

# PUBLIC BROADCASTING & PUBLIC AFFAIRS:

Opportunities and challenges for public broadcasting's role in provisioning the public with news and public affairs

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

U.S. public broadcasting faces profound challenges as a mass media service entering a disintermediated digital era. It approaches those challenges with both chronic strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths include a clutch of highly visible and trusted brand names (PBS, NPR, *Sesame Street*), a creative and far-flung talent network, and a highly balkanized structure, which invests funders and audiences in the survival of individual entities, especially local stations. Its weaknesses include an audience that skews old and is getting older, particularly for television; a reputation for elitist programming; and that same highly balkanized structure, which inhibits decision making to respond to the changing environment.

In an increasingly segmented media marketplace, public broadcasters still aim to educate and inform the broadest possible swath of Americans. Radio in particular has succeeded in attracting new listeners in the past decade. But programmers and stations struggle to both maintain current audiences and engage new ones across a quick-shifting array of new platforms and devices.

Public radio and television operate in very different ways, and their record of providing public affairs and news is also very different. Public radio has consistently since 1969 provided high-quality, innovative, daily news programs, which are the backbone of the service and attract the largest proportion of listeners. Competition among public radio program services has helped to increase the diversity of voices and formats. Meanwhile, public television—in part because it has been under much tighter scrutiny politically—has struggled with news provision. Its one daily news program, an hour long, is in a traditionalist format and is produced by an independent production house. Public affairs documentaries and series struggle for placement in a service better recognized and appreciated for its children's and cultural programming.

News and public affairs provision is a core function of public broadcasting, and garners enormous trust ratings—a feature that is in short supply in participatory news media. However, future news and public affairs programming will require genuine interactivity and listener/viewer choice and participation to remain relevant. This has been a major obstacle for a service that has been rewarded for its feudalistic stability. Efforts to develop nationwide public affairs programming for the emerging digital TV channels have been stymied by a lack of funds and the complications of implementing

shared solutions in sharply different local contexts. Public broadcasters have conducted isolated experiments in interactive and participatory media, with mixed results. Tools and funds for reliably measuring the impact of such projects have not materialized, and commercial yardsticks do not track the public benefits of such media. Public broadcasters have also proposed a variety of common digital platforms, without consensus or resolution. Although several organizations are helping stations to coordinate around solutions, no single organization is positioned to lead the full range of public broadcasting entities through digital and online transitions.

Public broadcasting's resources and assets are valuable today and hold great potential value for tomorrow's nonprofit online media sector. The sector will have to transform to fulfill that potential—the question is how. Scenarios include going local, going national, partnering up, or fighting it out, each of which offers opportunities to those who care about preserving the public service media.

## INTRODUCTION

U.S. public broadcasting is a rare animal internationally; compared to the majority of state or public broadcasters around the world, the government funding it gets is tiny and its role in defining the national news agenda intermittent. Yet it is actively scrutinized as a potential source of liberal bias by conservative legislators and watchdogs, who loudly criticize it as a waste of taxpayer money. U.S. public broadcasting developed in a profoundly bifurcated way, with radio and television evolving separately into highly distinct services. Both, however, were created and exist within the U.S. mass media regulatory regime. Both operate on spectrum reserved by the FCC specifically for noncommercial (*not* “public”) broadcasting. Both play significant, though different, roles in shaping the American news and public affairs diet, and both provide news and public affairs programming that are rarely matched in the commercial environment.

## HISTORY

Public broadcasting has always been a small, niche service in the United States. In fact, it was created as an afterthought. Legislators, helped along by corporate lobbyists, between

1927 and 1934 decided the shape of U.S. electronic media. Commercial enterprises were given permission, through licenses, to use designated parts of the spectrum for profit, by selling advertising time. Other interests—labor unions, religious organizations, educators, private foundations—had warned that such commercial use would eliminate community and educational use of the spectrum. Such warnings proved correct and in 1938, a small part of the FM spectrum—then pioneer territory, and generally regarded as worthless—was reserved for educational broadcasters, as a sop to the most well-organized of the losers. Later, in 1952, educational TV got a similar deal—reserved spectrum, mostly in the UHF band, not through any public petitioning or protest but largely as a result of the concern of one FCC commissioner. The UHF band was then regarded as vastly inferior spectrum, because it was much harder to tune into than VHF.

Spectrum without resources was not much of an opportunity. Many of the available channels stayed dark, and those that attempted to broadcast—usually through a school or university—often carried dull, cheap programs, perhaps talking heads in a classroom.

After World War II and the advent of television, the Ford Foundation became newly aware of the power of media. After failed investments in commercial television, Ford funded a campaign to push for more federal funding for the non-commercial television space that had opened up in 1952. These efforts triggered the interest of other funders and were instrumental in establishing the Carnegie Commission on Public Broadcasting, which in 1966 unveiled an ambitious proposal for a service that could enrich the nation informationally and culturally.

The Commission's report became the platform on which legislation for a public television service—this was the first use of the phrase “public television”—was then negotiated. The White House took an active role, recruiting leading members of the defense establishment as well as cultural leaders to present the proposal. The proposal was framed within the goals of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, where government programs penetrated deeply into the culture and society. Pres. Johnson's then-aide, Bill Moyers, who was instrumental in negotiating the legislation, later became a leading public affairs producer on public television. The legislation was written, until the last moment, about television and not radio; only the active and furtive intervention of a public radio lobbyist succeeded in including radio in the

new legislation at all, and even then radio was only allocated a quarter of the federal monies.

The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 was very different from the Carnegie Commission's recommendations. Driven by fears of a politically liberal broadcasting service (here the Ford Foundation's reputation loomed large) and the concerns of commercial rivals, Congress deliberately created a decentralized national service that was anything but a “system.” Congress provided only a small minority of what public broadcasters would need through federal funds, and that through a regular appropriations process. The choice of appropriations, rather than an endowment, guaranteed that public broadcasting's content would be perpetually under political scrutiny. Congress also banned the agency that handled those funds—the Corporation for Public Broadcasting—from providing “interconnection” (allowing the stations to share programming, in order to provide high-quality national programs). This guaranteed that stations would individually have to struggle to raise the bulk of their own funds to support themselves, and furthermore would have to organize themselves to develop cooperative arrangements to acquire programs and/or co-produce them.

Current policies and assumptions about public broadcasting were shaped by the broadcast realities of the time, and have been slow to change as new transmission technologies have evolved. Legislators, programmers, and advocates have regularly framed free, over-the-air public radio and television as a public good, but there are no guarantees of universal access. Satellite transmission in the 1980s transformed the importance of cable, which was turned from a welter of local services to a national phenomenon. It made possible low-cost transmission of programming, and therefore enabled the rise of national program services. (It also transformed the economics of public broadcasting by dramatically lowering costs of transmission for them as well.) “Must-carry” provisions enacted by Congress in 1992 guaranteed that cable companies would continue to carry local public TV stations—a decision upheld by the Supreme Court. Now, the transition to digital TV presents new questions about whether cable and satellite carriers are required to carry the multiple local broadcasts made possible by new spectrum allocations.

