AFTRA and Other Employee Unions

An Evolving Relationship with Public Broadcasting

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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…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major PTV Stations and Joint Licensees</th>
<th>Public Radio Entities</th>
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<td>• WNET, New York</td>
<td>NPR</td>
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<td>• WTTW and WFMT-FM, Chicago</td>
<td>Minnesota Public Radio</td>
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<td>• WETA-TV- Radio, Washington, DC</td>
<td>WNYC and WQXR, New York City</td>
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<td>• KQED TV and radio, San Francisco</td>
<td>Pacifica Foundation Stations (LA, NYC, DC, Houston, and Berkeley)</td>
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<td>• KPBS, TV and radio, San Diego</td>
<td>WBEZ, Chicago</td>
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<td>KING-FM, Seattle</td>
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<td>KNKX-FM, Tacoma</td>
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<td>KPCC-FM, Pasadena</td>
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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 predicable, 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

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