

AFTRA and Other Employee Unions

An Evolving Relationship with Public Broadcasting

Ernest Sanchez, President,
The Sanchez Law Firm P.C.

Tom Karlo, General Manager,
KPBS Public Media

PRRO Public Radio
Regional
Organizations



Learning Objectives

- Provide an overview of emerging AFTRA and public broadcasting relationship
- Explain the dynamics of public broadcasting staff unionization
- Describe how the initial staff contract with AFTRA is negotiated
- Share experiences and lessons learned in the unionization process

Why Do Public Broadcasting Employees Unionize?

- Below-market wages or benefits
- Perceived employer financial instability
- Fear of job reductions or restructuring
- Lack of multi-year, predictable wage increases
- Existing wage variations between similar jobs
- Inconsistent evaluations
- Unpleasant working conditions

What is SAG-AFTRA?

- Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists
- AFL-CIO union representing entertainment and news employees in all media platforms including motion pictures and broadcasting
- 250+ contracts with news organizations and stations
- 160,000 members
- Union annual budget > \$200 million
- 600+ union staff nationally

Who in Public Media Does SAG-AFTRA Represent?

Talent in Most Major Media Organizations, now including...

Major PTV Stations and Joint Licensees

- WNET, New York
- WTTW and WFMT-FM, Chicago
- WETA-TV- Radio, Washington, DC
- KQED TV and radio, San Francisco
- KPBS, TV and radio, San Diego

Public Radio Entities

NPR
Minnesota Public Radio
WNYC and WQXR, New York City
Pacifica Foundation Stations
(LA, NYC, DC, Houston, and Berkeley)
WBEZ, Chicago
KING-FM, Seattle
KNKX-FM, Tacoma
KPCC-FM, Pasadena

What Does SAG-AFTRA Want for Its Members?

- Increased wages with predictable multi-year increases
- Increased benefits and working conditions
- Job security and protection against layoffs through severance payments
- Health insurance
- Portable vested pension benefits
- Recognition of seniority
- Potential FCC EEO issue
- Limits on work outsourcing

SAG-AFTRA and Public Radio

- NPR staff unionized in 1977
- NPR now largest broadcast employee unit (400+) in SAG-AFTRA
- Public Radio employees have become politically important within SAG-AFTRA
- SAG-AFTRA has targeted public radio for further priority organizing

Why Is Public Radio an Attractive Target for SAG-AFTRA Unionization?

- Traditional large SAG-AFTRA commercial employers - downsizing or fragmenting
- Public Radio still growing in employees, audience, prestige, and financial strength
- Public radio employees attractive to SAG/AFTRA:
 - more likely to be in full-time positions
 - generally sympathetic philosophically to union values
 - well-educated, skilled, articulate, and willing to provide fresh leadership to the union
 - committed to high quality, high impact, public interest programming

Signs That You Might Be a Target

- Do you have more than 20 employees?
- Are other stations in your market represented?
- Is your station facing known financial uncertainty or political turmoil?
- Are the wages or benefits you offer below market level?
- Is the basis for wage increases anything other than predictable, on-going standard?
- Do you have fully-vested/portable pension benefits?
- Do you have any employees who have previously worked in a SAG-AFTRA shop?

Documents Related to Unionization Activities

- Documents from the National Labor Relations Board that explain some legal aspects of employer obligations in a unionization situation
- Things that SAG-AFTRA is saying about itself
- List of SAG-AFTRA news agreements

KPBS Collective Bargaining Timeline

2013

- August coworkers asked to support union
- September Petition filed with the NLRB
- September consultants and outside attorney engaged (start of the “campaign/education” period)
- November 18th Union Vote
- November 26th Certification Filed
- December 18th Letter of Intent to Bargain and Info Request

January 2014 to June 2015

- Negotiations
- Agreement Signed 7/16/15

The Internal Campaign before the vote: September 2013 to November 18, 2013

Consultants engaged at the time of card signing and where the NLRB petition was imminent

- Developed and conducted a pre-election campaign to better inform potential unit members and avert an affirmative union vote
- Series of meetings held with the unit and supervisors (concurrent union organizer meetings as well)

