



REVIEW OF THE INDIGENOUS BROADCASTING PROGRAM

APRIL 2006

**AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS**

Submission by

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TO:

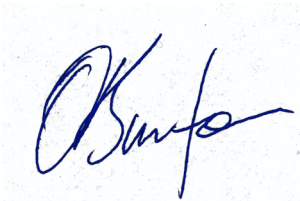
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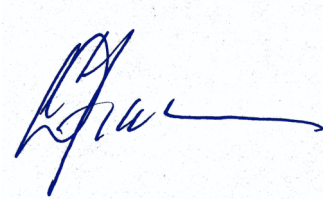
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Authorization

This submission has been authorised by the Donald Fraser, Director and Owen Burton, Chairperson of PY Media.



Owen Burton Chairperson PY Media



Donald Fraser Director PY Media



Will Rogers, General Manager PY Media

Overview

Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Media Aboriginal Corporation (PY Media) is known nationally as a pioneering, indigenous owned and managed, regional media communication organization with a range of landmark achievements in the area of media production, broadcasting, remote communications, and community consultation and service delivery. Its achievements demonstrate innovative and appropriate technological solutions for indigenous people living in remote Australia.

PY Media services a large number of communities across a vast portion of central Australia, in South Australia, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia. PY Media operates numerous community broadcast technologies for Anangu (the regional Aboriginal people) including a community radio network, a community television service, a web portal, and the UHF network. PY Media believes that community broadcasting systems guarantee empowerment and democratic governance for the Indigenous people of remote Australia. PY Media believes that a strong communication system is an essential component toward building a vibrant self-sustaining community.

Politically, PY Media makes it possible for people to hear what is going on in a range of council and organization meetings (see Appendix). In turn, the public can address the issues publicly over the Radio 5NPY network and individually in conversation over the UHF wireless network. Anangu can participate in building their future and the future of their families. Government must commit to supporting this self-determination. Economically, PY Media supports individual financial transactions, registrations, provides employment and supports local enterprise. Socially, PY Media builds community. And culturally, PY Media helps sustain identity, individual and community pride.

Like many government-supported services from transportation to sanitation, remote community broadcasting does not generate nor will it ever generate sufficient income to survive without dedicated ongoing funding. For PY Media to maintain its growth strategy, it must have some degree of reasonable long-range funding certainty. PY Media has the will, the expertise, and the resources to build a plan, develop a strategy, and to deliver on its objectives. If the government wants to see a return on its investment it must recognize the complex choreography entailed in operating a regional remote indigenous media telecommunication organization.

PY Media has made a concerted effort to examine and respond to the questions posed in the *Review of the Indigenous Broadcasting Program* (see below). The situation, however, demands looking at the larger picture and facing the real challenges and opportunities that exist in remote indigenous regions. Remote indigenous media organizations help meet the challenges and realize the opportunities that support and accelerate the changes necessary to fulfil social,

economic and political objectives. In order to meet this mandate, media organizations must be properly funded. This implies strong government support.

- That support must be characterized by consultation on the ground at a grass roots level. Policy should not be formulated by committees sitting in the capital cities who are unfamiliar with the day-to-day challenges faced in the management of remote indigenous media organizations.

- All of the small operations should be understood in the context of the larger picture. Indigenous communities are undergoing radical transformation in a short period of time. Moving from the traditional world to the global society at large demands changes in every aspect of the community's existence. The real issues include: democracy and governance, empowerment and providing essential services.

- All funding operations must involve a clear and equitable process with complete accountability not only to the government, but to the organizations whose operation supports so many aspects of the community's well-being. Exacerbating the challenges, government cuts of funding operations at a moment's notice hardly support government objectives and the long range aspirations for the people in the communities.

- Government authorities that make funding decisions should have some experience in the field. ICC should participate in the operational process rather than make decisions based on the advice tendered by individuals with limited or no field exposure.

The questions below address limited issues ignoring the volume of services that RIMOs take on in supporting the communities. RIMOs should be seen as a part of government process, fulfilling public mandates at the grass roots level.

