chapter 1

introduction to the project

I see the role of community radio to be, or I believe it should be based on exactly what it is saying, community radio, and community involvement, opportunities for the community, serving the community, educating if you want to, the community, informing, entertaining but with the community always in mind. It obviously goes beyond that as well, but that is the basis. I think that is a good way to start myself. Even providing opportunities for the community, because every one of us belongs to a community…. (Melbourne Focus Group, 2001).

This sentiment expressed by one community radio volunteer epitomises the purpose of Australia’s community radio sector. The willingness of the sector’s 20,000 or more volunteers, scattered from metropolitan centres to regional towns and rural, often-isolated communities to produce local broadcasts is a heartening phenomenon in the Australian media. Though not without its faults, the sector does much to represent Australian cultural diversity through encouraging and demanding active citizen participation in the public sphere. For the uninitiated, community radio is part of Australia’s third tier of broadcasting and is governed by discrete legislation under the Broadcasting Services Act (1992). Among other principles, the Act requires that community stations be not-for-profit; represent the community they have been licensed to represent; and significantly, encourage their communities to participate in station operations and program content (Thompson, 1999:23). In line with this, community radio stations see their listeners as potential volunteers. By advocating the participation of citizens in local broadcasting and thus supporting the community by broadcasting issues and ideas of immediate relevance to their everyday existence, community radio has established itself as a real and relevant ‘alternative’ to other radio services in many Australian cities and towns. In Australia, the tyranny of distance deems this local participation and coverage particularly important – or as another contributor to our focus group explained: ‘…there’s no point expecting people in Bunbury to know what’s going on in Albany; you need Albany people to know what’s going on in Albany…’ (Albany Focus Group, 2001). Central to community radio’s role in Australian broadcasting is to effectively, ‘let Albany people know what’s going on in Albany’.

This report is the culmination of three years of research funded and supported by the Australian Research Council, the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, the Community Broadcasting Foundation and the Federal Department of Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts. Coordinated by researchers from Griffith University's Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, this project examines the current state and role of Australia's community broadcasting industry.

The project was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on the sector. Consequently, the fieldwork for the project involved several stages:

1. Telephone Survey of Station Managers
2. Telephone Survey of General Volunteers
3. Telephone Survey of News and Current Affairs Volunteers
4. Focus Group Discussions involving Metropolitan and Regional Centres in each state.

We interviewed sector bodies, such as the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council, Radio for the Print Handicapped Australia, the Community Broadcasting Foundation and the Association of Christian Broadcasters, and canvassed a wide range of literature on the community radio industry in Australia and overseas.

The first component of the study, a survey of all community radio stations, was designed to cover a broad range of issues pertaining to community broadcasting. Station Managers were questioned about subscription levels, volunteer participation, their perceived contribution to the local community, training offered, news services and some basic demographics concerning income, age, education, etc (see Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2000; 2001). The second component of the study, the survey of General Volunteers, sought information about ‘everyday’ volunteers involved in on-air presentation and/or program production, asking questions about their programs, aims, audiences, and their reasons for involvement in community radio. The third national survey of News and Current Affairs volunteers collated data on, among other things, how these workers obtained their information, station policies on news and current affairs, journalistic practices, editorial autonomy and if, indeed, they saw themselves as professional journalists. All three surveys shared some questions on the respondents’ general views on community radio and demographics. Cumulatively, we conducted more than 350 interviews. Some lasted only 20 minutes while others continued for several hours and included lengthy discussions on issues affecting the sector.

The final stage of fieldwork, the focus group discussions, gathered more substantive and qualitative commentary on themes that either emerged as significant in our analysis of the survey results, or were of particular interest to the research team and our industry partners. Invitations to participate and a schedule of focus group venues were sent to every fully licensed community radio station in Australia. The focus group discussions were conducted in the following centres: Brisbane; Townsville; Canberra; Sydney; Bathurst; Darwin; Hobart;
Melbourne; Warrnambool; Adelaide; Port Augusta; Perth; and Albany. In each focus group, we posed general areas for discussion which were:

- The Role of Community Radio
- Funding and Resources
- The Use of New Technologies in the Sector
- Training
- Representation for the Sector – peak bodies and sector representatives
- The Future of Community Radio

Participants were also invited to add any other issues they thought significant. The focus group discussions yielded approximately 35 hours of discussion that we categorised using the Qualitative Research Software, NVivo.

Participation in both the surveys and the focus groups was strongly representative of the make-up of the community broadcasting sector. This supports our contention that the findings of this study offer an accurate picture of the sector at the turn of the millennium. State participation, for example, parallels the distribution of community radio stations (see Fig 1). While New South Wales is marginally over-represented (by about two percentage points), and Queensland is under-represented by about 3 percentage points, the remaining states are fairly accurately reflected in the figures.

**Figure 1: State breakdown in survey and actual state breakdown**
Similarly, the breakdown of station formats based on respondents to our survey accurately reflects the dispersion of station formats across the sector (see Fig 2). While Educational, Indigenous and Ethnic format stations are slightly over-represented (by less than 2 percentage points in all cases), Generalist stations are slightly under-represented as are Religious stations, and those with an RPH format. Despite these slight differences, the figures indicate that the responses for this study are generally representative of the community radio sector as a whole.

**Figure 2: Station formats in survey and actual station formats**

![Graph showing the comparison between surveyed formats and actual format breakdown.](image)

The areas of service represented in our surveys were also indicative of the actual make-up of the sector, with the large majority of stations – more than 60 percent – located in regional areas. While the metropolitan and sub-metropolitan stations are often the largest, regional areas of Australia clearly contain the largest number of community radio stations. There were no figures available to directly compare our ‘area of service’ proportions with sector proportions, but a preliminary breakdown based on a Station List provided by the CBAA indicates our sampling is accurate.
As the sector approaches its 30th Anniversary, the national snapshot provided by this research is timely and will provide both governments and sector representatives with a clearer picture of the sector in all its diversity. Australian community radio (and more generally, community media) have previously lacked definitive research data on their character and operations – as noted by the recent Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into Broadcasting (2000). With few notable exceptions (Van Vuuren 2002; Thornley 1995; Barlow 1995, 1997, 1999; Bear 1979, 1983; Moran 1995; ATSIC 1999; Morris & Meadows 2001), Australia’s community radio sector has not received comparable prolonged academic or government attention and consideration. The paucity of available material on Australian community radio reflects a broader international trend in community media research. In their analysis of community radio regulatory and funding arrangements in Australia, Ireland, France, The Netherlands, Canada, South Africa and Australia, Price-Davies and Tacchi (2001; also Tacchi 2001) note the ‘lack of co-ordinated information and data available’ for scrutiny in both national and international contexts. This study seeks to redress this imbalance, at least in the Australian context.

In part, this research project aims to attract some well-earned and prolonged attention for Australia’s community radio sector. Initially, we provide an overview, examining the sector’s past and present, and putting the Australian industry in the context of previous Australian and international research (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 profiles the sector, and addresses the issue of who is working in community radio by looking at age, gender, political beliefs, salary levels, education, work hours, and so on. By understanding the people who are creating content on community radio, we are better able to analyse and understand the structure, role and programming strategies applied across the sector. Chapter 4 looks in detail at what we have called the ‘cultural role’ of the community radio, which is an attempt to describe the role that
community stations play in our local communities, and in society generally. Specifically, we consider the sector’s contribution to issues of revitalised citizenship, production of Australian content, and representation of community diversity. The following chapter extends this theme, examining the sector’s important role in providing access and for Indigenous and ethnic groups. Both the surveys and focus group discussions revealed that Indigenous and ethnic stations comprised some of the most established and well-respected (and successful) stations in the sector, and Chapter 5 looks at the role and contribution of these in more detail.

An important theme that emerged from both the surveys and focus groups was the training role of the sector. When we began this project, the primary raw data we had to draw upon was a previous training survey by DCITA. We expected training would form a major part of our investigations — and indeed it did. Our study has confirmed that this is one of the primary roles the sector is fulfilling for the broader media industry and which is largely unrecognised. In particular, the training provided to people who often leave community radio stations soon after for either public or commercial broadcasting emerged as a major issue for industry workers. Chapter 6 examines this and related training issues in more detail. Chapter 7 looks at the contribution by the sector in producing news and current affairs by evaluating the original and local services offered across Australia. The findings of this chapter are primarily based on the results of the survey of news and current affairs workers. We also consider the sector’s National Radio News service and the more recent web-based Ethnic News Digest, which was created after our project began. Chapter 8 offers an overview of one of the most important issues facing the sector today – funding. In an era of decreasing Federal government support, stations have been forced more and more to look towards commercial solutions for their revenue. While some stations embrace this approach, others are concerned that the ‘creep of commercialism’ is affecting the structure, aims and content of the sector. This chapter examines these issues, raised by a number of people in both the focus groups and surveys. Our concluding chapter draws together the issues raised throughout and provides some thoughts for further consideration by the industry, their stakeholders and policy makers.

Limitations of the research

Given the size and diversity of the sector, along with time and financial constraints, there were some limitations on the project. While we are satisfied that we have consulted with a representative sample of community radio workers in Australia, there are areas of the sector worthy of future research. While there has been some research into the full-time ethnic radio stations, there has been little targeted work on either the Radio for the Print Handicapped Network, or the Association of Christian Broadcasters network. While we included all of these groups in our study, closer scrutiny of their specific roles and relationships with communities
suggests opportunities for further research. Our necessarily limited fieldwork meant that we did not consult aspirant stations (although some representatives did miraculously appear during our focus groups!) or BRACS stations as they had already been the subject of inquiry (ATSIC 1999; Morris and Meadows 2001). Other studies (Rennie, 2002) have also helped to pave the way into an understanding of the community television sector — we have not included television stations as part of this project.

Some responses to the results we have published thus far have noted the need for sector-wide audience research. We agree that addressing the absence of data in this area should be a priority for future work. There is a belief within policymaking circles that community radio can justify funding increases only if it can show evidence of substantial audiences – while we recognise the importance of audience analysis, our research suggests that it should not be seen as the main determinant of community radio success. It is one element of a complex structure. The attraction of large audiences was not part of the original ‘brief’ for the sector – the focus was on accommodating community groups and servicing niche audiences not otherwise satisfied by commercial media. Our study offers new data concerning the many local processes that essentially define the sector — these are inexorably linked to any analysis of the success and value of community radio.

We hope we have represented with due respect and regard the views of those volunteers, employees and station managers we encountered during this project. We aimed to complete our timely examination to increase understanding of this significant and yet relatively unknown sector of the Australian mediascape.
Community media around the world variously bear the tags ‘local’, ‘access’, ‘radical’, ‘alternative’, ‘rural’, or ‘non-profit’. They tend to emerge where communities are denied access to existing forms of expression (Thomas 1993:63-65). For example, the development of community radio in post-apartheid South Africa (Wigston 2001) is an attempt to secure democracy, freedom of expression, and diversity of broadcast content and ownership previously denied (Tacchi 2002). Community media includes radio, television, video, popular theatre, print and more recently, the Internet. The emergence of community and public radio and television has been touted as the ‘most vibrant and hopeful response to the trend towards globalisation and commercialism’ because local communities identify more strongly with local cultural issues (Herman & McChesney 1997:200). Results from our focus groups support the observation that community media can challenge globalising trends:

…I can go from one day to the end of the next week and not watch television or watch the news…for me in the short term, I’m not really fussed what’s happening out in the world. I’m sort of fussed about what’s happening here, locally, because that’s what effects me day to day…you see it on the news about globalisation, I think people are getting tired of that, they want to come back to home and find out what’s happening in their backyard. I think that’s where we are fitting into that niche that has been missing, certainly in Albany for a long time (Albany Focus Group, 2001).

Radio is by far the most widespread medium for community use nationally and internationally. It has proved to be better than most as a medium of social communication at the community level (Roncalgiolo 1991:206-208). The community sector worldwide is diverse and expanding yet manages to maintain a special bond with its varied communities — described by some as a ‘participatory relationship’ (Girard 1992:13). Australia’s community broadcasting system is different from those in continents such as Africa, Asia and Latin America where the state maintains tight control (Camara 1997:14). Although Latin American community radio is considered to be the most dynamic and diversified, it operates in a problematic legal and political environment (Girard 1992; Lopez-Vigil 1996:8-9; Truglia 1996:10-11). In the United States, a recent resurgence of pirate radio reflects community dissatisfaction with licensed
community broadcasters who are becoming ‘less distinguishable from mainstream media’ (Robinson 1997:17). Further north, the community radio sector in Canada is deemed to be ‘drastically’ under-funded with stations operating on annual budgets of $10,000 (Girard 1992:10). State-controlled systems pervade the Pacific Islands and Papua New Guinea (Alverez 1997:24-25; Molnar & Meadows 2001) while Australia and New Zealand have legislated for discrete community sectors with provision for access and participation (Alverez 1996).

In Australia, The Broadcasting Services Act 1992 provides discrete legislation for community broadcasting. Amongst other principles, the Act requires that community stations be not-for-profit, represent the community they have been licensed to represent and significantly, that stations encourage their communities to participate in their operations and program content (Thompson 1999:23). Unlike other media, community radio sees its listeners as potential volunteers. While (in the vast majority of cases) not commanding comparable audiences to commercial media, community radio performs a vital task in the Australian community enabling representation in the public sphere for those who would otherwise be denied access. In its early stages, community radio was precisely about ideas of ‘democracy’ and the need to provide an opportunity for Australia’s diverse communities to be heard (and to hear themselves) over the airwaves.

In 1932, the Australian Government established a dual radio broadcasting system in Australia. This dual system consisted of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation) as publicly owned and funded, and commercial services which were privately owned operating only in specific areas. This broadcasting arrangement remained relatively unchanged until 1972 when grassroots movements and other political forces joined to campaign for a third tier in Australia’s broadcasting environment (Bear 1983). Dissatisfaction with existing broadcasters prompted music enthusiasts, educators, ethnic groups, religious groups, trade unionists, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other interested parties to lobby for community access to the airwaves. Between 1972 and 1975, the Whitlam Labor government1 (Barlow 1999) granted the first low-powered community radio licenses for the broadcast of educational and course material by universities (Moran 1995:151). ‘Fine music’ stations followed with 2MBS-FM Sydney in 1974,2 followed by 3MBS-FM in 1977. In 1978, the Fraser Liberal-National Country Party Coalition government fully enshrined the third tier of Australian broadcasting in legislation. Many authors have attributed the birth of the community radio movement to the reformist Whitlam Labor government (Seneviratne 1993;

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1 For a history of party political support for community broadcasting see Thornley (1995). Suffice to say here that both parties at varying times supported community radio initiatives.

2 There is some disagreement about which station was the first public broadcaster - ‘education’ stations associated with the University of NSW and the University of Adelaide pre-date 2MBS-FM.
Rosenbloom 1978). However, Thornley (1995) gives equal credit to both the Coalition and Labor government, but notes the first licenses were granted during the Whitlam era.

In its short history, the community radio sector has experienced phenomenal growth. In 2002, the Australian Broadcasting Authority listed 234 community broadcasters and 104 active aspirant stations working toward a full licence. In comparison, there are currently 255 commercial licenses. Of the 234 fully licensed community broadcasters, more than 60 percent are in non-metropolitan areas while in 37 places in Australia, community radio is the only broadcast service (Melzer 2001).3

The Australian community radio sector emerged from local grassroots action. As is the case today, supporters and participants of community radio represent a diversity of interests. Bear (1979:5-7) isolates four different groups that were primary participants in the development of community radio: fine music buffs; ethnic communities; educational institutions; and political groups. These four groups maintain a strong presence in the community broadcasting landscape and have evolved over the 25 plus years of community radio in Australia. The first FM station in Australia, 2MBS demanded ‘fine music’ on community radio and significantly, better reception via the FM spectrum. In 1991, the Australian Fine Music Network was established for marketing and other purposes. Fine music stations (with a broader definition than ‘classical music’ – now including jazz, blues, folk, light opera and others) can be found in every state in Australia and cater for musical tastes often absent in mainstream radio. A second pressure group, ethnic communities, sought access to the airwaves to ensure programming in languages other than English and to undertake their own culturally relevant programming. In 1975, 2EA and 3EA went to air although these were operated by the Federal Department of the Media. They were later absorbed by the establishment in 1977 of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). In 1979, 4EB went to air as a community-based ethnic radio station in Brisbane followed the next year by 5EBI (Moran 1995:150-151). In 2002, the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council reported more than 1700 hours per week of broadcasting in languages other than English on more than 100 community stations around Australia (58 regional and 42 metropolitan stations). These programs are broadcast in 100 languages catering for the broadcast needs of Australia’s multicultural community (Francis 2000:17; NEMBC 2002).

The third impetus for the development of community radio came from educational institutions. The University of Newcastle and the University of Adelaide were the first educational

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3 This history of Australian community radio ignores many frustrating delays, party political manoeuvres, specific issues relating to ‘radio activists’ etc. during the development of community radio. The path of development did not run smoothly. For further discussion see Thornley (1995); Bear (1979); Bear (1983); Barlow (1999)
institutions to become involved in community radio. In 1975, the Whitlam government issued twelve experimental tertiary licenses to groups generally associated with universities. Today the list of stations associated with universities includes Bathurst 2MCE, Lismore 2NCR, Radio Adelaide 5UV, Newcastle 2NUR, Darwin 8TOP and Sydney 2SER. Stations with an educational background cover a broad range of interests providing access to many communities including ethnic, educational, women, Indigenous Australians, youth, gay and lesbian and music groups (Moran 1995:151). Finally, there were politically progressive elements in the push for community radio (Bear 1979:7). Stations in this group include 4ZZZ, 2SER, 3RRR, 3CR and Canberra’s 2XX. These stations enabled groups such as Indigenous Australians, gay and lesbian, environmental, youth, anti-drug law campaigners and other politically marginalised groups to broadcast their political viewpoints and contribute to the diversity of opinions in the public sphere. All stations show a commitment to local non-commercial music. Contemporary community radio retains the legacy of fine music, ethnic, educational and politically progressive stations and now boasts additional categories including sport stations, Radio for the Print Handicapped (RPH), Indigenous stations, youth and religious/Christian stations. At first glance, it may appear that these diverse programming formats have very little in common. The *sine qua non* of community radio is its philosophy of community access and participation. A ‘community’ may be defined in terms of interest, geographical or cultural boundaries. However defined, enabling local access to the airwaves is a consistent and central theme of community radio.

The commitment to ‘democratising’ the airwaves is particularly evident in the sector’s Code of Practice (required under section 123 of the *Broadcasting Services Act* 1992). Among other principles, the code clearly states the sector’s responsibility to ‘seek to widen the community’s involvement in broadcasting and to encourage participation by those denied effective access to, and those not adequately served by other media’. Of course, this is a key feature of community radio that differentiates it from commercial media. The capacity of community radio to provide access to groups not adequately served by mainstream media is a consequence of both their ‘local community’ and ‘not-for-profit’ status: operating on a not-for-profit basis frees community broadcasters to pay less attention to audience measurement and more attention to their community’s profile and needs. To illustrate – in late 2000, the City Mayor of Shepparton in Victoria approached 3ONE, the resident community station, asking if they could secure an Arabic speaker as quite a number of Iraqi asylum seekers had moved into the area and there was a need for communication (CBX November 2000). The station identified a bi-lingual presenter who was able to broadcast for short periods each day in Arabic to the asylum seekers, providing information about their status in Australia and giving them news from their home country. This is just one example of the niche services community radio offers its communities — services that cannot be provided by their commercial
counterparts. Duty to diversity is articulated in the sector’s Codes of Practice in which the sector has a manifest mission to ‘present programs, which contribute to expanding the variety of viewpoints in Australia and enhance the diversity of programming choices available to audiences’. This resolution is particularly important in Australia where geography and the ‘tyranny of distance’ mean regional coverage and perspectives are vital to, and appropriate for, many communities.

A Framework for Understanding Australian Community Radio

A key finding from our research has been to identify community radio stations as a cultural resource in that they comprise a medium for representing, maintaining and reproducing local cultures. Culture can be defined as a ‘way of seeing’ the world which highlights the ‘production of meaning and aesthetics through a variety of practices’ (Stevenson 2001). Community radio is implicitly about conveying, representing, producing and maintaining culture. In some ways, this is equally applicable to commercial radio. The difference is that community radio’s commitment to local regions and to marginalised groups not served by mainstream formats means that they are able to represent a diversity of cultures not present elsewhere in the Australian mediascape. Commercial radio is primarily concerned with selling audiences to advertisers and it cannot afford to offend its audience through the broadcast of radical political viewpoints, ethnic language programming, or music formats with specialist appeal. Importantly, smaller regional services do not offer commercial radio feasible returns for financial investment.

A report by the House of Representatives into local radio (2001) found that although there had been a substantial increase in the number of radio services to regional areas, networking and syndicated services from metropolitan centres, pre-recording and automation diminished a real commitment to local content. The report found that the principal reason for the lack of local commercial radio services to regional areas related to commercial viability. Community radio can serve these regional and rural audiences and encourage them to actively broadcast their ideas for the simple reason that it has long been its primary responsibility to do so.

While there are clearly differences between community and commercial radio formats, it is problematic to reduce the community radio sector simply to an ‘alternative’ to commercial and public sector radio. The danger in seeing community radio as providing an ‘alternative’ is the tendency to reduce all its operations to this simplistic dichotomy. The ‘alternative’ tag is a concept the sector itself finds problematic, as seen in this exchange during our Adelaide Focus Group (2001):

Participant: ... for some people the word alternative is a dirty word because they focus on people with multiple piercings and dreadlocks and all that sort of thing, that’s the image, and that’s what alternative can mean. I think one of our most alternative programmes...is Roundabout, University of the Third Age. Totally not catered for.
anywhere else. Big audience for that reason and they are presenting a really, really valuable programme.

Participant: Alternative doesn’t mean anything unless you qualify what it is alternative to. So just to say it’s alternative means nothing, makes a gag, but if you say it’s alternative to something else, it makes a lot more sense. So I don’t think there’s any point in just saying it’s alternative, it doesn’t mean anything.

Participant: Well it’s perceived to be alternative to mainstream.

Participant: I think you can say ‘offers alternatives’, which is a different thing to saying “alternative”.

Participant: ...you can see in a City like Adelaide, and you can flit between four FM stations and roughly the same sound will come out, Rock -n- Roll anthem, Rock -n- Roll anthem, Rock -n- Roll anthem. It's alternative knowing that you are within that context ...even if you got a new commercial station in town they would do almost exactly the same thing...

Participant: It's not hard to be alternative at the moment.

Internationally, there is increasing recognition that the common perception of community radio existing (only) in opposition to mainstream media misrepresents other significant roles. While community radio participants from our focus group discussions see themselves as ‘offering alternatives’, what is equally important is the community created within the station and the process that creates and broadcasts locally relevant material (Morris & Meadows 2001). One focus group participant illustrates this additional dimension to the role of community radio by observing that ‘there is community within the station... as well as the community that’s listening to it’ (Melbourne Focus Group, 2001). It may be that program production is not necessarily the prime criteria on which to judge the success of community radio. It is also important to consider and evaluate the ways in which a community radio station facilitates the process of community organisation within the station and the cultural relationship between program producers and the community itself (Tomaselli and Prinsloo 1990:156). In attempting to move away from the alternative/mainstream dichotomy, Rodriguez (2002:79) favours the concept of ‘citizens’ media which she uses to account for:

…the processes of empowerment, conscientisation and fragmentation that result when men, women and children gain access to and reclaim their own media. As they disrupt established power relationships and cultural codes, citizens’ media participants also exercise their own agency in reshaping their own lives, futures and cultures.

Implicit to participation in ‘citizens’ media’ is the practice of setting priorities as to what should and will count as public information, thereby setting a local cultural agenda. Couldry (2002:25) argues that we should be more specific about an ‘alternative media’ definition:

By ‘alternative media’, I mean instead practices of symbolic production which contest (in some way) media power itself – that is, the concentration of symbolic power in media institutions.
Through their own production and creation of cultural ‘symbols’, groups and individuals participating in community radio combat many aspects of our dominant cultural traditions that often act to exclude or marginalise other cultures. Community radio challenges the power of large media institutions to set the cultural agenda – and this is a significant role for the sector, especially in Australia where the concentration of media ownership and the consequent growth in networking and syndication have resulted in a decline in local coverage. However, the concept of ‘alternative media’ does not adequately encapsulate the purpose and operations of community radio. Rodriguez (2002:79) urges researchers to move beyond definitions of community media that rely on what it is not, to an analysis of the ‘transformative processes they [media] bring about within participants and their communities’. In this report, we echo Rodriguez’ (2001, 2002) observations along with those by other community media specialists (Rennie 2002; Tacchi 2002; Couldry 2002; van Vuuren 2002) and assert that the ‘transformative’ roles played by these stations within their communities should become a focus for governments and policymaking bodies.

**Community Radio, Citizenship and Democracy**

From its inception, community radio in Australia was precisely about the democratic representation of Australia’s cultural diversity. It was concern for the representation of minority groups in broadcast media that prompted initial investigations into the feasibility of a community radio sector. In 1975, the Whitlam government’s Working Party on Public Broadcasting suggested that it was the responsibility of the new sector to provide neglected and minority interests with an avenue for participation in broadcasting. The working party asserted that access by trade unions, industry groups, professional groups, religious and all political, social, ethnic and cultural minorities would be effective in countering the discrimination these bodies experience within the existing dual broadcasting structure. At the time, the capacity of community radio to foster democracy via access to broadcasting and its associated potential to ‘extend the freedom of the individual, foster local independence and cultural enrichment’ were familiar in both government and community literature and consultations (Barlow 1999:86-87). The fundamental philosophy involving both the rights of groups to broadcasting opportunities and the obligations of democratic governments to provide an environment conducive to public participation, still underpins the community radio sector.

In the headlong rush toward economic efficiency and profitability, there is a concern that many of the altruistic ideals surrounding community radio and its role in ‘broadcasting democracy’ and ‘citizenship’ are being abandoned (we discuss this in more detail in Chapter 8). Increasingly, the community radio sector is being called to quantify its social and cultural benefits. Given the sector’s specialist audiences, traditional audience research methods are unlikely to produce results that impress governments. In a climate of economic rationalism...
where evaluation is framed by ideas of profitability, efficiency, competition and numbers, ‘soft’ notions like social and cultural benefit fail to carry much weight. Increasingly, social and cultural benefits are seen to flow from effective economic management. This situation is particularly pronounced in the Productivity Commission’s *Inquiry into Broadcasting* (2000) where acknowledgement of community broadcasting’s social and cultural benefits is secondary to the primary need to justify community radio in economic terms. The Commission (2000:275) concludes:

…[T]he major cost to the general community of community broadcasting is the opportunity cost of the spectrum they use. Community broadcasters receive ‘free’ access to scarce radio frequency spectrum and thus exclude other potential broadcasters.

‘Opportunity cost’ is an economic concept referring to the value foregone so that a resource might be used in a particular way. The ‘opportunity cost’ of the free allocation of spectrum is the amount commercial broadcasters would pay for the privilege. It seems that in financial terms *alone*, the allocation of spectrum for non-commercial broadcasting does not produce any outstanding financial rewards for government (Melzer 2001). Best financial practice and management is not, and has never been, the cornerstone justification for community radio. The point is that attempts to gauge the performance of community radio using criteria similar to those applied to commercial enterprises are at the very least, inappropriate. The Commission concedes this:

Society…may wish to give up some of the economic benefits to pursue social goals that are valued more than the associated loss of economic efficiency. That is, there is a collective judgment that the social value of the outcome is worth more than the opportunity cost of not applying those resources to the most valuable alternative use. Such a judgment requires more than an appraisal of considered opinions. A sound and reliable judgment cannot be made without rigorous cost-benefit analysis of alternative uses of the channels (Papandrea in 2000: 276).

At the same time that ‘social value’ is acknowledged, ‘a cost-benefit analysis’ is proposed as a fundamental and defining requirement. The difficulty in measuring the impact of community radio is described by an Adelaide Focus Group participant (2001):

Part of what I love about community radio is that you can’t measure its value. There are so many ripples going out. The impacts of what we do are immeasurable, because they are going out so far into the community. It’s a beautiful mystery, you kind of send it out and you don’t know how it’s going, what is the ultimate outcome of what you do.

