



# New Jersey Public Media

Providing trusted news, civic information, and  
public-interest programming statewide

**DUE+EAST**  
PARTNERS

**PUBLIC  
MEDIA  
CO.**

**FP**  
Free Press

**FINAL REPORT**  
May 2026



## Vision

*People across New Jersey have access to innovative, independent, and sustainable public media that informs, educates, and reflects their communities.*

*This vision is grounded in a coordinated statewide framework that distinguishes content production, ecosystem support, grantmaking, and fundraising — aligning complementary institutions around a shared public mission while preserving independent governance.*

*This vision was shaped in part through a public engagement process in March and April 2026, in which nearly 70 civic leaders, journalists, artists, educators, and community members across New Jersey weighed in. Their voices are reflected throughout this report.*





# Executive Summary

New Jersey has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build the strongest statewide public media ecosystem in the country — one built with and for the communities it serves.

The state’s information landscape is changing rapidly. Traditional media business models are collapsing, newsroom capacity has declined, and the major network broadcast outlets serving New Jersey are headquartered outside the state. At the same time, the loss of federal public broadcasting support and the transition of NJ PBS operations to a new contractor in mid 2026 require New Jersey to establish a durable, in-state framework for public media.

This report presents a strategy for doing exactly that. Commissioned by the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (NJCIC), it outlines a coordinated public media system designed to provide trusted news, civic information, arts and culture, high school and college sports, increased coverage of New Jersey government and public affairs, including C-SPAN–style coverage of statehouse meetings, and public-interest programming to communities across the state.

Following the initial draft of this report, Free Press and Due East Partners conducted a public engagement process so that key stakeholders could weigh in on how their tax dollars should be spent to better inform New Jersey residents.

Nearly 70 civic leaders, journalists, artists, educators, and others representing key constituencies across the state were invited to join a series of listening sessions during a two-week period in March and April 2026. A public feedback form seeking comments was also included in the distribution of this report.

**Their feedback has been incorporated into the final report and a summary of the key findings are below:**

- ▶▶ Trust, or the lack thereof, in public media and local news is the defining issue
- ▶▶ Sufficient and long-term funding is needed for sustainability of NJ’s media system
- ▶▶ The public must be seen as co-creators and participants, not just consumers, in local media
- ▶▶ A fragmented media system is making good information hard to find for NJ residents
- ▶▶ Better representation, low-barrier access, trusted sources, and widespread distribution are needed to evolve NJ’s public media

Where you see this icon , the findings and recommendations reflect priorities echoed by stakeholders through listening sessions and a public comment survey conducted in March–April 2026.

For more detailed findings from the stakeholder input, please see Appendix.

# Executive Summary

The proposed framework proposes three recommendations: 

- ▶▶ **Statewide Content Production and Distribution** through a new independent public media organization (called “NewCo” for purposes of this report) producing news and public-interest programming across broadcast and digital platforms.
- ▶▶ **Ecosystem Support and Collaboration**, led by the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University and NJCIC, building on existing statewide infrastructure for collaboration, research, and field support, strengthens partnerships, training, and innovation across New Jersey’s journalism ecosystem.
- ▶▶ **Funding and Sustainability Infrastructure** through NJCIC, which will continue to secure public and philanthropic investment to support civic information statewide.

Together, these essential functions create a coordinated statewide system that preserves editorial independence while expanding collaboration, reach, and long-term sustainability.

To realize this vision, the report proposes a total state investment request of approximately **\$11.9 million in FY2027, comprising:**

- ▶▶ \$6.9 million to launch NewCo, the new statewide public media service
- ▶▶ \$5 million for NJCIC to sustain the broader civic information ecosystem

Over five years, the total public investment required by NewCo and NJCIC will be \$55 million: \$30 million for NewCo and \$25 million for NJCIC.





# About This Report


The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (NJCIC or “the Consortium”) commissioned this report to reimagine the state’s public media system to serve all of New Jersey.

Responding to the dissolution of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, transition of NJ public broadcasting to a new contractor, and collapsing business models within public media, NJCIC convened a group of experts to envision a more innovative, effective, and sustainable public media system. Meeting weekly for several months, this Design Team created a shared vision, clarified core functions, explored various governance, operating, and financial models, and developed solutions grounded in state data and national best practices.

The “Design Team” included leaders from the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium; the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University; NJ Spotlight News; Rutgers University; Kean University; Rowan University; The College of New Jersey (TCNJ); the Community Foundation of New Jersey; the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey; the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; and experienced journalists, media professionals, and civic leaders from across the state.

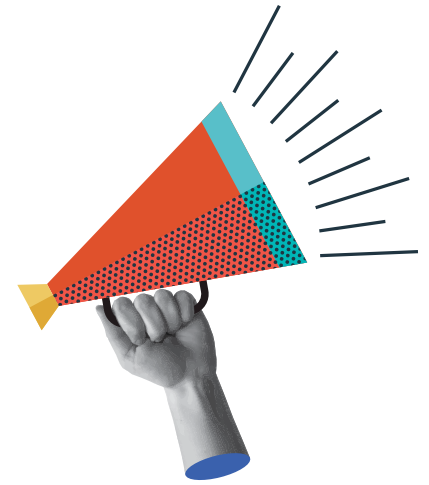
The Consortium hired a consulting team with relevant experience to support the visioning process, including:

- ▶▶ Due East Partners - visioning and systems design
- ▶▶ Public Media Company - business modeling
- ▶▶ Free Press - stakeholder engagement

 This report is authored by the consulting team with an emphasis on independence, editorial integrity, sustainable funding, equitable representation, and a strong statewide news function for public media in New Jersey. While the findings are informed by the guidance and input of the Design Team as a whole, the recommendations may not reflect the views of individual Design Team members. Following stakeholder listening sessions and a public comment period in March-April 2026, this final report incorporates community feedback. This report outlines a proposed framework for a statewide public media system.



# Reimagining NJ's Public Media



## What We Mean by Public Media

Public media is a system of independent media organizations and content creators serving the public interest and public good—strengthening civic life, community connection, and democratic participation.

## Public Media Is...

- ▶ Independent
  - Not owned or governed by another organization with priorities beyond public media
  - Editorial freedom
  - Diverse in funding, information sources, flows, and platforms
- ▶ Transparent and trusted
- ▶ Co-created with and accountable to the communities it serves
- ▶ Accountable to journalistic [standards](#)
- ▶ Representative of the public it serves 🧑🏽🧑🏾🧑🏿
- ▶ Responsive to community needs 🧑🏽🧑🏾🧑🏿
- ▶ Accessible across languages, platforms, and geographies
- ▶ Focused on public mission over profit
- ▶ A public good that requires public investment

## History

*For decades, New Jersey operated its own statewide public television network (NJN). In 2011–2012, the state transitioned away from operating the network and entered into an agreement with WNET to operate NJ PBS. As that agreement approaches its conclusion, New Jersey now has an opportunity to reassess the long-term structure of public media serving the state. During this transition, it will be important to work collaboratively with WNET to transfer NJ public media assets (archives, equipment, infrastructure and NJ Spotlight). The status of NJ Spotlight News, its editorial independence, and its relationship to the new operator will require particular attention during the transition.*



# Reimagining NJ's Public Media



## Why This Approach

This report presents a proposed framework for a statewide public media ecosystem in New Jersey — outlining the structure, investment, and collaboration required to build the strongest local news and civic information system in the country.

## Why Now


- ▶▶ Audience needs and information consumption habits are changing faster than traditional public media models can adapt.
- ▶▶ Existing business models are financially unsustainable.
- ▶▶ Local and regional news capacity has eroded, creating gaps in civic information.
- ▶▶ New Jersey lacks a locally-owned or governed public media institution serving the entire state.
- ▶▶ The dissolution of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and WNET's withdrawal from statewide operations require New Jersey to establish a nimble and enduring in-state structure.
- ▶▶ The political moment creates real opportunity: Governor Sherrill and the legislature share priorities around countering social media misinformation and strengthening civic engagement

New Jersey previously operated a statewide public television network (NJN). In 2010–2011, the state ended all direct funding of public television, enacted the Transfer Act authorizing programming services to be managed by a nonprofit entity and brokered a contract with WNET to operate NJ PBS. As that contract approaches its expiration, New Jersey now has an opportunity to reassess the future structure of public media serving the state.

## Why It Matters

- ▶▶ [Strong public media is essential to our democracy](#), supporting an informed public, civic participation and trust, and cultural expression and identity.
- ▶▶ Without innovation and expanded public investment into quality public media, it will be harder for New Jersey residents to find trusted sources of information, leaving them exposed to misinformation and content that sows division.
- ▶▶ Building trust with communities — particularly those historically underserved, misrepresented, or ignored by mainstream media — is essential to public media's value and role.

# The Case For Change

 New Jersey’s information environment is at an inflection point. Audience behavior is shifting rapidly, traditional public media organizational and cost structures are under pressure, newsroom capacity across the state remains uneven, and trust dynamics are evolving.

With WNET exiting statewide operations and federal public media infrastructure dissolving, New Jersey must transition from an outsourced operating model to a coordinated, in-state public media framework.

Across stakeholder listening sessions, residents, journalists, educators, and civic leaders confirmed that the fragmentation of NJ’s information landscape is not an abstraction — it is a daily experience. People struggle to find trusted, locally relevant information. Many communities feel invisible in current coverage.

At the same time, New Jersey has unusual structural strengths — including annual public investment through the [NJ Civic Information Consortium](#) and ecosystem support and content sharing through the [Center for Cooperative Media](#) at Montclair State University — that make transformation not only necessary, but achievable.

## Audience Trends

New Jersey audiences increasingly consume public media across platforms — not just on broadcast.

According to the NJ PBS 2024 Local Content & Service Report, NJ PBS reached 26.8 million TV viewers, alongside 1.2 million digital and social media streams, and NJ Spotlight News added 11,000+ YouTube followers in the reporting year.





# The Case For Change

At the broader ecosystem level, the 2024 Impact Architects “Local News & Information Ecosystems: New Jersey” report shows that to stay up-to-date on the news:



**56.3%**

New Jersey residents report using a **TV station daily**



**40.6%**

New Jersey residents report using a **website or app daily**



**40.6%**

New Jersey residents report using a **social media daily**

This underscores that residents are not choosing between broadcast and digital — they use both.

How often, if at all, do you use each of the following for staying up-to-date on news?	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less Than Monthly	Never
A newspaper	34.4%	17.2%	5.5%	16.4%	26.6%
<b>A website or app</b>	<b>40.6%</b>	15.6%	4.7%	15.6%	23.4%
A radio station	30.5%	22.7%	3.9%	20.3%	22.7%
<b>A TV station</b>	<b>56.3%</b>	16.4%	9.4%	10.2%	7.8%
Direct communication with people in your area	22.7%	32%	15.6%	15.6%	14.1%
A magazine	4.7%	14.1%	14.1%	31.3%	35.9%
<b>A social media platform</b>	<b>40.6%</b>	11.7%	3.9%	6.3%	37.5%

Data is from the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey. n = 128



**Public media must operate as a cross-platform, community-centered information utility — not a linear channel with digital extensions.**

This is especially true for younger audiences and immigrant communities, who rely primarily on social media, apps, community networks, influencers, and streaming — not traditional broadcast.