In light of government mandates for the communities and their support organizations, there are a number of un-posed questions that should be raised:

- Why has there not been an increase in the ATSIC/ATSI/DCITA Indigenous Broadcasting Program (IBP) budget, pegged at \$13.3 million since late 1990's, nor any CPI increase?
- Why is the Indigenous broadcasting sector held together by CDEP wages?¹ Why is the government hanging onto CDEP when it has been proven not to be an effective way of employing people in remote communities?
- Why haven't the majority of government employees ever visited a community in remote Australia? In good faith, how are they able to make policy decisions affecting the future of those communities?

¹ AICA report in response to the IBP Review, May 2006.

- Why must it be a constant battle to keep funding at the levels that organizations need to survive?
- Why do budget decisions appear to succumb to emotion instead of process?
- How many times must we justify our existence?

Indigenous people in our region live in the "Fourth World." They live in poverty. They live in appalling conditions within a First World country. Everyday, remote indigenous people awake without the proper material sustenance for proper nourishment, to ward off disease, to build a viable economic future. Rather than highlight these conditions and the complex array of causes, the media when it suits their editorial ambitions rushes to judgment in decrying the villains, the alleged paedophiles and petrol pushers.

DCITA should be falling all over itself to help those organizations on the ground that are working on the remedies, working on addressing the deep-seated causes for the myriad problems and not simply masking the superficial effects. Maintaining funding levels is not enough. Realizing strategic objectives demands a systematized policy of funding increases and long-range support.

LIST OF QUESTIONS

B.1.2.1 Does the proposed funding model provide for a more equitable distribution of funds?

Funding must take into account more than per capita statistics. Each region has unique challenges related to environment; distances; health, economic, and political development. Those variables must be considered when allocating resources.

Each region has different goals driven by the locally determined political, economic, and social priorities on the ground. The outcomes in each region are similarly determined by a complex set of unique conditions. While building a blanket model for uniform assessment might appear to support bureaucratic overview, it is a disservice to the people, an indifferent and mean-spirited denial of each community's unique set of circumstances. Even on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, the communities' particular circumstances differ dramatically and defy a common analysis. To flatten the funding determinants and performance criteria across all of Australia is ludicrous.

PY Media provides the services of a community broadcasting station as well as looking after RIBS communities. The current amount of funding prior to being cut was barely enough to simply survive.

PY Media evolved over a long period of time into a community based organization with very real responsibilities. People rely on us to deliver a myriad of services. DCITA's funding is only a part of the picture.

Recommendation: IBP should recognize the myriad regional differences when determining allocation. IBP should lobby for increased support recognizing the growth of remote communities, inflation, the ambitious objectives.

B.1.2.2 Are there any strong arguments to justify funding for broadcasting under the IBP on a multi-year basis?

Many successful projects achieved have been multi-year funded. In order to plan adequately, to secure the best contracts, the most appropriate hardware, to plan, these efforts need to be researched and implemented in a coordinated and well-thought out manner. On the APY Lands, the UHF wireless network represents one such successful model. It took several years to research the landscape, choose the tower locations, to check those locations, to contract the construction of the towers, to equip the towers with the appropriate hardware, to test the system. The care and attention paid off in a reliable, heavily utilized network that has become a vital part of the communication landscape.

Another argument, securing funding on a multi-year basis frees up submission time for more effective management of resources. Time can be devoted to greater coordination with governing agencies to broadcast vital meetings, public service reports by police, land management, services and other agencies.

Insofar as the government asks for three-year strategic plans, it seems obvious that funding should match the planning. How does it advantage anyone to keep hard working indigenous organizations in a constant state of uncertainty? Does anyone operate better when they are perpetually hungry never knowing from where their next feed is coming. The government does not follow this model.

Personnel can be secured for longer commitments. Staff turnover uses valuable resources, in particular training time, relationship building time.

More time can be devoted to recruiting and training indigenous staff, to strategic planning, to future initiatives.

Recommendation: IBP should fund on a multi-year basis.

B.1.2.3 Comment is requested on the proposal for a capital equipment fund.

Telecommunication and broadcasting equipment wears from normal use. In desert regions, equipment life is even more limited by the dust, the heat, the wear and tear of transportation for mobile units.

