



S. Sutton & Associates Inc.
Consultants in Philanthropic Management



Public Radio Program Directors Association Strategic and Operations Plans - FINAL

August 31, 2022

Executive Summary

In April 2022, Public Radio Program Directors Association (PRPD) engaged S. Sutton & Associates Inc. to audit and assess the organization's current operational path and funding model, and make recommendations for new revenue sources, programs, and processes, where appropriate, resulting in a new multi-year strategic plan and corresponding operations plan.

The Innovation Team, selected by S. Sutton & Associates Inc., conducted over a dozen 1:1 interviews with key stakeholders, ran a focus group with PRPD's Board of Directors, and sent a survey to the entire PRPD membership, soliciting input on the future direction, priorities and opportunities for the organization. The team also conducted an environmental scan of other member organizations that serve the public media industry to get a sense of the trends and developments that will likely take place over the timespan of this strategic plan. In early July, a mid-project report was submitted to PRPD's leadership to share initial findings, observations, a SWOT analysis, and recommendations for the strategic and operations plans. These are included as addenda to this document.

PRPD is highly valued by its membership, recognized as a trusted resource, convener and advocate for program directors and content creators working in public media. It also benefits from an engaged Board of Directors, and experienced and respected leadership. Leveraging these critical assets, and the momentum generated through this process, the following plan focuses on **four key areas** to drive the organization's continued success and stability in the coming years, and amid a shifting landscape. These include identity and brand, programming and content, partnerships, and funding.

This document outlines these strategic priorities and the specific tasks for operationalizing them, as well as a calendar for implementation in the year ahead. Once this plan is approved by the Board, it is recommended it be shared broadly with the membership to gain buy-in and ownership of the organization's future direction.

The *Strategic and Operations Plan Implementation Timeline* is included as a supporting document.

Strategy 1: Be the Premier Association Serving Nonprofit Public Media Programmers and Content Creators so They Can Successfully Serve Their Audiences

[Intent: Retain and increase the number of members]

- **Objective 1: Review and revise PRPD's mission statement to ensure it reflects the audience it aims to serve, its purpose, goals, and aspirations**
 - Action: Draft a new mission statement for the Board's and membership's consideration
 - ⇒ Potential revised mission statement for consideration:
PRPD is the leading resource, convener, and collective voice for public media program directors, content creators, and independent producers, dedicated to helping our members be successful at understanding and serving audiences with meaningful content.
 - KPI: The Board and membership agree on the new mission statement.
 - Timeline: The new mission statement is approved by September 30, 2022.
 - Numbers to be Served: Initially, the Board of Directors and executive leadership, and ultimately the entire membership
 - Owner(s): PRPD staff and the Board of Directors

- **Objective 2: Determine if PRPD needs to change its name to better reflect its revised mission and the audience it serves**
 - Action: Related to the revised mission statement, a new organization name would be a more accurate and inclusive reflection of the organization.
 - KPI: Initially, to decide on whether a name change is appropriate at this time. If a change is determined to be the best course of action, a new objective and timeline should be set for the renaming process.
 - Timeline: Initially, December 31, 2022 in tandem with Objective 1
 - Numbers to be Served: Initially, the Board of Directors and executive leadership, and ultimately the entire membership
 - Owner(s): PRPD staff and the Board of Directors

- **Objective 3: Retain existing members**
 - Action: Develop communications materials to ensure that members understand the mission statement and value proposition PRPD offers. Schedule regular opportunities for member participation in committees, feedback surveys, discussion forums, networking events, and other similar engagement tools. Lapsed members can be surveyed annually to detect trends in dropped memberships. Consider developing a membership recognition program based on milestones and/or membership lifetime value. Leverage technology to automate the membership renewal process.
 - KPI: Maintain existing membership levels or increase, and ensure new members are equal or greater to lapsed members. Track rate of retention annually (calculate total active members at beginning of annual cycle – total active members at end of cycle / total active members at beginning of cycle).
 - Timeline: Create new membership materials by January 31, 2023, and then track membership number quarterly
 - Numbers to be Served: Entire membership
 - Owners: PRPD staff, PRPD Board Chair, and appoint a Board member to oversee membership and retention

- **Objective 4: Engage new potential members**
 - Action: Create a case for membership, demonstrating benefits of membership
 - KPI: Create a one-page, visually appealing, and thoughtfully-designed document highlighting the benefits of membership to share with all new and prospective members. Ensure that membership applications include data collection on “why did you join?”
 - Timeline: In concert with Objective 3 above, create new membership materials by January 31, 2023, and then track membership number quarterly
 - Numbers to be served: PRPD currently has 120 active members, and 400 entities in its database. Determine the three-year membership growth potential and set a target goal once the new membership dues structure is approved and ready to be communicated to the membership – by January 31, 2023
 - Owners: PRPD staff to oversee with marketing and communications support, and work with the appointed Board member who oversees membership and retention (per Objective 3 above)

Strategy 2: Develop Timely and High Value Programming for Members

[Intent: Provide opportunities for members to convene, collaborate and learn from each other, so they can better serve and grow their audiences.]