# The Case For Change

## Financial Reality

Even as audience engagement grows in New Jersey and across the country, public media is at a crossroads with an uncertain future. The unexpected shutdown of the Corporation of Public Broadcasting after 58 years has left gaping holes in public media budgets.

NJPBS, operated by WNET, [announced in September 2025](#) that the network will cease operations on June 30, 2026, citing significant federal and state funding reductions and the inability to finalize a new contract with the NJ Public Broadcasting Authority for programming services.

This development highlights a central challenge: audience demand may be strong, but legacy cost structures — particularly those reliant on unpredictable public funding streams — are increasingly fragile.

Meanwhile, NJ PBS reported adding nearly 3,500 new members in 2024, demonstrating that community support is growing. (Please see page 2 of [this link](#).)

At the same time, listening session participants across the funder and journalism groups noted that high production costs remain a barrier to entry for many community content creators, and that any new system must find ways to reduce these barriers through shared infrastructure and services.



## Key Takeaways

**As the state seeks to find a new home for New Jersey public broadcasting, now is the time to reimagine and restructure New Jersey’s public media system to better serve the public and sustain a robust mix of broadcast, digital, radio and print media. Centralize costly infrastructure (investigative teams, nightly news broadcasts, back-office functions) while decentralizing content creation.**



# The Case For Change

## News Ecosystem Gaps

New Jersey’s proximity to New York and Philadelphia creates a structural news gap: the major network broadcast outlets serving NJ audiences are headquartered out of state and often treat New Jersey as a secondary news priority.

The 2024 Local News & Information Ecosystems: New Jersey report by Impact Architects documents stakeholder concerns that:

- ▶▶ Most broadcast coverage is owned or produced outside New Jersey 🧑🧑🧑
- ▶▶ Local civic reporting, including municipal and statehouse coverage, has declined significantly 🧑🧑🧑
- ▶▶ News deserts and uneven geographic coverage persist. (South Jersey, rural areas, and smaller municipalities are consistently undercovered relative to more populous, urban centers) 🧑🧑🧑
- ▶▶ Many New Jersey voices and communities remain underrepresented 🧑🧑🧑
- ▶▶ Immigrant and multilingual communities face persistent barriers — language, platform, and access — that limit the reach and usefulness of existing journalism 🧑🧑🧑

In addition to these qualitative findings, Design Team analysis of [ecosystem mapping data](#) indicates capacity constraints in the composition of New Jersey’s media landscape. The majority of outlets are for-profit and corporate-owned, while nonprofit and public media organizations represent a relatively small share of the overall ecosystem.

This distribution suggests that nonprofit and public-interest journalism — which disproportionately supports investigative and government accountability reporting — operates with limited statewide scale relative to the number of media outlets.

Together, these trends point to a system in which reporting capacity is fragmented, unevenly distributed, and insufficient to meet statewide civic information needs. (Please see pages 1–2, 3, and 15 of [this link](#).)



# The Case For Change

The overall number of news and information providers in New Jersey is shrinking:

**731**  
total news  
and information  
providers statewide —  
**down 6%**  
since 2020.

**628** providers physically  
based in New Jersey —  
**down 8%** since 2020.

Just  
**414** outlets produce  
new content at  
least weekly.

Those 414 outlets are spread across  
only 60% of NJ municipalities —  
**leaving 40%** of communities with  
no local news outlet.



New Jersey ranks **49th out of 50 states**  
in local journalists per capita —

**just 5 journalists per 100,000 residents.**



Ethnic media  
outlets have  
**declined 12%**,  
now totaling

**123**  
statewide

In short, fewer organizations are producing original reporting, fewer communities are being covered consistently, and fewer journalists are available to hold government accountable.

These declines fall hardest on communities that already face the greatest information barriers. Ethnic media outlets — down 12% — serve as critical trusted sources for immigrant and multilingual communities. Their continued decline is not only a journalism loss; it is a civic and public health risk.

This is not simply market consolidation — it is a measurable decline in reporting capacity across the state, reinforcing the need for a coordinated, statewide civic media strategy.

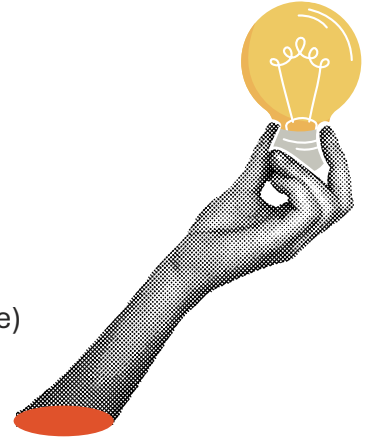
# The Case For Change

## Public Trust

Trust remains fragile nationally, but New Jersey shows relative strength.

According to the Impact Architects NJ report:

- ▶▶ Approximately half of NJ residents agree that local news does not intend to mislead (roughly six percentage points higher than the national average)
- ▶▶ Community and ethnic media outlets are often trusted more highly than mainstream outlets. (Please see pages 14-15 of [this link](#).)



This presents a strategic opening — but also a warning: trust must be actively earned, not assumed. Listening session participants across all groups described trust as fragile, historically damaged, and dependent on consistent local presence, transparency, and the ability of communities to see themselves and their concerns reflected in coverage.

## What's Working

### 1 Coordinated Investment

#### Public Investment:

The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (NJCIC) was established through state legislation in 2018 and is supported by annual state appropriations to strengthen local news and civic information across New Jersey. This public funding represents one of the nation's most direct state-level investments in rebuilding local journalism infrastructure.

#### Private & Philanthropic Investment:

In addition to state funding, philanthropic partners have made meaningful contributions to the state's civic information ecosystem. As of December 2025, [NJCIC reports](#) that total investment in New Jersey's civic information ecosystem — combining public and philanthropic funding — exceeds \$20 million, reflecting growing cross-sector commitment to strengthening local news and civic life.

This public investment model — with clear accountability and community responsiveness built in — is exactly what stakeholders described as essential for rebuilding trust in public media.





# The Case For Change



## What's Working

### Private & Philanthropic Investment (*cont*):

- ▶▶ In 2024, Press Forward New Jersey (a collaboration between NJCIC and the Community Foundation of New Jersey) [received a \\$250,000 two-year Catalyst Fund grant](#) to establish the NJ chapter of Press Forward and mobilize additional state-level funding.
- ▶▶ In its first regional grant round (South Jersey), [Press Forward NJ awarded grants](#) between \$50,000–\$60,000 to seven local organizations.

### 2 Ecosystem Mapping, Coordination and Field Support

- ▶▶ The Center for Cooperative Media (CCM) at Montclair State University has mapped and tracked New Jersey's news ecosystem for more than a decade through its NJ News Commons and statewide research initiatives. CCM's most recent ecosystem mapping identified 731 news and information providers connected to New Jersey, including 628 based in the state and 123 ethnic media outlets, while also documenting ongoing declines in outlet count and reporting capacity.
- ▶▶ Through convenings, research, training, and content-sharing initiatives, CCM and NJCIC together play a central coordinating role across nonprofit, for-profit, public, academic, and community media organizations statewide.
  - [Referenced in the NJ ecosystem chapter](#)

### 3 National Ecosystem Recognition

New Jersey is [identified by Democracy Fund](#) as one of several states where ecosystem-building strategies are being actively supported and studied.

### 4 Non-Commercial Radio

Non-commercial radio — including community radio, college stations, and LPFM stations — represents an important and underutilized asset in New Jersey's public media ecosystem. These stations often have deep roots in specific communities, including immigrant and multilingual audiences. Any reimagined public media system should more robustly account for these stations, recognizing that most radio listening now occurs via apps, websites, and streaming rather than over-the-air.



# A Reimagined Public Media Ecosystem

## New Jersey Media System Overview

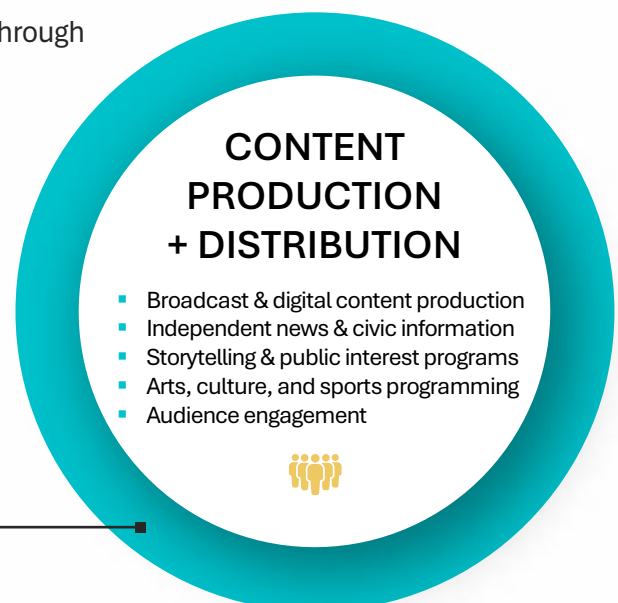
NJ’s public media system provides reliable, trusted news, civic information, and public-interest programming statewide. The system has three core functions, led by three independent, yet interconnected organizations: statewide content production and distribution, ecosystem support, and funding. **The model centralizes costly infrastructure — production equipment, broadcast facilities, investigative capacity, and core functions (HR, legal, and benefits) — while decentralizing content creation to reflect the full diversity of New Jersey’s communities.**

To ensure ongoing coordination and adapt NJ’s public media to changing technologies, economics, and consumer wants/needs, this system will require a coordinating body made up of representatives from the three core functions as well as state, philanthropic, and media leaders. The composition, authority, and accountability structure of this coordinating body must be clearly defined — including how editorial independence is protected from funding or political influence.

## CONTENT PRODUCTION + DISTRIBUTION

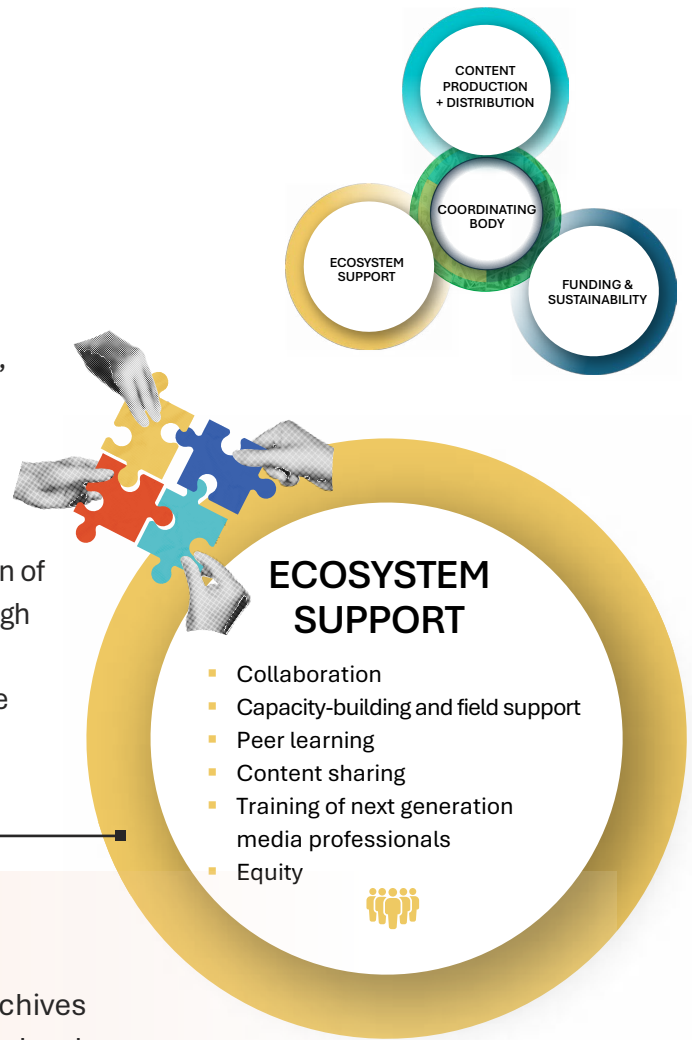
Through NJ Public Broadcasting Authority (NJPBA) and Department of the Treasury, the state will transition public broadcasting programming in mid 2026 to a new operator — generically called “NewCo” in this report until that selection is made. NewCo will serve as the statewide content producer and successor to prior statewide public television operators. It integrates broadcast and digital production under unified editorial leadership, with NJ Spotlight News forming the core of its news operation. NewCo will fulfill FCC broadcast requirements while expanding access through streaming, social, and emerging platforms. Centralized infrastructure supports a decentralized network of community-based content creators, correspondents, and regional producers across the state.