Public broadcasting organizations are not poised to protect their long-term interests. If high-speed broadband became the primary distribution mode, then what kinds of investments and agreements would they need to negotiate to

ensure reliable access to their programs by the public? There are considerations all along the chain of transmission—from creators, to stations, to service providers, to end-users—each of which involve various clusters of policymakers, lobbyists, corporations, and activists.

## STRUCTURE

The structure of U.S. public broadcasting cripples any kind of coherent national planning. It has provided remarkable stability over the years, but this stability at a time of rapid change is itself becoming a liability.

The core institution of public broadcasting is the station, operating through a nonprofit entity, usually a university or nonprofit community organization, but possibly a local or state government or even a religious group. It is run by its board, sometimes with advice (but no authority) from a community advisory board.

About 20 percent of all radio stations in the United States are noncommercial—the FCC notes 2,873 “educational” FM stations as of September 2007. But only about 700 are “public radio” for the purpose of qualifying for federal support; the rest are small, student-run or religious, usually evangelical Christian stations. Public radio reaches an estimated 90 percent of the American population with formats that range from classical music to jazz to long form public affairs. Big cities might receive four or five public radio signals. But public radio also serves small communities and rural areas that no commercial signal reaches, such as Indian reservations and remote parts of Alaska.

About a fifth of the U.S. TV broadcast stations are public—356 local public television stations, out of a total of around 1760 TV stations, are run by 176 licensees (meaning that some licensees have more than one station, often within a state network). Almost all U.S. television viewers have access to at least one public television signal, even when they do not get a commercial signal.

Although most U.S. homes can receive public broadcasting signals, the stations rarely act in unison. This is partly because they respond strongly to their local situation, and partly because there are several kinds of stations, each with their own interests. In radio, some 70 “flagship” stations—the leaders of state and regional public broadcasting networks—tend to dominate both production and policy.

Public TV is much more polarized. A few powerful, program-producing stations are extremely important in setting program agendas. A much larger number of small stations produce no programming and simply retransmit packaged programming. In fact, the “big three” stations—in New York (WNET), Boston (WGBH), and Los Angeles (KCET)—produce approximately 60 percent of the programming for all public stations.

There are also powerful national organizations within public broadcasting, each with its own unique interests, limitations and shaping force on the service. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) is a nongovernmental entity funded solely by federal tax dollars with a politically appointed board that is balanced along partisan lines. It supports public radio and television stations with grants to improve equipment and services, research and policy development, and since 1980, with limited programming funds. CPB is also a lightning rod for Congressional attacks on public broadcasting. Over the years, Congress has removed much of CPB’s decision-making power, forcing it to act as a simple funnel for tax dollars to stations.

In spite of Congress’ attempts to prevent a national network, public broadcasting does use national programming services that establish a national schedule of sorts.

Since the 1970s, National Public Radio (NPR) has provided, from its base in Washington, D.C., a morning and evening news service to its member stations. Since the mid-1980s, two other radio services—Public Radio International (PRI) and American Public Media (APM)—have become significant rivals to NPR for member dues. These members, to be clear, are all stations; the programming services have almost no income from individuals. (They also aggressively fundraise from private donors; NPR in particular was extremely lucky to receive a \$200 million bequest from the widow of the McDonald’s corporation founder.) A new service, Public Radio Exchange (PRX), offers an Internet-based market in which public radio programmers can shop for programs that independent producers upload.

In television, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was created in 1969, with the help of the CPB and member stations, as a subscription service for programming for public stations. Like NPR, PBS is also a membership service; its membership consists of public TV stations. It provides daily prime-time bundles of programming for stations, while less well-known satellite distribution services for public television carry programs that stations can purchase individually. Through these services stations get the benefits of quality

programming—far too expensive to produce locally—without violating the law that banned CPB from distributing programs.

Big distributors like NPR and PBS are often synonymous with public broadcasting for most listeners and viewers, and they have sky-high trust ratings. But in fact they are private, nonprofit services that depend on the dues of their member stations for support. Without their member stations' dues, they collapse. They do, however, have a major role in determining what viewers and listeners receive, because most high-quality programming depends on national distribution to cover costs.

## FINANCING

The financing of public broadcasting in the United States is as complex as its structure. Each of the three major sources of funding—government, viewers and corporate donors—comes with its own set of constraints.

According to 2007 estimates from the Association of Public Television Stations, state, local, and federal tax dollars account for less than a third of the \$2.2 billion annual pie for public radio and television. Even so, the American taxpayer pays only an estimated \$1.50 a year in federal tax contributions for all public TV and radio services—far lower than in most other countries where public service broadcasting exists. Tax money is largely used to pay for infrastructure and technical improvement costs, investments that are extremely difficult to fundraise for.

Public broadcasting's large and critical dependence on taxpayer dollars—appropriated every three years—also means that it is very vulnerable to political attack. Such attacks have been unremitting, and have made station managers and bureaucrats gun-shy. At the federal level, picking on public broadcasting has become part of the Republican agenda. This tendency started early, with President Richard Nixon, the first president to experience the newborn service, and has continued. The Reagan administration ill-advisedly attempted to cripple the service financially, and discovered the power of local station boards, with many board members who were Republican, monied and older. When the Republicans won the majority of both the House of Representatives and the Senate in 1994, a long-smoldering conservative hostility to public broadcasting resurfaced with a vengeance. Once again, massive response

from concerned voters who were listeners and viewers—many also Republican and older—was important in checking the effort. The Bush administration perpetually threatened to chisel the budget but always acceded to pressure from local station boards and public broadcasting's national lobbyists.

Member dollars, about 25 percent of the budget, constitute the single largest source of funding for public broadcasting and are the most valuable, because the funds are not restricted to particular uses or programs. Only about one in ten viewers and listeners actually donates. Stations dedicate perhaps 10 percent or more of a station's production resources to fundraising. Online fundraising has complemented but not replaced on-air pledge time.

Corporations provide about 16 percent of public broadcasting funding but unlike other sources, they pay to associate their name with specific programs or to participate in joint ventures. They typically look upon public broadcasting as an opportunity for what Herb Schmetz, the legendary public relations guru who positioned Mobil Oil as the “thinking man's gasoline” on the basis of its association with public television, called “ambush marketing.” Ambush marketing is reaching people who avoid advertising. Just over 7 percent comes from private foundations, which also typically fund for specific projects.

