



# Rethinking **PUBLIC MEDIA**

More Local, More Inclusive, More Interactive

**A WHITE PAPER BY BARBARA COCHRAN**

  
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE  
*Communications and Society Program*

 John S. and James L.  
Knight Foundation  
*Informed and engaged communities.*

A project of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program  
and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

# Rethinking Public Media:

## More Local, More Inclusive, More Interactive

A White Paper on the Public Media Recommendations  
of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of  
Communities in a Democracy

written by  
Barbara Cochran



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE  
*Communications and Society Program*  
December 2010

The Aspen Institute and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation invite you to join the public dialogue around the Knight Commission's recommendations at [www.knightcomm.org](http://www.knightcomm.org) or by using Twitter hashtag #knightcomm.

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The Aspen Institute  
One Dupont Circle, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Published in the United States of America in 2010 by The Aspen Institute

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 0-89843-536-6  
10/021

Individuals are encouraged to cite this paper and its contents.  
In doing so, please include the following attribution:

The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, *Rethinking Public Media: More Local, More Inclusive, More Interactive*, Washington, D.C.:  
The Aspen Institute, December 2010.

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Cover background graphic was created in part at [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net).



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# From Report to Action

## *Implementing the Recommendations of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy*

In October 2009, the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy released its report, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*, with 15 recommendations to better meet community information needs.

Immediately following the release of *Informing Communities*, the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation partnered to explore ways to implement the Commission's recommendations.

As a result, the Aspen Institute commissioned a series of white papers with the purpose of moving the Knight Commission recommendations from report into action. The topics of the commissioned papers include:

- Universal Broadband
- Civic Engagement
- Government Transparency
- Online Hubs
- Digital and Media Literacy
- Local Journalism
- Public Media
- Assessing the Information Health of Communities

The following paper is one of those white papers.

This paper is written from the perspective of the author individually who gathered her research through numerous interviews with key players. The ideas and proposals herein are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Aspen Institute, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the members of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, or any other institution. Unless attributed to a particular person, none of the comments or ideas contained in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any person other than the author.

# **Rethinking Public Media: More Local, More Inclusive, More Interactive**

## *Executive Summary*

The Knight Commission sees a major role for public service media in meeting community information needs. Building on a strong base of trust, public media should become more local, more inclusive and more interactive, the commission said. To accomplish this, the commission recommends increased support from Congress.

This paper proposes changes in leadership, structure and funding to meet these goals. It addresses the context in which public media operate and the strategic openings created by broadband expansion. It recommends building on existing models of innovation, making a virtue of the decentralized structure of public broadcasting and redefining what is included under the umbrella of public service media.

The paper begins with a tale of two communities. Akron, Ohio, is home to the first newspaper owned and edited by John S. and James L. Knight, but the newspaper is losing circulation and staff, leaving its 200,000 citizens with few alternatives for local news and information. Meanwhile, in nearby Cleveland, a bold venture in rethinking public service media has broken down barriers to serve its community on air and online.

For public service media “this is potentially a 1967 moment,” said Ernest J. Wilson, chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), referring to the legislation that transformed educational television and radio into a national public broadcasting service. Public service media can take advantage of the digital revolution to remake itself. But current structures, laws and a shortage of funds pose challenges. While National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) have developed strong news and information programming at the national level, capacity among local stations is uneven and very limited at a majority of local stations.

To become more local, this paper recommends identifying and scaling up successful models. The most successful public radio stations emphasize news and information programming, operate multiple stations to serve a variety of audience interests and are licensed to community boards rather than institutions. At the national level, CPB and NPR are helping to strengthen local news capacity through Local Journalism Centers and Project Argo, projects that could be expanded.

The paper proposes creating a fund of at least \$100 million to add 1,000 new public media reporters, an increase of 50 percent. One approach would be to focus on the top 25 markets with a goal of raising more than \$400 million annually to

fund 160 new reporters in each market. New staff should create a more diverse work force with expertise in digital media and content areas in need of attention. To ensure public media retain credibility, managers should also dedicate funding to professional development and editorial oversight. Public media should bolster capacity through partnerships with other media outlets, including community and investigative websites.

Public television stations, which for the most part produce little local news and information programming, should form a study group to develop a strategy for more news content and community engagement.

To become more inclusive, public service media should make inclusiveness a priority. This means increasing diversity in news and information staff at both the national and local levels, engaging a wider variety of communities, partnering with journalism schools to engage young people and creating a Public Media Corps to promote digital literacy.

To become more interactive, public media should follow up and expand on projects such as the Public Media Platform, an open application programming interface that will allow networks and local stations to share content online, and Public Insight Network (PIN), a database of experts drawn from public radio audiences. Managers should invest in professional development to help staff acquire digital skills, should promote staff use of social media and should purchase digital gear to add video to websites and on-air productions. Public media should also develop metrics to measure performance at the local level.

Public media leaders should become more active and involved in the development of the nation's broadband policy. They should seek a broadband reservation similar to the spectrum reservation that would guarantee access, reduce costs of streaming and other technology and overcome copyright roadblocks.

To achieve these changes, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting should become the Corporation for Public Media. All license-holders, including universities and state and local governments, should form community governance structures. Stations should get support to create successful boards.

The Public Broadcasting Act should be overhauled to reflect the reality of digital media, and funds should be redirected from outmoded broadcasting infrastructure and duplication of service to building digital capacity. Congress should authorize new funds to enable public media to participate in broadband build-out. The Federal Communications Commission should make it easier for stations to acquire other stations and merge or enter into operating agreements. Philanthropic organizations at the national, regional and local levels should support investments in public media.

Above all, public media leaders need to embrace a new definition that is more local, more inclusive and more interactive. Only public media leaders can convince government and philanthropic supporters that they have a new vision worthy of their investment.

**RETHINKING PUBLIC MEDIA:  
MORE LOCAL, MORE INCLUSIVE,  
MORE INTERACTIVE**

*Barbara Cochran*



# Rethinking Public Media: More Local, More Inclusive, More Interactive

*“Increase support for public service media aimed at meeting community information needs.”*

— Recommendation 2, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*

## **Knight Commission Recommendation**

Recommendation 2 of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy is to “[i]ncrease support for public service media aimed at meeting community information needs.”<sup>1</sup> This paper analyzes the Knight Commission’s goals and proposes steps to achieve them.

## **Knight Commission Analysis**

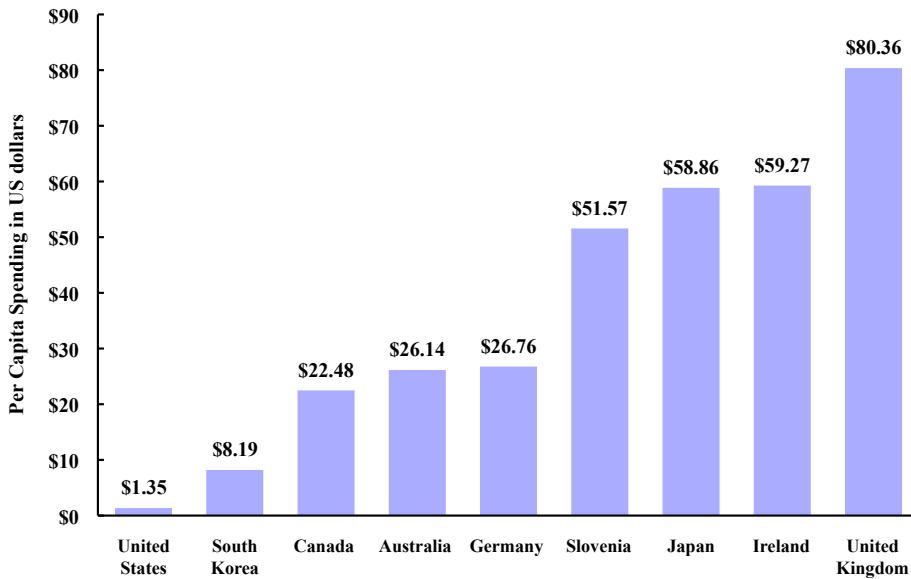
The Knight Commission report makes note of the high level of trust earned by public broadcasting in the 43 years since its creation. But the commission also points to failings of the service to provide local news of significance in most of its communities or to reach audiences that reflect the diversity of the American population. Nor does the report see a widespread embrace of digital media at the local level of public broadcasting.

The commission says the current public broadcasting system should “move quickly toward a broader vision of public service media, one that is more local, more inclusive and more interactive.”

The report acknowledges the financial exigencies that have limited public broadcasting’s capacities. Most western democracies support public broadcasting through substantial government funding, but that is not true in the United States. United Kingdom pays \$80.36 per capita for its public broadcasting service. In the United States, core federal funding amounts to \$1.35 per capita and is only 15 percent of the entire public broadcasting budget.

A solution recommended by the commission is to increase taxpayer support. “Congress should increase the funding available for the transformation and localization of America’s public media,” the report says.

### Exhibit 1: Global Spending on Public Media



Source: Free Press, "Changing Media: Public Interest Policies for the Digital Age," 2009, p. 267.

The report also addresses the question of whether government-supported journalism is in keeping with the First Amendment guarantee of a free press. But, the report says, "public broadcasters in the United States have demonstrated their capacity to deliver high-quality, fair and credible news and information programming free of government interference."

This paper offers proposals for meeting the Knight Commission's goals of public media that are more local, more inclusive and more interactive. It proposes changes in leadership, structure and funding to help public media meet these goals. The paper addresses the context of the information needs of communities and the strategic openings created by broadband expansion. It recommends building on existing models for innovation, making a virtue of the decentralized structure of public broadcasting and redefining what is included under the umbrella of public service media.

### Information Needs of Communities: A Case Study

Akron, Ohio, is the birthplace of the newspaper chain founded by John S. and James L. Knight. In many ways, the state of news media in this city of more than 200,000 typifies the problems facing communities where traditional sources of journalism are increasingly imperiled.

Once known as the rubber capital of the world, Akron has seen its population and economy shrink like those in many Rustbelt cities, but it has remade itself as a high-tech and biomedical center. Just 39 miles south of Cleveland, the city has its own identity, its own governmental structures and its own issues.

The *Akron Beacon Journal* was the seed that blossomed into the Knight-Ridder chain that embraced 32 daily newspapers in communities including Miami, Charlotte, Philadelphia, Detroit, Fort Worth and San Jose. The *Beacon Journal* covered local issues closely and never shied away from taking on powerful local interests. The paper won four Pulitzers, including one for an expose on failures in Firestone's radial tires and another for a deep look at the city's racial divisions.

When The McClatchy Company acquired Knight-Ridder, executives decided to sell the properties in cities with declining advertising bases. The *Beacon Journal* was acquired by Black Press Ltd., a Canadian publishing company. The story at the *Beacon Journal* has been the same as elsewhere. Circulation penetration has fallen, ad revenue has plunged and staff has been cut. Today the *Beacon Journal* employs about 90 people in its newsroom, half the number of 10 years ago.

