These activities and others are related to one of the concepts given considerable stress within Pacifica: *transparency*. However, like a number of words commonly used within this culture, it is subject to different interpretations. For some, it is simply a willingness on the part of managers to be forthcoming about activities and plans. For others, it means more than that: a requirement to submit any plan or proposed action to decision makers for their review. Whether the latter approach is constructive and, more to the point, workable in the long term is an open question.

As executive director, I have found that any decision may be questioned, making the cautious course to inform relevant board committees of many pending matters. Unfortunately, both committees and the PNB itself are consistently backlogged, leading to delays, potential lost opportunities and missed deadlines. This exacerbates a tendency toward crisis management. Without appropriate delegation of authority the organization is likely to continue reacting slowly (sometimes tardily) to challenges and opportunities.

Governance: Clarifying oversight

The comments above point toward the interface between management and the governance structure, and suggest that although *oversight* is clearly a board responsibility, determining the practical limits of this function is also part of the job. This in turn is related to trust, and the general regard in which people hold each other within Pacifica. It is here that I have encountered some serious difficulties.

CIVILITY: It has been quite shocking to hear the harsh criticisms issued from many sources: staff, volunteers, local and national board members, community activists. While I certainly understand the need for a skeptical attitude and the willingness to air differences, what I have heard – in private conversations and in groups, in e-mail messages and other public communications – goes beyond constructive criticism to insulting characterizations, paranoia, and a deep well of distrust that tends to poison the atmosphere.

Many Pacificans are justifiably concerned by incidents of incivility, rude behavior, intimidation, harassment, and insults sometimes described as racist, sexist, and more. The HR officer hears about some of these incidents, and in several cases, I've already been asked to play a mediating or disciplinary role. But this pattern of behavior is clearly not restricted to staff, and a change in the general culture can only be achieved if decision makers and other leaders model the behavior they wish to see. In other words, intemperate speech and the demonization of those with whom one disagrees will have to stop if behavior problems within stations are to be reduced. Enforcement of decent conduct at meetings and in workplaces seems essential.

SELF-CRITICISM: Something else thing that might help is to replace the tendency to direct criticisms outward with a willingness to be self-critical – about our own behavior, how well meetings are conducted, and so on. Let me begin with myself: In my remarks to

the PNB in January, I now feel that I raised expectations about what could be accomplished without adequate knowledge of the organizational constraints that may make actual achievement difficult. During my trip across the country, while attempting to listen to many groups and viewpoints, on a few occasions I may have become too forceful with my own opinions. And when meeting with individuals, I need to become more sensitive to specific dynamics that grow from my official position and the power it suggests. I offer my apologies to anyone who was made uncomfortable or felt that I was not sufficiently responsive.

LEGAL AND CONTRACTS: On the plus side, we have begun to make progress in some areas. In February, I convened the Corporate Counsel Committee to screen candidate firms; by the time the PNB meets that group will have met three times, interviewed several candidates, and be approaching a recommendation. Board committees have also been involved in the resolution of a long-pending legal matter, and the Coordinating Committee has begun to implement its new contracts policy. I supported that motion. However, we may soon discover that it places too great a burden on the Board, since it appears that several new contracts are generated every month and the committee has limited time for review. The risk is that the policy will increase the Board's backlog and prevent staff from taking necessary, often routine steps on a timely basis. Among these areas are FCC and other legal decisions, affiliate contracts, and consulting arrangements that, under other circumstances, would fall within the purview of management. I suggest an early review and openness to modification of the policy.

Human resources: Fairness and inclusion

Prior to my arrival, our Human Resources officer was dealing with considerable unfinished business and working without a private office. I have changed the the latter and worked closely with her on the former. However, this is an area that has been downplayed for so long that both she and I have considerable catching up to do.

HIRING: Since early February, we have begun hiring processes for Interim General Manager at KPFA (and permanent GMs at both KPFA and WBAI), and National Election Supervisor. In the near future, we will begin the process for selecting a National Programming Coordinator. In addition, we recruited and interviewed candidates for the PNB's Race and Nationality training, and coordinated the corporate counsel process. These are time consuming activities, and until they are further along it may be difficult to turn our attention to other pressing tasks.