- **Objective 1: Identify a signature initiative and/or theme that will drive programming development for the next two to three years**
 - Action: Explore opportunities for collaboration with other organizations also serving the public media industry to leverage resources and expand reach for greater impact, and create a committee of three Board members who will help oversee this with PRPD staff leadership
 - KPI: The signature initiative and three Board members are identified
 - Timeline: By October 31, 2022
 - Numbers to be Served: Entire membership
 - Owner(s): PRPD and Board leadership, and selected Board members for the committee

- **Objective 2: Align conference content, delivery and timing with PRPD's signature initiative**
 - Action: Identify a Board member and several representatives from the membership to serve as the conference planning committee, working in partnership with PRPD staff leadership to align the conference content and agenda to the signature initiative, as well as the delivery format (in-person, virtual or hybrid) and timing (every year or every other year)
 - KPI: Board member and membership representatives are identified and enlisted to join the conference planning committee
 - Timeline: December 31, 2022
 - Numbers to be Served: Entire membership
 - Owner(s): PRPD and Board leadership, and conference planning committee

- **Objective 3: Create cohorts that members can opt-in to join to further enhance their membership experience**
 - Action: Identify 5 to 7 key cohorts that members may select to join in their membership profile
 - KPI: Add the cohort selection option to the membership profile on the website and target communications to members of each cohort, and enlist representatives from the membership to lead the cohorts
 - Timeline: December 31, 2022
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owners: PRPD staff, Board, and membership representatives

- **Objective 4: Enhance and expand communication with and for members**
 - Action 1: Improve PRPD's website so it is a more robust resource for members
 - KPI: Select a webhosting platform that is geared towards membership-based organizations (e.g., Wild Apricot) that can manage the required tools and ensure data security and integrity, and then undertake the improvement process
 - Timeline: Webhosting platform selected by December 31, 2022, and the improvement process timeline will be developed in collaboration with the webhosting platform
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owners: PRPD staff in partnership with selected webhosting platform

- Action 2: Create Online Membership Directory for Members-Only
 - KPI: Leveraging the new webhosting platform, create a searchable online membership directory on the PRPD website to help connect members by region, station type, cohort, experience, and station size
 - Timeline: April 30, 2023
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owners: PRPD staff in partnership with selected webhosting platform

- Action 3: Make it easier for PRPD to communicate directly with members and vice versa
 - KPI: Select a social media management tool (e.g., Hootsuite, Buffer) to track engagement and directly communicate effectively across platforms with membership
 - Timeline: Select social media management tool by December 31, 2022 and create communications plan for the year ahead by January 31, 2023
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owners: PRPD staff with potential outside consulting help to create an annual communications plan

- Action 4: Create newsletter/regular all-member communication from PRPD's volunteer leadership and/or executive director
 - KPI: Develop a template for a quarterly report that can be automatically generated and distributed to all members who are subscribed (e.g., MailChimp)
 - Timeline: Identify communications tool by December 31, 2022; design template by January 31, 2023; and create and implement 2023 communications calendar by February 28, 2023
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owners: PRPD staff with potential outside consulting help

Strategy 3: Act as a Collective Voice on Issues of National Importance Affecting the Public Media Industry

[Intent: Ensure members are empowered to advocate effectively on their audiences' behalf and that they have a seat at the table on issues affecting their ability to effectively do their work]

- **Objective 1: Monitor issues and proactively provide resources to members so they can effectively advocate**
 - Action: Utilize the annual membership survey and dynamic member communications (e.g., via social media, online discussion forum on the website, cohorts) to identify issues of concern to the membership
 - KPI: Develop an issues-focused area on the membership website for members to access by topic. Members should be invited to contribute to the content where they have experience and expertise. This also is a long-term member engagement strategy for longstanding members.
 - Timeline: Ensure an advocacy section is included in the selected webhosting platform that will be identified by December 31, 2022
 - Numbers to be Served: Entire membership
 - Owner(s): PRPD staff and Board