Stations then spend the money they take in on services. These include programs, which they buy in bundles from large providers such as NPR, PRI, APM, and PBS, from stations (for example, *Nova*, *American Masters*, *Frontline*), from independent vendors (Bill Moyers specials, *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, *P.O.V.*), or from public broadcasting organizations (Independent Television Service, a CPB-funded service, which provides *Independent Lens* and other work by independent producers; The National Minority Consortia, a cluster of CPB-funded organizations that commission programs by and about ethnic communities; and PRX, which makes available the work of independent radio producers). Although a limited number of television stations produce their own programs, a substantial subset of radio stations produce local daily and weekly shows. Significant national radio programs also originate from stations such as MPR, WBUR, WNYC, WBEZ, and WXPB.

## TYPES OF NEWS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

News and public affairs have fared very differently in radio and television, in part because of the strong conviction of those putting it under surveillance that television was far more persuasive and powerful.

Public radio has benefited, ironically, from the fact that both funders and Congress have historically regarded radio as dowdy in comparison with television. Public radio early developed a deliberately cutting-edge approach to news through National Public Radio, which experimented aggressively with sound imagery, story lengths and story types and set a standard for its competitors. Although in the Reagan years public radio came under political scrutiny and adopted newspaper-like codes of practice as a result, public radio was never forced into retreat from news and public affairs. Rather, public radio has continued to play a vanguard role in developing public affairs formats with wide appeal, including hybrid formats that combine public affairs and entertainment, such as *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*, a game show, and *StoryCorps*, which contributes to grassroots history. Local public radio stations typically produce a sizeable amount of local programming, much of which is in some sense public affairs or news. Public radio also supports the only left-wing national news service in radio, Pacifica. This syndication, contributed to by four major public radio stations and many listeners, offers a spectrum of news programs including *Democracy Now*, which also offers a TV and online version.

By contrast, public television's early experiments, the most high-profile of which were funded by the Ford Foundation, suffered close scrutiny from the White House and Congress, and resulted in a devastating and precedent-setting retreat from news and public affairs by 1972 by the stations that took the lead in forming the Public Broadcasting Service. Public television divided spectacle and entertainment (*The Three Tenors*, *Masterpiece Theater*) from sober news and public affairs (*Frontline*, *Nova*). The great historian of broadcasting, Erik Barnouw, called public television's signature programs, none of them public affairs, "safely splendid." Most public TV stations produce no local programming, and local public TV news is a great rarity—understandable as it universally is expensive and appears to be a negative in pledge drives.

The rise of cable channels has fragmented the audience over time, and to some extent provided rival programming to public broadcasting, especially in the area of children's, nature, and history programming. Although cable offered new news services such as CNN's 24-hour news, however, it did not in fact drain audiences from public broadcasters' news services. The few that existed and exist had a distinctive longer and more in-depth format than anything on cable. The biggest obstacle to the development of national news services on public TV was and continues to be the high political visibility of TV news, and the almost inevitable repercussions both among donors and legislators in response to anything remotely controversial. For instance, *Tongues Untied*, a 1993 *P.O.V.* video essay about growing up African-American and gay, divided almost every station board of directors in the country, and provided the raw meat for Jesse Helms to call for cutting off funding for public broadcasting. *Trade Secrets*, a Bill Moyers special in 2001, caused a furor when the American Chemical Society denounced it, although Moyers' investigative reporting was solidly grounded in fact.

Public radio has been able to use such close scrutiny as a calling card for membership pledges, while public television has avoided friction wherever possible. Overall, however, neither public radio nor public television has accommodated with any comfort dissident or minority voices (with the exception of Pacifica Radio). Public radio stations only very occasionally indulge in the independent voices that can be found on PRX. Public television stations regularly program independent documentary series such as *Independent Lens* and *P.O.V.* in the wee hours of the morning or other invidious time slots, if it all (Washington, D.C., still does not receive *P.O.V.*).

## PHASE-ONE DIGITAL CHALLENGES

In the early 1990s, as Japanese government and industry invested in high-definition television, U.S. television (but not radio) lobbyists succeeded in getting Congress to mandate a high-definition standard for U.S. television, and to authorize new spectrum for broadcasters' use to make it possible. At the time, it seemed to broadcasters that more spectrum couldn't help but be better. Many anticipated being able to keep both analog and digital spectrum allocations. However, it now looks



like broadcasters will in fact have to return the analog spectrum, while forcing their customers to buy new equipment or lose access to television. Many offered futuristic visions of clumsily interactive features, not imagining the fully interactive world of the Web that was around the corner. Instead, the costs of upgrading have been enormous, satellite-fed interactivity is a nonstarter, and finding mass-media based viable business models for the newly available electronic real estate has been a challenge.

What for commercial broadcasters is a bad cold is, for public broadcasters, pneumonia. The digital transition has been an enormous drain on resources with bleak prospects for advancement. Physical plant upgrades were extremely expensive, and maintenance costs, including electrical supply, are also substantial. (Public broadcasters won extra funds from federal and state sources for the upgrade.) Then comes the challenge of filling the new space, within the already-strained noncommercial model of begging and currying favor. Because of technological innovation, stations not only have space for high-definition (for which there is little programming, all of it expensive) but for multiple non-HD digital channels. So, in addition to the primary PBS channel, stations could offer secondary (or “multicast”) channels featuring a slate of different programs. Due to lack of funding and the difficulties of coordination, however, PBS has failed to produce promised new national programming blocks, including Public Square—a public affairs multicast channel intended to be interactive, dynamic, international, and innovative, produced with a variety of partners.

There are a few national multicast public TV channels already available to viewers through both digital broadcast and digital cable providers. One all-Spanish channel, V-me, has been picked up in selected locations across the country. A look at the weekly lineup for the World channel, produced by WGBH in conjunction with PBS, provides a preview of 24-7 public TV news that offers little to attract new viewers. Programs include:

- personality-driven analysis and interview shows such as *Charlie Rose*, *McLaughlin Group*, and *Tavis Smiley*;
- signature news programs such as *Bill Moyers’ Journal* and *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*;
- educational programs like *Scientific American Frontiers* and *Wild Chronicles*; and
- documentary films from PBS series like *Wide Angle* and *P.O.V.*

The World channel announced its national launch in August 2007, but local stations have been slow to pick it up, and most that have are not in major markets. WGBH carries it, as do WLIW in New York and WCET in Cincinnati, but many of the 27 stations that carry the channel as of August 2008 are in small college towns—hardly constituting national coverage. And although the World channel would offer a valuable service after the DTV transition to those viewers who do not subscribe to cable or satellite TV, with its mix of news and documentary programming, the channel faces strong commercial competitors like CNN and the Discovery Channel.

MHz, an independent, noncommercial broadcaster based in D.C., offers a competing take on world news. Its Worldview channel includes a package of shows that originate from stations around the globe, supplemented with independent on-air and online content. As of July, just 15 public stations around the country had picked up Worldview, including the home station in D.C., WYCC in Chicago, and KCSM in San Francisco. The channel is also available nationwide via DirectTV and WorldTV satellite.

