

Interview:

**To be Creative, Go Local: An Interview with Government-Access TV Producer Mark Murray**

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When you think of television producers, who comes to mind? Do you think of Shonda Rhimes of *Bridgerton* and *Grey's Anatomy* or Larry David of *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*? Though they receive far less attention in our culture, there are many types of noncommercial television production as well, many of which are affiliated with local school districts or religious organizations. Another type of noncommercial television is government-access television, in which a local government broadcasts over a cable television station and provides the local area with coverage of board meetings and public service information.

Mark Murray is a television producer for government-access television in Pennsylvania. He is a producer and director for Lower Merion Township Television in the Public Information Office. Murray directs live broadcasts of the weekly Board of Commissioners meetings and Board Committee meetings and provides Lower Merion Township with 24/7 programming. The programming consists of bulletin board messages with important township information and original programming. Murray produces, writes, records, and edits each of the original shows for township viewing.



Figure 1: LMTV Logo.

In the summer of 2023, I interned at Lower Merion Township television and experienced the benefits to noncommercial television broadcasting. Working in small crews, in a team of three, exposed me to every aspect of television production. As an intern, I wrote and edited promos and shows, operated cameras and teleprompters, and engaged in fieldwork. Unlike most internships in the commercial industry, this one allowed me to experience *everything*, even to the point of giving me considerable creative control.

Because I found this experience in government-access television so rewarding, I thought other students in Film & Media Studies at Washington University in St. Louis—and beyond—would be interested in learning more about “alternative” opportunities such as this in the entertainment industry—opportunities that provide students with more hands-on experience and creative control from the very beginning. This interview provides a lens into government television—the differences between freelance work and corporate jobs, general information about government television, and the opportunities that government television offers. Also, the interview provides advice for students looking to enter the entertainment industry after college.

**What did you do before working for government television?**

**Murray:** I had a bunch of jobs. While I was in college, I was lucky enough to get a job at a post-production house in Philadelphia as a tape op. Then, through a family connection, I got a job in LA as a sound effect editor for network television and premiere movies. Then, the writers’ strike happened, so I was forced to go look for work. I came back to the East Coast and worked for an insurance company. Having your own TV was a big thing back then, so I helped them build their TV studio and did productions for them. After seven to ten years there, they were bought out and

I started doing freelance work, including doing medical films. I did that for a while and then I applied to [Lower Merion] township. That was almost 30 years ago!

**What did you enjoy most about the freelance work?**

**Murray:** Learning! I didn't nail myself down as being just a camera man or just a technician. Whatever assignment they needed me for, I was more than willing to take. I learned a lot at each position. In Los Angeles, I learned a lot about the television industry, how it works, and how all the post-production stuff works. That was pretty cool. But I liked the constant change of input, trying new challenges—that I find exciting.



*Figure 2: On the set of LMTV's Beside the Gavel.*

**How did you get involved in government television?**

**Murray:** Well, I was thinking of getting married and having kids, and benefits cost a lot of money. Someone said, ‘Hey you ought a get corporate job’. And I’m like ‘Well, I don’t know’. But this job opened. It was significantly different; it has changed a lot since I first started, but that’s how I got in. I needed benefits. I wanted to have good health care to help take care of my family. In the freelance world, you—and it comes out of your paycheck—pay for every benefit that you want. Whereas with the government job, we get medical, dental, vision, sick days, holidays—a whole bunch of stuff—that are paid. In the freelance world, if you don’t work, you don’t get paid. There aren’t any holidays.

**What is different about government television, or makes it special, than other careers in Film and Media?**

**Murray:** Well, I’m trying to break the stereotype of government video: of the boring, horrible, mundane video with people who can’t act. I’m trying to change that up—that’s what we’re hoping for. But one of the things that makes it different is actually that. If you watch entertainment television or cinema, its goal is to entertain and to be visually pleasing to see.

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Government is more informational and I’m trying to combine the two so you can be informed while being entertained. One of the shows we’re writing is game show, “Where is This?”, that

helps us get information across in a more fun way. Its goal is to have residents participate and learn about their local government and the area in which they live by answering fun questions.

**What is your favorite aspect of your job in television?**

**Murray:** I would say the variety. We are a non-union shop—so, you are not pegged to being just a camera man, just an editor, just a graphic artist; you get to wear all the hats and do all the things: write, produce, direct, and shoot your own show from beginning to end. A lot of places don't offer that opportunity. Of the things that I do, I would say my favorite is probably outside productions. I like setting up all the gear and making it more visually impressive as to what we do.

**How does your perspective, or opinion, or directing tactics change when you're directing a live show versus a recording show?**

**Murray:** Well, in a recording show, since it's not live, you can stop if you make a mistake. You fix it, and you move on; In post-production, you edit it and never know it happened. In live, you don't have that opportunity, so any problem that pops up, you must solve while keeping your show that's on moving forward. You must come up with a quick solution, know all your equipment, know your people, know how to solve that problem, and keep the live broadcast going—but come up with a quick solution to the issue.



Figure 3. Broadcasting LMTV's Board of Commissioners' Meeting.

### **Do you have a memorable story to tell from recording a show?**

**Murray:** I remember one time we were recording our township manager, one of our previous township managers. When you go out on a shoot, you usually do a scouting location: you go out at the time of day you're planning on shooting, and you check as much as you can, so you understand what the environment's going to be like. It was a perfect sunny day, everything was gorgeous. We start shooting and up shows a construction crew. They start jack hammering, making a heck of a lot of noise. Of course, we couldn't hear anything. So, I happened to have a makeup artist with me, and she said "Hey, I have an idea, I'll be right back." She runs out and we are trying to come up with a solution, and then she comes back, and goes "give it five more minutes." The jackhammering kept going and then it stopped. We asked what happened, and she goes "I bought them coffee and donuts", so all the workers stopped working to eat coffee and donuts, giving us enough time to record the township manager.

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*Figure 4: Shooting LMTV's Lower Merion Update.*

**Do you have any upcoming projects you are looking forward to?**

**Murray:** We are launching a show we call [“Lower Merion Update”](#) which is kind of a soft news program about what happens over a three-month period in the township: this will cover what happened in August, what happens in September, and what will be happening in October. We are also launching a new show called jobs at Lower Merion, which reviews all the open employment opportunities that the township offers.

**What would you tell students interested in pursuing a career in government television or in the entertainment industry?**

**Murray:** If you're interested in production work, no matter what it is—government or broadcast or corporate—intern or volunteer as much as you can. The more experience you have, the more

valuable you are to the employer. If I had to pick someone who knows editing over who doesn't, well guess who I'm going to pick. And learn as much as you can. Learn while you're out there. Ask your producers, 'Can I assist in lighting', Can I assist in set design', 'Can I assist in editing or graphic design'. Learn so you learn more skills and have a stronger skill set yourself, so you are more marketable.

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For more information on Mark Murray and what he is working on, check out [Lower Merion Township Television's Video Catalog](#) or check out LMTV's [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#), or [YouTube](#).

For more information on government-access television across the US, check out "[TV: Expanded Access to Government · Government Information Exhibits · University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library](#)"