



Low Power FM: a Powerful Resource for Women

How does media consolidation hurt women – and how can LPFM help?

In an age of rampant media consolidation, the walls between journalism, advertising, entertainment and marketing have all but disintegrated. With just a handful of self-interested conglomerates owning the vast majority of news and entertainment outlets in America, women's voices continue to be marginalized in nearly every aspect of corporate media, in front of and behind the cameras and microphones. In this profit-oriented media climate, broadcast news has become increasingly sensationalistic and sexist. War coverage is routinely interrupted by breaking bulletins about Lindsay Lohan's (lack of) underwear. Female politicians' bodies, haircuts and style choices are debated as if they are as or more newsworthy than their legislative positions. Popular news anchors blame women who are raped, battered and even murdered for "provoking" these crimes against them. And reasoned commentary has given way to a homogenous circus of angry talking heads – primarily white and male – screaming at each other as if public affairs programming were a death sport.

LPFM stations offer an opportunity for women to enter the debate and engage on their own terms, creating content that better serves their needs. Women's rights organizations and women-led social justice groups could use LPFM stations to discuss, debate and organize around issues related to women's and girls' social, political, economic and physical equality and security.

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

LPFM stations empower local broadcasters to provide local communities with a variety of new voices and services that can't be found on the corporate media dial. LPFM stations can address the interests of underserved groups – women, people of color, labor groups, religious communities, artists -- and provide a forum for information and debate about issues of concern to these communities. LPFM stations strengthen community identity in urban neighborhoods, rural towns and other areas currently too small to be taken into consideration by "mainstream," ratings-driven, corporate-owned media.

Where are the women in corporate media?

When women are underrepresented as media sources, guests, reporters, producers, news managers, executives and board members, it becomes increasingly difficult for our perspectives to shape public debate over the pressing issues of the day and, by extension, public policy.

Yet despite **women being the majority of college journalism majors since 1977**, women have been marginalized in corporate media jobs at nearly every level – with women's presence decreasing at every rung up the power ladder.

Women in Broadcast Media Content:

- Women are just **19% of sources in cable news, 27% of network evening news sources, and 34% of sources on network morning news.**
- Women are only **14% of guests on the nation's highly influential Sunday morning political talk shows**, which have the power to shape public perceptions of political, cultural and legislative affairs.
- Women of color are virtually invisible as pundits in these arenas. For example, over a six month period, only two non-white women – PBS's Gwen Ifill and Democratic strategist Donna Brazile, both African American – appeared as panelists on NBC's, ABC's and Fox's Sunday morning talk shows.



"LPFM opened many doors for me. Now, I write pieces on media reform, and I was even asked to talk to the FCC during their hearings on media consolidation." – Ginny Welsh, Executive Director WRFN-LP, Nashville, TN

Why are TV news outlets so comfortable sidelining women as news sources and commentators? In part, this lack of prioritization of women's talent and perspectives trickles down from a larger marginalization of women in the news industry.

Women Working in Broadcast Media:

- Women reported only **28% of all U.S. broadcast network TV evening newscast stories** (ABC, CBS, NBC) in 2006.
- Women were **40.2% of the TV news workforce** in 2007. Still, women were only 28.3% of news directors (sadly, that's an all-time high).
- In 2006, women were just **24.4% of the radio news workforce** and **23.5% of radio news managers** (and approximately **64% of radio news staffs do not include any women**). These numbers are actually declining, with women making up **22.7% of radio news workers** and **20% of radio news managers** by 2007.
- In radio, the picture for women was not as good. The percentage of women fell again in 2007 from 24.4% to 22.7%. The percentage among news directors also fell back to the 2005 levels of 20% after rising to 23.5% in 2006. (*Radio-Television News Directors Association, July/August 2007*)
- Only 18 women were featured in Talkers Magazine's 2009 "Heavy Hundred" list, honoring "The 100 Most Important Radio Talk Show Hosts in America." (Of those, three co-host shows with male colleagues.)



"LPFM gives voice to those who are otherwise voiceless. It encourages advocacy both individually and collectively and affirms the creativity, dignity and worth of people in the community." - Efia Nwangaza
Founder WMXP-LP Greenville, SC

Women in Media Ownership, Board Membership and Executive Leadership:

- Women own just **5% of 1,363 full-powered TV stations** and **6% of 10,500 full-powered radio stations** in the United States. (Only 3% of TV and 8% of radio stations have non-white owners. Data specifically tracking ownership by women of color is not available.)
- Women comprise just **12% of board members** in top communications companies, and just **15% of executive leaders**. If these numbers seem dismal, consider that women executives held **only 5% of "clout titles"** – executive positions that can shape programming priorities and news agendas.

How Low Power FM can put women back into the picture

While the majority of broadcast television and radio stations in the country pay short shrift to women in the news force and in the populations media are supposed to serve, low power FM stations offer women the opportunity to report, debate and create local media that respects us, informs us, challenges us and fulfills our communities' needs.

What You Can Do

Let members of Congress know that women – who are slightly more than half the population – deserve equal access to the airwaves. Register your concern about the availability of low power FM radio licenses in your area. Urge your representatives to support pro-LPFM legislation similar to the bills that were introduced in the past two years:

Senate: The Local Community Radio Act of 2009 (S 592)

House: The Enhance and Protect Local Community Radio Act of 2009 (HR1147)

Sign up for our "Prometheus De-livered" e-mail list to **hear of new opportunities to apply for these low-power stations** and spread the news amongst your networks! http://prometheusradio.org/get_involved/de-livered_list.html

"I found the process of applying for a low power radio station inspiring and empowering, and now I can proudly say that a community radio station exists to serve the community of Florence, MA" – Margo Robb, WXOJ-LP



RESOURCES

- Prometheus Radio Project <http://prometheusradio.org>
- Women In Media & News (WIMN): <http://www.wimnonline.org> and <http://www.wimnonline.org/WIMNsVoicesBlog>
- FCC's Audio Division <http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/lpfm/index.html>
- National Federation of Community Broadcasters <http://www.nfcb.org>