To fill the new digital space, stations are mostly recycling and repackaging existing programming (how-to, kids, best-of), and also using their FCC-given permission to rent out some of the space. Significantly, for many stations, hard news and public affairs reporting have not been a big part of their packaging mix.

Public radio stations are also developing digital broadcast channels, but without the regulatory pressure to meet deadlines. In sharp contrast to television, analog radio programming (the main signal) has moved increasingly toward talk and public affairs formats, with cultural (classical, bluegrass, jazz) moving to digital. Unlike satellite radio, digital radio broadcasts are available over the air for free, but users need HD radio receivers—available in some car models and in retail stores—to tune in to the new channels. The CEOs of NPR, APM, and PRI also recently called for the FCC to set aside a portion of the satellite radio spectrum to receive these digital broadcasts—another skirmish in the ongoing battle to secure and retain the public stake in the communications spectrum as new platforms emerge.

## PHASE-TWO DIGITAL CHALLENGES

The transition to online platforms, of course, has created enormous challenges for all mass media, including public broadcasting. Broadcasting is based on a model of distributing a signal via terrestrial airwaves, from towers to receivers. This is limited by the signal strength, which in the United States was mandated to be extremely local. Broadband communication permits, at least in theory, universal, worldwide exchange of information, leveling the relationship between sender and receiver. Looked upon as distribution, the transition to online distribution increasingly means that over-the-air broadcasting is merely one path for national content to reach local audiences. This puts pressure on stations to differentiate by offering more local content and services—their original mandate and unique value—which is a difficult economic proposition for many.

All broadcasters, including public broadcasters, have huge resources sunk into physical plants, especially for the digital channels they are now offering over terrestrial airwaves. They are committed, not least through real estate investments, to a physically local, one-way model of distribution. Further, they have never been systematically required to do more than transmit content to audiences (although select projects and stations have ambitiously tried to engage publics around issues and communities). They are now faced with the challenge of how to take advantage of distribution that can simultaneously eliminate and capitalize on local connections. Furthermore, this capacity involves metrics that can trace and make transparent all interactions, and tools that can enable listeners and viewers to become commenters and contributors to public broadcasting. Best practices for using and measuring the impact of those participatory tools remain elusive.

In short, if public broadcasters are to thrive in the new digital media environment, they need to find a new or more flexible definition for what they do—one that meets the original goals of diversity, education and localism while drawing the public in as a partner. But both culturally and economically, it is an agonizing moment in public broadcasting.

### Finding and Monetizing the Assets

Public broadcasting's assets are as scattered as its structure is. Most programming ultimately resides with producers, only some of which are stations. Producing stations and producing

syndicates generally act like other archives, production houses or media companies: they guard their programming assets zealously. Those assets do not belong to “the system,” a common term that refers to the concatenation of separate entities that are loosely affiliated for business reasons. PBS in particular owns very little programming.

This dispersed ownership, held closely by its various owners who usually see it as an asset to carry forward in uncertain times, is one reason why idealistic proposals to provide public broadcasting programs freely on the Internet (perhaps limited to educational or nonprofit uses) have been difficult to coordinate. Suggestions that public radio and television simply converge are nonstarters for the same reasons.

Problems with access to third-party copyrighted material are a significant stumbling block as well. Even willing experimenters in donating material to mashup culture—WGBH and ITVS for instance have done so—have harshly limited projects, partly because most programming incorporates some material that has existing copyrights (songs, images, photographs, and archival footage). Even owners of programs do not have rights to release material they licensed for their programs. Furthermore, some programming, especially on radio, leans heavily on blanket licenses that only apply to broadcast; other platforms, such as computers and phones, are not covered in the blanket licenses. This is particularly important in radio for music rights.

A third reason why it is difficult for programming to travel across platforms freely is the ongoing tension between local stations and the variety of organizations providing national programming, including major producing stations, production houses such as Sesame Workshop, the clutch of aggregator services for themes (such as religion and regional programs), and the best known national programming services (NPR, PRI, APM, and PBS). For instance, *Frontline* offers streaming versions of its shows on its website, to the consternation of many stations that pay for rights to air that same program and of PBS, which would like to be a central, Web-accessible, digital repository of TV programming but has not succeeded in getting member stations to agree. NPR offers both hourly news summaries and a 24-hour programming stream on its website, which many stations have regarded as a dangerous move that could lead to NPR attempting to access viewers without going through stations. (Their fears may be exacerbated by NPR's recent decision to release its API, described later in the “Experiments” section.)



A fourth reason why programs find it difficult to circulate on the Web, despite technical capacity, is ongoing concern over control of resources. Many public broadcasters depend on income from educational sales and archival sales to cover costs. They are understandably reluctant to let their programs go, in the clear, onto the Net, to live there forever. Although some have hoped that digital rights management (DRM) could give them the control over their product that they want, in fact DRM—something consumers universally detest and reject—does not work well enough and may never work well enough to provide security.

Though online distribution represents a challenge to the future over-the-air broadcast, it still represents a miniscule fraction of the audience. There is no question that public radio stations in any case will need to maintain over-the-air transmission for years to come to fulfill their mandate.

Some public broadcasting brands are an asset. For instance, PBS and NPR have high recognition and high trust ratings. Program brands such as *Nova* and *A Prairie Home Companion* have significant value; *This American Life* has been able to capitalize on brand equity both by spinning off a commercial program on Showtime and attracting advertisers to the show's podcasts. Locally, most public stations are associated with trust. For specific communities of independent producers and users looking for offbeat content, independent services such as ITVS, *P.O.V.*, and PRX are regarded as allies and friends. It is not clear how their owners can leverage those brands in an emerging era. For instance, people trust what they think “PBS” is, but PBS has no ability to provide new services that its own, internally divided membership does not want to invest in.

Well-educated, loyal, and influential, public broadcasting audiences also serve as an asset. The Web site for National Public Media (NPM), which represents public stations and programs seeking corporate underwriters, notes that public broadcasting listeners and viewers often shy away from commercial programming, and see corporate sponsors as providing a public service. NPM also represents public broadcasting websites and supports “cross-media” buys. Public broadcasters are finding it as difficult to monetize their online content as commercial broadcast and print projects are, although observers have suggested that the trusted relationships between public broadcast brands and their audiences could serve as a basis for more robust online fundraising. Project VRM offers one scenario for prompting

online donations from a new generation of users.

A very real but hard-to-quantify asset is the ability to put together deals among disparate actors, which is a feature of many kinds of news and public affairs programming and is also typical of the sector's high-end arts and culture programming. Public broadcasters have extraordinary, far-flung talent networks.

The hardest assets of all to track, however, relate to the intangible benefits that public broadcasters offer to viewers, including increased literacy, tolerance, and cultural fluency; a deeper understanding of complex issues, and the capacity to act as informed citizens. Such outcomes resist monetization, but continue to both justify and inspire public broadcasters' efforts.

