



A Review of the Available Studies  
On the Impact of Community Radio  
On its Community

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March 29, 2006

“Wireless broadcasting, which is universally recognized to be one of the most powerful instruments at our disposal for the transmission of idea, must not be regarded simply as a medium for the spreading of news and information; it must also be made to play its part in the raising of the standard of general culture, cooperating in the intellectual, artistic and moral training of the public mind for whose benefit the daily programs are planned.”

*International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1935*

## **Acknowledgements**

In a three to four week research project there is little time to go back and follow-up. My thanks go to all those who responded to requests and provided information, in particular:

Special gratitude goes to Melissa Kaestner, NCRA/ANREC National Coordinator, who has been my contact and community radio sector advisor. Melissa was able to provide me with considerable background information and data sources. Thanks also go to John Harris Stevenson, NCRA/ANREC Advisory Board, who was able to define for me the realistic scope of this project.

Jim MacLeod, President of BBM, was gracious, accessible and able to coordinate the production of some data for me in a very short period of time.

Lotfi Chahdi kindly provided some data from Statistics Canada.

RFA, for directing me to information on their website.

The community radio station managers and their teams who responded to the emails and calls and took the time to email their stories.

Randy Geling (CFUV Victoria), Daniel Vandervoort (CKLN Ryerson), and Brian Heinrich (CKUL, now CKXU Lethbridge) for digging up, faxing, and couriering the surveys.

David Teasdale for permitting me to add his impact information as an appendix.

Janice Dupuis who dropped other commitments to assist me with the follow-up calls.

## Introduction

*“Instead of an authorial voice, preferably efficient administration, concentration of power, and the production of a standardized product, those who work at CIUT [University of Toronto Community Radio Inc.] value volunteerism, mutualism, and the equitable distribution of power and resources within the organization. One consequence is occasional turmoil and only slow deliberate change is possible in most cases, but another more important consequence is the creation of a range and dynamic of conversation and cultural exploration that is unrealizable within any existing media system.” (Fairchild, 267)*

I was forewarned at the beginning of this brief research project that I may have difficulties finding adequate quantitative data to examine a balance of major, medium, and small markets. I did receive access to some BBM data and CRTC and Statistics Canada data. As well, I received a handful of campus/community station surveys. As the above statement from Charles Fairchild suggests, it is the qualitative information that provides the most significant community impact statements - the stories I received from the stations. Moreover, academic literature on the value of community radio to its local community is supported by these stories.

The following is an overview of the types of information and data I have reviewed. It identifies areas where impact on community can be better understood. I also suggest a process toward the preparation of a Canada wide survey.

### **Finding valid data for the community and community campus radio sector**

*“During our search for secondary research, we discovered that there is a lack of qualitative and quantitative research in the radio community, especially in the post-secondary market.” (CKXU, University of Lethbridge Student Listener Survey, 2005)*

The challenge with finding meaningful quantitative data for the community and campus based sector lies much in the nature and essence of community radio.

Community radio in English Canada consists of mainly volunteers who organize, schedule, create programs, interview local people of interest, become local roving journalists – particularly in times of community crisis, create discourse where anyone can participate and contribute, and provides local musicians and artists an avenue for self-expression and growth. They are a training ground for journalistic, musical, artistic, and political expression, all of which helps define local culture and enhance issues of social justice. Charles Fairchild, in his book *Community Radio and Public Culture*, argues that “without question community radio stations in North America are structurally,

operationally, and ideologically marginal institutions.” (p.4) Its alternative programming, typically small budgets, community reach, and small audience numbers will always be reflected in community radio. It has been argued that community radio exists for the marginal portion of society who dismisses the mainstream in music, artistic and political expression. This is the nature of community radio and this is its strength.

When it comes to measuring the ‘impact’ of community radio in terms of commercial media indicators such as market share and revenues, community and campus radio will seldom register in any meaningful way. As long as community and campus based radio stations are fulfilling their prescribed roles, this will continue to be the case. Understanding the purpose and value of community radio must be ever present in order to collect the correct type of data to demonstrate its value to the local community.

