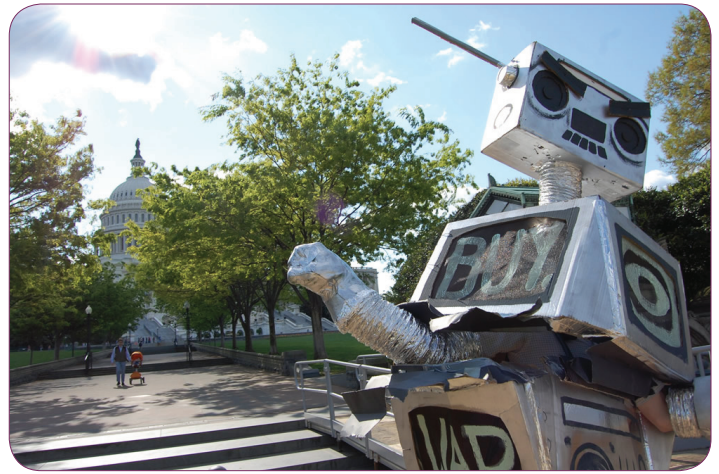


Expenses to Expect

One of the absolutely beautiful things about low power radio is how cheap it is. Many stations get on the air for under \$15,000 and can stay on the air for less than \$1,000 per month. The main **start-up expenses** for a radio station are engineering fees, studio equipment for producing radio shows, and transmitting equipment for sending your signals out to the world. The main **recurring costs** are rent, utilities, and personnel.

Note: that these numbers are tailored towards 100-watt LPFM stations. If you're starting a different class of station, the requirements will vary.



Start-up Expenses

Application

The good news is that there's no application fee for LPFMs! However, you may need an engineer's help to fill out the application. If you have a fairly good understanding of how radio allocations are made, and there's a clearly available frequency in your area, then you can probably apply on your own. But if you want someone to double-check your work, or if you're having trouble finding an available frequency, it may be worth it to hire an engineer.

Engineering Fees

While some stations may be able to get on the air without a paid engineer, most will need to pay an engineer somewhere along the way. An engineer can generally help you find a frequency and prepare an application for between \$500 and \$3,000, and can also help choose and set up equipment. It's often a good idea to have a professional broadcast engineer work on the radio-specific parts of your station, like doing the frequency search and choosing and installing transmitting equipment. On the other hand, you can probably get most of the help you need with your studio from an audio engineer (like someone who runs a recording studio), or even an enthusiastic hobbyist who has some background in audio systems and is willing to do a bit of research.

Studio Equipment

A studio can be put together primarily with donated or used equipment. A cheap studio set up using consumer grade audio gear can cost as little as \$5,000, depending how much you scavenge and how picky you are. If you opt for top-of-the-line new equipment, it is easy to spend upwards of \$100,000! The one thing that almost always has to be bought new is the emergency alert system (EAS), which monitors the airwaves for emergency alerts and rebroadcasts them on your station. The FCC requires every



station to have this, and it costs around \$3,000 for a fully compliant EAS. It is hard to find a used EAS because radio stations rarely replace them. Aside from the EAS, consumer grade studio equipment is perfectly adequate when you are starting out and short of cash. It is generally a little noisier, less convenient to use and will break much quicker than good professional machinery. If you are putting things together on a shoestring, the pro-gear can wait. On the other hand, it is often easier to fundraise for start-up expenses than maintenance. Try to look at the skills of your volunteers and evaluate whether your group will be more skilled at fundraising from listeners after you start up or winning big grants before you start.

Some stations have a second “production” studio in addition to their main studio. This allows one person to pre-record material while another person is doing a live broadcast. A production studio is by no means essential, but will make station operation much smoother. Production studios require a bit less equipment than on-air studios. Please visit our [Studio Resources](#) page for more information.

Transmission Equipment

A transmitter, antenna, and associated equipment usually cost between \$4,500 and \$12,000. Transmitting equipment is harder to scavenge than studio equipment because the FCC has special rules about what transmitting equipment a licensed station can use. Because transmitting equipment is only useful when you’re broadcasting on the air, we recommend waiting until you have a Construction Permit from the FCC before buying this equipment.

You can read more detailed equipment recommendations in our [Low Power FM Equipment Guide](#), or visit our [Transmission Resources](#) page for additional information.



Maintenance Costs

Rent and Utilities

You may need to rent studio space, but it is worth asking around for a local group that will donate a room or more to you. Having a radio station inside is a big draw for a community center, public access TV station, or other institution that likes to have a lot of people coming through. If you can’t put your antenna on the roof of your studio, you may also need to rent space at a dedicated transmitter site. Both the studio and transmitter will need electricity, and the studio will probably need internet and phone connections.

People Power

Many stations get by on volunteers exclusively. However, in many cases stations may want to hire part-time or even full-time staff to keep the office running smoothly. This is largely a matter of your organization’s operating philosophy. If paid staff are desired, figure out how much (or little) they will work for and make this a part of your operating budget. Tasks that may require paid services include volunteer coordination and training, accounting, fundraising, and general record keeping.



Content Licensing



If you play any content on the air that is licensed, you’ll need to pay licensing fees. Typically licensing fees are paid to Performance Rights Organizations (PROs) that in turn pass on money to artists and composers. Licensing fees for LPFMs are generally around \$600/year, with additional fees if you stream your programming on the Internet.

To stay updated on the latest news about applying, FCC rulemakings, resources, and chances to participate [Sign up for our email list](#).

Links to Resources

Low Power FM Equipment Guide: http://prometheusradio.org/sites/default/files/lpfm_equipment_guide.pdf

Transmission Resource: <http://prometheusradio.org/transmission>