

PRPD/PRNDI



NEWS/TALK CORE VALUES TOOLKIT

(September 2004)

PRPD/PRNDI News and Talk Core Values Planning and Evaluation Tools

(September 2004)

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PRPD/PRNDI News and Talk Core Values Toolkit Guide

"We're so rushed to get product out and we're so concerned about what's coming up next sometimes we don't take the step back to evaluate ourselves...this is a nice tool to keep you thinking about and sharpening your own skills, and making you improve your work."

- Doug Doyle, WBGO.

"It's made us look at the whole picture, from sound to writing to questions to proper voices".

- Keith Shields, New Hampshire Public Radio.

"Anytime that you have set questions that need to be answered and there's such a framework so that you can structure a critique or a session with a reporter, it's ALWAYS a good thing because then it's not just about 'What did you think?' and 'What did I think?'"

- John Dankosky, WNPR.

What are the Core Values Tools?

The tools are simple, easy-to-use, one-page Editorial Planning and Editorial Evaluation Grids. They were developed by PRNDI and PRPD in 2003 and field tested for six months in 2004. Twelve PRNDI News Directors participated in the Core Values "Beta" Test, representing a range of station market and newsroom size. The tools were used to plan and evaluate newscasts, features, talk shows and magazine shows. At the 2004 PRNDI Conference, we reported that stations found their use of the tools:

- Prompted Increased newsroom dialogue and planning
- Provided an effective framework with objective criteria for doing evaluations
- Gave News Directors a training tool that quickly summarized the unique role of public radio for new staff and volunteers

Suggestions for improvement included reducing the number of questions in the grid to sharpen their focus and eliminate redundancy.

We've attached copies of both the original (tested) grids and the new revised grids that incorporate the suggested changes. You should feel free to use whatever version works best for you, and to make changes that you find work better for your news department. All we ask is that you let us know so we can share your experience with other news directors!

What are the Core Values?

The Core Values were developed as part of a 4-year research project conducted by PRPD that produced 5 different studies between 2000 and 2004. The critical studies for News Directors are:

- ***Defining Public Radio's Core Values*** (2000).

Based on a "summit" of the Executive Producers of public radio's top seven shows, this report includes a summary of the values, which fell into three categories:

- Qualities of the Mind and Intellect
- Qualities of the Heart and Spirit
- Qualities of Craft

The report also identified how the producers "filter" the content, talent and craft elements of their programs to establish and maintain high standards. A summary of both the values and filters are attached.

- ***The Core Values of Local (News/Information/Talk) Programming*** (2001)

This report found that the core values identified by the producers are confirmed and shared by public radio listeners. Other findings show a widening opportunity for public radio but only if programming matches the same core values and standards listeners find in their favorite shows. An Executive Summary of the study is attached.

Some Other Core Values Applications

Much of the information generated by the Core Values Project has been combined in PRPD's handbook called "The Fundamentals of Core Values-Based Program Development. The handbook's Executive Summary is attached.

Other tools include simple frameworks for hiring and evaluating news talent, and a checklist for developing local programming. We've attached copies of these as well and would love to hear from you if you use them in your newsroom:

- News Host Ledger
- Talk Host Ledger
- Hiring On Air Talent – Qualities to look for
- Local Program Development Checklist (News or Talk)

Want More Information?

If your station is a PRPD member and you would like more detailed information on any of their core values studies or applications, you can find it on the PRPD website. You will need your station's password. www.prpd.org

Why should my station care?

The core values represent the best research today about what public radio listeners expect from stations. Those expectations are high. They would prefer that a station's local programming meet the standards of national programming. They expect their station to connect them to the world in a very broad sense. (Some questions to help frame your news programming to meet this goal are included in the Executive Summary of PRPD's "Fundamentals" handbook (see the summary listing headed "Shaping Content's Local Service and 'Sense of Place.'")

In a saturated media market with new competition emerging from new technology and new choices, the local work of public radio stations can be more important than ever in the future. This is our bread and butter, but listeners expect more than crumbs – they want fine wine and caviar. They expect it from public radio, and it's more important than ever that what we produce in and about our communities meets national standards.

How can I use the tools at my station?

