

# Public Broadcasting: Background Information and Current Issues for Congress

Updated June 18, 2025

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R48545



**R48545**

June 18, 2025

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## Public Broadcasting: Background Information and Current Issues for Congress

Discussion of public interest in educational or noncommercial programming dates to the early days of broadcasting. In 1938, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) set aside a portion of available radio channels for noncommercial and educational broadcasting, periodically updating policy as technology evolved.

In 1965, the Carnegie Corporation of New York created the Carnegie Commission on Public Television to make policy recommendations on public broadcasting. It recommended that Congress create a private, nonprofit corporation to support the development of local and national programming for public television (and later radio). This was enacted as part of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 (PBA; P.L. 90-129). The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was subsequently incorporated in 1967 as a private nonprofit corporation governed by a board of directors appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. In April 2025, four board positions out of the statutorily mandated nine positions were vacant. The White House moved to dismiss three directors, leaving two in place. The CPB subsequently contested the action in court, suing President Trump and certain other members of his Administration in their official capacities. In its motion, the defendants argued that presidential appointees are removable at will absent specific statutory restrictions.

The CPB is funded by federal appropriations. Appropriations to the CPB are under the jurisdiction of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. Beginning in 1975, Congress has provided two-year advance appropriations to the CPB to facilitate long-term programming decisions outside the pressures of the one-year budget cycle. For example, the FY2027 advance appropriation for the CPB of \$535 million was made under the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4). In addition to funds appropriated to it directly by Congress, the CPB may receive federal grant funds from other agencies for educational programming, support of public broadcasting emergency alerting functions, and other purposes.

The CPB distributes appropriated funds to independent public broadcasting stations and content producers according to a statutory formula. As of FY2024, approximately 10.6% of public television and 6.0% of public radio broadcasting revenue comes from the CPB's Community Service Grants (television and radio station grants). The CPB grants are the largest single source of funding for public television and radio stations and for programming development and distribution.

The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) was created by the CPB in 1969 to operate and manage a nationwide program distribution system interconnecting all the local public television stations and to provide a distribution channel for national programs to those public television stations. National Public Radio (NPR) was created in 1970 by the CPB as a news-gathering, production, and program-distribution company governed by its member public radio stations. According to the CPB, PBS is funded mainly by "member stations, distribution revenue, and underwriting support." Similarly, NPR is funded mainly "by member stations, distribution services, underwriting and institutional grants, and individual contributions." Public broadcasters may use the CPB grant funds to pay membership dues to PBS and NPR and to purchase program content. Therefore, the CPB grants may provide some funding to PBS and NPR indirectly.

Much of the debate over the future of public broadcasting centers on its value as a public good. Advocates for public broadcasting argue that public broadcasters provide balanced and objective information, news, children's education, and entertainment in an internet-dominated media environment. Critics contend that public broadcasting has become less relevant and less essential and that PBS- and NPR-branded public affairs comments reflect political and cultural bias. Public broadcasting advocates say that programming decisions—including whether or not to carry certain PBS- or NPR-branded content—are made by independent local stations, which may tailor programming to the preferences and needs of local audiences.

The White House acted in 2025 to curtail the CPB's role in the public broadcasting enterprise. Executive orders—if upheld—would prohibit CPB funding of NPR and PBS and terminate grant funding by federal agencies. In addition, the White House requested that Congress rescind the CPB's FY2026 and FY2027 appropriations. Congress may provide legislative ratification for these actions. Alternatively, Congress might act to maintain or reinforce existing institutional relationships by clarifying legislative intent in matters under legal dispute. If Congress takes no action, this would leave resolution of disputes between the Trump Administration and public broadcasting entities to the courts.

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## Introduction

The national public broadcasting enterprise includes nearly 360 television stations and 1,200 radio stations, which together can transmit communications to 99% of the U.S. population.<sup>1</sup> Local stations are operated by a variety of different entities, including public and private institutions of higher education, local school districts, state agencies, and nonprofit community organizations.<sup>2</sup> In its early decades, this enterprise largely developed without regular federal funding. Beginning in the 1960s, broad-based support for alternatives to commercial broadcasting led to the passage of legislation that authorized regular federal funding for public broadcasting. Congressional appropriations are distributed to public media broadcasters and producers through a private nonprofit corporation known as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), established in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 (PBA; P.L. 90-129). The CPB does not own or operate any stations.

