

Public Radio Background Information

The public radio network encompasses almost 1,300 locally and independently managed stations, together serving nearly the entire country—regardless of population density, income, or geographical challenges—with free and accessible programs and services unique to their communities.

Public Radio: The public radio system provides essential public services in news, music and cultural programming, and emergency services to Americans nationwide.

- More than 42 million people listen to public radio programming each week across all platforms. Public media reaches nearly 99% of the U.S. population with free, over-the-air programming. It provides essential service to local communities seeking vital information during emergencies, especially in rural America where fewer sources of local news may be found.
- Millions of Americans depend on their local public radio station for fact-based public service journalism about their world, country, and community that deepens connections to each other and enhances our understanding.
- In rural and minority communities, public radio stations are often the main or only source for noncommercial local news, music and entertainment. Without federal funding, Americans in underserved areas of the country would lose a critical emergency communications and information lifeline.
- Federal funding for public media amounts to about 0.01% of federal spending – only about \$1.60 per person per year. It is a highly successful example of a private-public partnership serving the entire country. On average, for every \$1 in federal grant money an eligible public radio station receives, it raises \$8 from local sources. The annual federal investment is an essential part of a public radio station’s annual budget, and especially for smaller or more rural stations, where it can account for 30-50% of the station’s budget. This vital investment strengthens our communities, and has special import for rural and underserved areas.
- CPB is a private, nonprofit corporation authorized by Congress in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. The annual federal investment in public media through the CPB is the foundation for the public media system. CPB’s mission is to ensure universal access to noncommercial, high-quality content and telecommunications services. CPB supports 393 public radio grantees. CPB provides additional support to 186 CSG radio grantees in 45 states and U.S. territories including Guam and Puerto Rico serving rural and minority communities; the latter includes African American, Native American, Latino and multi-cultural licensees. In many cases, they are the sole local broadcasting service available in their communities.
- Public radio news is countering the spread of local news deserts across the country. Local public radio stations employ more than 3,100 reporters, editors, producers, and other journalists to provide community, state and regional news.

- Federal funding is essential to public radio's service to the American public and its continuation is critical for both independent local stations, like CapRadio, and program producers, including NPR. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) distributes about 70 percent of the advance federal appropriation directly to locally owned, independent public radio and television stations. Stations, in turn, draw on this mix of publicly and privately sourced revenue to pay NPR and other public radio producers for programming, as well as developing their own local programming. Support from their communities provides revenue from listeners, corporate sponsors, and foundation grants, making public media organizations financially sustainable community-first organizations.
- Local public radio organizations should continue to be in the position of determining what programming and services best support and engage their local audiences.
- The services that NPR provides to Member stations are essential for public radio stations to develop loyal audiences, raise outside funds, and ensure that local communities are receiving access to national and international coverage that complements their essential local news.

NPR: Our Network is the bedrock of information and emergency communications for most of America.

- Member stations and NPR have been working together as a network since the founding of NPR more than 50 years ago. As a Network, NPR and Member stations jointly provide a public service to the entire country.
- NPR is an independent, nonprofit media organization with almost 250 Member stations operating about 1,100 radio stations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Guam. Its mission is to create a more informed public – one challenged and invigorated by a deeper understanding of events, ideas, and cultures. Its nationally acclaimed news, music, and entertainment programming reaches over 33 million Americans across broadcast and approximately 30 million across a range of digital platforms each week.
- Nearly 99% of the U.S. population lives within the listening area of a station carrying NPR news, music and cultural programming. Based in 16 international and 17 domestic bureaus, NPR correspondents report on dynamic stories of the world's people, politics, economy and culture.
- Our data shows that NPR is more trustworthy than NYT and CNN among familiar audiences.
- NPR and Member stations collaborate by expanding local news coverage to underserved parts of the country by hiring reporters in regions that need more support, bringing more local and regional stories by station reporters to NPR's national programs, and enriching national programming with voices and perspectives from communities across the country. This network includes local newsrooms at more than 200 member stations across the country, plus another 400 reporters and editors at NPR.