Media technology changes quickly. In 2006, digital mobile units allow for greater community participation in broadcasting activity. Ten years ago, we could only dream about such a possibility. Today, portable laptop units can carry vast amounts of programming. Material can be stored and redistributed electronically. Some effort to maintain the state-of-the-art, to embrace each new generation of technological advance is important for not only improving but for making possible a higher degree of service.

The provision under the *Backing Indigenous Ability* initiative to restore aging radio infrastructure is a positive step. While this is a stand alone and one-time consideration, long-term programs for maintenance and restoration should be considered part of IBP support. PY Media proposes an ongoing three year program for equipment upgrades and replacement.

The new transmitters that would enable ICTV to operate as a stand alone service in remote communities will eliminate the need for the switchover equipment (that switches transmitters from ABC to ICTV) and cut out one possible problem point in the system.

Recommendation: A capital equipment fund should support regular replacement and upgrade of equipment.

B.1.2.4 Should activities such as training and recording festivals, stories, customs and traditions receive funding from a competitive funding pool set up under the IBP?

PY Media has sponsored a number of festivals in addition to continuing to record ongoing custom and traditional activities and special events. There should be ongoing support for these activities. Extraordinary events might be augmented through a competitive funding pool.

Ongoing hands-on training should not be competitive; it should be funded on a continual basis. After all, we do not competitively fund our schools. The commitment is to try and educate all children to the highest possible standard. Preparing the largest number of individuals to achieve the highest level of operational and creative competency should be the guiding principle behind the support of telecommunication training.

Recommendation: Ongoing funding should support training programs and special events.

B.1.2.5 If so, what activities should be eligible for funding from the pool?

Special festivals bringing in performers from outside venues might be supported by special funding. The opportunity to distribute recorded material to outside venues, to travel events on the APY Lands and to a broader indigenous community demands continual support. On the Lands, there are sufficient variables to contend with when planning any event without worrying about the ebb and flow of funding. Many events must be planned well in advance. How far ahead will be pool support its applicants' requests? Will there be money made available for last minute opportunities?

B.2.1.1 Will the proposed model for RIMOs enable RIBS to operate more effectively?

PY Media currently follows the model proposed whereby the RIBS are supported and maintained through the oversight of the RIMO. The centralized model does provide the efficiency of scale and accountability proposed. It should be noted that support for RIBS remains a priority and those costs should not be discounted in the centralization of support. It is important that this support be sustained and augmented with cost-of-living increases and boosted by growth factors.

PY Media's management structure includes a governing body that consists of one representative from each major community on the APY Lands. An elected chair and vice chairperson, and a designated Anangu Director oversee a General Manager, who, in turn, is responsible for the day-to-day operations serving 18 central desert communities in the NT and SA with a population of over 3,000 people.

B.2.3.1 Would indirect funding of RIBS through RIMOs be a better way of supporting RIBS?

Indirect funding is presently the model employed on the APY Lands. Community broadcasting technologies managed by PY Media include:

- the Radio 5NPY community radio station based in Umuwa on the APY Lands and broadcast over 350,000 sq km. Radio 5NPY is broadcast on a FM frequency through the Imparja satellite based in Alice Springs.
- Indigenous Community Television (ICTV), which broadcasts 100 per cent meaningful and appropriate Indigenous content, and has a national footprint covering 80 communities in remote and regional Australia.
- UHF radio network, which is based on UHF CB 'communicator' coverage within all APY communities and beyond, and includes 'mobile' coverage along main thoroughfares.
- Internet waru.org web portal, which is a promotional and information web site offering resources to Anangu as well as government organizations and researchers.

B.2.3.2 Should the operation and maintenance of radio/television transmitters in communities be supported by the local communities themselves, rather than funded from the IBP?

The communities lack the engineering expertise to maintain transmitters. When PY Media assumed responsibility for RIBS, the quality of installation improved immeasurably. Now, the equipment and installation of each RIBS station is up to professional broadcast standard, with equipment locked in secure metal cabinets. Each station is designed and installed in a comparable manner allowing for centralized maintenance in an efficient cost-effective manner. Reliability of service has become the norm. New and innovative equipment can be ordered and installed across the region in a planned orderly manner. This is a given in most major cities and towns around Australia. The same provision should be made for remote communities.

Recommendation: Operation and maintenance of transmission should be funded through RIMOs.