There are very few statistically valid station-run surveys in the campus/community sector. The anecdotal reasons for this range from a desire for data but serious lack of funding to complete a professional survey, as one explained, a lack of interest in obtaining quantitative data because the resulting information would not be viewed as useful to the station’s goals and objectives. Simple listenership surveys do occur at many stations, however, they are ‘station centric,’ seldom statistically valid and not deemed meaningful by their owners beyond the stations’ intended purview.

### **Measurement tools**

*“Compared to film and television, radio is hardly noticed in academic literature and as a practice is mostly taught in a vocational context as a preparation for journalism. As a result, radio practices and policy lacks a language for critical reflection and analysis.”*  
(Lewis: *The Invisible Medium*, 1990)

**BBM Canada** performs a critical role in measuring market share of listenership primarily for commercial radio purposes. They supply radio and television audience rating services to the Canadian broadcast advertising industry. The data collected by BBM for the non-profit community radio sector is generally a by-product of their main client focus. A few stations within the community radio sector are subscribed BBM associates, however, most stations cannot afford or do not recognize a cost benefit to subscription. If the community station is not in a major centre of BBM survey activity, the results could also be misleading – e.g., a small BBM survey sample in smaller markets and effective for the commercial stations is often too small to accurately measure the community stations. Small data returns are generally suppressed from the BBM measurement surveys.

BBM data tells us that in 2004 1.2 percent of radio listeners tuned into 78 community/campus and travel/tourism stations in the English language format while 4.9 percent (47 stations) of the same categories tuned into the French language format (CRTC BPMR 2005). We know that some of the community/campus stations do not receive a single count on BBM surveys.

Jim MacLeod, President of BBM, kindly coordinated the collection of some data on 57 community/campus/Native radio stations situated in Canadian cities ranging from large, medium, and small populations. All but a few of these stations registered such low samples that the BBM software

automatically suppressed the data. By grouping multiple community stations' data by city, numbers became large enough to be identified and from which to draw general conclusions - but with serious caution as to its reliability. In fact, 11 stations of the 57 listed received no tuning over an eight-week period from September 5 to October 30, 2005. This data indicates that the station reach to the community surveyed is small, ranging from 1.1 to 8.2 percent. The data also confirms that the overall percentage of listenership is very small, ranging from 0.1 percent in St. John's (1 station represented) to as high as 3.5 percent in Edmonton (up to 4 stations represented) over this eight-week period.

By the very nature of community and campus radio listenership, BBM data is not going to provide meaningful 'impact' data. However, the results from the data noted above, given some measure of validity, does beg analysis to understand why one city captures a significant larger audience percentage than another. Understanding the available BBM data is an important element for an NCRA/ANREC review and survey of community/campus stations' listenership. In particular, individual cume (the unduplicated number of people tuned one or more times to a station in a given period of time) data will provide a base point for comparative research completed by individual stations and can validate BBM data on its ability to identify listenership size for the small community radio stations. To know that 1.2 percent of English speaking listenership tune into community radio is less meaningful than to understand that perhaps two or more hundred thousand people (as an example, number was not calculated) tune into community radio programming each week. The community radio sector may play a large role in the "Cultural Creative" (Ray and Anderson) in our society.

***I recommended that the NCRA/ANREC make the necessary arrangements to access BBM data and to work closely with BBM to identify the data that is available for individual community radio stations, and understand how to interpret this data in terms meaningful to the mandate of the community/campus sector.***

The **CRTC**, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, responsible for regulating Canada's broadcasting and telecommunications systems, collects financial information from its annual station returns that do permit a look at the broad source of revenues and expenditures for campus/community radio. CRTC revenue breakdown is in terms of local and national time sales, syndication productions, etc. However, a more detailed breakdown of revenue is required to complete a truly meaningful comparison of revenue sources by individual station or groups of stations for community/campus radio. For example, an NCRA/ANREC September 12, 2005 communiqué to Industry Canada provided a revenue breakdown for some of their members into categories such as student/university support, fundraising donations, advertising and sponsorship, events, etc. This more relevant information can become one valuable measurement or indicator in understanding how community stations are funded in relationship to the value they bring to their community. It is also an excellent example of how to look at information differently to make it meaningful for community radio. By adding relevancy to this data, the rate and timeliness of these returns from community radio stations could improve.