The CPB expanded the U.S. public broadcasting enterprise through technology investments and grants to independent local stations and producers in partnership with major philanthropies, educational institutions, state and local governments, and corporate and individual donors. This expansion enabled production and distribution of programming for national audiences—capabilities that barely existed in public broadcasting before 1967. While these changes have provided diverse programming to national audiences, they have also exposed public broadcasting to broader national scrutiny of its cultural content and balance. This report provides historical background on the national public broadcasting enterprise and the evolving role of the federal government and federally supported entities within it. In addition, this report provides an overview of policy issues and legislative options of potential interest to Congress.

## Public Broadcasting Before 1967

Interest in educational or noncommercial programming dates to the early days of broadcasting. Beginning in the 1930s, some state universities and other educational institutions seeking to better serve rural populations pioneered the use of broadcast radio for remote learning. In 1938, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) set aside a portion of available radio channels for noncommercial and educational broadcasting, periodically updating policy as technology evolved.<sup>3</sup> During this period, advocates viewed such broadcasting as a form of public education similar to that provided in public schools, which they argued should be free from commercial pressures and influences.<sup>4</sup>

In the early postwar era, the emergence and growth of television technology prompted efforts to develop noncommercial and educational broadcasting in the new medium. Federal support was largely limited to FCC set-asides of frequency spectrum for noncommercial and educational broadcasters—first radio, and then television—and limited grants made through defense appropriations.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of regular federal funding of public broadcasting during this

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<sup>1</sup> See Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), “About CPB,” <https://cpb.org/aboutcpb>.

<sup>2</sup> See CPB, “CPB FAQ: Who Operates Local Stations?” <https://cpb.org/faq#2-3>.

<sup>3</sup> See Federal Communications Commission (FCC), *Fourth Annual Report: FY 1938*, p. IV, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-308653A1.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Ralph Steetle, “The Changing Status of Educational Television,” *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, vol. 32, no. 9 (May 1959), pp. 427-433 (hereinafter “The Changing Status of Educational Television”).

<sup>5</sup> For description of educational initiatives of this era, see “The Changing Status of Educational Television.” For general information on frequency spectrum allocation, see CRS Video WVB00471, *National Spectrum Policy: Concepts, Issues, and Options for Congress*, by Jill C. Gallagher and Ling Zhu.

period, private philanthropies—and occasionally for-profit broadcasters—provided funding to support noncommercial and educational broadcasting. The Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York became major supporters of this enterprise.<sup>6</sup>

Despite support from these and other sources, efforts at expanding the reach of noncommercial and educational radio and television broadcasts often had an experimental and improvisational character—especially outside urban areas. In early 1960s, one initiative—sponsored in part by the Ford Foundation and led by Purdue University researchers—deployed DC-6 airliners equipped with television transmitters to circle above sparsely populated areas of the Midwest and broadcast educational television programs.<sup>7</sup>

Advocates sought greater federal support for noncommercial and educational broadcasting to provide more consistent financing to improve transmission technology and programming quality. Congress enacted the Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962 (ETFA; P.L. 87-447) to support construction and upgrades to educational television facilities through a system of matching grants administered by the then-extant Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. In signing the bill, President Kennedy framed educational television as a Cold War national security imperative.<sup>8</sup> The law authorized \$32 million in appropriations over five years—or \$339 million in April 2025 dollars.<sup>9</sup>

Other advocates framed public broadcasting as a cultural alternative to the “vast wasteland” of commercial television, enriching civic discourse, public education, and community life.<sup>10</sup> In 1965, the Carnegie Corporation of New York created the Carnegie Commission on Public Television (the Carnegie Commission) to study the state of noncommercial and educational broadcasting in the United States and to study best practices from several other countries. President Lyndon B. Johnson publicly endorsed the general objectives of the Carnegie Commission that year.<sup>11</sup> The Carnegie Commission released its report, titled “Public Television: A