Regardless of the lack of coordinated data on the sector, government inquiries relevant to community radio still manage to reach conclusions about the sector. The House of Representatives Report, *Local Voices – An Inquiry into Regional Radio* (2001), using a sample of the 200 plus community radio stations and 104 aspirant stations, concluded:
The Committee believes the community broadcasting sector is not autonomous. The viability of the sector needs further inquiry as should the use of spectrum for the community sector. The concern of the committee is simple. We concede the community sector does have the potential to deliver real live and local radio service to regional Australia. However, unless the communities theoretically served actually support their local community radio, the genuine and worthwhile aspirations of the sector will never be realised (2001: 41).

On the contrary, our research suggests that local and/or regional community radio stations do have the support of their communities. This is supported by the large number of volunteers taking part in community radio on a daily basis – in our estimation, the equivalent of $2.79 million in unpaid labour each week (see Chapter 3). Reports such as the Productivity Commission’s *Inquiry into Broadcasting* (2000) and *Local Voices* (2001) reveal a misconception of the fundamental philosophy and purpose of the sector. While community radio is concerned with the ‘bottom line’, it is not their *raison d’etre*. Community radio considers notions such as active participation, access, community, citizenship and representation of culture – issues that are enabled by (but are not defined by) spectrum allocation.

Over the past few decades, changes brought about by global movement of peoples and the impact of new information technology have challenged more traditional notions of democracy and citizenship. These changes are particularly relevant to the endeavours of the community radio sector. The traditional notion of democracy as a monolithic and static idea bestowed by the state upon equally static and homogenised citizens is no longer sustainable. Recent work by Rodriguez (2001, 2002) on community media argues that in a pluralistic society, we need to conceive of community media workers as involved in an ongoing process to articulate their citizenship (cited in Rennie, 2002:8). Democracy and citizenship are not solely defined in constitutional mandates, associated legal requirements and policy initiatives. These factors are present in Australian conceptions of citizenship as defined in the government’s most recent statement on this issue, *Australian Citizenship… A Common Bond* (2001). However, the ‘flavour’ of citizenship we have encountered in our study of community radio is remotely pertinent to the ‘Australian Citizenship Pledge’ and the ‘Affirmation Ceremonies’ for existing citizens so embraced by government in *Australian Citizenship* (2001). Like community radio, democracy and citizenship are located ‘within the everyday achievements of ordinary people’ (Rennie 2002: 12).

Community radio is a site where citizens claim cultural rights (Pakluski 1997: 80). Planning a community radio station can be thought of as a process of cultural empowerment — or cultural citizenship. It is the empowering process of engaging with others in the community and making public an internal dialogue about issues of interest in the local area — this is a distinct benefit of community radio. This pivotal local role should not be forgotten as it feeds directly into community radio’s role in broader considerations of democracy and citizenship. It
is this community process that identifies community radio as a valuable cultural resource in those communities fortunate enough to enjoy its services. From this perspective, the justification for community radio becomes less about justifying the cost of spectrum allocation and more about encouraging a sector that, despite financial and technical hurdles, is validating the existence of many smaller communities and their cultures.

**Community Radio and the Public Sphere**

Community radio volunteers have instigated a form of participatory democracy where a space is organised to facilitate the public dissemination of ideas and cultures marginalised by other broadcast media, or in the public sphere generally. This exchange during the Melbourne Focus Group (2001) highlights the freedom of expression enabled by community radio:

Participant: So also a community radio station is a facility where whatever point of view you want to put across, unless its defamatory, you’re free to do it, there aren’t any agendas. The government’s not on your back to keep quiet on certain issues, with commercial radio stations you are not sort kowtowing to your investors.

Participant: Absolutely.

Participant: I think that is one major function of community radio, it doesn’t matter what your point of view is, you are permitted and encouraged to put that view across.

Through their participation, these stations and their volunteers foster an additional ‘community’ dimension to the public sphere – the space where public opinion and debate occur (Habermas 1984). Implicit in their broadcast of ‘alternative’ ideas and cultures is the democratisation of the public sphere. The role of local media in democratising the public sphere has received attention in other recent community media research. Avison and Meadows (2000) have argued that Indigenous newspaper production has contributed to a re-conceptualising of Habermas’s notion of the public sphere. Similarly, in her work with the independent press in Australia, Forde (1997; 1998) suggests that journalism in that sector represents a crucial activity that extends contemporary ideas of the public sphere and democracy. The fundamental philosophy of access and participation furnishes ordinary Australians with the opportunity to contribute to the broad public sphere – a space dominated by large mainstream media organisations. Through their maintenance and support of a community public sphere, community radio stations position themselves alongside Australia’s other media institutions. As such, the role of community radio stations is simultaneously ‘philosophical’ in its commitment to localism and ‘pragmatic’ in the services, information and knowledge it offers to local communities.

A Western Australian Regional Focus Group participant takes up this idea of the role of community radio in providing local information relevant to the cultural agenda of its audiences:
Well I reckon community radio is very important because there is no community-based radio here in Albany. It is a very big centre and basically we are the only people that they can ring up and say ‘the whales are in Middleton Beach’, and we can go straight to air and say ‘pop down and see the Whales at Middleton Beach’, or ‘there’s a bad storm coming through Denmark, it will hit Albany at 3.00 this afternoon’. No other station here in Albany can do that… we are here, actually live all the day.

The space created by community radio for citizens to contribute to their own ‘community public sphere’ should not be underestimated.

Summary
Australian community radio is a valuable cultural resource by virtue of its commitment to maintaining, representing and reproducing local cultures. The title ‘alternative media’ does not account for the multiple roles community radio plays in the local context. While community radio contests mainstream and dominant representations of Australian culture, the local roles at the community level cannot be ignored. This perception of community radio highlights the empowering process facilitated by local access and participation and further, the relationships developed both within the radio station and by the station with the local community. A more accurate description of the sector would be ‘citizens’ media’ which acknowledges the pivotal role of citizenship and democracy in the broadcasting process.

The ‘local processes’ characteristic of community radio are particularly pertinent to emerging ideas surrounding democracy and citizenship. In these formulations, democracy and citizenship are (in part) seen as concepts that people articulate and practice in the course of their daily lives. Community radio promotes ‘cultural citizenship’ by enabling diverse cultures access to broadcasting opportunities in the public sphere. In short, cultures neglected or marginalised in the mainstream public sphere can be prioritised at the local community level. In this way, community radio actively contributes to the creation of a community public sphere which interacts with other sections of the local community to build and maintain a meaningful local cultural agenda. Their contribution to a community public sphere places community radio alongside Australia’s other media institutions and their efforts in the broader public sphere.
The bulk of our study on the community radio industry focused on the structure of the sector and the practices and cultural contribution of those working within it. In this chapter, we build a profile of community radio workers to provide an insight into the people regularly working in, and volunteering for, community radio. Importantly, it enables an analysis of the ‘average’ community radio worker/volunteer, and the ‘average’ station manager to give some sense of the personalities of the sector. Discovering exactly who is producing and presenting sector programming enables a better understanding of the sector itself. Only by profiling the people involved in this work can we begin to truly assess the diverse nature of the sector.

The issues presented here are drawn primarily from the findings of the demographics component of the national surveys, with some additional material from the metropolitan and regional Focus Groups.

We surveyed more than 350 people working in community radio – Station Managers, general volunteers and news and current affairs workers. The proportions of those who responded to our survey accurately reflect the make-up of the community radio sector (see Figure 1, 2, 3 in Chapter 1). Our state breakdown figures, details of station formats and area of service are all representative of the actual proportions existing in the sector. This indicates that the results presented in this chapter are representative of the sector as a whole – there is no over-representation, for example, of generalist stations, or of volunteers from New South Wales, and so on.

**The ‘average’ community radio worker**

Looking at the combined results of the station manager, news worker and general volunteer surveys, we can say that the average community radio worker is male, over 40 years of age and probably without a tertiary education. He is most likely to have been born in Australia of British or Irish descent, and is most likely to place himself politically in the ‘middle of the road’. He is slightly more likely to vote Labor than either Liberal or National at the next Federal election. We will look at these figures in more detail to gain an idea of how ‘average’ the ‘average’ community radio worker really is.
Almost two-thirds of people working in the community radio sector are male (see Figure 1). While this is consistent with other areas of media work (Forde 1997: 109; Henningham 1992), it does indicate that community radio’s commitment to providing equity for all people, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality etc is not yet fully realised. These results indicate women were more likely to be working in the sector as general volunteers and news workers, rather than as Station Managers. As reported previously (Forde et.al. 2001), more than 70 percent of Station Managers surveyed were male. Sector-wide, 62.2 percent of all community radio workers are male, and 37.8 percent are female, indicating a more equal participation by men and women in the general volunteer and news worker categories than in the station manager category.

Community radio workers are more likely to be baby boomers than Generation Xers. While most Gen Xers are now in their 30s, they are still under-represented in the sector. Almost 69 percent of community radio workers are over 40, and nearly 41 percent are over 50 (see Figure 2). This suggests that community radio workers are significantly older than their
counterparts in the alternative and independent press industry where the median age was around 35 (Forde 1997: 108).

Only 17.5 percent of community radio workers are under 30, and around 13 percent are in their 30s. So, as with the general Australian population – which is aging – community radio is dominated by the over 40s. However, this is consistent with the important training role that community radio fulfils for young broadcast workers – we believe these results are due to the fact that our sample was designed to attract responses from the most regular station volunteers. This would not account for the large numbers of high school and university students who spend short periods of time in the stations gaining work experience and industry skills. So, perhaps more accurately, most regular community radio workers and volunteers are in the over-40 age bracket.

One in five community radio workers indicated that they were retired or aged pensioners, again consistent with the age group findings of the survey. The proportions of seniors working within community radio – most of whom are volunteers – are generally consistent with the proportion of volunteer workers in the broader community (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002). However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found the largest number of volunteers in Australia came from the 34-44 age bracket. We can say, then, that community radio volunteers are, on the whole, slightly older than their counterparts in the broader community.

The Adelaide Focus Group heard one comment on the sector's age and cultural diversity:

You can always get more diverse than you are but in my experience, it is like the only place that I am ever likely to go to with this range of people. If you're older, you're usually in kind of groups with a lot of older people, or if you're younger, you are usually in groups with younger people. You don't mix that much; many people don't mix that much across cultural groupings and here in an average day we do that all the time (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

The Darwin Focus Group heard from a manager whose station has a range of different contributing age groups:

The majority of them, though, when they're coming in, they want to be on air and they want to be the star. And that's good. Our ages range from about 13 to about 87. I hope I'm as good as he is when I'm 87. He's marvellous. That's a pretty wide range. There's no breakdown whether there's more males or females. We sort of run in fads on that. Suddenly we get a run of females and the next couple of months it reverts the other way.

The Brisbane Focus Group also heard about a mix of young activists, more ‘mature’ 30-somethings, and older volunteers:

We've had a lot of activists who've become involved from an historical point of view...And we've found it's definitely a good thing having the late '20s and '30s people...
come, with a much more mature point of view, a much more reliable point of view. A lot of people come in...like if you're young, you might say, "Well, I'll play baseball next season" whereas the older ones might [stay around for longer]...It's been very hard to get a lot of young journalists to follow through...(Brisbane Focus Group, 2001).

Education

 Compared to the general Australian population, community radio workers are reasonably well educated. Almost one-third has completed tertiary study, and about four in 10 have at least some level of tertiary study (such as an incomplete degree). This compares with only about 15 percent of the general population with a tertiary degree (ABS 2000). Almost half (47.6 percent) have at least some form of post-school qualification, comparable with the figures for the general population which indicate about 44 percent of the Australian population has some form of post-school study (ABS 2000). Almost 5 percent of community radio workers have completed a postgraduate degree, which is slightly higher than figures for the general population (4 percent, ABS 2000). A large percentage has completed high school only, while about one in ten community radio workers have not completed high school (see Figure 3). A much higher percentage of the general population has not completed high school.

Figure 3: Education levels

About 14 percent of community radio workers are currently studying, either at high school or university level. Most of those are in part-time study. A much higher proportion of the general population compared to community radio workers has a trade or vocational qualification.
As journalism researchers ourselves, we were interested in the number of community radio workers who had degrees specifically in journalism, media or communications. Of those who had a tertiary degree, about one in five had studied journalism or media. The largest single grouping (about one-third) had studied general humanities, English, politics, or sociology. A reasonable percentage – more than 10 percent – had studied environmental science, and another 10 percent had a business or commerce degree. So of those who had studied, they were most likely to be general arts graduates rather than business, law, science or communications graduates.

**Politics**

The politics of community radio Station Managers became an interesting point for discussion when our initial results were released. Similarly, the politics of community radio workers across the sector as a whole provide telling results. What we have found is that generally, volunteers working for community radio are less conservative than their Station Managers. While we found Station Managers were more likely to vote Liberal than Labor, the reverse is the case for volunteers. When we combine the Station Manager figures with volunteer figures, we find that overall, the sector is more likely to consider itself left of centre, than right of centre (Figure 4). However, it is MOST likely to place itself in the middle of the road politically.

![Figure 4: Political leanings of respondents](image)

Almost one-quarter of community radio workers were undecided how they would vote at the next election, indicating a large swinging vote in the sector. Twenty-eight percent of respondents said they would vote Labor if a federal election was held tomorrow, while only 21
percent said they would vote for the Coalition (Figure 5). A significant 10 percent said they would vote either Democrats or Greens, which represents a higher primary vote than either of these parties generally receives at Federal elections. Votes for One Nation outweighed votes for the Democratic Socialists or the Indigenous Peoples’ Party, although figures for all these parties were very small. Only 2 percent of respondents refused to indicate how they would vote at the next election. So while community radio workers as a whole are more likely to be Labor supporters than Coalition supporters – and this is perhaps consistent with perceptions of the sector – they are generally most likely to be swinging voters and to consider themselves middle of the road politically.

**Figure 5: Federal election preferences**

And as with the politics of the sector, we have found the cultural background of community radio workers reflects the diversity of the Australian community generally. Indeed, the representation of Indigenous people in the sector is more than double the proportion in the Australian community generally, reflecting the strength of community radio in reaching communities without a voice in the mainstream broadcast media (see Figure 6).

Overwhelmingly, though, respondents were of British or Irish origin, although one-quarter had at least one parent from a continental European background.
Interesting comparative figures are generated when we look at the country of origin for community radio workers, compared to the country of origin for the Australian population generally. Three-quarters of community radio workers were born in Australia, which reflects almost exactly the proportion in the broader Australian community (ABS 2001). A further one in 10 community radio workers were born in Britain, which is slightly above the general population figure of 6 percent. About 2 percent of community radio workers were born in either Africa or Asia, with continental Europe comprising the most popular non-Anglo/Celtic place of birth (see Figure 7).

**Figure 6: Cultural background of community radio workers**
These figures indicate that while Indigenous Australians have strong representation in the community radio sector, some groups – for example Asian Australians – appear to be under-represented. We are cautious with these figures, however – our sample of 350, while broadly representative of the sector, has led to very small numbers of respondents in some ethnic groupings. A few additional interviews, for example, with Asian Australian volunteers could have put their representation over rather than under the national average. We therefore conclude that on the issue of ethnic representation, we need to speak broadly. We were unable to reach conclusions regarding the representation of the African-born population – those figures were not available as each African country fell below 0.3 percent of the population. However, we can say that most ethnic groupings seem to be over-represented in the sector, a good indicator of its cultural diversity. More accurate figures on the representation of various ethnic groups could be gained with a survey that interviewed most community radio sector workers, rather than a sample.

Volunteer hours
Our Station Manager survey found that community radio Station Managers were largely unrewarded financially for their efforts in the sector – 50 percent of them were carrying out their duties voluntarily. When we extended our survey to include general and news workers, we found that the overwhelming majority of them were volunteering for their stations for at least six hours a week. One quarter of volunteers contributed more than 26 hours of their time per week – more than a half-time appointment – while only 16 percent worked five hours or less. These figures compare favourably with general volunteering rates for the Australian community, where the highest average volunteering level was 2.5 hours per week, in the 65 and over age group (ABS 2000).

If we attempt to quantify the volunteer contribution of community radio in economic terms, the sector is saving both commercial and public broadcasting — indeed society as a whole – a significant amount of money in volunteer hours. We conservatively estimate that 20,000 people around Australia regularly volunteer for community radio. If the average weekly contribution is – again, conservatively – 10 hours per week⁴, then around 200,000 work hours per week are being contributed voluntarily in the community radio sector. If we take the median income of Australian workers, based on the latest ABS figures⁵, we estimate volunteers in community radio contribute free labour to the Australian community of $2.79 million per week — more than $145 million per year.

While there are clear benefits for many of the volunteers because of their involvement in community radio, it is important to note the significant contribution – and monetary savings – they represent to the government and society as a whole. Most community radio stations

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⁴ Calculated on the median weekly volunteer contribution from both the News and General Volunteer surveys
⁵ Median income of $538 per week. This equates to a rate of around $13.97/hr
have one employee or less (53.7 percent), with 90 percent of stations employing no more than eight people. Of those employees, most of the paid roles within community stations are in either administration or sales. This indicates the sector is recognising the importance of the need to generate funding and is rewarding those volunteers who take on the task of selling sponsorship time. One participant in the Victorian regional focus group indicated, however, that while he receives a wage for his sponsorship work, it was a little less than he originally expected:

…I have been with the station for eight years. The station is 13 years old. I stumbled across the radio station…on a visit home one time when I was seriously considering semi-retirement from broadcasting, having been in ABC and commercial radio. So I went to visit the radio station, not with the thought of ever working there, just to have a look at it. Having been in commercial radio there was this pesky beastly little thing that we called community radio that we tried to flick off our shoulder and couldn’t and I’d never been into one. So I went in and visited them and the woman running it explained to me that Dingo paid her wages and they did employ sales reps, sponsorship reps and they were paid on a basis of 40 percent commission. Having paid my staff 5 percent I thought 40 percent was fantastic and I could retire on that, so I told her that I would take the job, ‘til I found it was 40 percent of $70 per week…(Warrnambool Focus Group, 2001).

**Looking closely at the Station Managers**

The results presented so far have provided a general overview of sector workers and, as noted previously, are drawn from the results of our three surveys – of Station Managers, news workers and general volunteers. It is also worth looking more closely at the specific characteristics of Station Managers, as they are most often responsible for the overall tone and theme of the station. While many community radio stations operate democratically, with volunteers and members determining the direction of the station, the Station Manager is perhaps a reflection of that station’s character.

Our survey of Station Managers – which was the first completed for the project – provided some interesting findings about the level of commitment and involvement required to work in community radio. Given the demanding position of Station Manager, one could have assumed that the majority of these posts would be paid. This is clearly not the case. More than 50 percent of Station Managers are volunteers (see Figure 8). Of those Station Managers who are volunteers, about one-quarter are pensioners or retired people.

**Figure 8 – Employment status of Station Managers**
Station Managers have fairly average incomes, with one-quarter grossing less than $400 per week. Most Station Managers receive between $400-$1500 per week, although most are working full-time or part-time in other work and receive income from there. While the figures indicate nearly 30 percent of Station Managers are receiving between $700-$1500 per week, clearly one-third of stations are unable to afford such wages, particularly when coupled with the statistics which show that more than half of Station Managers are working in a voluntary capacity. So while the figures indicate that Station Managers are receiving wages at an average level, these are, in most cases, not the wage they are receiving from their community radio stations but rather from an outside source (such as a part-time or full-time job outside the station).

More than 70 percent of Station Managers are male and their average age is 49, which, as expected, is higher than the average age of volunteers. The gender breakdown indicates that while community radio has prided itself on policies concerning open access and equity, particularly involving women – the sector’s executive has featured a number of prominent women in recent years – the policies are not filtering down to the daily operations of radio stations. While figures for the sector as a whole represented a slightly more ‘equal’ representation of women, the results for Station Managers indicate there are many steps to be taken before there is an equal distribution of men and women in that role.

Our results show that most Station Managers have been involved with their community radio station for at least six years with around 30 percent involved for 10 years or more. This reflects a long-term and very promising commitment on the part of senior people within the sector.

Figure 9: Percentage of Station Managers Engaged in Activities

![Figure 9](image_url)
Station Managers fulfil a multi-skilled and generally overarching role within their organisations (Figure 9). More than half of those surveyed reported involvement in fundraising, sponsorship sales, marketing, promotions, administration, production and program co-ordination and training. The largest single percentage (87 percent) are involved in administration and roughly two-thirds (67 percent) in program coordination. Again, these results indicate the willingness and self-motivation of (for the most part) volunteers to engage in a plethora of skilled tasks to ensure the continued operation of their stations (Figure 9).

More than half of Station Managers did not have any tertiary or TAFE qualifications, although around 40 percent had completed at least some tertiary education (Figure 10). The vast majority do not have university or other qualifications in journalism or media studies. Predominantly, those with a tertiary education had qualifications in the humanities/social sciences and science/environmental science disciplines. The paucity of formal media or broadcasting qualifications further emphasises the 'grassroots' structure of community broadcasting. Involvement of Station Managers is dependent on personal motivation and philosophy rather than predicated on appropriate qualifications or career development — typically the rule in the other tiers of broadcasting.

Figure 10: Levels of formal education for Station Managers

Station Managers’ voting tendencies

When we presented the preliminary findings from this next group of results to delegates at the CBAA conference in November 2000, it was perhaps the area that raised the most interest
within the sector. Certainly, they indicate that community radio has made a substantial shift away from its ‘alternative media’ roots of the 1960s and 1970s, with an increasing number of conservative voters holding senior positions within the sector. About one-third felt they sat to the left of centre, with a sizable 45 percent nominating ‘middle of the road’ as the category that best described them politically. About 16 percent felt they were a little or pretty far to the right. Perhaps a more accurate indicator of political leanings is revealed in the question: ‘If a Federal election were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for in the House of Representatives?’

The results of this question show that more community radio Station Managers would have voted for the Liberal Party than the Australian Labor Party if an election were to be held the following day. If the Coalition votes are combined, they outweigh the Labor vote by about five percentage points. About one in ten said they would vote either Australian Democrats or for the Greens, with a sizeable 22 percent remaining undecided. It would have been interesting had there been a similar survey conducted 20 years ago to assess how political leanings might have shifted. We should also note that unfortunately, One Nation did not appear as an option in our survey coding, but support for that group can be said to be less than six percent as this was the total proportion that nominated a party ‘other’ than those listed.
Summary

In this chapter, we examined just one aspect of the results we have produced – the characteristics of community radio workers. The results presented here are important for a number of reasons. Firstly, in key categories such as age, ethnicity and politics, the average community radio worker is closely aligned to the ‘average’ Australian. This indicates that community radio is, in many areas, attracting a range of volunteers and paid workers who accurately reflect and represent the diversity of the broader Australian community – an important legislative requirement for the sector outlined in the Broadcasting Services Act (Price Davies et al., 2001). This does not imply that the content produced by the sector is similar to the content produced by other media outlets – indeed, our results indicate the sector is producing alternative content on many levels – but it does suggest that the contributors to community radio come from all sections of the Australian community. In areas such as the participation of Indigenous people, the community radio sector is playing an essential role in compensating for their under-representation in the broader media industry. In key characteristics such as age and gender, the community radio sector is showing that it is little different from the broader media industry – men constitute more than two-thirds of Station Managers, and just under two-thirds of the entire sector. While parts of the sector focus on a youth audience and there are many young university students involved in community radio, volunteers and Station Managers are far more likely to be from the baby boomer generation than from Generation X. The CBAA’s 2002 conference, which included a one-day Speaking Up! special for young community broadcasters, can be seen as an attempt by the sector to be more encouraging and inclusive of its younger contributors.

Secondly, community radio volunteers are giving up their time at a far greater rate than volunteers in the general community. The overwhelming majority work for at least six hours per week – compared to a peak of 2.5 hours per week for the average volunteer in the Australian community. This indicates high levels of commitment, involvement and most likely, personal satisfaction, for community radio volunteers. The community radio sector enjoys not only the participation of more than 20,000 volunteers, but also a demonstration by them of a high level of dedication and satisfaction with their roles through their strong contribution of unpaid work.

Finally, the discussions in our focus groups provided a great deal of evidence for the important community role that the sector is fulfilling. While many may argue there is still much to be done before community radio is a truly representative public forum – and our results would support this in some areas – there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that it is already providing a diverse and highly accessible medium. Particular stations may service niche areas of our community, but when considered as a whole, the people working in the sector are broadly representative of the diversity of the Australian community. While
mainstream media outlets – particularly commercial media – are dominated by ethnically homogenous presenters and producers, community radio, consistent with its charter, is more likely to include the many faces of Australia in its profile.
chapter 4

‘we want to be part of this’ – localism & culture in community radio

Participant: I was listening to one of the presenters coming over this morning and he actually lives at Heyward and he gives Heyward a fair bit of a plug. He was saying that one of the local footballers has made it into the VFL team that is playing in Melbourne on Saturday and he gave him a bit of a rev up. Those sort of things the local community gets to know about what’s going on and listens to what’s going on.

Participant: It’s what commercial radio did very well 25 years ago. (Warrnambool Focus Group, 2001).

Our research has affirmed community radio as pivotal in maintaining and reproducing local cultures. Adopting a broad definition of ‘culture’ as outlined in Chapter 2 not only draws our attention to perhaps more obvious sites of ‘culture’ such as Indigenous and ethnic communities, but also acknowledges the significance of local gardening groups, musicians and their audiences, or local sporting clubs in producing, maintaining and expressing local cultures. The contribution of the community radio sector to Australian culture – while difficult to quantify – can be demonstrated in the volume of evidence of community and cultural work that is accomplished. The community and cultural work performed by these stations makes meaningful a commitment to respecting cultural diversity and does much to encourage harmony and tolerance within the Australian community at large. The capacity of community radio stations to develop culturally relevant programming, to encourage the participation of diverse cultural groups in Australian broadcasting, and to deliver a myriad of services to the community establishes these stations as an important cultural resource in Australia. Stations produce and provide broadcast content to a variety of cultures present in Australia and this is important in terms of cultural citizenship and democratic participation in Australia’s public sphere. Community radio assists in the establishment of a community public sphere thus validating and empowering local community cultures.
It is important to acknowledge that the nature of service varies from community to community — region to region. But it is precisely this ability to reflect local cultural diversity that is community radio's strength.

**Metropolitan and Regional Stations**

Regional stations constitute the majority of community radio stations while metropolitan stations have the longest history in the sector — some metropolitan stations have been broadcasting as community stations for almost 30 years. Given the shared philosophy of access and participation, there are some significant differences in the services offered by regional and metropolitan areas. In metropolitan areas, there are often several community stations that serve more specific communities. For example, in Brisbane, 4AAA is an Indigenous station, 4MBS caters for fine musical tastes (from jazz to opera), 4EB caters for ethnic groups, and 4ZZZ caters for ‘alternative’ groups, opinions, local music and arts talent. A Melbourne participant describes metropolitan services as ‘complimentary’:

So you get this kind of complimentary pattern in a capital city that I think is quite different to what you can do within a regional place and it’s an issue of scale and how many communities of interests are put into one service. So if someone had come to me and said, ‘I really want to run a one-hour programme on Triple R which is for handicapped people’, then I would say ‘Well, we are unlikely to do that, you should speak to 3RPH (Radio for the Print Handicapped’). If there wasn’t an RPH aspect then we might need to look at what that community of interest is about more (Melbourne Focus Group, 2001).

Metropolitan stations perform a different cultural role in their communities. As one urban volunteer commented, ‘City stations see their role as “alternative” because there is no point in replicating that which already exists [in mainstream radio]’ (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001). Not enjoying a similar ‘critical mass’, regional stations often adopt a generalist format catering to their geographic constituency as well as other communities of interest within the region:

We’ve got groups in the community, groups that focus on jobs, on sport, support the arts. We’ve got quite a few community groups that are saying ‘we want to be a part of this’…We’re not having to go out and find people they are coming to us (Victorian Regional Focus Group, 2001).

Regional stations are often only one of a few choices available to audiences and thus, often serve a broader or more diverse community than their metropolitan peers. For example, 3WAY (Warrnambool, Victoria) and 3RPC (Portland, Victoria) cater to the local fishing community by providing information on weather conditions and other relevant issues (Victorian Regional Focus Group, 2001). Community radio station 5TCB (Bordertown, SA) serves a population of approximately 4000 people. It is the only station in the area and there are currently 36 other regional areas in Australia in which community radio provides the only service. As such, the station plays a critical role in disseminating local news and current affairs and information about cultural events and local happenings (Port Augusta Focus
Generally speaking, regional community stations provide locally relevant information to smaller communities.