- **Objective 2: Utilize cohorts to identify and surface issues of importance affecting the membership and public media industry so PRPD can provide leadership in organizing a response**
 - Action 1: Ensure cohort leaders include time for discussing issues of importance during cohort meetings and proactively communicate these discussions to PRPD leadership
 - KPI: PRPD staff attend a meeting of each cohort at least once a year to listen for and discuss issues of importance affecting the membership
 - Timeline: Ongoing
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owner: PRPD staff and Board

Strategy 4: Foster Financial and Organizational Sustainability

[Intent: Ensure long-term impact as an organization, with a budget, infrastructure (staff and contract) and board to achieve this]

- **Objective 1: Explore a long-term partnership or collaboration with another organization that serves public media professionals to expand programming reach and impact, as well as staff bandwidth**
 - Action: Identify potential organizations and undertake exploratory conversations, utilizing feedback from the annual membership survey to guide what types of collaborations to explore
 - KPI: Develop a partnership rubric to inform the approach to exploration, to articulate what PRPD is looking for to better serve its membership and what the organization can offer in a partnership
 - Timeline: Create a partnership rubric by October 31, 2022, and identify selected partner by December 31, 2022
 - Numbers to be Served: Entire membership
 - Owner(s): PRPD staff and Board leadership

- **Objective 2: Develop and implement new membership dues structure**
 - Action: Enlist the Finance Committee to undertake the development of a new membership dues structure, exploring a flat-tiered structure and having memberships for organizations, individuals (including a legacy membership for retired professionals), independent contractors, content creators, etc.
 - KPI: Ensure the new membership dues structure is more predictable, and supports growth (financially and total number of members) and long-term organizational stability
 - Timeline: Finalize new membership dues structure by January 31, 2023, so it can be shared with the membership before the new billing cycle begins in May 2023
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owner: PRPD staff and Board Finance Committee

- **Objective 3: Leverage PRPD's signature initiative to create programming and funding opportunities that attract year-round grants and sponsorship**
 - Action: Pending the identification of the signature initiative and plans for corresponding programming (including the next conference), create list of potential funders
 - KPI: Organize the list of potential funders and sponsors by giving capacity and likelihood to give, as well as highlight potential conflicts or opportunities with members
 - Timeline: An initial list of potential funders to public media is included in this plan, and this list can be further augmented as the signature initiative and corresponding programming takes shape.
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owner: PRPD staff and Board

- **Objective 4: Create a succession plan for volunteer leadership**
 - Action: Appoint a Board member to serve as co-chair of the conference with a member volunteer (and/or small member volunteer committee), as a way to further prepare the Board member to assume the Board Chair role, and for the member volunteer to be prepared for Board service
 - KPI: There is a stronger, documented pipeline of potential Board members and Board Chairs
 - Timeline: Identify conference co-chairs by January 31, 2023 [Board member and membership volunteer(s)]
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owner: PRPD staff and Board

- **Objective 5: Provide leadership opportunities for members across PRPD**
 - Action 1: Identify and engage membership to serve as volunteer cohort leaders
 - KPI: Develop a leadership structure for each cohort to ensure regular engagement, and determine term limits for each cohort leader
 - Timeline: February 28, 2023
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owner: PRPD staff and Board

 - Action 2: Publicly and proactively recognize members in the various ways they contribute to PRPD's programming and resources (e.g., serving on a panel, serving as a cohort leader)
 - KPI: In the various communications that PRPD will create as part of this plan (e.g., a regular e-newsletter, a "year-in-review" message), PRPD leadership will acknowledge members for their volunteer serve
 - Timeline: Ongoing, as opportunities arise
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owner: PRPD staff

 - Action 3: Appoint a committee to oversee the strategic plan to help ensure it stays on track and to make adjustments to the plan, as necessary
 - KPI: The committee should be no more than 5 people, and include Board members as well as representatives from the membership
 - Timeline: Pending the Board's approval and adoption of the strategic plan in October 2022, members of the strategic planning committee should be identified and enlisted by December 31, 2022
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owner: PRPD Board and staff

- **Objective 6: Engage outside consultant expertise to achieve strategic goals, as needed**
 - Action: Identify an outside consultant to lead or partner on priority projects and initiatives
 - KPI: Consultant/contractors who can provide support on grant writing and fundraising, communications, and volunteer management and engagement, as needed, under contract
 - Timeline: Consultant/contractors identified by December 31, 2022
 - Numbers to be served: Entire membership
 - Owner: PRPD staff

Potential Funding Sources (External)

- **Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB)**

CPB provides funding for the development of public media television, radio, and digital content as well as multiplatform projects that reflect public media's mission to educate, inform and inspire the American public by providing stories through diverse perspectives, genres, styles and technologies.