B.2.3.3 Should a specific allocation of funds be made available within the IBP for local content production in RIBS?

The goal remains local community origination of programming. PY Media trains and produces community video and radio that becomes part of the broadcast schedule of ICTV and Radio 5NPY. The more allocation of support the greater the community involvement. This funding should be considered a long-range goal, directed at young adults and older children. As part of the educational process, it should be ongoing.

Recommendation: Funds allocated to RIBS for local content production should be managed through RIMOs.

B.3.1 Will the proposed changes to the funding arrangements between the IBP and the CBF assist in clarifying roles and eliminating overlap and the possibility of double-dipping of funds?

Insofar as there are no commercial indigenous broadcasting operations on the APY Lands, there is little possibility for overlap. It is important to recognize that commercial operations have greater resources for production and programming. They can use a small proportion of their profits for community service related projects involving indigenous people and organizations and directed toward the indigenous communities. Traditional indigenous media organizations do not have this luxury and need the highest level of support from government agencies. The motives are never profit, but always self-sustaining community serving operations.

B.4.1 Are these appropriate principles for administering the program?

The principles appear sound. DCITA should keep in mind that no program remains self-sustaining at current levels. Either a program grows or it stagnates and diminishes. The communities continue to evolve, growing more engaged in outside social, economic, and cultural activities. Enterprise develops. Populations grow. With those demands and others, media must play an increasing role in disseminating information, maintaining communication, and building a unified properly functioning community. Support projections should recognize those needs and support them as a positive development with clear social, economic, and political outcomes.

C.1.1.1 How could the IBP encourage more Indigenous employment?

If indigenous people recognize the media organization(s) in their community as growing institutions supporting important community activities, that recognition will help develop commitment and interest. Funds should be made available for developing staff positions. Those positions should receive funding that goes beyond CDEP top-up support.

There are a number of ingredients needed to employ and develop people's skills for work in media at all levels. At the outset, individuals need to acquire experience working with media technology. Over time, work in the field helps to develop people skills. It takes that much longer to build administrative experience and managerial capabilities. For administrative and managerial growth to happen, the overall culture must take on the need for this to happen. It is a complex political, economic, and social matrix. This ongoing process demands a commitment by government to support the organizations and managers working to effect this positive change.

Recommendation: Additional funds should be allocated for increased numbers of indigenous staff positions within indigenous media organizations.

C.1.1.2 Should the IBP set targets for Indigenous employment within funded organisations?

As a long range goal, targets would be helpful barometers of community engagement and individual willingness to be engaged. These positions would require training and a growing commitment that will take time to cultivate in remote communities, where populations travel, wax and wane.

If IBP sets targets, IBP must be willing to support those targets. It is of no use to set targets and then equivocate on follow-up support. There's no point in building targets destined to fail. The targets should be a shared responsibility, a shared commitment between IBP and the organization in the field. This cooperation demands a commitment by IBP to send its personnel into the field to gain a first-hand understanding of the challenges and demands.

Recommendation: Long range targets are helpful barometers if local circumstances are weighed in assessments.

C.1.2.1 Should the IBP provide for two hours paid work per day for operators at qualifying RIBS sites?

Two hours a day constitutes a start. Limited employment should be recognized for what it is in an economic context. Two hours of work a day does not represent a functional wage, not to mention a viable job anywhere in the world. In remote communities, a two-hour position would not be granted any greater

recognition. Individuals employed would continue to view other family obligations and community roles as more important than a two-hour daily regimen.

Recommendation: While every bit of support helps, two hours part-time remuneration should be seen for what it is - a token gesture. IBP should provide for at least half-time positions at qualifying RIBS sites.

C.1.2.2 How should arrangements for paid work be monitored?

PY Media has executive members in many of the major communities. They report on the relative success of media operations in their communities. They poll fellow members of the population and might be given greater supervisory obligations.

PY Media has representatives of the organization that tour the communities on a regular basis. They report back to their supervisor(s).

Recommendation: Executive members and RIMO staff should monitor paid workers.

C.1.2.3 How significant is CDEP to the smooth function of Indigenous broadcasting, particularly in remote areas?