On the next page you'll find eight exercises you can use to get your staff involved with core values-based tools and information. We hope that as you work with these tools in your newsroom, you'll report back to us and let us know what happens. Both PRNDI and PRPD are eager to create more opportunities for our respective members to share success stories, and new avenues for hearing and critiquing each other's work. Thanks to the stations that participated in our field test of the core values tools, and thanks for your interest in this work!

Core Values Toolkit Exercises:

Suggestions for using these tools:

1. If staff at your station are unfamiliar with Core Values, try asking them what they think listeners value in public radio news and talk. Have them brainstorm on post-it notes privately, then put them on a board and group similar concepts. Then compare their thoughts with the core values research.
2. Utilize the core values planning and evaluation grids. Options include before and after all assignments, or perhaps in periodic meetings. Allow staff to adapt them to their own needs as they see fit. Perhaps ask them to evaluate each other – or just themselves. In particular, beta test stations found the grids useful when training new, inexperienced staff members. The core values grids can be extremely helpful to help introduce them to public radio journalism.
3. Gather a small group of listeners for your own local and informal focus group with your staff. Perhaps drawing from pledge volunteers, or membership info, your friends group, or even major donors. Ask them what they value about public radio news and talk. Ask them how it compares to national programming. Ask them what could be better. Show them the core values and obtain their reaction. Is your station measuring up in their eyes?
4. Ask other staff outside the newsroom to use the evaluation grid to comment on some of your work. They should be listening anyway. Are they? What do they think? Do they think your programming lives up to core values expectations?
5. Use the evaluation grid on national programming – how does it measure up? This might help develop ideas for your own work.
6. Set up an evaluation trade relationship with another station. It can help to obtain feedback from outside, to avoid newsroom politics or just our own individual limitations and the boxes we tend to operate within.
7. Consider hiring a PRNDI Newsworks trainer to work with your station on planning and or evaluation of your work. In particular, this could be most effective with evaluation. PRNDI would be happy to facilitate training in this regard, with much of the work via telephone or email, or internet.
8. Incorporate the core values evaluation grid into the airchecking process.



Public Radio's Core Values: Editorial Planning Grid

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<u>Qualities of the Mind</u>	<u>Qualities of the Heart</u>	<u>Qualities of Craft</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of lifelong learning • Substance • Curiosity • Credibility • Accuracy • Honesty • Respect for the listener • Purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humor • Idealism • Inspired about public life and culture • Civility / belief in civil discourse • Generosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely human voice • Pacing • Attention to detail

Telling the Story	Content Questions	Talent Questions	Production Questions
Selecting Stories and Topics	<p>Why is this story something we should cover?</p> <p>How can we add depth, substance, and new perspectives?</p>	<p>Which reporter or program host will do the best job?</p> <p>What does he/she need to know to do this story well?</p>	<p>What form will best tell the story (newscast, produced piece, interview, call-in, etc.)</p> <p>Can we re-version this story to reach more of our listeners?</p>
Framing / Shaping Stories and Topics	<p>What are the key issues and how can we expand understanding of them?</p> <p>How does this story impact our community?</p>	<p>What are the key questions we need to ask?</p> <p>Whose voices do we need to hear to have those questions answered?</p>	<p>How can we write, structure and edit this story for the ear?</p> <p>Does it lend itself to added texture? (vox, music, movie clips, ambience, actualities)</p>



Public Radio's Core Values: Editorial Evaluation Grid

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<u>Qualities of the Mind</u>	<u>Qualities of the Heart</u>	<u>Qualities of Craft</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of lifelong learning • Substance • Curiosity • Credibility • Accuracy • Honesty • Respect for the listener • Purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humor • Idealism • Inspired about public life and culture • Civility / belief in civil discourse • Generosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely human voice • Pacing • Attention to detail

