

# Report of the Program Committee to the Board of Directors on Strategic Plan Progress and the DJ Summit

November 17, 2023

## Background

Since 2021, WOMR's staff and Program Committee have been working to implement the first goal laid out in WOMR's Strategic Plan (2016) of producing "Dynamic, Quality Community Programming."

The Strategic Plan states that:

"Slots in the programming schedule must gradually be opened to accommodate new voices. It is not our intention to replace hard working and dedicated volunteers, but to create space and a welcoming atmosphere for a diverse generation of programmers who will reflect Cape Cod's changing population and guide the station through the twenty-first century."

In the view of the Program Committee, creating space in the broadcast schedule for new voices is mandated not only by the Strategic Plan, but also by WOMR's Mission Statement, Statement of Values, and the 2024 Corporation for Public Broadcasting Grants Eligibility Criteria, copies of which are all attached to this report.

As described in the Report of the Ad Hoc Strategic Plan on Programming Committee, dated July 2022, achieving the goal of "Dynamic, Quality Community Programming" requires both revising the broadcast schedule, and reaching out to the community to identify and engage new volunteers. The Ad Hoc Committee report requested that the Board "... authorize and direct staff and the Program Committee to develop a revised program schedule to create additional airtime to enable broader points of view." That report was ratified by the Board of Directors in August 2022. The Program Committee subsequently set out to make that happen.

In numerous meetings during 2022 and 2023, however, it became clear that successful community outreach requires additional staff resources, and that designing diversity, equity and inclusion ("DEI") policies for programming decisions is complicated, and potentially beyond the expertise

of the Program Committee. Staff suggested that a successful DEI policy may well require the assistance of a consultant to help develop consistent and legally compliant criteria.

At the same time it became clear that we have more eager volunteers than regularly available slots on the broadcast schedule. Throughout 2022 and 2023, competition for regular airtime was heated, and the Program Committee evaluated numerous qualified proposals for every open slot.

For these reasons the Program Committee elected to focus first on changes to the broadcast schedule designed to create more space for trained volunteers, and to address the goal of attracting diverse talent to the station as a subsequent phase.

### The Summit

In July 2023 the PC voted to hold a “DJ Summit” to solicit feedback from volunteers on ways to create more airtime. The DJ Summit Subcommittee was formed to plan the event, consisting of John Braden, Matthew Dunn, Justine Alten, Ira Wood and Michael Fee. The Subcommittee met regularly during August and September, subsequently engaged Sky Freyss-Cole to facilitate, and then met with her weekly in late September and October to plan the event.

During September and October, the PC communicated regularly with the volunteers regarding the substance and purpose of the event, and framed the discussion by outlining various options for creating more airtime and inviting feedback. Many volunteers responded thoughtfully, and their comments are summarized in an attachment to this report.

The Summit convened on October 28, 2023 at the Wellfleet Public Library. 50 volunteers attended in person, and 23 participated by Zoom. Board members Sheila House, Sarah Burill, Justine Alten, Breon Dunigan, Carolyn Cason, Indira Ganesan and Fred Boak were also present in person.

After welcoming remarks from Executive Director John Braden, past president Ira Wood discussed the 2016 Strategic Plan and the fact that the goal of “Dynamic, Quality Community Programming” was the sole remaining task to be addressed. Operations Manager Matt Dunn spoke to

the process of implementing Strategic Plan goals, noting that as an organization we need to “honor the past, support the present and secure the future.” He encouraged the group to build on our strengths, and figure out ways to “recruit, train and encourage the next generation.”

Volunteers then broke into small groups and were asked to describe what they love about WOMR, why they came to the Summit, and how they felt about implementing programmatic changes to address the goals of the Strategic Plan and Mission Statement. A larger group discussion followed exploring the same topics, during which many volunteers shared their love of the station, commitment to its mission, and mixture of support and apprehension about implementing programmatic changes.

Volunteers expressed love for the fact that WOMR is “a family” that is “sometimes cantankerous” and that we are here to “help and take care of each other” and foster “creative freedom.” Several folks lauded the “great music” and “range of programming.” Others expressed gratitude about being part of “something bigger than yourself,” an “oasis when the rest of the world is so weird,” “local, not corporate,” and a “group that spreads joy.”

When asked why they came to the event, the tone was uniformly positive: “because we stayed on the air 24/7 during Covid,”; “because there is a legacy of change and evolution here and I want to be part of the process”; “because we have unfinished business”; and “because I care.” When asked to describe how they felt about proposed changes to the broadcast schedule, several long-term volunteers counseled a cautious approach. “Good radio is hard to come by” said one original station founder. “Let’s look at what’s working and what’s not. Let’s not be a solution in search of a problem,” said a member of the Program Committee and the Board.