HANDBOOKS: The community is awaiting action on both the employee and volunteer handbooks. To date, attempts by the HR director to solicit input about the volunteer handbook draft have been met with a limited response; this is delaying the broader dissemination of that document. Hiring processes, as well as pending grievances that must be handled promptly, have also delayed the further development of the employee handbook. The completion of these handbooks should help to protect rights, define

relationships and responsibilities, reduce the number of complaints filed, and create more acceptable uniform procedures for handling problems.

TRAINING: We are making some headway here. A training outline for stations that will include general hiring processes, EEO compliance, and other HR topics has been developed, and will be implemented soon. We have also been in touch with Francie Moeller, an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance specialist who was contacted by IED Ambrose Lane last fall, to develop a plan in response to the PNB's January motion on ADA compliance. She will be visiting stations, conducting assessments and training, and providing a plan during the next year. I am in the process of developing a list of other training needs, based on feedback received.

DEFINING TERMS: The two words I hear most often in relation to these areas of activity are *inclusion* and *interim*. The latter reflects the tendency to delay long-term decisions, in part due to the higher burden imposed by the decision to make positions permanent. The result, however, has been the creation of too many temporary positions that become permanent on a de facto basis. At the same time, the tentative nature of these posts can mean that other decisions are avoided or delayed. At KPFA, this has led to instability that dates back at least five years, affects morale, has cost the station money, and makes it increasingly difficult for any managers to be effective. In that case, it may be necessary to engage an outside firm to orchestrate a transition back to something close to normalcy.

Like the other words already mentioned – transparency, oversight, and interim – the word *inclusion* is also subject to different interpretations. At Pacifica, it appears in general to mean attention to under-represented communities, primarily communities of color. However, we do not yet have a fair and effective process in place, nor it is clear, in my opinion, what else may be implied. For example, how does inclusion relate to Pacifica's "factional" political culture? What precisely is meant when the related term *diversity* is used? Does it refer exclusively to race, as the CPB defines the term, or include much more than that? Are there specific goals on which the community agrees? These are sensitive human resources, governance, and political questions, and I do not presume to have the answers. But I hope that they will be more fully explored.

Finances: maintaining sustainability

Although my time has been dominated by personnel, administration and programming issues (see below), I have been developing an understanding of Pacifica's financial picture and reviewing both income flows and expense categories. The CFO's report will provide most of the details of the organization's current and projected situation. However, I will make a few comments here.

CASH FLOW: There has been some confusion about how funds move within Pacifica. One area has been described as "inter-fund transfers," another term that is not that clearly defined. Nevertheless, I have observed that the periodic cash flow problems encountered

by such a complex financial structure require that funds maintained in reserve accounts must occasionally be drawn down for short-term purposes. The standard practice is that such transfers – in effect, internal loans – are followed by repayment as soon as feasible, thus maintaining the integrity of the reserve account. This is especially necessary due to the Board's choice not to allow the organization to secure a line of credit. No business – pardon the expression – can operate successfully throughout the year, especially when some local financial targets may not be met, without some way to compensate for uneven cash flow.

REIMBURSEMENTS: A related issue is the decision not to permit stations or the national office to maintain corporate credit cards. I understand that this is based on concerns about potential abuse, and some past examples. But the absence of this common tool means that managers and other staff are charging large sums on personal cards, a burden that they should not be asked to carry except for smaller, mainly pre-approved expenses. We now have a reimbursements policy in place that requires managers to seek most expense approvals in advance. This will serve as a means to prevent future problems. I urge the PNB to consider alternatives for handling expenses related to PNB meetings and other budgeted expense items that already fall within the purview of management.

FUNDRAISING: You will receive reports from GMs and the CFO about recent fund drives. Although the results have been better than originally feared, there is ongoing concern that our on air drive targets may not continue to be achievable. The proliferation of premiums, along with a lack of effective planning and fulfillment rate shortfalls in some areas, tend to exacerbate this problem. Unfortunately, on air pitching tends to become a competition and the best programs don't always win. In any case, a discussion of how to diversify revenues streams is essential, as well as a frank debate about how current programming affects (and sometimes limits) our ability to attract new audiences or keep the audiences we have.

The national office's efforts to raise currently funds centers on direct mail, an ongoing initiative designed to provide a financial cushion large enough to pay basic expenses even when station drives don't meet targets, and to pay for national programming, including Democracy Now!, Free Speech Radio News, a new Spanish language news show, and special broadcasts (there have been three, plus the first Katrina Town Meeting – a sponsored project produced independently) since early February. A new mailing was prepared in February ("Wake up the airwaves"), and should begin to show results in April. Beyond that, we will re-open discussions with satellite radio outlets in April.