The *Beacon Journal* is one of only a few journalistic voices devoted exclusively to Akron. While Akron falls within the Cleveland television market, it gets little coverage from Cleveland news stations. Only one commercial broadcast newsroom remains, WAKR-AM, owned by the Rubber City Radio Group. With a newsroom of eight full-time and two part-time staff, large by commercial radio standards, WAKR also supplies news to the music-formatted stations in the group. It operates a website, Akron News Now ([www.akronnewsnow.com](http://www.akronnewsnow.com)), which competes aggressively with the *Beacon Journal's* Ohio.com site and has won national awards for excellence in local news coverage.

Akron is served by public media headquartered outside the city limits. National Public Radio (NPR) member station WKSU-FM is licensed to nearby Kent State University and combines a classical music format with NPR flagship news and information programs. It has a local news department of seven, who produce newscasts and occasional documentaries. Public television station WEAO is licensed to Akron and has a small studio there used for a weekly news roundtable, but is headquartered along with sister station WNEO in Kent.

The other public media entity serving Akron is ideastream ([www.ideastream.org](http://www.ideastream.org)). With offices and studios in Cleveland, it includes news and information about Akron in its regional coverage. As will be discussed in the next section of this paper, it also could be a model for the kind of public media that will serve Akron in the future.

In a sign of what the future could hold, Akron has established free wireless service in the downtown area through the Connect Akron project. It is about to launch a citizen journalism website. A joint project of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Akron Community Foundation, the Akron Digital Media Center, the *Akron Beacon Journal* and Ohio.com, the website will allow individuals and groups to share hyperlocal news and information with an online audience.

The Akron Digital Media Center is offering workshops to train citizens in the tools and skills needed to produce content for the website.

The situation in Akron epitomizes the state of media at the community level: a struggling newspaper, one commercial broadcaster providing local news, a nascent digital information presence and public media licensed elsewhere and limited by funding. If the newspaper were to cease publication, or the locally owned radio station were to be sold and lose its newsroom, where will the 200,000 citizens of Akron turn for reporting that holds officials accountable, for information that helps them live full lives, for a common understanding that ties a community together? And who is serving new generations whose media preferences are for content available on demand over online or wireless devices?

As Leonard Downie Jr. and Michael Schudson asked in their report, “The Reconstruction of American Journalism”:

What is going to take the place of what is being lost, and can a new array of news media report on our nation and our communities as well as—or better than—journalism has until now? Most importantly...what should be done to shape this new landscape, to help assure that the essential elements of independent, original and credible news reporting are preserved?<sup>2</sup>

Yet Akron also offers incredible opportunities for transformation. Projects like the citizen journalism website are a promising beginning. Public media can play a major, transformative role. With visionary leadership, a shift in mission and priorities, greater financial and technological resources, a modernized structure and a revitalized system of governance, public media can be part of the solution, not only for Akron, but for communities across the country.

## **Models for Transformation**

Thirty-nine miles to the north is an example of a local public media entity that could be a model for Akron and other communities. It is an organization that has broken down the silos between platforms and embraced interactivity and the digital space. It sees its mission not as broadcasting but as community service.

Created in 2001, ideastream is the public media organization in Cleveland that combines public television station WVIZ-TV, public radio station WCPN-FM, the statewide Ohio Network and four other educational media organizations into one. The founders seized the opportunity presented by digital convergence to become a seamless multiple media public service organization housed in a new facility in the heart of Cleveland’s Playhouse Square.

A Carnegie Reporter article on ideastream advises, “Think of ideastream as a digital community center or a virtual YMCA, seeking to draw together the resources of ‘heritage institutions’ (museums, theaters, colleges, libraries, medical centers, government agencies, etc.) and make them digitally available on demand to patrons, clients and students.”<sup>3</sup>

The mission of ideastream is to strengthen communities. The organization serves many communities in northeast Ohio, including Akron, with both a regional approach and a local focus. Both the television and radio stations can be accessed in Akron, and ideastream devotes air time and online resources to coverage of Akron news, information and cultural events.

Instead of a newsroom, there is a content center, where a staff of 18 prepares news and information and educational content for television, radio and the web, with support from another dozen technical and support staff. CEO Jerry Wareham, the former president and general manager of WVIZ-TV, and COO Kit Jensen, the former president and general manager of WCPN-FM, share a vision of multimedia community service. “I think this radio and TV stuff is so 20th century,” says Wareham, speaking of the traditional separate organizational structures of the services. Their numerous collaborations include Cleveland’s newspaper, *The Plain Dealer*, which partnered with ideastream on a four-year multimedia project “The Quiet Crisis” on the economic downturn in northeast Ohio.

In addition to the television and radio stations, five other educational, news and public service media programs that had been housed by various organizations became part of ideastream. They include two Columbus-based operations managed by ideastream on behalf of all public broadcasters in Ohio, the Ohio Public Radio and Television News Bureau and the Ohio Channel, which provides coverage of the Ohio state legislature and state supreme court and carries local programs from public broadcasters throughout Ohio.

With more resources, ideastream could address in depth the information needs of Akron and surrounding communities, possibly in partnership with other public media entities such as WKSU or the new citizen journalism website. Akron could become a laboratory for experimentation in how best to serve communities in the digital age.

### **ideastream: A New Approach to Public Media**

“ideastream is public broadcasting and a whole lot more.” So says the home page of the web site for Cleveland’s unusual consortium of public television, public radio, a statewide cable network, educational and service channels and interactive and digital media. COO Kit Jensen points to “BackStage With...” as a project that utilizes ideastream’s versatility. Hosted by NPR’s Scott Simon, the program originates as an interview of a major artist (John Lithgow and Patricia Heaton, for example) conducted live in ideastream’s studio in Playhouse Square before an audience of students. The program is disseminated live through interactive video and audio to schools throughout the state. Recordings are used for a segment in the daily arts program on the public radio station, for the weekly arts program on public television and are posted online. A 30-minute special is distributed to the PBS system and Scott Simon uses the edited interview on NPR’s Weekend Edition. Online curriculum is supplied to teachers for use in the classroom.

The success of ideastream comes from five ingredients that will prove key to the ability of public media to transform: leadership, a mission rooted in community service, structure, governance and finances. The leaders in the creation of ideastream shared a vision, were willing to break down silos, mobilized support from the community and garnered resources through partnerships and diligent fundraising.

These same ingredients have been key for other successful models that will be described in this paper, models such as Minnesota Public Radio, New York Public Radio, KQED Public Media, Southern California Public Radio, KETC in St. Louis and KPBS in San Diego. Because they are community-based, they are evolving to meet local needs drawing on local resources. There is no one-size-fits-all model, but all have the essential ingredients in common.

## **The Opportunity**

With the business models for traditional media crumbling and the digital revolution disrupting the relationship between news organizations and communities, public broadcasting finds itself at a crossroads. “This is potentially a 1967 moment,” said Ernest J. Wilson III, chair of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California. “Just as the Public Broadcasting Act moved us from educational television to public broadcasting, now we need to move to public service media.”

What is meant by public service media? John S. and James L. Knight Foundation vice president Eric Newton told the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Future of Media study that he defines news in the public interest as “the news people need to run their communities and their lives.” He would expand the definition to include not only the existing public broadcasting stations and national systems, but also an entirely new non-profit media landscape that includes entities such as Wikipedia, online magazines such as *Consumer Reports* and locally focused websites such as Texas Tribune, Voice of San Diego and the St. Louis Beacon. He argues that such sources should be included in the new public media ecology and receive federal funding.<sup>4</sup>

## What is Public Service Media?

Since the creation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in 1967, the term public media has been virtually synonymous with public broadcasting. Public media are commonly defined as non-commercial, publicly funded broadcast outlets with a mission to meet the civic and educational needs of the community or broader public. In practice, this has meant television and radio stations eligible for CPB funding.

There is broad agreement that public media include:

- CPB-funded networks such as NPR, PBS, American Public Media (APM) and the many affiliated broadcast stations, program producers and funders that belong to these networks (e.g., WGBH, KQED, Public Radio International, Independent Television Service, Radio Bilingüe, etc.)
- Community radio
- Low Power FM Stations
- Public Access or PEG TV (local cable public access, education and government programming)

With the explosion of new digital platforms and delivery mechanisms, this definition is beginning to expand. New conceptions of public service media place greater emphasis on the function or mission of the organization (e.g., to inform and engage people around shared issues and civic concerns) than the type of organization or its affiliations. Patricia Aufderheide of American University's Center for Social Media has defined it this way: "Public media isn't something you are. It's something you do."<sup>i</sup>

In this expanded view, the primary aim is still serving the public, not making a profit. However, some people would broaden the definition of public media to include a range of publicly funded, not-for-profit, professional and nonprofessional, and potentially even commercial media. The following media have been suggested as part of an expanded definition of public media<sup>ii</sup>:

- Wikipedia and other collaborative media
- Bloggers and podcasters
- Independent publications (e.g., Consumer Reports)
- Professional journalist sites (e.g., ProPublica)
- Citizen news sites covering local to international (e.g., Global Voices)
- Consortia of niche media (e.g., New America Media)
- Metro news sites (e.g., Texas Tribune, Voice of San Diego)
- State investigative news sites
- University-led community news sites
- "Soft advocacy" sites (e.g., Sunlight Foundation, Common Sense Media)
- Online mappers
- Viewer-supported satellite channels

In this paper, the assumption is that with the current climate of scarce resources, the best way to proceed toward implementing the public media recommendation of the Knight Commission would be to allow public broadcasters to redefine themselves as public media centers that would include online, mobile and other digital communication.

i Jeremy Egner, "Beyond Broadcast: Maps of public media plus maps as public media," Current.org, June 23, 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.current.org/web/web0811beyondbroadcast.shtml>

ii See remarks by Jan Schaeffer to the FCC Hearing, Preserving Public and Other Noncommercial Media in the Digital Age, April 30, 2010, (at [http://www.j-lab.org/speeches/fcc\\_public\\_and\\_noncommercial\\_media\\_in\\_the\\_digital\\_era/](http://www.j-lab.org/speeches/fcc_public_and_noncommercial_media_in_the_digital_era/)); Henry Jenkins, "Where Citizens Gather: An Interview with The Future of Public Media Project's Jessica Clark (Part I)," MediaShift IdeaLab, March 31, 2009, (at <http://www.pbs.org/idealab/2009/03/where-citizens-gather-an-interview-wh-the-future-of-public-media-projects-jessica-clark-part-one090.htm>)

Like other media, public broadcasting is profoundly impacted by the digital revolution. Competition is burgeoning. Public broadcasting's best-known brands are being challenged by cable channels that offer children's, educational, cultural and documentary programming and by websites that offer news and information instantly, globally, on demand.

News and information consumers are no longer content to wait for the morning newspaper or the evening newscast. They want to interact, to share, to comment and to provide original information. In many breaking news stories today, citizens are the first to provide eyewitness accounts and disseminate video and audio to a worldwide-networked audience.

Digital technology offers amazing opportunities for those who want to create and distribute content. Cost is no barrier. You do not have to own a printing press or a transmission tower. Universal broadband will expand opportunities exponentially for media makers and consumers. Technology can have a multiplier effect. Eric Newton said, "Technological breakthroughs allow one well-trained journalist to do things that used to require dozens if not hundreds of old-school, shoe-leather reporters.... For the first time having only two reporters at a public radio station need not be an impossible editorial challenge."<sup>5</sup>

The new technology enables public media to transform from the one-to-many broadcast model to a distributed, networked model. Existing stations can transform into hubs that bring communities together, facilitate dialogue and curate vital information.