***I recommend that as part of its survey, the NCRA/ANREC collect revenue data in categories that will indicate a station's relationship with its community and can be reconciled with the CRTC revenue totals.***

If upon completion of an extensive survey, this categorization proves to be statistically meaningful, then *it should further be recommended that the NCRA/ANREC request of CRTC to include the revenue categorizations as part of revenue returns for community and campus radio stations if this is not currently the case, and publish data in this format for the community radio sector.*

**Statistics Canada** collects BBM data and CRTC information. Along with its own community demographic information, they have a communications section knowledgeable on the Canadian broadcasting regulations and its relevant data. Statistics Canada can assist in compiling useful reports to assist in learning more about community and campus listenership profiles.

### **Station surveys**

Through an email request to all campus/community stations from the NCRA/ANREC and telephone/email follow-up to 71 stations by the consultant, four surveys were forthcoming from three stations and one of these stations provided BBM station data from 2002. Three other respondents indicated they were planning surveys over the next year. Some were hesitant to share their data, usually due to privacy concerns. Others could not respond within the short time frame available to them. All of the surveys received were from community-based campus stations including Ryerson campus in Toronto, the University of Victoria campus, and two from the University of Lethbridge campus. One focused on students on the campus, the others included students and the local community.

The purpose of these surveys included issues of station awareness, listening preferences and demographics of its donors, and the desire to improve fundraising and some advertising revenue. These surveys were successful in identifying levels of station awareness, programming and music preferences, gender and age variables, and favourite listening times among its listeners. Some identified average listening times while another compared the “conventional” ratio of music listening preferences to the alternative music at its campus station.

In general terms, the surveys provided meaningful information for the community stations. However, they do not provide an overall critical understanding of its constituents

### **Large, medium and small markets**

The station surveys received from Toronto, Victoria, and Lethbridge do identify different values, each defined by its local culture and demographics.

CKXU Lethbridge, population 67,376 (Statistics Canada, 2001 census) attempts to reflect southern Alberta culture; the listenership survey suggests more Rock and Country music; the station struggles with brand identity on its own campus and looks for pragmatic marketing recommendations; the survey indicates that it is possible to increase its community listenership by several hundred people in the Lethbridge community over time.

CFUV Victoria, population 311,902 (ibid), rather than concerning itself with market share, wants to know more about the demographics of its listeners. CFUV listeners prefer Electric, Blues, Punk

and Jazz. The survey acknowledges that the diversity of its programs effect the breadth of listenership.

In 2002, CKLN Toronto, population 4,682,897 (ibid), boasted a 0.2 percent market share with a cume of 43,800 unique listeners. CKLN performs an annual survey to its donors. News and special programming appear to be of special interest to its constituency.

From this small example, it does appear that the interests among these communities vary in different cultural interests and organizational needs. A community station in a smaller population such as Lethbridge will still maintain a small percentage of market share, and therefore have a small listenership. A mid-size city, Victoria, is large enough to assume a following and can therefore entertain diverse programming with confidence. In Toronto, a community station has a miniscule market share that in real numbers reflects a significant following. However, the comparison does not provide the type or depth of information that provides clear insight into the impact and value of the stations on their communities.

### **Qualitative information – the literature**

*“If the public, as producer or audience, experiences his or her situation on many different levels simultaneously, the conflicts within the station reflect part of an external reality.’ Salter identifies the perspectives-in-conflict as three: those concerned with class, with participation and with process. ‘Each perspective represents a skeletal analysis of society, some commentary on the role of the media, and a prescription for Co-op programming and organizational structure.’” (Lewis and Booth p.130)*

The books I reviewed for this study, while stressing different aspects of community radio and culture, also complemented each other by providing consistent common themes. The literature focuses clearly on community value, volunteerism, and democracy in action. Much of the literature reviewed analyses specific Canadian community radio stations for their studies. I found the literature to be a rich source for understanding the nature of individual stations. The literature that focuses on the development of community radio praises the Canadian government initiatives to support community radio, at the outset and through the development of meaningful policies. A short suggested reading list (see Bibliography) is suggested as preparation for developing an ‘impact’ survey.