The Internal Campaign before the vote: September 2013 to November 18, 2013

Management Do's and Don'ts (union reps didn't play by the same rules):

- Gave Facts, Opinions and Examples
- Didn't Promise, Threaten, Interrogate, or Spy

The Internal Campaign before the vote: September 2013 to November 18, 2013

Coworkers felt the consultants did more damage to station credibility;

- Consultants' materials were helpful but the execution was problematic
- In hindsight, would have been much better for our team to present information and talk to staff directly
- Encountered a great deal of misperception, hence we published "KPBS myth busters"
- KPBS management was attacked

Collective Bargaining

Negotiations Started January 2014

- Immediate Requests for KPBS Budget
- Key was establishing the KPBS negotiating team
- Job families had to be created as a first step in addressing compensation matters (past practice can work for/against you)
- Constantly running financial simulations of cost/impact via excel templates; very important!

Collective Bargaining

- Station Management had no prior experience with union formation and practices; rules and regulations made it difficult to communicate
- “Politics”: sensitivity and vulnerability of negotiations and appearances; campus, staff, chancellor’s office, state and local representatives

Collective Bargaining

- Final Agreement signed 7/16/15
- Effective August 2015
- Expires December 31, 2017
- Negotiations towards a new agreement begins no later than 6 months prior to the 12/31/17 expiration, i.e. July 2017

After the Contract

- “Minimum terms” contract
- Measuring economic impact; simulations vs reality
- Premium pay:
 - Out of class assignments
 - Seniority

After the Contract

- Work day, work week
- The Unit, as defined
 - Started off as content creators + engineers; later negotiated engineers out; “the grab” for members!
 - Growth in headcount of the unit
- Legal fees

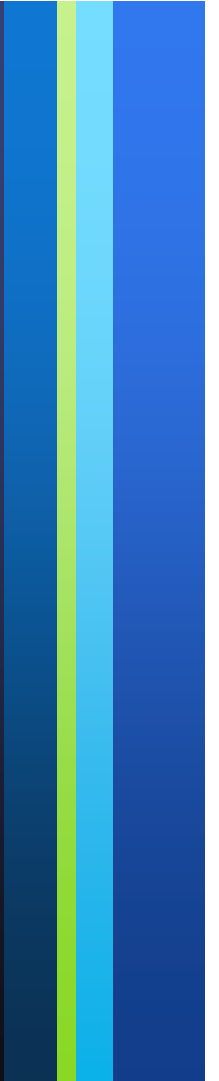
Lessons Learned

- Take seriously that public broadcasting is a target for unionization
 - Be proactive; assess your environment and risk; don't take things for granted
 - The union business model is about dues and sustaining / growing membership
 - Expect the attack on management, compensation, overtime, seniority, scheduling, out of class assignments; work week

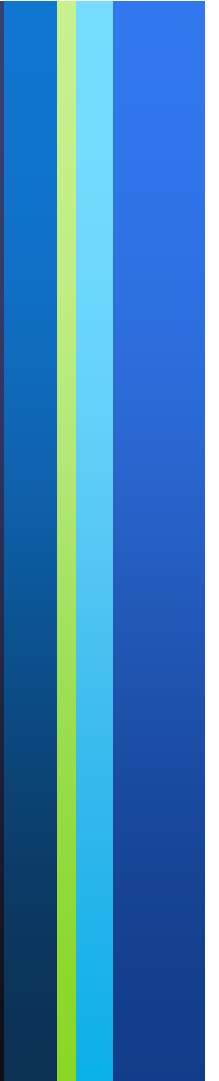
Lessons Learned

- Train Supervisors and Managers about contract terms and new ways to manage
- “Seat at the table” vs “Management Rights”

Q & A



Thank
you!



Contact Information

Ernest Sanchez, President

The Sanchez Law Firm P.C.

1155 F Street N.W., Suite 1050, Washington, D.C. 20004

Phone: 202-237-2814; Fax: 202-540-9311;

Ernest Sanchez 2348@gmail.com

Tom Karlo, General Manager

KPBS Public Media

5200 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92182

Phone: 619-594-2490; Fax 619-594-3812

tkarlo@kpbs.org