Laura Walker, president and CEO of New York Public Radio, wrote of her organization's mission to make government and institutions accountable to the people they serve. "We'll create new, far-reaching tools to reflect and reach diverse audiences and to establish a variety of communities across interests, heritage, neighborhood, and demographics," she said. "We seek to create active, rather than passive, consumers of information, increased opportunities for participation by news consumers and marginalized communities, and more transparent, more effective, and more accountable civic and government agencies."

## **The Challenge**

This vision of public service media in the digital landscape resonates with the aspirations more than 40 years ago that led to the transformation of educational television and radio into a national public broadcasting service. In a 1966 letter to the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, E.B. White wrote, "It should be our Lyceum, our Chautauqua, our Minsky's, and our Camelot. It should restate and clarify the social dilemma and the political pickle. Once in a while it does, and you get a quick glimpse of its potential."<sup>6</sup>

Growing out of the Carnegie Commission's recommendations, the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act created the independent, non-profit Corporation for Public



Broadcasting and authorized federal funding to support existing stations. The act calls for services that will “be responsive to the interests of people both in particular localities and throughout the United States, and will constitute an expression of diversity and excellence....” Specifying a role for the federal government, the act said that “it is necessary and appropriate for the Federal government to complement, assist and support a national policy that will most effectively make public telecommunications services available to all citizens of the United States.”<sup>7</sup>

Three years after the act became law, the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio came into existence to provide national organizations for educational television and radio stations.

Public broadcasting remains decentralized, with individual stations at the core. A decentralized public broadcasting has been able to survive occasional intrusive political pressure, but has been less successful in adopting a unified strategy. “The structure of U.S. public broadcasting cripples any kind of coherent national planning,” said Pat Aufderheide and Jessica Clark of the Center for Social Media. “It has provided remarkable stability over the years, but this stability at a time of rapid change is itself becoming a liability.”<sup>8</sup>

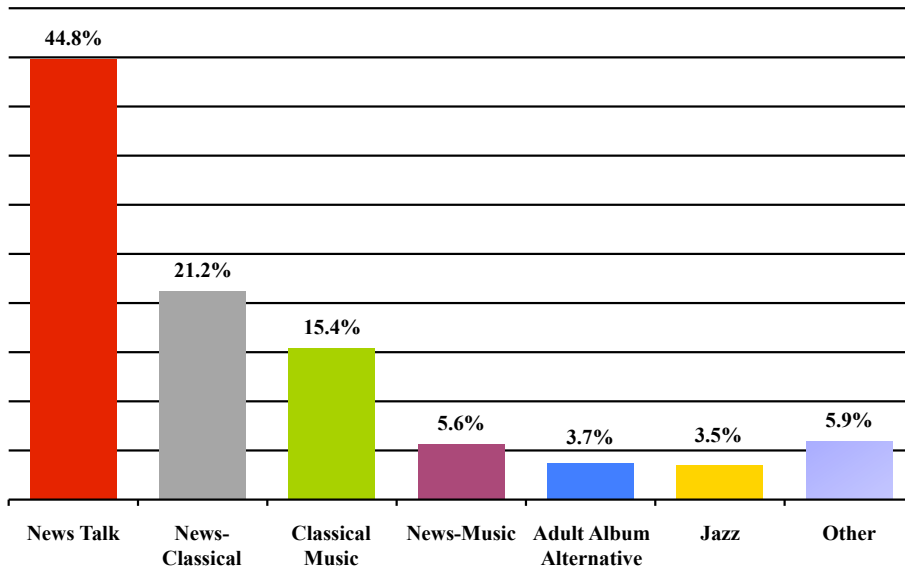
A total of 365 television stations are members of PBS. About 800 of 900 public radio stations, operated by about 400 entities, are members of NPR. According to the CPB-PBS-NPR filing in the Federal Communications Commission’s Future of Media inquiry, these stations can be accessed by more than 98 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>9</sup> Public television says it has 61 million viewers weekly as of May 2010 and public radio says it has 30 million listeners.<sup>10</sup>

But the audiences for public television and public radio are on opposite trajectories. While public television has lost viewers, public radio’s audience continues to grow. Arbitron figures provided by NPR show the total audience for NPR member stations has grown 176 percent over 20 years, and by 9 percent in the past five years.<sup>11</sup>

News programming has spurred public radio’s audience growth. Anchored by the two daily NPR news magazines, *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*, radio stations also acquire news and information programming from two other national services, American Public Media and Public Radio International. Between spring 2005 and spring 2008, overall public radio listening grew by 2.3 percent, but listening to news programming grew by 6 percent, according to “Grow the Audience,” a report on public radio produced by the Station Resources Group for CPB.<sup>12</sup>

The strong performance of nationally produced news programming has enabled public radio stations to establish identities in their communities as news and information sources even though the majority of stations have news departments of one or none. The “Grow the Audience” report found the most successful stations carry NPR news programs, the all-news-talk format is the most popular format where it is offered, and news is the most-listened-to programming on stations with a mixed format.<sup>13</sup>

## Exhibit 2: Public Radio Formats, Ranked by Audience Share



Source: Arbitron, "Public Radio Today 2010: How America Listens to Radio," p. 59.

Public radio stations also benefited from a vacuum created by declining investment in news among commercial radio stations. Between 1994 and 2001, during which the 1996 Telecommunications Act eased radio ownership rules, local radio newsroom staffing declined 44 percent, according to Bob Papper, then of Ball State University.

"Our biggest success in public media is NPR," said Bill Kling, president and CEO of American Public Media. "However, the primary gateways to NPR—in fact, the retail face of NPR in most communities—are the public radio stations and public media companies. Often those local stations are considerably less successful than the national networks. Sometimes that is because of the structure they are a part of (university, municipality, school board), in part because it is the result of a lack of direct governance. Most often it reflects leadership deficiencies. And of course, it results from a lack of resources."

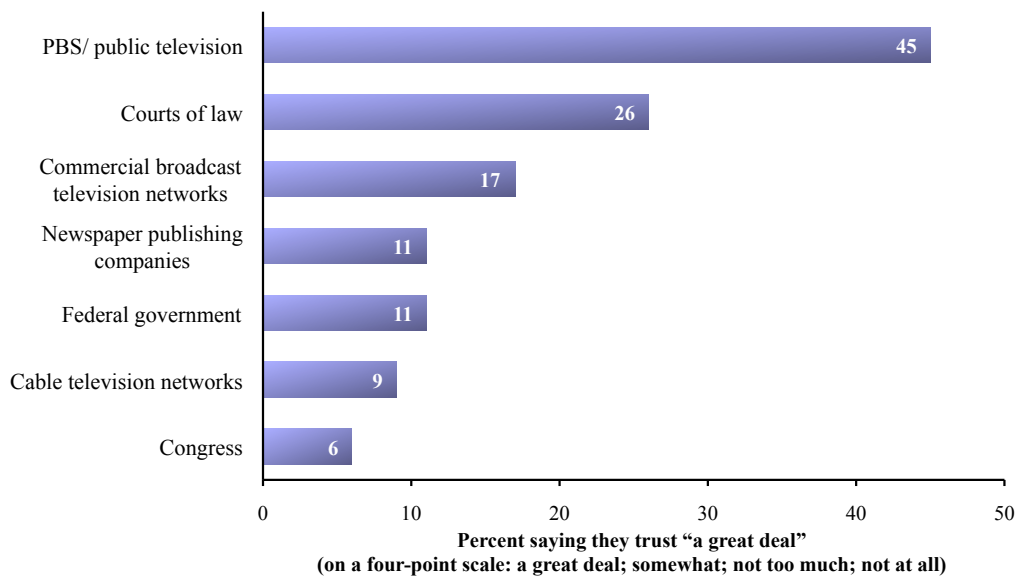
PBS's news and information programming includes the award-winning PBS *NewsHour* and *Nightly Business Report*. The weekly documentary program, *Frontline*, recently received funding to produce programming year-round, instead of taking a summer break. A new weekly program, *Need to Know*, launched in May to replace *Now on PBS* and *Bill Moyers Journal*. *Washington Week in Review* is a staple of the Friday night line-up.

### Exhibit 3: News Organization Believability

	<i>Believe all or most</i>		<i>Believe almost nothing</i>	
	4 %	3 %	2 %	1 %
<b>60 Minutes</b>	33	34	22	11
<b>Local TV News</b>	29	40	23	8
<b>CNN</b>	29	36	22	13
<b>NPR</b>	28	32	25	16
<b>Fox News</b>	27	29	22	22
<b>Wall Street Journal</b>	25	37	23	14
<b>C-SPAN</b>	23	35	25	17
<b>MSNBC</b>	22	38	21	19
<b>ABC News</b>	21	43	23	13
<b>CBS News</b>	21	41	24	15
<b>Your Daily Newspaper</b>	21	38	27	14
<b>NBC News</b>	20	43	23	14
<b>New York Times</b>	20	38	21	21
<b>USA Today</b>	17	39	28	15

Source: Pew Research Center, "Americans Spending More Time Following the News," September 12, 2010.

### Exhibit 4: Public Trust in Major Institutions



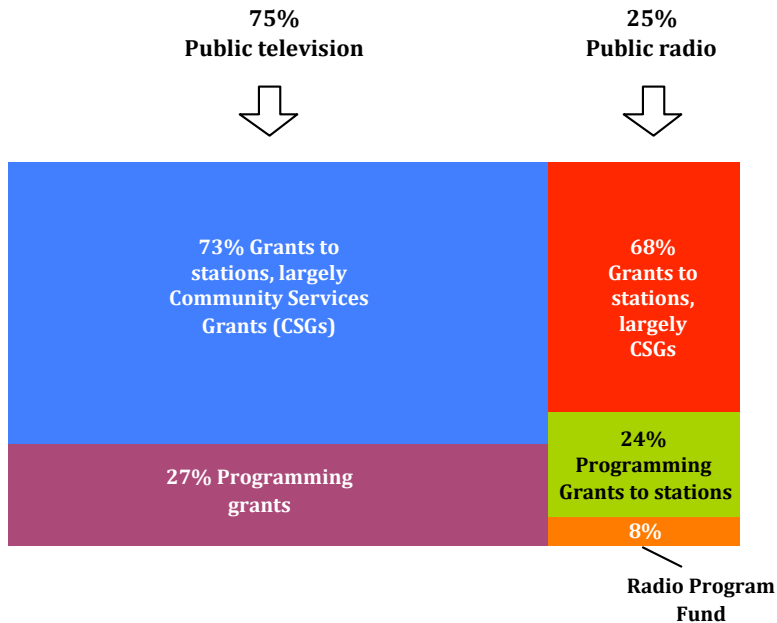
Source: PBS Research, GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media Surveys, 2010.

Because of PBS’s structure, the national news and information programs are not produced by a single entity but by production companies or member stations in Washington, New York, Boston and Miami for distribution to other stations. Up to now, this has made it more difficult for the program producers to coordinate their efforts and bring their collective strengths to bear on major news stories such as elections or the economic crisis.

Very few public television stations produce local news. At most, they may offer a weekly news roundtable using reporters from other organizations or the occasional local or regional documentary. Some are beginning to partner with public radio stations to produce local and regional news and information programming, an effort that comes more easily to joint licensees.