Questions about assets flow into larger discussions about business models for public broadcasting. Many proposals for how to fund public broadcasting in the digital media age have emerged, some of them deeply familiar (get Congress to fund an endowment), some combining the old and the new (trade in analog spectrum early for an endowment), and some of them grandly ambitious. NPR and PBS teamed up to fund a proposal for a Digital Futures Initiative, which would position public broadcasting as the public resource required for educational and economic growth in a competitive global economy. However, this proposal died within public broadcasting, a reflection of deep tensions within the membership of both organizations as well as beyond them, before it could confront political realities outside the community.

## ADDRESSING THE DIGITAL CHALLENGES

Although slow to adjust, over the last five years, public broadcasters have increasingly attempted to grapple with the challenges. These include:

- how to find common purposes and platforms, while maintaining autonomy for different parts of public broadcasting;
- how to attract revenue, at least as efficiently as the former membership model;
- how to overcome the culture of mass media (we send, you do what you want to) and embrace the digital culture (hello, my new ally and colleague);
- and how to ensure universal access to content as platforms and devices multiply.

In this struggle, stations as a whole have, as might be expected, not been leaders. Aggregators and system-wide producers such as the radio syndication services and PBS have most quickly grasped the issues, but solutions that satisfy the needs of all stakeholders remain elusive. Interactive digital distribution could hypothetically allow them to reach customers directly instead of through a station-based middleman. However, public aggregators' revenue is also almost exclusively coming directly from those very middlemen and the valuable audiences they command.

## Technical Solutions

Various public broadcast organizations have proposed, for years now, different solutions to simplify, streamline, and standardize digital delivery to consumers. These have all confronted the leadership and coordination problems referenced previously.

The creator of the peer-to-peer video delivery system Kontiki, Mike Homer, offered a nonprofit version, Open Media Network, to the public broadcasting community. But in spite of some zealous advocates including now-NPR head Dennis Haarsager, not enough public broadcasters accepted the platform. (Many were afraid of losing control, and believed that they would be able to design their own; many stumbled over the problem of undercutting stations and losing ways to reach the financially crucial individual donors to stations; familiar problems about rights also stymied them; there were also difficulties in the rollout and presentation of the technology, as well as questions over commercial linkages to the code.) Now Apple would like public broadcasters to adopt iTunesU as the standard, and many of the same reservations and concerns are surfacing.

In 2006 and 2007 the Station Resource Group convened a number of coordinated conversations and meetings focused on creating collaborative digital distribution activities and infrastructure for public radio. NPR also created a Digital Distribution Consortium (DDC) working group, inviting half a dozen digital leaders from the field to spend six months researching and writing a business case for the DDC. A final report was published in February 2007, but no direct action to create a new digital service resulted from the effort.

The Integrated Media Association (IMA) has developed standardized web metrics for public broadcasters, piggybacking on the free Google Analytics service.<sup>1</sup>

Public Interactive (PI), created by PRI and now sold

to NPR, is an Application Service Provider (ASP) that provides back-end software for mostly small and mid-sized stations to maintain their websites. PI also offers tools to create more Internet-friendly relationships with users—for instance, a community engagement tool that can be installed on a station's website, allowing social networking, blogging and other common features of Web 2.0. PI has struggled, however, to find stations willing to invest in these tools, both financially and culturally.

## EXPERIMENTS

In the absence of large-scale adoption of online standards within public broadcasting, varied experiments have blossomed. Anxious to preserve their reputation for quality and unwilling to commit significant resources, public broadcasters have been cautious about opening up to audience participation. Instead, audience members are invited to contribute within narrow constraints, or to comment on rather than shape coverage. Still, there have been several vigorous experiments in participatory media, many of them focused on public affairs and news. Leaders in this area have included programming services like NPR and APM; large stations like KQED and WGBH, and pipelines for independent producers, like PRX and ITVS. Public radio organizations have tended to be more adventurous in their efforts to directly engage and partner with publics online.

Although there are exceptions, smaller stations have on the whole been slow to experiment with participatory tools. A 2007 survey that the Center for Social Media conducted of public radio staff members revealed that stations have few resources to support online participation and worry about maintaining standards of journalism and civility. When they do venture into social media, it's often through links to external sites, like local Flickr galleries or blogs.

One notable exception is :Vocalo, a project of Chicago station WBEZ. Launched in beta last May, the station is designed to attract a younger, more diverse, and tech-savvy audience. It streams live online, and broadcasts on 89.5 FM, which currently reaches Northwest Indiana and parts of South Chicago. Users are encouraged to post a range of multimedia content, with the chance of ending up on the air. Local listeners are invited to attend "Make Your Own Audio" trainings, and the site offers a variety of community tools, including social

networks, messaging, tagging, and online chat for interacting live with radio hosts. Though critical assessments of the station have been mixed, WBEZ plans to expand the signal to reach many more Chicago listeners.

Even at the national level, however, no easy formulas have emerged for combining broadcast and online content. Shows with a dedicated online component like NPR's *The Bryant Park Project* and PBS's *Wired Science* have recently been cancelled. Methods for measuring the success of social media projects are hazy—engaging with audiences takes staff time and does not clearly result in dollars or significantly larger audiences. There is not much money available for risk taking, and public broadcasters lag behind in developing content for newer platforms like game consoles and mobile devices.

No definitive central clearinghouse exists for sharing best practices for participatory media across all of public broadcasting. Foundations have supported a range of one-off and digital transition projects, but do not work together to assess the results of their investments. The CPB administers a [Public Media Innovation Program](#),<sup>2</sup> which offers stations small-scale grants to generate online content, build social networks, or test out web-based business models. Annual gatherings such as the Public Media and Beyond Broadcast conferences serve as showcases for such experiments, while networks of enterprising public media makers communicate through formalized online networks like [PubForge](#),<sup>3</sup> or less formal ones, like listservs or the [public broadcasting community on Twitter](#).<sup>4</sup>

Training programs have also been established to outfit independent, minority and public media makers with skills in multimedia production: the [Knight Digital Media Center](#),<sup>5</sup> the [Bay Area Video Coalition](#)<sup>6</sup> and the [National Black Programming Consortium's](#)<sup>7</sup> New Media Institute are three hubs for learning.

The [PBS Engage](#) site does aggregate examples of uses of participatory media by public TV programs and stations.<sup>8</sup> But labeling much of this online content “engagement” may stretch the limits of the term. Many of the sites just extend the broadcast model to the Web, offering program schedules, text summaries of shows, streaming audio and video, classroom resources, and blogs by on-air personalities. Efforts to push public television content out to commercial content-sharing and social network platforms—like Hulu, YouTube, and Facebook—may broaden the audiences for select shows, but reflect a similar top-down philosophy.

