

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Bill Siemering, in his Foreword to this report, describes our “mapping” as a first step and, in this section of the report, we provide a framework for what the next step for the project will be.

The following Critical Questions were posed by project Advisors as they proof-read a draft of this report. This is not an exhaustive list, by any means. The correlations of various findings and related questions are meant to stimulate new thinking and ideas, and help to inform the agenda for convening stakeholders throughout the system as we begin to discuss the project’s Findings.

1. **Looking at the total sector of Independent Producers, it appears that public radio’s traditional funding sources don’t provide a strong economic base.**

**Q:** Does the industry have a responsibility to ensure the economic viability of Independent Producers? If so, what is the reasoning?

**Q:** Is it wiser to take a survival of the fittest approach to the Independent economy, and assume that the best negotiators or the ‘cream of the crop’ producers will rise to the top, and have the best chance of thriving, and of serving listeners with their work?

**Q:** If the public radio system values independently produced programming, is it logical or necessary that the barometer of economic support should register more highly?

**Q:** Are there any opportunities to build on the foundation of support for freelance producers that exists at the local radio stations?

2. **The community of Independent Producers is smart, diverse, and includes a contingent of young producers who are not yet committed to radio as a profession.**

**Q:** At a time when we see growing challenges to the industry, is there an opportunity to better harness the resources of the Independent Producer community in a way that could enhance public radio’s competitive stance? Or is it best to play to the proven strength of the industry’s programming and not risk trying to upset a successful formula?

**Q:** How important is it to try to foster environment where younger producers would have a chance to thrive?

3. **Acquirers say they are interested in a range of formats from Independent Producers.**

**Q:** Is there an onus on individual producers to learn to market their programming better to Acquirers?

**Q:** Are we in a situation where there are too many suppliers but not enough shelf space?

4. **Conventional thinking right now is that satellite radio and streaming audio threatens to erode public radio’s listener base. As a result, many stations are thinking about how to be more strategic locally to strength their position.**

**Q:** Is there a way for stations work more closely with the Independent Producer community to build their local program identity and bolster their position strategically?

**Q:** Along these same lines, is there an opportunity with HD Radio or streaming for stations to form stronger ties to Independent Producers?

5. **We are currently in period where public radio is considered, by all measures, a tremendous success story. The growth of the industry in terms of revenues and the size of listenership can be attributed, in large part, to its overwhelming success in serving its audience with high quality in-depth journalism. This study seems to indicate that one of the consequences of this success is that public radio has evolved into a limited platform for programming produced by Independent Producers, both in terms of the volume of the programming stream comprised of independent work, and also in the dearth of opportunity for formats other than short-form reporting or commentary.**

**Q:** Are alternative formats, such as storytelling, evocative soundscapes, or extensively researched programs a necessary sacrifice of public radio's enormous success as a provider of in-depth journalism?

**Q:** Are there incentives for increasing airtime for independently produced, alternative formats?

**Q:** Given the incredibly crowded and competitive programming field, and the lack of demonstrated ability to generate listener sensitive income, where would such programs find a home?

**Q:** Should public radio simply stick to its successful "brand" as a high quality provider of in-depth news as it considers strategies for the future?

**Q** Given that 90% of independently produced programming that turned up in this study is less than 10 minutes in length, has the description "in-depth" changed in meaning over time? Does 10 minutes allow for 'in-depth?' Does 5 minutes allow for in-depth?

Following are additional "critical questions" that have emerged during debriefings after the December 7, 2004 release of "Key Findings, Critical Questions":

6. **Some consider it a luxury to take the time to produce long-form programming that focuses on a single-topic, is in-depth, sound-rich, and generally requires some sort of special funding.**

**Q:** If the Acquirer has an in-house Independent Producer – someone working full or part time on the payroll, producing independently on the side – is the incentive to keep such an assignment in-house greater than looking outside?

**Q:** From an Acquirers P.O.V., what is the incentive for giving this sort of an assignment over to an Independent Producer who works outside their usual infra-structure? Is there something an outside Independent brings that is of unique value?

**Please send us your ideas or comments. [\[click here\]](#)**