



Future of Music Coalition on

# Full Power FM Radio – The Opportunity of a Generation

★ FACT SHEET 2007

**We have before us a once-in-a-generation opportunity, one that could directly increase how much chamber music, jazz, vocal, world, and community arts we hear on the radio.**

This spring, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) will give away hundreds of *full power non-commercial educational (NCE) licenses* for any qualified nonprofits. Applications will be accepted for these valuable licenses during an as-yet to be determined 5-day period in the spring of 2007. For ten years, no new licenses have been given out. If you have ever dreamed of starting your own radio station, this is likely to be your last chance before all remaining FM spectrum is given away.

**How much time will I need to prepare an application?** The window to apply will only last five days, and there will be 30 days notice before the five days start. Only complete and error-free applications will be considered, and putting an application together will require the help of an engineer and maybe also a lawyer familiar with the FCC process, and generally takes about two months. The application window is expected to be open in Spring 2007, so the time to decide if you want to do this is NOW.

**What kind of licenses are available?** The only eligible channels distributed in this window are between 88.1 Mhz and 91.9 Mhz on the FM dial – this is a part of the FM band reserved for public radio stations. Licenses can range from 100 watts – 100,000 watts, depending on the region where the station is located. Examples of stations currently broadcasting with such noncommercial radio licenses include – independent jazz and world music station WPFW, serving Washington DC; full time classic jazz station KKJZ-FM in Long Beach, CA; Georgia Public Broadcasting, WACG in Augusta; and Pittsburgh classical station WQED.

**What groups are eligible for full power FM radio licenses?** Any group with *nonprofit status* is eligible to apply, and 501c3 status is not required. Over the years, all manner of community-based nonprofits, large and small, have applied for and been awarded these licenses. (Even labor organizations such as the AFL-CIO and SER – Jobs for Progress National, Inc. have endorsed or applied for community radio licenses.) Stations serving niche music interests, orchestras and classical music institutions, bluegrass and jazz supporters that have lost much of their radio coverage, can also apply. Any group, or consortia of organizations, with a message to communicate, or a desire to expand their organization locally can benefit from this rare opportunity.

**What does this opportunity cost?** The FCC gives out these licenses to nonprofit organizations in the United States for free, and there is no application fee. But there are costs associated with preparing the applications.

- **First step: Finding a Frequency.** The most important part of the application is having an available spot – *frequency* – on the FM dial where a new station can go. To determine this, you will have to do a *basic frequency search*. If there is a good frequency for your organization, then the next step is to figure out the more detailed costs for getting an

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application ready, hiring an engineer, and maybe an attorney. This might cost between \$3,000-10,000 for technical and legal support, depending on your local conditions. Note that it is unlikely that there will be any frequency available if you live in or are within 20 miles of the 50 largest cities in the US.

- **Demonstrating Access to Capital.** At some point in the process, the FCC will also ask you to demonstrate that you have access to the cash to *construct* and *operate* the station without income for the first six months. Depending on the coverage you plan to provide along with other factors, you may need to demonstrate access to funds or collateral property worth anywhere between \$25,000-\$200,000 for the purposes of the application. Actual annual operating costs once the station is up and running will vary, depending on if you have a paid staff or use volunteers, but it could range from \$25,000-\$1 million per year.
- **Associated Legal Fees.** There is going to be a lot of competition for these frequencies, from public radio stations, schools, churches, and other community groups. So if another group applies for the same frequency you want, you might also incur legal fees to devise the best strategy to win your license. These costs have to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

**When can I apply?** Nonprofits who want to take advantage of this opportunity will have a five-day window in spring 2007 when they must apply. There will be 30 days notice before the five days start, so groups need to have their applications ready to file as soon as the window is open. The fastest and most reliable way to know when the window is announced is to either sign up for the daily alerts from the FCC, or sign up for the Full Power Window notification list that FMC is managing – email Jean Cook to get on it at [jean@futureofmusic.org](mailto:jean@futureofmusic.org)

**How long will it take? When will my organization be able to build its own radio station?** Because the FCC will be flooded with applications, the processing time is likely to be at least a year. That will give you plenty of time to do fundraising and build local support for your project. After processing, the FCC issues a *construction permit*, which allows you to build the station, which might take 1-2 years. When everything is plugged in and working, you will then get your actual *license to broadcast*.

**Where can I learn more?** You can get more information on how to apply for a new license, on how to construct a new radio station, and on organizing, operating and supporting a community radio station from the following resources:

**Public Radio Capital** (<http://www.pubcap.org/>) -- is a consultancy that helps groups find financing for new frequencies.

**National Federation of Community Broadcasters** (<http://www.nfcb.org>) – provides services and advice to community radio stations, production groups and others.

**Prometheus Radio Project** (<http://prometheusradio.org>) – has been helping build low-power radio stations all around the country.

Or, contact Jean Cook, FMC's Outreach Director at [jean@futureofmusic.org](mailto:jean@futureofmusic.org).

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