



# Hidden assets in community radio

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Continuing the metaphoric feast of the discussion around Social Capital I would like to promote the idea of joint ventures and investment in the community media sector.

The ACE sector has long had incidental relationships with community media. People use local radio to promote their courses on air. Others – maybe the same people – are participants, presenting a jazz show or doing their own interviews. But the full potential is often not realised.

Arguably, the more than 300 community radio stations around the country, and the TV stations in every capital city, are *the* most active sites of adult learning in the country. At the very least, volunteers acquire management, technical and presentation skills. The learning process can be rough justice at times, but it is happening.

Programming on community media is often educational too – not always in the Radio National style, but, for example, you'll hear interviews with the local people, different types of music from that on any other station, and networked documentaries.

Where are the investment possibilities then? The opportunities to consolidate social capital, earn an extra return on the resources of people, equipment, networks and knowledge? A good way to answer this is through the story of how one station – 5UV Radio Adelaide – has used these resources to maintain its strength while its traditional funding from the University of Adelaide has been steadily wound back. The station has had to find income to pay and train station workers and maintain running expenses in a rapidly changing technological environment. High quality adult education, on and off air, has played a critical role.

Since the 70s, the station has presented 'educational' radio. Fully paid staff once did the job, with little thought about how the bills were paid. Now it's done by a small core staff, working with well-trained volunteers. Some of these go on to paid work in this skilled and resourced station. Client groups will invest in

the production of radio programs as a way of promoting their message. The station attracts a very diverse audience, built around the range of its own on-air programming and membership of the community radio network.

The investment in training has been small enough. A half-time training coordinator and a budget for hourly paid trainers. Over time, the dividends show. Basic training for broadcasters is mandatory, and the reputation of the 12-week course is such that the fees charged cover most of the running costs. 5UV invests in volunteers who earn some income and develop their skills as trainers. The station has now achieved RTO status and attracts outside clients, mostly school groups, ready to pay for the accredited training. Overseas students are also keen to acquire this kind of training and on-air experience.

Just as importantly, the skills base of the station is being built. Project funding can be confidently sought and won, knowing that it can produce interesting and entertaining programs. These are now produced digitally, and often distributed on CD to the statewide network of stations or on the national Community Radio Satellite.

Productions in the last couple of years have covered topics such as basic legal information, parenting, arts and disability and youth suicide. 5UV and other stations around the country regularly record and network material from music festivals such as Womad and the Byron Bay Blues festival. Professional bodies, community and advocacy groups have all been prepared to pay, or to make joint applications for public funds at realistic levels covering salaries and equipment.

A lot of satisfied customers, a lot of value adding to community cultural and educational events and resources. And probably, better radio. 5UV Radio Adelaide is in some ways unique, but no more so than any of those other 300 stations. Why not explore the possibilities? Your nearest station will be listed on the website for the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia at <<http://www.cbaa.org.au>>.