



## **Radio staffing continues to grow with modest increases**

**By Bob Papper and Keren Henderson**

MAY 20, 2024 – The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey shows the typical (median) radio news operation has a full-time news staff of 2 for the second year in a row. The average is approaching 4 (3.7). Once again, the larger staff results from public radio. Commercial radio has an average of 2.7 staffers, but the median remains at 1. Non-commercial radio averages 6.7 with a median of 3.

The increases vary across the board. Large and medium markets are up in average staff size; major and small markets each slipped by 0.2. The median staff size is up in major and large markets and remains the same in medium and small markets. Part time mostly is up or even. Overall, mostly a win.

Both commercial and non-commercial radio are up by about half a person on average. Median stayed the same for both groups.

Using a centralized newsroom by multi-station groups is fairly steady. This year, 75.9% of multi-station operations involve a centralized newsroom. Last year, the number was 3 points higher.

### Radio staff size (2023)

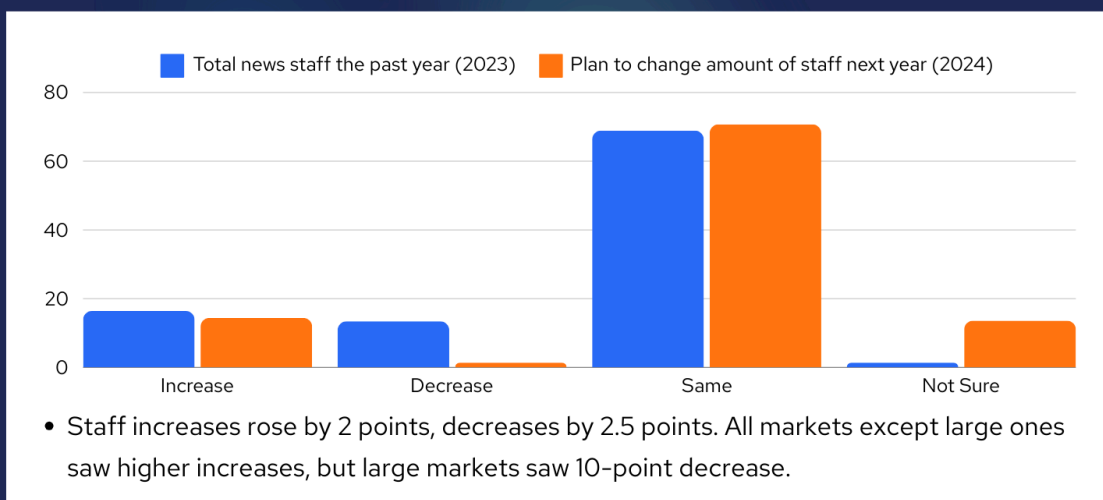
	Avg. full-time	Median full-time	Max full-time	Avg. part-time	Median part-time	Max part-time	Avg. total staff	Median total staff	Max total staff
All Radio	3.7	2	85	2	1	32	5.7	3	93
Market size:									
Major	10.9	6	85	5.2	1.5	32	16.1	10	93
Large	3.9	3	18	1.6	1	12	5.5	4	18
Medium	2.8	1	30	1.8	1	20	4.6	3	50
Small	1.6	1	6	1.1	0	30	2.7	2	30
Commercial	2.7	1	49	1.9	1	32	4.6	2	81
Non-comm	6.7	3	85	2.2	1	20	8.9	5	93

The overall staff size difference between commercial and non-commercial stations remains steady at around 3:1, non-commercial to commercial, but non-commercial stations are more likely to be found in large and major markets.

As usual, the larger the market, the larger the news staff is likely to be.

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
Total news staff the past year (2023)	16.4%	13.4%	68.9%	1.4%
Plan to change amount of staff next year (2024)	14.4	1.4	70.7	13.6

### 2023 CHANGES IN RADIO STAFF AND PLANS FOR 2024



The overall percentage of stations saying they increased staff rose again – up nearly 2 full points compared to last year. But “decreased” is up by 2.5. All market sizes are at least higher in “increase” compared to “decrease” except large markets where decrease led to an increase of 10 points.