**Local Knowledge – Cultivating Cultures**

When community broadcasting was first enshrined in legislation, the then Minister for Post and Telecommunications, Tony Staley (1978: 2) commented that community broadcasters, 'should have a better appreciation of the interests, hence needs, of their broadcasting communities than anyone else, including government'. Our results indicate that the cultivation of 'local knowledge' is a strong element in community radio endeavors, as this description of local program content supports:

[We produce programs about] local issues, health issues, local politics, community announcements. So we're not just there as access for people to come in and be presenters but for people to disseminate information on a particular area—as a community service, I suppose you could say (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).

Evidence of the community sector’s commitment to local information is clear in the number of hours dedicated to locally produced programs. From our national survey of Station Managers, almost two-thirds of respondents reported producing 100 or more hours of local programs each week.

*Figure 1: Hours of Locally Produced Programs*

An important aspect of maintaining community culture is the provision of local news and information. These broadcast services give audiences the opportunity to hear locally generated news and information that is immediately relevant to their everyday lives. A participant in our Melbourne Focus Group (2001) described how they ensured a commitment to local radio:

*Chapter 4 – Localism and culture*
With the programme that I do I have local content in it all the time and I have a segment...from around the area, that people are informed where they can go to. Like last week I spoke on depression, and there are people, especially around Kyneton and our area, people are depressed, and there are support groups out there. Mention a number, well they’ll be able to contact this particular person who … It’s a reach out, for my programme to help people in the community, to make sure that there is help out there for them…I make it essential, every week I have some local content in my programme.

The provision of local news and information is not always clearly defined as a ‘news broadcast’ and is often a simple matter of course for presenters:

Participant: It’s to inform the community as well, particularly focussing on things that are happening within the community. I think community radio tends to pick a geographical area and then broadcast to that so obviously its supplying that area with information that's relevant to their lifestyle, which is what the commercial stations can't do, because they broadcast to such a large geographical area and we can pinpoint and focus on issues and things that happen in the area.

Q: *And do you do that through your news?*

Participant: We do it through a whole different range of things. We have local news as well as a national news service. We have community announcements, we have interviews, and just comments that presenters make on air about things etc. We have our council that's actually involved with the station and is supportive of the station. They have air time talking about issues. We have our local member talking about things, so it’s through a whole range of things. A little bit of talk back, from time to time (Brisbane Focus Group, 2001).

Results from the national survey of Station Managers supported focus group participants’ comments on the importance of local news and information. The survey found that (without prompting) more than half of community stations saw their primary role in the community in providing local news and information. This was the single most frequently cited response.

**Figure 2: What do you consider to be your station’s most important role? (Most common responses)**
More than one third of Station Managers described their role as ‘entertainment’. Frequently, those respondents in the ‘other’ category saw themselves as ‘specialist’ stations, catering to ethnic groups, Indigenous communities, or religious groups and defined this as one of their most important roles. These ‘specialist stations’ also perform a news and information function in their own communities. Another frequent response to this question was to define the role of community radio as an ‘alternative to the mainstream’.

A follow-up survey question (with prompting) asked Station Managers to describe the contribution their station makes to the local community. More than 90 percent of respondents nominated the provision of access (and participation) to community groups. The only other category that achieved more than 50 percent of positive responses was the station's contribution to community cultural events. Community radio stations frequently organise outside broadcasts for local cultural events and festivals that often incorporate discussion with, and representation of, local artistic talents. For example, Artsound (Canberra) broadcasts from their local folk festival; 5UV Radio Adelaide organizes numerous outside broadcasts (and recordings) for both local, national and international festivals; 5UMA (Port Augusta) organises outside broadcasts for NAIDOC week as does 4AAA (Brisbane). 3WAY (Warrnambool) is also a frequent participant in local festivals. This list is not exhaustive, but is an example of the way in which community radio nurtures the development of local cultural identities. Of the other responses, about 40 percent emphasised ‘other contributions’ to the community — this included the representation of ‘specialist groupings’ such as ethnic communities, young people, etc. ‘Other contributions’ frequently referred to the station's contribution as a local alternative to the mainstream radio stations and as a forum for the broadcast of local music.

Figure 3: How would you describe the contribution your station makes to the local community? (Note: No prompting for responses)
Participants in the focus group discussions and telephone surveys consistently confirmed their commitment to the representation of diversity and the important role played by their stations in enabling local access to broadcasting opportunities. Also evident from the focus groups is the willingness of community radio stations to adopt a proactive approach in their communities. For example, Hobart (2001) participants recounted recent community activities involving a local prison:

We took a local band—because of what we do here [we have our] own band. They thought that was absolutely wonderful. The year before I contacted the prison authorities and asked them if any of the prisoners would like to send a cheerio to their loved ones outside, and I announced it on radio, and we had a lot of people from the outside who wanted to send cheerios to people inside the prison…I couldn't imagine the other radio stations doing that. They wouldn't have the time for a start. We had to have other people going up to the station—myself and three other people, and we just spent hours and hours doing that... Commercial radio wouldn't have had the time.

Initiatives such as these are important in representing diverse components of the community, and highlight the capacity of community radio to engage in a meaningful way with its local audiences. 2AAA in Wagga Wagga services a notoriously dangerous section of a local highway and a representative offered this example:

We started presenting a truckies radio programme from midnight to 5.00am... It's designed first of all to help truckies stay awake. It's designed as a community thing for the trucking industry, to make a little bit of money and to fulfill our role as a community broadcaster (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).

In the case of 2AAA, the trucking industry is a significant part of the local cultural landscape and the station’s efforts to provide a service to this section of the community shows its ability meet the needs of a specific audience.

Community broadcasting and Australian content

Community radio’s commitment to local culture may also extend beyond their immediate geographical location or ‘community-of-interest’. The sector’s production of Australian content is significant, particularly in light of increasing reliance – particularly on Australian television – on US content. Coverage of local cultural events and festivals, support of local writers, artists and musicians and the subsequent creation of Australian radio content encourages community participation in the public sphere at the local level. Our research has revealed many examples of community radio’s dedication to Australian cultural production. Amid the deluge of cultural products manufactured elsewhere, particularly in the United States, community radio's efforts serve to nourish a sense of belonging and pride in our own local communities. The production of Australian content — such as radio drama, poetry readings, live recordings of Australian music, the broadcast of new Australian classical music and the
regular support of local theatre and literature — are important elements of Australia’s cultural landscape.

Indicative of community radio’s contribution in this area is 5UV Radio Adelaide which broadcasts ‘Art Breakfast’ every Saturday, providing up-to-date information on the Adelaide arts scene. During Adelaide’s Fringe Festival, 5UV’s ‘Squat’ program allocates one hour of live radio for Fringe-registered artists to flaunt their talents via the broadcast medium. A 5UV Radio Adelaide focus group participant described the Squat project in these terms:

When a fringe artist registers, and there will be thousands of them that register for Adelaide Fringe, they can also register to do Squat. Which essentially means no matter what art form you are attached to, there is an hour of radio and they can come in and reinvent radio as they think it should be…. So we are prepared to run anything… on the basis that will just see what happens and something interesting might happen. You wouldn’t do that if it was a commercial decision and the only thing we are going to say is just don’t break any broadcast laws but apart from that do exactly what you like (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001)

5UV also runs a weekly program, Writer’s Radio, which features Australian writing and writers including poetry, prose, and drama, funded by the Australia Council Literature Board. This program is re-broadcast by 20 other community radio stations. 5UV Radio Adelaide also works closely with drama students from the University of South Australia, producing five radio plays each year featuring young scriptwriters’ work and student actors. The station has close links with the women’s theatre group, VitalStatistix, and a series of plays were produced for broadcast on 5UV Radio Adelaide during the 2001-2002 season. It records all sessions during Writers’ Week at the Adelaide Festival of Arts, and produces a series of feature programs broadcast over several months.

The chain of fine music stations have traditionally strong connections to the classic arts community through their support for Australian composers and live recordings of new classical music. Canberra’s Artsound has a strong connection to the local arts community, featuring a daily program on National Arts, daily local recordings of classical music recitals, and a daily program, ‘In Performance’, which features locally-recorded concerts and recitals. Artsound features a weekly round-up of people and issues in Canberra’s arts scene, new releases from local classical and jazz record labels, and interviews with representatives from the Canberra School of Music and the Canberra School of Arts. Artsound also produces radio theatre. It provides an outlet for Australian radio drama writers and actors through its weekly program, Artsound Radio Theatre. It has a specialist arts community audience, and produces a variety of programs supporting local theatre, music, and art exhibitions, including a weekly ‘Writer’s Radio’ segment promoting Australian literature. Similarly, 3RRR in Melbourne features a high level of Australian arts and cultural content. Its weekly one-hour Dramarama program features interactive theatresports drama broadcast live to air. The program includes
a weekly radio drama. Tuesday’s programs ‘Texture’, and ‘Love Your Work’ include performance interviews, literature, visual arts, art world news and reviews. A specialist program broadcast on Wednesday looks at contemporary arts and popular culture, with a focus on the visual arts. A three-hour Thursday morning program has a broad arts focus on visual arts, theatre, performance, upcoming arts events and interviews.

Christian radio stations have also made concerted efforts to link with their local arts communities, particularly those musicians and theatre groups fostering Christian culture. With 24 licensed radio stations around Australia, this sub-section of the broader community radio sector strongly promotes what it terms ‘Christian culture’ through programming, training and community service. Most of the Christian radio stations are listed on the Australian governments’ Register of Cultural Organisations, and fulfill an important role in promoting local theatre, community halls, church groups and Australian Christian music. For example, Christian station 2CBA (Perth) provided a live broadcast of the Easter Awakening Festival, broadcast on Comрадsat and picked up by both Christian and generalist stations around Australia. In another example, 2BLU in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney supports a radio drama group which broadcasts regularly on the station. An experimental drama group comprised of young actors and writers is being established at the station. The station supports the local arts community through weekly poetry readings and live book readings from local authors. North-West FM in Melbourne is currently producing its own comedy-drama series and has broadcast another radio drama, ‘The Young Marvel’, in the past 12 months. Radio 2AAA at Wagga Wagga supports the local Booranga Writers Centre, based at Charles Sturt University, providing free air-time for it to promote functions, activities, book readings and launches. Melbourne aspirant broadcaster SYN-FM is a strong supporter of radio drama producing a series of short comedy radio plays in the second half of 2000.

4MBS Classic FM in Brisbane has produced a 10-part radio series focusing on Queensland and Federation. The station also produces a monthly half-hour poetry program featuring Australian artists and emerging poets. Radio 2SSR also produces regular poetry readings and radio drama, and in 2001, broadcast an original play by the Bareboads Theatre Company. The Writers’ Fellowship asked 2SSR to broadcast poetry formerly heard on the ABC, and the station now records regular poetry readings, and has an arrangement with the Arts Department at Sutherland Council to broadcast winning essays and poems from the Centenary of Federation literature competitions. HuonFM in Tasmania has produced a five-minute radio drama by local school students based on their Landcare project. Albeit a small-scale production, it nevertheless was able to combine a community service (involving young school students) with the production of new Australian drama. Similarly, Beau-FM in Beaudesert, south of Brisbane, produces a weekly half-hour program with the Beaudesert Shire Writers Group featuring local readings. Brisbane’s 4ZZZ strongly supports local
musicians through live recordings and its annual Market Day which attracts a huge crowd of university and arts community patrons.

Australian Music

As indicated earlier, community radio stations furnish Australian musicians and audiences with an avenue to hear the breadth of Australian musical talent and tastes. The commitment to Australian music is apparent in the sector’s Contemporary Music Initiative for Community Broadcasting (CMICB), and the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP). The aim of CMICB is to encourage more and varied Australian music on air with the project facilitating the development of contemporary Australian music programs for transmission on community radio via the sector’s satellite channels. The project aims to assist distribution of contemporary Australian music to the sector, including commercially released recordings. The CMICB project further aims to develop websites to promote Australian music to the sector and to the general public (Owens 2000:3-4). The AMRAP project is now complete and set out to promote Australian music with $1.5million in funding from DCITA. The project facilitated close collaboration between the sector and the Australian music industry with the AMRAP committee including representatives from the Australian Record Industry Association (ARIA), the Association of Independent Record Labels (AIR), the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA), the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council (NEMBC), the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (NIMAA), DCITA and the Community Broadcasting Foundation. The project sought to fund community broadcasting initiatives in Australian music programming; live concert and festival broadcasts; recording and distribution; training; development innovation and partnerships (Mason 2000). Stations such as Melbourne’s 3CR already run high levels of Australian music content, with 3CR adopting a 55 percent Australian music policy in 1980, even though the legislative requirement is currently 20 percent. The role of community radio stations in supporting local music talent is worthy of special consideration. Aside from the formal arrangements alluded to earlier, community radio actively supports and promotes emerging artists in a fashion no longer pursued by commercial networks as this focus group member recalls:

My early days in commercial [radio]—we were stations that used to break new artists and new music around. I don’t think they do that anymore. I think community radio does that and the feedback I’m getting is that community stations that are now playing the more independent artists. They’re playing new labels, because commercials operate in what they call ‘safe’ formats. If it’s a hit they’ll play it. If it’s new they don’t want to touch it til somebody starts playing it. We’re not getting the support from CBAA in that area. We’re not getting support from the music producers, but the independent ones, the cluey ones, have cottoned onto that very quickly and they’ve worked hard. They’re getting out to us and saying, ‘Hey, we know you guys play us’ and they’re doing it. So that’s a role that we really are playing, and it’s a strong one (Darwin Focus Group, 2001).
I don't know much about the commercial side of radio, but from what I've seen, every minute to them is critical the dollar value, so I guess they only play songs that are that are going to bring in some money. And it seems that community radio, like us, we give the opportunity to all those people who are up and coming and they've just got a chance to be heard (Brisbane Focus Group, 2001)

During the surveys and focus group discussions, stations often cited their role as promoting local musicians – this means giving their music airplay, publicising gigs, sometimes producing CDs, etc. As the participants suggest, stations are not driven by commercial success and as such, are prepared to give local musicians opportunities otherwise not available to them. One participant in the Hobart Focus Group (2001) described how he had used his contacts in the Australian Country Music Industry to help a local talent:

[The Country Music Writer] had a listen to them, and said 'this is brilliant' - here's a recognised Australian artist writing songs for an unknown kid. Those little contacts, you can do. Community radio will take the time to do that. Commercial radio—'bring back your CD and if it's any good I'll play it'—but they won't go to the trouble of getting the kid off the mark. We've got another couple of kids coming along nicely.

Another important function of community radio is catering to a breadth of musical tastes. The chain of fine music stations deserve acknowledgement in this regard. Country music is a genre which although popular in the Australian community, does not have a significant presence on commercial radio. Other musical styles such as jazz and bluegrass are broadcast by community radio and serve the musical tastes of a smaller audience of enthusiasts:

Well in terms of the Bluegrass, there simply is no other Bluegrass radio programme in South Australia. A little bit dotted here and there in Country Music programmes on a couple of the other stations, and a little bit late at night on the ABC, but ours is the only Bluegrass radio programme in South Australia. So we are providing something that simply is not accessible anywhere else at all, unless you want to sit through a fair bit of dross to get the occasional [track]. It's certainly alternative because there is nothing else (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

As community radio stations strive to cater for cultural diversity, they are not limited by a set music format. This gives stations the freedom to program a variety of musical genres that they deem appropriate for their community – many of these genres exist outside the mainstream and thus do not promise any outstanding financial reward for stations. An allegiance to local communities and the consequential support for local music and a diversity of music genres encourages and significantly exposes Australians to their own voices and tastes. Australian music played by Australians and aired by local Australian radio stations is, and will increasingly become, recognised as a valuable resource in the Australian cultural landscape.
Community radio stations provide local access to the airwaves and in doing so, enable local communities to participate in, and be informed of, local cultural pursuits. What is perhaps not so obvious is an additional dimension to the ideals of access and participation enabled by Radio for the Print Handicapped stations. Richard Micallef (2001), executive officer of the Radio for the Print Handicapped Australia, says the RPH network is the only source of news and information that print disabled and similar groups can rely on. The network serves not only print disabled, but also people with arthritis, the elderly and others with mobility disabilities. Some non-English speaking migrants use the service to practice their English.

To understand the cultural impact that we have, you have to think what it would be like without RPH. It would represent a significant cultural shift for those people, and a significant change in the way they go about their life and the quality of life they have…many of our listeners are interested in Wimbledon, for example, so we do an audio description of Wimbledon to accompany the television broadcast each night. It’s very frustrating for visually impaired people to watch something like tennis – all you can hear is the ball being hit every few seconds – but with the audio description as well they can follow the game (Micallef 2001).

The RPH stations also support visually impaired community members and enable them to take part in local community activities, offering volunteering opportunities and providing information about local events and news. Micallef (2001) concludes:

We’re supporting localism and local culture because each station reads all the local papers every day as well as a few specialist publications. The network has some content the same (such as the Wimbledon broadcast), but local content always varies.

The RPH network does much to ease the isolation and alienation that special members of the Australian community are likely to experience. An RPH volunteer at the Canberra Focus Group (2001) emphasised that RPH services extended beyond vision-impaired members of the community:

We read the stories in full. It was one of the things that those unable to access the printed word and that runs anywhere from someone who is blind to ten areas of disability, to someone who is arthritic, can’t hold a book or that they were suffering on lack of information. They heard the 30-second new broadcasts on radio and television but it really didn’t give them any in-depth information. So that is what our network is doing and we also get books of course but you name the magazine, we have got a programme on just about every subject you can think of …The only other thing is according to the stats, 10% of any given group of people are print handicapped and while the blind are the smallest in number they are the heavy needers of the service because they also cover people who have had strokes (that) are illiterate, or when English isn’t their first language. Some of the ‘Learn English’ classes use our services as a reading tool.

By meeting their information needs, these stations ensure that members of the local community, despite of their disability, are validated and respected. Community radio gives
print handicapped people access to the cultural life of their communities from which they might otherwise be excluded.

Summary

Through its representation of — and active engagement with — many cultures, community radio has established itself as an important component in the Australian cultural landscape. As a ‘quiet’ cultural resource, community radio stations serve a range of cultural tastes and pursuits representative of a heterogeneous Australian public. Their role in local communities is becoming increasingly important. The creation of local content facilitates the maintenance and representation of cultural tastes, pursuits and knowledge not catered for by other media. The creation of Australian content and support for local artists is a key cultural role performed by community radio. The examples we cite here support the notion that community radio volunteers are fulfilling a vital role in setting local cultural agendas. The significance of this local cultural production is two-fold: it is primarily a contribution to Australian cultural production that affirms and validates the existence of local and sometimes marginalised communities; and secondly, it contributes to other more obvious sites of Australian content production to ensure that our own cultural identities are represented in the public sphere. It helps to ensure that all Australians are given the opportunity to hear their own voices rather than being ‘passive recipients of alien communicators’ (Venner, 1988). It is the empowering process of volunteers producing and prioritising their own perceptions of Australian culture that forms the foundations for the cultural role of community radio. Community radio’s commitment to local communities – in particular, Indigenous and ethnic communities – is explored further in the next chapter.
From its beginnings in the mid-1970s, community radio in Australia has championed its role in giving voice to the voiceless. This is nowhere more apparent than in Indigenous and ethnic community broadcasting.

By the turn of the new millennium, there were more than 100 licensed Indigenous radio stations in Australia broadcasting more than 1,000 hours of Indigenous content weekly (Productivity Commission 2000: 95). They are licensed by the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) as community stations. There are three narrowcast radio services (one is an open narrowcast licence) and a commercial radio station. Now most major urban and regional areas have an Indigenous broadcaster, complementing existing mainstream media and in many cases, providing a first level of service to Indigenous audiences. But most stations rely on funding from ATSIC to survive. In 2002, there were around 200 local radio stations around the country either producing their own or receiving Indigenous programming through the National Indigenous Radio Service hub, based in Brisbane. This included at least 100 Broadcasting to Remote Aboriginal Community Scheme (BRACS) units, 50 Indigenous radio stations and 40 other community radio stations (NIRS 2002).

The National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters’ Council (NEMBC) is the peak organisation representing ethnic community broadcasters in Australia. It has identified 104 stations, (58 regional and 42 metropolitan) across Australia producing weekly in excess of 1700 hours of local programming in 100 languages (NEMBC 2002). Both the government-funded arm (SBS) and the community arm of ethnic community media have become core elements of multicultural society. Notably, the community arm produces about three times as much broadcast content as SBS (Francis 2001).
In some cities, like Darwin, for example, cultural diversity is such that community radio is the only medium able to undertake the range of broadcasting approaches to meet community needs, as this station representative explains:

We can talk locally, we can talk about issues and as I said at the beginning, we can talk about Indigenous problems here, about cultural problems, and because Darwin and the Territory itself is so diverse in cultures, I don’t think there’s anywhere else like that. I’ve been lucky enough to work all over Australia, and I don’t think I’ve ever experienced that. We’ve got 22 language groups. We’ve got English and we’ve got Indigenous, so we’ve got 24 different cultures, here in this one area. What’s our population in Darwin? 80,000? So 24 different cultures, population 80,000. That’s enormous (Darwin Focus Group 2001).

This observation epitomises both the flexibility and importance of community radio.

Indigenous broadcasting and community radio

Community broadcasting is the largest component of Indigenous media in Australia and Indigenous broadcasting, in turn, is the fastest-growing sector. The value of hearing local voices and stories is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify and yet is the distinguishing feature of community broadcasting, particularly for small speech communities who are usually unrepresented on mainstream media. This is particularly evident in the report of the 1998 ATSIC review of Indigenous media, *Digital Dreaming*, which found that where local radio production was being undertaken regularly, stations were perceived to be playing an important role in maintaining local cultures and languages (ATSIC 1999).

Local media play a crucial role in Indigenous communities where such media are based on traditional frameworks. Where local and culturally appropriate frameworks are used to structure community media, then these media become part of the local community — that is, part of local culture (Morris and Meadows 2001). For example, 5UMA (Port Augusta) provides culturally relevant information to Port Augusta’s significant Indigenous population (around 7,000 out of a total of 17,000 people). The station estimates there are 10 Indigenous languages in the area of which two are broadcast by 5UMA because of their intelligibility across several language groups. The station prides itself on the broadcast of Indigenous issues in these languages and in ‘plain’ English, thus accommodating those in the Port Augusta community for which English is (at the very least) a second language (Port August Focus Group 2001). This affirms the role that community radio plays in reflecting local cultures in a way that is impossible for either national or commercial broadcasters. For many of these stations, survival is a major issue with most supported almost wholly by funds from ATSIC. This is because the vast majority are in regional, rural or remote areas, sparsely
populated and unlikely to generate significant funds from local sources, as this focus group participant explains:

We do get some sponsorship in and we're fortunate in that we can actually advertise if we want, because we are licensed...we haven’t got community broadcast licenses yet, even though we’ve applied for one so we’ve been operating off an open narrowcast licence for what, all the time we’ve been operating [for] 10 years, and we’ve been renewed every year. Yeah, we do bring in some sponsorship dollars, not a great deal, Port Augusta is a, really, a dying town, and when it comes to the industry, I mean, there’s not a lot of industry around to be able to get a lot financial back-up from them (Port Augusta Focus Group 2001).

The Indigenous media sector provides Indigenous communities with a ‘first level of service’ but, in many places, also acts as a ‘cultural bridge’ linking Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in many different, and unexpected ways (ATSIC 1999; Productivity Commission 2001). At 4TOP in Darwin, for example, around 100 volunteers broadcast in 22 different languages to service both the Indigenous and multicultural communities of the Darwin region. The station includes some specific Aboriginal programming, broadcasts live the Tiwi Island Grand Final (rugby league), and supports both Indigenous and non-Indigenous tourism promotions, sports and cultural events. Similarly, 4AAA Murri Country in Brisbane is funded by ATSIC and operated by an Indigenous board, but its country music format has attracted a huge diversity of regional and non-Indigenous country music fans — and some significant sponsors. Through 4AAA, country music followers are also exposed to Indigenous music and broadcasters, community events, political commentary, news and cultural issues. A survey of 4AAA’s audience in 1998 revealed around 100,000 people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous tuned in each week with around 60 per cent of Brisbane’s Indigenous population regular listeners (Meadows and van Vuuren 1998). The special nature of Indigenous radio has prompted calls for the introduction of a new licensing category. This point was raised by chairperson of the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) Tiga Bayles in evidence to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts inquiry, Local Voices: Inquiry into Regional Radio, in 2001. As a result of this and other evidence presented concerning Indigenous radio, particularly in regional and remote Australia, the committee made the following recommendation:

The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts should prepare amendments to the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 to establish an additional category of broadcasting service relating to Indigenous broadcasting services (2001, 37).

It is estimated that there are now up to 150 Indigenous media associations across Australia. At least 12 of these are major regional associations with radio licences of their own and a range of production interests, including video and television. The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) is the oldest and it has been an important role model. In the early 1980s, CAAMA was broadcasting via a community radio station in Alice Springs and the ABC. By 1985, CAAMA had its own licence, 8 KIN FM (known as CAAMA Radio). This was
the first Special Interest Aboriginal community station in Australia. CAAMA Radio now broadcasts for more than 100 hours each week via satellite and daily on the ABC’s High Frequency Inland Radio Service to areas within a 450-kilometre radius of Alice Springs. Programs initially were broadcast in six Aboriginal languages but this was reduced following a restructuring. CAAMA has become a major production house for audio and videocassettes for distribution throughout Aboriginal communities and broadcast television (Molnar and Meadows 2001).

**The National Indigenous Radio Service**

In addition to the almost 200 community stations involved in broadcasting or producing Indigenous programming, there are two Indigenous radio networks. The now defunct National Indigenous Media Association (NIMAA) coordinated the setting up of the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS), launched on 25 January 1996. The long-term aim is to link all Indigenous community radio stations in remote, regional and metropolitan regions to the service. This will give the NIRS a potential geographical reach second only to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). At one end of the spectrum, the NIRS enables aspirant and remote area broadcasters to provide relevant Indigenous broadcasting 24 hours a day to their communities, with the opportunity to ‘window’ local programming according to community desires. For broadcasters who meet the licensing and equipment requirements for a full time service but who lack the funds or resources to provide a full 24-hour service, the NIRS will enable them to fill any available airtime with its continuous programming. For community broadcasters who access programs through a CBAA affiliate station, the NIRS will provide the opportunity for them to hear national Indigenous issues, as well as enabling them to boost local airtime. And at the other end of the spectrum, the NIRS will provide to fully licensed broadcasters who already broadcast 24-hour programming access to high quality national current affairs and issues that would not normally be accessible to these stations.

The NIRS is a supplement rather than an alternative to regional broadcasting, offering itself as a tool which local broadcasters can ‘tap into and utilise to compliment their existing service’ (NIRS 2002). The service offers a ‘bed’ program with music a large percentage of its programming. At any specified time (depending on current affairs and information programs) listeners can access a large range of Indigenous Australian music, both traditional and contemporary, as well as the best in Australian contemporary music with Australian content is the focus (NIRS 2002). Around this music base, the NIRS offers national programming dealing with health, education, various governmental department updates, and issues relevant to Indigenous Australians. The service offers regional roundups from across Australia, coverage of sporting events and special music and festival events. NIRS programming comes from existing Indigenous Radio Stations, including:

- 4AAA, Brisbane, QLD
The NIRS broadcasts special events including coverage of the Sydney Olympics, Corroboree 2000, the Woodford Folk Festival, the Tamworth County Music Festival, the Gympie Muster and weekly AFL matches. In 2001, the National Indigenous News Service (NINS) was launched, operating on a shoestring out of the NIRS studios in Brisbane. It provides a general, independent, national news service that features Indigenous stories when they are relevant. The other Indigenous radio network is The Aboriginal Program Exchange (TAPE). Established in Melbourne in 1985, it distributes programs weekly on audiocassette tape to Indigenous community radio stations and Indigenous media associations broadcasting on non-Indigenous community radio stations.

A Framework for Indigenous broadcasting

Of course racism, dispossession and trauma are the ultimate explanations for our precarious situation as a people. But the point is: they do not explain our recent, rapid and almost total social breakdown…our current social dysfunction is caused by the artificial economy of our communities and by the corrupting nature of passive welfare (Pearson 2000, 38).

A key element that distinguished Indigenous broadcasting from other kinds of community radio is that it provides communities with a ‘first level of service’ (Productivity Commission 2000). But to achieve this, it must be incorporated into community social structures. In Indigenous communities where communication production is active and strong, local producers have an ongoing dialogue with elders and senior lawmen and women. This relationship with Indigenous law and the many reciprocal expectations flowing from it present a framework for communication that is unlike no other in Australia. Funding bodies, policymakers and politicians need to recognise that another law—Indigenous law—exists, operates and influences value judgements and decision-making processes alongside non-Indigenous law in many Indigenous communities producing programming around the country (Morris and Meadows 2001).