As a steward of federal funds, the vast majority of CPB support—by law—goes directly to local stations through Community Service Grants, which help stations expand the quality and scope of their work. However, CPB offers a limited number of additional grants to producers for Content & Production, and additional station support to address specific initiatives and issue areas.

- **Ford Foundation**

The Ford Foundation makes approximately 1,500 grants annually according to a clearly defined, yet broad, set of priorities. They are known for supporting organizations that engage in supportive work and have helped launch institutions like Human Rights Watch, the Public Broadcasting Service, and South Africa's Legal Resources Centre.

Their initiative on creativity and free expression is likely a good fit for PRPD, perhaps in particular for the association's signature event or initiative that would require seed funding. The Foundation's open technology fund is also worth exploring for anything with international impact.

- **Kresge Foundation**

The Kresge Foundation is a private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America's cities through grantmaking and social investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services and community development, nationally and in Detroit, Memphis and New Orleans. In collaboration with their partners, they help create pathways for people with low incomes to improve their life circumstances and join the economic mainstream. Using a full array of grant, loan, and other investment tools, Kresge invests more than \$160 million annually to foster economic and social change. They have a history of supporting public media entities.

- **MacArthur Foundation**

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people, effective institutions, and influential networks building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. MacArthur is placing a few big bets that truly significant progress is possible on some of the world's most pressing social challenges, including advancing global climate solutions, decreasing nuclear risk, promoting local justice reform in the U.S., and reducing corruption in Africa's most populous country, Nigeria. In addition to the MacArthur Fellows Program and the global 100&Change competition, the Foundation continues its historic commitments to the role of journalism in a responsive democracy as well as the vitality of its headquarters city, Chicago.

- **[The Wallace Foundation](#)**

The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropy based in New York City that seeks to foster improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. The Foundation has been a significant supporter of National Public Radio and other media outlets.

ADDENDUM: From the Mid-Project Progress Report (submitted July 8, 2022)

Initial Findings, Observations & SWOT Analysis

Initial Findings & Observations

- **PRPD's Mission and Purpose**

Overall, the membership values PRPD but there is a wide range of understanding, and some confusion, as to what is PRPD's mission and who it now serves, given how much public radio and content distribution have changed in the past decade. While some respondents mentioned PRPD's purpose is to serve "program directors," a significant number of respondents used other language to describe who PRPD serves, such as "public media," "public audio media," program and "content creators," "public media content professionals" and "pubcasters." Survey participants agreed that PRPD's name should be less about the position (Program Director) and more about the role/purpose within an organization (content creation).

Based on survey responses and interviews, it seems most members would agree with the statement that PRPD's mission is to help public media grow their audiences (and audience support) and further diversify programming and content to appeal to these expanded audiences. However, outside of the conference, how PRPD consistently delivers on this seems unclear to the membership.

- **Conference**

Survey participants uniformly mentioned the annual conference as PRPD's most significant and valuable membership benefit. As long as the content is robust and timely, the majority of survey respondents are open to changing the conference frequency (perhaps to every 18 to 24 months) and delivery format (in-person, virtual, or hybrid). Survey respondents cited the recent successful virtual conferences, as well as the continuing financial pressures member organizations face navigating the post-pandemic environment, as reasons why a virtual or hybrid conference would remain appealing to them. The opportunity for "organic networking" at in-person conferences also was mentioned as a benefit members would like to have continue, or somehow translate into a virtual or hybrid format.

- **Cohorts**

Survey participants responded favorably to the idea of creating cohorts that members could self-identify and opt-in to participate. For example, cohorts could be created for program directors, classical music stations, early-career professionals, emerging leaders looking for mentorship, content creators for certain size radio stations or audience demographics, etc. Key to the successful implementation and ongoing management of cohorts is PRPD staff bandwidth, which is already stretched thin. A consultant with experience in coaching professional development for membership organizations could be hired to manage this benefit.