As the state transitions NJTV programming services to a new contractor, several operational questions will need to be addressed, including the transfer of assets, infrastructure, and responsibilities currently managed through the WNET partnership.



## ECOSYSTEM SUPPORT

The Center for Cooperative Media coordinates training, content-sharing, and capacity-building across public, nonprofit, for-profit, academic, and community media organizations. CCM hosts the NJ News Commons — a network of journalists, content creators and media outlets across the state actively engaged in the creation of quality news and information. It receives funding through NJCIC to support its New Jersey research and Spanish translation work, and the two organizations collaborate on select capacity-building initiatives that strengthen the broader journalism ecosystem.

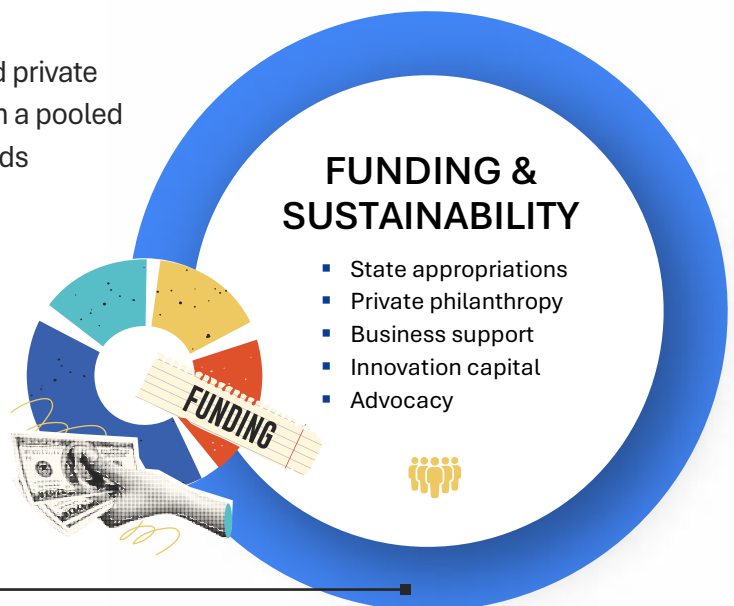


### Transition Considerations

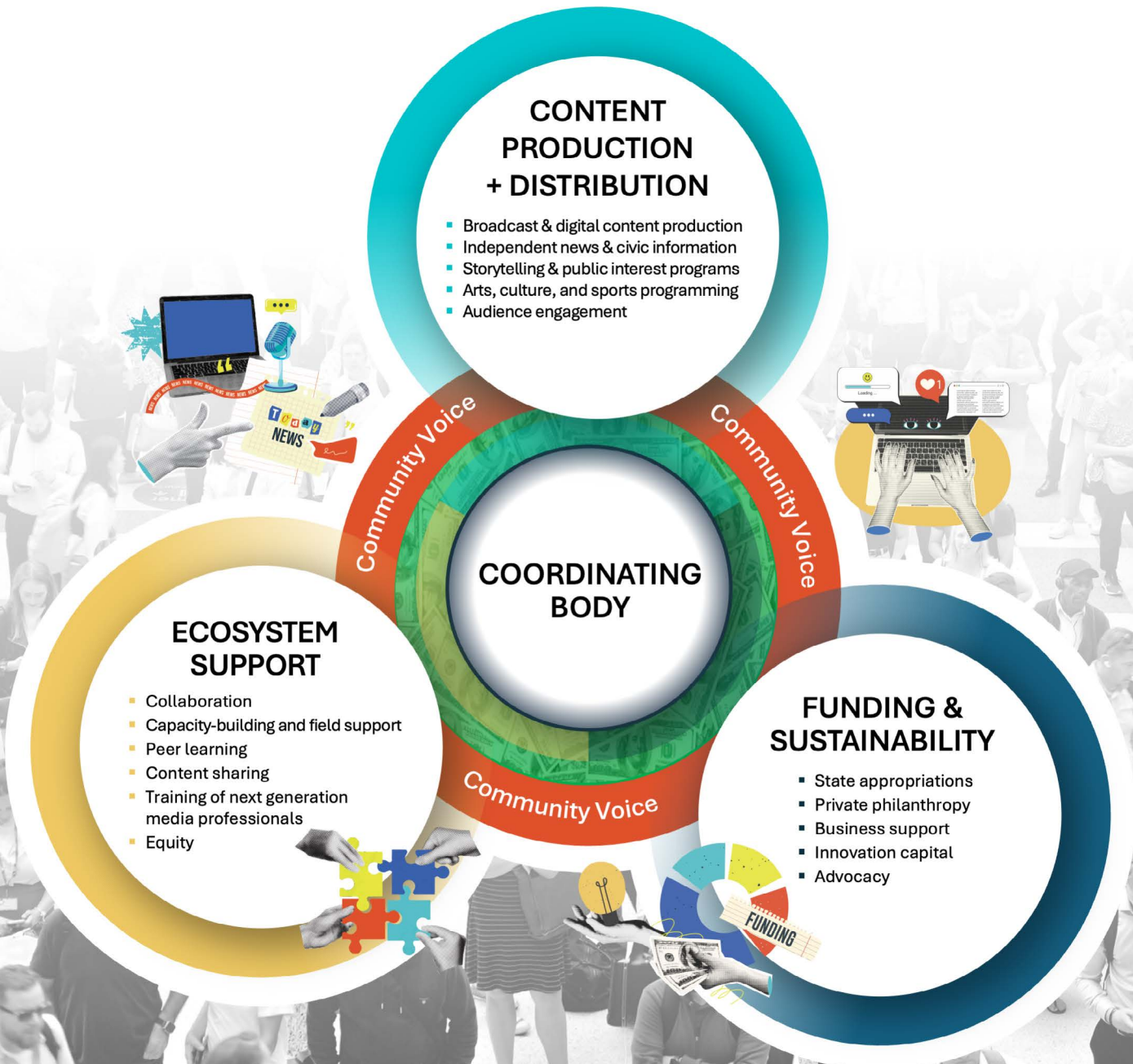
- ▶▶ Status of NJ Spotlight News
- ▶▶ Stewardship of historic NJ public television archives
- ▶▶ Ownership of production equipment and infrastructure located in New Jersey
- ▶▶ Coordination with philanthropic supporters and partners
- ▶▶ Community engagement strategy to ensure transparency and trust during the transition period

## FUNDING & SUSTAINABILITY

The NJCIC secures annual state appropriations and private funding to support public media statewide. Through a pooled fund for public and private investment, NJCIC awards competitive grants to sustain and strengthen local journalism, civic information and public media statewide. It also offers training programs, back office support for its grantees, and paid university internships for aspiring media professionals. Grants prioritize community-based, content creation that represents the full diversity of New Jerseyans— including ethnic media and public meeting documenters.



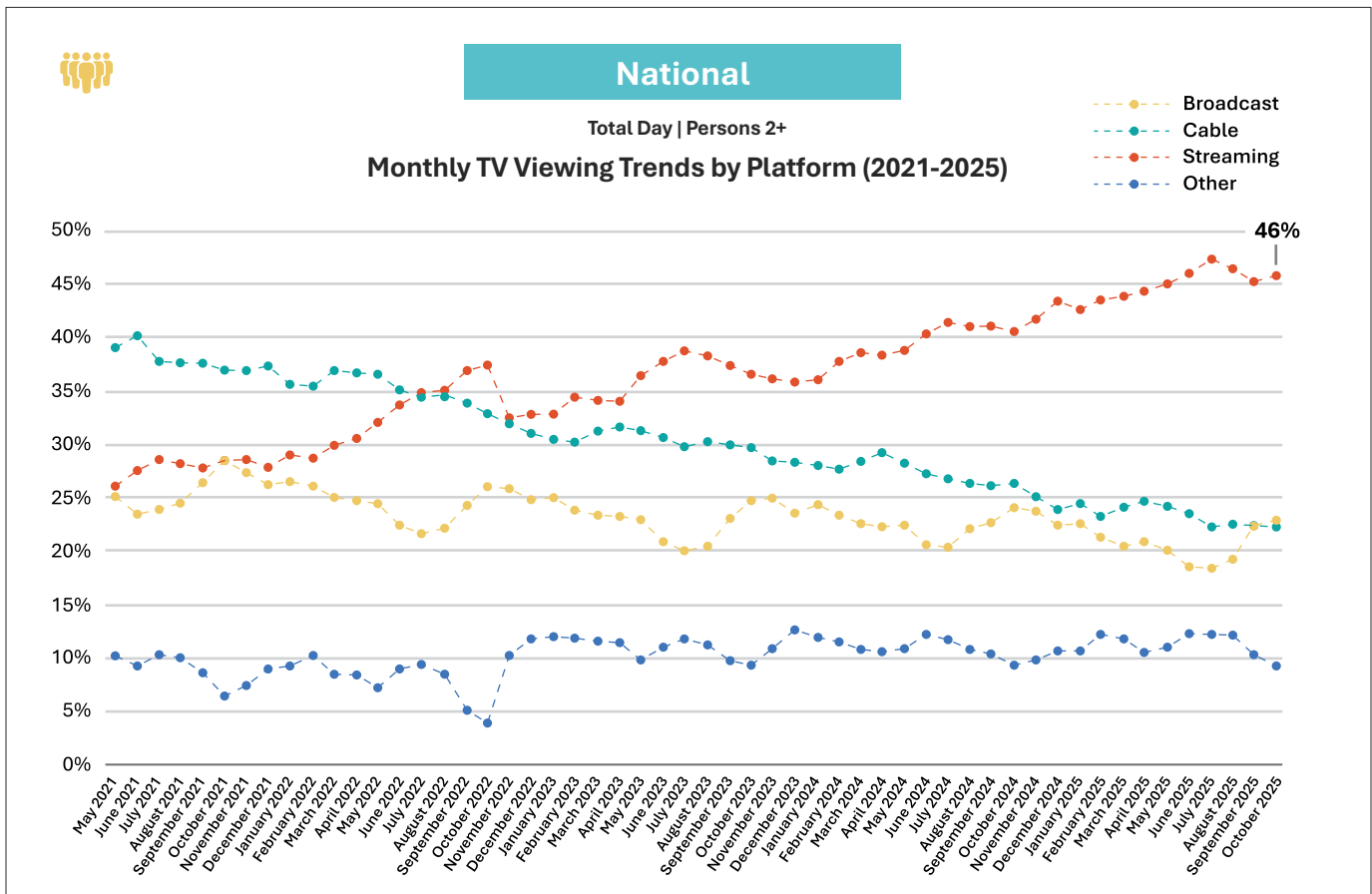
# A Reimagined Public Media Ecosystem



# Business Model

## National Trends in Broadcast TV and Public Broadcasting

National television consumption has shifted decisively toward streaming and broadband delivery. Streaming now represents approximately 45% of total U.S. television viewing, surpassing cable (roughly 20–25%) and broadcast (20–25%) in 2025. Broadband-only and internet-delivered live TV bundles (vMVPDs) together now account for approximately half of national TV consumption. Over the past five years, broadband-only households have more than doubled nationwide, while cable penetration has steadily declined. Advertising-supported streaming continues to grow incrementally, while subscription streaming has plateaued. Younger audiences — particularly adults under 35 — are unlikely to have ever had a cable subscription or even a traditional TV and disproportionately consume video via connected devices and streaming platforms. The 24-hour linear television stream is rapidly fading as a dominant consumer habit.