Federal funding for public broadcasting has never reached the levels expected when Congress enacted the legislation in 1967. For the past several years, federal funding has remained flat, at about \$400 million a year. Moreover, the distribution of most of that money is mandated by Congress, going to stations in the form of community service grants and split 75/25 between television and radio.<sup>15</sup>

**Exhibit 5: CPB Budget Allocation Formula**



Above chart represents 89% of CPB budget. The additional 11% goes to CPB administrative and system support costs (satellite system, copyright fees).

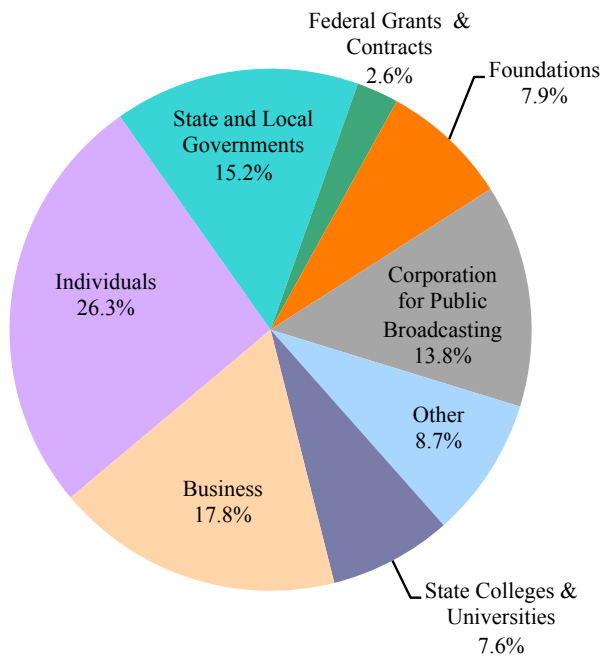
Source: [www.current.org/pbpb/statistics/CPBformula.html](http://www.current.org/pbpb/statistics/CPBformula.html)

While federal funding provides only about 15 percent of the services' annual budgets, public broadcasting has also seen declines recently in other sources of funding, such as state and local support, university funding, corporate underwriting, foundation grants and individual giving.<sup>16</sup> These financial pressures have led to reductions in services, staffing and programming at all levels and come just at a time when public broadcasting needs to make investments in digital media.

Financial pressures were the reason given by management of KCET-TV in Los Angeles when the most-watched public television station in the second largest market in the country declared it was leaving PBS because it felt the dues it paid for programming and other membership benefits were too high.<sup>17</sup>

Government funding quickly became an issue in the wake of NPR's firing of analyst Juan Williams over comments he made during an appearance on Fox News Channel's *The O'Reilly Factor* in late October 2010. Conservatives, including members of Congress, called for an end to federal funding for NPR and the rest of public broadcasting. While the percentage of federal funds in public broadcasting budgets is relatively small, it is, as PBS president Paula Kerger characterized it, "a critical 15 percent."<sup>18</sup> The episode revealed the precarious state of official support for public broadcasting more than 40 years after its creation.

**Exhibit 6: Public Broadcasting Revenue by Source of Revenue, 2008**



Source: 2008 Public Broadcasting Revenue Reports, Table 2, September 2009, <http://www.cpb.org/stations/reports/revenue/>

There is no shortage of challenges to public media—the digital revolution redefining the players and audience expectations, a decentralized public broadcasting structure, declining public television audience and stagnant federal funding.

Yet the opportunity is huge. Public media can become an essential element in our democracy by better serving the information needs of communities. It can do so, as the Knight Commission recommends, by becoming more local, more inclusive and more interactive.

### ***A. More Local***

Local communities are ground zero for the changes in how citizens are getting information. Local newspaper audiences have declined by 25.6 percent in the past 10 years and one-third of newspaper jobs have been lost since 2001.<sup>19</sup> Public media are poised to fill the gap, but to do so, steps must be taken to

- Encourage innovation
- Strengthen leadership and resources devoted to local news and information
- Promote internal and external partnerships
- Engage communities on all platforms

Public radio stations have built on the strong audience appeal of the national programs to create a local news presence. It is relatively easy to provide local headlines, weather and traffic during predictable breaks in *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. Stations that might not have the reporting talent to produce a longer news magazine can still produce short packages that can be incorporated into the national programs. This also guarantees that local content, by appearing within the national programs, gets maximum exposure, since purely local programs draw fewer listeners than the national programs. *Morning Edition* gets the most listeners of any national program, capturing as much as 25 percent of all listeners at some stations.<sup>20</sup>

Some radio stations have built the news and information identity into a strong local brand with a reporting staff and local news programming. But closer examination shows local news capacity is uneven and very limited at the majority of local stations. NPR's Local News Initiative and CPB's Grow the Audience project have both studied local news capacity in detail.

The Local News Initiative found only 15 percent of NPR's member stations have more than four people reporting full time and another 30 percent had two to three. A majority of stations had only one (22 percent) or none (33 percent).<sup>21</sup>

CPB commissioned a “Census of Journalists in Public Radio and Television” this year. Michael Marcotte, who conducted the survey for Public Radio News Directors International in August 2010, said his team found about 2,000 paid news professionals in public radio, including non-NPR member stations. In addition, another 2,000 work as volunteers performing journalistic functions.<sup>22</sup>

Tom Thomas of the Station Resource Group, which conducted the Grow the Audience project, says there are five stations that invest more than \$20 million in their broadcast operations, have newsrooms of more than 20 and reach more than 500,000 listeners weekly. About a dozen more spend more than \$10 million, have 10 to 20 in the newsroom and reach more than 250,000 weekly. Below those tiers, the investment, staffing and audience are much more modest.

With more investment, the strongest stations could make a leap to the next level of excellence. These stations could serve as models for building local news and information capacity around the country. Here are recommendations for making that vision a reality.

### **1. Encourage innovative models for public media local news initiatives and look for opportunities to scale up such ventures.**

The five community-based public radio organizations with the strongest news operations and biggest audiences are New York Public Radio, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), Chicago Public Radio, KQED Public Media (Northern California) and Southern California Public Radio in Los Angeles. They share characteristics: except for MPR, they are located in the largest markets in the country, they are licensed to community boards rather than institutions, they operate multiple stations and only KQED-FM in San Francisco is a joint licensee with a television station. They are led by visionaries who have staked success on making a mark in news and information. They are among the top-rated stations in the system and the most successful fundraisers.

None of these stations is resting on its laurels. All have ambitious plans to expand their reporting strength, to create new areas of expertise and to greatly expand their engagement with digital media. Laura Walker of New York Public Radio said, “I’m quite concerned about the tone of journalism. It’s imperative to provide in-depth reporting, not just recreate the newspaper. We need to look forward.”

Among these stations' initiatives:

- New York Public Radio has developed plans to “dive deep” by significantly strengthening efforts in three content areas: New York government and politics, the New York economy and New York culture. NYPR plans to add \$30 million over five years to the \$20 million it already spends on content to grow its editorial staff to more than 100 and to build a digital news platform. It also will seek ways to program WNYC-AM 24/7 to support its mission. Walker said, “This combination of local news, online information, curating online and radio civic engagement is, we believe, the ultimate statement of our local news/information mission.”
- KQED is increasing local news content and integrating radio and online formats. It is adding 8 new positions to its newsroom staff of 45 and 10 regional newscasts to the daily schedule. The newly launched website is called KQED News (KQEDnews.org) and will stream the new newscasts. KQED president and CEO John Boland said, “We’re transforming what was a very successful 20th-century broadcasting organization into the model for 21st-century digital media.”<sup>23</sup>
- Minnesota Public Radio has long been a leader in innovation. Among its latest efforts is Public Insight Network (PIN), a database of 89,000 experts in a wide range of subjects. The database is being shared with dozens of other public radio stations. PIN will be described in detail in the Interactive section of this paper.

Many of these station initiatives, like Public Insight Network, are being shared with other stations. One of NYPR’s content specialties is transportation and infrastructure, a natural for New York City. NYPR has extended its expertise by forming a hub for reporting on transportation and infrastructure with reporters embedded at local stations WDET/Detroit, Minnesota Public Radio, KALW/San Francisco, WAMU/Washington, D.C., Yellowstone Public Radio/Montana, and KUHF/Houston, as well as at American Public Media’s Marketplace. With hopes to add stations in Seattle, Atlanta and Arizona soon, the project will deepen its coverage with looks at transportation and civil rights, transportation and climate change and connections between development, housing and social equity.

At the national level, efforts are being made to strengthen the news capacity of local stations. Although some station managers privately express fears that podcasting and online delivery will change the relationship among network, stations and audience, NPR president Vivian Schiller believes the national organization



needs to maintain its ties to local stations. “People listen to stations, not NPR,” she said in an interview. “Our fate is tied to local stations. How can we cover news in 800 (NPR member station) markets?”

As digital media open possibilities for national producers such as NPR to reach audiences directly, it is important that NPR keep this commitment to develop local stations. APM president Bill Kling said, “As the strongest national producer, NPR has the dual obligation to (a) become an important national institution and (b) assist its member stations in becoming important community institutions.”

National organizations have launched two significant projects to strengthen local news capacity. They are:

- CPB’s Local Journalism Centers (LJCs). The \$10.5 million initiative was launched this spring with the goal of creating seven centers across the country partnering several stations in each region to focus on a relevant topic. For example, the Southwest consortium, titled *Fronteras*, brings together stations in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Texas where a bilingual reporting team will report on cross-cultural issues. Seven reporters, two editors and a social media editor will staff the project. However, the local journalism centers are expected to become self-sustaining in two years.<sup>24</sup>
- NPR’s Project Argo. The collaboration between NPR and 12 member stations, including some television/radio joint licensees, funds one content creator who focuses on a topic of local importance, such as politics, health care, the environment and criminal justice. For example, Oregon Public Broadcasting “will track policy developments that affect...natural resources, and host a conversation about how they should be managed.” NPR staff is assisting with construction of Argo websites and tracking metrics for website use and engagement. The sites are to be incorporated into NPR’s content management system and utilize PBS’s embeddable video player. The project is funded with \$2 million from CPB and \$1 million from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.<sup>25</sup>

## Local Journalism Centers

CPB is funding local journalism centers (LJC's) for a new approach to newsgathering and distribution. The centers are forming teams of multimedia journalists, who focus on issues of particular relevance to each region.

### Southwest

KJZZ (Phoenix, AZ), KPBS (San Diego, CA), Nevada Public Radio, KRWG (southwest New Mexico and far-west Texas), Texas Public Radio, KUAZ (Tucson, AZ), KNAU (Flagstaff, AZ). The LJC is called "Fronteras: The Changing America Desk." A bi-lingual reporting team looks at cultural shifts, including Latino, Native American and border issues.

### The Plains

KCUR (Kansas City, MO), Iowa Public Radio, NET Radio and Television (Nebraska), KBIA (Columbia, MO), High Plains Public Radio (Garden City, KS), Kansas Public Radio. The LJC focuses on agribusiness, including farming practices, food and fuel production.

