



“Know Your Rights” 8-Step Production Primer

Step 1: Getting Approval

Independent producer Rob Rosenthal presented the idea for "Know Your Rights" to WMPG management who gave the "go ahead." Then the Maine Civil Liberties Union was asked to participate. With approval from both organizations, WMPG sought funding.

Step 2: Funding

It's possible that a series like "Know Your Rights" could be produced with volunteer staff. But, the process is rather labor intensive, over and above what a station might expect from a volunteer. So, with WMPG approval, Rob solicited funds from foundations using WMPG's 501(c)3 status and letters of support from the MCLU. Finding support was challenging. Most funding for civil liberties related projects is focused on national activities. Fortunately, the Maverick Lloyd Foundation generously supported WMPG's efforts. Details about the budget can be provided upon request.

Step 3: Topic Selection

Rob and producer Kerry Seed met with MCLU attorney Zach Heiden and discussed potential topics for the 20 part series. With a lot of direction from Zach, we gravitated toward a mix of contemporary, in-the-news issues as well as more traditional civil liberties topics.

Step 4: Research, Interviews, Transcriptions

Zach conducted research on the various topics in order to be current and conversant for interviews. Kerry drafted interview questions based on his own research then he interviewed Zach at the MCLU offices. Each interview was recorded for potential use of

soundbites in the programs. They tended to last about a half hour per topic. The interviews were transcribed by Kerry.

Step 5: Writing

From the transcriptions, Rob drafted scripts. The scripts were edited by both Kerry and Zach. We discussed tone quite a bit and opted to write and voice the pieces to communicate urgency and a firm point of view. We wanted pieces with spine.

When possible, we wrote the pieces with Maine in mind. Some of the commentaries reference civil liberties related issues in Maine. For instance, on the topic of "Free Speech Zones" which are created and enforced by Presidential security at public appearances, we referenced a visit by President Bush to Maine. In other cases, we included the names of specific locations in Maine. "Say you are driving from Bangor to Portland on Interstate 95..." as an example.

"You" was frequently utilized in the writing of the scripts. Infringement on civil liberties is often thought of as something that happens to someone else, somewhere else. By using "you" we hoped to personalize the issues, like this excerpt from our segment on the USA Patriot Act: "Tonight when you go home, take a look around. The FBI may have been in your home on a "sneak and peek" investigation."

Step 6: Production

With edited scripts, Kerry voiced the programs at Rob's home studio. Each week, a new CD with one program was provided to WMPG.

Step 7: Broadcast

One of the benefits of a two-minute format is flexibility and repetition. At community radio stations, pre-empting regularly scheduled programs can often be a contentious issue. But, two-minute programs can easily be scheduled between or during programs.

WMPG is airing "Know Your Rights" twice. The first time around, the series ran for twenty weeks. The station aired one segment ten times a week. The Program Director scheduled the pieces at the same time each week but in many different day-parts. The second time around, the series ran for a month. WMPG scheduled one segment, twice a day at noon and 7pm, Monday - Friday.

Step 8: Your Turn

It's a relatively simple process -- a six month project a few hours a week. The benefits are many: timely broadcasts on a topic of public interest, collaboration with a community organization, support of your commitment to localism, and quality programming. We urge you take up pen and mic and produce your own series on civil liberties. Please contact us if you have any questions and feel free to use any of these materials to make your case to your station and ACLU affiliate.