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<sup>6</sup> Philanthropy Roundtable, “Ford and Carnegie Create Public Broadcasting,” <https://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/almanac/ford-and-carnegie-create-public-broadcasting/> (hereinafter Philanthropy Roundtable). Ford Foundation records show \$5.45 million (nominal dollars) in donations for public radio and television since 2006, focusing on content production, technology, and professional development, with the most recent grant made in 2020. See Ford Foundation, *Grants Database*, <https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/awarded-grants/grants-database/>. Carnegie Corporation of New York records show \$7.87 million (nominal dollars) in donations for public radio and television since 2004, focusing on content production for education and public affairs programming, with the most recent grant made in 2024. See Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Grants Database*, <https://www.carnegie.org/grants/grants-database/>.

<sup>7</sup> Allison Perlman, “Flying Classrooms in the Midwest: The MPATI’s Experiment in Regional Educational Television,” *in media res*, February 28, 2008, <https://mediacommons.org/imr/2008/02/28/flying-classrooms-in-the-midwest-the-mpatis-experiment-in-regional-educational-television#:~:text=Utilizing%20Stratovision%2C%20a%20broadcast%20distribution%20system%20developed,reached%20schools%20within%20a%20200%20mile%20radius;and%20Carson%20Benn%2C%20The%20Midwest%20Program%20on%20Airborne%20Television%20Instruction%20and%20the%20Ford%20Foundation,> Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports, 2020, <https://rockarch.issuelab.org/resources/37719/37719.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill Providing for Educational Television,” *The American Presidency Project*, May 1, 1962, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-president-upon-signing-bill-providing-for-educational-television>.

<sup>9</sup> Calculated using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index (CPI) Inflation Calculator, [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

<sup>10</sup> See Newton N. Minow, “Television and the Public Interest,” American Rhetoric Online Speech Bank, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtonminow.htm>. Minow delivered the speech on May 9, 1961, while serving as FCC Chairman.

<sup>11</sup> “Carnegie I: Members, Preface and Introductory Note, 1967,” *Current*, January 26, 1967, [https://current.org/1967/01/carnegie-i-members-preface-and-introductory-note-1967/?wallit\\_nosession=1](https://current.org/1967/01/carnegie-i-members-preface-and-introductory-note-1967/?wallit_nosession=1).

Program for Action,” in January 1967—an event that received national front-page news coverage.<sup>12</sup>

The report introduced public broadcasting into the mainstream lexicon, drawing a distinction between programming to support classroom instruction (educational television) and broadcasting of noncommercial content for the broader viewing community (public television). The Carnegie Commission’s primary recommendation was that Congress create and fund a nonprofit corporation to support production of public television content for local and national audiences. Other recommendations included (1) an excise tax on television sales to fund the new nonprofit public-broadcasting corporation—the Carnegie Commission argued that such a tax would provide a predictable source of funding not dependent on, or influenced by, the annual appropriations process—and (2) separate legislation for new authorities and appropriations, which would allow the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to provide improved broadcasting facilities to independent local stations and support a national interconnection for program distribution and live broadcasts.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967**

The PBA, as amended, incorporated several recommendations of the Carnegie Commission, modified or omitted others, and added several original provisions. The primary recommendation of the Carnegie Commission’s report—that Congress create a private, nonprofit corporation to support development of local and national programming for public television (and later radio)—was enacted as the law’s core provision. The CPB was incorporated in 1967 as a private nonprofit corporation.

As recommended by the Carnegie Commission, the law prohibited the CPB from operating or controlling independent local stations. However, the CPB became the primary conduit for federal support of local broadcasters and producers and for the buildout of a national interconnection for program distribution and live broadcasts.<sup>14</sup> Congress elected to fund the CPB through the annual appropriations process, rather than using a federal excise tax as recommended by the Carnegie Commission. Public broadcasting expanded rapidly in geographic reach and availability of programming for national distribution after enactment of the PBA. According to the CPB, the national public broadcasting system now reaches 99% of the U.S. population.<sup>15</sup>

## **Structure and Leadership of the CPB**

The CPB Board of Directors is organized under Section 396(c) of the PBA (47 U.S.C. §396(c)), as amended. The board consists of nine directors appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. By law, directors are U.S. citizens “who are eminent in such fields as

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<sup>12</sup> Philanthropy Roundtable.