### Upstate New York

WXXI (Rochester), WMHT (Schenectady), WNED (Buffalo), WRVO (Oswego), WSKG (Binghamton). The LJC focuses the regional economy and innovation technology.

### Upper Midwest

Michigan Radio, WBEZ (Chicago), ideastream (Cleveland). The LJC focuses on the economy and reinventing the industrial heartland.

### Central Florida

WUSF (Tampa), WEDU (Tampa), WGCU (Fort Meyers), WMFE (Orlando), WMNF (Tampa), WUFT (Gainesville). The LJC focuses on healthcare issues.

### Northwest

Oregon Public Broadcasting, Puget Sound Public Radio (KUOW), KCTS Television Seattle, Northwest Public Radio/Television, Boise State Public Radio, Idaho Public Television, and Southern Oregon Public Television. The consortium covers regional environmental issues, including renewable energy, natural resources, sustainability, and environmental science.

### The South

Georgia Public Broadcasting, Alabama Public Television, WBHM-FM, (Birmingham, AL), Louisiana Public Broadcasting, KEDM-FM, (Monroe, LA), Mississippi Public Broadcasting, WNPT-TV, Nashville Public Television and WUOT-FM, (Knoxville, TN). The LJC focuses on education challenges.

### Gulf Coast Coalition

Louisiana Public Broadcasting, Alabama Public Television, Mississippi Public Broadcasting, WE-DU-TV/FM (Tampa, FL), WUSF-TV/FM (Tampa, FL), WWNO-FM (New Orleans, LA), WBHM-FM (Birmingham, AL), WSRE-TV/FM (Pensacola, FL), WVAS-FM (Montgomery, AL) and KRVS-FM (Lafayette, LA). The consortium will provide expanded reporting on the Gulf Coast oil spill for the next year.

## Argo Member Stations

**Boston/WBUR**

CommonHealth: Where reform meets reality

**Boston/WGBH-WCAI**

Climatide: Oceans, coasts, and climate change on Cape Cod

**Minnesota Public Radio**

On Campus: Everything higher education in Minnesota

**Oregon Public Broadcasting**

Ecotrope: Covering the Northwest's environment

**New York/WNYC**

The Empire: Everything you need to know about New York state politics and governance

**Philadelphia/WXPN**

The Key: Discover Philly's best local music

**San Diego/KPBS**

Home Post: The military in San Diego

**San Francisco/KALW**

The Informant: Cops, courts and communities in the Bay Area

**San Francisco/KQED**

MindShift: How we will learn

**Seattle/KPLU**

Humanosphere: Covering the fight to reduce poverty and improve global health

**Southern California Public Radio**

Multi-American: Immigration and cultural fusion in the new Southern California

**Washington, D.C./WAMU**

DCentric: The changing face of the District

These projects are a good beginning, but represent a tiny fraction of the budgets of CPB and NPR. Much more support will be needed, both conceptual and financial, to have an impact on the larger system. Much of that support should go to station-to-station sharing so that the successful models can be replicated in more communities.

## **2. Strengthen leadership and resources devoted to local news and information, and invest \$100 million to add 1,000 public media reporters.**

Journalism requires boots on the ground. A major criticism of the blogosphere is that it is derivative of original reporting. Investigative reporting particularly requires time that only comes when there is enough staff to free reporters from daily demands.

Public media are not even close to having enough staff to replace what is being lost from newspapers. Even newspapers hit by drastic cutbacks, such as the *Akron Beacon Journal*, still have newsroom staff that number close to 100. More than half of public stations have one reporter or none.

Some far-reaching proposals suggest dramatic increases. Tom Thomas proposes investing \$100 million to hire, equip and support 1,000 additional news staff, increasing the size of the current professional local news force by 50 percent. The funds would cover annual salary and benefits plus editorial, technical and administrative support. While the seed money would need to come from national sources, both governmental and philanthropic, he believes sustaining money could come from foundations and major donors at the local and regional level who are interested in facilitating civic engagement.

Still, 1,000 new reporters amount to only about three per market. APM's Kling proposes focusing on public media's journalistic strength in the top 25 markets. He proposes to demonstrate the full potential of local public media by raising philanthropic funding to create four to six model public media centers, built on the foundation of public radio stations, with 100 journalists and editors, strong governance and company leadership. In the case of his own Minnesota Public Radio, which has 80 news department staff, including 30 reporters, he would like to see 100 reporters to begin to match staffing levels at the local newspapers. APM's Southern California Public Radio would also be a candidate by building on its 20 reporters to bring its reporting and editorial staff to the 100-person level. New York's NYPR and Chicago's WBEZ are the other initial partners in this venture.

The fund for more reporters could be created at the national level, with re-allocated and new government funds and a bold commitment from philanthropic organizations. Stations and independent journalists would apply for the funding by submitting proposals to demonstrate how their coverage would enrich local information capacity.

This influx of new talent should bring new attributes. In addition to excellent reporting skills, they would need to know how to prepare material for all platforms

and be digitally fluent. Such requirements are becoming the industry norm. At the commercial network level, ABC News moved this year toward replacing traditional reporting teams of correspondent, producer and camera crew with digital journalists who can master several skills.<sup>26</sup>

The new staff should contribute to increasing gender, ethnic, religious and other types of diversity in the public media workforce. They should have a variety of content expertise in areas most in need of attention now—in economics, the environment and science, for example.

To promote continued high quality, to adjust to changing information demands and to keep pace with technological changes, public media leaders and managers should invest in professional development opportunities for their journalists, current and new. For example, 22 local journalists from 19 states gained expertise in covering business and economics through the NPR News Economics Training Project, a CPB-funded initiative.<sup>27</sup>

Public media cannot afford to squander its reputation for accuracy and fairness with sloppy journalism. As more reporters are added, it is also important to add editing and producing capability to ensure quality. In its local news survey, NPR found that only 37 percent of reporters said their work was always edited by someone, while 20 percent said their work was never edited. Only 24 percent of stations reported having full-time editors.<sup>28</sup> It is vital to strengthen editing and producing ranks to protect the credibility of public media.

### **3. Promote internal and external partnerships.**

CPB's Local Journalism Centers are a good first step to creating regional sharing of reporting efforts and content. Some regional networks are succeeding, such as the Northwest News Network. This should be encouraged.

Collaborations around content are also important, as demonstrated by NYPR's transportation and infrastructure hub. Public television station KETC in St. Louis developed web resources on the mortgage crisis that proved to be just as valuable in Tampa and Las Vegas. Communities of interest should be fostered, something done easily with digital media.

The technical means to make this happen should continue to be developed. NPR's application programming interface is serving that need and the Public Media Platform will expand that effort exponentially. Public Radio Exchange (PRX) also provides that opportunity. PBS is developing a "supervertical" for news content from all programs, local as well as national, and will participate in the Public Media Platform. These projects will be described further in the Interactive section, below.

Public media organizations are not only partnering with other public media, they are also looking externally for partners. Jo Anne Wallace, general manager of KQED-FM, said, "As we watch what's happening to local newspapers,

we can't duplicate the breadth of coverage unless we partner. We're looking for partnerships of all sizes, large and small." KQED partners with more than 25 organizations, including the San Francisco Chronicle, the Center for Investigative Reporting, Youth Radio and ProPublica.

Almost all of the most talked-about non-profit journalism web ventures, such as Voice of San Diego, Texas Tribune, the St. Louis Beacon and the Chicago News Cooperative, have a connection to local public media. The new sites have captured a lot of attention, but are still limited in reach and pose questions about sustainability. By partnering with public media, with an established track record in news, the new ventures can benefit from stability and a larger audience, while public media can benefit from the new ventures' increased reporting left. The Beacon, for example, has 13 news staff, while the St. Louis public radio station has seven in its news department.

#### **4. Define the role for public television stations in meeting information needs of communities.**

Jim Lehrer, the best-known news figure in public broadcasting, sees a gap to be filled. "There's a crying need for serious reporting at the local level," he said in an interview. "Public media has a responsibility to meet that need."

His proposal is a simple one: to build on what newspapers are already doing. "Newspapers already have beat reporters covering local issues," he said. They can collaborate with the local public television station to start a news program. As he travels the country, he is urging public stations to find a way to mount such programs, a daily one if possible. In San Antonio he hit on success by bringing together KLRN with the San Antonio Express News, which are now planning a program on Friday night to be hosted by the newspaper's editor. If he can get four or five such programs started, he believes he will have a model to show to others.

Up to now, local news programming has not been a high priority for public television stations and there is little original reporting done by most public stations except for occasional documentaries. There are a number of reasons for that, including the competition with commercial stations for local news viewers. News is an important profit center for commercial stations and with three or more stations in a market, competition is fierce. The number of commercial stations offering news in a market grew through the 1990s and has declined in the past two years by only eight stations nationwide. In the local news arena, public radio faces less competition while public television faces more.

There is also the matter of expense. The budget for a commercial television newsroom in a mid-size market is about \$4 million to \$5 million annually, one-third to one-half of the entire budget for public stations in comparable markets.

Some public television stations are venturing deeper into news and public affairs, sometimes by partnering with one of the new non-profit news websites. In St. Louis, KETC is providing office space for The Beacon, a website founded by former staffers for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and sharing content. In San Diego, KPBS has launched Project Envision, a multi-platform effort with deep reporting on local issues that appears on television, radio and online and that engages the community in contributing information to the project.

While it may be natural for public television and radio stations to pair up when they share a license, PBS president Paula Kerger sees a role for those television stations that do not have that benefit. Public television stations can expand upon existing public affairs work and form partnerships with their local radio stations, Kerger said. “Even if a station doesn’t have its own newsroom, it still has a vital role to play. Local PBS stations have always served as community conveners—places where citizens come together to engage in civil discourse—and that will continue in the digital age,” she said.

Rather than producing newscasts or staffing a full newsroom, public television stations can partner with other news organizations, such as public radio stations, local newspapers and non-profit websites to give those reporting efforts wider distribution. They can also serve as conveners meeting community needs, as KETC did in St. Louis with its “Facing the Mortgage Crisis” project, which combined town hall meetings with an interactive web resource where citizens could post questions and get answers.

Public television should form a study group of general managers and others to develop a strategy for news content and civic engagement. This could be undertaken by CPB as an effort comparable to the Grow the Audience project for public radio. PBS has taken steps to strengthen national news and public affairs programming by building up digital platforms and extending *Frontline* to a year-round schedule. It is urgent for leaders at the local level of public television to examine the future for news and public affairs.

## ***B. More Inclusive***

### **1. Make inclusiveness a priority. Adopt a two-pronged strategy: general and specialized in programming and control.**

CPB president Patricia Harrison says her agenda can be called the three Ds: dialogue, digital and diversity.<sup>29</sup> Since its inception, public broadcasting has been dedicated to serving all communities. The Public Broadcasting Act says public media should “serve unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities.” CPB, PBS and NPR have undertaken many projects to improve the inclusiveness of its staffing and its programming. But public media leaders acknowledge more can be done and also note the fact that the country is becoming more diverse, not less.

“If the military can integrate, why can’t public broadcasting do a better job?” asks CPB chairman Wilson. He says beyond the rhetorical commitment there should be active ways to make public broadcasting more welcoming to diverse communities.

Grow the Audience, CPB’s project for public radio, states that inclusiveness is part of the fabric of public media and calls on colleagues to deepen their commitment to pluralism, diversity and inclusiveness.