CDEP provides another means of recruiting community involvement. It does not substitute for clearly funded positions within the organization. It is economically expedient as a means of providing work incentive to individuals on the dole who might otherwise not want to jeopardize government support for funded employment that remains uncertain from year-to-year. In that context, CDEP remains important. In its place, greater government support for ongoing positions across a range of services might help move the community in time toward greater self-reliance.

C.1.2.4 Have any IBP funded organisations completed, or are they currently negotiating, an SRA with DEWR that includes broadcasting?

We have mentioned that we would be interested in working on a RPA to look at the overall needs of the region. PY Media does not think that these projects or operations will work on a community-by community-basis. RPAs should be a 3 way agreement: PY Media (1) manages and supports community, (2) community works and provides services to the people and (3) programming to the network. Most important, the Government provides the capital and the funding to make it work. These operations will only work if the government takes on more responsibility than just managing grants. DCITA must recognize that media and communication are an essential service like healthcare, water,

infrastructure, and roads. DCITA needs to look at the way the services are provided and maintain some flexibility in the delivery.

C.1.3.1 What is the best way of meeting the training needs of Indigenous broadcasting services?

Training is a long-term, ongoing process. PY Media trainers work with young adults, with school children. Training should include as many members of the community as possible to ensure that responsibility for producing broadcast content and maintaining it continues throughout the year regardless of family commitments and community events. With the demands of promoting literacy and knowledge in other areas, vocational training has been largely assumed by PY Media in the area of telecommunications. PY Media should be guaranteed the assistance to continue to provide training support. There should be an adequate number of trainers funded to cover all of the communities on a regular weekly basis across the tri-state region (SA, WA, NT) throughout most of the year.

The traditional residents of the APY Lands are hands-on people. They do not historically or culturally learn things from reading books or by sitting in classrooms studying texts written and spoken in their third language. The people are hands-on learning and require hands-on support.

Recommendation: A long range funding program should support ongoing hands on training programs in the communities.

C.1.4.1 Comments are sought on opportunities for traineeships.

Training programs have sometimes been in conjunction with Adelaide University's public broadcasting service and with Batchelor College. Students have traveled to Adelaide and to Alice Springs and Batchelor for special concentrated periods of instruction. While those efforts harbor some value, the follow-up remains crucial. Here, PY Media assumes complete responsibility for that follow-up training when individuals return to the communities. Without the follow-up, the time spent in Adelaide or at Batchelor proves ineffectual.

PY Media training generates programming material that is later broadcast. Students have a measured assessment of their own productivity by what appears on their televisions and over their radio network.

Recommendation: that trainee ships are only effective if they are properly supported

C.2.1.1 How can IBP funding be most effectively used through AICA and IRCA to best serve the interests of members under the proposed new funding model?

Funding should not be centralized at the expense of the regional communities. The national organization AICA and regional organization IRCA lobby for support and facilitate coordination and cooperation. Neither organization has the capacity to manage programs on a regional basis. Neither organization has the mechanism at its disposal to assess performance.

Recommendation: Funding should not be allocated through AICA or IRCA.

C.2.2.1 Is NIRS adequately representative of the Indigenous communities that it serves?

NIRS does represent indigenous communities though perhaps in proportion to where their population is distributed. In that regard, metropolitan communities enjoy greater coverage. NIRS is not broadcast in the APY region. NIRS do not see themselves as an Organisation representing all indigenous peoples.

C.2.2.2 Should NIRS provide a wider range of content than it currently does under the new arrangements? If so, what additional content should be provided?

NIRS should be able to decide on its own content provision.

C.2.3.1 What benefits and outcomes do you see emerging from SRAs for IBP funded organisations?

PY Media is working with Nganampa Health, APY Services, Land Management, with the Police helping to support their agendas and programs. SRAs will provide greater support and recognition for that vital area of responsibility borne by media organizations if all involved support the outcomes..

Summary

The systems that PY Media have installed may resemble the technologies in rural regions or capital cities throughout Australia and the services may appear similar. The difference is that PY Media has had to fight constantly to justify Anangu's right to communicate. Funding frameworks tilt the landscape. If only a small percentage of the money that has gone into mainstream telecommunication service providers was put into remote Australia, remote indigenous Australians would be that much more integrated and involved.

