

WJFF Radio Catskill Board of Trustees

Meeting Minutes

March 10, 2025 at 6:00pm

Meeting Location: The BOT met at The Arnold House for a special in-person meeting to do an in-depth SWOT analysis and brainstorm funding ideas.

Approved on: 5/5/2025

Board Members Present: Jeff Barnes, Amy Brightfield, Katie Childs, Barb Demarest, Gerard Finn (entered at 6:30), Jill Fruchter, Leif Johansen, Tanya Kalivas, Pete Madden, Ilya Marritz, Krissy Smith, Sally Stuart

Board Members Absent: Donald Almquist, Dale Blagrove

Staff Present: Mimi, Tim, Patricio, Kim, Jason, Ronald

Members of the Public Present: Sonya Hedlund

A quorum being present, Sally called the meeting to order at 6:06pm.

Opening updates: There are a few changes to the BOT. Heather is stepping down from the board effective now and Krissy is staying through June but will not run for a second term.

Sally welcomed Sonja Hedlund and appreciated her recent show with David Dan that shared out wonderful memories and history of the station and how it has changed.

Sally opened with an overview of our goals at this special all in-person meeting. We're talking about big-picture strategy, especially given that we're unsure about CPB funding medium and longer-term. Thank you to Leif and Jill for organizing and leading the SWOT activities. We'll break out into groups to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and external threats, then come back together to discuss. For the second activity, we'll brainstorm strategically how to prepare for the uncertainty. Mimi will talk about how to raise private support and build the donor base in large part by emphasizing the critical services we provide to the community.

Potential Funding Cuts (Mimi/Tim) Mimi was on an NPR call and reports are that stations mid drive have all overperformed. A DOGE house subcommittee hearing is scheduled for March 26th. Today Sen Gillibrand's office reached out regarding the FEMA funding to find out what's going on. Our participation in Protect My Public Media Day made an impact and we are continuing to run those messages on air.

MOTION to approve consent agenda minutes (Amy/Leif).

- Finance Committee Minutes 1/22/25
- Strategic Planning Work Group Minutes 1/29/25
- Board of Trustees Minutes 2/6/2025
- Finance Committee Minutes 2/12/25
- Strategic Planning Work Group Minutes 2/26/25

In Favor: Jeff Barnes, Amy Brightfield, Katie Childs, Barb Demarest, Jill Fruchter, Leif Johansen, Tanya Kalivas, Pete Madden, Ilya Marritz, Krissy Smith, Sally Stuart

Abstained: None

Opposed: None

MOTION to approve bylaw changes (Pete/Ilya)

In Favor: Jeff Barnes, Amy Brightfield, Katie Childs, Barb Demarest, Jill Fruchter, Leif Johansen, Tanya Kalivas, Pete Madden, Ilya Marritz, Krissy Smith, Sally Stuart

Abstained: None

Opposed: None

Financials (Katie) Katie has circulated a memo outlining several financial scenarios given the likelihood of cuts. For right now, we will continue operating as normal as possible. If we do lose funding, we would need to evaluate every single expense and align where we want to invest.

SWOT Analysis

Leif and Jill introduced the Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats analysis and the board broke into groups. The following guiding questions were shared:

- Who are Radio Catskill listeners in 2030? What characteristics do they have? How is this different and/or the same from listeners in 2025?
- How do Radio Catskill's listeners engage with the station in 2030, and how does Radio Catskill engage with them? How is this different/the same from 2025?
- What is the added value that Radio Catskill brings to its community, and what attracts its audience and keeps them engaged?
- What is Radio Catskill's distinct/unique offering as a content shop?
- What are Radio Catskill's revenue sources in 2030? How might this look different than 2025?

After small group discussion, we reported out in a full group. See below for the notes of this first round draft SWOT analysis.

STRENGTHS

- Diverse mix of supporters that extends beyond our geographic listening area

- Making strides attracting “younger” (40s/50s) audience
- Community good will
- Loyal listener base
- Dedicated staff
- Strong volunteer base
- Wonderful 35-year history
- Strong, cool branding
- Programming - Locally produced and subscription-based
 - Local music shows
 - Diverse, Community-centered
 - Long form interviews, depth of coverage
 - NYPNN shows
 - NPR programming
- Local journalism
- Haven for renegades and refugees
- Complimentary media partnerships
- Diverse skill set of Board

WEAKNESSES

- Available archive
- Lack of IT and Website skills
- Poor podcast distribution
- Inconsistent digital presence (website, social media)
- Reactive vs. responsive/sustainable ability to produce local news content
- Preparedness for AI utilization
- Low audience awareness and familiarity with breath of Station programming
- Size of audience
- Reach of terrestrial signal
- CAB engagement
- Limited funding in region (few people, limited, seasonal economy)

