

Radio Free Urbana / WRFU

Frequently Asked Questions

June 8, 2004

Get involved now : RFU meets the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month @ 8 PM
At the IMC, 218 W. Main St., Downtown Urbana
All meetings are open to the public

Join the RFU e-mail list : <http://lists.cu.groogroo.com/cgi-bin/listinfo/rfu>
rfu@ucimc.org

Introduction

We hope this FAQ can answer most basic questions about RFU, how it is different from other stations, and how we think it will run.

Radio Free Urbana is organized to be responsive to the Urbana-Champaign community, while also providing a venue for innovative and creative programming. Therefore the station is organized differently than just about any other non-commercial radio station.

RFU has an organizational structure which sets up how the station will run – it's modeled after the structure used successfully by the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center for the last three years.

Perhaps the most important thing to know about RFU's structure is that the station is a collective that attempts to operate as democratically as possible, with as little hierarchy as possible. Therefore, every participating volunteer member of RFU has as much influence over the direction of the station as any other member. Changes to RFU's structure are made only with the consensus of the RFU volunteer members.

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1. What is a low-power FM (LPFM) radio station ?

As the name suggests, LPFM stations broadcast with less power than regular broadcast radio stations. LPFM stations may broadcast with no more than 100 watts of power. By comparison, most full-power FM stations broadcast with 500 to 100,000 watts of power.

The amount of power a station has determines how far its signal will go, and how strong the signal will be within that reception area.

The LPFM license was created by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 2000, and are intended to be a low-cost way for non-profits, community groups and citizens to get on the air – especially people and groups normally excluded from broadcasting.

LPFM stations are required to be noncommercial and non-profit. Another restriction is that LPFM stations cannot be owned or run by a person or group that owns or runs any other type of radio station. LPFM stations are also required to air a minimum number of hours of locally-produced programming every week.

2. How far will RFU broadcast?

It's difficult to say for sure until the station goes on the air, but it's safe to say that the station should cover most of Champaign-Urbana, from Route 130 on the East to about Staley Rd. on the West. Depending on where and how high we're able to mount the station's antenna, it's signal may go further into the Western edges of Champaign, Savoy and unincorporated areas outside city limits.

3. Who owns RFU?

The official license holder for WRFU is the Socialist Forum of Champaign County, a non-sectarian discussion and advocacy group. The station will be operated through an agreement with the Independent Media Center of Urbana-Champaign, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation dedicated to the promotion and creation of independent media. As part of that agreement, RFU is a fiscally sponsored organization of the IMC, which means that the station enjoys the benefits of the IMC's federal non-profit status.

RFU will be housed at the IMC, which is planning to buy a building between now and June, 2005. Therefore RFU will use many existing resources of the IMC, including the IMC's radio production studio.

4. Who's in charge?

The short answer is: all of RFU's volunteers. In practice things are little more complex.

All RFU meetings are open to the public, and everyone in attendance may participate. Meetings are conducted by consensus, which, in short, means that no action happens until

a solution that is acceptable to everyone is found. Thus, no member has more power than another member.

RFU is divided into working groups and programming groups, which each have an area of responsibility. For example, there may be an engineering working group which keeps all of the station's equipment running. Each programming group is responsible for the programming that airs during a particular segment of the day or week. The members of each group are collectively responsible for the group's work and have autonomy over those decisions.

Provided they work cooperatively with other working groups and volunteers when necessary, and obey the constraints of the structure and federal rules that apply to radio stations, a working or programming group is free to do as its members wish.

Because some decisions and responsibilities affect the entire station – not just one group – there is a central Steering Group. This group is the closest thing RFU has to board of directors. Unlike a board of directors, any RFU member may participate in the Steering Group, although there is a minimum membership.

5. What's the Steering Group?

The Steering Group is the working group that is responsible for tasks and decisions that affect the entire station, especially legal, contractual, regulatory and financial responsibilities. In this way the Steering Group is similar to a board of directors. However, unlike a board, participation in the Steering Group is open to all RFU members.

Because the work of the Steering Group is so important, this group has a minimum membership to make sure that all working groups and programming groups are spoken for. The minimum membership of Steering includes one spokesperson from each working and programming group, plus what is known as the Steering Group's core membership.

