Background and Information on the draft KUNM Strategic Plan

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KUNM, like every other traditional media company, is moving through dramatic technological and content transitions that put the consumer in the absolute driver’s seat for choice of content and preferred method of content delivery. For example, you can now listen to KUNM anytime, anywhere, for free, on your desktop, laptop, cell phone, IPod, or related devices.

In bygone days, KUNM was one of 40 choices on the radio. Now, KUNM is one of infinite choices available to many of the citizens we seek to serve. In bygone days, our capacity to serve was limited by the boundaries at the edge of our radio transmission. Now, our capacity to serve is unbound.

The early stages of this tech transition were recognized in KUNM’s environmental assessment in 2001-2002. Now, we are firmly in the midst of a seismic shift. We must be responsive to this shift in consumer opportunities, or risk becoming irrelevant to the public we seek to serve. Strategic planning is critical for our continued ability to providing the types of public service we have created over the past four decades.

KUNM’s last strategic work took place in 2000-2002 resulting in a vision statement that still holds value today (see kunm.org/community). The consensus-based vision process helped to create extensive change at KUNM, including a complete renovation of our facilities to provide a greater capacity for collaboration between broadcast staff, students and volunteers. Our paid staff grew from 13 full-time employees to 16 full-time employees to support Programming, Information Technology, and Development.

We added digital infrastructure and capacities for digital broadcasting, and expansion of online services. We launched Youth Radio, reorganized KUNM News programming, re-capitalization our transmission facilities and built four new KUNM affiliated stations, including the new station serving Rio Arriba County from Española.
This work came to a conclusion in the summer of 2008 when the FCC issued the new station’s licenses and just before the economic collapse of Fall 2008. Our listenership grew from two million hours-per-month in 2000 to three million hours-per-month today. KUNM has responded to new content distribution challenges and is now providing 35,000 hours-per-month of radio service online, in addition to podcasts, video blogs, audio archives, and web-only content.

KUNM is capable of delivering its unique brand of community-based public service content to online and mobile broadband users. The station must increase its focus on these arenas to maintain its relevance to a citizenry who increasingly is choosing online and broadband as convenient delivery systems with unlimited choices of free and paid content. Consumers are migrating away from traditional media – newspapers, radio, television, magazines and printed books. They are migrating to online content delivered to their computers, phones and other portable devices.

KUNM’s draft strategic plan relies on our deep community roots to sustain traditional radio listening at its current level into 2016. At the same time, we must constantly improve and expand our digital services to grow from 35,000 hours-per-month to 800,000 hours-per-month by 2016. We must develop online charitable donations to support our work.

Online and broadband technologies allow us to reach a global audience with unlimited content. They deserve our attention to provide public service content and to raise the funds needed to create the capacity which we use to provide public service.

KUNM can continue to serve existing listeners whose media habits are migrating away from the radio. We can find and serve new listeners anywhere, anytime, on any platform. If we do nothing with our digital opportunities, our current radio audience will drift away over the next five years. Our listeners will find the content they want, when they want it, on the listening device of their own choosing.

Without a digital delivery strategy, our traditional listeners and stalwart contributors will continue to migrate away from the radio as their primary content delivery system. Our fragile business model and our public service will begin to evaporate. Do nothing now, and our listeners will move on.

The imperative for Strategic Planning seems environmentally obvious. Innovate quickly or evaporate slowly. Internally, we have much work to do to develop a shared vocabulary and understanding of new media opportunities. We need cohesion to effectively map an action plan for success among the many paid staff, students, community volunteers, and Radio Board members working together at KUNM.
An external study of KUNM, requested by UNM’s Provost, and presented by Keystone International in January 2010, shows that, internally, and in the present moment, we are not as strong and collaborative as we could be. The KUNM Study is available at kunm.org/community. The study included one-on-one interviews with staff, students, volunteers and Radio Board members followed by a lengthy online survey. The recommendation for strategic planning is among the more than 40 recommendations made by Keystone International in the KUNM Study.

In April 2010, I began to engage staff, students, volunteers and the Radio Board to complete and submit a draft strategic plan by October 1, 2010. By the end of June 2010, the Operations (paid) staff, working with a UNM facilitator and the Volunteer Representative to the Radio Board, had developed a draft Strategic Plan as the basis for promoting discussion and encouraging feedback in the planning process. This draft was offered online for public review and input.

The draft Strategic Plan was discussed at two Radio Board meetings and two General Meetings during summer 2010. These meetings are open to the public. Only a couple of short e-mails were received from listeners. Feedback by KUNM volunteers was collected and posted online. To the degree possible, some of the suggestions were incorporated into the current draft.

A rough draft was submitted to the Deputy Provost’s office in late September 2010 for initial review and reaction. The primary feedback was to provide additional information and background for the Strategic Plan. The information contained here is intended to provide a higher degree of context for use in conjunction with the actual planning document.

As requested, the draft plan is now being submitted to the Provost for review and approval. The five-year span for the plan runs from calendar 2011-2016. In some instances, specific measurable goals are given for specific objectives. For other objectives, KUNM must undertake significant outreach, education and consensus-building in Year 1 among the paid staff, students volunteers, and members of the KUNM Radio Board to establish measurable outcomes and the specific tactics to achieve the desired results.

There is much work to be done. There will be plenty of opportunities for input and participation as the future unfolds.

The plan should undergo a complete annual review near the anniversary of the plan’s launch in early 2011. The review should be lead by Operations staff principals in consultation with other Operations staff members, students, volunteers, members of the Radio Board and the Provost’s staff. The plan itself, and reports or other results for the review will be posted to our website for public information and feedback.

For further information, please contact my office (505) 277-8009 and RichardTowne@kunm.org. Audience estimates are from Arbitron Research Inc and Limelight Control LLC.