Operations Manager Matt Dunn laid out the rationale for schedule changes. At present there are simply not enough opportunities for people with skills. The pandemic narrowed the field of opportunity and we now have a far greater percentage of pre-recorded content, so it is “difficult for most active and engaged subs to get any meaningful airtime. And we can’t even begin to address our diversity goals until

we create greater flexibility in the schedule. We should be able to provide opportunities for people that we know, and people we haven't met yet. The long-term sustainability of the station depends on our willingness to evolve. We can't do better unless we try."

Matt also described the process of pre-Summit outreach to the volunteers, and noted that based on their response, four potential suggestions emerged that warranted further discussion:

1. Shorten some shows;
2. Remove some syndicated content;
3. Restrict DJ's to only one show; and
4. Develop internet-only content.

The volunteers discussed the benefits and challenges of the four options and shared some general observations. Bob Thayer asked why there were always so many open slots. Matt explained that volunteers often are unable to do shows due to illness or other unanticipated events. That trend will continue no matter how the broadcast schedule is, or is not, reconfigured. Bob asked who had the authority to mandate the kinds of changes that were being discussed. Bob Weiser and Chuck Cole explained the functions of the Board and the Program Committee and affirmed the transparency of the current discussion.

Scott Penn stated that in his experience community based non-profit organizations are fragile and that implementing changes must be gentle and incremental. Dr. Paula Sperry argued that the current schedule has been working for decades and did not see where any change was necessary. She opined that the internet is a strong possibility to solve the "capacity issues."

The volunteers were then asked to share their thoughts on notes posted at stations set up for each of the four suggested changes. After the station hosts summarized those comments to the room, the volunteers were then asked to vote on which idea they supported the most, and which idea they felt should be implemented first. The specific comments of the volunteers are set forth in Exhibit 3.

The results revealed that the ideas most supported by the volunteers who voted were: (i) internet only content (20 votes); (ii) remove some syndicated content (11 votes); (iii) shorten some shows (9 votes); and (iv) restrict DJ's to only one show (zero votes). The ideas that the volunteers who participated thought should be the first move were: (i) remove some syndicated content (15 votes); shorten some shows (11 votes); (iii) internet only content (11 votes); and (iv) restrict DJ's to only one show (4 votes).

In an open forum following the voting exercise, volunteers were asked to share their thoughts, and there were many notable insights. Bob Thayer posed the question "What is our community? Is it the DJ's, the listeners, the Cape, the world?" Denya Levine stated that listener surveys could be a helpful tool in figuring that out. Eric Auger observed that ours is a beautiful community and that we should think of it in terms of "we, not me." Robert Johnson said "We are a radio station. Let's fix the towers, not spend the money on an internet stream." Board member Sarah Burill said that "Change is challenging, but we need to understand and fulfill our mission. Not everyone will agree or is going to like it, but we need to decide if we are going to be true to our mission."

At the conclusion of the Summit, volunteers were asked to share feedback on the "Menti" digital platform, and later to respond to an online survey. That feedback is attached to this report.

#### Next Steps

The Program Committee met on November 15 to prepare this report and determine next steps. We noted the volunteers' interest in development of internet channels but were concerned about the potential "brand dilution" that might result from creating a second layer of content, as well as the significant financial investment that would be required. We agreed that given the financial impacts, the Board of Directors must decide whether to pursue this option. Staff and the Committee will prepare a written summary of the issues and be prepared to discuss at the Board's convenience.

The Committee discussed the tension between the Strategic Plan's directive to create more room for new voices, and the disruption that might flow from a broad schedule revamp. The consensus was that we should apply a hybrid approach toward attaining Goal # 1 of the Strategic Plan, which respects the contributions and seniority of current programmers, while at the same time searching out ways to expand the schedule. The hybrid model enables the Committee to explore shorter shows with current DJ's that are interested, pare syndicated content where appropriate, and explore the concept of dedicated slots for emerging DJ's. Matt informed the group that a weekly three hour slot will become available in early 2024 due to a recent resignation, and the Committee can consider using it as a "radio lab" to fulfill the Strategic Plan's goal. We anticipate this will be an ongoing process and we will keep the Board apprised of our progress.

The Program Committee appreciates the Board's support and participation in this effort.

Respectfully submitted,

Justin Alten, John Braden, Carol Courneen, Breon Dunigan, Matthew Dunn, Michael Fee, Andy Falconio, Melinda Krasting, Denya LeVine, Mary Lyttle, Andy Rahorcsak, and Ira Wood