Non-commercial stations are three times more likely to increase staff and nearly two times more likely to decrease staff than commercial stations. Overall, not an exceptional year for public radio.

Plans to increase or decrease the staff look close to last year’s numbers. The “increase” expectation was just about right last year, but “decrease” came in a lot higher than expected. We’ll see what 2024 brings.

Large market stations expect to increase staff this year, like last year, when they saw the largest decrease in staff.

Stations in the Northeast fared better than any other region with more than twice as high a percentage of increase over decrease. Stations in the West are the most optimistic about 2024.

### **Radio digital staffing is largely stable**

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found relatively little change in digital staffing this year. Both full time and part-time are up by 0.1. But the largest markets actually went down in staff size while all other market sizes went up.

#### **How many people work on the digital side?**

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
All Radio	1	0.7	1.7
Market size:			
Major Market	1.8	0.5	2.3
Large Market	1.3	0.7	1.9
Medium Market	0.9	0.7	1.6
Small Market	0.6	0.7	1.3
Commercial	0.9	0.6	1.6
Non-commercial	1.1	0.8	1.9

Both commercial and non-commercial radio rose by just 0.1 full-time. Commercial radio is up by 0.1 part-time while non-commercial radio fell by the same amount, so the two groups are now closer than ever.

### Do other staffers help on the web?

All Radio	66.9%
Market size:	
Major Market	70.2
Large Market	72.5
Medium Market	65.6
Small Market	64.4
Commercial	62.5
Non-commercial	77.5

All the average numbers on staffers helping with the web are down – all across the board. The median number for every market size is 100%.

### Radio staff burnout

The problem isn't anywhere near the level as it is in TV, but staff burnout in radio is relatively high – with 41.4% of news directors and general managers saying they see more evidence of burnout this year. The problem was the worst in major markets (58.5%) and in the largest newsrooms (62.9%). Non-commercial stations were higher than commercial ones, but the difference was just 4 points. We asked what evidence the burnout managers were seeing. We received a boatload of answers. In their own words:

- A lot of tough news stories this year between wars and shootings
- Apathy, hard to get people excited about the work
- Being the only person in the department until recently, I haven't been able to take a vacation since January 2022
- Complete and total burnout
- Despair at mismanagement of station by GM, indifference of audience
- Difficulty filling open positions created a lot of extra work for employees and managers
- Fatigue, tension during meetings, etc.
- Harder to get more done with less staff
- I feel more burned out than normal, but I work too much
- Just fewer people doing more work grinds away at you
- Lack of sleep, lack of caring, no vacation, little days off
- More people working 24/7 until they need weeks to recover
- No raises - wanting more from employees without pay
- Overall business is down, hard to make a living in rural radio
- Overworked and understaffed
- Bureaucracy has prevented the promised additional staff from being provided, causing staff to experience sickness, overwork, long hours, burnout, and low morale

Nearly 60% (57.8%) of news directors and general managers say they've countered burnout. At the top of the list, at 37.9%, the answer was flex time, encouraging (or insisting on) taking time off. In their own words:

- Being able to choose your own hours, having more vacation time, and helping when needed
- Frequent check-ins; flexibility in hours if needed; hiring additional full/part-time staff
- Grant vacations without guilt, urge staff to take time to rest and recover, listen to their concerns
- Mental health day if needed
- Offering flexible schedules, shifting workloads, management doing air shifts, fun station events
- Enforce people taking comp time and being more lenient with deadlines

At 19.7%, talking, counseling, celebrating success – one-on-one discussions:

- Be as accommodating as possible, even more so than we have been in the previous years. Acknowledge excellent work, appreciate the little things, and reward
- Being accessible to employees for counseling, open conversations to air frustrations, encouragement
- Our benefits include six complimentary counseling sessions for mental health, the ability to work remotely, and regular in-person reviews to address support and needs

Also at 19.7%, a decision to eliminate some content, not doing some stories or expecting less:

- Adjust expectations
- Some meetings and programs don't get covered

At 15.2%, managers doing more to help relieve employees, incentives, increasing salary or letting employees work more on stories they really cared about:

- As a leader, do more and ease the burden on lower staff
- Employee help program
- Maintain a mix of stories for each reporter – not beat coverage but projects that they want to do, stories that may be softer but that provide enjoyment and connection to the community

Of the initiatives, 7.6% involved hiring more people – or at least doing so.