The core membership is two spokes each from the Socialist Forum (SF) and the IMC, for a total of four members. The reason for this core membership is that because RFU is a joint project of the SF and the IMC, both of these organizations should have a guaranteed seat for decisions that affect the whole stations. This is especially important because SF is the legal FCC-license holder for RFU.

While the Steering Group deals with decisions that affect the entire station, the group does not have the power to force decisions on programming groups or working groups. However, if a group engages in behavior or actions that are a threat to the station – like airing libelous or obscene programming – the Steering Group may take appropriate action to address the risk.

6. What kind of programming will be on RFU?

That's up to the volunteers who join RFU. The idea is that the programs should reflect the needs and desires of the community and the volunteers who dedicate the time to produce them. Right now the founding collective has not made any decisions about what programs will or will not be on the air – we sincerely want to see what volunteers want to produce.

Unlike most commercial and public radio stations, there is no single program director who picks everything that goes on the air. RFU is even different from most community radio stations, which typically have an elected committee pick the programs.

Individual time slots and programs will be the responsibility of the Programming Groups, which are described in the next question. Programming groups are formed with the consent of the Steering Group – so, in effect, new programs are added when all the RFU volunteers agree to it (remember – any RFU member can attend Steering meetings and take part in decision making).

Programming groups are assigned particular times of day, but are not necessarily assigned any particular type of programming. This arrangement is designed to allow for experimenting and allowing programmers to create programs that aren't necessarily constrained by typical conceptions of genre and type.

7. How will I get on the air?

The most important step to getting on the air is to take RFU's training class. After you've completed training you have the opportunity to start or join a programming group.

To join a programming group, find a group that's responsible for a time of day that you would like to be on air, or that produces the kind of programming you'd like to do. Each programming group is different, so you may want to attend a few meetings to see which one is best for you.

Once you've found a group that's right for you, you can ask to join that group's collective.

If there's no group that's working in the area or time you want, you can start your own programming group for any part of the day or week that's not already programmed. However, you must find at least one other RFU volunteer who would like to be in a group with you (because one person is not a group). Then, you go to Steering Group and ask to form your programming group. If Steering consents, then you're ready to go.

If you don't want to have a regular slot, or you'd like to try out different types of programs, you can join the Traffic Working Group, which is responsible for all the times not taken care of by a programming group. For more information about the Traffic Group see:

8. How do I stay on the air?

To stay on the air all one has to do is maintain a paid membership in RFU, continue to be a participating member in an active programming group, and not violate any policies of the station.

To remain active, a Programming Group must have publicly accessible meetings at least once a month, have at least two RFU members, and participate in the Steering Group by sending a spokesperson to Steering Group meetings. The Group's spoke must attend the majority of Steering Meetings every calendar year, and no one person can be a spoke for more than two consecutive years. Also, one person can be the spoke for only one group.

9. How many shows can I have?

That's a difficult question to answer, since unlike most college or community stations, people don't have their own shows in the same way that a college DJ might have the same two hour slot each week. Each programming group is responsible for a particular slot of time, and the group is free to divide up that time however it sees fit.

However, one person can be the member of a maximum of two programming groups at one time. Therefore there is a limit to how much time a single person could be on the air, but that depends on how much time a particular programming group is responsible for and how it chooses to divide up that time.

10. How do I become a member of RFU?

You become a member of RFU when you pay your membership fee and take our training course. Currently, memberships are \$35 - \$50 per year, which includes membership in the IMC. Current IMC members only have to pay \$10. The reason why IMC membership is mandatory is because RFU will be housed at the IMC and take advantage of the IMCs facilities, including Internet, production facilities, and portable recording equipment. This cooperative arrangement keeps down the cost of operating RFU.

11. How will RFU be funded?

The annual operating costs of RFU should be minimal, especially since it is a low-power station using only 1% of the power of many stations on the dial. Further, the station will be hosted by the IMC, greatly reducing costs associated with rent and utilities. Therefore, a significant portion of RFU operating expenses should be covered by the annual membership fees.

Additional costs—like new equipment--will be raised through occasional funding efforts, such as benefit concerts, T-shirt sales, and the like. RFU does not plan to operate on a pledge drive funding model like most public and community stations, although RFU is permitted to use the airwaves to promote its own events.

RFU is a non-commercial station, and therefore is forbidden by the FCC from running commercial announcements. RFU is permitted to run what are called underwriting announcements – which are the short commercial-like announcements you hear on public radio. No decision has been made about whether or not RFU will air underwriting announcements.