### **Qualitative information – the stories**

*“The station happened to be broadcasting an historically significant hockey game at the time the budget announcement was made [by the student union to eliminate funding to the station to shut it down]. The news was promptly broadcast. By the next morning, twenty-six professors and hundreds of students had left voice-mail messages [in] the student union’s mailbox. The president of the university collected hundreds [of] email messages sent by concerned community members, students and alum. The response from the community and UNB provided a clear mandate to continue funding at appropriate levels.” (Email excerpt from CHSR- FM, Fredericton)*

The stations unable to provide survey data were asked to provide a story that could best reflect the impact their station has on their community. Most of the stations contacted in person did take the time to provide an 'impact' story. It is through these stories that the passion of community and campus radio staff and volunteers is revealed. The stories colourfully cover the basics of this sector...volunteerism, exposure for local musicians and other local artists, focus on local news, especially during special events or crisis in the community, alternative points of view from mainstream media, protection of language rights and emphasis of language, culture and education on First Nation reserves. Some stations have 'bragging rights' as being the training grounds for prominent radio and television personalities in the public and private broadcasting sectors, particularly in news and journalism.

The stories and literature tell us that Native community stations perform a critical role regarding the survival of its languages, cultures, and health education. CICU, on the Eskasoni Indian Reserve, Nova Scotia, was developed in response to the wave of young people suicides in Big Cove, New Brunswick. The station manager of CICU has assisted with the development of three other Native radio stations on reserves, including CFTI in Big Cove. These stations focus on education as well as their First Nation traditions and languages.

Appendix A is a community impact statement from CJMQ 88.9 FM in Lennoxville, Quebec. It provides an excellent view into the diverse roles played by the community and campus radio sector and its impact on community across Canada.

The accessibility, diversity and alternate views required by community radio regulations come to life through the stories, which is fitting given that radio is an oral and aural communication medium. The challenge remains of how to quantify them in order to fully describe the impact of community and campus radio on its community in statistical terms.

### **Developing surveys**

From what I have learned through this review, I recommend that multiple surveys be conducted that build upon each other. The gaps in understanding and accurately reflecting community radio from a quantitative point of view are great, yet I believe it is possible through a building-block information and learning process.

The literature suggests that a national survey to measure the impact of community radio on its community must begin with the stations' organization structures, management and levels of democracy (and therefore, conflict) in their decision making processes. If Fairchild is correct (and the other literature reviewed tends to corroborate that he is) in his thesis that the structure of organization and decision making in community radio is a microcosm of the community it represents, then this should be the beginning point. The initial survey should be structured in a manner that would categorize and measure the organization structures, the diversity of the people making the decisions and the level of democracy in the decision making process. Detailed revenue and expenditure data would be collected at this stage.

The second building block would consist of a survey that provides outcomes regarding the diverse

programming expected of community stations in terms, for example, of its distribution and diversity of spoken word programming (possible categories might include news, local issues of importance, nature of political discussions, diversity of interviews, and with educational programming, demographics of audience). The same process would occur for music selections and include access to local musicians and artists. Even alumni information for those who have made it a stepping-stone to occupations, vocations, and lifelong passions can become valid data regarding station impact to the local community and beyond. A correlation analysis between the first two studies would clarify the nature of organization structure in terms of its impact on community.

The third survey block would identify groups of selected stations that would best reflect the Canadian cultural mosaic (and CRTC categorizations of non-commercial and public radio). A listenership survey based on these groupings would provide extensive nation wide data. The survey would be built out of the knowledge gained from the first two surveys. A telephone survey may provide the most consistent and value added data. The outcomes from this study would provide the final elements for a complete picture of the impact that community radio stations have on their communities in Canada.

The fourth and final block would be to work with the CRTC, Statistics Canada, and BBM to develop measuring tools that would measure data appropriate and specific to community radio.

