



Future of Music Coalition on

# Low Power FM

Radio

★ FACT SHEET 2007

**Low Power FM stations (LPFM) are community-based, non-commercial radio stations that operate at 100 watts or less and reach a radius of 3 to 7 miles.**

Allowing LPFM stations on the air empowers local broadcasters to serve their communities with a variety of new voices and services. LPFM stations can address the interests of specific groups – underserved musical genres, minority groups, religious and linguistic communities – and provide a forum for debate about important local issues. LPFM stations strengthen community identity in urban neighborhoods, rural towns and other communities that are currently too small to win much attention from “mainstream”, ratings-driven media.

## **Who can get a license to operate a Low Power Radio FM station?**

LPFM licenses are available to community groups, high schools, labor unions, churches and other nonprofit organizations that would like to reach out to a small, geographically concentrated group of individuals. About 780 radio stations, broadcasting at 100 watts or less, are currently successfully serving communities across the country, with many more in the process of applying for a license or in construction phase.

## **Why is Low Power FM important?**

As the radio marketplace consolidates, what we hear on the radio is increasingly homogenized. Massive media organizations are focused on serving the broadest audiences possible, especially the demographic groups that are most appealing to advertisers. As a result, programming that reflects local community interests and niche genres has largely disappeared.

## **How does Low Power FM affect musicians?**

Music that is not perceived as highly profitable is not usually heard on the radio in many communities, impacting the livelihoods of many musicians, including jazz, classical and world music artists. Musicians find it increasingly difficult to reach listeners via the airwaves, while presenting organizations, orchestras and opera companies have fewer opportunities to promote their performances and broaden their audience base.

For example, Opelousas, Louisiana is the birthplace of zydeco music, but until the Southern Development Foundation began broadcasting on a Low Power frequency, the local community could not hear the unique music of its local heritage on the radio, and zydeco musicians had no way to expand their audiences.

Amy Ray and Emily Saliers of the Indigo Girls are strong supporters of low power FM radio, stating that community broadcasting was vital to their early success.

**Future of Music Coalition**

Education, Research and Advocacy for Musicians

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## **Doesn't public radio fill the gaps?**

The increasing pressure on profitability and market share has caused public radio stations to change their formats as well. In 2001, New Hampshire Public Radio dropped all of their classical and most of their jazz programming in favor of more talk-oriented fare. Residents in New Hampshire were unable to listen to classical music on the radio until an LPFM station, WCNH, received its license and became the only classical music station in the state. Public radio stations across the country are making the same decision as New Hampshire Public Radio, moving from music programming to public affairs and talk-radio formats.

## **Legislative History of Low Power Radio Service**

- In January 2000, the FCC voted to issue low power FM radio licenses, a huge victory for communities nationwide where, in many instances, consolidation of commercial media outlets has led to decreased localism and diversity on the airwaves.
- Incumbent broadcasters, represented in large part by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), opposed the FCC's move and lobbied Congress to stop the service, warning that low power FM radio would cause "oceans of interference" for full power stations. Responding to this pressure, Congress passed the "Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act" in December 2000, which eliminated about 75 percent of the original LPFM licensing opportunities, predominantly in the most densely populated areas, and required that the FCC undertake a study of potential interference issues.
- After three years of inquiry and testing, the interference study was released in July 2003. The MITRE Corporation, which was hired by the FCC to conduct the study, concluded that LPFM causes no significant interference problems and recommended lifting the burdensome restrictions imposed by Congress. In other words, the interference concerns raised by the NAB were, as predicted by Low Power advocates, unfounded.
- In March 2005 the FCC began a further inquiry into possible revisions to its LPFM rules. Among the areas being explored are revisions to its point system (by which a choice is made from among mutually-exclusive qualified applicants) to no longer favor local programming, permitting ownership of more than one facility, permitting ownership by non-locally-based entities, permitting LPFM licenses to be sold or control to be transferred, and the need to protect existing translators from interference from LPFM stations. Comments are on file but a decision has not been issued.

## **LPFM Today**

Since the release of the MITRE study, several bills have been introduced into Congress attempting to lift restrictions on the FCC's ability to manage low power FM radio licensing. In 2006, the Senate Commerce Committee passed legislation authorizing the FCC to expand LPFM into urban markets, however the legislation did not reach the Senate floor. We look forward to legislation being reintroduced and hopefully passed in 2007.

## **What You Can Do**

Let members of Congress know that access to the airwaves impacts your livelihood and that you are concerned about the availability of low power FM radio licenses in your area. Urge them to support pro-LPFM legislation similar to the bills that were introduced in the past two years:

Senate: The Local Community Radio Act of 2005 (S 312)

House: The Enhance and Protect Local Community Radio Act of 2005 (HR 3731)

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## RESOURCES

Prometheus Radio Project <http://prometheusradio.org>

Media Access Project <http://www.mediaaccess.org/programs/lpfm/>

FCC's Audio Division <http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/lpfm/index.html>

National Federation of Community Broadcasters <http://www.nfcb.org>

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