Public broadcasting collaboration around the 2008 election demonstrates the range of online outreach efforts,

and offers a preview of how integrated, multiplatform public media content might function. The CPB provided a grant for this collaborative effort, and PBS hosts the results on a [portal site](#) featuring an “Election Connection Blog” that points to related content across public media;<sup>9</sup> widgets containing election-themed quizzes, games and content, and a *NewsHour/NPR 2008 U.S. Election Map* that reflects state-by-state voting statistics and provides links that drill down to local public TV and radio coverage. The map, like many of the projects included in this collaboration, is interactive rather than participatory—users can click but not contribute, and remain within the confines of a branded public broadcasting site. In contrast, the widgets represent a particular type of participatory media; stations, bloggers, and individual users can all place them on their own sites and networks. And a few of the widgets lead to projects that are even more open. For example, both APM's Idea Generator and NPR's Get My Vote project prompt users to contribute and rank content related to election issues, while PRX's Ballotvox project looks beyond the public broadcasting universe, curating local election-related user-generated content from around the Web. In mid-August, PBS Teachers released *Access, Analyze, Act: A Blueprint for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Engagement*, an election-themed teaching kit that offers media literacy lessons and encourages students to create their own blogs and videos, and to contribute to Get My Vote.

In late July, NPR announced an experiment that draws inspiration both from Web 2.0 business strategies and the open source software community. It released its Application Programming Interface (API), which allows users to write online applications that feature text and audio from an archive of NPR programs dating back to 1995. Developers inside and outside of the sector can create mashups and widgets, as well as story streams tailored for various devices; current implementations include a 3D globe featuring location-specific NPR pieces, and a searchable interface of stories for the iPhone. Giving up control of a portion of their content was a risky enough proposition for Web-only sites like Google and Facebook, which have multiplied their popularity and flexibility since providing open APIs. However, serving up branded public media content for repackaging presents unique challenges. Though new widgets and interfaces might expand the audiences for NPR stories, infusing them with a new relevance, developers could also tailor content to magnify a bias in coverage, or associate NPR content with unsavory

causes. The API experiment also brings up familiar questions of ownership and station revenue. NPR could only offer access to the programs for which it had online distribution rights, excluding popular shows like *Car Talk*. Members of the NPR Digital Media team are still working out implications and next steps for the API on the Inside NPR.org blog.

A few participatory media public broadcasting experiments gesture to a future in which audiences are treated as both trusted partners and engaged citizens:

- Members of [Minnesota Public Radio's Public Insight Network](#) can join to serve as sources, offering story suggestions and volunteering as interviewees.<sup>10</sup> Reporters have drawn on the network for pieces on heart stents, student testing, an environmentally conscious fitness club, and more; online connections sometimes lead to face-to-face brainstorming sessions. Although the network began as a local initiative, it's now being used to inform national shows like *Marketplace*.
- One web-based project of ITVS's Independent Lens, [World Without Oil](#) not only demonstrated the potential of online role-playing games to spark participation around social issues, but foreshadowed public reactions to our current oil price crunch.<sup>11</sup> More than 1900 gamers from 40-plus countries collaboratively imagined their reactions to a simulated 8-month energy crisis through submissions via blogs, Flickr, YouTube, and podcasts. Participants virtually carpoled and bought bikes, moved out of transportation-poor suburbs, and started backyard gardens—and then reported corresponding changes in their real lives. Though the simulation ended in May 2007, reactions and reporting continue on the [WWO Lives blog](#).<sup>12</sup>

Such immersive, authentic engagement with both audiences and issues is what is needed to ensure public broadcasters' relevance in an ever-more participatory media universe.

These experiments suggest that there is will and energy within public broadcasting to develop more democratic digital projects, and a corresponding interest from publics. But many uncertainties remain, including questions about sustainability,

reliability, competition, coordination, ownership, and diversity.

## LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

This is, obviously, a moment for leadership. However, there is no clear candidate for coordinating any response to current digital challenges. CPB has struggled to provide convening space and efforts, advice and knowledge. However, its actual ability to force change is extremely limited, tied mostly to its ability to put conditions on its Community Service Grants (the pass-through grants to stations for infrastructure and basic needs). PBS faces the challenge that its own membership is divided into factions, each of which has a different set of parochial needs and desires. NPR would like to take a lead in the radio community but faces deep suspicion from its smaller competitors and suspicion as well from stations, which fear that NPR will attempt to package its products in ways that minimize their role. WGBH, the behemoth of producing TV stations, has staked a claim to innovation but not to system-wide leadership. In general, radio and TV coordinate little with each other; indeed, in many stations the TV and radio operations are entirely separate. These significant institutions also face an “Innovator’s Dilemma,” preventing them from fostering the disruptive change that might undermine their core business while leading to radically different models of the future.

Some look to CPB to assert leadership over both radio and TV, but as CPB cannot command, any leadership it asserts would have to be accepted by stations. Stations have not yet come to a shared acceptance that the situation is bad enough to require coalition building, much less mutual action. Some think that revised legislation to implement a master plan for an interactive public broadcasting would be an effective way of breaking the stalemate, but of course without a coherent proposal backed by a significant number of players, legislation is a nonstarter. Political opposition to change from the welter of different balkanized interests, each appealing to its state legislator or favored group of legislators, would sink it.

## WHAT IS AT STAKE

Public broadcasting has two features of great value: highly trusted and useful programming, and a close relationship with

an active part of the U.S. citizenry.

Public broadcasting has historically played a critical role in information provision for a democracy. Both PBS and NPR, for instance, carried the Watergate hearings gavel to gavel. Public broadcasters have regularly held political candidate forums, especially (and especially in radio) for local candidates. Public radio has pioneered new genres, for instance the *All Things Considered* style and tone of reporting; thoughtful talk shows such as *The Diane Rehm Show*; shows that combine information and entertainment such as *Car Talk*, *This American Life*, and *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*. It has innovated grassroots storytelling in radio with *StoryCorps*. Types of public affairs formats that have virtually disappeared elsewhere survive in public television: the long form public affairs documentary (produced by people such as Bill Moyers, Roger Weisberg, and Hedrick Smith), investigative journalism (*Frontline*), high-quality science journalism (*Nova*), adventurous cultural coverage (*American Masters*), international public affairs (*Wide Angle*), and independent documentary (Independent Lens, *P.O.V.*). Innovative news and public affairs programs—creatively adventurous, in-depth, expensive (such as employing foreign correspondents), authoritative—have been a specialty of public radio via NPR, APM and PRI.

Most of the producers who have worked on these programs and series are not particularly loyal to public broadcasting. They would go wherever they could work best. Public television is extremely difficult to work for—too many entities, too many review panels, just too many people to say “no”—and public radio is very hard to get into. The reason these shows are made within public broadcasting is that commercial broadcasters will not pay for them and the emerging world of Internet distribution does not have a business model. The risk that the core news and public affairs programming currently available will decay and disappear if public broadcasting is diminished or even dismantled is real.