It is promising that the CRTC Broadcasting Policy Monitoring Report 2005, under the section of Social issues (p. 93), identify diversity and accessibility as two of its four social policy objectives. The report indicates that “the Commission put forward specific measures and objectives in order to...encourage broadcasting licensees to continue efforts to increase production and broadcast of regionally produced programs reflecting the realities of those communities...and recognize the special role of community radio stations.” (p. 96). Under Social issues section on diversity (pp. 96, 97), the Commission identifies “two clear objectives for the Canadian broadcasting system with respect to diversity: The broadcasting system should be a mirror in which all Canadians can see themselves...[and it] should be one in which producers, writers, technicians and artists from different cultural and social perspectives have the opportunity to create a variety of programming and to develop their skills.”

It is encouraging to note that CRTC continues to recognize the unique role of community radio stations. It is clear from this review that continued study to understand the significance of community radio on its community is required to fully appreciate its relation to the values of accessibility, diversity, education and training as well as democracy and social justice.

## **Summary**

There is sufficient review of Canadian community radio stations through academic literature along with community radio stories that support the literature to draw a fairly clear picture of community radio in Canada. The traditional measuring tools for commercial radio are insufficient to indicate the impact and value of community radio to its community. The station surveys reviewed, while informative, tend to focus on typical marketing techniques that do not necessarily get to the essence of community impact. A careful strategy will be required to first understand the existing theories

on community radio, and second, to test those theories through strategically defined survey instruments.

*“These three models are more than an analytical system of differences: Politically and economically they are engaged in mutual struggle. The logic of the commercial system is to swallow up new markets and extend its frontiers to compete with, even undermine the public service domain. The logic of the public service is to defend national territories, industries and identities against such invasion. The logic of community radio is to defend human rights against the intrusion of both state and capital.” (Lewis, *The Invisible Medium* p. 10)*

## Bibliography

There were numerous web articles, emails, broadcasting regulations, letters etc. that I referred to in completing my research and have not documented below. These listing represent books, articles, reports, and surveys that became important sources for this study.

\*\* Indicates suggested reading in preparation for developing a community radio survey

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## **Appendix A: A community impact statement (from Email)**

From: David Teasdale, CJMQ, Lennoxville, Quebec  
To: Jim Riva, Consultant  
Date: Tue, March 21, 2006 1:10 pm

Hi, It was a pleasure to talk to you,

CJMQ is the only locally produced English Broadcaster in the Eastern Townships of Quebec.

There are 225,000 people in our broadcast zone.

It has been confirmed by two different sources that we have over 30,000 listeners.

CJMQ is part of the Emergency Broadcast System for our region. We work together with the local hospitals, Fire, Police departments as well as the local Amateur Radio Club. CJMQ was in fact one of the instigators of this effort.

The impact that we have on our community is faceted into the following spheres of activities.

We provide a voice to the English Community of the Townships that helps them to be a cohesive, lively, functioning community. The Eastern Townships is large and the English Community is spread out. The most effective way for us to keep in touch with what is going on in our community is through radio.

Radio is instant and readily available to all. Everyone already has the equipment required to listen to radio. The immediacy of radio has made it the first choice in emergency situations or disasters.

We announce all local events for non profit organizations for free. We give interviews that are not time limited to various groups touching on subjects that are important to all of us.

We are literally one phone call away, members of the community can call and know that we will be there in any type of situation.

Local commerce, especially those that are just starting out can't afford regular commercial rates for advertising so we give them advertising for a fraction of the cost and sometimes we advertise their commerce for free if necessary, until they can get on their feet. We know that if a local commerce succeeds it is likely that they will perhaps hire someone from opportunities for the members of the community.

Community radio offers an immediacy and a level of familiarity. The broadcasters heard on community radio are your neighbour, cousin, brother, son, daughter... people that you meet at the grocery store in essence they are you.

CJMQ is an all-volunteer organization, there are no paid positions at CJMQ.

Our transmitter and antenna used to be located on a tower that was poorly situated and perpetually for sale. The tower was not maintained by the owner and so no qualified technician would climb it.

