

**Radio Staffing Largely Stable ... As Usual
by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey shows the typical (median) radio news operation had a full-time news staff of one -- the same as it's been since I started doing these surveys 27 years ago.

All told, 76.6% of all multi-station local groups operate with a centralized newsroom. That's down four points from last year.

Comparing the airing of local news by ownership, 75.7% of locally-owned radio stations run local news versus 88.2% of non-locally-owned stations. The numbers came out that way last year, too.

Radio staff size – 2021

	Average full-time	Median full-time	Max full-time	Average part-time	Median part-time	Max part-time	Average total staff	Median total staff	Max total staff
All Radio	3.2	1	75	1.7	1	29	5	3	82
Market size:									
Major	9.1	3.5	75	2.9	1	29	12	7	82
Large	2.9	1	25	1.4	1	6	4.3	3	28
Medium	2.2	1	21	1.6	1	22	3.8	3	30
Small	1.5	1	14	1.4	1	23	2.8	2	25
Commercial	2	1	36	1.4	1	18	3.4	2	54
Non-comm	6.7	3	75	2.4	1	29	9.2	6	82

These numbers are not much different, overall, from a year ago. The average staff size edged up 0.2 people, but just about everything else stayed the same. All market sizes went up in average except large markets, which dropped a full person.

I break down radio numbers in a variety of ways, but the sharpest overall contrast in radio news is between commercial and non-commercial stations. And the differences have become sharper and deeper year after year. This year, commercial radio station staff went up, on average, by 0.3, but non-commercial station staff rose by 1.1. Note that non-commercial stations are more likely to be found in large and major markets.

As usual, the larger the market, the larger the news staff is likely to be.

Changes in radio staff in the last 12 months (2020) and planned for the future – 2021

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
Total news staff the past year (2020)	10.8%	17.6%	70.6%	1%
Plan to change amount of staff next year (2021)	12.9	1.2	71	14.9

For the second year in a row, the percentage of stations increasing staff fell by 4 points in the past year; the percentage decreasing staff rose by 7. That's a sizeable jump. The bigger the staff and the bigger the market size, the more likely that the station added staff. Number of stations in a local group and geography made no difference. Non-commercial stations were four times more likely to add staff than commercial ones. But increasing staff at non-commercial stations just beat out decreasing staff. At commercial stations, three times as many stations cut staff as added staff. Overall, it was not a good year.

Predictions for this year are almost exactly the same as they were a year ago. The bigger the staff, the more likely for the station to expect to add more. But, unlike the typical year, market size wasn't a consistent determinant of the likelihood for expansion. Non-commercial stations are more than four times as likely to expect to increase staff as commercial stations.

Radio digital staffing down

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that, overall, full time radio web staffing went down all across the board.

How many people work on the digital side? 2021

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
All Radio	0.8	0.7	1.5
Major Market	1.8	0.6	2.4
Large Market	0.6	0.8	1.4
Medium Market	0.6	0.7	1.3
Small Market	0.4	0.7	1.2
Commercial	0.7	0.7	1.3
Non-commercial	1	0.8	1.8

In contrast to TV, virtually every number for people in radio news is down. Both full time and part time, both commercial and non-commercial.

Do other staffers help on the web? 2021

All Radio	71.5%
Major Market	73.5
Large Market	67.6
Medium Market	74.4
Small Market	69.4
Commercial	69.2
Non-commercial	77.3

Radio fell by 3 points overall, but market size differences were inconsistent. Both commercial and non-commercial radio fell slightly.

New and replacement hiring

The average radio station hired 0.3 replacement positions and 0.2 new hires. Both replacements and new hires are down 0.1 compared to last year. The median – or typical -- for

both replacements and new hires remained at zero. That's exactly what it's been for the last six years.

The top radio replacement position – by a huge margin – is reporter at 40% of all replacement positions. That's been true for the last few years. Quite a few stations, especially non-commercial ones, noted specialty reporters: education, political, health, diversity and others.

Producers came in at 13%, followed by anchor/host, news director and digital all tied at 11%. Everything else was in low single digits.

The top new position in radio news again this year was reporter – at 56% of all new hires. Digital hires – which didn't show up two years ago, came in second at 18%. News editor came in at 12%, followed by anchor/host at 9%. And then you're in low single digits.

In radio, major markets are those with 1 million or more potential listeners. Large markets are from 250,000 to 1 million. Medium markets are 50,000 to 250,000. Small markets are fewer than 50,000.

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About the Survey

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2020 among all 1,762 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,379 radio stations. Valid responses came from as many as 1,358 television stations (77.1%) and 765 radio news directors and general managers representing 2,310 radio stations. Some data sets (e.g. the number of TV stations originating local news, getting it from others and women TV news directors) are based on a complete census and are not projected from a smaller sample.