Evaluating the Story	Content Questions	Talent Questions	Production Questions
The Stories and Topics We Selected	<p>Was this story something we should have covered?</p> <p>Could we have added greater depth? Substance? New perspectives? How?</p>	<p>Did we pick the right person, and program host to tell the story?</p> <p>Was he/she adequately prepared to do the story well?</p>	<p>Did we choose the best forms/ and format/s to tell the story?</p> <p>Could other versions of the story or sidebars have been done to reach more listeners?</p>
The Way we Framed / Shaped the Stories and Topics	<p>Did we cover the key issues? Could we have added more understanding of them?</p> <p>Was the community impact made clear and compelling?</p>	<p>Did we get the answers to the key questions?</p> <p>Did we hear from the right people? Were any voices missing?</p>	<p>Was the story written, structured and edited for the ear?</p> <p>Could we have added more texture? (vox, music, movie clips, ambience, actualities) Should we have used less?</p>
Evaluation What did we do well? What can we do better and How do we make sure that we do!			



Public Radio's Core Values: Editorial Planning Grid (Revised)

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<u>Qualities of the Mind</u>	<u>Qualities of the Heart</u>	<u>Qualities of Craft</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of lifelong learning • Substance • Curiosity • Credibility/Accuracy • Honesty • Respect for the listener • Purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humor • Idealism • Inspired about public life and culture • Civility / belief in civil discourse • Generosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely human voice • Pacing • Attention to detail

Station call letters:	Content Questions	Talent Questions	Production Questions
Selecting Content and Topics	What are the key issues that make this something we should cover for our listeners?	What does our host, reporter newscaster or producer need to meet our content goals?	How can we write, structure, edit and texturize* this content for the ear? <i>(possible texture elements include ambience, actualities, vox, music, movie clips)</i>
Framing / Shaping Content and Topics	How can we add new depth, substance and perspective on these issues for our listeners?	Whose voices do we need to hear and what questions do we need to ask?	How can we re-version this content to reach more of our listeners in other programs and dayparts?
Questions for different types of news programs	Newscast – How should we stack the newscast?	Talk Shows – What is the pathway for callers to participate in the program?	Magazine Programs – how should the elements: (interviews, features, music, news items, etc.) relate to each other editorially and contextually?



Public Radio's Core Values: Editorial Evaluation Grid (Revised)

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<u>Qualities of the Mind</u>	<u>Qualities of the Heart</u>	<u>Qualities of Craft</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of lifelong learning • Substance • Curiosity • Credibility/Accuracy • Honesty • Respect for the listener • Purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humor • Idealism • Inspired about public life and culture • Civility / belief in civil discourse • Generosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely human voice • Pacing • Attention to detail

Station call letters:	Content Questions	Talent Questions	Production Questions
Selecting Content and Topics	How did we do in identifying key issues? What, if any, did we miss?	What could have been done to help improve how the host, reporter, newscaster or producer met our content goals?	What would we change in the writing, editing or structure if we had the chance to do one more edit before airing this content?
The Way We Framed/Shaped Content and Topics Questions for Different Types of News Programs	How adequately did we deepen understanding of the issues we covered and their community impact? Newscasts - How well did the newscast flow?	What voices or questions were missing? Talk Shows - Were callers engaged effectively?	Could we have done more to get this content to more of our listeners? Magazine Programs – Did the elements of the program work together?
Evaluation on Use of Core Values:	What core values can we hear in what we aired?	Were any of the three categories of Mind, Heart and Craft weak or missing altogether?	How could we have improved our fulfillment of the core values?

PRPD CORE VALUES (News/Information)



Qualities of the Mind/Intellect

- **Love of lifelong learning:** A desire to learn something new every day
- **Substance:** Expand understanding of and connection with the world
- **Curiosity:** The need to dig deeper, to ask why, not just what
 - **Credibility**
 - **Accuracy**
 - **Honesty:** Listeners trust that we are non-manipulative, non-sensational
- Respect for the intelligence of the listener
- Purpose: **A clear understanding of why we do what we do**

Qualities of the Heart and Spirit

- **Humor:** Always has a purpose and is never mean-spirited
- **Idealism:** We believe in our power to find solutions
- **Inspired about public life and culture**
- **Civility – Belief in Civil discourse**
- **Generosity:** Content has center stage and the guest is the star

Qualities of Craft/Excellence in our use of the Medium

- **Uniquely human voice:** conversational, authentic, intimate
- **Pacing:** deliberate, thoughtful, appropriate to the substance of the content
- **Attention to detail:** music, sound elements, language

Conclusion:

Successful programs can mix those qualities in a variety of ways but all three categories must be present. It is the fusion of these three sets of core values that creates public radio's "signature" sound and the fundamental appeal of our programming to core listeners.

