



Future of Music Coalition on **Low Power FM**

FMC FACT SHEET

UPDATE: On December 18, 2010, Congressional champions joined with grassroots advocates and public interest groups — ranging from civil rights, environmental, arts, and religious organizations — to secure a pivotal victory in the effort to expand the diversity of views and voices on American radio. The Local Community Radio Act passed the House of Representatives and Senate, thanks to the bipartisan leadership of Representatives Mike Doyle (D-PA) and Lee Terry (R-NE) and Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and John McCain (R-AZ).

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

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

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

LPFM licenses are available to community groups, high schools, labor unions, churches and other nonprofit organizations that would like to reach out to a small, geographically concentrated group of individuals in their community. About 825 radio stations, broadcasting at 100 watts or less, are currently successfully serving communities across the country, with many more in the process of applying for a license or in the construction phase.

Why is Low Power FM important?

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

Why is Low Power FM important for musicians?

Since commercial radio is focused on programming music with mainstream appeal, music from niche formats or independent sources is not usually heard on the radio. This impacts the livelihoods of many musicians, including jazz, classical and world music artists. Musicians find it increasingly difficult to reach listeners via the airwaves, and venues, presenting organizations, orchestras and opera companies have fewer opportunities to promote their performances and broaden their audience base.



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Radio also largely ignores regional musical formats. For example, Opelousas, LA is considered the birthplace of zydeco music, but until recently the community could not hear the unique sound of its local heritage on the radio. Likewise, zydeco musicians had no way to expand their audiences. In 2003, the Southern Development Foundation began broadcasting on a Low Power frequency, and the station now plays zydeco, blues, gospel and jazz, and hosts community talk shows. This has benefited both niche musicians and the community at large.

Doesn't public radio fill the gaps?

Public and noncommercial radio has done an admirable job supporting independent and culturally diverse music, but the increasing pressure on profitability and market share has caused public radio stations to change their formats as well. In 2001, New Hampshire Public Radio dropped all of their classical and most of their jazz programming in favor of talk-oriented fare. Residents in New Hampshire were unable to listen to classical music on the radio until an LPFM station, WCNH, received its license in 2004 and became the only classical music station in the state. Public radio stations across the country are making decisions similar to New Hampshire Public Radio's, and moving from music programming to public affairs and talk-radio formats. This has resulted in less airtime for music of all kinds.

Legislative History of Low Power Radio Service

- In January 2000, the FCC voted to issue low power FM radio licenses. This amounted to a huge victory for communities nationwide where, in many instances, consolidation of commercial media outlets following the 1996 Telecommunications Act had led to decreased localism and diversity on the airwaves.
- Incumbent broadcasters, represented in large part by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), lobbied Congress to stop the service, warning that low power FM radio would cause "oceans of interference" for full power stations. Responding to this pressure, Congress passed the Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act in December 2000, which eliminated about 75 percent of the original LPFM licensing opportunities, predominantly in the most densely populated areas, and required that the FCC undertake a study of potential interference issues.
- After three years of inquiry and testing, the interference study was released in July 2003. The MITRE Corporation, which was hired by the FCC to conduct the study, concluded that LPFM stations caused no significant interference problems and recommended lifting the burdensome restrictions imposed by Congress. In other words, the interference concerns raised by the NAB were, as predicted by Low Power advocates, unfounded.
- In March 2005, the FCC began a further inquiry into possible revisions to its LPFM rules. Thousands of citizens filed comments in the proceeding.



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- In June 2007, The Local Community Radio Act was introduced in both the House and the Senate. If passed, HR 2802 and S 1675 would remove the “third-adjacent channel” restrictions, allowing further low power stations to be licensed in more urban and suburban areas. In October 2007, S 1675 was voted out of committee by consensus vote and was sent to the full Senate for review.
- In November 2007, the FCC passed a set of provisions designed to protect existing LPFM stations and encourage localism and diversity. The provisions include limiting the number of stations that can be owned to one per organization, giving existing LPFM stations some protection in interference issues with full power stations, and prohibiting the use of repetitive/automated programming. The FCC also reiterated its support for Congress lifting the third adjacent channel ban, which is a very affirmative step towards the long-term goal of having LPFM stations available in more populated areas.
- In 2009, the [Local Community Radio Act](#) was reintroduced in Congress. On October 7, 2009, the bill cleared a major hurdle when it passed out of the House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet in a sweeping 15 to 1 vote.
- In October 2009, the Local Community Radio Act passed out of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce in a unanimous vote. In December 2009, the bill passed in the full House — the furthest pro-LPFM legislation has come in a decade. After some back-and-forth in the Senate, Congress passed the Local Community Radio Act on December 18, 2010.

What musicians and the public can do

Support Low Power and community radio initiatives in your own community.

RESOURCES

FMC blog posts on LPFM

<http://futureofmusiccoalition.blogspot.com/search/label/low-power%20FM%20%28LPFM%29>

Prometheus Radio Project

<http://prometheusradio.org>

Media Access Project

<http://www.mediaaccess.org/programs/lpfm/>

FCC’s Audio Division

<http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/lpfm/index.html>

National Federation of Community Broadcasters

<http://www.nfcb.org>

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