<sup>13</sup> The original report is not available online but is available in hard copy format in Library of Congress collections. For online access to the report summary and recommendations, see “Text of Summary and Recommendations in Report by the Carnegie Commission,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1967, p. 27, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1967/01/26/82578013.html?pageNumber=27>.

<sup>14</sup> Congress continued to authorize appropriations for station support and improvements to the public broadcasting system through the Education Broadcasting Facilities Program, originally established under the Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962 (ETFA), and its successor, the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program, established under the Public Telecommunications Act of 1992 (P.L. 102-356) and administered by the Department of Commerce until 2017. The final appropriation for the program was made in 2010.

<sup>15</sup> CPB, “About Public Media,” <https://cpb.org/aboutpb/what-public-media#:~:text=Today%27s%20public%20media%20system%20began,with%20free%20programming%20and%20services>.



education, cultural and civic affairs, or the arts, including radio and television.” In addition, the law requires that directors are geographically representative of different regions, professionally diverse, and possess “various kinds of talent and experience appropriate to the functions and responsibilities of the [CPB].”

Directors serve a term of six years and may serve up to two terms consecutively. By law, one director must represent public television stations, and one director must represent public radio stations. No more than five directors may be affiliated with a single political party, but the law otherwise prohibits applying any “political test or qualification” for nominations or appointments. According to statute, directors must forfeit their positions for *absenteeism*, defined as missing 50% or more of meetings in a calendar year. The PBA provides no other specific guidance on removal of directors.

Directors have typically represented a variety of professional backgrounds in diverse fields related to broadcasting, such as public policy, community organizing, entertainment law, and corporate leadership. The PBA provides the board with authority to name and appoint CPB corporate officers and to fix terms of compensation. In addition, it mandates several oversight and facilitation functions. These include the following:

- “facilitate the full development of public telecommunications in which programs of high quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, and innovation, which are obtained from diverse sources, will be made available to public telecommunications entities, with strict adherence to objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature”;
- assist in the development of physical infrastructure to facilitate the widespread dissemination of public broadcasting content and in the development of public broadcasting entities;
- ensure freedom of public broadcasters from external interference in developing or programming content and related activities; and
- obtain and disseminate grant funding to public broadcasters for the production and acquisition of programming, as well as other expenses.<sup>16</sup>

These legislative authorities and mandates guide board activities. Meetings include a public session and a confidential executive session. Directors also vote to accept or approve financial statements, plans, and other documents. The CPB exercises oversight of local stations through the Office of the Inspector General, which typically focuses on ensuring use of CPB grants within program rules. The CPB Board and its officers do not manage programming decisions and other routine activities of local broadcast stations, which are independently licensed and operated.

In April 2025, the White House moved to dismiss three directors. The CPB subsequently contested the action in court, claiming that the President did not have authority under the PBA to remove CPB directors because, among other factors, the CPB is a private nonprofit organization.<sup>17</sup> Further, the CPB argued that the action was taken with the intent to prevent the board from meeting quorum requirements to conduct CPB business. (If the dismissals withstand

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<sup>16</sup> 47 U.S.C. §396(g)(1).

<sup>17</sup> *Corporation for Public Broadcasting et al. v. Donald J. Trump et al.* (D.C. Cir. 2025) (hereinafter *CPB v. Trump*). As the case was proceeding, on May 15, 2025, the CPB also amended its bylaws to expressly prohibit removals of directors by the President or other official without a two-thirds vote of other directors approving the action. See Austin Fuller, “Facing Trump Threat, CPB Amends Bylaws to Protect Directors from Removal,” *Current*, May 16, 2025; and, CPB Board of Directors, *Bylaws of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting: As Amended May 15, 2025*, May 15, 2025, p. 5, [https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/CPB%20BY-LAWS%20AS%20AMENDED%20MAY%2015%202025%20\\_0.pdf](https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/CPB%20BY-LAWS%20AS%20AMENDED%20MAY%2015%202025%20_0.pdf).