Such a collapse would have real consequences for national conversations about issues central to our democracy. Although both PBS and NPR have often rightly been criticized for their lack of diverse content and staff, PBS has shown with its children's programming that high-quality noncommercial content can attract viewers from across the demographic spectrum. In fact, the race, education and income levels of PBS viewers roughly mirror those of the U.S. population—although those viewers currently cluster in the under-5 and over-50 age ranges. Public radio attracts a more elite audience.

The 2007 *Public Radio Today* report notes that the News/Talk format attracts nearly 44 percent of public radio listeners; 72 percent of those listeners are college graduates, and more than half live in households earning at least \$75,000 per year. So, taken as a whole, public broadcasting has both wide reach and influence among thought leaders. Many executives and producers are also committed to the mission of educating and informing all comers. Though newspapers and network newscasts once claimed the same goals, these values are eroding under market pressures.

Public broadcasting may fall short in its efforts to inform and enlighten a pluralistic and contentious society. Noncommercial business structures have not guaranteed that public service media actually serve diverse publics well. Still, the current constellation of organizations is the result of decades of lobbying by educators, newsmakers, legislators and issue groups convinced that media are a crucial resource for a functioning democracy. Public broadcasting serves as an unparalleled “safe space” for contested issues and minority voices, and should not be abandoned wholesale in favor of either technoutopian dreams of unfettered online communication or free market rhetoric that insists that audiences “get what they want.”

## SCENARIOS FOR CHANGE

So, given all of the complexities described, how might these interlinked entities evolve?

**Go local.** Stations could change what they define as their core tasks, becoming a version of an electronic public library for the community (this was a 1990s idea within public broadcasting). This would stress the “public” side of their name, rather than the “broadcasting” part, which until now has been more dominant. Today most stations in fact have very limited community involvement. Their boards, often a good reflection of the locally powerful, have limited expectations that stations will play a role in cultivating grassroots opinion and action. They could become lively, interactive local hubs for community knowledge creation and transmission, building on the centralized programming resources such as PBS, NPR, APM, PRI, ITVS, PRX, Sesame Workshop, Public Affairs TV (Bill Moyers's production house) and others provide. They might even find common ground with other local media, from local cable access stations, which are also fighting for resources and have more experience with



treating audience members as media-makers. and partners, to blogs and community news sites, to struggling small-town newspapers. This kind of shift would require almost a complete turnover of the existing executive class, which is aging and entrenched in the broadcasting model, and it is a fundamentally different notion of what a station is from the role most stations now play in their communities.

**Go national.** A core group of organizations could work to make high-quality, national-level public broadcasting programming available on all platforms, all the time, cutting out the station middleman. This is something that some producers (such as Sesame Workshop) see as the appropriate future. Such a scenario would require finding new sources of income for public broadcast programming, almost all of which is produced more expensively—usually for good reason (research, production quality, nurturing of new or minority talent)—than similar commercial programming. Consumer payments likely will not cover the costs. Shutting down stations and transferring the annual taxpayer subsidies to some designated set of program producers might make sense economically, but such a move faces gargantuan political counterforces and would, if successful, certainly create new alarms among those who closely watch content produced with taxpayer dollars.

**Partner up.** Public broadcasting entities could leverage existing assets—including the access to far-flung talent network—and develop partnerships with rising Internet businesses that need both content and the ability to create content. This would encourage a variety of experiments in participatory media that draw upon the deep and well-researched content so notable in public broadcasting. It would not require extensive Internet-based expertise or culture on the public broadcast side, and results could be harvested and shared to lower innovation costs. Or, they could band together to become leaders in co-developing an Internet-based nonprofit media sector. For instance, Apple is growing a nonprofit section of iTunes—iTunesU—and Google is currently working with a variety of nonprofits to digitize assets—both under terms that benefit the corporations greatly and do almost nothing for the nonprofits. A coordinated negotiation with Apple or Google or Yahoo could invest public broadcasters with some agency in the process of developing a nonprofit information sector. Such negotiations would require a coordinating body that currently does not exist, and leadership that can work well with Internet

company executives.

**Fight it out.** Let internecine warfare and the withering away of old models sort out who should stay and who should go. Weaker stations—perhaps the “overlap” or “differentiated” stations that now provide content diversity, perhaps the Pacifica stations that serve diverse audiences, perhaps small market stations and stations that cannot develop funding strands through production—may fail to survive. Other stations, when changing hands, may leave the CPB fold, most likely for religious broadcasting investors. Local presence may be undermined by broadband access to same or similar kinds of programming. Major talent may depart for other projects. Beloved shows might be cancelled or downsized. Survivors could include major producing stations, major program producers, and some aggregators. The winners could be more streamlined and able to take advantage of a business environment that is more stable than the current one. This would be a gamble, because public broadcasters might also simply end up as nonplayers in the emerging environment. Almost certainly lost would be the now nearly universal local presence. As well, the process will likely favor those who accommodate most conveniently to commercial pressures.

Each of these scenarios offers opportunities for funders and others who hope to support a media environment that includes high-quality news and information programming in the public interest.

## NEXT STEPS FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING SUPPORTERS

Funders and others concerned with the future of public broadcasting could:

**Support and grow local leadership.** Public broadcasting lacks executive strength in the digital area, especially at the station level. With targeted investment, this may be an opportunity for public broadcasting’s own convening organizations, such as the Integrated Media Association or the Station Resource Group, to step forward and offer training. Or programs could be formed with business schools or consulting firm to shape

strategy for local stations. Community foundations are potential partners in such efforts. If the most promising local stations can develop solutions, they can be replicated elsewhere.

### Create a national engine for innovation and investment.

Foundations are searching for ways to both publicize and measure the impact of dollars spent on participatory and digital projects. The CPB is interested in partnerships to encourage projects in the digital interactive area. High-profile digital projects could also attract corporations seeking to associate their products with prestigious public broadcasting brands. These groups could work together to form a new nonprofit entity that would analyze and showcase innovations from across the sector—as the Knight-funded [MediaShift Idea Lab](#) is doing with community news innovators—and serve as a point of connection for public media supporters and producers.<sup>13</sup>

**Foster collaboration.** The fragmentation of public broadcasting is deeply embedded its current structures. But outside funders can help to bridge gaps by investing heavily in projects and organizations that involve cross-platform partnerships or explore hybrid public–private business models. Targeted publics—clustered around issues or locations, and organized by nonprofits or advocacy groups—should also be considered as viable partners for collaboration.

**Back the winners.** Funding tried-and-true brands and promising organizations would save funders from the complex and fraught process of devising grand solutions. The trick would be defining the goalposts. Should funders throw in with those programs and organizations that draw the most eyeballs and commercial partnerships? Or should success be measured in terms of participation, creativity, learning, and mobilization? Investment in new forms of impact measurement could help to clarify the stakes.