Then there was this:

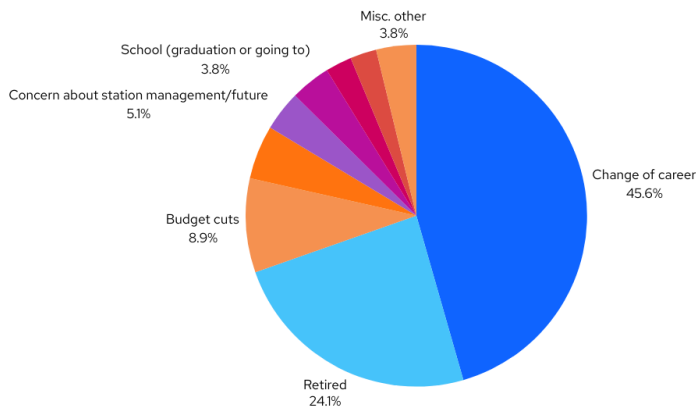
- The autonomy of the news and sports department for a one-person shop means that there are a ton of chances to be creative with new ideas, but there is a part of the brain that knows that this is gleefully doing Feng Shui with the deck chairs on the Titanic

### **A new question this year ... Why did employees leave?**

- 45.6% Change of career
- 24.1 Retired
- 8.9 Budget cuts (let go)
- 5.1 Concern about station management/future
- 3.8 School (graduation or going to)
- 3.8 Wanted a change of location
- 2.5 They were part time
- 2.5 Wanted a bigger market
- 3.8 Misc. other

# WHY DID RADIO EMPLOYEES LEAVE?

## HERE ARE THE TOP 6 REASONS.



- Radio staff burnout is high, with 41.4% of managers noticing more burnout this year, though it's not as bad as in TV.
- Burnout hit hardest in major markets (58.5%) and big newsrooms (62.9%). Non-commercial stations saw a bit more burnout than commercial ones.

RADIO NEWS STAFFING REPORT 2024

RTDNA

Syracuse University  
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## New and replacement hiring

The average radio station hired 0.5 replacement positions and 0.2 new hires. Both numbers are down from last year. Average replacements are down 0.1 from last year, and new hires are down 0.3. But the median – or typical – for both replacements and new hires remains at zero. That's exactly what it's been for the last nine years. The typical radio station made no hires whatsoever.

The top radio replacement position by far is a reporter at 39.1% of all replacement positions. Reporter has been on top the last few years, but it's down 16 points from last year. Host/anchor comes next at 25%, followed by the producer at 15.6%. News director is 6.3%, digital at 4.7%, followed by five more positions that total 9.4%.

The top new position in radio news again this year is reporter – at 43.3% of all new hires. That's also down 16 points from last year. Host/anchor comes next at 20%, followed by digital and news director – both at 13.3%. Then the content editor at 6.7% and producer at 3.3%.

In radio, major markets are those with 1 million or more potential listeners. Large markets are from 250,000 to 1 million. Medium markets are 50,000 to 250,000. Small markets are fewer than 50,000.

**About the Author**

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**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2023 among all 1,876 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 4,764 radio stations. The television response rate is different for every question, but Valid responses came from as many as 1,387 television stations (73.9%) and 631 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,902 radio stations. Some data sets (e.g. the number of TV stations originating local news, getting news from others and women TV news directors) are based on a complete census and are not projected from a smaller sample.