court challenge, this would leave two directors out of the statutorily mandated nine, because four vacancies were unfilled when the terminations took place). In opposition to the CPB's request for a temporary restraining order, the defendants argued that presidential appointees to the board are removable at will.<sup>18</sup> On June 8, 2025, the court denied the request for a temporary restraining order but allowed the case to proceed.<sup>19</sup>

## Appropriations for the CPB

The CPB is largely funded by federal appropriations but sometimes receives private donations as well. In the first several years after creation of the CPB, appropriations were made annually. Beginning with the Public Broadcasting Financing Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-192), Congress provided two-year advance appropriations to the CPB in order to separate programming decisions from pressures of the appropriations process and to better allow for long-term planning of content development.<sup>20</sup> For example, the FY2027 advance appropriation for the CPB of \$535 million was made under the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4). The Ford White House was also supportive of advance appropriations to the CPB, originally proposing a five-year advance appropriation. On the basis of discussions between congressional leadership and the White House, Congress shortened this period to two years. Subsequent Congresses continued the practice of advance appropriations.<sup>21</sup> However, some Members in recent Congresses have called for an end to advance appropriations for the CPB.<sup>22</sup>

Appropriations to the CPB are under the jurisdiction of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. These subcommittees provide appropriations under the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. The FY2027 advance appropriation for the CPB was \$535 million, which continued the funding levels from FY2026 and FY2025.<sup>23</sup> Congress has periodically provided separate appropriations for support of the interconnection infrastructure that enables national distribution of content and live programming events. For FY2026, the appropriation for interconnection support was \$60 million.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Congress provided emergency appropriations to the CPB in response to economic and social disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Defendants Opposition to Plaintiffs' Motion for Temporary Restraining Order, *CPB v. Trump*.

<sup>19</sup> Memorandum Opinion and Order, *CPB v. Trump*.

<sup>20</sup> According to the CPB, the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce stated that advance funding "would go a long way toward eliminating both the risk of and the appearance of undue interference with and control of public broadcasting ... and will minimize the possibility of any government scrutiny of or influence on programming that might occur in the course of the usual annual budgetary, authorization, and appropriation process." See CPB, "Purpose of CPB's Advance Appropriations," <https://cpb.org/appropriation/purpose> (hereinafter CPB, "Purpose of CPB's Advance Appropriations").

<sup>21</sup> CPB, "Purpose of CPB's Advance Appropriations."

<sup>22</sup> For example, see U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee, *Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2025*, report to accompany H.R. 9029, 118<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., H.Rept. 118-585, July 12, 2024, p. 254, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/118th-congress/house-report/585/1?outputFormat=pdf&s=1&r=12>.

<sup>23</sup> See Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4), and CPB, "Purpose of CPB's Advance Appropriations."

<sup>24</sup> Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-47).

<sup>25</sup> Congress provided \$175 million in fiscal stabilization funds for public broadcasters under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2) and \$75 million in fiscal stabilization funds under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (P.L. 116-136).



## Other Sources of Federal Support for the CPB

In addition to direct appropriations from Congress, the CPB may receive federal grant funds from other agencies.

### Ready to Learn Grants

In recent decades, Ready to Learn (RTL) Grants from the Department of Education have supported the development of educational television and digital media targeted at preschool and early elementary school children.<sup>26</sup> RTL grants are awarded on a competitive basis every five years. The CPB has been awarded grants in previous years to partner with local stations and other public broadcasting entities that produce content for national distribution.<sup>27</sup> In the past, RTL grants have helped fund a number of well-known children's programs, such as Sesame Street, Clifford the Big Red Dog, and Molly of Denali.<sup>28</sup>