The ‘Dreaming Tracks’ that criss-cross the continent have been described as ‘information conduits’ or media, along which people travel, carrying goods for exchange and moving to ceremonial sites. This is an important part of how traditional economies are managed (Michaels 1986, 508). But the traditional or subsistence economy has given way, in most parts of the country, to a cash economy or an artificial economy based on ‘passive welfare’.
Pearson (2000, 5) suggests that both the traditional economy and the ‘whitefella’ market economy are ‘real’ in that to participate, people must work. In traditional economies, work was a necessity or people starved; in the market economy, people work to get paid. He has argued (Pearson 2000, 64) for the importance of traditional knowledge and the traditional economy in shaping Indigenous use of communications technologies in Australia:

Technology has had and is having a great effect on our culture and traditions. This effect can be negative for our culture and traditions (as it mostly is at the moment), or we can devise ways to utilise technology to maintain and perpetuate our traditional knowledge. It is likely that the long-term survival of our traditional knowledge will depend upon our ability to exploit the new information and communication technology. For us to continue to rely upon our oral traditions is unsustainable. The new information technology has the real potential to help our people maintain our traditions—we need to grapple with it and devise strategies for exploring its potential.

Many influential Indigenous representatives suggest that communities must base communication developments, like radio, on the idea of the traditional economy and the ways in which they worked to link people and communities. Murray Island Chairman Ron Day (2000) describes how people from Mer (Murray Islands), Stephens Island (85 km away) and Darnley Island (55 km away) traditionally joined for festivals in the Torres Strait for as long as he and his ancestors could remember. With no modern communication systems like telephones, they ‘knew’ when it was time to celebrate. He concludes: ‘I don’t know how, maybe it was telepathy.’ And like many others, Day (2000) acknowledges that Indigenous communication is a central part of the traditional community structure:

The main thing is the sharing of the concept of spirituality. I think that was the main thing because people have to be in contact with other people and the only way you can do that is through something spiritual like [with] Darnley and Stephens, for example, and I’m sure they had some sort of contact. In my tribal area we had what we call a communication point where people go to get information from other islands, including Kaurareg [Thursday Island].

The difficulty for people in the Torres Strait is that missionaries imposed a new spirituality on people and Day argues that Islanders now need to rediscover ‘the old ways’. He reminds us that prior to the arrival of the London Missionary Society in the Torres Strait in 1871 (‘The Coming of the Light’), the traditional economy had established an order. His experiences are mirrored in many Indigenous communities across Australia:

Today we’re finding it hard to get it [the traditional structure] back because most of the young people won’t cooperate. They just feel they are not part of it. So we have to sit down and get this small community to understand from where they came to exist. What was in place before. There was an order of something that made them to be what they are now (Day 2000).

Indigenous community representatives like Ron Day and Noel Pearson are in no doubt of the value of traditional structures as a framework for modern Indigenous society—and communication. Pearson (2000, 20) argues: ‘Central to the recovery and empowerment of
Aboriginal society will be the restoration of Aboriginal values and Aboriginal relationships which have their roots in our traditional society. He acknowledges that despite all of the losses Indigenous people have undergone, what has survived are traditional relationships, values and attitudes—Aboriginal Law—which gave structure and strength to families and communities (Pearson 2000, 23). Traditional economies are about building relationships and kinship systems between clans—the main commodity being intellectual property. This is the basis for then establishing relationships whether local, national or international. Indigenous people were involved in international relations with the people of modern nations like Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific Island countries for generations before the arrival of the first non-Indigenous explorers (Morris and Meadows 2001).

The struggle to realise such values in the face of mainstream media images and the dominant non-Indigenous economy is a challenge. Specific conditions (e.g. the use of local languages) accompany specifically funded projects on community radio in Australia and this creates a dilemma for young Indigenous people, as this Darwin radio worker explained:

\begin{quote}
You know, it’s fine to say we want to maintain language but you’re getting a lot of kids coming along, and probably until they reach middle-age, they’re not going to realise how important that language is to them. And we found that with Aboriginal kids. They just didn’t want to identify with it, ‘No, we want to wear our caps back to front. We want to wear baggy pants, and listen to rap music the same as everyone else does.’ Because they are picking up television out there, and it has all that, but as they get older, we notice they turn around like everyone did, and start to pick up more and more on their language. But if you go to them and say, ‘Well, if you want to do a program, you’ve got to speak in your language’ it cuts them out. It’s a real hard area for us, so consequently, the age group that we had doing language programs is a lot older. So we’re not attracting the younger kids in there. It’s a dilemma, in that we’re trying to address, because the young ones who do speak the language say ‘they’re so old on there, you know? Why are they so old?’ And I say, ‘Well, a lot of us are old, don’t hold that against us!’ But they say, ‘We’d just like to have some modern music, and we don’t always want to play music that is in the language of our origin. We want to play a bit of other [music].’ But you can’t because then we’re in breach [of specific funding restrictions for specific projects] (Darwin Focus Group 2001).
\end{quote}

Cross cultural issues

In the next chapter, dealing with training, we discuss the role of community radio in providing work experience opportunities across Australia in more detail. But it is important to highlight here the role of Indigenous radio in providing a ‘cultural bridge’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Apart from cultural exchange through programming such as news, current affairs and music, perhaps the most important element of this is the interaction between the Indigenous community radio production process and non-Indigenous people. The main non-Indigenous participants in this process are tertiary students. Survey data gathered for the training chapter from tertiary journalism education programs in Australia revealed several examples where university students were undertaking periods of work experience and training with Indigenous community radio stations. This is particularly the
case in Queensland where both James Cook and Griffith Universities regularly place undergraduate and postgraduate journalism students in Indigenous radio newrooms. Journalism students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) studying at James Cook University’s Cairns campus are working with the ‘liberal, forward-thinking and progressive’ community station, Bumma Bippera, producing a daily news bulletin orientated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences with some material from Papua New Guinea (Norgate 2002). This largely reflects the make-up of students in the course. In addition, students produce a live sports program focussing on local Indigenous events. Journalism lecturer James Norgate (2002) explains some of the benefits:

It specifically encourages our white Australian students’ input and I believe the broadcast experience and training—not to mention the racial interaction—is brilliant. Our daily news bulletin is giving a voice to Indigenous news that is being completely ignored by all other media in Far North Queensland. This is reconciliation in action.

JCU students in Cairns also produce supplements with the Cairns Post. Norgate’s colleague at JCU in Townsville lecturer Lynda McCaffery has had her students working with Indigenous community station 4K1G for the past two years, producing regular news, current affairs and arts programs (McCaffery 2002). Griffith University’s journalism program in Brisbane has had links with the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) and 4AAA over the past five years with final year undergraduate and both international and local postgraduate students working with Indigenous staff there. Griffith’s journalism staff also have strong links with the Koori Mail (Meadows 2002). Such arrangements offer trainee journalists a unique cross-cultural learning environment. The benefits flowing from this are significant, as this Brisbane community radio worker observes:

It’s a very deliberate strategy of ours—we try to ‘blood’ mainstream journalists within Indigenous experience and then set ‘em loose. Don’t go bloody straight from uni and keep on maintaining the bullshit that happens in mainstream media. Let’s try to give as many [experiences]...the news service and Triple A, and blood them there for a while, then set them loose. For some it works, for some it doesn’t (Brisbane Focus Group 2001).

A handful of stations in other states reported cross-cultural work with Indigenous community radio but this one from South Australia stood out. With the station in question a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), it became involved in a number of projects involving remote Aboriginal communities:

Probably the most interesting training project that we do is that we do all the training for the Pitjantjara People’s Radio Network. So over the last five years we’ve done training up in the lands and down here for their Radio Network, and a lot of that concentrates on the school kids now. Our training coordinator Nicky Page...has been the key person in that…(Adelaide Focus Group 2001).
All the programming that our people do has that cultural aspect as its central task—it is about providing cultural information in the public domain. Ethnic programming goes to the core of what we are as a multicultural nation…it is the core of people’s understanding of their culture, and their right to a cultural identity and recognition in a democratic society (Francis, 2001).

This observation by NEMBC Executive Policy Officer Bruce Francis exemplifies the feeling expressed across Australia in response to our study of community radio and its relationship to the idea of multiculturalism. Perhaps never in its short history has Australia had to deal with the issue so directly. The impact of recent international events has highlighted the sometimes fragile nature of Australian race relations. Terrorist bombings in the past 12 months in the USA and Bali have raised suspicions surrounding the existing (and potential) Australian Islamic community, for example. The furore surrounding the ‘Tampa’ and its compliment of refugees near Christmas Island in 2001 and the subsequent Australian government’s ‘Pacific solution’ has raised international eyebrows and attracted criticism from the United Nations and others. Combined with Australia’s problematic history of relations with Indigenous people and past and recent race-related debates (e.g. the white Australia policy and the rise and fall of One Nation), the idea of multiculturalism is clearly under pressure. Amidst the idea of ‘Australian multiculturalism’ (National Multicultural Advisory Council, 1999), the community radio sector emerges as a persistent and tangible expression and representation of cultural diversity. The National Multicultural Advisory Council (1999) defines Australian multiculturalism as a process which ‘recognises and celebrates Australia’s cultural diversity’:

It accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy. It refers to the strategies, policies and programs that are designed to:

- make our administrative structure, social and economic infrastructure more responsive to the rights, obligations and needs of our culturally diverse population;
- promote social harmony among the different cultural groups in our society; and
- optimising the benefits of our cultural diversity for all Australians (National Multicultural Advisory Council 1999).

RMIT Linguistics Professor Michael Singh (2002) has argued that Australian ethnic broadcasters, through their multilingual media platforms, have created a dynamic environment where there is real dialogue around the role of community languages and their links to ideas of identity. He suggests that ethnic community broadcasters have demonstrated that it is 'not necessary to prescribe English-only broadcasting in order to create an egalitarian sense of Australianness that embraces Anglo-ethnics and all Other Australians'. He continues (2002):
Australia’s ethnic broadcasters are playing a significant role in developing their listeners consciousness of the debates over the sustainability of linguistic diversity, sustaining egalitarian multilingualism; laying claim to and redefining constructions of Australianess.

Singh argues that in this way, multilingual broadcasting plays an important role in shaping the day-to-day practices of Australian multiculturalism, including the following (2002):

- recognising and making explicit the power people have to influence changes in language use and identity construction in Australia;
- promoting a commitment to the sustainability of linguistic diversity within Australia and beyond, and
- encouraging a commitment to appropriating and remaking the Australian identity and Australian English(es).

Access to the airwaves for representatives from Australia’s multicultural communities has not been easy—and it remains a challenge for many new migrants as a recent National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters’ Council study has identified. Even for new arrivals such as refugees, there are many barriers to access, they include (The Ethnic Broadcaster 2002):

- lack of awareness of the existence of the sector;
- lack of awareness of funding and training available;
- lack of confidence;
- lack of mobility;
- making radio not a priority during the first stages of settlement;
- insufficient numbers of people from the community wanting to get involved to sustain a weekly program;
- lack of resources and lack of airtime; and
- stations under resourced and therefore not proactive.

**Telling stories**

Strategies to counter these barriers abound across the community radio sector with ethnic broadcasters doing what they do best—telling stories. One recent example was a series of programs called *Migrant Women in the Workforce*. This focussed on migrant women’s experiences and featured a gynaecologist, a bus driver, a filmmaker, a woman wearing a *hijab*, a magistrate, a sex worker and a woman working in a cake shop. Female ethnic community broadcasters from across Australia produced this 10 part radio series (*The Ethnic Broadcaster* 2001b). This program series is an example of the ways in which community radio is able to establish a dialogue with its many different audiences.
Our study identified many, diverse, and sometimes moving examples of community radio stations pursuing the idea of a multicultural Australia in their own particular way. In all of the examples that follow, it is the stations’ ability to focus on a specific local audience that has enabled them to meet the challenges they identify. One of the recent themes that emerged powerfully from focus groups across Australia was the relationship of community radio to recent refugees. While the federal government sought solutions that focussed on removing many of them from the community, radio station representatives in our national focus group discussions spoke passionately about the strategies they introduced to include these ‘new Australians’. One which stands out is an example from Manager of community station 5UV in Adelaide, Deb Welch, who described the work undertaken by ethnic broadcasters in South Australia in 2001 to establish a dialogue with refugees there. The station set up a training program for five refugees from West Africa and the Middle East to produce radio programs and to learn the necessary skills. Welch eloquently summarised the aims of the project (*The Ethnic Broadcaster* 2001a):

> One of the key aims of community broadcasting is to encourage participation by those denied effective access to, and not effectively served by, other media. We’ve heard so much about refugees and asylum seekers—but how often do the people who have had this experience get to tell the story? Or determine how it will be told? Expanding the variety of viewpoints heard is to all our benefit and the underpinning of this project which came about through a partnership between our station and the Australian Refugees Association and is made possible through financial support from The Mercy Foundation. Here at 5UV Radio Adelaide we’re also looking forward to expanding our awareness by getting to know these people with vastly different life experiences. The group includes journalists and a cultural tourism worker, and is shaping up to be one of this year’s most exciting training projects.

This is a good example of how ethnic community broadcasting fulfils a central community-building and cultural maintenance role. Community Broadcasting Association of Australia President David Melzer (2001) reminds us that although community broadcasters may never command mass audiences, ‘they serve the public interest in ways that could never be met by commercial or national broadcasters’.

When a group of Albanian refugees was brought to Australia to escape the Kosovo conflict, Radio 3ZZZ in Melbourne arranged an Albanian language program to be produced and broadcast each day to inform them of happenings in their home country, as well as their status in Australia. In a similar way, Hobart’s 7THE responded to the needs of Albanian refugees and managed to find Albanian journalists within the refugee community. Members of the station drove 40 minutes each way to pick up the Albanian journalists to enable them to deliver their programs. 7THE FM 92.1 serves Hobart’s minority ethnic communities providing programming for the Polish, Indian, Croatian, Greek, Dutch, Pakistani, Macedonian, African, Serbian, Spanish, Dutch and French people within its footprint. The station serves an audience of around 30,000 and its ethnic programming represents a valuable community cultural resource. Using new communication technologies, 7THE’s Croatian program regularly...
crosses live for an update on soccer scores. During the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the station crossed live to Croatian athletes for commentary and interviews. Using the Internet as a source, it provides important news and current affairs information to a diverse range of ethnic communities. The Australian Somalian community has also acknowledged the importance of local programming. With a high number of illiterate Somalis seeking refugee status in Australia, many rely completely on local language broadcasts through community radio as their sole source of information. This is particularly the case for those living outside SBS’s reception area (Hobart Focus Group 2001).

Melbourne radio station 3CR has been involved, too, in projects to record ethnic music for national distribution, including Timorese, Greek, Kurdish and Tongan music by local musicians. And an Adelaide community radio worker explained local plans there to engage with refugees:

…we’ve got a refugee radio project were we are working with a group of refugees who are on temporary visas in Adelaide. We don’t know what they are going to do yet, they don’t know what they are going to do, because they are going to devise it whilst they do their training. At the end they will have some sort of programme we think but they’ll work out what they think is the most useful for their community (Adelaide Focus Group 2001).

Dances with funds

While Australia’s attempts to deal with an influx of refugees occupied significant discussion space in focus groups around the country, many participants identified concerns about the current funding structure for stations producing ‘language’ programming. Several community radio workers identified the lure of funding for stations to produce programs in local languages, despite the sometimes very small audiences involved. This participant from Canberra outlined the challenge:

Many times in a smaller community you will have someone from an ethnic background who wants to do a programme. Fine, but do they really have an audience for a Greek programme; or a Serbian programme; or a Chinese programme; or an Arabic programme in the their community? Therefore they are committing that much airtime a week to a programme which probably has a very, very small listening audience simply because the funding will come in. Now in capital cities and specific stations which are licensed to do multicultural broadcasting, obviously there, there is a substantial enough audience and it is justified there but I think a lot of smaller stations, the more general community stations, have gone for the ethnic funding because it is easier to get and yet there may or may not be that audience there to justify that (Canberra Focus Group 2001).

Participants reported concern over the funding guidelines which many suggested restricted what local community groups could produce—or, in fact, wanted. This comment, again from the Canberra Focus Group (2001) summed up the frustrations of many:
When we started looking in the rules they then turned around and said, ‘Your content must be 50 per cent language and not so much of that’ and then they said …you weren’t allowed to have a high music content, [it] had to be an information content, very, very high. Now once you start putting all those rules in place, your then losing the way you intend to do your programme. We know, for example, we’ve have a Czechoslovakian hour that we put on one of our nights and the reason why that programme is popular—it gets no funding because it can’t meet the rules to get the funding—because it is 90 per cent music. That’s want they want to hear and it has Czechoslovakian news and information amongst that, but because the music content is so high it does not qualify to get any funding (Canberra Focus Group 2001).

A participant from this discussion group reported that even the station’s ethnic presenters objected to the 50 per cent language rule—for very practical reasons:

…we realise that if we go in excess of 50 per cent foreign language nobody will listen. They [our ethnic broadcasters] say that themselves. They go to their own conference room and say the same thing and nobody can change it. So every year or two we get a letter from Melbourne saying send us a tape of this programme. We get deducted $1,000 because they say we didn’t have enough [language] in it (Canberra Focus Group 2001).

The issue was taken up by a participant in the Darwin Focus Group (2001), who pointed out that not all members of particular ethnic groups spoke their own languages fluently. This, he argued, was a disincentive, particularly for young people, and he gave this example:

Maybe we’ve got a couple of youth coming along that are from overseas countries, but they don’t speak the language. Now we cannot put them on air, unless we put them into the English programs, but they say, ‘No, look, we’re Sri Lankan but we don’t speak the language fluently’, so we are restricted. We can’t put them on. There again, we have really hard guidelines and it’s the same with Indigenous. There’s a lot that don’t speak the languages but somebody sitting in Sydney or Canberra or wherever says, ‘OK, we’ll fund it but only if they speak Aboriginal languages. Oh, that’s due to the funding thing.’ Well, it’s not only funding, but it’s part of our charter [to present] 22 languages—and even though they’re talking to Sri Lankans, if they speak more than 10 per cent English then we are breaching the guidelines. I get that argument nearly every week— ‘My Mum and Dad I can speak a little bit, but not enough to do an hour program, or a two hour program. We’d love to do one.’ We’d love to put them on; put them in a non-language area. But no, they want to speak to Sri Lankan people. And it all comes back to funding (Darwin Focus Group 2001).

Several members of the discussion groups raised the issue of ethnic programming funding in terms of seeing it as an invaluable source of support — sometimes the only major form of support — for small community stations. While some suggested that this could tempt stations to apply for ethnic program funding and not use it appropriately, there was overwhelming support for the benefits that flow to local radio audiences as a result of the programs produced:

We find that a lot of our normal listeners will listen in—they can’t understand the language, but they love the music. You get a lot of feedback from the English speaking listeners saying, ‘There was a program on at the weekend, the Croatian program, or the Dutch program—it was lovely music.’ They play an important part—to
the extent that we want to acknowledge the ethnic broadcasters. That’s why now all our stationery is the same as our shirts: ‘Community and Multicultural Broadcasting’. Our business cards are the same (Hobart Focus Group 2001).

A participant in the same focus group identified benefits for stations as well:

We can’t always rely on ethnic broadcasting to bring the dollar in though some stations seem to think that—and that's another perception, too, that ethnic broadcasting, as far as grants are concerned, brings money into the station. There are those out there that think it’s only ethnic broadcasters who benefit. But that studio up there which we opened on Friday, that was done partly through ethnic funding—but we all use it. We’re not going to say to the ethnic broadcasters, ‘Sorry, you use that one and we’ll use this one’—doesn’t work that way. It’s for all and sundry (Hobart Focus Group 2001).

**Summary**

Community radio is possibly the only medium able to accurately represent the diversity of cultures that makes up the modern Australian population through its philosophy of access and participation. Around 200 local radio stations provide a first level of service for Indigenous communities across the country while more than 100 ethnic broadcasting stations offer their communities of interest something similar. Both sectors provide an important bridge between cultures. This process alone could be one of community radio’s most valuable contributions to Australian culture.

The Indigenous media sector is one of the fastest-growing in Australia and relies heavily on community radio to get its messages across. The National Indigenous Radio Service criss-crosses the continent in the same way as Dreaming Tracks — as a conduit for information. With a National Indigenous News Service now in full swing, the network has the capability of challenging the ABC for reach and diversity in the potential number of stations able to tune into its unique sounds. As the *Digital Dreaming* report found — and as several focus group participants have reminded us — this network represents a vast untapped resource for advertisers ranging from the federal government (one of Australia’s largest advertisers) to regional authorities and businesses. Where they work best of all, Indigenous community radio is linked intimately with local community social structures. Several Indigenous observers have suggested this as an important framework for success as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognise the value of their intellectual property (including broadcasting) and devise ways of managing this more effectively. This study has also revealed important cross-cultural work being undertaken by some Queensland Indigenous radio stations that invite students from several tertiary institutions to work with Indigenous professionals. As one contributor to the study observed: ‘This is reconciliation in action.’

The ethnic broadcasting sector has taken on the task of bringing to life the idea of multicultural Australia. A strong element that emerged from national focus group discussions
was the way in which ethnic broadcasters around the country have embraced the new wave of refugees arriving in Australia. The varied accounts of local projects which sought to include the new arrivals in the face of sometimes public rejection of their status was one of the most moving and inspirational aspects of this research. This represents a different sort of reconciliation in action and one that ethnic community radio broadcasters demonstrated both through their passion and their expertise. The cultural and community service role performed on a daily basis by community broadcasting is incomparable to that played by commercial or publicly-funded broadcasters like the ABC. Community radio undoubtedly has a unique role to play in the development of Australian culture in terms of its Indigenous and multicultural elements. Indigenous people would be voiceless without the continued revitalisation provided, particularly through Indigenous radio. Ethnic communities would be powerless without their local-language stations. Children of migrants would be losing their sense of identity, of history, of belonging, without continued maintenance and production of their culture.

In the past few decades, Australia has embraced multiculturalism and has endeavoured to empower its Indigenous peoples. Community radio is the local medium through which the cultural diversity of Australia is affirmed and applauded. Commercial media and the national and multicultural broadcasters alone cannot provide the local diversity in programming sought by local audiences. Community radio’s contribution to community life, and to the production and maintenance of our cultures, is consistent and demonstrable.
`we're not teaching community broadcasting, we're teaching broadcasting`: training in the sector

Introduction

I'd like to see a bit of information put out about how many stations are actually doing training. I think people would be very surprised to find out how much training is going on, and not everyone flies their own flag saying this is what we're doing. It maybe that they're just sitting there in the studio and doing training like what happened here. That is still training, and there's no credit for that. But it all takes time, and takes dollars, as well, to do all that. If you could use some of that as an outcome, then if we are allocating x amount of hours to actual training, that should be part of the funding system (Darwin Focus Group 2001).

This pertinent comment from an experienced Darwin community radio worker highlights many of the key issues facing the sector in terms of training — acknowledgment that a huge amount of Australian broadcast industry training occurs with little recognition in terms of resources for this time-consuming and value-adding activity. As the Darwin observer suspected, training is provided at almost every community station in Australia. Our research suggests that between 4,000 to 5,000 people a year in the community sector are undergoing training relevant to Australia’s broadcasting and online media environment. Most of this (86.1 percent) is presently unaccredited.

This chapter takes up these issues and identifies others using data gathered in telephone surveys of Station Managers, general volunteers, and news and current affairs volunteers across the community broadcasting sector and nationwide focus groups. To contextualise the analysis, it should be remembered that 86 percent of the stations involved in this survey have up to 500 members with 44.5 percent reporting less than 100 members.

The nature and extent of training provided

Virtually all community radio stations (98.7 percent) undertake some form of training whether formal (29.5 percent), informal (53 percent), or a combination of both (82.6 percent). In
addition, a small proportion of stations extend training to include the broader community (16.1 percent). About half of Station managers (54.4 percent) coordinate this training activity with a slightly lesser proportion (46.3 percent) involved in more specific ‘technical coordination’. Figure 1 reflects the large number of community stations undertaking training and the limited resources available to them.

**Figure 1: Number of people trained in previous 12 months**

Most training is on a one-to-one basis (41.7 percent) rather than in groups (25 percent). However, one third of Station Managers (33.3 percent) reported using both approaches. News and current affairs’ workers reported a slightly lower overall involvement in training (96.9 percent) but with a focus on formal (65.6 percent) rather than informal methods (31.3 percent).

**Figure 2: Training areas for the sector**

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**Culture Commitment Community**
This is most likely to do with the importance placed on the need for specific knowledge of topics like broadcast law which was rated third (83.1 percent) in a list of the top 10 training areas by Station Managers and second (76 percent) by news and current affairs volunteers (see Figure 3).

General volunteers and news and current affairs workers combined identified three key areas in which dominate training across the sector—panel operation (92.6 percent), station policy and structure (80.2 percent), and broadcast law (71 percent) (see Figure 2). Station managers agreed with this ordering but gave each of the three key areas a higher rating—panel operation (98.6 percent), station policy and structure (95.3 percent), and broadcast law (83.1 percent).

Figure 3. The top 10 training areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station Managers</th>
<th>News and general volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panel operation (98.6 percent)</td>
<td>Panel operation (92 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station policy/structure (95.3 percent)</td>
<td>Broadcast law (76 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast law (83.1 percent)</td>
<td>Station policy/structure (76 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview techniques (75.7 percent)</td>
<td>Production techniques (68 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Script/copy writing (65.5 percent)</td>
<td>Interview techniques (64 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception duties (62.2 percent)</td>
<td>Script/copy writing (52 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills (61.5 percent)</td>
<td>Station management (20 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside broadcasts (56.8 percent)</td>
<td>Computer skills (16 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station management (53.4 percent)</td>
<td>Reception duties (12 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution (43.6 percent)</td>
<td>Conflict resolution (12 percent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This comparison reinforces the different priorities accorded to training by different elements of the sector. Predictably, perhaps, news and current affairs and general volunteers place more emphasis on training in specific skills such as broadcast law and production while giving reception duties short shrift. Conversely, Station Managers—with a broader brief—placed greater emphasis on training in station procedures and policy and indicating the importance of ‘front of house’ contact at the reception desk. This first point of contact, for many potential volunteers and other members of the public, is clearly a crucial one.
Approaches to training delivery

The ways in which stations manage their training regime varies enormously across the sector. Some stations run a 26-week course with modules covering digital broadcasting and the internet along with broadcast law, sometimes with online support. Family Radio, for example, has offered an accredited course in Brisbane run by former commercial broadcaster Haydn Sargent and charged participants around $1,000 each (Brisbane Focus Group 2001). Others have used external trainers in similar ways, as this Indigenous focus group participant explained:

We started out using mainstream trainers. You know, the first manager, ten years ago, was a commercial radio station person...Our newsroom had a couple of guys there—one's still on 4BC...We'd bring in whitefella experts and train our mob up...(Brisbane Focus Group 2001).

One station in Canberra reported running a campaign for new volunteers that attracted around 60 members, ranging from schoolchildren to retirees. The station adopted a systematic approach by folding the trainees into the existing station structure and using local expertise for on-the-job training:

...and we've given them basic training and probably about nine of them have gone to air, in various categories. We've still got some more to go, some more training...we then make them backup presenters until such time as a spot opens up (Canberra Focus Group 2001).

On the other hand, another volunteer explained how, several years ago, he had adapted a training course run by another station to suit local needs. But a lack of staff has meant much of the initiative has now been lost:

We based it on a course that was run by RIMA Newcastle, but I think even the roots of that might have come from somewhere else as well, but Newcastle had refined it and we basically took the syllabus and developed it ourselves, and used local people. But nobody other than myself is left, currently serving. Not that we've given up hope of them coming back. They're still here in Darwin, but we did cover those subjects—but there's been nothing since (Darwin Focus Group 2001).

As the telephone survey data revealed, training in broadcast law featured high on the list of priorities across the sector, typified in this comment from a Hobart Focus Group member (2001): ‘Yes, the first thing we talk about is defamation—what you can and can’t say.’ A volunteer from regional Victoria explained why this is so important:

The point that I really feel that a lot of people within the community stations really miss out on is the fact that there are so many dangers in putting the wrong things to air, and the fact that your licence can hinge on the fact that someone might go on air and say the wrong thing (Victorian Regional Focus Group 2001).