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*Jake Shapiro is the founding Executive Director of the [Public Radio Exchange \(PRX\)](#), a nonprofit web-based service for distribution, review, and licensing of radio programs. Since its launch in 2003, PRX has been a leading innovator in public broadcasting, pioneering new digital distribution models and social media applications. Jake has also recorded and performed on guitar and cello with numerous groups, most frequently with Boston-based rock band [Two Ton Shoe](#).*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://publicmediametrics.org>

<sup>2</sup> <http://publicmediainnovation.org>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pubforge.org>

<sup>4</sup> <http://twitterpacks.pbwiki.com/Public-Media>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.knightdigitalmediacenter.org>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bavc.org>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nhpc.tv>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/engage/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/vote2008/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/publicinsightjournalism>

<sup>11</sup> <http://worldwithoutoil.org>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.lives.wordpress.com>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/idealab>

## APPENDIX I: PUBLIC BROADCASTING RESOURCES

### Key Players

#### The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB)

<http://www.cpb.org>

This private, nonprofit corporation was created by Congress in 1967; its mission is to “facilitate the development of, and ensure universal access to, non-commercial, high-quality programming and telecommunications services.” CPB-funded projects include:

- **CBP Stations Activities Benchmarking Study (SABS):**

<http://www.cpb.org/stations/sabs/>

This annual survey collects financial and operational information for all public television licensees.

- **Independent Television Service (ITVS)**

<http://www.itvs.org>

ITVS “brings to local, national and international audiences high-quality, content-rich programs created by a diverse body of independent producers. ITVS programs take creative risks, explore complex issues, and express points of view seldom seen on commercial or public television.”

- **National Center for Outreach (NCO)**

<http://www.nationaloutreach.org>

NCO’s mission is to “increase public broadcasting’s ability to serve local communities and to be a catalyst for community engagement by public broadcasting.”

- **The National Minority Consortia (NMC)**

Members of the Consortia “function as developers, producers, and distributors of radio and television programming that appeals to diverse audiences and harnesses the creative talents of minority communities.”

- **Center for Asian American Media**

- <http://www.asianamericanmedia.org>

- **Latino Public Broadcasting**

- <http://www.lpbp.org>

- **National Black Programming Consortium**

- <http://www.nbpc.tv>

- **Native Public Media**

- <http://www.nativepublicmedia.org>

- **Native American Public Telecommunications**

- <http://www.nativetelecom.org>

- **Pacific Islanders in Communications**

- <http://www.piccom.org>

### Television

#### American Public Television (APT)

<http://www.aptonline.org>

APT develops and delivers programs and services to U.S. public television stations, as well as international and cable outlets.

#### Flagship stations:

The following stations produce widely syndicated public television content:

- **KCET, Los Angeles**

- <http://www.kcet.org>

- **WGBH, Boston**

- <http://www.wgbh.org>

- **WNET, New York**

- <http://www.thirteen.org>

#### Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)

<http://www.pbs.org>

PBS is a private, nonprofit corporation, founded in 1969, whose members are U.S. public TV stations. PBS provides programming and related services, including promotion, education services, new media ventures, fundraising support, technology development and marketing.

### Radio

#### American Public Media (APM)

<http://americanpublicmedia.publicradio.org>

APM is “the largest owner and operator of public radio

stations and a premier producer of public radio programming in the nation.”

### **National Public Radio (NPR)**

<http://www.npr.org>

National Public Radio is a private nonprofit organization that produces and distributes noncommercial news, talk, and entertainment programming to its U.S. member stations. Its mission is “to work in partnership with member stations to create a more informed public—one challenged and invigorated by a deeper understanding and appreciation of events, ideas and cultures.”

### **Public Radio International (PRI)**

<http://www.pri.org>

PRI is an independent, nonprofit corporation that distributes programming to U.S. public radio stations. Its mission is “to engage listeners with distinctive radio programs that provide information, insights and cultural experiences essential to understanding a diverse, interdependent world.”

### **Station Resource Group (SRC)**

<http://www.srg.org>

The Station Resource Group is an alliance of 45 public radio broadcasters that develops strategies for strengthening public radio content, audiences, fundraising, and management. SRC projects include:

- **Public Radio Capital (PRC)**

<http://www.pubcap.org>

PRC is a nonprofit organization that “focuses on expanding the capacity and asset base of public radio,” by helping stations to secure financing, purchase stations, and build alliances.

- **Public Radio Exchange (PRX)**

<http://www.prx.org>

PRX is a nonprofit service for distribution, peer review and licensing of radio pieces, as well as an online community of listeners, producers and stations.

## **Related Organizations**

### **Association of Public Television Stations (APTS)**

<http://www.pts.org>

APTS is a nonprofit membership organization for public television stations established to “secure federal funding and policies to help our stations serve their local communities as effectively as possible.”

### **Current**

<http://www.current.org>

*Current* is the “newspaper about public TV and radio in the United States,” and hosts the Public Broadcasting PolicyBase (<http://www.current.org/pbpb/>) an archive of documents about the history, policy and structure of U.S. public broadcasting.

### **Development Exchange (DEI)**

<http://www.deiworksites.org>

DEI is “public radio’s fundraising and marketing service organization,” serving more than 245 member stations.

### **Federal Communications Commission (FCC)**

The FCC regulates licensing for noncommercial radio and television stations, as well as the transition from analog to digital broadcast.

### **Integrated Media Association (IMA)**

<http://www.integratedmedia.org>

The IMA is a membership organization for public radio and TV stations and networks. Its mission is “to harness the power of the Internet and other new media platforms for the benefit of public broadcasters.”

### **National Public Media (NPM)**

<http://nationalpublicmedia.com>

Jointly owned by WGBH and NPR, NPM is the “premiere national media representative for underwriting announcements on public television and public radio.”

### **National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB)**

<http://www.nfcb.org>

The NFCB is a “national alliance of stations, producers, and others committed to community radio.”

## Public Interactive (PI)

<http://www.publicinteractive.com>

NPR recently agreed to acquire PI, the mission of which is “to support and facilitate the online initiatives of local, community-based public broadcasting stations.”

## Audience Demographics

“About PBS: Corporate Facts”

[http://www.pbs.org/aboutpbs/aboutpbs\\_corp.html](http://www.pbs.org/aboutpbs/aboutpbs_corp.html)

*Audience 2010: Reinvigorating Public Radio's Public Service and Public Support*

<http://www.rrconline.org/reports/pdf/Audience2010-21stCenturyTrajectories.pdf>

*Public Radio Today: How America Listens to Public Radio*  
(2007 Edition)

<http://www.arbitron.com/downloads/PublicRadioToday07.pdf>

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