- NPR is investing in public radio’s local journalism capacity through the practice of collaborative journalism. With six regional newsrooms in California, the Midwest, Texas, Gulf States, New England, and Appalachia, NPR brings together stations to share resources, enhance local and regional reporting, and elevate important stories to a national audience. NPR is in the process of expanding this collaborative work to new regions for a deeper partnership nationwide in production of local and national stories.
- NPR provides other shared services, including collaborative fundraising, to the NPR Network in ways that enhance stations’ financial stability and thus, the ability to serve their communities.
- Stations acquire programming from NPR, and other national producers, that is cost-prohibitive to produce at a local level, but affordable when produced and distributed at scale — for example, international news covering conflicts abroad that keep communities - including those in rural parts of the country with little or no access to other media.
- NPR conducts quarterly NPR Network-wide editorial planning and review meetings for NPR newsroom leadership to hear directly from Member organization editorial leaders on how the organization’s journalism serves the needs of audiences in their local communities. Additionally, the editorial team meets monthly with a rotating group of stations to review coverage across all platforms.

Interconnection: We are a critical pillar of the emergency broadcast system.

- NPR also enables lifesaving emergency alerts for all public radio stations—not just NPR Member stations—through its management and operation of the Public Radio Satellite System (PRSS). PRSS is the nationwide infrastructure connecting all stations that enables broadcast distribution and content sharing with national producers, and between stations themselves. It is also the backbone for reliable, resilient emergency alerting services reaching 99% of the public.
- NPR operates the PRSS on behalf of the entire public radio system. Public radio’s satellite-and-Internet interconnection system enables public radio to provide universal access to broadcast information and emergency alerts, making your local station the single most reliable source for public safety information in an emergency or natural disaster situation.
- In the event of a national emergency, public radio’s interconnection system receives a Presidential alert directly from FEMA and transmits within minutes to the 1,241 interconnected radio stations across all 50 states and U.S. territories. This is a critical service to our nation’s civil defense.
- This system is replicated on the state and local level, providing critical information during natural disasters or man-made disasters, such as a chemical spill. Public radio alerts are even more important when the power goes out and other sources of media cannot be accessed. Broadcast radio is often the only accessible information source in these cases, and the

investment in public media ensures that these stations can be resilient in times of crisis to serve their communities.

- Without the federal funding that partially supports the operation and maintenance of the PRSS, public radio stations would be unable to provide this lifesaving service.

Rural Public Radio Stations: Rural America relies on us for information.

- According to the 2022 Rural Public Media survey, nearly every rural public radio station produces local news with reporters that live in local communities. The majority of stations (80%) deliver the news with a newsroom staff of nine or fewer journalists. In addition to daily local news reports, rural stations produce a variety of other news programming such as regional and state news, public affairs programming, podcasts, call-in shows, short video documentaries, community calendars, and weekly short-form news magazines. They cover issues that their communities care about—ranging from local politics to economic development, to agriculture and water rights. Rural public radio station collaborations also benefit rural audiences with improved access to local and regional news and engaging music or cultural programming that celebrates the community.
- During emergencies, rural public radio stations provide critical public safety information, and may be the only emergency alert system in rural communities. Natural disasters and emergencies are not uncommon.
- Public radio is essential for reaching audiences that lack broadband access, creating a lifeline in emergency situations. Public radio stations work as trusted partners with law enforcement, public safety officials, and schools to respond in times of crisis. In addition to issuing automated alerts, rural radio stations also have the ability to provide live, original reporting for on-air and online coverage and continuous coverage before, during, and after disasters.
- Rural public radio promotes and preserves local arts, music, and culture by incorporating local voices on the air and online. Through music programming, local call-in shows, gardening and food shows, and other features of local personalities, public radio stations capture the essence of their community and common interests that bind people together. They also serve diverse audiences—providing programming in more than 15 languages, including many indigenous languages.

Public Radio Music Stations: We help carry our culture forward.

- Public radio provides a home for music selections, artists, and genres that are essential elements of America’s music experience—and in many cases broadcast only on public radio—including classical, jazz, folk, opera, AAA, Americana, and traditional regional music.

- CPB's support for music licensing fees ensures that public radio music stations can afford to provide a wide range of music for music discovery, education, and community engagement with the arts.
- Local public radio stations help support and preserve cultural institutions, including symphony orchestras, philharmonic societies, theater groups, and historical venues. Public radio's role in music is not possible without a diverse revenue base, including federal funding for local stations.