Therefore, the issue is not the value of support, nor the delivery of promised operations. The issue is whether the Australian government wants the indigenous people of this country to have a strong voice. If we agree that a strong remote indigenous voice helps promote community, family, and is of value to the nation and national identity, then it is essential that the government increase its support of remote Australia by developing and maintaining a technological media infrastructure that empowers people and allows affordable communication for all remote users.

Over the past twenty years, PY Media has proven over and over again that Anangu have something to say, that they own and can manage their country, and that long-term plans bears measurable results. PY Media has been the catalyst for political growth, economic possibility, and social self-realization. Working in a tough environment has made PY Media into a tougher organization. With its broad amount of research coupled with its deep understanding of the people, PY Media has been able to demonstrate its reliability and success within the performance culture.

Talking is a part of Anangu culture, a part of indigenous culture throughout Australia. Providing the people a platform to be heard empowers them to join the rest of the nation, to be a voice, to be a contributor, to negotiate a place within the nation, within a global society. Don't take this away. Embrace it and support it the proper way.

Appendix²

PY Media Radio Broadcasting Goals

PY Media encourages all regional organizations and service providers (including government agencies) to broadcast meetings, events and program information on Radio 5NPY. Using radio to disseminate information across the APY Lands has proved itself time and time again as a reliable medium. When used in conjunction with other information campaigns, those agencies that have used Radio 5NPY as a tool access all of the communities on the APY Lands.

One of very first meeting's broadcast was the annual general meeting of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation (NPY Women's Council). A recent example of talkback radio in 2005 PY Media Chairperson Owen Burton hosted an eight hour heated discussion in English and Pitjantjatjara languages reviewing the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act and the operations of the APY Land Council. Among the interviewees was the the Opposition Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (the South Australian Minister involved with the changes to the Act declined numerous invitations to participate).

PY Media aspires for government and local agencies to utilise 5NPY Radio as a site for publicising information and participating in healthy debates. Regional organizations have broadcast their general meetings on Radio 5NPY.

With the addition of the UHF wireless network, messages spread like wildfire. The interaction between community radio and UHF has been the most effective means to broadcast to a wide audience.

UHF: bush radio in the new millennium

Following instruction from its executive and on request of many of its members, in 2002 PY Media began to redesign the bush radio using a UHF system. The resurrected bush radio was launched in 2004. As an unique form of community broadcasting, the current UHF system is successful because it:

- rekindles the bush radio era allowing Anangu to communicate at low cost over hundreds of kilometres;
- uses a robust, low cost to user radio network based on UHF CB 'communicator' coverage within communities and 'mobile' coverage along main thoroughfares;
- UHF handsets are widely available and at low cost (approximately \$50);

² adapted from the PY Media submission to the Australian Government Minister for DCITA inquiry into community broadcasting, 17 March 2006.

- promotes economic development and social opportunity by linking repeater sites and providing strong signal zones that allow individuals, business, and support organizations to communicate and move freely across the APY Lands;
- reduces the isolation and danger of remoteness by strategically locating low cost Blue Pole access points for emergency roadside assistance;
- aggregates the new facilities with existing broadcasting services to create a valuable community asset and reduced cost of ownership;
- removes the 'call centre' experience from fault reporting by using Remote Area Diagnostic Information Collection And Logging (RADICAL) to supervise UHF CB repeater network and Blue Pole integrity;
- chooses site locations and dimension infrastructure to leverage redundancy and possibility for future services e.g. diversity coverage, CDMA cell extension, private data, and essential services telemetry;
- turns remoteness into advantage through the use of unconventional antennae techniques that double 'communicator' coverage and reduce infrastructure cost i.e. the Australian Communications Authority limit transmitter 'reach' of repeater through the maximum EIRP allowed, but receiver 'reach' of repeater can be effectively doubled for low power communicator radios by using a Yagi antenna.

The UHF network has 16 repeater sites and antenna masts and equipment shelters installed on four mountaintops. Blue Pole access points provide emergency plus social access to the UHF CB radio network from strategic locations along local main roads. They are vandal resistance plus suitable for permanent exposure to the environment; their location, function, and operation is obvious by design and signage; and field maintainable by non-technical personnel.³

³ For further information on the technical components on the UHF network, see www.waru.org