We re-located to the Radio Canada tower, this move took us three years to accomplish, but that was mainly due to the paper work that had to be done with Industry Canada and the CRTC.

We were very lucky that the CBC assumed most of the cost of the physical transfer in order to correct an interference problem they were causing us with their CBC-2 transmissions. It turns out that the way to minimize the interference was for both antennas to be on the same tower. CBC was very helpful to us and even helped me to move the transmitter in the middle of a fierce snow blizzard that had ripped our coax off of our tower.

There used to be paid positions at CJMQ and virtually all of our money went into these salaries leaving nothing for equipment. All of our equipment was out of date, broken or not functioning to full capacity.

The move of the transmitter and antenna including engineering reports cost us about 20,000\$ the replacement of old equipment cost us 80,000\$ and we haven't even changed our aging, ailing transmitter yet. We estimate 70,000\$ for the change of the transmitter.

CJMQ impacts the community in other ways. We promote local talent by highlighting a different local band every week, producing a single for them and putting that single in our play rotation.

We started a Children's Story Telling Time, this involves community members coming to the station to read Children's stories which we then air every week.

We have received permission from many local authors to read their books on air so we pre-record their books and air them one chapter at a time.

We have another project where we take historical books of the region, and do the same thing with them. The first book we did was on Reginald Fessenden, Radio's First Voice, it was very appropriate that we do this book since Mr. Fessenden was crucial to the development of Radio and in fact without his invention radio and television would not be possible. Mr. Fessenden was born here in the Eastern Townships and attended Bishop's.

We are currently working on two books both written by C.M. Day in 1863, titled respectively "Pioneers of the Eastern Township" and "The History of the Eastern Townships".

Community members can become involved at all levels of the station. We teach them broadcasting, they can become members of our Board of Directors, or they can get hands on at the station and see what goes into operating a radio station.

We have set up a computer play list that plays whenever there is no live show on. This list is made up of songs by local, regional, provincial, and Canadian artists in that order, as well as classic rock hits. We take two songs and put them together using a computer and we add a voice announcing what the songs were and who the author was. We get many calls and letters from listeners complimenting us on the playlist.

We get several calls asking about these songs and where they can buy them, most of the time the callers are asking about new songs by local artists.

CJMQ attends local events and provides music for many of these events, including Friendship Day, Winter Fun Day, Townshippers Day and the local fairs.

CJMQ also covers local sports events and breaking news stories live. We have covered train derailments, major fires and flooding. People listening to CJMQ knew right away whether or not there were any toxic leaks from the train derailments, or if everyone got out of the apartment building that burned to the ground and was home to 40 students. We had parents call us after and thanked us for the coverage.

We have done interviews with the local hospitals, fire dept. police, juvi suicide prevention, the diabetic association etc. describing what services are available and whether or not they are available in English.

The radio station is the uniting force of the community especially given the geographically dispersed nature of our community.

When someone does an interview on community radio, we don't limit them to 30 seconds like commercial radio stations do. We also have less advertising so we have more time for content and music. Community radio tends to be more laid back and less stressful to listen to than commercial radio.

Commercial radio will never be able to cover stories the way community radio stations do because they have to answer to their owners and advertisers, that is why during the ice storm Montreal based stations stopped talking about conditions in the Townships or where citizens could go for services as soon as the power was back on in Montreal, in spite of the fact that some regions of the Townships were without power for three months.

Well I guess that is it for now, I'll probably think of more after.

David

This publication is a production of the  
National Campus and Community Radio Association  
Association nationale des radios étudiantes et communautaires  
NCRA/ANREC

Funding provided by the  
Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission  
Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des télécommunications canadiennes  
CRTC

The NCRA/ANREC is the not-for-profit national association of organizations and individuals committed to volunteer-based, community-oriented radio broadcasting. We are dedicated to advancing the role and increasing the effectiveness of campus and community radio in Canada. We work closely with other regional, national, and international radio organizations to: provide developmental materials and networking services to our members, represent the interests of the sector to government and other agencies, and promote public awareness and appreciation for community-oriented radio in Canada.

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