The diversity goals of public media should start with the audience—that is, are diverse audiences that can be served by public media being served? Inclusiveness can be pursued on two tracks. One is an overall commitment to inclusiveness in organization and content. The other, as the Grow the Audience report recommends, is to encourage differentiated efforts and support of programming and stations developed and controlled by communities of color. These efforts could be developed in partnership with other community resources, including other public media organizations.

In May, CPB launched a Diversity and Innovation Fund of \$20 million over two years to benefit PBS’s program service. The goal is to attract younger and more diverse viewers and media makers. But, as Jacquie Jones, president of the National Black Programming Coalition noted, that sum is a fraction of CPB’s over-all budget.

The Juan Williams firing cast an unflattering light on NPR’s efforts to reflect diversity in staff and content. Even before the Williams episode, NPR had adopted goals to improve diversity in content, audience, workplace environment and hiring and recruitment by 2012. Recently, NPR elevated its chief diversity position to the vice president level and hired Keith Woods, the respected dean of the Poynter Institute. On the local level, Minnesota Public Radio has appointed an “editor for new audiences” to build connections among diverse Minnesota communities. NYPR has partnered with CPB on a “Workforce Diversity” program which will add a new community engagement ambassador to its community engagement team.

## **2. Increase diversity of news and information staff and content at national and local public media organizations.**

The people in a newsroom are the key factor in producing programming that is relevant and inclusive, that “sounds like me,” in the words of the Grow the Audience report. Without a diverse staff, a news organization is in danger of appearing insensitive or ignoring important stories.

Recruiting, hiring and retaining a diverse news staff are not issues exclusively for public media organizations. A 2004 summit of network and local broadcast news executives and the presidents of five minority journalism organizations enumerated these best practices:



- Develop a pool of candidates for potential openings and build relationships over time.
- Be willing to wait longer and look harder to find well-qualified, diverse candidates.
- Hold managers accountable for hiring diverse staff.
- Develop partnerships to increase your applicant pool by linking with UNITY and its partner organizations, professional associations and university journalism programs.
- Be aware of whether your newsroom climate is welcoming to new recruits and make improvements if needed.
- Help new hires make the transition to the newsroom and the community.
- Use internships to find new talent.
- Establish mentoring programs to aid advancement.<sup>30</sup>

Content efforts should include both general and differentiated programming. Stations should audit content frequently to track progress and gaps. Inclusiveness should be defined to encompass age, education, income level, political and religious identity as well as gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Investing more in digital engagement can reap benefits in reaching an audience that is younger and more multicultural.

The CPB/PBS Diversity and Innovation Fund will provide resources for more diverse programming. CPB has funded Independent Television Service to create documentaries diverse in content and production. CPB also supports a number of ethnic radio production organizations.

NPR recently canceled a program for diverse audiences for budget reasons, but still produces *Tell Me More*, a daily talk show hosted by Michele Martin and designed to “capture the headlines, issues and pleasures relevant to multicultural life.” As part of its diversity initiative, NPR is conducting audience research and undertaking efforts to broaden its list of experts to discuss issues such as national security, politics and the arts.

Keeping track of the diversity of voices is essential. NPR’s ombudsman recently analyzed its on-air sources and commentators and found that only 26 percent of sources and one of 12 commentators were women.<sup>31</sup> The media watchdog group, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) reported in October that PBS’s public affairs program guests are “strongly dominated by white, male and elite sources.”<sup>32</sup>

Most of the top-performing public radio news and information stations are located in markets with diverse populations and are making efforts to reach out to them more. *The Takeaway* is a four-hour per weekday national program currently heard in 60 markets. It is jointly produced by New York Public Radio and Public Radio International, with editorial collaboration from The New York Times and the BBC. One of its goals is to reach a more diverse audience. In New York, *The*

*Takeaway* has more black listeners than *Morning Edition*, according to NYPR president Laura Walker. She said the staff of, and contributors to, *The Takeaway* are among the most diverse in public radio.

Among public television stations, WNPT won recognition for its documentary series, “Nashville Nextdoor Neighbors,” on immigrant communities from Bhutan, Kurdish Iraq, Somalia and Spanish-speaking countries.

### The Takeaway

An alternative to NPR’s *Morning Edition* is *The Takeaway*, a four-hour weekday program produced by New York Public Radio and Public Radio International. One of the goals of the program is to reach a more diverse audience. It is now heard in 60 markets, many of which are urban centers with diverse populations. In New York, where the program is heard on WNYC-AM, the listening time among African Americans has increased fivefold and the weekly cumulative rating has increased 2.5 times, according to Laura Walker, NYPR president and CEO. In New York, she says, *The Takeaway* has more black listeners than *Morning Edition*. Hosted by John Hockenberry and Celeste Headlee, the program has one of the most diverse staffs and roster of contributors in public broadcasting.

### 3. Engage communities in gathering information, offering viewpoints, highlighting priorities and bringing issues to the surface.

Digital platforms make it possible to engage communities in new ways. American Public Media’s Public Insight Network database is a superb tool for bringing in a wider diversity of expertise.

NYPR’s *Brian Lehrer Show* incorporates the audience directly into content production and delivery, using call-ins, live events, social media and crowdsourcing. In the wake of the economic crash, the *Brian Lehrer Show* launched a multiphase, multimedia project, called Your Uncommon Economic Indicators, focused on the human, and more tangible, realities of the economic collapse, asking the audience to share in words, images, and video how the economic crash was impacting their local neighborhoods. This was followed up in two other phases, “Recovery Road” and “Help Wanted.” As an example of crowdsourcing, the show asked listeners to post the cost of a marketbasket of goods at local shops to examine pricing disparity across the city. With help from CPB, NYPR has launched the project at other public radio stations.

### 4. Partner with journalism schools to engage young people in public media.

About 47 percent of public media licenses are held by universities and other educational institutions.<sup>33</sup> They are well positioned to connect with young people on campus, especially where there are journalism and communications programs.

Yet many university stations do not encourage student internships or have no relationship with the journalism department. University licensees should be required to establish internships for students.

The New America Foundation, in a policy paper “Journalism Education in Flux,” recommends partnerships between public media and journalism programs as part of its vision of seeing journalism schools become “anchor institutions” in communities as producers of news and information.<sup>34</sup> A more engaged role for journalism schools in what the paper calls the “emerging information ecosystem” is an obvious fit where the schools or their parent institutions hold public media licenses.

### **5. Create a corps to promote digital literacy in underserved communities.**

One of the most intriguing ideas launched this summer by the National Black Programming Consortium with support from CPB is Public Media Corps. Like Teach for America, the program would recruit new college graduates to go into communities to teach digital skills. The corps will employ fellows with technical and media skills to “promote and extend broadband adoption in underserved communities.” By serving as residents in public broadcast stations, libraries, high schools and non-profit community centers, the fellows will develop web-based and mobile applications on topics of community interest, train community members in the use of digital media and document that use for further study. The pilot program is serving African American and Latino communities in Washington, D.C., and is being operated in partnership with public television stations WHUT and WETA and public radio stations WEAA and WPFW. If the pilot program is successful, it could serve as the basis for a broader program.

## ***C. More Interactive***

### **1. Incorporate digital media into every aspect of public media at all levels. Support the creation of a platform to share all public media content. Include mobile platforms in planning.**

Public media is embracing digital technology and using it to advance its mission of service to communities. The national organizations are developing strategies that will not only strengthen their digital presence but will also help stations develop their capabilities.

In her paper “Public Service Media 2.0,” Ellen Goodman writes, “Public broadcasting entities have gone a long way in recent years to diversify their offerings. PBS and local stations now have significant presences on the web and other digital distribution platforms....”<sup>36</sup>

NPR president Schiller said recently, “NPR is radio at the core, and using digital media as a tool to advance the mission.” She said NPR looks at each platform in its own terms and rather than saying they are platform agnostic, they say they are “platform embracing.”<sup>37</sup>

The most expansive effort in digital technology to date, announced in June, is a collaboration of PBS, NPR, American Public Media, Public Radio International and Public Radio Exchange to develop the Public Media Platform with \$1 million in support from CPB.<sup>38</sup> The Public Media Platform will use an open application programming interface (API) to allow public media producers to share content on a single platform and “make it available for uses from news websites to educational curricula,” the announcement said. The platform will be made available to non-public media producers as well. Among the potential uses are to feed the websites of not only stations, networks and producers but also other non-profit media. The platform will support partnerships with a rights-management system that would enable a local station to distribute content to a regional newspaper or non-profit news website. The platform will allow local stations to use national material, national programs to use local material and local stations to use material from other local stations.

The Public Media Platform is a logical next step in efforts already under way at NPR and PBS. NPR introduced its API in 2008, which allows stations to present NPR material on their own websites and now supports traffic for large member stations. This year PBS rolled out COVE, its video player, which can be incorporated into local station websites, Mike Kelley, PBS vice president, strategy and operations, said in an interview. PBS is also developing a supervertical to aggregate all PBS news content and allow for content verticals. This will bring together, for example, coverage of the war in Afghanistan from the *NewsHour*, *Frontline* and *Need to Know*, coverage that previously existed only on the individual websites of each program. Another PBS project is Project Merlin, a re-architecture of PBS.org that will bring local content to the surface and drive users to local websites.

PBS’s flagship news program, *NewsHour*, incorporated interactivity in its roll-out of a new program format late in 2009. The website was redesigned to be more inviting and includes interactive features such as “The Rundown,” where *NewsHour* correspondents can engage with the public. The *NewsHour* hired Hari Sreenivasan to give the site a “face.” He appears twice in the program, once with headlines and a second time to highlight online content. In a regular feature, “NewsHour Connects,” he interviews local public media reporters about stories in their communities. The reporters are able to send video to the program via the web, an action that previously would have required expensive satellite transmission.

*NewsHour* staff members say their most successful venture has been the “oil widget,” an embeddable player that showed BP footage of the Gulf oil leak with a variety of counters that the user could select from to calculate how much oil was flowing. The oil widget went viral, with 12 million page views by the end of June, and was embedded on 6,000 web pages. Thanks to the interest in that, *NewsHour* website traffic in summer 2010 ran 40 percent above the previous year. The widget has been embedded in local public station websites, helping to bring traffic to those sites as well.

NPR and partners such as PRX have had great success in the past year with mobile platforms. The NPR News app for iPhone was launched in August 2009 and downloaded more than 1 million times in the first five weeks. It has consistently ranked in the top three news apps and in early July 2010 was number one. The NPR iPad app is second among free news apps, and recently topped 400,000 downloads. NPR also has an app for Android phones. NPR's mobile website was relaunched last summer and now achieves 1 million monthly visitors.<sup>39</sup> NPR says its overall web traffic is 11 million visitors a month.

Podcasts have been another area of success for public radio, with NPR reporting 14.7 million downloads in December 2009. The most recent iTunes ranking has local public station-produced podcasts at number one overall ("This American Life" from WBEZ) and number nine overall ("Radio Lab" from WNYC). Two other programs produced by local stations and distributed by NPR are number three overall ("Wait, Wait . . . from WBEZ") and number seven ("Fresh Air" from WHYY.)