COMMUNICATION: For finance, the word at issue is *accountability*. I am aware that some board members have not felt that financial reports provide all the information they feel is needed, and encourage those still concerned to provide specific requests. But accountability also requires responsibility; that is, prudent use of both the PNB and staff's time. We are entering a new budget cycle, a good time to improve communication and avoid the type of suspicions that have hampered our efforts and distracted us from Pacifica's primary mission.

Programming: from competition to cooperation

In the end, the point is what goes on the air. Therefore, to the extent that the PNB allows itself to be preoccupied with internal governance, Pacifica risks missing opportunities to use its full potential at a crucial time. When the board is unable to adequately focus, your managers often find themselves drawn into discussions and disagreements that force them to delay other important tasks. Among those tasks is upgrading technological capabilities and making long-term programming decisions for the network as a whole.

AUTONOMY: During my first weeks, I have been facilitating decisions about both special broadcasts (State of the Union, Domestic Spying hearings, International Women's Day, Katrina town hall series) while pointing our managers toward a longer-term vision. The words at issue here are *autonomy* and *cooperation*. Stations, as well as some divisions within the national organization, have placed an emphasis on their ability to make independent choices. Autonomy has been used to describe how both stations and collectives that produce programming would like to define their relationship to the larger organization. Related to that, I have noticed that there are independent media producers in most station areas who feel that our station management is not open to change and new voices.

Autonomy without cooperation results in alienation of various parts from the whole, and, in the end, a destructive competition for limited resources. For that reason, I believe that programming resources and personnel need to be pulled together, creating what I have described in various conversations as a "national programming hub," a forum for more cooperation and the development of a rational budget that incorporates the needs of producers, engineers, and our national archives, website and affiliates programs. In general, more systematic and productive consultation between management, programming staff and producing groups, both within individual stations and in the OC, is needed to insure participation, quality, and long term success. In my view, program schedules ought to balance factors including diversity, inclusion, outreach, timeliness, social impact, educational value, uniqueness, and public service, with clear policies and procedures for preemption, cost sharing, scheduling changes, national broadcasts, and testing new programs and concepts that expand audiences. In the process, public input is vital, but so is balance, reach, and creative management.

COOPERATION: What I am proposing, beginning with the current budget cycle, is a consolidated national programming budget and a reevaluation of various functions as they relate to one another. Some of this can take place through the meetings of the Operations Collective (See Work Teams above). But it will also require discussions between individuals based on shared tasks and interests. Of course, negotiations with Free Speech Radio News (FSRN) are a major concern – and relates to this general issue. I am aware that FSRN wishes to be more integrated and better compensated. To accomplish that, its talent and needs will have to be meshed with an overall strategy that includes national priorities, e.g., fall election coverage, shows on the environment, labor, and education, lifting local voices to the national level. That is also true for our current D.C.

news bureau, as well as local news and public affairs operations. We have an enormous opportunity to influence public dialogue in the months ahead, but only if our efforts are effectively coordinated. At the March PNB meeting, I hope we can have a useful initial discussion about the options and opportunities, including some possible steps during the second half of 2006.

OUTREACH/DEVELOPMENT: Our Affiliates Program is already playing an important role in helping Pacifica to define needs and reach emerging audiences, and can be an ongoing source of insights into training needs, publicity strategies, and new programming and talent. Adequate support and integration into overall planning makes practical sense. The Affiliates Coordinator has already proven to be a key member of the programming team, and I urge the Board to act promptly on requests for new contract approval and other initiatives that expand listenership, increase syndication, and can produce future income. Its financial relationship with the Pacifica Radio Archives also merits a closer look.

The archives has unique resources and a strong track record, but deserves even more attention on station airwaves. Pacifica's past broadcasts can be an powerful outreach tool. PRA has been successful in attracting some grants and marketing premiums, yet it would be myopic to view it as simply a "museum store" or "cash cow." It is an ongoing source of programming that can be used both as part of other broadcasts and sometimes stand alone. The National Programming Policy under review offers some suggestions in this area. In addition, I will be looking at how we can improve on the current approach to its on air fundraising (primarily a one day drive) and finance continued restoration and digitization.