Source: Nielsen, *The Gage, TV Viewing Trends in the U.S., Americans' Media Habits.*




# Business Model

## National Trends in Broadcast TV and Public Broadcasting

At the same time, public media has entered a new era. With the elimination of federal funding in the summer of 2025, the traditional financial foundation of public broadcasting has fundamentally shifted. For nearly six decades, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) distributed federal appropriations, with more than 70% of its annual allotment — approximately \$535 million in 2025 — going directly to over 1,600 local public media stations. On average, public television stations derived roughly 15–18% of their revenue from CPB support, with some affiliates more heavily reliant on it. That funding is now gone, while PBS dues and national programming costs remain. Coupled with aging linear audiences and intensifying competition for underwriting and philanthropic dollars, the economic model of legacy public media is under significant strain.

Radio audiences have declined at a much lower rate than TV, as the live nature of traditional radio has proven resilient. However, changes in listening habits, the evolution of the car dashboard to include more on-demand audio options, and competition from podcasts have eroded time spent on traditional public radio. As with TV, public radio is embracing digital delivery and podcasting to expand audiences. The greatest trend, however, is toward public media organizations that are no longer defined by TV or radio alone — but that serve their communities across all media platforms, maximizing the capabilities and reach of each.

 Public media organizations are responding by deepening local engagement, exploring new operational partnerships, and broadening collaboration with nonprofit local and statewide media organizations. Most importantly, a fundamental conversation has emerged about public media’s role in a world no longer defined by broadcast technology.

This evolution requires public media to reframe its relationship with audiences entirely — moving from a broadcast-to-consumer model to one where communities are active participants in content creation, distribution, and governance. This is not only a business model shift; it is a trust-building strategy.

## Public Media Network




Data from CPB's Report: "State of the System: FY24 Financial Results, CPB CSG Grantee Stations," May 2025

# Business Model

## National Trends in Broadcast TV and Public Broadcasting

This new reality directly informs the design of New Jersey’s new public media service (NewCo). **A statewide institution launched after the loss of federal funding cannot rely on legacy assumptions about future federal subsidies or linear audience growth.** While a nightly newscast and PBS distribution remain important tools for statewide civic visibility, long-term sustainability must be built on diversified revenue and broadband-led audience growth. A new entity must engage the broader public media ecosystem, leverage the great work of NJ Spotlight, serve as a hub of journalistic activity focused on New Jersey, and align with national trends in public media innovation.

 The operating model for NewCo bridges the gap between legacy and future-state realities. Broadcast, which is still valued by newsmakers and an older generation for its reach and accessibility, serves as the civic spine, but collaboration and digital distribution are treated as the primary growth engine. **Streaming, social video, podcasts, newsletters, distribution, and on-demand access are core channels, not secondary extensions.** Investments in digital product leadership, creator networks, data-driven audience development, and multi-platform distribution position NewCo to serve younger and more diverse audiences who are unlikely to adopt traditional broadcast habits. Reaching these audiences also requires that content be culturally relevant, available in multiple languages, and distributed through channels — including social platforms, community networks, and messaging apps — that communities already trust and use.

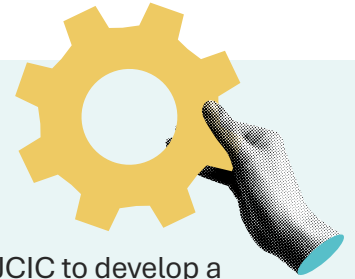
Financially, the elimination of federal funding requires structural diversification. NewCo relies on a mix of State subsidies, expanded underwriting, growing membership, major gifts, foundation support, and close alignment with NJCIC. In this environment, NJCIC becomes even more central, serving as a statewide civic journalism funding vehicle supporting investigative reporting, regional bureaus, community engagement, and innovation initiatives independent of federal appropriations.

In this post-federal funding landscape, public media in New Jersey must evolve from a federally anchored broadcast system to a diversified, state-aligned civic information network. By combining the credibility of a nightly news service with a broadband-first multi-platform distribution strategy and a diversified revenue base aligned with NJCIC, NewCo is positioned to become a resilient, statewide civic institution built for long-term sustainability.



# New Jersey Statewide Public Media Service (NewCo)


Staffing Plan, and Five-Year Budget Overview and Funding Needs (FY27–FY31)



## Background and Purpose

“NewCo” is a placeholder for the future statewide public media operator.

With input from the Design Team, Public Media Company was commissioned by NJCIC to develop a five-year financial model reflecting key structural and financial assumptions. **The model is intentionally based on a fully built, robust statewide public media enterprise — not a minimum viable product or pilot configuration. The assumptions presented here are intended to illustrate the scale, structure, and operating principles of such a system.**

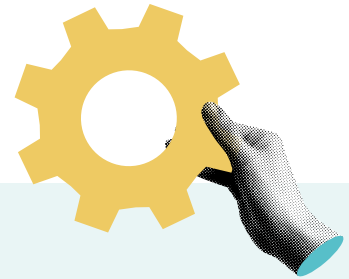
 **This model represents a comprehensive civic media institution that integrates:**

- ▶▶ A statewide nightly news program
- ▶▶ A fully staffed newsroom with investigative and regional capacity
- ▶▶ A structured creator network
- ▶▶ A broadband-first, multi-platform digital product strategy
- ▶▶ Education and classroom-aligned content
- ▶▶ Community engagement and civic forums
- ▶▶ Strategic partnerships across institutions
- ▶▶ Arts and culture and sports programming
- ▶▶ C-SPAN type coverage of statehouse meetings and legislative sessions
- ▶▶ A community participation and co-creation infrastructure, including training, compensation, and editorial integration of community contributors

Lean or digital-only models were considered. While such approaches would reduce short-term operating costs, they would not deliver the statewide impact, civic infrastructure, or long-term audience growth envisioned for New Jersey. The staffing model assumes a high degree of collaboration and partnering to generate a wide variety of news and information from across the state such as arts and culture reporting and local sports. The nightly newscast is envisioned as a bridge to a digital-dominant future.

**The goal is not simply to operate a television service, but to establish a statewide civic information infrastructure capable of delivering daily accountability journalism, reflecting New Jersey’s diversity, and sustaining long-term public trust.**

# NewCo



## The Operating Model

NewCo integrates three mutually reinforcing components:

### 1 Nightly News

A nightly newscast serves as the public-facing anchor of the service. It establishes statewide visibility and accountability through:

- ▶▶ Statehouse and regional reporting
- ▶▶ Election and civic forums 
- ▶▶ Beat coverage (education, health, environment, government, etc.) 
- ▶▶ Service journalism that helps residents navigate civic life
- ▶▶ Public-service journalism

The nightly broadcast feeds digital platforms, podcasts, and social distribution. PBS programming remains part of the schedule, with flexibility regarding scale and mix over time. Over the next 3–5 years, resources devoted to traditional nightly broadcast are expected to shift toward digital distribution while maintaining depth of coverage.

Currently, only a small number of public TV stations air nightly newscasts, including NJ Spotlight, KPBS (San Diego), and WTTW (Chicago), reinforcing the distinctiveness of this approach.

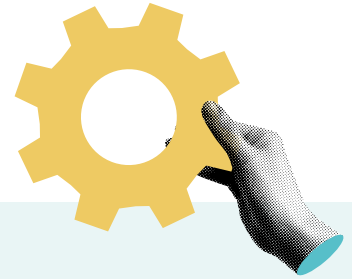
WTTW in Chicago is a strong benchmark for a multiplatform public media operation. Operated by Window to the World Communications, WTTW serves nearly 10 million people in and around Chicago and has developed a robust local journalism operation on public television. In addition to national programming from PBS, the station produces a large portfolio of original local content across broadcast, digital, and streaming platforms. In [FY2024, WTTW TV spent \\$37 million in total expenses, translating into a \\$3.70 per capita.](#)

At the same per capita expense rate, NewCo’s expenses would be \$33 million per year. While we don’t expect NewCo to spend at this level in the next five years, its operations are expected to grow as its content and engagement strategies take hold and funding sources expand.

WTTW is a useful benchmark for emerging public media initiatives because it demonstrates that a public television station can successfully operate a hybrid model combining broadcast journalism with strong digital and community engagement. Its newsroom feeds both the nightly television program and a broader digital news ecosystem, allowing stories to reach audiences through broadcast, streaming, web, and social platforms.





# NewCo



## The Operating Model

### 2 Creator Network: Statewide Representation

Alongside staff journalists, NewCo embeds, trains, and funds a structured creator ecosystem:

- ▶▶ Commissioned content
- ▶▶ Community correspondents 
- ▶▶ Regional creators (North, Central, South Jersey) 
- ▶▶ Language and culture-specific contributors
- ▶▶ Compensated community contributors — paid storytellers from within communities, not just volunteer or unpaid citizen journalists

This model ensures geographic and demographic representation while maintaining editorial standards through commissioning, coaching, and newsroom integration.

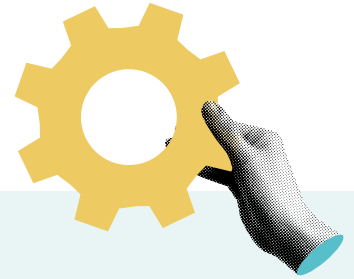
#### **NJCIC alignment is particularly important here. NJCIC funding will help support:**

- ▶▶ Investigative and enterprise reporting
- ▶▶ Regional bureau expansion
- ▶▶ Community engagement pilots
- ▶▶ Education and civic literacy initiatives
- ▶▶ Training of next-generation media professionals

This enables innovation and equity goals to be funded structurally rather than episodically.