One Sydney volunteer reinforced this, explaining the importance and detail of a very thorough training course (costing $295) run regularly by the station:
[Training] covers broadcast law, interviewing, presentations, script writing. So we have lectures one night of the week and then a second night of the week is hands-on practical stuff in the studio and that's over eight weeks. At the end of that formal course the trainees sit in other experienced programmers for a few weeks and observe and have a go themselves and then they can put in a proposal for their work programme. If [station staff are] happy with the proposal then they'll get air time... We have solicitors coming in and talking about media law and broadcast practice. The programme director comes in and talks about programming in general and programming at the station. So people bring in their respective expertise (Sydney Focus Group 2001).

Comprehensive courses like this one link strongly with many of Australia's 23 journalism education programs — an issue we will take up in greater detail later in this chapter.

As Figure 4 shows, the vast majority of training across the community radio sector is functional and ‘on-the-job’.

**Figure 4: Time spent training ‘on-the-job’**

This is not surprising given the minimal resources available to community radio stations with few having the luxury of being able to allocate specific funds for training purposes. The advantages for new volunteers are enormous. It means that virtually from day one, they have the possibility of working on a production and in some cases, providing they meet station criteria, could be on the air. While not all volunteers see this as their reason for participating in community broadcasting, the data from this study reveal training programs across the sector must rely heavily on making the best use of available resources. This inevitably means a practical ‘on-the-job’ approach is preferred. Here’s a typical induction experienced explained by a focus group member from South Australia:

Once they've gone through [an introductory phase], they usually go and sit in the studio...and some cases they even get to go on air—minus the microphone, operating the buttons, with someone standing beside them. So, the best experience you get is hands-on, for real. If something's going to go wrong, it goes wrong for real and someone has to get you out of trouble (Port Augusta Focus Group 2001).
Some stations have moved to design flexible training programs to meet the demands of volunteers, many of whom have commitments other than with the station. One focus group participant commented that formal training programs did not suit many volunteers for that reason:

It [training] was fairly formal before, now it’s a tad more formalised and we are risking turning more and more people off. So we are looking at maybe doing a weekend block, so we can perhaps do one-third of the course in a weekend and then the rest of it weekly after that. Just so we can get them to the point where they can be a bit more self-sufficient and come straight in and do hands-on (Adelaide Focus Group 2001).

Other broadcasters applied the idea of flexibility in a different way:

We don’t have a training guideline as in ‘you will spend 6 weeks or 8 weeks’—it’s up to the individual. We had one chap who took 12 months to train. Others take it like ducks to water, a couple of sessions and they’re away. We leave it up to the individual. We’re happy to train them at their own speed (Hobart Focus Group 2001).

While our study identified the proportion of community radio volunteers who are involved in ‘on-the-job’ training and the time they spend doing this, focus participants pointed out of the other side of the coin — the time spent by experienced station personnel in providing that training:

Firstly, training costs money and when you’re talking about community radio, it’s the old situation where a lot of them are volunteers. I mean the hours that you put in…it’s just unbelievable. Now if people want us to step up the training program, I feel that we should have some sort of a grant put our way to be able to cover travelling expenses for these people to come in their own vehicles and on Sundays. Because that’s basically when it happens. It’s at nights, Monday nights, that sort of thing…it’s all volunteer and it really does cost a lot (Brisbane Focus Group 2001).

Suggestions for a national training scheme were greeted with scepticism by another member of the same focus group, reminding us of the real resource crisis facing many stations:

I don’t think most community stations would have the resources or the time to be able to do a proper course. It’s just basically… ‘there’s a coffee machine and we’ll do a quick five minute thing’. I think that would apply in most cases as far as community stations are concerned. So whether there’s a need for a national thing or not, I don’t know. Probably, most stations would say, ‘No, we’re not bothered’ (Brisbane Focus Group 2001).

But despite such obstacles, most stations consistently run training courses themselves. Typical is one station in Canberra that offers a 10-week course three or four times a year with around 15 people attending. This same station has negotiated a community presenters’ licence qualification through a local TAFE College (Canberra Focus Group 2001). The focus group discussions across Australia revealed a strong desire by participants to either improve or maintain the quality of the training they currently offer, as this response from Darwin suggests:
All staff who go on our station have to do a minimum of 10 weeks of training before they actually get on the air…and we also have run for the last 10 years, a nationally accredited AERTP training program [Australian Ethnic Radio Training Program]. Our volunteer program is pretty much the same. It’s based on probably a combination of a number of other modules—the AFTRS [Australian Film, Radio and Television School] and those sorts of things. Nobody actually goes to air. They obviously do slip in the back door every so often, but we jump on that fairly quickly (Darwin Focus Group 2001).

Members of several focus groups singled out the Australian Ethnic Radio Training Program (AERTP) for both its quality and relevance—this one from Brisbane:

…if you’re an ethnic broadcaster you can get funding for that and have a person go through a 26 week program. That program is on the internet. You can get that free…But it's very, very, in-depth, and sometimes probably a little too in-depth for what you want for your specific station. So I guess it just depends on what aspects of training you’re after. Whether you’re training somebody in-depth for every single thing, which say, in our case, we don't have the room, for someone to train on a 26 week program, so we…make it three or four, then get them into the system and they learn from there. They've been given the basics (Brisbane Focus Group 2001).

But there were some qualifications. As this Darwin respondent suggests, funding under this scheme is limited, leaving the stations in question to try to gain accreditation for their training programs through other means:

We get a little bit of funding for the AERTP training, but it covers the cost of the trainer, and that's it. We wear the costs of the rest of it. The same with volunteers. As we're going into accredited training now, for the broadcasting course, Certificate II, we've put that together at our own cost as well. Because we're not a RTO [registered training organisation] we've had to go through the university department to get that through. But 99 percent of all our courses are in-house…we have three full-time staff, two part-time, and we're running 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Darwin Focus Group 2001).

The benefits of training

One of the most commonly- (and strongly-) expressed feelings during the focus group interviews was a desire by Station Managers and volunteers for some acknowledgment of the benefits community radio training programs make to the broad Australian media industry. Training plays a central role in the ability of community radio workers to be able to make important connections with local audiences and organisations. Indeed, the benefits of training might be summarised by the overwhelming majority (91.4 percent) of news, current affairs and general volunteers who identified as ‘very important’ the process of imparting information to their local communities. In a similar vein, a significant majority (62.9 percent) identified the ‘importance of expressing yourself’ as a tangible outcome of the training process. Perhaps reflecting the ‘hands-on’ approach to training adopted by most community radio stations, the single most functional benefit of training identified by almost three-quarters of volunteers was confidence in the use of broadcasting equipment (see Figure 5). This reflects the important
Several focus group participants highlighted the benefits of on-the-job training itself. This one from Darwin was typical, reminding us that many stations offer a wide range of training by drawing on the expertise of staff, both paid and volunteer. However, this contributor pointed out that the relevance of the training extended well beyond the community sphere:

...by the end of the ten weeks, those people know how to put a program together, how to turn a mike on, even how to do an interview. Very, very basic, but at least it gives them that. We give them a competency test at the end. They've got to be able to present a program to us on tape and we'll sit down and judge that and say 'well, this is good, that's fine' or 'you need to work on this, but we're happy to put you on the air'...By the time they come out [of the training program] they should be able to take their certificate and go into any broadcasting station, because we're not teaching community broadcasting, we're teaching broadcasting (Darwin Focus Group 2001).

As one Brisbane participant suggested, the benefits that flow from training depend largely on what volunteers want to learn:

A lot of people come to community stations to use it as a training area, as a step to get into commercial radio. So they are already probably reasonably orientated or they're coming out of university doing journalism courses or something. So you probably find that they're getting hands-on experience maybe at the ABC or something like that. But a lot of people that come into the station just want to do it as a hobby and they're not really interested in doing the accreditation part of it. They just want to know how to use the equipment (Brisbane Focus Group 2001).
Others observed that while broadcasting ‘stars’ had sometimes emerged from basic training programs, there were few career paths for these talented people:

So this became a problem for us, so the buddy system works better for us and I have a real problem, as a community asset, if we are going to train people and we can’t offer them something at the end of it. I don’t think it’s a very fair thing to do (Canberra Focus Group 2001).

Several focus group contributors suggested that training programs can also be useful in identifying those people who really want to be involved in broadcasting, whether community or otherwise. And as this Melbourne station worker comments, the high quality of training offered acts as a filter, ensuring that high standards are maintained:

I want to call it [quality of training] professionalism but being a good broadcaster is stressed even before they get to training and through training. I’ve got a strong training programme and it really does weed out those who are there just because they feel like it and those who really do want to be there and broadcast (Melbourne Focus Group 2001).

Sector-wide, almost all Station Managers (96.6 percent) reported that trainees were not required to be over 18 to participate in station courses. While three quarters (75.7 percent) of stations do not charge a fee for such courses, most (58.1 percent) require trainees to be paid-up station members.

The community radio sector and outside institutions

The vast majority (70.2 percent) of community stations undertake training involving institutions in the wider community. The most significant element of this training is work experience (48.6 percent). In addition, about one-quarter of community stations (24.2 percent) have training links with local government bodies and around one-fifth (21.6 percent) identified training links with ‘other’ community organisations. Coupled with the community sector’s involvement in local disaster planning (24.8 percent of stations) and ‘other community activities’ (38.3 percent of stations), this represents a highly significant contribution to workplace training that, until now, has remained largely unquantified and unrecognised.

The most significant element of training linked to outside organisations identified by Station Managers is work experience. With almost half of Australia’s 200 permanent community stations variously engaged in this training, it is not surprising that many focus group participants highlighted both the positive and negative aspects of this widespread activity. One of the key groups identified by news, current affairs and general volunteers was the significant role played by the community sector in providing a training environment for journalism and media students from tertiary institutions. Many focus group members commented that this was further evidence of the large amount of unpaid training work undertaken by sector members. While several community stations had direct links with
universities and journalism programs, none reported receiving any funding from the tertiary sector for use of their resources, both human and technical.

On the other hand, the benefits for community radio stations through the production, by students, of news and current affairs programs are clear. A significant number (67.6 percent) of news, current affairs and general volunteers reported receiving training in radio or journalism outside the stations.

An e-mail survey of Australia's 23 tertiary journalism programs (through JEANET) revealed that 11 of the 12 east coast journalism programs that responded use community radio regularly in varying degrees. An interesting development in Queensland is the placement of journalism work experience students (undergraduate and postgraduate) with Indigenous radio stations Bumma Bippera and 4K1G in Cairns and Townsville respectively, and the National Indigenous Radio Service and 4AAA in Brisbane. Here, it is a case of non-Indigenous journalism students being trained by skilled Indigenous professionals — an educative innovation with an ironic twist. One Brisbane focus group participant explained that exposure to Indigenous culture for these journalism trainees might be their only real training in dealing with cross-cultural issues (Brisbane Focus Group 2001):

[With] 100 percent hands-on work experience...that different aspect is not mainstream, it’s Indigenous, which is a little different, and I think it equips them much better if there is a straight journo job. They walk out of our joint with a contact, a list of contacts, that you don't walk out of any other radio station with, or mainstream media service with, and that's one of the biggest problems with mainstream media. They haven't got a clue about how you talk to blackfellas, or which blackfellas you talk to about what. They expect me to be able to play a didgeridoo, and carve an emu egg and...I ask them: ‘See that boat out there on the harbour? Captain Cook came on that, hey. Reckon you can sail it?’...We've had a few postgraduate students that come through ...it’s their work experience place as well, and they go off and find, in general, jobs somewhere else. We do offer an awful lot of training.

Another agreed:

It's true and I think it’s probably an issue that community radio is seen as something to tap into for new young journalists who do have some background with Indigenous people, and they recognise that the older journalists don’t have a background with Indigenous people which is used every day (Brisbane Focus Group 2001).

Journalism students from James Cook University work with Indigenous radio stations Bumma Bippera (Cairns) and 4K1G (Townsville) in a similar way. These comments by JCU Journalism Lecturer James Norgate (2002) perhaps best express the benefits of these associations:

It specifically encourages our white Australian students’ input and I believe the broadcast experience and training—not to mention the racial interaction—is brilliant. Our daily news bulletin is giving a voice to Indigenous news that is being completely ignored by all other media in Far North Queensland. This is reconciliation in action.
Journalism students at Griffith University in Brisbane have worked with staff in the National Indigenous Radio Service since 2000 — and with similar results. Brisbane’s ethnic radio station 4EB offers a multicultural experience for journalism students at Queensland University of Technology who produce a regular news and current affairs program.

Journalism and radio students up and down the east coast (and across Bass Strait) are working with a wide range of generalist community stations. For example, Sydney-based 2SER has a long-standing relationship with University of Technology Sydney and Macquarie University journalism and radio students. But, as one Sydney community radio representative expressed, there are drawbacks:

From our point of view, we were taking about 12 to 14 people on work experience each year and a lot of the supervision, most of it fell to me and yes, it’s terribly demanding. But you can see the benefits for those people and we received many letters of appreciation and thanks. It’s sort of two edged (Sydney Focus Group 2001).

University of Tasmania Journalism Lecturer Nicola Goc describes the relationship as ‘a very successful arrangement for all concerned’ (2002). The university itself is a licence aspirant. Other Journalism programs focus on Radio for the Print Handicapped stations (University of Queensland, University of Canberra) with students from all southeast Queensland universities doing regular work experience with generalist community stations such as 4ZZZ, Radio Logan, and Bay FM. University of Queensland Journalism Lecturer Martin Hirst helped set up the National Radio News service while he was teaching at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst and now has his students working with community television station Briz 31. The University of South Australia places interns at 5UV; RMIT has a similar arrangement with 3RRR and 3CR in Melbourne; and the University of Southern Queensland has linked up with 4DDB FM. The availability of accredited training status for community stations in South Australia has meant that several have established links with schools, TAFE Colleges and the like with the offer of specific training packages, as this focus group participant explains:

[Stations] can go and start working with their local high schools, where you can offer radio courses as part of Year 11 and Year 12, and you can get funded to do that. So one of the aims was then to build a sort of a training income into their own station by accessing training for TAFE students...So that’s how South Australia sort of became more the training State in that sense too (Adelaide Focus Group 2001).

A similar relationship exists with many tertiary journalism courses around Australia. Some factor work experience at community radio stations into course assessment, as this Adelaide focus group member explained:

That’s a really good arrangement for both parties...In terms of studying Journalism—I had been at University for three years and I had never sat behind a microphone before, let alone gone on air. No-one had ever taught me how to write a script, or radio, or anything until I came here...in terms of training to become a journalist, I have learnt a lot more here, just by being here and being thrown in the deep end, than in the University. When I came on the News Team, we had a girl from France...She had been in Adelaide for two weeks and PJ just said, ‘Off you go read the news. And
where else are you going to get that opportunity? You couldn’t understand a word she said but it was beautiful and it was the best way for her to learn English with, you know, ‘I’m on the radio’, and she learnt really quickly and it was lots of fun (Adelaide Focus Group 2001).

With community stations providing infrastructure and personnel for this significant level of training, many felt that this should be reflected in the federal funding regime. The basic, intermediate and, in some cases, advanced levels of training being undertaken voluntarily at community radio stations around the country represents a significant cost benefit for other media as trained workers move through the various tiers and sectors of the Australian media industry. It has become almost an assumption, now —both by the ABC and commercial sector — that applicants for traineeships or cadetships in newsrooms will have extensive work experience. While the ABC and, to a lesser extent, the commercial sector, do offer work placement opportunities, the chance for students to ‘go live’ is rarely possible in anything other than the community sector. As many experienced broadcasters cited in this report observe, and as many others working in mainstream media will testify, there is nothing quite like working in a ‘real world’ situation to sharpen the learning experience. The community sector is undertaking a significant proportion of this work and the list of ‘graduates’ who have moved into the mainstream from a community radio platform is impressive, as this Bathurst focus group participant reminded us:

I mean, we look at who’s come through 2MCE in the last 25 years, and we’re talking of people like Andrew Denton, Amanda Keller, Jessica Rowe, Jacinta Tynan from the ABC, Selena Edmonds and Natasha Belling from Channel 10. These are the names that have come through here, and I think it needs to be recognised by, not necessarily governments, but other sectors as well. That this is where the talent comes from. It starts with community radio and because we are associated with the School of Communications we get those people coming through as students, and they then go on to have careers and become big names. I think it needs to be recognised that this is the early breeding ground, the early training ground for the future top journalists, top broadcasters, radio, TV, print. No matter what, they are going to come through this sector. I think there needs to be the resources there to ensure that they are getting the best grounding that they can (Bathurst Focus Group 2001).

A feeling expressed in all focus groups, exemplified by these two responses, was that much of the training being carried out across the community radio sector went largely unacknowledged by the federal government, the mainstream media industry and members of the public:

I think that when it comes to training you might be just disappointed in the fact that there is very little about the issue of the training that is going into community broadcasting and there is certainly no compensation of any sort, let alone support from the commercial sector that occasionally picks up your skilled people. That’s the biggest disappointment, not that we do training, or that we would like to do more training, that’s not the problem…The problem seems to be the lack of recognition [of our] role (Sydney Focus Group 2001).
Another added:

The commercial industry is more than happy to pinch whoever they see coming through but if they don’t have to pay for it then they’re not going to. You haven’t been appointed by government to be a training ground (Canberra Focus Group 2001).

Despite this concern, many participants acknowledged the importance of engaging with external organisations, identifying particular links between community radio news and current affairs production activity and educational institutions. This comment from the Canberra Focus Group (2001) was typical of many:

…we do work with the students at the University of Canberra, CCAE and we also are involved with work experience through the secondary colleges in the ACT but because we are listed as a work experience station, and the specialist nature of it, we actually have people doing work experience from within New South Wales as well. At the moment this week we have got a person who is a Year 10 student at a college in Tamworth, who is doing work experience with us.

Another participant pointed out that community radio had become a defacto trainer for the mainstream media sector but without the funding base to sustain it:

Community radio is supposed to be there to make it accessible for those that haven’t got the expertise to come in at the top. If it means that we have got to turn around and be the apprentice trainers for commercial radio, so be it. But if we are funded in such a way that we can put on those training courses without having to scrape, and that we have got the proper equipment to allow us to do those training, then if it means only from a presenter we get two or three years out of him, so be it. Let him move on, let him make history, because we’ve got new people coming through (Canberra Focus Group 2001).

The reluctance by universities to pay for the training work undertaken by community radio, even when stations are located on campus, remains a burning issue, as this Darwin Focus Group member explained (2001):

There's no money in teaching. You don't make money out of it. But in our case the university will say: 'This is wonderful. Well done.' But if you say: 'OK, want to send some money?' ‘Well, no.’ And the local ministers are quite happy to come along to the first class and have a photo taken and if we say ‘bring a cheque with you’, again, ‘No’.

This participant also observed that of all radio and television presenters on air in Darwin at the time (2001), there were five who began their training with the local community station, Top FM. The argument over who should pay for this re-emerged:

We've become, like most community stations, a training area for the people who are getting funding, and ABC is one of them…they are getting funding for training, and they take people that have been trained and really it’s an easy access for them. They just have to train them the ABC way…We've become a very cheap training ground for commercial radio who do, to put it bluntly, bugger-all for training for radio (Darwin Focus Group 2001).

Despite some concern about acknowledgement of the extent of training being undertaken across the sector, the majority of comments concerning work experience were positive. For
example, one Sydney community radio worker spoke about an emerging relationship with a
local TAFE college through which a local community radio station would be providing
accredited training using some of the TAFE facilities, including a training studio:

    We’ve also been asked over the last couple of years to train music industry students
from the…music industry college and we haven’t really got into that as yet because of
all our location problems. We hope that when we’ve made that bond that that will be
an even better situation for us as far as the training goes (Sydney Focus Group
2001).

The benefits of the quality of training received in regional community radio are clear when
students move into a formal radio or journalism university programs elsewhere, as this focus
group member from Western Australia observed:

    Well, I know when we had a couple of young girls down here a few months back, and
they have gone to Perth to do other studies, but I know one of them went into media
studies and the first thing that their lecturer said was ‘Did anybody have any
experience in radio?’, and one said, ‘Well I’ve done some community radio’ and he
said, ‘Well you are already a step ahead’. So I think it’s got that kind of reputation as
well—even in Perth (West Australian Regional Focus Group 2001).

As one member of the Port Augusta Focus Group (2001) reminded us, schools around the
country are involved in work placement and training as well: ‘One of the guys who’s actually
working with us actually works at the school as well, so between him and the teacher, they did
interviews with the kids and four got selected and came in and they do a program once a
week.’

From the array of data available, it is clear that the community radio sector has established
strong links with a variety of educational institutions Australia-wide. It is equally clear that
while the benefits of the exchanges are acknowledged by community stations and institutional
representatives alike, there is widespread concern across the sector about acknowledgement
of the extent and quality of the training being undertaken — and the need for adequate
compensation.

Room for improvement

As Figure 7 shows, the vast majority (87.5 percent) of volunteers evaluate the quality of their
training in the sector as either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. On the other hand, more than three
quarters (77.4 percent) identified a lack of access to required equipment as an impediment.
Slightly fewer (71 percent) identified access to training funds and appropriate trainers and
personnel as a concern. This reinforces the strong sector-wide feeling that the quality and
extent of training is unrecognised and under-resourced.
Many stations reported trying to balance what they are able to afford against training needs to ensure their programs and presenters understood the basics of broadcasting. Ultimately, for many, it is the cost of providing training — in terms of both funds and human resources — that is the major determinant, as this response suggests:

We are really trying to get our head around just what we can do and what money there is available and how we should do it and how we fit it into our day. We are also battling with the fact that our courses are really suffering just lately and that's again I think to do with the unemployment thing and how busy everybody is. Where we used to do a course with about five, six or seven people on block, two hours a week for eight weeks, and everybody would sail through it and come in between lessons and do their practice and what have you, do their designated homework. Nowadays were are finding that a lot of them turn up for the formal session but they are not doing the practice, so they are not getting any real hands on it. That's an issue. Of the last 15 people we have trained only two I think are on air. So that's a catastrophe, in fact (Adelaide Focus Group 2001).

When asked what improvements could be made to training, news, current affairs and general volunteers identified a range of responses. The most supported nominated option was a need for more formal and accredited training across the sector (see Figure 8). As this analysis shows, more than three-quarters of respondents (76.4 percent) preferred to identify their specific training needs ('Other'). This is indicative of the highly varied kinds of work being carried out across the sector. Some of the suggestions for improvement under the ‘other means’ category included:

- a need for a senior journalist to oversee news and current affairs training;
- a need for separate, more specific training programs for music and current affairs workers;
- more training about non-technical aspects of news (e.g. research, voice training);
- more time spent with presenters when they come through;
more training using portable digital equipment;
- a need for a proper manager for training;
- encouraging people to stay on after training;
- a need for a full-time trainer;
- more consistency from trainers and uniformity of training standards;
- more publicity for training courses and a more regular course (TAFE?);
- more information available in station manuals;
- more people to be involved in training; and
- more training with equipment.

Figure 8: Volunteers’ suggested improvements to training

Summary

Almost every community radio station in Australia undertakes some form of training for its members — most of it unaccredited. This represents an enormous amount of planning, work and resources, much of which must be supported by existing station budgets. Stations use both formal and informal training approaches involving mostly a combination of one-to-one and group sessions. The responsibility for ensuring the production of fair and accurate program content is evident in an overwhelming emphasis on training in broadcast law, rated second and third respectively by news, current affairs and general volunteers and Station Managers respectively. The emphasis in the ‘top 10’ training areas is on functionality — what is needed to keep stations on the air, producing quality and appropriate programs. Volunteers working in specialised areas tended to identify specific skills required for enabling them to do their jobs better (e.g. broadcast law, production methods) whereas Station
Managers tended to identify broader categories of training needs (e.g. station policy/structure).

Approaches to training varied across the sector from intensive weekend courses to those run in the evenings over periods varying from 10 to 26 weeks. The key here is flexibility and most stations identified this in their responses both to the telephone surveys and in focus group discussions. The data suggest that this approach to training is the most effective way of using limited resources to meet a huge range of varied training needs. More than three quarters of the training undertaken is done on-the-job and while this was identified as being most appropriate in terms of ‘real-world’ experiences, a significant number of station representatives expressed concerns about the toll this was taking on the time available to existing station staff. Many identified the long hours put into training or supervising new volunteers. This is evidence of an important commitment to quality that was emphasised in focus group discussions across the country. Several focus group participants raised the Australian Ethnic Radio Training Project (AERTP) as an example of a training scheme (albeit restricted to ethnic broadcasters) that had worked well and which should be continued.

The identified benefits flowing from training are many and varied. However, one issue emerging from both the surveys and the focus groups was that trainers across the sector maintain they are training most of their volunteers for careers elsewhere in the Australian media environment. As this focus group participant from Darwin puts it: ‘We’re not teaching community broadcasting; we’re teaching broadcasting!’ The data show that all members of community radio stations have access to training, regardless of age. In addition, training extends beyond the sector and into the broader community. Significantly, around 70 percent of all community stations are engaged in training involving external organisations. This is a significant national contribution to the Australian labour market and one that many community radio workers feel is undervalued and largely unrecognised. Training would make up a significant element of the estimated $145 million dollars per year in labour costs provided by community radio volunteers in Australia. The survey results and focus group interviews provide strong evidence that without community radio, a significant proportion of training in radio, news and current affairs by tertiary institutions would have to be re-thought. Almost half of all community radio stations identified work experience as their most significant interaction with external organisations. Virtually all of the journalism programs at universities who responded to our survey rely on community radio for internships and work experience. It represents access to ‘hands-on’ experience otherwise unavailable to students. In turn, this contribution has made a significant contribution to the quality of news and information programs being produced on community radio. Around two-thirds of news and current affairs and general volunteers reported having received some training in radio or journalism ‘elsewhere’. In one area in particular — reconciliation — it could be that community radio is playing a more significant role than any other media sector in the country. As several
university lecturers from Queensland reported, associations between journalism programs and local Indigenous radio represented examples of ‘reconciliation in action’. Similar links between journalism students and ethnic broadcasters and radio for the print handicapped has set up invaluable links between local stations and the varied communities they serve. In this area, too, many community radio respondents voiced their concern that this valuable work went largely unrecognised and unrecompensed by organisations like mainstream media and universities who clearly benefited from the association.

Respondents had many suggestions for improving the existing training regime in community radio. While an overwhelming majority rated the training they did receive very highly, the main issue identified remains access to training, *per se*, and the resources to enable it to occur. Participants in this study tended to identify a large number of specific areas of training need, demonstrating the wide cross-section of work being undertaken within the sector.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, most training (86.1 percent) being carried out is not accredited. But this could change. The CBAA has accreditation through the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB), a NSW statutory body established by the *NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Act 1990*. As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), the CBAA is thus in a good position to enter into partnerships with community stations to implement accredited training schemes nationwide. In practice, this would mean the possibility of accessing funds to support training programs. Such an approach was suggested in one of the recommendations (Recommendation 6) of the 2001 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts inquiry into regional radio, *Local Voices*:

> The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts should establish a station manager employment and training scheme for the community broadcasting sector to allow community broadcasters to participate in accredited training courses. The scheme should be based on a self-help model in which Government funds are made available on a dollar for dollar basis to match locally-generated funds. The level of Commonwealth funding should be capped at $5,000 per station (2001, xiii).

The CBAA has affirmed that ‘for community broadcasting to remain an integral and equal part of the Australian broadcasting system there must be effective and continuing support from both the government and the regulatory regime’. It has argued, for example, that ‘smaller rural and regional stations are unable to engage suitably qualified and skilled Station Managers because of a lack of income’ (CBAA 2001, 4). These assertions are strongly supported by the findings of this study. In response to the *Local Voices* inquiry into regional radio, the CBAA has suggested adopting a model used in the USA to fund a station manager employment and training scheme based on a dollar for dollar match between local and federal government funds. The association has suggested that an additional $2 million a year for this purpose in Australia would be of ‘considerable benefit’ to rural and regional stations, now in
the majority across the country. In August 2001, the CBAA suggested to the federal government these other training options (2001, 5):

- refinancing the established and successful Australian Ethnic Radio Training Project (AERTP) at around $250,000 per year;
- new funding for sector-wide broadcast training, i.e. the extension of accredited training to all sections of community broadcasting ($1 million per year); and
- new funding to develop and deliver to rural and regional stations accredited management training packages focusing on financial and human resources management, marketing and strategic planning ($500,000 per year).