OPPORTUNITIES

- Youth engagement (schools, young people)
- Community events
- Untapped, diverse listener audiences (“Purple” area, Growing religious community, Local conservative majority, Pennsylvania, Remote listeners, New homeowners, Remote workers; Shifting population)
- Public media mergers

- Digital and asynchronous content delivery
 - Social media/online presence
 - Podcasts and podcasting
 - People no longer using certain newspapers or social media for news
 - Content available and ready to be shared with broader audience
 - Majority of audience will soon be digital natives
- Filling news void; Local population wanting “real news” (housing, immigration)

THREATS

- Lack, loss of federal funding
- Changing news consumption habits
- Fractured media landscape
- Vast region to cover
- Losing staff; Staff bandwidth
- Can’t afford full NPR member benefits (e.g. CMS, tech support)
- Aging radio listening audience, supporters; Need to pivot to reach younger audience
- Decrease in influx of remote workers; New resident exodus
- Censorship
- Cancel culture
- Politicization of news

Mimi introduced a second round of small group discussion topics related to increasing private support for WJFF. Topics included Underwriting, individual giving, increasing Sound Supporters.

The Attracting New Donors group came up with the following ideas and suggestions:

- a. For private dinners/parties, speak with Jeff, Pete and Eddie Adams family.
- b. Look for Celebs to show support e.g. Authors, Actors, Musicians, etc.
- c. Message out the need to support Protect Your Public Media
- d. Work on ways to create an emotional connection for listeners e.g. driveway moments, telling our stories, what’s going on in our backyards...
- e. The group didn’t think that asking donors to add three dollars to their monthly giving was a big enough ask.

The Sound Supporter group came up with the following ideas and suggestions:

- a. Lower pre-set donate amount on website to \$10
- b. New business in-kind donation to encourage Sound Supporters
- c. New swag (visibility) Better seats at....
- d. More desirable giveaways (glamping @ Bethel Woods)

- e. Partnerships/NYC + New Yorker giveaway
- f. PBS “passport” to cool stuff (canopy)
- g. Campaign around character/superhero
- h. Celebrity voicemail (The Hulk-Mark Ruffalo)
- i. Exclusive/early access to reporting/podcasts
- j. Radio’s own celebrities-time with...one to many, Rosie on the stamp
- k. Yard sign
- l. Promote Sound Supporters to newest members
- m. Create online community for Sound Supporters
- n. Exclusive events-DJ, brunch w/Jason, farm visit

The Underwriter group came up with the following ideas and suggestions for new underwriters:

- a. Weiss Grocery-Indian Orchard
- b. Stewart Airport or Play Airlines
- c. Johnstons Subaru hasn’t bitten, Subaru Binghamton may be a better fit
- d. Look for contractors-Eschenberg
- e. Summer camps
- f. Consider a non-profit rate, even 10% off would be helpful
- g. Consider a focus group with local underwriters
- h. Holiday Mountain
- i. New Hope-Leif may have a connection
- j. High End Wedding Venues
- k. Campanelli’s
- l. Himalayan Institute
- m. Consider offering sponsorship of an hour of the fund drive
- n. Ask for a presence at events

At the close of the meeting, Sonja Hedlund appreciated the SWOT process and how engaged the Board of Trustees is. She also shared her views and suggestions related to opportunities and threats:

Opportunities

- Studio: visible, access to Latinx population, outdoor space and community room for events.
- Hold events in studio: gatherings on weekends for singles/mixers, open house, families, live music (“live from Studio B,” as Jill Padua does for Cooperage)
- Enlarge volunteer community; train to do more work that would free up staff to do the work that only staff can do: open station in the morning, do radio shifts

throughout the day, help with office work, mailings, record in the field, assist on weekend programs, invite kids/families to visit studio, decorate the studio, plant a garden/flowers

- Strengthen collaborations with partners; Cornell Extension, SUNY, Catskill Art Society, DVAA, other public stations (Woodstock/ Roxbury), libraries
- Send flyer about station to real estate agencies, chambers of commerce, towns

Weaknesses

- The reputation of NPR is white, liberal, 2nd home owners
- In Sonja's view: A Community of volunteers no longer exists, communication among volunteers is not encouraged by staff
- Building is not used on weekends
- Underutilization of studios; most local shows produced at home
- Weak signal
- PA studio not producing enough for what it costs
- Few local events covered LIVE in the field
- No live call in shows
- No coverage of local sports
- Nothing on history of the station in the studio; little on wikipedia

Please consider:

Asking volunteers and others with strong connections to the station to complete SWOT: DJs, CAB, committee members and also county leaders: newspaper owners, UD network leader, library leaders.

(Sonja Hedlund has DJed on WJFF for over 30 years, is a former trustee and president of the Board.)

The meeting adjourned at 7:56.