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Preliminary Results from a National Survey of Community Advisory Boards

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The following are the results of interviewing 17 Public TV Senior Executives and CAB Chairpersons. The purpose of this study was to find ways for the WTTW Community Advisory Board to be more effective by learning from others. We interviewed individuals from stations as large as KCET-TV (Los Angeles) and WETA-TV (Washington, DC) to small market stations KIXE-TV (Redding, Ca). Most interviewees were Senior station executives or CAB Chairpersons. The following is a brief that highlights the results of those conversations. As you read, please note the trend of station senior management involvement and committee interaction with station activities.

It appears that many CAB's seem to be integrated into various station activities much more than the WTTW CAB. Members seem to be encouraged to participate in various station activities such as pledge drives and community events. We need to discuss this element.

It appears that most CAB's composition is much more diverse than ours and the recruitment appears to be much more proactive to various community action groups. Nominees from community groups are sought out.

CAB's appear to be involved in station ideas that can reflect upon the CAB role. As an example, a few of the stations' CAB's are involved in "Community Action Awards". I believe this can be the kind of thing that helps us become more proactive.

Most stations' CAB have a closer affiliation their respective Board of "Trustees" than the WTTW Trustee/CAB. Most common appears to be annual joint "meeting".

CAB's appear to be used as a focus group at a majority of the stations surveyed. One caveat of these CAB's is that they reflect the profile of the community.

There is no central or national resource for CAB information and direction.

The following information:

- 1) is meant to provide WTTW direction in making the CAB more relevant.
- 2) should assist the current board in determining future activities and paths of recruitment.
- 3) holds the potential for us to demonstrate a national CAB leadership role.

Composition

Most stations' Community Advisory Boards are at about 20-25 members (some were much larger but were bifurcated). All stations sought to have a cross section of the local population. Members were recruited by various methods and some are as follows:

Community Action Groups are asked to submit candidates who are "screened". An example might be for the WTTW CAB to invite Operation Push to submit a candidate.

Self Nominated individuals are sometimes accepted. Nearly all stations stated that this was the most difficult to manage because of the cross section issue.

From other station volunteer groups such as pledge volunteer groups. These names are often provided to the CAB for follow-up.

The highly outspoken. Upon occasion, those members of the community who are most critical

of the station are asked to participate on the CAB. The CAB might consider offering a membership to the CMA.

Some stations use the CAB as a proving ground for their "Board of Trustees". At one station, the CAB chairman is a voting member of the Board and nominates an "alternate" to serve on the Trustee Board. This is a one year assignment on the Trustee Board. As an example, Thom Clark would serve as a regular member of the Board of Trustees as long as he is Chairman of the CAB but would relinquish the Trustee role once his CAB Chairmanship is over and would be replaced by the new CAB Chairman on the Board of Trustees. Those that used the CAB as a proving ground said that this was as the result of community criticism that their Board of Trustees was becoming too insular.

Those stations that serve multiple markets such as Sacramento-Stockton have established multiple CAB's.

Activities

Nearly all stations stated they made an effort to include CAB members in various station events including pledge nights (this appeared to be very common). I questioned this as being conflictive but was told members not only serve as participants but also as moderators on pledge drives. Who should know station issues more than CAB members and who should be more believable than CAB members?

CAB members were asked to participate in promotion events. When I challenged this as volunteer work, nearly all said this was done in order for the station to appear to be diverse to the public but also for station personnel to work with members of the CAB and to have an opportunity to discuss station issues in an informal small group setting.

Nearly all stated that once a year, the CAB and the Board of Trustee's meet in joint session to discuss their objectives and achievements. In some cases it is at a formal dinner or reception or even an open house where the public is invited. The key element is to have the two socialize issues and to make sure they understand the key issues of serving the market. This includes legal, programming and financial items.

At the Sacramento station, the GM said they can participate in up to 20 events a years of various kinds.

Nearly all station GM's say that the key worth of a CAB is to gain "unsanitized" community input and to share it with senior station management and the Trustees.

The CAB's at certain stations are involved in presiding over the selection and granting of community action awards. One station where the CAB is very involved in this kind of initiative is KCET. A secondary off shoot of this is that the CAB gets to work directly with various community action groups and can get a sense of who the station serves in the Chicago area. . (I very much like this idea.)

Most CAB's meet less often in formal session than we do but meet in smaller groups on task specific issues such as focus groups and station events. A typical interval is once a quarter but with action groups meeting during the interim.

Some stations poll members on specific items. One station asked the membership to meet in special session to view and discuss a forthcoming controversial program. KIXE in Redding does this on a regular basis.

Some CAB's are expected to actively seek out community ideas and issues and provide community input to senior management.

The composition of the CAB is important so that the station can gain an "instant" focus group that represents a socio/economic mix of the community. (This seems to be more prevalent in smaller markets)

In nearly all markets, it was a given that CAB is given open access to all financial and programming information.

Reporting standards

Most CAB's appear to have a close working relationship with the Senior Executive of the station. As an aside, the more direct involvement the Senior Executive has the more active the CAB appears to be.

One Senior Executive who has worked for several public stations through the years stated that most stations typically must make a decision to spend energy avoiding the development of a CAB or embracing the concept and making it work for them.

Nearly all Senior Executives stated there was a direct and interactive link between the "Trustees" and the CAB.

The CAB is a proving ground for the Board of Trustees. It appears this is less likely in larger markets but in nearly all markets, the CAB has proven to be a resource. Only one station said he views the two as distinct entities (Business vs. Community). But this manager also said he sees it important that the two have opportunities to discuss station issues together.

It appears that many stations have a more pro-active role in nurturing the CAB ideas and activities. Whether it is via the Senior Executive or via a direct report, stations seem to be a catalyst for CAB achievement. In other words, the less station commitment, the less result.

As stated elsewhere, CAB's and Boards have standardized opportunities to meet and discuss issues.

One additional item

There appears to be no single resource to which CAB's or Station Personnel can refer for ideas or organizational information. In every case from Senior Executive to CAB members to station underlings, their appeared to be enthusiastic support for building a website to which CAB's can refer for ideas and advice.

Based upon this committee's experience in acquiring this information, this could be a tremendous tool for individual stations.

It is this committee's opinion that WTTW can demonstrate a leadership role by developing a grant request to the CPB for the purpose of establishing and maintaining such a website.

Stations Interviewed:

KRCB-TV Rohnert Park
KEET-TV Eureka
KVPT-TV Fresno
KCET-TV Los Angeles
KIXE-TV Redding
KVIE-TV Sacramento
KTEH-TV San Jose
KBDI-TV Broomfield
KRMA-TV Denver
WETA-TV Washington
WMFE-TV Orlando
WEDU-TV Tampa
WMEC-TV Macomb
WTVP-TV Peoria
WNIN-TV Evansville
WFWA-TV Fort Wayne