At the very least, support for such initiatives would begin to address some of the concerns identified in this study. The evidence is clear that the community sector undertakes a considerable amount of quality training for its staff with, in most cases, little financial incentive. The contribution this training makes to the broader Australian broadcasting industry is difficult to estimate but clearly, it is significant economically. Similarly, the relationship community stations have built up with external organisations like schools, TAFE colleges and universities suggests more value adding for those organisations. Of course there are benefits for community stations in this, too, but these are yet to translate into much-needed funds that would seem to be highly likely to satisfy many of the concerns raised here.
‘you forgot to put the news on’: news and current affairs services

A primary motivation for the original development of the study was to determine the contribution that the community radio sector was making to information diversity in the Australian news media. This was in order to build on the work previously conducted by Forde into the independent print news industry, and to build on Meadows work into Indigenous broadcasting. It became clear fairly early, however, that the sector did not consider the delivery of news and information to be one of its primary goals. While the commitment to communities was strong, and sector representatives readily identified the ‘social glue’ role of the community radio station, their contribution to diversity of news information, and delivery of alternative news, seemed to be well down on the list of priorities.

Despite this, it emerged that certain community radio stations were strongly committed to the notion of delivering alternative news and information to their listeners. As examples, youth stations such as 4ZZZ in Brisbane and 2XX in Canberra were defined by their commitment to providing listeners with detailed news and current affairs programs from a variety of perspectives. Indeed, one of the primary initiators of the development of the community radio sector in the early 1970s were (mostly) left-wing political groups, and there is still evidence of this origin in the sector today.

It was somewhat of a surprise to discover that exactly one-fifth of stations do not provide any form of local news service at all – either a syndicated or original program. This suggested that a sizeable proportion of the sector do not consider their role to provide ‘alternative’ information (or at least, alternative news) to their listeners. It also suggested that some perhaps considered their identity to be that of a niche station, and they were expecting their listeners to gain news and information from other sources (i.e. mainstream sources).

This chapter will deal primarily with the results from the News and Current Affairs survey and focus group responses, which were concerned with stations that produced their own news and/or current affairs programming. It is important, however, to also gain an overall picture of the news and information role of the sector by looking at the delivery of news in the sector as a whole, including delivery of syndicated news services.
 Syndicated News

Four out of five community radio stations broadcast some form of news service, and two-thirds of those who do broadcast a news service are broadcasting a syndicated service. Of the syndicated services, National Radio News (NRN) was by far the most popular with 51 percent of stations that broadcast syndicated news choosing this source. The NRN is produced by the community radio sector. A further 13 percent broadcast the community radio syndicated current affairs program *Undercurrents*, while about 12 percent broadcast either BBC, Sky News or the National Indigenous Radio Service. A significant percentage – almost 40 percent – broadcast a syndicated news service other than these. This ‘other’ syndicated service was most likely to be the commercial Macquarie News or Southern Cross News. Some stations were broadcasting syndicated commercial news programs because they felt it was ‘what their audiences wanted’. Others broadcast commercial news because they were dissatisfied with the quality of news coming from the community radio sector’s National Radio News. By way of background, NRN is a service that broadcasts more than 80 news bulletins per week and which can be taken by community radio stations for a fee. The news broadcasts are produced predominantly by students from Charles Sturt University’s journalism program – previously the University of Newcastle journalism program was also responsible for some of the news broadcasts but it withdrew in 2000. Thoughts on NRN and syndicated news programs from the focus groups were mixed, with some suggesting that NRN’s access fee, comparable to the cost of commercial news programs, was not justified:

We considered taking it (NRN). A couple of the board has considered taking it a couple of times but cost is comparable with commercial radio news. We would philosophically rather take another news source rather than the commercial news but the comment from the board is that they felt it wasn’t good enough to put to air, because we see that the news bit on the hour, which we broadcast every hour, our listeners object very strongly if any of our presenters forget to put the news to air. We often get phone calls “you’ve forgotten to put the news on” (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).

...in reality I’d prefer to have our own news service, but in consequence, I don't think we’ll ever be able to afford to do that seven days weeks, 12 or 14 hours a day. So, for the dollars that are involved [NRN is preferable] – mind you, I think it’s overpriced (Darwin Focus Group, 2001).

Another Canberra focus group participant found the quality of NRN variable, which he/she believed was due to the high student involvement in the bulletins:

It [quality] fluctuates, it’s interesting because I was involved with it at 2MC when I was down there when they first started it off and it was in concert with Newcastle University. I think that there were problems with two universities reviewing it
separately. There were definitely differences between the two broadcasts… Generally we’re satisfied with the service.

Given that it is a service that you do have to pay for… you can demand a reasonably high standard from it, should demand it and they are trying to respond to that. I think their biggest problem is in retaining staff over long periods… It’s augmented by the students at CSU and again some of those are very good and some of those are not so good and I think they need to keep an eye on that and only be putting on for the national radio news service those students who can really handle presenting to a national audience. We let them know when we think it is good and we let them know when we think it could be improved (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).

A participant from the Darwin focus group was similarly concerned about the quality of the NRN service:

We take the National Radio News simply because it does provide a service to us. I'd probably leave my judgement open on the quality of the news. Some days it's very good, some days very poor, and others mostly average. And that's one of the problems I do have. Also, up here with satellite, in the wet season you lose it fairly often. That's a problem. My wish would be to have independent local news...(Darwin Focus Group, 2001).

The politics of the syndicated community radio news service was also an important point of discussion, with some radio stations pointing out that the perceived ‘left’ slant of past news bulletins was disappearing, but there were now concerns about NRN's move towards ‘professionalism’:

…but also keeping in mind that the last service before NRN came out of Melbourne [and] financially could not make a go of it because it was perceived as generally being too left leaning in their presentation. In some stations, that is exactly what some stations wanted and asked for but not enough to keep that sustainable over the period. NRN are still trying to be a little more middle-of-the-road on it. I think they have been successful on it but I think they have to be careful to also differentiate themselves a little bit from the commercial services.

A Darwin participant expressed similar sentiments about the ‘commercial’ sound of some community radio programming, and went on to explain the difficulty of providing true ‘local’ content with a syndicated news service:

They [news services] tend to play follow the leaders on that and whatever's a hot story. You know, you flick across and – it’s one of my pet hates -- and everyone is running the same story, and they all lead with the same story...I know when news is hot, it’s hot, but three hours later, it’s still the same story and it gets really frustrating…

…it’s also that localism -- if there’s something that's absolutely hot in Sydney, it's not always of real relevance when you're broadcasting to a network. That's no judgement on the people providing the service (Darwin Focus Group, 2001).
Similarly, a Victorian regional station found some of the content generated by the ComRadSat programs to be inappropriate to their local area – not simply in terms of the lack of local content (which is clearly unavoidable with a syndicated program) – but because of the different ‘culture’ of the urban and regional communities. The station, which began taking ComRadSat programs to cover an overnight slot (1am-6am), is reconsidering taking the syndicated programs following ‘a few complaints’:

[We’ve been receiving complaints] particularly in the 5.30-6.00am slot. We are getting a few “F words” dropped. There has been some fairly negative feedback from some of the people, [like] the farmers that are milking because they’re listening in... (Victorian Regional Focus Group, 2001).

While a syndicated service was the most likely format for news in the sector, about two-thirds of the stations also produced either their own news or current affairs programming.

An important addition to the sector since our study began is the introduction of the Ethnic News Digest (END), a syndicated news service specialising in news for ethnic stations and communities. The END provides news in 20 languages and is updated three times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. News reports can be read on air by those stations wishing to provide Australian-based news in their own language. Our figures do not include levels of usage of the Ethnic News Digest due to its recent establishment.

We were keen to discover more about the content and format of the original news and current affairs programming in the sector, particularly the attitudes and journalistic practices of the workers and volunteers responsible for producing the news and current affairs content.

**Original news and current affairs production**

This component of the survey was concerned with an analysis of stations that provided an original news service, and that indeed had either paid or volunteer staff engaged in news and current affairs work. Our survey of station managers indicated about 100 stations (about 69 percent of respondents) felt they produced either news or current affairs locally. A much lower percentage, however, said they had a paid or volunteer worker dedicated to news or current affairs production – about 60 stations altogether. This suggested that some stations were ‘producing’ news and current affairs, but did not have a dedicated employee or volunteer

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6 ComRadSat stands for Community Radio Satellite. It is a service that provides a range of programs that community radio stations can airs for a fee. Various stations contribute programs to ComRadSat – including current affairs, specialist music programs such as country & western, ‘truckies’ hour, arts programs etc. Once stations pay the fee for ComRadSat, they can air as many programs as they wish from the satellite.

7 This figure can be broken down to provide more detail. About 18 percent of stations produced original news AND current affairs; about 20 percent produced news only; and about 30 percent produced current affairs only. The remainder, about 32 percent, did not produce any original news or current affairs programming at all.
fulfilling that role. Based on these figures, we began to survey those stations that said they had an employee – paid or voluntary – dedicated to original news or current affairs production.

Our sample, however, required further refinement. It became clear that what some station managers considered to be ‘original news production’ by a ‘dedicated employee or volunteer’ sometimes involved reading the morning newspaper on-air, or reading sections from the stock report, specialist news magazines and so on. We were therefore forced to reduce the sample further, identifying 50 stations that produced either original news or current affairs, AND who had a dedicated volunteer or paid employee to produce such programming. We eventually made contact with 35 workers in the community radio industry producing original news and information for their audience, representing a response rate of 70 percent. Our sample of 35 stations constituted just under 20 percent of all community radio stations at the time the survey began in 2001, although we believe that about 33 percent of stations produce their own news or current affairs and have a dedicated volunteer/employee to produce the programs. This figure is consistent with estimates from sector representatives regarding the proportion of stations producing their own news and current affairs programs – in fact sector representatives considered this percentage to be quite high.

To clarify then, the figures presented below are drawn from survey interviews with 35 news workers, and comments about news and current affairs production made during the national focus groups. It is relevant to compare some of the figures emanating from this study of community radio news workers with previous results from a study of the Australian independent press. Indeed, both sectors – print and radio – are attempting to provide an alternative source of news and information to their audiences. Considered as a whole, the independent press journalists and community radio news workers comprise the bulk of the Australian non-mainstream news media.

**Location and type of station**

Our survey indicated that stations producing their own news and current affairs were more likely to come from New South Wales than anywhere else – in fact NSW accounted for almost half of the stations whose representatives we interviewed. Victoria contained the second-largest component of stations, with 14.3 percent of the sample, while South Australia and Western Australia provided 11.4 percent of the sample each. This indicates that, while New South Wales is quite significantly over-represented in terms of news production, Victoria and Queensland are under-represented when considered against the actual number of community radio stations in those states. South Australia and Western Australia represent just under 10 percent each of community radio stations across Australia, so their share of the news and current affairs market is quite healthy (11.4 percent).
Station formatting is quite consistent across the news and current affairs category – 54.3 percent of stations providing original news and current affairs have a generalist format, which is slightly (but not significantly) less than the actual 63 percent of all stations that have a generalist format. Indigenous stations are somewhat over-represented in the production of news and current affairs, which indicates an important commitment on behalf of these stations to providing their audiences with news and information that they probably would not gain from the mainstream media. Generally, stations representing youth, Indigenous peoples, and ethnic groups had a fairly high commitment to providing original news, because of recognition within the station that their ‘community of interest’ was not being served by mainstream news agendas. One focus group member in Brisbane described it like this:

…it’s a very mainstream sound. You would never think it’s a national Indigenous news service. I mean some people think it would be ‘just blackfella news’. How do you identify what’s blackfella news or whitefella news? But the difference is we can focus on indigenous issues that would be usually overlooked by mainstream and that’s really why we’ve set it up, and sometimes there aren’t many issues of an Indigenous nature, but we still cover the mainstream issues as well (Brisbane Focus Group, 2001).

A higher proportion of stations producing original news and current affairs were from regional areas, although at 49 percent of the sample, this represents less than the actual proportion of regional stations in the sector. Metropolitan stations were somewhat over-represented by the sample, indicating that the capital city stations are better-equipped and more inclined to produce original news and current affairs than their regional counterparts. This perhaps confirms anecdotes from the focus groups that suggested some of the regional stations were poorly resourced, and operating on meagre budgets. Due to the withdrawal of commercial radio from regional areas, however, local news would seem to be an important service for many regional community radio stations to offer. While some commercial local radio broadcasts a regular news service, these services are often emanating from the nearest large city. As this exchange in one of our focus groups reveals, there are certain reasons why particular regional stations -- despite an obvious need -- may not offer news:

We do respond to community feeling, and community needs. We do that extremely well, because we can, and because 5EU and 5TS [local commercial stations] don't respond at all, because they aren't owned within the community...They're both networked and our local newspaper is part of the group as well. The ABC in [Port] Pirie does respond to the community needs very well, but that's on a wider basis. So we are the only ones who respond to Whyalla and we can do that, but we have people on the board who don't see any reason to have—well, we can't have a newsroom: there's no room, through lack of planning; we don't have the people who have the skills to gather news anyway. When we had that Flight 904 [story] last year...

Q: What's Flight 904?
Whyalla Airlines went down into Spencer Gulf here just over 12 months ago, with a loss of 8 lives. We came in the next morning and found that every news place in the country was trying to get hold of us, because they considered that we would know what was going on, like a radio station. No, no there’s no-one, and we just ran out of space on our answering machine. We couldn’t respond at all, because we didn’t have any way of responding (Port Augusta Focus Group, 2001).

News workers and employment

Almost half of the community radio news workers we interviewed were volunteers – 48.6 percent. A further 31 percent, or almost one-third, were employed full-time by their stations and the remaining 20 percent were part-time employees. These results indicate that, as our station manager surveys found (Forde et al 2001), most people working in the Australian community radio sector are working on a voluntary basis, even when that work requires regular and sometimes long hours. More than one-third of the news workers volunteered for more than 16 hours per week, the equivalent of a half-time position, while a further 37 percent volunteered for 6-15 hours per week. These figures are also consistent with findings from a study of independent press journalists that indicated more than half of the sector was working for less than A$20,000 per year (Forde 1997). Only 17 percent of news workers volunteered for less than five hours per week, which indicates that they are performing work beyond providing a daily news service, perhaps also contributing to other areas of the station or providing a substantial news service such as hourly bulletins and/or a current affairs program.

We found that current affairs was a more popular format with community radio stations than news – almost 50 percent of the ‘news’ workers we interviewed were producing current affairs only. A further one-quarter of the sample (n=9) was producing both news and current affairs, while only one-fifth were producing news only. This suggests that the current affairs format – which relies less on timeliness and immediacy – is favoured by community radio stations. It suggests that more in-depth analysis, comment and background research accommodated by the current affairs format is more prevalent in the sector. This is consistent with findings from an Australian independent press survey (Forde 1998) that suggested independent newspapers were more interested in ‘filling the gaps’ left by the mainstream news than in providing a news service competing with traditional mainstream news formats. Almost half of the stations that provided a news or current affairs service were producing at least five current affairs programs per week, with one in 10 stations producing their own current affairs program each day. Most stations produced two to 10 current affairs programs per week.

Stations that produced news only (not current affairs) were generally producing at least two news bulletins per working day, or a minimum of 11 bulletins per week (that is, two each day, Monday-Friday, with an additional bulletin on the weekend). Only a small group of the stations (11 percent) that provided news or current affairs were producing less than seven news bulletins per week. Stations regularly provided ‘special’ news broadcasts relating to specific
events, with stations such as 4AAA Murri Country in Brisbane broadcasting news live from community events such as NAIDOC Day and other large community gatherings, and others such as 2XX in Canberra regularly covering Federal election nights:

We have a long history of providing national election night coverage, coordinating an alternative election coverage and I have to say there are a number of times that we have beaten the ABC... and the commercial stations with their calls on the election, and we’ve been able to move on to other analysis of what's going on.

More than half of the news workers interviewed described themselves as ‘journalists’, rather than broadcasters, activists, volunteers and so on. At the same time, they considered their work to be multi-levelled, with many nominating their major work tasks to be reporting, editing, news reading and producing. As with other parts of the community radio sector (station managers and general volunteers, for example, Forde et al 2001; 2002), news and current affairs workers are multi-skilled and required to perform a range of tasks within their organisation. A relatively high number of the news workers – 43 percent – have studied journalism or media studies at a university or tertiary institution. This figure is higher than that reported for journalists working in the independent press (Forde 1997), and also slightly higher than figures for the mainstream Australian journalism industry reported by Henningham (1992). We can assume, however, that while Henningham’s figures have not been updated in the ensuing 10 years, a higher percentage of mainstream journalists now hold tertiary degrees in journalism. In any case, these figures for community radio news workers are very heartening and indicate a strong commitment to the field of journalism from those who are producing the sector’s news and current affairs.

One of the metropolitan stations reported that while some of its current affairs workers were journalists, others were not trained in journalism but were community members with a specific interest in news and current affairs. They felt this added to the diversity of their news offerings:

Can I just add that here at [our station] the Current Affairs team is like 10 or 15 people and we are all different ages and all different backgrounds and that affects what goes into the news. We care about different things, we’re not all journalists. There are people from all different backgrounds and that affects what comes into our bulletin, into our programmes and that reflects the community values (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

While many news workers had studied journalism outside their radio station, the survey found that most of the radio stations producing news and current affairs also provided training in that field for its workers. Two thirds of the respondents said their station provided training in news and current affairs production, while 92 percent also provided training in panel operation. Three-quarters of the sample said their stations also provided training in broadcast law, an important area of knowledge for practising journalists. Sixty-four percent of respondents said they received training in interview techniques – these results indicate that the community radio stations that do offer a news or current affairs service are providing training for their
workers in the key areas of journalistic practice – interviewing, production, broadcast law, panel operation, and writing (52 percent). Three-quarters of the sample said the training program they had received at the station had made them ‘completely confident’ to carry out their news and current affairs duties.

News and the local community

On the whole, our study has found the Australian community radio sector to be strongly committed to issues of localism and acutely aware of its role as an important source of community information – particularly in regional areas where community radio is often the only radio service available (Forde et al 2002). This survey of news and current affairs workers found that three-quarters of the news produced by the community radio sector is local in nature, with only one-fifth of the sample indicating that less than 50 percent of their news concerned the local community. This is important on several levels. Firstly, it provides support for community radio’s stated aim to be connected with and provide a service to its community of interest. Secondly, it provides evidence for the emergence of an explicit ‘citizens’ media’ – perhaps a local public sphere – which truly contains information of interest and relevant to the immediate community. Thirdly, it suggests that while community radio stations may syndicate their state or national news service (for example, from the community radio sector’s National Radio News, or the commercial Macquarie News Network or Southern Cross News), they are identifying their own news production as able to provide a unique and informed local service for the simple reason that it is emanating from and being produced by the local community through the station’s volunteers.

An Adelaide Focus Group participant – from a regional station – reported on the benefits of having a qualified journalist on staff because of the additional focus she could provide on local rural issues:

We’re very fortunate, we have a journalist. Not a lot of country community stations do. She is very focused on rural issues, in particular agriculture and more particularly bio-diversity (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

Another participant in the same focus group expressed the importance of being connected to the local community to identify news stories and sources:

...the range of people that we’ve got doing current affairs, you draw on all of the things and the people that they know and that’s often where your stories come from. It’s actually their own person on the ground, it’s not journalism as such, but it’s just being part of a community and bringing those things in with it. (Adelaide Focus Group, July 4 2001).

These comments from the focus group were supported by the findings from the national survey. The news and current affairs workers identified their own regular contacts as the most important source of story ideas for them. Local meetings, social conversations and local

Chapter 7 – News and Current Affairs
newspapers provided story ideas for two-thirds of the news workers. The national newspapers were also a strong source of news ideas, with 68 percent using the national newspapers either ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ for their stories. As with the mainstream media, press releases were used regularly by community radio news workers, with 90 percent of respondents indicating press releases were ‘sometimes used’ for story ideas. A source that was largely unused by the community radio sector was the news editor or chief-of-staff, who usually provides most story ideas for mainstream journalists. Only 40 percent of community radio journalists said they ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ used an editor or chief-of-staff for story ideas, indicating that community radio news workers had a high level of autonomy in story selection for their news or current affairs programs. Indeed, when directly asked whether they felt they had autonomy in story selection and reporting, 83 percent felt they had ‘total autonomy’ to select and report on stories. None of the news workers interviewed felt they had ‘no autonomy’. The news sources identified by community radio workers very closely reflect the sources used by their counterparts in the independent press (Forde 1998).

To further consolidate their connections with local communities, more than 90 percent of community radio news workers said ‘proximity’ was the most important factor they considered when determining if something was a good story for their station. While 66 percent nominated proximity as a ‘very important’ news value, only 29 percent nominated ‘timeliness’, while 20 percent chose ‘impact’ (which relates to the potential effect of the story on the audience). Not surprisingly, the presence of famous or prominent people in a story was not very important to community radio news workers, nor was the presence of conflict. One Canberra focus group participant identified ‘proximity’ as the most important news value, because the station covered only local news:

…But what we do with our news is, we don’t produce general news or anything else because we know that that is available on radio, television and the other broadcasting areas. The news items that we produce in our news are strictly related to the Tuggeranong Valley. Local news (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).

Almost three-quarters of news and current affairs workers said their station’s most important role was to ‘provide local news and information’. Just over one-fifth reported their main role was to entertain, with a small percentage (8.6) identifying the station’s main role as exposing local talent. However, a large number nominated other roles for their station (although providing local news/information was by far the largest category). As with the independent press sector (Forde 1999), many news workers in community radio felt their main role was to ‘fill in the gaps’ left by mainstream news programs:

Our role is filling in the gaps left by censorship in the mass media. We are a voice for people and issues, and music that isn’t presented elsewhere.

A Victorian metropolitan station similarly reported its role was:
To provide a voice for people, issues and groups that are marginalised...[to provide] access and empowerment for people who feel disempowered by the mass media.

Other comments included:

To provide alternative programming, and to fill the gap not met by commercial radio.

To be the voice of the voiceless – to give access to people who have no access to other media.

When specifically asked what they did differently to the mainstream, the largest percentage said they either ‘focus on local news and current affairs’ (42.8 percent) or simply ‘cover and focus on different issues to the mainstream’ (51.4 percent). A significant percentage (40 percent) said they felt their station provided more context and depth to issues than their mainstream counterparts. More than one-quarter answered in the ‘other’ category to this question, and their response was commonly that they did not ‘sensationalise’ news, or that they focused on positive community news rather than gossip. For example:

We cover our stories with less sensationalism. We don’t do gossip. We are more sensitive, and cover more world issues.

We are more culturally sensitive to the issues. We don’t sensationalise as much and don’t insult any groups or culture.

We avoid sensationalism, don’t chase ambulances, fire engines or police cars. Society tends to enjoy negativity and sensationalism. I avoid that. I also avoid giving ammunition for stories to perpetuate stereotypes.

The majority of respondents felt their coverage of local issues and their commitment to covering issues ignored by mainstream media outlets was the main characteristic that set them apart. Some of the interviewees expanded on this:

We do everything different. The mainstream media doesn’t cover certain things AT ALL. There is no coverage of environment issues, or really no depth to the coverage. We provide more than a 30-second grab, we give background and more information.

We reflect the community’s concerns and interests. We are prepared to go in detail into areas such as diseases in plants, salinity problems etc. I see community radio as an outlet to voice concerns, to actively campaign to further local residents’ interests. The station is continually battling with politicians who try to implement policies and developments that are not ecologically sustainable, or which pose a threat to local farming activity and viability.

We have an alternative agenda to mainstream news angles, and we will go in where the mainstream doesn’t tread. We are questioning the assumptions that mainstream media people make about government etc…we’re providing analysis.

Our ability to inform people who have no other access to mainstream media [is what makes us different]. We’re correcting mainstream media myths – providing options and different sides to stories.
We cover local news, there’s an emphasis here on localism. We’re prepared to deal with people who couldn’t get spots on the mainstream media.

We keep it 100 percent local, we avoid crime stories and court proceedings.

We provide mainly positive news with a regional angle. We cover news that others don’t cover, particularly in the outback.

When specifically asked, and without prompting, many news and current affairs workers nominated ‘providing local news and information’ as either their station’s most important role, or the main characteristic which set their station apart from the mainstream. While there were some comments which indicated that the stations were not providing a sufficient news service for the local community because of either a lack of resources or a lack of expertise (two respondents answered along these lines), news and current affairs workers generally spoke positively about the news and information services their stations were providing. They seemed proud of their program’s ability to attempt to provide information that listeners could not obtain elsewhere.

Summary

Around one-fifth of the Australian community radio sector is producing original news and current affairs, in most cases, on a daily basis. Those stations that produce their own content are providing high levels of training for their workers in news and current affairs production, and a large number of the workers or volunteers have formal training in journalism. The news and current affairs services provided by the Australian community radio sector are strongly anchored in their communities of interest – whether a geographical or cultural community. News workers rely heavily on local meetings, conversations, regular contacts and local newspapers for story ideas, while imparting information to the local community is considered to be the most important role of the news service. Three-quarters of the news and current affairs produced by the sector is specifically relevant to the local community, and news workers feel they have complete autonomy to select and report on stories of importance. Additionally, the majority of workers identify their provision of local news and information as their station’s most important role, along with their station’s ability to provide ‘alternative’ information from their mainstream competitors. This ‘alternative’ information sometimes relates to the station’s stated aim – for example, as a way to ‘fill the gaps’ left by the mainstream news media, and to provide additional detail on events and issues that the mainstream do not cover adequately.

8 Note these figures total more than 100 percent, as some respondents gave multiple answers to the question of what they do differently – for example, one respondent might say they covered more local news and current affairs, and also did more in-depth interviews.
‘...the big issues that have to be faced’: funding and fundraising

Funding the sector is one of the primary challenges facing both sector representatives and station managers today. With a decreasing level of assured government funding, stations are forced more and more to attract sponsorship, subscribers and other outside funding sources. Along with this trend has emerged – not coincidentally – an increasing tendency in the sector towards commercialism. This trend is being challenged by many, and is causing some division between developing factions within the industry. Our focus group discussions showed evidence of this, as did interviews with the station managers. This chapter will provide an overview of the funding structure of the community radio sector in Australia, and will examine results from the Station Manager surveys which indicate sponsorship and funding issues are paramount. Comments from the focus groups are important illustrators of the issues surrounding funding, and appear to demonstrate a strong – some would say undesirable, but necessary – push in the sector towards semi-commercialism.

Funding the sector

This report has previously discussed the growth of community radio from its genesis in the early 1970s to its accelerated growth the past five years. Since this study began almost three years ago, more than 50 new permanent community licenses have been granted. However, this growth has not translated into funding increases for individual stations. Despite Federal Minister Richard Alston’s keynote address to the 2000 CBAA Conference (Gold Coast, November 24-26, 2000) which expressed enthusiasm for the growth of the sector, an increase in the number of stations between 1987 and 2002 has not been matched by comparable funding (Moran 1995:158; Forde et al 2001).

Core funding levels for the sector between 1985 and 2000 have decreased on a per-station basis significantly. These figures reflect core funding only -- that is, funding that is guaranteed to the sector on an annual basis. In 1985, around $1.27m was provided by DCITA to 56 stations, representing a little more than $22,000 per station. This funding level increased until 1995, when it peaked at an average of about $25,000 per station. In 1996, core funding began to decrease as a result of the introduction of a new 'targeted' funding regime. Core or
'guaranteed' annual funding is now down to a level of just under $17,000 per station per year, well below the 1985 levels, particularly when considered in real terms. Targeted funding is currently set at around $4.5 million over three years. If we take targeted funding into account - which is not guaranteed, and which has to be justified by the sector each three years -- the figures are still low. Including targeted ($4.5m over three years) and core funding ($3.3m), the per station amount in 2000 was $24,600, lower than the per station figure for core funding in 1993-94 and in real terms lower than the 1985 figure of $22,000 per station. Importantly, these funding figures do not take into account aspirant stations that receive no core funding and who are expected to be self-funding until they achieve a permanent license.

Funding to permanently licensed stations from DCITA for the 2002-2003 financial year is around $21,900 per station, a further drop from the 2000 levels. This is calculated on funding of just over $5 million to 236 permanently licensed stations (see Figure 1). Interestingly, funding channelled through the Community Broadcasting Foundation from ATSIC to Indigenous stations has increased significantly — up from $54,810 for the 2001-2002 year to $105,000 for the 2002-2003 financial year.