Our Internet Technology (IT) division is pursuing development plans as rapidly as possible: streaming service (the number of users who can access a web stream) is being increased at individual stations, a new website designed for "wholesale" users is up and running, training and technical assistance at stations continues, and a revamped Pacifica main site in the works will provide improved organization and new tools for the Board and committees. A report at the March meeting will offer more details. In my opinion, the importance of this division has been underestimated for too long. IT skills and resources are unevenly distributed within Pacifica, and the division is under-staffed. Assessment and training is underway, but going slowly. The risks include interrupted service, uneven quality, security breaches, and unanticipated technical failures. IT maintains the architecture that makes much of what stations do easier – or more difficult. Along with a programming coordinator, hiring a national IT specialist (rather than the current ad hoc approach) is an important step.

MOVEMENT BUILDING: Although my current assignment is to manage one organization, I am mindful of Pacifica's relationship to other alternative, community-based and independent media. Our foundation has enormous resources -- at least compared to other producers and outlets – and lots of talent. But it is not an island, and must continue to nurture its role as a vehicle for training and the development of new talent, and as a conduit for the ideas of more than its own producers and management.

There is a large reservoir of energy and talent beyond the doorways of our stations, eager to be tapped and waiting for Pacifica to respond. Of course, that implies change – in relationships and, ultimately, schedules. It also opens questions about who really owns content, and whether Pacifica wishes to move toward a new licensing approach, e.g. open source. I offer no specific prescriptions at this point, but do encourage debate (or, if you prefer, dialogue), along with early steps that at least lets the larger independent media community know that we want to play an active and supportive role -- without alienating current listeners or jeopardizing our financial health.

BALANCING NEEDS: On a practical level, the network faces a number of pressing issues: upgrading IT capacity and equipment at some stations, hiring a national programming coordinator and technology director, defining new training needs, and providing adequate support to our affiliates, technology development, and the archives. This does not mean that every request can or will be granted; rather, it means that each proposal will have to be considered in the context of an overall thrust – one that is developed and supported by both national and station staff. I urge all involved to think beyond their own functions and consider how best to project Pacifica's talent and agenda to new and larger audiences.

Promotion: Projecting the network

Although individual stations have deep roots in their communities and the ability to project their images, the foundation's promotional capacity is quite limited. No staff is specifically assigned to public relations tasks (although it does appear in the current ED job description as a responsibility). As a result, Pacifica is often at the mercy of outside forces, individuals and media outlets that seek to define it. This puts us in a passive and often reactive position.

As a journalist, I am aware of the problems that can emerge when an organization cannot shape its issues and image. Pacifica must do better. To that end, I plan to create a promotion and marketing team in the near future, using existing staff. Its task will be not only to define the messages we want to project, but also to make it happen. Members of the national staff, e.g. affiliates, development, as well as assigned local staff should be part of this team. I foresee no significant budget impact.

SETTING PRIORITIES: The underlying issue, I believe, is that Pacifica's identity as a *network* is a bit unclear. Like the other words I've mentioned, this one too is not adequately defined, in part because there is some concern that being a network could be disempowering to local stations. During my cross country trip, people occasionally questioned whether being part of a network is even important, suggesting that stations might do fine without any national staff or presence. Even if I wasn't the ED of this organization, I would find that proposition an unacceptable abdication. Pacifica is not only a national network, with the potential to reach literally millions of people; it is a unique national resource that must not be under-utilized. That said, reaffirming the terms of our social contract is vital, including assurances that persuasion rather than force will

be the standard practice. On the other hand, Pacificans – boards, staff, volunteers – need to agree on high priorities (initial work on this was completed in Feb. 2005), and I would argue that projecting a progressive counter-narrative nationwide – through public affairs, news, *and* culture -- ought to be on the list.

Old Business vs. New Business

To date, much of my time has been spent completing tasks that were sidetracked, delayed, or put on hold due to the extended hiring process. That may continue for a while longer. Until that old business has been handled, there may be limited time to initiate some of the changes that people eagerly await. I also need time to more fully understand Pacifica's culture, the expectations of its members, and the aspirations of its many stakeholders.

Nevertheless, I hope that the next time I report to this board I will be spending more time talking about the future – our mission and a long-term plans to realize it even more fully. The goal, at least as I see it, is to find ways to unleash the tremendous, often latent potential within and surrounding Pacifica – in other words, working synergistically the larger independent media movement of which it is a part -- and help us to move forward together. It is long past time for this vital organization to retake its place as a leading voice and moving force in community-based media..

Submitted by Greg Guma, Executive Director
March 10, 2006