UNC TV North Carolina Channel and Twin Cities PBS Minnesota Channel are good examples of a Creator Network. Both local channels air public affairs, state history and identity, cultural and regional storytelling, community partnerships, and other locally produced programs. Together, these models illustrate how public media organizations can operate beyond a single station newsroom by building a broader ecosystem of contributors and partners. Instead of producing all content centrally, they function as regional/statewide platforms for curated storytelling, allowing local producers, institutions, and communities to participate in the content pipeline.

# NewCo



## The Operating Model

### 3 Multi-Platform Distribution

NewCo distributes across broadcast and digital platforms, including:

- ▶▶ Streaming and local digital services
- ▶▶ Social video
- ▶▶ Podcasts
- ▶▶ Newsletters
- ▶▶ Educational materials
- ▶▶ Multilingual content and translation services
- ▶▶ Community messaging platforms (WhatsApp, Signal, and similar channels used by immigrant and ethnic communities)

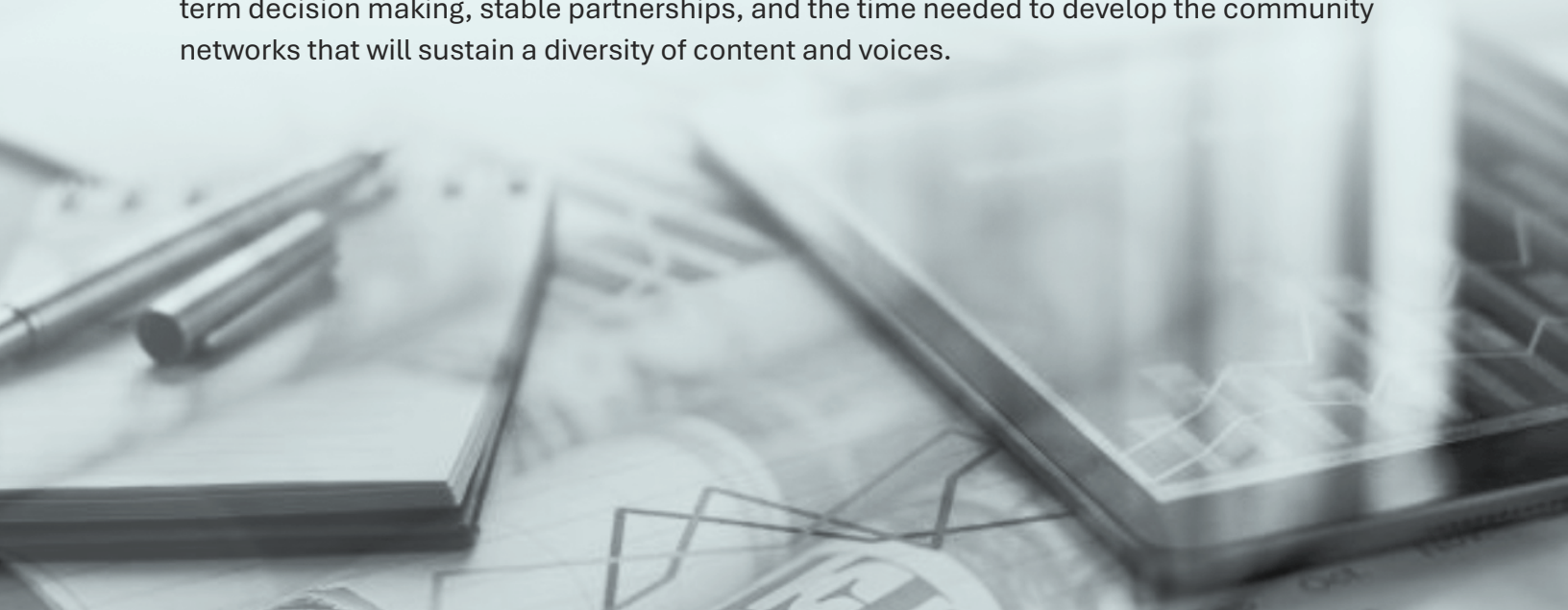
Broadcast provides accessibility and civic visibility; digital platforms serve as the primary engine for growth and audience development.

**Staffing Plan: Headcount grows from 80 in FY2027 to 100+ in FY2031.**

(including contract-based independent correspondents and creators).

### 4 State Funding Support

NewCo will benefit from sustained, predictable state support that will enable better long-term decision making, stable partnerships, and the time needed to develop the community networks that will sustain a diversity of content and voices.



# Benchmarks



The proposed NewCo model has no single direct peer organization. It blends multiple elements that are typically found separately across the public media landscape: nightly public

television news production, a statewide creator-network content strategy, and multiplatform distribution across broadcast, streaming, and digital platforms. Accordingly, the benchmarks below highlight organizations that illustrate these individual components rather than serving as exact operational equivalents.

In addition to the Chicago, North Carolina and Twin Cities benchmarks described on pages 21-22, another useful benchmark is KPBS, although it serves a much smaller population in the Greater San Diego metropolitan area. KPBS produces KPBS Evening Edition, a nightly television news program that integrates reporting from its radio, television, and digital newsroom. Similar to WTTW, KPBS distributes its journalism across broadcast, streaming, web, and social platforms, illustrating how public media organizations can operate integrated multiplatform news operations.

Digital nonprofit newsrooms also provide relevant benchmarks for statewide civic journalism models. The Texas Tribune is a nonprofit newsroom focused on state policy and politics and distributes its reporting across digital platforms and partnerships with media outlets throughout Texas. Similarly, CalMatters produces statewide coverage of California government and policy and distributes its journalism through its website, newsletters, social platforms, and partnerships with newspapers and broadcast outlets.

NewCo should look to emerging models of participatory public media — including outlets that have embedded community advisory boards, compensated community correspondents, and multilingual content operations — as it develops its audience engagement and content participation strategy. These practices are increasingly seen as essential to building trust with communities that have been underserved by traditional public media.



# Benchmarks



The NewCo concept draws elements from each of these approaches: a broadcast anchor in the form of a nightly news program, a multiplatform distribution strategy, and a statewide network of creators and partners contributing to the content ecosystem. The table below summarizes several of these benchmark organizations and compares their overall scale to the populations they serve.

Organization	Primary Model	Geography Served	Population Served (Approx.)	Annual Expenses (2024)	Per Capita
<b>WTTW</b>	Broadcast newsroom + multiplatform distribution	Chicago metropolitan region	~10 million	\$37 million*	<b>\$3.70</b>
<b>KPBS</b>	Broadcast newsroom + multiplatform distribution	Greater San Diego metro	~3.3 million	\$31 million**	<b>\$9.40</b>
<b>Texas Tribune</b>	Statewide digital-first nonprofit newsroom	Texas	~30 million	\$15 million***	<b>\$0.50</b>
<b>CalMatters</b>	Statewide digital-first nonprofit newsroom	California	~39 million	\$17 million****	<b>\$0.44</b>

Given its population size, TV broadcast operation, and the nightly news production, WTTW is closer to NewCo than the other examples. At WTTW’s per capita expense rate and NJ state population of 9.5 million people, NewCo’s operating expenses would be approximately \$35 million per year. While NewCo is not expected to operate at this level within the next five years, the comparison illustrates the potential scale of a mature statewide public media organization as its content, engagement strategies, and funding sources grow over time.

Note: Projected membership and major gift revenue figures will be revisited as NewCo’s membership program matures. Initial projections may underestimate long-term member and major donor potential, particularly as trust and audience are built.

## Notes

\*: [TV operation-only](#)

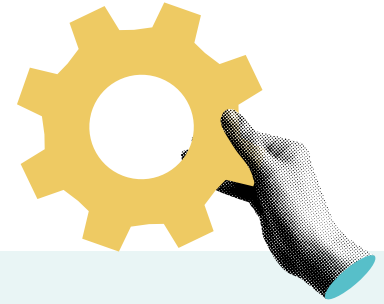
\*\* : [TV operation-only](#)

\*\*\*: <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/264527097>

\*\*\*\*: ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer



# 5 Year Budget Forecast



## Phase 1 (FY2027–FY2028)

- 1 Launch nightly news and core newsroom
- 2 Establish creator network infrastructure
- 3 Build membership and underwriting teams
- 4 Add digital product leadership
- 5 Establish North/South Jersey regional bureau leadership
- 6 Establish community participation infrastructure — including creator training programs, community correspondent contracts, and multilingual content capacity

## Phase 2 (FY2029–FY2030)

- 1 Add Investigations Editor and investigative reporting capacity
- 2 Expand digital journalists and distribution staff
- 3 Add North/South Jersey bureau leadership
- 4 Add digital archiving and media asset management
- 5 Expand education and K–12 partnership capacity
- 6 By FY2031, NewCo operates as a fully integrated statewide news and civic media institution with balanced broadcast and digital capabilities.

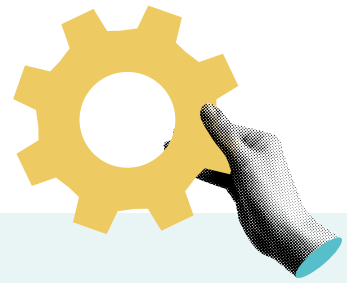
## A System Built to Last

### Over Five years, NewCo becomes:

- ▶▶ A statewide civic news institution
- ▶▶ A creator-driven, equity-centered journalism platform
- ▶▶ A multi-platform digital and broadcast service
- ▶▶ An education and civic engagement partner
- ▶▶ A modern public media infrastructure aligned with NJCIC
- ▶▶ A trusted civic institution that earns community support through representation, access, and co-creation

Together, NewCo, NJCIC and the Center for Cooperative Media establish the foundation for a long-term statewide civic information system built for reliability, credibility, inclusion, and resilience.

# NewCo



## 5-Year Budget Estimate (FY2027-FY2031)

Total revenues grow from **\$2.9M in FY2027** to **\$8.3M in FY2031**, not including the tower lease and EBS revenue from the State or funds that support NJPBA.

### Key components include:

- ▶▶ **Tower rental revenue provided by the State:** \$2.56M → \$2.88M\*
- ▶▶ **EBS lease revenue provided by the State:** \$1.61M → \$1.81M\*
- ▶▶ **Underwriting:** \$0.76M → \$1.65M
- ▶▶ **Foundations:** \$0.25M → \$0.80M
- ▶▶ **Membership (donors giving <\$1,000):** \$1.26M → \$3.15M
- ▶▶ **Major gifts (donors giving >=\$1,000):** \$0.56M → \$2.45M
- ▶▶ **Planned Giving:** \$0.10M → \$0.25M

\* EBS/tower revenue, which is state-allocated but is not a new appropriation — represents existing state infrastructure revenue being redirected to support the new entity.

Total expenses (NewCo, not including NJPBA) grow from **\$14.0M in FY2027** to **\$17.6M in FY2031**.

### Major cost drivers include:

- ▶▶ **Salaries and Benefits:** \$9.46M → \$12.72M
- ▶▶ **PBS dues:** \$1.18M → \$1.30M
- ▶▶ **Program production/acquisition that includes all non-PBS programming:** \$1.0M annually
- ▶▶ **Facilities (rent, utilities, maintenance):** approx. \$0.80M → \$0.88M
- ▶▶ **Technology, streaming, and master control infrastructure**
- ▶▶ **Fundraising and administrative support services**

## Operating Gap and Sustainability

The projection reflects annual operating deficits ranging from approximately \$4.6M to \$6.9M across the five-year period, with a cumulative funding gap of approximately \$30M plus \$3.5M in working capital.