Figure 1: Funding provided through the Community Broadcasting Foundation, 1985-2002***

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of stations</th>
<th>Total funding $</th>
<th>Amount per station $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985/86</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.27m</td>
<td>22,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2.00m</td>
<td>20,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>3.23m</td>
<td>25,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>3.3m* / 4.80m**</td>
<td>16,900* / 24,600**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/02</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>3.53m* / 5.08m**</td>
<td>17,200* / 24,800**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>3.58m* / 5.28m**</td>
<td>14,300* / 21,000**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Core funding (guaranteed)
**Includes core funding (3.3m) and targeted funding (4.5m over three years)
*** Figures provided by the Community Broadcasting Foundation
ATSIC provided an additional $54,810 in 2001/02; and $105,000 in 2002/03. The ATSIC funds are included in the figures for those years. As of the 2002/03 financial year, the 80 BRACS stations will also be eligible to apply for the Indigenous component of funding distributed by the CBF.

Concerns about under-funding and under-resourcing are generally acknowledged and frequently bemoaned throughout the industry. A sector publication notes that core funding levels per station have declined by 36 percent over the past five years, even though the number of licensed stations has increased by 60 percent. The document notes: ‘Competition

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9 In the 2002-03 budget targeted funding was adjusted to be calculated over a four-year, rather than a three-year term.
10 It is important to note that these ‘per station’ figures are to illustrate a point regarding funding levels – they do not reflect the actual allocations to stations. A proportion of funding is set aside for ethnic and/or Indigenous broadcasters only, which means some stations (usually generalist stations) do not receive a share of the DCITA funding every year. One station represented at the Canberra Focus group, for example, received some ethnic broadcasting funding
for the limited grant funds available has greatly increased and many community radio stations now operate without any government funding.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed the sector has called for core funding levels to be restored to the 1995-96 peak level and annually indexed to sector growth. One participant in the Adelaide focus group emphasised this:

The pool of money that can go to your general community radio station...has not grown for a long, long time, and the number of stations that apply within that pool of money is growing every year. In fact in the last 2 or 3 years it has grown enormously because all these new stations are getting licensed. So sitting from both sides as the Station Manager and somebody who actually makes the decisions on the grants, what you'll get now is that each station about every 3 years might get $4,000 and that's just to compete, it's nothing (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

Another Adelaide participant suggested that government could show financial support for the community radio sector in ways other than direct funding – particularly through the placement of government sponsorship with community radio stations. The participant suggests that government support for mainly commercial media outlets represents indirect financial support for those organisations:

There is another link between government money and sponsorship and funding which I think is really important...you wouldn't want to be pretending that the government doesn't give a lot of money to mainstream commercial media because it gives a hell of a lot of money to them and to the ABC...They give millions to the ABC, they give a lot of money to commercial media in various ways and they give a teeny weeny little bit to community radio in retrospect.

One of the most interesting connections between the money that goes to commercial media is government advertising contracts. I always think it's ironic if you sit all through this year watching the number of International Year of Volunteer ads playing on television on every station, and the amount of money that a private media company is being paid to make those and televisions stations are being paid to broadcast those, and we could just have a little bit of that because we are volunteers. I don't think we get nearly enough of those government information contract advertising (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

Participants in the focus groups called for guaranteed government funding for capital expenditure in the sector, and also suggested that government should consult with the sector before allocating large lumps of funding for particular projects. The Community Broadcasting Database is cited as an example of a government-driven rather than a sector-driven initiative. While the benefits of the CBD are recognised by the industry, it was suggested that priorities identified by the sector might lead to a more beneficial allocation of funds (Canberra Focus Group, 2001; Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

\textsuperscript{11} Community Broadcasting Association of Australia; National Ethnic & Multicultural Broadcasters’ Council; National Indigenous Media Association of Australia; RPH Australia; Community Broadcasting Foundation (2001). “Our Voices, Our Vision: Australian Community Broadcasting”, published by CBAA, NEMBC, NIMAA, RPH, CBF.

Chapter 8 – Funding and Fundraising

for a one-hour program each night, but had received no other funding from the Community Broadcasting Foundation for four years.
The creep of commercialism

The sector is in a difficult position when considering its funding options. On one level, it is fortunate in that it does not pay for broadcasting licenses for which its commercial counterparts are sometimes paying around $200 million. The *quid pro quo*, however, is that as a result of the free licensing arrangement, community radio stations must be non-profit and are constrained by a range of sponsorship and advertising guidelines that attempt to ensure that the success of some of them do not negatively impact (in an economic sense) on their commercial counterparts. The experience of one participant in the Brisbane Focus Group reinforced this:

...One of the commercial radio stations [did] a survey, and we got an anonymous phone call from the manager of that radio station and he said, 'Well, we always considered [community] radio not to be an opposition, or threat to anybody, but we find that you've got about 30,000 listeners. So, you are a bit of a worry!' (Brisbane Focus Group, 2001).

At the same time as community stations are constrained from raising funds to enable them to operate comfortably, they face the reality of decreasing government funding. Stations that reject government funds, attempt to generate their own revenue, attract a larger audience and thus move towards a totally ‘commercial’ model of operation are in breach of the *Broadcasting Services Act* – as in the case of Wild-FM in Sydney12 – and are warned by the ABA that they are not fulfilling the principles of community radio. This is a real balancing act for most community radio stations. The challenge is to be successful enough so that stations are not reliant on government funding and show government (i.e. DCITA) that they are serving their ‘community of interest’ by attracting a reasonably large audience. At the same time, stations cannot be seen to be too successful – to attract large levels of sponsorship would challenge the station’s ‘not for profit’ status, and negatively impact on commercial radio’s market share.

This is an issue with which the sector is currently grappling. In the light of decreasing core funding from the Federal government (Forde et.al. 2001), more community radio stations are relying on commercial activities to keep their operations alive. On average, Federal funding forms less than 10 percent of Australian community radio’s income – the rest is provided by fundraising and sponsorship from local businesses. And while ethnic radio stations receive a slightly higher proportion of government funds, President of the NEMBC and past-President of Radio 3ZZZ in Melbourne George Zangalis has argued that the ethnic broadcasting sector

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12 Wild FM was a successful community radio station operating with a temporary licence in Sydney. They targeted the niche dance party market, holding ‘raves’ which raised money and then producing CDs which they sold to their listening audience. The station made a great deal of money, but when the time came to allocate the remaining Sydney permanent license Wild-FM was found to be a profit-making rather than a not-for-profit enterprise, and was unsuccessful in its bid for the license.
was saving the Federal government ‘billions of dollars’ each year, with most ethnic stations raising 75-95 percent of their own funding:

Ethnic broadcasting relies heavily on volunteers. Between seventy-five and ninety-five percent of the income of all stations broadcasting in community languages is raised by the stations themselves, by the volunteers. They pay to come and broadcast on behalf of their communities and the nation (EBAQ, 2002: 97).

There was recognition throughout the 1990s that many community radio stations, while anchored in their community of interest, were threatened by increasing calls for audience share and higher sponsorship levels. The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA), has noted that the drive towards commercialism – fuelled by the government’s reluctance to properly fund the sector, and its encouragement for higher sponsorship levels – is hindering community radio’s ability to continue to provide the opportunity for access and participation, let alone radical content (Thompson 2000: 7; 1999). High ratings tend to equate to tighter commercial formats and targeting programming at markets which will appeal to sponsors – that is, audiences with a high disposable income in the 18-35 market. This participant from Canberra articulated the dilemma:

You still hang on to your ideals and philosophies but to survive we need cash flow and the only way to do that is to be actively competing in the commercial market (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).

One representative from Victoria offered this solution:

…the radio station either had to fold up or find another way of resourcing itself. So we split our radio station into two and went for an almost professional sound between 6.00am and 6.00pm. We retained all elements of the volunteer component and reverse programming from 6.00pm until 6.00am, well really till midnight and promised the volunteers that if they went along with it and supported it they’d never have to sell another raffle ticket in their life. They could turn up to the radio station and have well-maintained equipment and do their programme and apart from their $25 per year membership, that was their only task apart from their programming that they had to do. Eight years later that’s what’s happening. We have three paid staff (Victorian Regional Focus Group, 2001).

4AAA Murri Country in Brisbane has attempted to establish its financial independence by identifying niche markets in Queensland’s south-east corner. It has adopted a country music format, otherwise unavailable in the region, and also broadcasts live AFL games. While rugby league dominates in Queensland – and while the Brisbane Lions are a successful AFL team – there is no other radio station in Brisbane covering AFL matches, as this participant in the Brisbane Focus Group explained:

…Primarily we’re looking for niche markets that might see us in five years time say to ATSIC, ‘Thanks, but no thanks. Give it to the people who need it.’ We’re in a prime position - we’re in a unique situation where we have a potential audience of 1.5 million or whatever in the south-east corner. And I really believe we can – maybe in
five years, I may be a little ambitious, but maybe in five years we'll be able to raise a million dollars, or whatever it takes to keep the station on air... So we're the official Lion's broadcaster, where we have a team of callers travel from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Perth, and they'll call a Lions game. Then we've got our guys going into the cricket ground and calling every Friday night - that's the MCG in Melbourne, and then we'll do Saturday and Sunday games as well...(Brisbane Focus Group, 2001).

This gives rise to a further concern within the industry – its ability to attract high levels of sponsorship advertising without accurate audience research data. Some of the larger and more successful community radio stations indicated in the focus groups that they were unable to be included in the regular AC Nielsen audience figures because they could not pay the annual fee of $70,000, well beyond their means. However, the agencies through which most large companies place their advertisements, deal only with media outlets that have proven audiences according to the AC Nielsen figures. Again, a Catch-22 for the sector:

Advertising Agencies make the decisions and they just look at the audience. We don't have a proven audience (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

It doesn't matter what your philosophical point of view is -- when it comes to sponsorship they are all going to ask the question 'What am I going to get out of it apart from a nice warm glow feeling that I am helping the radio station?'. They want to see something coming back...That is something we are lacking in community radio. We do not have that statistical information [about audiences]...That's where surveys are very, very important and also too, when it comes to the almighty dollar, which we still need in sponsorship, if you can turn around and say, 'Well look, we have an audience rating of X percent of the population'—that does give you a selling point to a certain degree (Brisbane Focus Group, 2001).

They [advertisers] ask how many people are listening to your station...what people are listening to you and when, and the different times and why are they listening to you. You need that to determine...whether you are reaching that audience or not...You have got to get those statistics and you have got to do those surveys to [get] those statistics (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).

Big sponsors are not interested...AC Nielsen is the only language they talk. AC Nielsen is the only general survey agency.

Q: And does B105, for example, pay $70,000 a year to be included in that?
A: Yes. And that's the thing—their income is dependent on their ratings. And even though we might be a community station, we still have clients who want to know that the money they're spending is going to be beneficial to them. So we still have clients asking our sales manager "well, what are your survey results" and it's very difficult. Even when you're looking at smaller clients, they're still interested in knowing how you're rating etc.

One Sydney station representative identified the problem of making a change from a subscriber-based station to one driven more by the need for sponsorship dollars:

...We're obviously confronted with considering and dealing with compromising [programming] because frankly our listening audience has fallen. [Our station] is one of the most recognised community broadcasters in Sydney and we're really confronted with that issue. We go to sponsors and we're trying to put packages together and they want to have a look at results of surveys. It's a very fine line that
you walk between being dedicated to a particular type of broadcasting but if you can’t finance yourself through that then what do you do? That’s where the compromise begins (Sydney Focus Group, 2001).

Raising funds

In the 1999-2000 financial year, the sector reported an estimated aggregated turnover of $50 million, raised from subscriptions, membership fees, on-air appeals, airtime access fees and sponsorship. This represented an average turnover for each station of $169,000. Because this is an average figure, clearly some stations generated much larger turnovers while others received a lot less.

The Broadcasting Services Act limits community radio stations to accepting 5 minutes of sponsorship per hour – ‘advertising’ in the sector is termed ‘sponsorship’ — and the sponsor must be acknowledged during the announcement. Station Managers indicated that the overwhelming majority of stations (90 percent) have guidelines for the broadcast of sponsorship announcements ensuring that both the content of messages and the sponsors affirmed the local/non-commercial nature of community broadcasting. Just over 82 percent of stations have guidelines for community service announcements, to ensure material does not go to air which would offend sections of the station’s community. One-third of station managers indicated they had refused to air some sponsorship announcements, usually on the basis that they disagreed with its content. About one-fifth of station managers said they had refused sponsorship announcements because they disagreed with the organisation wanting to sponsor the station.

**Figure 2: Reasons for refusing sponsorship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagreed with content of the sponsorship message</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreed with the organisation wanting to sponsor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (mostly audience-related)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The commitment to attracting sponsorship – a necessary part of most station’s daily lives – is evident from the survey data that reveals more than half of Station Managers are involved in both fundraising and sponsorship sales. Of the stations that employ paid staff, the majority work in administration or sales, rather than programming, production, station management or technical roles. This emphasises the importance the station’s place on their ability to raise funds and to be as independent as possible from diminishing government funding. Fundraising attempts are hindered by constraints on sponsorship in the Broadcasting

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13 Results are from stations who indicated they had refused a sponsorship announcement at some stage.
Services Act and a lack of resources to effectively market community radio. In 1995, the Australian Broadcasting Authority commissioned a report, *Radio Research - Listening to the Listeners* (AGB McNair), that asked respondents if they had heard of community/public radio and if they knew how to access it. Only 38 percent of the respondents were aware of community radio, while 83 percent and 88 percent of the population respectively were aware of AM commercial and FM commercial. According to the ABA’s 1995 figures, awareness of community radio in the Australian community is about the same as awareness of SBS radio (*ABA Update*, October 1995). It appears that – as of 1995, at least – there is a large proportion of the Australian audience that is unaware of the existence of community radio or at least, its distinct role in the broadcasting industry.

It seems timely for another study of community radio ‘awareness’ to be conducted, and for audience surveys and evaluations to be included in this. This would enable the sector to more readily identify its strengths and weaknesses, and not become unduly focussed on attracting ‘mass audiences’ -- the role of commercial radio. These ideas were taken by participants in the Adelaide Focus Group:

…our absolute priority is not audience share. We are not going for the most successful, biggest rating thing, we are trying to provide things that are not available as well. But at the same time we do want our programmes to be successful. You want them to be heard and you want them to be good.

It [commercial radio] thinks about people as a market. I suppose we don’t not think about people as a market at all, but we do think about them as a community or an audience first and then how can we make that into a market. We don’t think what’s our market and how can we sell to it, which is what the commercial media does. We think who do we want to have as our audience and what kind of programme can we do and then consequently we think how can we make some money out of that, and it’s kind of that way round for us (Adelaide Focus Group, 2001).

**Figure 3: Proportion of sponsors in license area**
In line with the sector's commitment to local businesses, more than 80 percent of sponsorship across the sector comes from organisations in the licensed or local area (Figure 3). This is a fair indication of the productive reciprocal relationship that exists between local businesses, organisations and local radio.

For some stations, their largest source of funding is not sponsorship, but the sale of airtime to local organisations that wish to run their own programs. A local bushwalking club, for example, might run a half-hour program each week on a community radio station and will pay a fee for the privilege. The Sydney Focus Group indicated this kind of activity was a primary source of funding for several metro and sub-metro stations in the area. Fees varied between $5 to $90 for a one-hour program, depending on the time slot. Stations saw this type of activity as a way for the station to ensure the programs they were presenting were coming directly from their community of interest – groups paying for air time had to show that they had reasonable community support, or that they had a certain level of membership. Some stations do not sell air time to community groups – they provide their air time free, but sell sponsorship during the programs. A Sydney participant summarised the variety of sponsorship and sale of air-time options explored by stations:

I don’t think it makes any difference whether it’s being charged for or not, as long as there is equal access to everybody. Some stations will charge nothing [for air time] and make their money in a difficult way. Some will charge some money for access [sale of air time] plus sponsorship…there is no one funding regime that any station has. It is a combination of a whole bunch of different funding apparatus that they use. I think so long as it is accessible and equitable and everybody that wants a programme [can do that]…(Sydney Focus Group, 2001).

While many suggest that community radio struggles to attract a reasonable audience – indeed, government continues to suggest that community radio must prove substantial audiences before funding will increase – there is evidence of successful attempts to attract outside funding sources. Byron Bay Bay FM, for example, reported a subscription increase of 60 percent from 2000 to 2001, with its annual campaign attracting more than 800 new subscribers — up from 500 the previous year. Similarly, 4ZZZ in Brisbane raised $42,000 from its annual radiothon — the highest amount ever — while Sydney’s 2SER raised $52,000 from its own activities. Perth’s 98.5 Sonshine FM reported a record $55,000 generated by its annual fundraiser in 2001. Melbourne’s 3RRR, one of the larger community radio stations, reportedly raises around $300,000 per year from its radiothon — clearly a major source of revenue for the station.

Our survey of station managers indicated that about half of Australia’s community radio stations have 400 subscribers or less, with the other half attracting between 400-4,000 subscribers (Figure 4). A small percentage – about six stations – have more than 4,000 subscribers, while about 22 stations (15 percent) do not operate a subscription system. The
same number of stations have no signed-up subscribers. This group includes new licensees, and a number of very small stations who have no official subscribers. Some stations have also indicated that while they obtain money through a subscription-like system, these contributors are called ‘members’ rather ‘subscribers’.

Figure 4 – Subscribers

As discussed in Chapter 7, some stations raise funds through accredited training they offer. Almost one-third of stations charge a fee for training. Of those, 84 percent charge less than $100. Just over 13 percent charge between $100-$300. Overall, less than one-third of stations use their training programs to raise funds for the station. This suggests that two-thirds of the sector is running training programs with no income attached, even though this activity clearly costs the stations money in terms of employees’ time, training materials and use of equipment. Two-thirds of the sector is therefore carrying the financial burden of training – and we have already seen that almost 99 percent of stations offer some form of training, with the majority of stations training 20 people or more in the previous 12 months.

One of the stations represented at the Adelaide Focus Group reported it grossed about $60,000 per year from its training fees and aimed to increase that. Another reported audio production – CD copies, recordings, and audio copies – generated about $60,000 per year in gross income for the station. Another participant in the same focus group reinforced the need for stations to obtain revenue from somewhere other than sponsorship because of the rule that stations can obtain a maximum of 70 percent of revenue from sponsorship:

You asked about the ABA and their thoughts, I didn’t say then that they actually asked us to watch the level of sponsorship in relation to the total token of revenue in the station. So there
is a feeling that the old benchmark of I think a maximum of 70 percent income through sponsorship is being invoked again.

Another suggested:

It was politely suggested to us that we look at that 70 percent as being a pretty big maximum. So we do, we try to. I mean I don't ever pull back on any sponsorship opportunity. I chase it, advertise it. We are looking at other revenue streams in order to water down the sponsorship because it's like anything, the bigger you grow, the more it costs you to run.

Participants from the Adelaide Focus Group highlighted the experience of one of Melbourne’s most established stations, which has resisted attempts to introduce sponsorship but which receives a great deal of income from other sources such as subscriptions and its annual radiothon:

There’s not a clear view across community radio [about sources of funding], there’s a full range of view on that one. It is a debate that will never die. …The best example is [a large station] in Melbourne, they take no sponsorship and because they have stuck to that and because they have worked on their other forms of income, they do fine. They have got a lot of subscribers, they have a really fantastic radiothon. They don't need it. As soon as they got sponsorship all of those other sources of income would go, and it would be a stupid mistake for them. They have stuck to their guns and they’ve articulated it really clearly, and that’s who they are and their listeners respect that and support that. It’s partly that they started in the 70s that they can be like that…In 1975 when [the large station] started, it was like a sort of a great passionate crusade to get this thing up and running because it was actually new for the whole country. It is not possible [for a new station] to be like that now I don’t think...

(Adelaide Focus Group, 4/7/01).

A Canberra radio station suggested an innovative way to raise funds without using sponsorship. Making the radio station visible through public events, theatre and film opening nights and other cultural events has proven to be an effective way to generate income:

You generate handouts, flyers, posters, the cinemas putting your logo on their ads in the newspapers, etc, and you are creating a good community gathering and raising quite a bulk of money at the same time. That entrepreneurship is something that takes you out into the community in lots of different ways and keeps your programming uncluttered by advertising or sponsorship (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).

Community radio stations are also eligible to apply for additional grants from the government and some do this. Larger stations have successfully applied for funding on a regular basis through various arts and music initiatives – usually associated with the cultural contribution made by the station. Community-based grants are also a regular target for community radio stations. So while guaranteed Federal government funding (through DCITA) is decreasing, there are other government avenues for community radio stations to explore. However, most require lengthy application processes and some stations do not have volunteers adequately skilled to do this work effectively.
Funding restrictions

At the start of this chapter, we considered the various funding options available from the Federal government through the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Before concluding this discussion on funding and fundraising in the sector, a number of issues need to be considered. Some of the focus groups reported that stations offering ethnic programming were receiving sufficient funds for their programs. Indeed, on one occasion, the Community Broadcasting Foundation was praised for streamlining the funding process for stations applying for and receiving funds for its ethnic programming. However, several focus group participants criticised the CBF funding application process, arguing that it was too lengthy, and that programmes funded were not based on their acceptance or popularity within the local community. One participant suggested:

I don’t apply for any of the CBF grants because of a) the sort of paperwork they want to put me through. The time spent doing what they want me to do I can make twice as much money out of local sponsors. And b) I think they want me to compromise my radio station to the point that the value of what they give me is lessened by what I have to compromise on the programme.

The focus groups also highlighted some concerns from within the sector over the restrictions placed on stations wishing to offer ethnic programs. To comply with funding guidelines, stations must ensure that at least 50 percent of their program is language content, which restricts the amount of music that can be played. We raised this issue in Chapter 5 in relation to ethnic radio and multiculturalism.

Some stations are concerned that when they seem to be successful in raising funds – either through subscription drives, radiothons or in increasing sponsorship – they are then excluded from receiving government funds through the Community Broadcasting Foundation. This ‘exclusion’ is not formal, but the sector clearly feels the CBF provides funds to those stations that are struggling to raise funds in other ways. One participant in Darwin clarifies:

We get penalised when we become efficient. If we have, say, an exceptional year and reach say $200,000 worth of sponsorship—mind you, that's a nice wish—but if we apply to the CBF next year and said, 'We want to do these programs', and they say 'Wow, you've got that [amount of sponsorship]', then straight away we'd be excluded. Even though we may be doing a project which could be on Indigenous issues, local issues, whatever -- I can tell you now, we would not even get through the front door. That's a real concern.

…[the understanding from a meeting with the CBF] was that funding would be given to groups that haven't been given any funding for the last couple of years. So, if you've received some funding, you've acquitted that, you've done everything right, you know that you'll be excluded for a couple of years—why? To me, if you've acquitted that and you've got a worthy cause, it should not be based on that. So the whole funding system is wrong (Darwin Focus Group, 2001).
Some of the larger stations acknowledged that they survive ‘reasonably well’ on larger amounts of sponsorship and subscriptions and support the distribution of government funding to smaller radio stations unable to generate funds because of their location in regional, rural or remote areas (Melbourne Focus Group, 2001).

Summary

The community radio sector in Australia is in a transition phase. This has been triggered primarily by decreasing levels of government funding to the sector, forcing many stations to seek higher levels of sponsorship, subscription and business support. While some industry participants have welcomed this shift, others are concerned that it has compromised the aims and daily operations of their stations. They argue that they can no longer produce programming that they (and some of their listeners) believe to be beneficial to the community. Instead, they feel compelled to produce programming which can attract high audience numbers for potential sponsors. There is a split between those who support this shift towards commercialism and those who continue to resist it, arguing that it must compromise program production. The long-established community stations survive well on their existing subscription and sponsorship bases. Other stations, especially those in regional areas, do not have a large critical mass from which to draw an audience and hence become more reliant on local sponsorship and the pressure to increase their audience figures.

Several issues arose during the focus group discussions which should be noted:

- there is great diversity in the way that stations choose to raise funding, usually involving a combination of sponsorship, sale of air time to organisations, subscriptions, annual radiothons and similar fundraisers, and government funds;
- there is great diversity in the industry in terms of funding levels and success. For example, some called for the five-minutes per hour limit on sponsorship to be lifted to enable them to take more sponsorship announcements. Others dreamed of the day when they could fill five minutes of sponsorship each hour;
- stations find it difficult to obtain reliable audience figures, because of the high cost of inclusion on the AC Nielsen audience ratings survey. While not all stations find this type of audience research necessary, some believe the lack of reliable audience research data hinders their efforts to achieve high and sustainable levels of sponsorship; and
- there were some criticisms from within the sector about the allocation of funding through DCITA, which some suggested could be more equitably distributed. Most suggested that funding levels should be increased, at least to ensure that all stations with licenses could purchase necessary capital equipment.
While community radio stations clearly take their fundraising seriously – and in this climate of decreasing government funding, they need to – there is still much about the attitude of community radio participants that sets them apart from commercial radio. This comment from the Albany focus group summarises the collegiality that seems to exist across the community radio industry, and which it unlikely to be evident in a truly commercial environment:

Q: Are you worried about funding though, I mean there are so many community radios mushrooming all over the place…

Participant: No I don’t think so. I think because we have been here already for a while, I think we have managed to sort of dig our little niche here. I think regardless of whether another community radio came up within, or outside our area but close by, I think it would probably go hand in hand. Perhaps it would be a good partnership rather than seeing it as a threat or detriment to us. I think we would need to look at it as a bonus for us in that it could be something that you could join up with to making the community bigger again (Western Australian Regional Focus Group, 2001).
Chapter 9

Conclusion: Community Radio, Citizenship and Australian Culture

When we began this study three years ago, like most researchers, we had our own ideas and assumptions about the community radio sector and the role it plays in relation to the public sphere in Australia. This was influenced by several sources: dialogue with sector workers including our industry partners — the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, the Community Broadcasting Foundation, and staff from the community broadcasting section of DCITA — and an assessment of prior research into the sector, as outlined in Chapter 2. It all helped to shape our approach. To a large extent, our findings extend this previous work and offer evidence in support of the many expectations and ‘gut feelings’ that committed sector workers have identified for years. But all of this could not have prepared us for the quality and quantity of data that has emerged from this study. It has come from more than 350 individual telephone surveys we conducted and around 35 hours of open discussion from the 13 focus groups we held across Australia. We hope the study has generated a huge volume of data with a depth and richness that will be of use to sector managers and policymakers for years to come. In this report, we have attempted to bring together the major issues identified from these multifarious sources.

The majority of community radio stations in Australia are in Victoria and NSW, but overall, 60 percent of community broadcasting happens in regional communities. This is particularly relevant in light of the recent trend for local commercial radio services to withdraw from regional areas with a corresponding reliance on networked services, often from major urban centres. This has had the effect of shifting local voices, almost exclusively, to regional ABC radio services and community radio. In this alone, the community sector is performing a crucial cultural role. In part, this preponderance of regional stations reflects the recurrent Australian ‘tyranny of distance’ theme that demonstrates the importance of services to remote and isolated areas. But more importantly, the strong presence of regional community radio stations affirms the ‘local’ role of community broadcasters in providing services immediately relevant to local communities. This is especially the case in terms of community news, local events, current affairs and local music. Metro and sub-metro areas account for around 35
percent of community radio stations and are mainly along the eastern seaboard where the majority of the Australian population resides.

More than 60 percent of community stations adopt a generalist format. The remainder serve specific 'communities of interest' that are insufficiently served by mainstream stations. This is clear evidence of the ability of community radio to prioritise content directed to marginal sections of the population. As not-for-profit organisations, they are not driven by audience ratings and the profit motive although financial independence is a universal, albeit for most, unrealistic, sector goal. The data we have gathered suggest that community broadcasters in Australia have established, as one of their primary aims, an active dialogue with local communities.

**Who runs community radio?**

At least 20,000 people around Australia regularly volunteer for work at community radio stations. Our conservative estimate is that this represents a labour cost of more than $145 million per year. This is a major contribution to the Australian media economy and, as we have argued throughout this report, a significant element of the Australian cultural landscape. In terms of age, ethnicity and politics, the average community radio worker is closely aligned to the 'average' Australian. This suggests that community radio attracts a range of volunteers and paid workers representative of the diversity of the broader Australian community — meeting an important legislative requirement for the sector outlined in the *Broadcasting Services Act* (Price Davies et al., 2001). Our study shows that this cohort is producing alternative content on many levels. Community radio plays a crucial role in terms of access for Indigenous people, compensating for their under-representation in the broader media industry. In key characteristics such as age and gender, the community sector parallels mainstream media — men constitute more than two-thirds of station managers, and just under two-thirds of the entire sector. Additionally, while parts of the sector focus on a youth audience and there are many young university students involved in community radio, volunteers and station managers are far more likely to be from the baby boomer generation than from Generation X.