Among local stations, the use of digital platforms varies widely. The Grow the Audience report says, "It is clear that public radio has an enormous distance to travel."<sup>40</sup> In this report, only one public radio station website (Minnesota Public Radio) achieved as many as 400,000 monthly visitors in 2008, with the other measured stations lagging farther behind. Seventy percent of station website visitors come once a month, while the typical listener tunes in a half-dozen times.<sup>41</sup>

But progress is being made. Laura Walker of New York Public Radio says since the Grow the Audience report was issued, NYPR's web audience has nearly doubled, reaching 400,000. And the promise is there. Tim Eby, general manager of KWMU-FM in St. Louis, discussed his hopes for partnering with the Beacon and said, "The web is the perfect point to come together and get over the ambitions of each organization." The shared platform being developed for all of public media would go a long way toward helping existing institutions make the transition.

## **2. Use digital means to engage communities.**

The Center for Social Media advises public media to direct funds and attention away from making top-down content and toward "directly mobilizing users around issues and news in collaborative spaces. Such a change would reflect the shift from *producing* public broadcasting content for delivery to *doing* public media with networks of publics. Such activities would include acting as guides to and curators of the mass of high-quality news and information that's now available online; working with users on participatory platforms to shape and generate high-quality, pro-am coverage; and engaging publics around shared civic problems."<sup>42</sup>

A number of ongoing projects could serve as models to accomplish the goal of greater community engagement. One of the most interesting efforts is Public Insight Network, developed by American Public Media and Minnesota Public

Radio with support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The project has created a database of 89,000 experts in various subjects. Journalists serve as analysts trained to search the database to tap into the insights and expertise of the public radio audience in order to efficiently deepen their reporting and make it more relevant. The system, which represents a significant open source platform that can undergird a number of applications for engagement and network collaboration, is now in use at more than 20 public radio stations and one newspaper (*The Miami Herald*). Examples of reporting utilizing the resources of PIN include a series on California prisons produced by Southern California Public Radio after the Chico riot and a Peabody-Award-winning series called “Hard Times,” produced by Oregon Public Broadcasting, on the impact of the economic crisis on Oregonians. In the first hours after the Minneapolis bridge collapse in 2007, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) used the database to contact structural engineers and others with expertise in bridges. While other media were speculating about a terrorist attack, MPR was reporting on the structural deficiencies later identified as the cause of the disaster.

### Public Insight Network

Public Insight Network (PIN) harnesses the expertise of more than 89,000 public radio listeners to contribute to broader and deeper journalism. Created by American Public Media, PIN began at Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) and is now used in more than 20 newsrooms around the nation. Listeners are invited to join the network and to list their occupations, education and expertise. Each newsroom has a trained analyst who culls the network for the desired expertise and connects network members with reporters. Participants are promised that their information will be used only for journalism, and they are invited to contribute their observations and ideas about stories that should be covered. In the first hours after the collapse of the I-5 bridge in Minneapolis, MPR used the database to identify structural engineers and other experts. While other media were speculating about a terror attack, MPR was reporting on the structural deficiencies later identified as the cause of the collapse.

Other examples of community engagement include the St. Louis mortgage crisis project that later spread to other communities, the San Diego Envision project that invites citizens to contribute their ideas about the community’s future and Cleveland’s ideastream. Kit Jensen, the ideastream COO, said, “We measure our success by the success of the region.”

Such an approach requires negotiation with journalists’ notions of themselves as observers, not activists. The use of a database of experts fits with traditional journalistic practice. Using public media to mobilize support for a particular plan of action could cause problems. Stations need to carefully delineate the boundaries between engagement and the credibility of their news operations.

**3. Invest in professional development to help staff stay current and acquire new skills. Promote use of social media by news and information staff. Purchase digital gear to add video to websites and on-air productions.**

Investing in professional development for staff is essential to make digital adoption work. With a Knight Foundation grant, NPR trained more than 300 employees in digital technology. NPR president Schiller and the Grow the Audience report noted the inconsistency among staff at member stations in digital knowledge and skills. Among the skills staff need is knowledge of social media to extend reach, engage new audiences and acquire new sources for journalism.

With less expensive, more portable digital equipment, acquiring video will become a less difficult proposition. Radio stations can add video to their websites and television can consider news programming that does not require a studio and expensive gear. Of course, staff must be trained to use the gear. In many cases, younger staff may be able to train veterans. Ideally, new employees should possess such skills already.

**4. Develop metrics to assess success and areas for improvement in digital media.**

Progress cannot be made in digital media without developing metrics to measure success. At the moment, the national organizations track trends in engagement on various platforms, but few local stations do the same. Also important is an analysis to identify areas for growth. The Grow the Audience study analyzed differences between on-air and online users and suggested strategies to turn web users into public radio listeners.

**5. Ensure that the national broadband plan promotes a strong public media.**

None of these dreams of public media that flourish in the digital realm can be realized without including public media in the nation's plans for universal broadband. The FCC's National Broadband plan devotes a section to the importance of broadband in promoting civic engagement and the role public media should play.

"As the Internet increasingly becomes the standard platform for receiving information, those who do not have high-speed access to the Internet will be left completely out of the civic dialogue," the FCC's report said. "Public media will play a critical role in the development of a healthy and thriving media ecosystem," the plan continues, "public media must continue expanding beyond its original broadcast-based mission to form the core of a broader new public media network that better serves the new multi-platform information needs of America.

"To achieve these important expansions, public media will require additional funding," the report concludes.<sup>43</sup>

The FCC report proposes funding online public media content from a trust fund to be endowed by revenues from a voluntary auction of spectrum licensed to public



television. It also recommends copyright law revisions to give online public media exemptions similar to those previously won for broadcast content and to give public media the necessary clearances from intellectual property rights holders to build an accessible archive such as the one contemplated in the Public Media Platform.

Ellen Goodman and Anne H. Chen, who call public media “the original broadband infrastructure,” forecast the consequences of not including public media in planning broadband policy. “Without better broadband infrastructure,” they write in “Modeling Policy for New Public Media Networks,” “public media cannot deliver mission-driven services to everyone.” They cite the lack of universal access to broadband and the high cost of streaming as barriers to reaching diverse, underserved and young audiences.<sup>44</sup>

Some have suggested a broadband reservation for public media, akin to the spectrum reserved for public radio and television broadcasts. This recognition of public media’s unique role could afford guaranteed accessibility and reduced streaming costs from Internet service providers and special consideration and reduced rates from copyright holders.

Public media stations should also be included among the “anchor institutions” eligible for infrastructure grants under federal stimulus spending to achieve universal broadband. These proposals complement the plan laid out by Blair Levin in his white paper for this series, “Universal Broadband: Targeting Investments to Deliver Broadband Services to All Americans.”<sup>45</sup>

To secure a place for public media in the shaping of broadband policy, public media leaders should become more involved and more active as advocates for their organizations. During the FCC’s deliberations on broadband policy, public media leaders privately supported some of the recommendations but never united and took a stand publicly. The creation of universal broadband is too great an opportunity to be squandered.

#### ***D. Structure***

To make public media more local, more inclusive and more interactive, steps should be taken to align the structure and funding of public media to meet these goals. Here are recommendations:

##### **1. Restructure the Corporation for Public Broadcasting as the Corporation for Public Media. Break down barriers between television and radio and consider a new structure based on strengths in types of content.**

Some argue that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has outlived its usefulness and that a new entity is needed to transform public media for the digital age. That is not the recommendation of this paper. On the contrary, in spite of some episodes of political meddling, CPB has functioned well as the firewall between government and independent media. Such a firewall will be even more



important in a distributed media environment with multiple sources and entry points for media makers and consumers.

Under its current leadership, CPB is taking steps to encourage its constituencies to plan for the future with its funding of the Public Media Platform, the Diversity and Innovation Fund, the Local Journalism Centers and the Grow the Audience project. Although hamstrung by legislation that dictates where federal funds will go, CPB still has \$36 million in annual discretionary funds to use to promote change. CPB itself has discussed whether it should be renamed the Corporation for Public Media, which would make a powerful statement about its new direction.

To make true change, public television and radio entities need to move further and faster in breaking down the silos that create a yawning chasm between practitioners in two media. In the course of the interviews conducted for this paper, station managers talked repeatedly about the lack of interest in partnership on the part of the other public media station in town. Within the public television and radio worlds, old rivalries persist and hinder cooperation that would benefit the public.

It would seem that digital platforms would be the perfect place to meet and march forward. The Cleveland stations that decided to merge have seen the benefits. Joint licensees like KQED are making progress. But these examples do not prevail in the majority of communities.

One approach could be to abolish the structural divisions along platform lines. What if public media were instead organized by content type? Instead of television and radio, there would be a news and information division, an arts and culture division and a children and education division. Such a structure would utilize existing and complementary strengths, avoid duplication of effort and expertise and allow public media to develop depth across platforms. Some local public media organizations are already making changes along these lines. Cleveland's ideastream is promoting cross-platform expertise in several areas, including education and local arts and culture as well as news. Its content producers are expected to create specialized material for television, radio and digital platforms.

## **2. Improve community governance structures.**

Bill Kling, the highly successful founder of Minnesota Public Radio and Southern California Public Radio, argues that the public media system has been allowed to underperform by regulators and federal funders and is held back in large part by the structure of its stations, 65 percent of which are licensed to universities, state and local governments, libraries, boards of education and other institutions whose primary mission is not public engagement through media. Many of the most successful stations are licensed to independent community organizations. NYPR has thrived after a community group was able to purchase WNYC from the City of New York.

Yet there are also universities that incorporate public stations into their teaching and service mission and provide high-quality news and cultural programming in communities where such fare would otherwise not exist. A solution would be to require all license holders to have a community board, which would be charged with supporting the mission of the station. Such a requirement would provide important outside feedback and developmental support.

Stations should get help in building successful boards. Numerous stations can serve as models, including those named in this paper. Resources, including written best practices, conferences and professional development, should be made available to stations to help them recruit community boards that can support their mission. CPB/CPM could offer these capacity-building services, perhaps with help from charitable foundations.

Even stations with community boards may be lacking digital expertise. Digital expertise among board members is no substitute for the knowledge and skills needed among staff. But boards need that expertise to set effective policy for the digital age. Efforts should be made to encourage both national and local organizations to recruit board members with digital knowledge and a system should be set up to help them identify candidates. CPB, whose members are appointed by the president, should include digital experts.

### ***E. Funding***

To accomplish the transformation needed to enable public media to help fulfill the information needs of communities in a democracy, funding should be redirected and increased. Here are recommendations for increasing the funding for public media:

#### **1. Public media must demonstrate the desire to change in order to encourage investment from government, foundations and corporations.**

“We need to be willing to recognize the need to change,” said CPB chairman Wilson. “To get others to support us, we need to get our own house in order.”

There is universal agreement that funding sources—whether government, philanthropic or corporate—will not provide more money to support the status quo. Many recognize that some of the funds now going to public media could be redirected for greater efficiency and less duplication. Some believe public media missed an opportunity to bring new ideas to the table when the FCC’s national broadband plan was under discussion.

There is also the hope that the crisis in journalism coupled with public media’s avowed desire to move into the digital space will inspire funding sources to make big investments.

Public media leaders need to be prepared and united in making that case.