This gap reflects the cost of operating a fully scaled statewide nightly news service combined with a creator network and digital distribution infrastructure.


Achieving long-term sustainability will require NewCo to build genuine community trust and engagement — not just audience size. Member and donor revenue, which represents the primary path to closing the operating gap over time, is directly tied to whether New Jersey residents feel that NewCo reflects their communities, serves their information needs, and earns their financial support.

# NewCo Budget

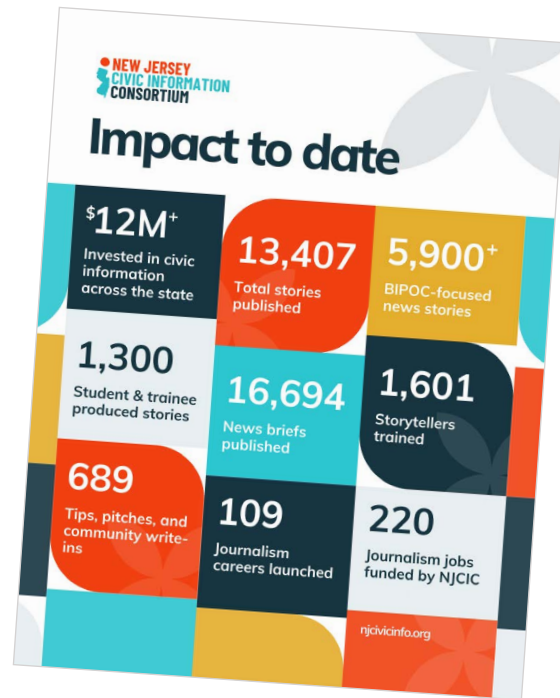
Cash Flow Projections for the Hybrid Model Base -Assumptions- (NewCo and NJPBA Combined)					
	NewCo Projections				
	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
	Jul. 26-Jun. 27	Jul. 27-Jun. 28	Jul. 27-Jun. 29	Jul. 27-Jun. 30	Jul. 27-Jun. 31
<b>REVENUES AND SUPPORT</b>					
Tower Rental and EBS Lease provided by the State	4,170,000	4,290,000	4,410,000	4,550,000	4,690,000
Underwriting	760,000	980,000	1,200,000	1,430,000	1,650,000
Foundations	250,000	500,000	600,000	700,000	800,000
Membership	1,260,000	1,720,000	2,200,000	2,670,000	3,150,000
Major Individual Gifts	560,000	920,000	1,350,000	1,850,000	2,450,000
Planned Giving	100,000	150,000	200,000	250,000	250,000
Other	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL REVENUES AND SUPPORT</b>	<b>7,100,000</b>	<b>8,560,000</b>	<b>9,960,000</b>	<b>11,450,000</b>	<b>12,990,000</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
<b>Headcount</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>97</b>
Salaries and Wages	7,260,000	8,080,000	8,690,000	9,200,000	9,640,000
Benefits, Payroll Taxes, Commissions	2,200,000	2,550,000	2,750,000	2,910,000	3,080,000
PBS Dues	1,180,000	1,200,000	1,240,000	1,270,000	1,300,000
Program Production and Acquisition	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
Rent	600,000	620,000	630,000	650,000	660,000
Utilities and Facility Maintenance	200,000	210,000	210,000	220,000	220,000
Outsourced Services	400,000	500,000	510,000	510,000	510,000
Supplies, Premiums, Postage, Printing	150,000	160,000	180,000	190,000	200,000
Telephone and Transmission	200,000	210,000	210,000	220,000	220,000
Market Research	250,000	-	-	-	-
Other Operating Expenses	600,000	630,000	670,000	690,000	740,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>14,040,000</b>	<b>15,160,000</b>	<b>16,090,000</b>	<b>16,860,000</b>	<b>17,570,000</b>
<b>Funding Gap</b>	<b>(6,940,000)</b>	<b>(6,600,000)</b>	<b>(6,130,000)</b>	<b>(5,410,000)</b>	<b>(4,580,000)</b>
<b>Cumulative Funding Gap</b>	<b>(6,940,000)</b>	<b>(13,540,000)</b>	<b>(19,670,000)</b>	<b>(25,080,000)</b>	<b>(29,660,000)</b>

The total NJ state request for FY2027 is \$11,940,000 (\$6,940,000 for NewCo + \$5,000,000 for NJCIC). Over five years, total state investment is projected at \$55 million. The funding gap for NewCo narrows consistently after FY2027 as the organization grows its revenue from individual giving, grants, and sponsorships over time.

# NJCIC Overview and Funding Needs

 The [New Jersey Civic Information Consortium](#) (NJCIC) is a first-in-the-nation initiative designed to strengthen local journalism and civic information across the state. As an independent 501(c)(3), the Consortium supports media outlets, journalism internships, sustainability efforts, and other initiatives **to address equity, news deserts, misinformation and declining civic engagement in New Jersey communities.**

To support its critical grantmaking function and expanded role with NewCo, a state appropriation of \$5 million is recommended. To date, state funding combined with foundation support has enabled the Consortium to award more than \$12 million in grants.

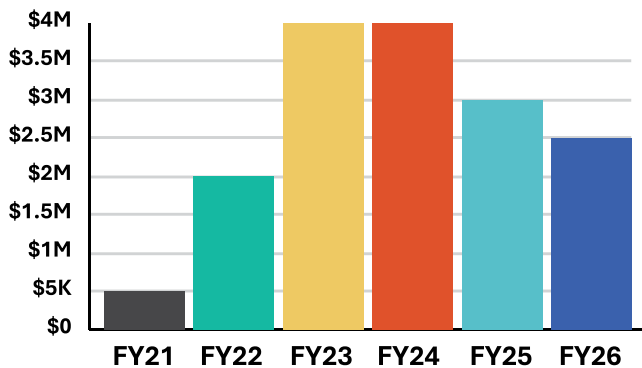


## Impact

The Consortium currently supports 50 grantees, including local media outlets, journalism internships, the Documenters program, which trains and pays community members to cover public meetings, research by the Center for Cooperative Media, and sustainability partnerships (Blue Engine) to help organizations build long-term revenue strategies.


Consortium grants typically require three to five years of support to help organizations build the capacity needed to attract additional funding. Of the current grantees, 32 are scheduled for renewal, and NJCIC plans to invest \$700,000 in new grants to expand coverage in counties with limited local news.

NJCIC's History of State Funding





# NJCIC Budget Overview and Funding Needs (FY27–FY31)

	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 30
<b>Revenue Projection</b>					
OSHE	\$2,500,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000
Foundations, Major Donors, other sources of revenue	\$1,158,168	\$1,520,000	\$1,664,400	\$1,814,196	\$1,995,616
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,718,168</b>	<b>\$6,520,000</b>	<b>\$6,664,400</b>	<b>\$6,814,196</b>	<b>\$6,995,616</b>
<b>Expenses</b>					
<b>Personnel Expenses</b>					
Salaries	\$495,276	\$628,025	\$650,167	\$666,072	\$682,454
Benefits	\$138,677	\$175,847	\$182,047	\$186,500	\$191,087
<b>Subtotal Personnel</b>	<b>\$633,953</b>	<b>\$803,872</b>	<b>\$832,213</b>	<b>\$852,572</b>	<b>\$873,541</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>					
Consultant Services	\$288,000	\$296,640	\$305,539	\$314,705	\$324,147
Material and Supplies	\$1,000	\$1,020	\$1,040	\$1,061	\$1,082
Equipment Rental/Purchase	\$1,500	\$1,530	\$1,561	\$1,592	\$1,624
Travel Expenses and Lodging	\$16,000	\$16,320	\$16,646	\$16,979	\$17,319
Communications/Marketing	\$60,000	\$61,200	\$62,424	\$63,672	\$64,946
Shipping/Postage	\$1,000	\$1,020	\$1,040	\$1,061	\$1,082
Conferences, Meetings	\$5,000	\$5,100	\$5,202	\$5,306	\$5,412
Subscriptions & Software	\$15,589	\$15,901	\$16,219	\$16,543	\$16,874
Current Grants	\$3,400,000	\$4,000,000	\$3,500,000	\$3,570,000	\$3,641,400
New Grants		\$700,000	\$1,200,000	\$1,224,000	\$1,248,480
Journalism Pipeline	\$49,500	\$120,000	\$170,000	\$200,000	\$250,000
Blue Engine (Revenue Capacity Building for Grantees)	\$40,000	\$80,000	\$100,000	\$102,000	\$104,040
Documenters Program - 	\$320,000	\$326,400	\$332,928	\$339,587	\$346,378
Audit	\$25,000	\$25,500	\$26,010	\$26,530	\$27,061
Other Expenses	\$61,300	\$62,526	\$63,777	\$65,052	\$66,353
<b>Subtotal Other Expenses</b>	<b>\$4,283,889</b>	<b>\$5,713,157</b>	<b>\$5,802,386</b>	<b>\$5,948,089</b>	<b>\$6,116,198</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$4,917,842</b>	<b>\$6,517,029</b>	<b>\$6,634,600</b>	<b>\$6,800,661</b>	<b>\$6,989,739</b>
<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>-\$1,199,674</b>	<b>\$2,971</b>	<b>\$29,800</b>	<b>\$13,535</b>	<b>\$5,877</b>
<b>Rollover funds</b>	<b>\$1,200,000</b>				

# What Will It Take?

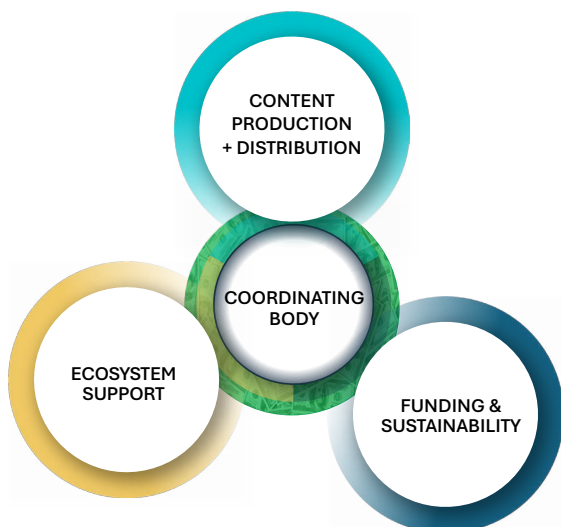
## Trusted Media that Informs, Educates and Engages the Public Requires Public Investment

New Jersey needs a reimagined public media system to provide trusted news, civic information, and public-interest programming statewide. Yet, public media in New Jersey and across the nation is struggling to survive. With the loss of federal support, compounded by market forces, the traditional business model for public media is no longer viable. Under these pressures, public media is becoming increasingly fragmented. The reality is, states that value public media’s vital role in upholding our democracy, informing the public and uniting our communities through fact-based information will need to invest in its future.

