MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING:
The relationship between St. Lawrence University and North Country Public Radio
September 2018

A. Overview

This memorandum formalizes the longstanding relationship between St. Lawrence University (the University) and North Country Public Radio (NCPR), the station for which the University holds a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) broadcast license, and delineates the responsibilities of each to the other and to the community served by NCPR.

The University serves the region and beyond through its commitment to educating its students to become contributing members of our society.

NCPR is a public journalism and media entity which contributes to the region and nation as an independent and trusted source of news, information and cultural content on broadcast and digital platforms. NCPR serves a constituency that extends far beyond the boundaries of the campus to include the entire Adirondack North Country and to some extent, through its reporters’ stories on nationally distributed programs, the entire American public.

As required by FCC and Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) regulations and guidelines, NCPR’s broadcast license must be held by a non-profit community organization, a municipality, or an educational institution. As the license-holder for NCPR, the University Board of Trustees is the legal governing body of the station.

The CPB also requires NCPR to maintain a community advisory board. This board is comprised of people from throughout the station’s geographic service area and from diverse constituencies. In addition to providing wide-ranging expertise and guidance to NCPR, it is charged with bringing the concerns and interests of the people served by the station to the attention of NCPR’s management and, in the event of unaddressed concerns or issues, directly to the University Board. NCPR’s advisory board is known as the Executive Council (EC) and, in order to insure communication between the representatives of the community and the station’s governing body, it includes three ex officio members of the University Board—two trustees and the Vice President to whom NCPR’s manager reports.

NCPR is recognized as an independent operating arm of the University, in the annual auditing process and in its internal operations.

B. Responsibilities of St. Lawrence University, the license-holder

1. The University advances the integrity of NCPR by accepting and protecting the independence of the station’s journalism, including non-interference in the content of that journalism, and non-interference in the internal operation of the station, understanding that the University’s direct relationship to the station is through the station manager’s report to the Vice President.

2. It is understood that the station manager oversees all personnel decisions—as a critical element of operational independence—while abiding by best practices of the HR department. The Vice President, after discussions with the NCPR station manager, shepherds NCPR personnel decisions through the University Human Resources process. The University, as the governing entity, oversees NCPR through the station manager.
3. The University oversees search activities when a new station manager must be hired. This process directly involves representatives from the University’s Board of Trustees, the station’s Executive Council, and the station’s staff. It is understood that the station manager is a public media professional, not a member of the University administration or Board of Trustees.

4. The University provides an annual stipend to the station which may increase or decrease with appropriate notice to the station. In general, this stipend is considered to be stable and unchanging unless there are exceptional circumstances. As of 2018, this direct annual support is set at $120,000, plus approximately $15,000 for electricity expenses.

5. The University provides NCPR with a wide-range of in-kind services including, but not limited to, payroll and donation processing; human resources expertise, guidelines, training; and access to broadband and telephone services (paid for by NCPR).

6. When requested by NCPR, the University provides expert advice and guidance on fundraising, finance, research, events management and technology.

7. The University’s faculty and senior staff are available to the station’s news and production teams for interviews, background information, and other content-related purposes, determined on a case-by-case basis by NCPR’s staff.

C. Responsibilities of North Country Public Radio, the station

1. NCPR understands and assures compliance with the Federal Communications Act, including eligibility requirements for the annual CPB community service grant. There are five specific requirement areas: the University Board of Trustees, as the station’s governing body, must hold meetings open to the public when addressing station-related issues; station financial information must be available to the public; a community advisory board must be established and maintained; equal employment opportunity regulations and reporting requirements must be observed; and the station must abide by FCC and CPB donor and political activity requirements. The station certifies continued compliance with the requirements of the Federal Communications Act on an annual basis in order to maintain eligibility for federal funding through the CPB.

2. NCPR understands and complies with the public media code of integrity (appended to this document), with NPR’s journalism standards and ethics, and with maintaining rigorous, ethical and transparent fundraising practices; NCPR understands and complies with the University’s Bylaws and all applicable University Policies and Procedures.

3. Through grants, individual and business contributions, and other sources NCPR raises all funds necessary to support its operation, except for the annual stipend and in-kind support provided by the University. NCPR does not directly solicit new donors from the University Board or alumni lists, unless members of either group are already supporting the station or are residents of the region and part of NCPR’s regular listener fundraising activities.

4. NCPR’s station manager will report to the University VP on a regular basis to keep the University administration current with key station activities, and to collaborate with the VP as needed for advice and assistance. Written reports will be provided on an annual and as needed basis.
5. NCPR will provide regular underwriting credit on air and online to the University, with messages developed collaboratively to insure compliance with FCC guidelines. The number of messages will be determined by the variables of going rate and availability with the station having final authority over number, language and location of all underwriting credits. It is understood that the station will provide the University with at least five credits on a daily basis.

6. NCPR will identify the University as its license-holder in broadcast, print and digital materials on a case by case basis with the understanding that the station will make all reasonable efforts to publicly identify the University as its licensee.

7. NCPR will promote public events on campus and provide on air interviews with key University personnel based on station programming and news priorities.

8. NCPR will provide equipment, facilities and staff expertise to University administrators and faculty when those resources are available and their usage does not interfere with NCPR’s operations.

9. NCPR will abide by Human Resources best practices but will, in consultation with the University VP, decide personnel issues including, position descriptions, position salaries, position categorizations (e.g., exempt vs. non-exempt). This staffing independence is essential to the station’s integrity as a news organization, rather than a department of the University.

D. Conclusion

This MOU is designed to clarify and formalize the relationship between the University and NCPR in the station’s 50th anniversary year. The station is no longer a campus experiment. NCPR has become a regionally and nationally recognized news organization. In order to advance and protect the station’s role as a source for trustworthy and independent journalism, it is essential that the firewall between the license-holder and the station’s news and internal operations be firmly articulated and agreed to by both parties, as the station affirms its adherence to all relevant University and governmental policies.