FILTERS THAT SET AND ENFORCE HIGH STANDARDS

Based on findings that emerged during the PRPD Core Values "Summit," a discussion held in June, 2000 with the Executive Producers of public radio's seven most popular programs.

SUMMARY FINDING

The distinctive sound of public radio is created through the disciplined use of 3 rigorous filters that separate the ordinary from the extraordinary and draw the line between merely good and great.

I. THE FILTER FOR CONTENT

"Listeners trust us to respect their intelligence and curiosity, and make interesting choices on their behalf. Not to waste their time, but to enrich their time while they're listening. They depend on us to sift through all the "run of the mill" talk show possibilities. In other words, they depend on us to find the distinctive people ideas and stories, which distinguish public radio from most of the "dreck" on the dial."

-Danny Miller, Executive Producer, Fresh Air

Goal: To present only the most intriguing ideas, clearest explanations, and most vivid descriptions.

Constructing the Filter for Content

Determine Purpose

Cast the net widely

Use multiple perspectives

Winnow/debate/decide

Organize/structure

1st edit - OK

2nd edit - compelling

3rd edit - if possible

II. THE FILTER FOR TALENT

"Editing and filtering, in some form, is one of the things that creates great talent, that the talent does not simply exist on its own, that it has to be produced and created. I have yet to meet someone who's so interesting that we can just run whatever happens to come out their mouth for an hour and have it be great talent and great radio."

-Doug Berman, Executive Producer, Car Talk

Goal: To identify great talent, build a format that brings out their best and hides their weaknesses and edit the hell out of them.

Constructing the Filter for Talent

Talent doesn't exist on own

Must be edited, produced
Anyone on air is talent
Depth of personality
Lives/embodies the content
Interesting/authentic
Warm, human, idealistic
Writes/communicates well for self
Distinctive, memorable

III. THE FILTER FOR CRAFT

"We need to look at not only what we're putting on the air but how we're putting it on the air...to continually ask ourselves -how are we sounding? Are we sounding as good as we can?"

-Ellen Weiss, Executive Producer, All Things Considered

Goal: To focus not just on what goes on the air but on all aspects of how it's being put on the air-to build a consciousness, a common knowledge, a set of common questions.

Constructing the Filter for Craft

This filter is built and based on:

Listening to work

A focus on writing

Use of any sound has purpose

Music matches content



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THE CORE VALUES OF LOCAL PROGRAMMING (2001)

1. There is a **widening opportunity** for public radio stations to serve core news listeners who:
 - want a **comprehensive** range of news and information programming -- local as well as national and international.
 - are highly critical of local, commercial radio and TV news and talk shows they describe as shallow, sensational, loud and manipulative.
2. If public radio is to fill the void core news listeners find in local commercial news, our local programming must reflect **the same Core Values** listeners hear on network programs. No matter where a program originates, listeners want information in depth **so they can think about large issues**.
3. The word "**local**" is **not particularly useful** – it's a word core news listeners often use as a pejorative. They equate "local news" with parochial (narrow, restricted, provincial) as opposed to coverage that presents information in a context that allows them to "connect the dots. This is because:
 - Public radio listeners, especially those who use an NPR station as their primary choice view events in their communities as part of **an interconnected web of causal relationships**.
 - In their view, **no event is isolated on any level—local, national or international**. They place the highest value on local news that integrates their experience as citizens of their communities, their nation and the world.

This means that in order to frame our local news programming to appeal to these listeners, we need to ask questions that emphasize context and connection:

- What special/unique meaning does this topic have in our community?
 - How does it interconnect our community with our nation, our world?
 - Has it happened here before?
 - Has it happened elsewhere?
 - Is it part of a pattern?
 - What is the cause?
 - What is the effect/impact?
4. **There is no advantage in local origination if the presentation is below network standards.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: CORE VALUES-BASED PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

What is the purpose of the program?