Community radio workers’ volunteering rates are almost two and a half times greater than the rate for volunteers in the general community. This is evidence of high levels of commitment, involvement and most likely, personal satisfaction, for this army of community sector volunteers. It is clear from this data that they are demonstrating dedication to the sector and satisfaction with their role by investing a high amount of unpaid work.

The discussions in our focus groups provided strong evidence for the important community role that the sector is fulfilling. While many may argue there is still much to be done before
community radio is a truly representative public forum, our study shows that community radio is providing a diverse and highly accessible medium. Particular stations may service niche areas of our community, but when considered as a whole, the people working in the sector are broadly representative of the diversity of the Australian community. While mainstream media outlets – particularly commercial media – remain dominated by ethnically homogenous presenters and producers, community radio, consistent with its charter, is more likely to feature the many faces of Indigenous and multicultural Australia.

The cultural role of community radio

One of the most pervasive images that has emerged from our study is the diverse cultural role played by community radio in Australia. The sector represents a valuable cultural resource that contributes to Australia’s rich and diverse cultural heritage through its commitment to maintaining, representing and reproducing local cultures. That was the basis on which community radio was established in Australia more than 25 years ago and our investigations have revealed strong evidence that this philosophy persists. Despite a significant shift in emphasis during that period — from an early dominance by urban-based ‘alternative’ stations to today’s predominance of rural and regional radio — the community sector overwhelmingly defines itself in terms of its commitment to local audiences. No other media sector operating in the public sphere in Australia has the capacity to do this.

The evidence from our study suggests that the term ‘alternative’, used to describe community radio in its early years, may be misleading. The ‘alternative media’ title does not adequately account for the many roles now being performed by community radio stations in Australia in a local context. While many community radio workers we spoke to during this study asserted their commitment to contesting mainstream and dominant representations of Australian culture, they consistently identified the local roles they perform as crucial to their sense of identity. This perception of community radio highlights the empowering process facilitated by local access and participation and the relationships that exist both within stations and through their many and varied connections with local communities. Perhaps the term ‘citizens’ media’ seems more appropriate to describe the cultural process in which community radio workers are engaged. The ways in which community stations include local elements as part of their daily operating processes is not only a characteristic of the sector, but also suggests strong links to the ideas surrounding democracy and citizenship.

Our study suggests strongly that these are concepts that at least 20,000 volunteers across the community radio sector put into practice as part of their daily lives. Community radio enables and encourages this kind of participation. This is evidence to suggest that community radio is, and will continue to be in, a position to challenge some of the negative aspects of globalisation, like homogenisation of content, for example. Community radio promotes
cultural citizenship by enabling diverse cultures access to broadcasting opportunities and thus, access to the public sphere. Cultures that are either neglected or marginalised can be given a voice at the community level. Community radio contributes actively to the creation of what we have termed, a ‘community public sphere’, which interacts with other sections of the local community to build and maintain a meaningful local cultural agenda. This contribution places community radio alongside Australia’s other media institutions and their efforts in the mainstream public sphere. The key to community radio’s success is functionality — where local communities identify concrete, functional outcomes from their involvement with stations at any level, then their participation will continue. It creates a sense of community ownership demonstrated time and time again in examples offered during the national focus group discussions. The process enables listeners to become program producers; they receive training in various aspects of production and management; the audience-producer barrier — a key defining characteristic of mainstream media — becomes transparent. In this aspect, community radio — where it works — has something in common with Indigenous or multicultural media. Listeners become resources for the development of multiple and complex media and cultural literacies through participation on a localised and personalised scale. Community media should be seen, not as a starting point for organising people, but as an extension of an existing desire to communicate to establish a sense of personal and community power (Hochheimer 1999). In these ways, the Australian community sector plays an important role in encouraging dialogue between diverse cultural arenas — the process which is integral to sustaining community social structure.

Cross-cultural issues

Community radio is possibly the only medium able to accurately represent the diversity of cultures that makes up the modern Australian population through its philosophy of access and participation. Around 200 local radio stations provide a first level of service for Indigenous communities across the country while more than 100 ethnic broadcasting stations offer their communities of interest something similar. Both sectors provide an important bridge between cultures. This process alone could be one of community radio’s most valuable contributions to Australian culture.

The Indigenous media sector is one of the fastest-growing in Australia and relies heavily on community radio to get its messages across. The National Indigenous Radio Service criss-crosses the continent in the same way as Dreaming Tracks — as a conduit for information. With a National Indigenous News Service now in full swing, the network has the capability of challenging the ABC for reach and diversity in the potential number of stations able to tune into its unique sounds. As the Digital Dreaming report found — and as several focus group participants have reminded us — this network represents a vast untapped resource for advertisers ranging from the federal government (one of Australia’s largest advertisers) to
regional authorities and businesses. Where they work best of all, Indigenous community radio is linked intimately with local community social structures. Several Indigenous observers have suggested this as an important framework for success as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognise the value of their intellectual property (including broadcasting) and devise ways of managing this more effectively. This study has also revealed important cross-cultural work being undertaken by some Queensland Indigenous radio stations that invite students from several tertiary institutions to work with Indigenous professionals. As one contributor to the study observed: ‘This is reconciliation in action.’

The ethnic broadcasting sector has taken on the task of bringing to life the idea of multicultural Australia. A strong element that emerged from national focus group discussions was the way in which ethnic broadcasters around the country have embraced the new wave of refugees arriving in this country. The varied accounts of local initiatives which have sought to include the new arrivals in the face of sometimes public rejection of their status was one of the most moving and inspirational aspects of this research. This represents a different sort of reconciliation in action and one that ethnic community radio broadcasters demonstrated both through their passion and their expertise. The cultural and community service role performed on a daily basis by community broadcasting is incomparable to that played by commercial or publicly funded broadcasters like the ABC. Community radio undoubtedly has a unique role to play in the development of Australian culture in terms of its Indigenous and multicultural elements alone. Indigenous people would be voiceless without the continued revitalisation provided, particularly through Indigenous radio. Ethnic communities would be powerless without their local-language stations. Children of immigrants would be losing their sense of identity, of history, of belonging, without continued maintenance and production of their culture.

Training

The study revealed that almost every community radio station in Australia undertakes some form of training—with virtually all of it unaccredited. This extraordinary effort goes largely unacknowledged and unrewarded. Stations’ commitment to quality outcomes is evident in an overwhelming emphasis nationally on training volunteers and paid staff in crucial industry skills. The clear focus in the ‘top 10’ training areas is on functionality — in other words, the skills needed to keep stations on the air, producing quality programs. Perhaps the stereotype of the community station as a place where ‘anyone can say anything on air’ can be finally laid to rest based on this evidence alone.

Approaches to training varied across the sector from intensive weekend courses to those run in the evenings over periods varying from 10 to 26 weeks. The key here is flexibility and most stations identified this in their responses both to the telephone surveys and in focus group
discussions. The data suggest that this approach to training is the most effective way of using limited resources to meet a huge range of varied training needs. More than three quarters of the training undertaken is done on-the-job and while this was identified as being most appropriate in terms of ‘real-world’ experiences, a significant number of station representatives expressed concerns about the toll this was taking on existing station staff. Many identified the long hours put into training or supervising new volunteers. This is evidence of an important commitment to quality that was emphasised in focus group discussions across the country. Several focus group participants raised the Australian Ethnic Radio Training Project (AERTP) as an example of a training scheme (albeit restricted to ethnic broadcasters) that had worked well and which should be continued.

The identified benefits flowing from training are many and varied. However, one issue emerging from both the surveys and the focus groups was that trainers across the sector maintain they are training most of their volunteers for careers elsewhere in the Australian media industry. As this focus group participant from Darwin puts it: ‘We’re not teaching community broadcasting; we’re teaching broadcasting!’ While tracking the movement of media workers from community radio to mainstream sectors was beyond the scope of our study, there is substantial anecdotal evidence across the sector of this phenomenon. There is little doubt the community sector is de facto, a major provider of training for the Australian media industry.

The data show that all members of community radio stations have access to training, regardless of age. In addition, training extends beyond the sector and into the broader community. Significantly, around 70 per cent of all community stations are engaged in training involving external organisations. This is a significant national contribution to the Australian labour market and one that many community radio workers feel is undervalued and largely unrecognised. The survey results and focus group interviews provide strong evidence that without community radio, a significant proportion of training in radio, news and current affairs by tertiary institutions would have to be re-thought. Almost half of all community radio stations identified work experience as their most significant interaction with external organisations. Virtually all of the journalism programs at universities around Australia rely on community radio for internships and work experience. It represents access to ‘hands-on’ experience otherwise unavailable to students. In turn, this contribution has made a significant contribution to news and information programs being produced on community radio. Around two-thirds of news and current affairs and general volunteers reported having received some training in radio or journalism ‘elsewhere’.

In one area in particular—reconciliation—it could be that community radio is playing a more significant role than any other media sector in the country. As several university lecturers from Queensland reported, associations between journalism programs and local Indigenous
radio represented examples of ‘reconciliation in action’. Similar links between journalism students and ethnic broadcasters and radio for the print handicapped has set up invaluable links between local stations and the varied communities they serve. In this area, too, many community radio respondents voiced their concern that this valuable work went largely unrecognised and unrecompensed by organisations like mainstream media and universities who clearly benefited from the association.

Respondents had many suggestions for improving the existing training regime in community radio. While an overwhelming majority rated the training they did receive very highly, the main issue identified remains access to training, per se, and the resources to enable it to occur. Participants in this study tended to identify a large number of specific areas of training need, demonstrating the wide cross-section of work being undertaken within the sector.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, most training (86.1 percent) being carried out is not accredited. But this could change. The CBAA has accreditation through the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB), a NSW statutory body established by the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Act 1990. As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), the CBAA is thus in a good position to enter into partnerships with community stations to implement accredited training schemes nationwide. In practice, this would mean the possibility of accessing funds to support training programs. Such an approach was suggested in one of the recommendations (Recommendation 6) of the 2001 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts inquiry into regional radio, *Local Voices*:

> The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts should establish a station manager employment and training scheme for the community broadcasting sector to allow community broadcasters to participate in accredited training courses. The scheme should be based on a self-help model in which Government funds are made available on a dollar for dollar basis to match locally generated funds. The level of Commonwealth funding should be capped at $5,000 per station (2001, xiii).

The CBAA has affirmed that ‘for community broadcasting to remain an integral and equal part of the Australian broadcasting system there must be effective and continuing support from both the government and the regulatory regime’. It has argued, for example, that ‘smaller rural and regional stations are unable to engage suitably qualified and skilled station managers because of a lack of income’ (CBAA 2001, 4). These assertions are strongly supported by the findings of this study. In response to the *Local Voices* inquiry into regional radio, the CBAA has suggested adopting a model used in the USA to fund a station manager employment and training scheme based on a dollar for dollar match between local and federal government funds. The association has suggested that an additional $2 million a year for this purpose in Australia would be of ‘considerable benefit’ to rural and regional stations, now in the majority across the country. In October 2002, the CBAA, RPH, NEMBC and CBF
suggested to the Federal government via DCITA that the sector’s training resources be
developed by implementing (among other initiatives):

- a national accredited broadcast skills training program addressing ethnic, Indigenous, 
  RPH and general community broadcasters needs ($2.64 million in 2003/04);
- a national accredited management skills training program and Regional and Rural 
  Radio Business Incubator Project ($1.661 million in 2003/04); and
- an establishment, and Training Infrastructure Development Fund ($2.2 million in 
  2003/04).

At the very least, support for such initiatives would begin to address the concerns identified in
this study. It is clear that the community sector undertakes a considerable amount of quality 
training for its staff with, in most cases, little financial incentive or acknowledgment. The 
contribution this training makes to the broader Australian broadcasting industry is difficult to 
estimate but, as we have argued, it is significant. Similarly, the relationship community 
stations have built up with external organisations like schools, TAFE colleges and universities 
suggests more value adding for those organisations. Of course there are benefits for 
community stations in this, too, but these are yet to translate into much-needed funds that 
would seem to be highly likely to satisfy the concerns raised here. The sector will need to 
address continuing concerns over access to new information technologies. This should 
involve sector-wide debates on the best ways to keep up with new media technologies. The 
technical support provided by the CBAA to date has been widely praised but the challenge of 
meeting the specific needs of specific stations remains. While not all stations want to adopt 
all aspects of new media, some will need specifically targeted training and support to enable 
them to achieve their aims — and to sustain them.

**News and Information**

Around 20 per cent of community radio stations produce what they defined as regular news 
and current affairs programs, mostly on a daily basis. Those that do are providing high levels 
of training for their workers. A large proportion of these communication practitioners have 
formal qualifications in journalism. The services we have identified in this study are strongly 
anchored in stations’ local communities of interest, whether this is geographically or culturally 
defined. News workers rely heavily on local meetings, conversations, regular contacts and 
local newspapers as their sources for story ideas and they believe that imparting information 
to the community is their program’s most important role. Around 75 per cent of the news and 
current affairs programming produced is of specific relevance to a local community and 
workers felt they had complete autonomy to select and report on stories of importance. The 
majority identified the provision of local news by their stations as its most important role along 
with providing alternative information to their mainstream competitors.
While involvement in defined news and current affairs production across the sector appears to be low, the national networking structures like Comradsat and the NIRS, for example, mean that the effect of this enterprise is far more widespread. In addition, it is clear from the many focus group discussions, that community radio workers provide a diversity of information to their communities that, for many, did not fall into the category of ‘news and current affairs’. Many community radio stations provide factual information to their audiences — details of local events, accommodation advice, and health-related issues to name a few. It is an example of the kind of information exchange activity in which community radio is constantly engaged. This is information that would most often have no relevance outside these communities. Equally, it is generally unavailable from mainstream media sources, with the possible exceptions of some local newspapers where they exist. With the pullback from regional Australia by local commercial radio, and increasingly, by regional newspapers, community radio are already, or will soon become, the only information sources for such audiences.

**Funding**

Our study has shown that the sector is in a transition phase, triggered by decreasing levels of federal government funding, forcing many stations to seek higher levels of sponsorship, subscription and business support. While some station workers in the sector have welcomed this, others are concerned that it has compromised — or has the potential to compromise — the very aims on which the sector has been based for much of the past 25 years. Many survey respondents and focus group participants voiced concerns that this new environment means they are no longer able to produce programming they believe to be beneficial to the local community. Many feel this trend will force them into producing programs which can attract higher audience numbers and, in turn, more sponsorship—in other words, aiming for the middle ground. Unfortunately for community broadcasters, this is the very audience already targeted by commercial media. There is no evidence from this study that one approach is working better than the other. But clearly, stations in high-density urban centres have a much greater potential for attracting sponsorship than the majority situated in regional and rural Australia.

The focus groups revealed a great diversity in the ways stations have adopted different fundraising methods. These include a combination of sponsorship, sale of airtime, subscriptions, annual events like radiothons or music festivals and government funds in various forms. There is a huge diversity in terms of success in these endeavours. Some station representatives urged the lifting of the five minutes per hour limit on sponsorship announcements to enable them to generate more revenue while others will continue to find it impossible to fill that gap. Stations are unable to obtain reliable audience figures because of the high costs involved in inclusion in the AC Nielsen audience ratings that have been adopted by the mainstream as the only acceptable evidence of listenership. Many
contributors to this study felt the need to be a part of an audience survey such as this was unnecessary, relying on local businesses and contacts to support their programming. But others believe it is a stumbling block in their attempts to achieve sustainable levels of sponsorship. An audience survey was beyond the scope of this study but there clearly needs to be more data on this aspect of the sector. Community stations clearly need access to low-cost audience evaluation. This could include guidance in applying basic audience monitoring tools such as brief, regular telephone surveys for station callers, and feedback from people attending station-organised events. This would provide many stations with basic information about their audiences that could be supplemented by a more detailed audience survey, based on a generic model, perhaps developed by the CBAA in partnership with experienced audience researchers. While the focus group data revealed extensive evidence of community radio station staff engagement with their audiences, sponsors (and governments) still want to see hard data. Few, if any, community stations are able to provide that information. Until they do, the sponsorship dilemma seems likely to remain.

There were criticisms from within the sector over what some saw as inequitable allocation of funding from DCITA. Most suggested that existing funding levels needed to be increased to provide minimal opportunities for licensed stations to buy such things as necessary capital equipment. Regardless of these concerns, community radio stations overwhelmingly see their role as different from that of their mainstream commercial counterparts.

The focus groups identified some concerns over sector management of funding. While most were supportive of both the CBAA and the CBF, the CBAA’s membership fee structure came under fire. Several focus group participants felt the linking of annual fees to station turnover was unfair — if a station was successful in increasing its annual turnover, they argued, CBAA fees increased accordingly; but if stations had a bad year, fees did not fall below a designated level (Darwin Focus Group, 2001). Others felt that CBAA membership, along with some of the services they paid for, but did not use (Comradsat, for example), were a waste of scarce station funds. Some reminded us that while turnover for a station might be, say, $250,000, the station could spend $249,000 simply staying on the air. It was suggested that this was evidence for the CBAA to consider reviewing its fee structure (Port Augusta Focus Group, 2001; Victorian Regional Focus Group, 2001).

Sector Management

The mere mention of sector representation in the focus groups guaranteed an often lively and lengthy discussion. This is clearly an issue that community radio workers are actively engaging with and in this, it should be seen in a positive light. Almost without exception, everyone who attended the many focus groups had something to offer on the nature and effectiveness of sector management by the CBAA, the CBF, DCITA and other relevant representative bodies. The CBAA was overwhelmingly the focus and it is fair to say that
opinions were divided between acknowledging its achievements and criticising perceived weaknesses. On the plus side, there was clear acknowledgment of the important, and sometimes hidden services provided by the CBAA, as this Adelaide Focus Group (2001) participant concludes:

It provides a very valuable service. Its membership services are many and varied. You can get any problem solved, online or on the phone. There is always someone there who can answer your query. I think it has extensive support for technical, organisation of conferences, policy lobbying...[community station] boards don’t see that.

CBAA technical support (and particularly the association’s technical support officer) was universally acknowledged as ‘first class’, as were facilities like the CBAA website and follow-up support for technical problems. The overall structure of the organisation is acknowledged as complex and by no means perfect (Adelaide Focus Group 2001):

I don’t think anybody would think it was the best but I think that there is a genuine goodwill in trying to make it work. I don’t think people are trying to stuff it up all the time, it’s just that once you take into account everybody’s sort of interests and their historical pattern that you’ll end up with a complicated picture...

There were similar views from community radio workers in Western Australia and Adelaide with this Canberra Focus Group (2001) comment acknowledging the political context in which the CBAA operated:

I think the CBAA does a very good job for a very diverse sector because they are trying to please a whole lot of different interests here, from regional people to the city people, from a lot of different points of views, specialists, broadcasters. I’ve seen what they do and the budget that they are doing it on and I think they are doing a pretty good job of that. I do sometimes have to question the effectiveness of it. I think they could probably improve their game on that to a certain extent but you also need to have a receptive government listening to those approaches as well.

An Adelaide Focus Group participant summed up with this positive response:

The staff are terrific and where you most see that exemplified is if you go to the National Conference, where you see the way that they all work together to make that conference work. I was noticing this last time...really committed to making sure people really participate and enjoy things. I’ve never seen quite that level of attention to people being able to be part of things.

On an allied issue — the relationship with DCITA — there were few comments, apart from this one from Adelaide, making the important point that individuals can make a difference. Here, the comment relates to a former member of DCITA and her relationship with people in the sector.

When you get somebody like that in a bureaucracy its like the value of 10 people because they have developed a kind of passionate commitment to it and she was that sort of person, and we might not be lucky enough to get that sort of person again. That's where it is a bit chancy, whereas if you were, there will always be administratively within the Department, people who will deal with the big players as a priority to the Department, so that's what's different for us.
The CBAA structure and management came in for some spirited criticism as well. Some suggested that the CBAA needed to see itself more as a partner with member broadcasters rather than ‘the boss’. Others felt that the CBAA had done little for specific sections of the sector, like Indigenous broadcasting, in particular. One participant pointed out that while support for Indigenous access to the airwaves was overwhelming at a CBAA conference some years ago, the association itself was unable to enforce the motion among its members, leading to a perception of it being more like a ‘gummy shark’. Another Brisbane Focus Group participant suggested that limited access to funds meant that some community stations gave joining local community organisations a higher priority than the CBAA (Brisbane Focus Group 2001). The strongest views on the relevance of both the CBAA and the CBF came from focus group members in Darwin and Port Augusta. One Darwin participant identified a lack of communication with both organisations as a problem, and one of the incentives for starting a local organisation of community broadcasters in the north. This observer felt that the tyranny of distance was one of the contributing factors. Another Darwin broadcaster voiced an ambivalent view, reflected by others around the country (Darwin Focus Group 2001):

I reckon the CBAA does a tremendous job as a peak body. I’ve heard others criticise it and say they’re a toothless tiger. But I suppose, in reality, any peak body is a toothless tiger to the point that they can’t go up to the government and demand what they want anyway. They’re only as good as their membership, and they’re lobby groups more than anything else. My criticism is…I wonder how representative of the sector it really is—the body itself is not made up of state-by-state representatives.

Several commentators expressed a concern that more consultation was needed before the CBAA embarked on new initiatives. This included criticism of a lack of opportunity for member input into national programming decisions for Comradsat, for example. Others were critical of national CBAA initiatives, the relevance of which, several members queried. This Adelaide radio worker summed up their concerns:

There is also the fact that in the last few years the governments tended to give blobs of money to community radio that wasn’t what we asked them. So there was the famous Community Broadcasting Database project, CB Online project which was pre-election ’96 or something. It was a sweetener, they said we are giving you this much money for basically IT development in community radio stations, which was a good thing. I mean there have been some really good things that have come out if but if the sector had sat down and said, ‘What are our priorities?’ we might have come up with something totally different (Adelaide Focus Group 2001).

Another observation concerned the overlap between the CBAA and the CBF:

I understand the reasons why both organisations want to be separate and feel they need to be but at the same time, there is a certain amount of duplication there, backing and rent and all that, that I think could be combined together. I’m not sure if the independence is worth the cost to the sector overall but it’s something to look at. But generally I think the CBAA is doing a pretty good job on not that huge a budget (Canberra Focus Group, 2001).
These comments, both positive and negative, were not isolated. As we suggested, at the very least, it suggests the membership cares about and is engaging with its peak representative organisations. One Sydney Focus Group (2001) member perhaps draws this together more eloquently:

A lot of the work that CBAA does is unseen, nobody knows about it except the CBAA. We know at a very glossy level, e.g. we’re talking about representation, OK, there’s a lobby group in Canberra. I’m sure there’s a lot of time and effort that gets put into it but most members look at the results, and most members look at the results of no increased funding, no movement on digital radio, no movement on this. So all the members see is the result and it doesn’t mean nothing is being done...

Another issue which was highlighted across the focus groups was the need for some publicity concerning what sector actually does—in other words, the need for community radio stations to market their services and successes to the Australian community. Several people who raised this point emphasised that such a campaign should focus on informing the broader audience of the role of community radio. This is an important issue and one raised by the Digital Dreaming inquiry into Indigenous broadcasting (ATSIC 1999). As with the Indigenous broadcasting sector, there is virtually no effective federal, state or local government use of community radio as a means of reaching specific communities of interest. This suggests that few, if any, of these governing bodies know of the existence of the sector, let alone what its facilities might offer by way of disseminating information. This ignorance represents a significant waste of resources that, in part, the federal government is supporting. This lack of communication and coordination needs to be addressed urgently. One or two regular sponsorship deals through the Office of Government Information and Advertising (OGIA), could represent survival for many of Australia’s more than 200 permanent community stations.

Where do we go from here?

The report has identified a number of issues that need attention by sector managers, government policymakers and other stakeholders. They include the following:

Acknowledging the existence and role of the sector

- The sector provides a medium for at least 20,000 volunteers who spend almost two-and-half times longer at work than the average Australian volunteer. This committed workforce engages in a wide range of participatory activities including training, program production, administration, management and community interaction. This is equivalent to a national labour force costing $2.79 million per week or more than $145 million per year. This is slightly less than the 2002-2003 Federal government support for Australia’s Multicultural Broadcaster, SBS ($170 million), and about one-fifth of the 2002-2003 government appropriation for the National Broadcaster, the ABC ($807 million).
This significant contribution to the Australian media economy needs to be recognised in the policy process. It suggests the current trend that has seen a steady decline in federal government support for the sector has underestimated both the quantity and quality of the work being undertaken.

- Government and associated agencies need to become aware of the important and diverse cultural roles carried out by community radio, especially in the light of the steady withdrawal of local commercial radio services from regional and rural areas. Services to many of these areas are being provided by community radio, by default. There needs to be an urgent campaign to make stakeholders aware of the extent and nature of the community radio network and to encourage them to use these facilities to disseminate relevant information through sponsorship. Federal government departmental campaign advertising and sponsorship is placed by the Office of Government Information and Advertising (OGIA) — this agency needs to be made aware of, and become involved in, the process.

- Community radio in Australia represents an increasingly important element of citizenship and might be better described as ‘citizens radio’ rather than ‘alternative radio’, although it performs both functions.

- The sector, along with its achievements and services, remains largely unknown to potential stakeholders like governments, government agencies, and community organisations and businesses. The sector needs to embark on a campaign nationally and by member stations, locally, to publicise its achievements and potential to a wide range of potential stakeholders. There needs to be a particular emphasis on raising the level of awareness of federal, state and local government departments and agencies about the role of the sector and its potential for delivering information to a wide range of audiences. Additional funds should be made available for this exercise. It should be seen as an investment that has the potential to result in a higher level of sponsorship for the sector Australia-wide.

- The community sector is engaged in an important educative role in conjunction with tertiary institutions, schools and community organisations. These associations may need to be formalised if there are moves to seek accreditation for sector training. Associations between journalism programs and Indigenous radio stations in Queensland offer a model for other states.

- The sector offers the opportunity for an extraordinary range of diverse audiences to participate from Indigenous, multicultural, print-handicapped, and generalist backgrounds. The role of community radio in the reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is highly significant. In a similar way, the sector plays a crucial role in promoting the idea of multiculturalism through its support for refugee and other NESB communities in Australian society.
Media training

- The sector is engaging in a largely unaccredited, widespread and diverse range of training programs. This important work needs to be accredited to recognise its quality and relevance and to offer community radio stations the possibility of attracting supportive funding from a range of sources. South Australian community radio stations’ experience with this might offer a model.
- There are significant benefits in community sector training activities for the broader Australian media industry with community sector-trained personnel moving constantly to the mainstream. The community sector is currently undertaking widespread training for the Australian media industry with little public acknowledgement or financial recognition. This needs to be acknowledged by industry and governments alike and should inform policy on sector funding.
- Tertiary institutions, particularly university journalism programs, have a strong link with the community radio sector, providing students and expertise through journalism education courses. In return, community stations provide a ‘real world’ outlet for this through program production and on-the-job training. There may be a need to examine these activities should sector-wide accreditation of training programs occur.

News and information services

- A small but significant section of the community radio sector provides a crucial source of news and current affairs programming on local events and issues for its audiences. Increasingly, this is becoming the only source of information for local communities abandoned by local commercial radio and newspapers. This important role needs to be acknowledged in the policymaking process and should be taken into account when considering overall sector funding.
- News and information programs on community radio have developed positive links with most of Australia’s 23 university journalism schools. Some of these arrangements need to be examined to ensure there is an equal exchange of resources for this important educative process.
- In addition to formal news and current affairs programs, community stations gather and present a large volume of factual information on events and issues relevant to their local audiences. For many, this is their only source of information.

Sector funding

- Declining levels of federal government funding for the sector have meant an increasing reliance on sponsorship across the sector. For many of the urban-based stations, this offers an alternative source of funds. But for the vast majority of community radio stations (60 per cent in regional Australia), a reliance on local sponsorship alone is an impossible dream. The majority of community stations
broadcast to low population centres. The possibility for most of these to become financially independent is nil. Government funding for such stations should be seen as an investment — with the winding back of local commercial radio, community stations, in many small regional centres, have become the only source of local content. They are playing an important cultural role in their communities.

- Tensions exist across the sector between those who argue for a more commercial orientation for community radio and others who suggest that the pitch for increased sponsorship has already begun to push community radio programming to the middle ground. This is the same market being sought by commercial radio and seems likely to disadvantage community stations in larger urban centres. One would expect the commercial radio sector to be unimpressed by this additional competition.

- The CBAA should investigate its current formula determining fee structure to ensure that it accurately reflects members’ ability to pay.

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