## **2. Increase congressional support through special appropriation and restore reauthorization.**

Public broadcasting's federal funding is appropriated by Congress and distributed by CPB. Until the last decade, Congress reauthorized public broadcasting for three years in advance to give broadcasters the opportunity to plan for their programming and equipment needs. For the past 10 years, Congress has been unable to agree on reauthorization (and in the past the appropriation often turned out to be less than the authorization), and has appropriated an annual amount that has remained flat for several years.

The Public Broadcasting Act specifies with exactitude how federal funds are to be divided among public media entities, with 70 percent going to community service grants given directly to stations and a 3/1 split between television and radio (see Figure 5). Any effort to reposition public media for the future requires a substantial overhaul of the priorities laid out in the act. "The statutory funding allocation creates an over-investment in broadcast infrastructure, and under-investment in content and an anachronistic bundling of network functions," said Ellen Goodman and Anne H. Chen.<sup>46</sup> Public media leaders and Congress should work together to amend the act so that it provides more flexibility and embraces a wider range of technology and broader concept of public service.

Given today's financial situation, federal budget pressures and political realities, it is unlikely that the overall appropriation will increase. However, in the past, Congress has approved a special appropriation for one-time expenditures, such as the mandatory conversion to digital television transmission. Public broadcasters should ask for a special appropriation to begin offering content more broadly on digital platforms as part of the national broadband plan. They should also attempt to restore the reauthorization process, since expenditures for broadband will continue over a number of years.

This may seem like a tall order in the face of calls from Republican members of Congress to end federal funding for public broadcasting in the wake of NPR's firing of analyst Juan Williams. Such calls are nothing new, however, dating to the first debates on the Public Broadcasting Act. During the Reagan administration and again in 1994 when Republicans won control of the House and Senate, there were moves to curtail and even zero out funding. Those efforts were eventually modified or defeated. The net effect, according to public broadcasters, was a boost in fundraising from foundations and individuals.

By emphasizing to Congress that support is going to strengthen local stations, public broadcasters may be able to avoid getting caught in partisan attitudes about national programming.

Some have suggested other sources for federal revenue, such as a tax on commercial broadcasters for spectrum use, a tax on advertising or a tax on the sale of digital devices. Any of these would place a burden on one sector for a service meant to be utilized by all. Just as funds for the National Endowments for the Arts

and the Humanities come from general tax revenues, it is fairest for public media to be funded by general revenues.

There have also been proposals to create a fund for public interest journalism from fees collected by the FCC, comparable to the national endowments. Such a fund would be duplicative of processes developed by CPB and would siphon off some revenue to create a new bureaucracy. Any new federal funds from the FCC or elsewhere should go to a reconstituted CPB/CPM.

### **3. Redirect resources to support the public media mission. Make it easier for stations to consolidate and merge.**

In its filing with the FCC's Future of Media inquiry, CPB, PBS and NPR said, "We recognize further efficiencies are possible and are eager to make improvements. Additional economies of scale can be achieved in back-office functions, unnecessary duplication of services can be reduced, and infrastructure can be rationalized. This will free some resources for investment in new outlets and technologies and in enhanced service. The challenge is to identify and create incentives to achieve these additional efficiencies while not reducing Public Media's local service, diversity of content offerings, and presence in communities throughout the country."<sup>47</sup>

Some in public media go further, saying there are too many organizations with too much overhead in the system. Public media should pursue these strategies and be prepared to detail the potential savings to Congress and the FCC.

Efficiency can be achieved through station acquisition, merger and operating agreements. Acquisition of a station license requires financing and has been successful in only a few cases. Public Radio Capital has helped in acquisitions and could use much more substantial backing. The FCC should clarify the status of public service operating agreements to make it easier for one organization to run several outlets. Mergers depend on the willingness of two or more parties, but the places where it has worked can serve as models.

Public television could realize new income if the FCC were to allow stations to lease excess digital capacity, as proposed in the CPB-PBS-NPR filing. Public radio could also make use of excess digital capacity with the FCC's clearance.

### **4. Seek foundation partners to jump-start the process. Engage community foundations to support fulfillment of community information needs.**

The Carnegie Corporation and Ford Foundation were invaluable to the launch of public broadcasting. The Knight Foundation is playing a key role in today's discussions of the information needs of communities, which include the role of public media. Major philanthropic organizations, which have a stake in preserving the fabric of American democracy, can help transform public broadcasting into public media.

Local and regional foundations have a stake as well in supporting public media close to home. It may take a refocusing along the lines of Cleveland's ideastream to engage that support.

Some feel the dollars are too small, but others, including APM's Bill Kling, believe this is an untapped source that needs to be approached with big ideas. "According to our internal analysis," Kling said, "if the top 25 markets all raised (funds) at the same rate as the top performer, they'd raise \$410 million a year more—or enough to pay for 160 reporters in each of those cities." That amount would be more than the entire annual federal appropriation to CPB.

### **5. Keep digital content free.**

In commercial media circles the debate is raging about where and how to put content behind a pay wall. The reasoning is that, by giving away content for free, legacy news organizations are courting disaster.

No matter what decisions legacy media make regarding paid content, for now public media leaders are promising to keep public content free and accessible to all. This is the premise behind the Public Media Platform: content produced on behalf of the public belongs to the public. That conclusion is in keeping with the history and mission of this country's public media.

Still, public media should also be able to experiment with aftermarket sale or license of content they create in order to create new revenue streams. Revenue that sustains public media is also in the public interest.

## **Who Should Do What**

To carry out the proposals in this paper, the organizations involved will need to undertake specific tasks. Here is a plan of action for stakeholders.

### ***Public Media***

Leaders of public media at the national and local level face the most important task: to relinquish the status quo and embrace a new definition of public media that is more local, more inclusive and more interactive. Only public media leaders can convince government and philanthropic supporters that they have a new vision worthy of their investment.

This begins with a transformation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting into the Corporation for Public Media (CPM). It encompasses a new agreement with Congress on the funding mechanism in the Public Broadcasting Act. It includes playing a proactive role in the establishment of national broadband policy and initiating efforts to make public media more efficient. It also means welcoming new players under the public media umbrella, including non-profits providing news, information and community service exclusively in the digital space.

At the local level, public media leaders should develop journalistic capacity by obtaining the necessary funding and hiring journalists who bring digital skills, diversity and content expertise. They should support journalists with strengthened editorial oversight and professional development opportunities. They should create a culture that supports independent, fearless journalism that serves their communities.

Local public media leaders should move full force into digital media and acquire the necessary expertise and resources. They should participate in the creation of the Public Media Platform and foster new relationships with their communities through resources such as Public Insight Network. They should redirect funding from outmoded broadcast infrastructure into digital technology. They should develop metrics to measure progress in creating community.

Local public media leaders should establish close and beneficial ties to their communities. This is essential to developing the level of financial support that will be necessary to sustain stronger local operations. University and other institutional licensees should move to establish community boards to create local support. Local public media leaders should develop partnerships with other public media entities, with non-profit and for-profit journalism enterprises and with journalism schools.

Public television leaders should determine what role they can play in meeting the information needs of their communities. They should convene, under CPM auspices, a working group similar to public radio's Grow the Audience project, to assess options and decide on a plan of action.

At the national level, CPM should lead the transformation by creating new standards and new incentives. It should continue seeding worthwhile projects such as the Local Journalism Centers and the Public Media Corps. It should work cooperatively with Congress to redefine public media for the 21st century. NPR and PBS should build on their progress in making digital tools available to local stations and to the public. They should work to strengthen local stations as sources of news and information for their communities and help build journalism capacity at the local level. They also should continue to improve and strengthen news and information programming at the national level to serve as a model and a beacon.

### ***Federal Communications Commission***

The Federal Communications Commission should adopt broadband policies that recognize public media's unique place in our democracy. Policies could include a guarantee of public media access to broadband delivery systems and advantageous rates for streaming video and audio. The FCC should adopt policies that ease station acquisition, mergers and operating agreements. The FCC should clarify the status of public service operating agreements to make it easier for one

organization to run several outlets. The FCC should allow public television stations to lease excess digital capacity and clear public radio stations to make use of excess digital capacity. If the FCC decides to redirect some of the fees it collects to support the information needs of communities, it should consider establishing a fund, similar to Public Radio Capital, to support station acquisition.

### ***Congress***

Congress should move swiftly to update the Public Broadcasting Act for the 21st century. It should change the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to the Corporation for Public Media and amend the funding allocations to reflect digital reality. It should appropriate additional monies and enact appropriate laws to enable public radio and television to participate fully in the drive for universal broadband. It should amend copyright law to enable public media to realize its potential in the digital space. It should fund the creation of a national Public Media Corps to promote digital literacy.

### ***Philanthropy***

Major foundations should create a fund to seed the ambitious goal of adding more journalists to local public media. Whether the initial goal is 1,000 journalists across the country or 4,000 in the top 25 markets, such an investment would be in keeping with the history of generous philanthropic support for public broadcasting at another transformative time. Likewise, local and regional foundations should invest in public media as one of the pillars of connection and civil discourse in their communities.

### ***Universities and Journalism Schools***

As license-holders of 47 percent of public radio and television stations, universities are in a powerful position to support change. Universities should recognize the importance of public media in their communities and allow the establishment of community boards to garner resources for local stations. Universities should forge ties between stations and journalism programs, where they exist on campus. University stations can offer internships and a lab experience for students practicing their journalism skills. Journalism schools should incorporate public media experience into their programs and contribute research and programming skills.

## **Conclusion**

Public media can play a vital role in meeting the future information needs of communities. That will require outside support in terms of more federal and philanthropic funding and regulatory and legislative action. But it will also take leadership on the part of the public broadcasting community to tear down barriers, open up to new non-profit information providers, embrace digital platforms, eliminate duplication and make the case for more resources. By building on existing strengths, replicating successful models, nurturing experimentation and developing leadership capacity, public broadcasting can transform itself into public service media that meet the needs of the American people. Then the words of E.B. White will be just as relevant and inspiring in the 21st century as they were more than four decades ago.



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# APPENDIX



## About the Author

Barbara Cochran is the Curtis B. Hurley Chair of Public Affairs Journalism at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. As a member of the school's Washington program faculty, Cochran engages in programs of research, consulting and training aimed at improving the practice of journalism. She works with the Committee of Concerned Journalists, also located in Washington, and the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute.

She served for 12 years as president of the Radio Television Digital News Association, the world's largest professional organization of journalists working in television, radio, online and other electronic media, becoming president emeritus on her retirement in 2009. Before joining RTNDA, she worked in journalism in Washington for 28 years. She held leadership positions in newspapers, radio and television, serving as managing editor of the *Washington Star*, vice president for news at National Public Radio, executive producer of NBC's *Meet the Press* and vice president and Washington bureau chief of CBS News.

At NPR, she directed the creation of *Morning Edition*, which, along with *All Things Considered*, received the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award during her tenure.

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The Program's Executive Director is Charles M. Firestone, who has served in that capacity since 1989, and has also served as Executive Vice President of the Aspen Institute for three years. He is a communications attorney and law professor, formerly director of the UCLA Communications Law Program, first president of the Los Angeles Board of Telecommunications Commissioners, and an appellate attorney for the U.S. Federal Communications Commission.