**Nearly 70 civic leaders, journalists, artists, and educators who participated in listening sessions in March–April 2026 affirmed this: trust must be rebuilt from the ground up, and public investment must center communities, not just institutions.** New Jersey has the opportunity to lead the nation with an adaptive, sustainable public media system (shown here):

This would require a total state investment of \$11.9 million in FY2027 — **\$6.9 million to launch NewCo and \$5 million for NJCIC to sustain the broader civic information ecosystem. Over five years, the total investment is \$55 million: \$30 million for NewCo and \$25 million for NJCIC.**

FY2027 Budget for NJ Public Media	
<b>State Funding</b>	
NewCo	\$6,940,000
NJCIC (historical + new)	\$5,000,000
<b>Subtotal State Funding</b>	<b>\$11,940,000</b>
<b>Other Revenue Sources (fundraising, etc.)</b>	
NewCo	\$2,930,000
NJCIC	\$1,520,000
State Allocated EBS/Tower Revenue	\$4,170,000
<b>Subtotal Other Revenue Sources</b>	<b>\$8,620,000</b>
<b>Total First Year Budget</b>	<b>\$20,560,000</b>



The cost is modest. The stakes are not. At \$1.25 per resident annually, New Jersey can lead the nation with a public media system that counters misinformation, reflects every community, and strengthens democracy from the ground up. This aligns directly with the Governor’s and Legislature’s priorities. That’s not just good policy, it’s what the people of New Jersey asked for.

# Reimagining New Jersey's Public Media Project Team

## Design Team

Phil Alongi, Alongi Media  
 Chris Daggett, New Jersey Civic Information Consortium  
 Chris Daniel, Daniel Productions  
 Hans Dekker, Community Foundation of New Jersey  
 Steve Fastook, Kean University  
 John Harmon, African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey  
 Alexis Levy, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
 Kay LiCausi, Hoboken Strategy  
 Mark Magyar, Rowan University  
 Carlos Medina, Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
 Matt McDermott, TZ Group  
 John Mooney, NJ Spotlight News  
 Stefanie Murray, Montclair State University / Center for Cooperative Media  
 Kim Pearson, The College of New Jersey (TCNJ)  
 Marc Pfeiffer, Rutgers University  
 Lisa Sahulka, New Jersey Civic Information Consortium  
 John Schreiber, NJPAC

## Consulting Team

This work was supported by a consulting team with expertise in systems design, public media, and stakeholder engagement. Together, Due East Partners, Public Media Company, and Free Press brought complementary perspectives to help shape the vision, structure, and strategy for a modern public media system in New Jersey.

**DUE EAST PARTNERS** is a strategy and design firm that works with public, nonprofit, and philanthropic leaders to solve complex systems challenges and build aligned, sustainable solutions.

**PUBLIC MEDIA COMPANY:** Since 2001, Public Media Company has partnered with nearly 400 nonprofit and noncommercial media organizations in all 50 U.S. states, D.C., and Puerto Rico, helping them amplify their service and impact, deepen community connections, and secure long-term business sustainability. We provide expert guidance, business resources, and connections to help local media organizations serve the needs of their communities, regardless of their size, location, or wealth.

**FREE PRESS:** Founded in 2003, Free Press works to give people a voice in the crucial decisions that shape media and democracy and fights to protect everyone's right to connect and communicate. We have proudly worked alongside communities and newsrooms across New Jersey for over a decade, and led the grassroots campaign to create New Jersey Civic Information Consortium.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## Key Findings from Stakeholder Surveys and Listening Sessions: Executive Summary

Following the initial draft of this report, the authors and design team initiated a public engagement process so that key stakeholders could weigh in on how their tax dollars should be spent to better inform NJ residents.

Civic leaders, journalists, artists, educators, and others representing key constituencies across the state were invited to join a series of listening sessions across two weeks in March and April 2026. A public feedback form was also included in the distribution of this report to gather broader public input.

The goal of this process was to learn about the pressing information needs of New Jersey's communities and to better understand how a new vision and framework for public media can best serve residents. Nearly 70 individuals participated in the public engagement process, and their feedback has been incorporated into the final report.

Here, we outline the key themes we heard across all sessions, and what stakeholders thought the opportunities and challenges will be in creating a truly public media system that supports the news and information needs of New Jerseyans across the state. These themes are incorporated throughout the report.

### KEY OVERALL THEMES

- ▶▶ **Trust is the defining issue:** While stakeholders shared varied perspectives on their levels of trust in public media (and media generally), participants all talked about the need for local news to be credible, independent, and representative of the communities they serve. Trust in local reporting and journalists, or the lack thereof, was particularly a big concern for youth, immigrant and multilingual communities, and those seeking civic affairs coverage.
- ▶▶ **Sufficient and long-term funding for sustainability of local news:** All participants recognized that local and public media were facing challenging economic headwinds. Long-term, adaptive investment in a mix of centralized and community-based media infrastructure is seen as essential to preserve and strengthen the public media ecosystem.
- ▶▶ **The public as co-creators and participants, not just consumers:** Those within and outside the journalism field spoke about a need to redefine how the public participates in local news reporting. This could include further engagement, listening sessions, collaboration, and an increase in media production training. Across sectors, there is strong demand for residents, youth, and creators to be directly involved in storytelling, with training and compensation.



# Stakeholder Feedback

## KEY OVERALL THEMES (CONT.):

- ▶▶ **Local, relevant, and actionable information is a priority:** People want journalism that will help them make sense of an increasingly complex world, so that they can better connect with and understand their communities, access basic resources, and navigate civic life. Coverage should prioritize information needs related to local government, schools, environmental issues, local sports, and social services.
- ▶▶ **A fragmented media system is making good information hard to find:** There is a lot of information out in the world, but participants stated clearly that they struggle to find and trust quality information in their day-to-day lives. What news they do have access to is scattered across sources, sometimes behind paywalls or not in their native language, and they are inundated with misinformation and clickbait. Access to quality local news varies widely by geography, with accountability gaps in many communities. They all craved something more accessible, centrally located, and connected across the state, with experts creating and curating quality information that is easy to understand and find.
- ▶▶ **Representation, access, distribution needs to evolve:** Persistent gaps in who is covered and access to relevant content need to be addressed systemically. This includes BIPOC, immigrant, working class, and rural communities. Additionally, participants spoke to how young people and students are turning to other platforms and distribution channels to search out trusted information. Digital and community-based channels are key to improving access and reach, while investments in community-based media creation need to be made in order to boost trust and representation.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW JERSEY PUBLIC MEDIA:

- ▶▶ **Partnerships with local civic organizations and community allies:** Schools, youth organizations, advocacy groups, and trusted community messengers are essential for connecting public media with community members. Immigrants, re-entry populations, students and those facing economic hardship have significant creative output but lack platforms and resources. Public media has an opportunity to not only engage the public, but support them in journalism and storytelling in order to celebrate and lift up these essential voices.
- ▶▶ **Creating collaborative infrastructure for economic viability and to unlock capacity:** Centralize costly infrastructure (investigative teams, nightly news broadcasts, back-office functions, HR/benefits, legal, insurance, etc) while decentralizing content creation through collaborative models that allow smaller outlets to prioritize reporting and operate more effectively
- ▶▶ **Building and sustaining the youth and community storytellers pipeline:** There is strong demand to build a youth media pipeline, starting in middle and high school to expose students to journalism early. To further build a talent pipeline, public media should invest in community storytellers and trusted voices to meet people where they are and to increase relevance and reach.
- ▶▶ **Moving away from broadcast first to meet people where they are:** Audiences are primarily discovering and engaging with content through social media and streaming, not traditional broadcast. This is especially true for younger and non-English speaking audiences. Platforms like WhatsApp, Signal, and grassroots organizations often serve as the main sources of news and information. While broadcasting can still reach an important audience, public media should evolve beyond broadcast and focus on how to serve audiences regardless of platform.
- ▶▶ **Calling in philanthropy to play a catalytic role:** Funders see themselves as risk-tolerant capital that can support innovation, pilot programs, and gaps that public funding cannot cover. Pairing philanthropy together with public funds can begin to provide the resources to support the entire ecosystem and to scale a public media system that reaches all corners of the state and puts community information needs at the center.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## CHALLENGES FOR NEW JERSEY PUBLIC MEDIA:

- ▶▶ **Longtime mistrust in communities will need to be addressed:** While many participants spoke about the importance of public media and local news, it was clear that journalists will need to rebuild trust with New Jersey's communities. Many are skeptical of traditional media and need more relatable, community-rooted entry points. While there are many understandable reasons for this lack of trust, building a credible, nonpartisan entity that communities believe in is seen as both critical and difficult. Stakeholder suggestions on how to address this included consistent presence, transparency, and better engagement to rebuild credibility. Working alongside trusted messengers and ensuring diverse representation in both the newsroom and coverage can also begin to rebuild trust.
- ▶▶ **Major gaps remain in representative coverage, government and accountability reporting, and specific geographical regions:** Many stakeholders shared that their cultures, identities, and everyday experiences are missing or selectively portrayed in current media. Others said that portrayals of youth, immigrants, and Black communities are predominantly negative or showcase hardships without offering solutions or information on how to create change in their community. Further, policy decisions that affect people's lives require consistent watchdog coverage, yet even highly-engaged residents felt that local government and public spending remain a mystery. South Jersey, rural areas, and smaller towns are consistently undercovered compared to more urban or high-profile regions, meaning that public media will have to prioritize where to deploy journalists and overcome trust issues to collaborate with local partners to provide coverage of the entire state.
- ▶▶ **Competing in a changing landscape and increasingly toxic media environment:** Platforms like TikTok, podcasts, and short-form video are central to how more audiences are consuming and creating content. Public media will have the challenge of moving away from viewing itself simply as broadcasters and be adaptable to changing media consumption habits. Additionally, there is a growing need to help youth and non-English speakers navigate misinformation, understand sources, and engage critically with content. To compete in a challenging information environment, stakeholders suggested public media play a role in promoting media and civic literacy and that newsrooms move away from clickbait and sensationalism and instead focus on the high demand for journalism that explains policies, breaks down complicated subjects, and helps people navigate the complicated world we live in.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## CHALLENGES FOR NEW JERSEY PUBLIC MEDIA (CONT.):

- ▶▶ **Overcoming barriers that prevent access and wider distribution:** While it's easier nowadays for everyday people to create and distribute media, barriers remain that can prevent communities from accessing public media and having their stories told across trusted platforms. Language access remains a fundamental gap, as much existing public media and local news is not available in the languages, formats or channels immigrant communities actually use, limiting reach and usefulness. Moreover, small organizations and individual creators often don't know how to plug into public media systems to reach wider audiences. Public media can have an air of prestige and historically shuts out diverse voices or non-professional mediamakers, making it harder for those closest to the ground to be able to distribute critical information and nontraditional content.
- ▶▶ **Seizing the moment and building for the future:** Stakeholders shared that a coordinated, multi-part system is appealing, but that any new approach for how to structure public media (and the wider ecosystem) will require clarity on structure, roles, and outcomes. Substantial public resources and long-term sustainability remains a large question, especially as the state grapples with tight budgets annually. Public media leaders and lawmakers will need to verbalize commitment to a new approach and back that up by moving away from yearly appropriations and commit to long-term sustainability.