- **Signature Initiative(s)**

Survey respondents liked the idea of PRPD taking on a signature initiative to bring more value to its membership benefits and the overall public radio/media field. No one signature initiative rose to the top of respondents' suggestions; several are suggested below for consideration under *Recommendations*, based on aggregated feedback from survey participants.
- **Membership Dues**

Survey respondents agreed that PRPD's membership dues structure likely needs to change for the organization's sustainability and to continue to provide value for its members. However, no one suggestion rose to the top as to what the membership dues structure should be in the future. If PRPD expands its focus beyond program directors and public radio to include content creators and public/audio media, this will allow the membership to grow beyond the current 120 member stations and simultaneously increase revenue potential.
- **Inclusivity**

Members feel PRPD is inclusive but not necessarily diverse, particularly in terms of active participation of younger, early-career members. By expanding PRPD's membership beyond a focus on program directors, this may allow for more diverse voices at the table to help drive the organization to better the serve public media landscape of the future.
- **Advocacy**

For the most part, survey respondents do not see PRPD as an advocacy organization. National Public Radio (NPR) and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) were cited as already serving that function for public radio/media. The only caveat is that no one is doing advocacy on behalf of the content team. Also, advocacy is defined differently by many respondents.

SWOT Analysis

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An engaged membership that is invested in PRPD’s long-term success and continuing impact• An engaged Board of Directors that is invested in PRPD’s long-term success and continuing impact• Respected and experienced staff• A reputation for being able to create and deliver quality learning and networking opportunities for the membership, such as the conference	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Because public radio and content creation and distribution have changed so significantly in the past decade, PRPD’s mission and name have created uncertainty and confusion about who the organization serves, and how this mission is fulfilled• Lack of staff bandwidth and organizational infrastructure to easily take on new initiatives that will help to expand and better serve the membership• The current membership dues model based on membership stations’ budget size does not allow for long-term organizational growth and sustainability• The annual conference is time-intensive for PRPD’s staff and limited resources, and does not generate sufficient additional revenue for the organization
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look to other organizations serving public media professionals and explore potential collaborations/partnership to strengthen membership benefits and expand organizational infrastructure and capacity• Leverage and improve PRPD’s website to make it easier for members to communicate with PRPD, access benefits, and network with each other• The membership seems receptive to personalizing the membership experience through the creation of cohorts and learning opportunities that address diverse member needs, interests and demographics• Identify a timely “signature initiative” for PRPD to lead to further demonstrate value to and differentiation in the field and enhance membership benefits• The membership seems open to shifting the conference to every other year, which would allow for more robust programming to be implemented in “off-years” that provides value to the membership while earning revenue for PRPD	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• With the significant rise in content creation and broadcast distribution outside of traditional public radio, PRPD must urgently and proactively determine its next chapter in order to address feedback from membership, remain relevant to the field and continue to have impact• The competition for listeners’ time, the splintering of audience interests, and the need to create content that appeals to increasingly diverse audiences, means that those working in public media already have very little time and limited resources to participate in membership organizations if they feel they are not getting value from the experience

Recommendations

1. PRPD's revised mission statement must be bolder and broader than "program directors" and "radio" in order to reflect the current and future public media landscape and how content is created for and distributed to the public. Expanding the mission to be inclusive of public audio media and content creators will help drive efforts to increase membership.
 - Please note: PRPD's new mission statement will likely necessitate a name change, as well, but the new name recommendation is outside of the scope of this project.
2. Explore a long-term collaboration or partnership with Greater Public or others to consolidate resources and infrastructure in order to better serve public media and the membership in a more comprehensive, integrated and forward-looking way.
3. Go for some early wins by improving accessibility of membership benefits, such as creating an online directory of all members, that only members can access, and making it easier for PRPD to communicate directly with all members, and vice versa, so that communication does not become bottlenecked with the identified point of contact at each radio station who is usually responsible for passing on information to colleagues.
4. Implement a cohort structure for members and create structured learning and networking opportunities around this – for example, cohorts could be created for program directors, classical music stations, early-career professionals, emerging leaders looking for mentorship, content creators for certain size radio stations or audience demographics, etc.
5. Identify a timely "signature initiative" for PRPD to lead to further demonstrate value to and differentiation in the field and enhance membership benefits. This signature initiative also could provide the theme for the conference and session tracks. Based on the membership survey and interviews, potential signature initiatives could be:
 - Industry research on emerging trends or best practices in audience development and engagement, with a particular focus on content creation and programming on a local level;
 - The creation of a professional training program with the possibility of certification/accreditation to support talent development; and/or,
 - The creation of an "on demand" webinars and resources library of learning opportunities and best practices, available only to members.
6. Identify and solicit potential funders who award grants to support operational capacity building and apply for support during this period of transition/evolution, as well as any new programming/signature initiative that PRPD undertakes.
7. Once PRPD has demonstrated enhanced benefits to its membership, implement the new proposed fees structure (currently in development) that has been communicated multiple times well in advance.