Selecting and Shaping Content

- Is the topic right for your program and its (target) core listeners?
- What makes it appropriate for the show?
- What is the central purpose of the proposed topic?
- What is the essential story to be told?
- What are the "chapters" to be covered
- What questions will best shape and advance the discussion of the topic?
- What is the segment's internal narrative structure – how will we tell the story?
- What information/research do we need to tell the story in a distinct way?

Shaping Content's Local Service and "Sense of Place"

- What special/unique meaning does this topic have in our community?
- How does it interconnect our community with our nation, our world?
- Has it happened here before?
- Has it happened elsewhere?
- Is it part of a pattern?
- What is the cause?
- What is the effect/impact?

Selecting and Shaping Talent

- Are they curious? Are they eager to learn something new?
- Do they embody the purpose and goals of the program?
- Do they live the content? Do they do their homework?
- Are they engaged with public life and culture?
- Do they speak with and to listeners (not at them)? Do they connect?
- Do they respect the intelligence of the audience?
- Do they write well? Do they express themselves clearly and articulately?
- Are they genuinely interesting, someone you want to spend time with?
- Are they solution-oriented?
- Are they willing to let the content/the guest be the star?
- Can they be prepared but also listen to/respond to what the guest says?
- Is your format designed to bring out their best and hide their worst?

Selecting and Shaping Craft

- Interview: Who would be the best/most appropriate and articulate guest(s)?
- Call-in: What is the question for the listener?
- Commentary: Is there a point/opinion an "outside" voice can best make?
- Texture: Vox pops, movie clips, actualities, ambience, music
- Feature Piece: Will a setup piece help tell the story/frame the discussion?
- Reporter debriefing: Is there someone who can help set up the issue/topic?

Other Questions to ask:

- How can we promote this on the air both pre-show and during the show?
- Can we add value for listeners via our website?
- And finally...how do we sound? Are we sounding as good as we can?

On-Air Host/Talent Ledger: (News)

POSITIVE

- In-depth knowledge
- Preparation/Planning
- Context/History/Fact
- Content-Centered
- Curiosity
- Share Expertise
- Connects with the World

NEGATIVE

- Uninformed
- Winging it
- Personal Opinions
- Host-Centered
- Bored, Know-it-all
- Talking up/down
- Narrow/Parochial

On-Air Talent Ledger: (Talk Host)

POSITIVE

- In-depth knowledge
- Preparation/Planning
- Context/History/Fact
- Content-Centered
- Curiosity
- Share Expertise
- Connects with the World
- Solution-oriented
- Believes in civil discourse
- Clear purpose

NEGATIVE

- Uninformed
- Winging it
- Personal Opinions
- Host-centered
- Bored, know it all
- Talking up/down
- Narrow/parochial
- Cynical/pessimistic
- Antagonistic
- Floundering around

Hiring On-Air Talent: Qualities to Look for

- **Are they curious and eager to learn something new?**
- **Do they live the content? Do they do their homework?**
- **Do they write well? Are they clear and articulate?**
- **Are they willing to let the guest/content be the star?**
- **Are they genuinely interesting and good company?**
- **Do they respect the intelligence of the listeners?**
- **Are they engaged with public life and culture?**
- **Are they solution-oriented/believe in civil discourse?**
- **Can they be prepared and still respond on the spot?**
- **Do they embody the purpose/goals of the program?**



PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST: NEWS OR TALK

GOALS:

- To identify a set of issues involved with the creation and production of public radio talk programming.
- To create a template of those issues that can be used as a yardstick for program creation and development.

ISSUES:

- I. Mission: Purpose of show
Relationship to other shows on station
- II. Design: Format, length, frequency, schedule placement
- III. Content: Editorial process/priorities
Talent: Host, guests, callers, contributors
Callers? Is yes, role/pathway
Research support needed
- IV. Station: Located in news department or programming
Relationship with news department
On air promotion strategy
- V. Resources: Staffing:
 - Talent profiles
 - Job descriptions and salaries
 - Interns/VolunteersCraft elements: music, sound
Technology/Facilities
Funding support and sustainability
- VI. Listeners: Audience service goals/timeframe
Fundraising goals/timeframe
- VII. Evaluation: Criteria for evaluating
Measures of success