# Stakeholder Feedback

## Detailed Listening Session Feedback

### All Voices

- **Trust is the defining issue.** Communities are skeptical of existing media due to past harm, bias, and inconsistency, but there is real opportunity to rebuild trust through transparency, representation, and sustained, local presence.
- **The system is fragmented and needs an overhaul.** Audiences struggle to find and trust information across scattered sources, pointing to a need for better connection, curation, and visibility.
- **Sufficient and sustainable funding is essential.** Long-term, adaptive investment in a mix of centralized and community-based media infrastructure is essential to preserve and strengthen the public media ecosystem. High production costs are a barrier to entry for many content creators.
- **Communities want to co-create, not just consume.** Across sectors, there is strong demand for residents, youth, and creators to be directly involved in storytelling, with training and compensation.
- **Local, relevant, and actionable information is the priority.** People want journalism that helps them understand their communities, access resources, and navigate civic life. Coverage should go beyond conflict and crisis. Public media should invest in in-depth reporting on what is working — for example, towns successfully advancing housing plans — not just fights and controversy.
- **Representation, access, and distribution must evolve together.** Persistent gaps in who is covered and access to relevant content need to be addressed systemically. Digital and community-based channels are key to improving access and representation.
- **The statewide vision is energizing but requires follow-through.** The ambition to build the strongest public media ecosystem in the country resonates strongly, but must be backed by clear next steps, a defined governance structure, and transparent financial planning.
- **Position public media as an active civic partner, not just an information provider.** Engage legislative leaders as active promoters of the New Jersey public media ecosystem — sharing stories through civic update emails to constituents — without compromising editorial independence. This kind of partnership could grow the informed public while building political will for sustained state investment.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## Journalism

- **Sufficient and sustainable funding is essential.** Long-term, flexible public funding is needed to stabilize newsrooms, cover core costs, and reduce constant fundraising pressure.
- **Restructure the system for economic viability and public responsiveness.** Centralize costly infrastructure (investigative teams, nightly news broadcasts, back-office functions) while decentralizing content creation.
- **Stronger infrastructure can unlock capacity.** Shared services (HR/benefits, legal, insurance) and collaborative models can help smaller outlets operate more effectively and focus on journalism.
- **Build content creation capacity within communities.** Engage community storytellers and trusted voices to meet people where they are and increase relevance and reach.
- **Trust is fragile but recoverable.** Communities feel misrepresented or ignored, but consistent presence, transparency, and better engagement can rebuild credibility.
- **Community participation is essential.** Residents want to help tell their own stories, and there is support for compensating and training community contributors.
- **Major gaps remain in coverage of government and accountability reporting.** Local government, public spending, and underrepresented communities are not being consistently covered. Policy decisions that affect people's lives require consistent watchdog coverage.

## Education & Youth

- **There is strong demand to build a youth media pipeline early.** Participants emphasized starting in middle and high school to expose students to journalism and build a talent pipeline.
- **Hands-on, paid opportunities matter most.** Internships, fellowships, and real reporting experiences, especially paid ones, are critical to engaging students from underserved communities.
- **Meeting youth where they are is non-negotiable.** Platforms like TikTok, podcasts, and short-form video are central to how young people consume and create content.
- **Media literacy is as important as media production.** There is a growing need to help students navigate misinformation, understand sources, and engage critically with content.
- **Trust and relevance are key barriers.** Many young people, especially in marginalized communities, are skeptical of traditional media and need more relatable, community-rooted entry points.
- **Partnerships expand reach and credibility.** Schools, youth organizations, advocacy groups, and trusted community messengers are essential for connecting with students and families.
- **Content needs to feel engaging and culturally relevant.** Making journalism “cool,” tying it to interests like sports or civic participation, and using peer-driven formats increases engagement.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## Immigrant and Multilingual Communities

- **Language access remains a fundamental gap.** Much existing journalism is not available in the languages, formats or channels immigrant communities actually use, limiting reach and usefulness.
- **There is strong demand for actionable, trusted information.** Communities need clear, timely guidance on immigration, education, policy changes, and available resources, especially in a rapidly shifting environment.
- **Coverage is limited, inconsistent, and often negative.** Many immigrant communities feel invisible unless there is a crisis, with little reporting on everyday life, culture, or structural issues.
- **Trust is created through experience, access, and whose stories get told.** Fear, misinformation, our history of systemic racism and political climate make some individuals hesitant to engage with media outlets or share their stories.
- **Community-based networks are primary information channels.** Platforms like WhatsApp, Signal, and grassroots organizations often serve as the main sources of news and information.
- **Cultural representation is a major unmet need.** Events, traditions, and transnational connections (e.g., news from home countries) are important but largely absent from mainstream coverage.
- **Grassroots efforts are strong but under-resourced.** Advocacy groups and community organizations are already filling gaps, but lack the funding and capacity to scale.

## Funders

- **Equity and representation are central priorities.** Funders emphasized supporting BIPOC storytellers, underserved regions like South Jersey, and ensuring communities shape their own narratives.
- **A community-first approach is essential.** Public media should focus on meeting real information needs, especially for working-class communities seeking practical news and information.
- **Trust is a core challenge for the system.** Building a credible, nonpartisan entity that communities believe in is seen as both critical and difficult.
- **Philanthropy can play a catalytic role.** Funders see themselves as risk-tolerant capital that can support innovation, pilot programs, and gaps that public funding cannot cover.
- **There is interest in funding ecosystems, not just organizations.** A coordinated, multi-part system is appealing, but requires clarity on structure, roles, and outcomes.
- **Capacity building and pipelines matter.** Investing in leadership development, training, and next-generation journalists is a key area of alignment.
- **Clear outcomes and accountability are expected.** Funders want measurable indicators of success, including improved coverage, engagement, and equity.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## Community Information Needs

- **Core information needs are practical and hyper-local.** Communities prioritize coverage of local government, schools, high school sports, environmental issues, and access to basic services and resources.
- **People want help making sense of complex information.** There is strong demand for journalism that explains policies, breaks down legislation, and provides context, not just headlines.
- **Representation gaps remain significant.** Many communities feel their cultures, identities, and everyday experiences are missing or selectively portrayed in current media.
- **Trust is rooted in proximity and familiarity.** Ethnic media, grassroots outlets, community groups, and informal networks (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, churches) are often more trusted than major outlets.
- **Community involvement in storytelling is critical.** People want more control over how their stories are told and value working with credible, community-based messengers.
- **Misinformation and political influence are major concerns.** There is a need for safeguards to ensure fact-based reporting that is insulated from political agendas.
- **The current system is fragmented and inconsistent.** Access to quality local news varies widely by geography, with accountability gaps in many communities.

## Arts & Creative

- **Arts and culture coverage lacks consistency and sustained visibility.** Creative work is often highlighted as one-off features rather than ongoing storytelling that builds audience and impact.
- **Digital platforms are central to cultural engagement.** Audiences are primarily discovering and engaging with arts content through social media and streaming, not traditional broadcast.
- **There is strong demand for authentic, community-driven storytelling.** Artists and organizations want to control their narratives and reflect real experiences, not filtered or one-dimensional portrayals.
- **Many creative communities are underrepresented.** Immigrants, re-entry populations, and those facing economic hardship have significant creative output but lack platforms and resources.
- **Youth development is a key opportunity within the arts.** Training young people in media and storytelling is seen as a pathway to both creative expression and workforce development.
- **Misinformation and content credibility are concerns.** There is a need to better distinguish between information, entertainment, and storytelling while maintaining trust.
- **Access to platforms and distribution remains a barrier.** Small organizations and individual creators often don't know how to plug into public media systems or reach wider audiences.



# Stakeholder Feedback

## Civic Affairs

- **Local civic information is fragmented and hard to access.** Residents often have to piece together information from multiple sources to understand what's happening in their communities.
- **Geographic coverage is uneven across the state.** South Jersey, rural areas, and smaller towns are consistently undercovered compared to more urban or high-profile regions.
- **There is a strong need for clearer, more structured civic information.** People want news organized by state, county, and local levels, clearly delineating news, opinion, and analysis.
- **Civic engagement gaps are especially pronounced among youth.** Many younger residents lack awareness of how local government works, how to participate meaningfully in civic life and why it matters.
- **Trusted information often comes from informal networks.** Community organizations, newsletters, faith groups, and social media play a major role in how people access civic information.
- **Collaboration with existing local outlets is essential.** Independent and hyperlocal journalism organizations are seen as key partners in filling coverage gaps.
- **Sustainability and workforce challenges persist.** There are not enough full-time reporting roles, making it difficult to maintain consistent civic coverage.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## Report Feedback

- **Restructure the system for economic viability and public engagement.** Centralize costly infrastructure (investigative teams, nightly news broadcasts, back-office functions) while decentralizing content creation.
- **Clarify funding and sustainability model.** Define long-term public funding approach, revenue streams, and how funding will be equitably distributed across the ecosystem. The state funding ask should be a clear, standalone figure — the current budget presentation is confusing and buries the gap. A projected five-year budget would also strengthen legislative buy-in.
- **Expand content strategy.** Operationalize a broader definition of news, including service journalism, cultural coverage, local sports, and explanatory reporting.
- **Design shared services and workforce supports.** Specify how organizations access shared infrastructure and how stable journalism jobs are supported.
- **Establish success metrics and accountability.** Identify what success looks like (coverage, engagement, equity, civic impact) and how it will be measured. A concrete audience target — such as reaching 25% of NJ adults (approximately 1.7 million people) — would give the plan measurable ambition grounded in what research suggests is achievable.
- **Clarify relationships with existing entities.** Define how this system complements and supports current organizations (e.g., the Consortium, local outlets) without duplication or displacement.
- **Refine the community participation model.** Detail how community members, citizen journalists, and creators are trained, supported, and compensated.
- **The report should also address the role of non-commercial radio more robustly** — including community, college, and LPFM stations — and update assumptions about radio audiences to reflect the reality that most listening now happens via apps, websites, and streaming rather than over-the-air.
- **The state funding ask should be clearly communicated** — respondents noted that the current budget presentation buries the funding gap and that the total NJ state request proposed in this report (~\$16M for FY2027) should be separated and made explicit. A five-year budget projection would strengthen the case.
- **Respondents also flagged that projected membership revenue figures in the report appear low and should be revisited moving forward** — both regular membership and major gift projections may be underestimated.
- **Restructure the system for economic viability and public responsiveness.** Centralize costly infrastructure (investigative teams, nightly news broadcasts, back-office functions) while decentralizing content creation.
- **Expand content strategy.** Operationalize a broader definition of news, including service journalism, cultural coverage, high school sports, and explanatory reporting.

# Stakeholder Feedback

## Report Feedback

- **Define the ecosystem structure and governance.** Decide how the system operates (hub vs. network), who holds decision-making power, and how accountability is defined and reported. The coordinating body needs more definition — who sits on it, what authority it holds, and how editorial independence is protected.
- **Build evaluation and feedback loops.** Design systems for ongoing measurement, community input, and iteration.
- **Center equity and representation.** Ensure commitments to underrepresented communities are embedded in funding, leadership, and content priorities.
- **Set expectations for trust and public value.** Align on how the system will rebuild trust and function as a public good, not a market-driven product. This includes building a compelling case for state investment — connecting public media’s mission to the Governor’s and State Legislature’s priorities around countering social media harm and strengthening civic engagement.



**NEW JERSEY  
CIVIC INFORMATION  
CONSORTIUM**