In the 2020-2025 grant cycle, the CPB was awarded a total of \$112 million in order to develop "new content that helps young children build vital skills to help them succeed in school and life, including functional literacy, critical thinking and collaboration—and shows them career options in age-appropriate ways."<sup>29</sup> On March 20, 2025, the President issued Executive Order (E.O.) 14242, "Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities." The E.O. directs the Secretary of Education to "take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education" while "ensuring the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely."<sup>30</sup> On May 1, 2025, the President issued E.O. 14290, "Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media," instructing federal agencies to end funding of certain public broadcasting activities (see "The Future Federal Role in Public Broadcasting" section). On May 2, 2025, the Department of Education terminated the previously awarded 2020-2025 RTL grant and instructed grantees to stop work on funded programming activities, according to the CPB.<sup>31</sup>

### Public Broadcasting Support for Public Alerts and Warnings

In addition to providing programming for local audiences, public broadcasting stations help provide public alerts and warnings during emergencies. The CPB administers a competitive grant program for public television and radio stations to replace and upgrade infrastructure to expand alert and warning systems, and to create a more resilient public alerting system. The grant program is funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as part of the Next

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<sup>26</sup> CPB, "CPB and PBS Receive Ready to Learn Grant from the U.S. Department of Education," press release, September 8, 2015, <http://www.cpb.org/pressroom/release.php?pm=1235>.

<sup>27</sup> Anne Brachman, Governmental Affairs, CPB, personal communication with CRS, April 7, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> PBS, "CPB and PBS Awarded Ready To Learn Grant from the U.S. Department of Education," press release, September 7, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/about/about-pbs/blogs/news/cpb-and-pbs-awarded-ready-to-learn-grant-from-the-us-department-of-education/> (hereinafter CPB RTL press release).

<sup>29</sup> CPB RTL press release; see also Julian Wyllic, "CPB Tells Stations to Stop Ready to Learn Grants," *Current*, May 6, 2025. RTL grants are awarded for the entire cycle but are disbursed in tranches annually based on appropriations.

<sup>30</sup> Executive Order 14242 of March 20, 2025, "Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities," 90 *Federal Register* 13679, March 20, 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/03/25/2025-05213/improving-education-outcomes-by-empowering-parents-states-and-communities>.

<sup>31</sup> CPB, "CPB Statement on U.S. Department of Education Terminating Ready to Learn Grant," press release, May 6, 2025, <https://cpb.org/pressroom/CPB-Statement-US-Department-Education-Terminating-Ready-Learn-Grant>.

Generation Warning System (NGWS) program.<sup>32</sup> NGWS is part of an upgrade within the existing public safety warning system known as the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System.<sup>33</sup> According to the CPB, FEMA has awarded the CPB a total of \$136 million to implement the NGWS program over the program's lifetime.<sup>34</sup> The CPB is the sole recipient of grant funds.

According to a House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security report,

[t]he first priority of the NGWS program is to help public media entities replace aging infrastructure that is essential to their role in civil defense and public safety missions. The program also supports these investments by these entities in new technology needed to enhance alert, warning, and other public safety communications systems to ensure resilience, service to underserved populations, and the ability to meet the evolving nature of public alerting challenges. The Committee expects FEMA to work with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to implement this program for public broadcasting entities.<sup>35</sup>

Under the terms of the grant, the CPB may award funds through sub-grants to public broadcast stations for technology upgrades and for purchase and distribution of commercial receivers to “help rural, tribal, and underserved communities access emergency information.”<sup>36</sup> The Biden Administration directed FEMA to prioritize grant awards to stations serving minority and underserved communities, in compliance with E.O. 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” issued in January 2021.<sup>37</sup> President Trump revoked this E.O. on January 20, 2025.<sup>38</sup> This may affect prioritization of future NGWS awards to local broadcasters.

On February 18, 2025, FEMA put a hold on further disbursements of grant awards funded under a \$40 million appropriation made by Congress in March 2022.<sup>39</sup> This hold temporarily halted work on NGWS upgrades. The CPB sued FEMA to restore funding but later secured the release of grant funds on April 24, 2025, through a negotiated agreement with the agency.<sup>40</sup> According to

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, *Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2022*, report to accompany H.R. 4431, 117<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., H.Rept. 117-87, July 15, 2021, pp. 76-77 (stating that the committee expects the Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA] to work with the CPB to implement the Next Generation Warning System [NGWS] program).

<sup>33</sup> For more information on the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, see CRS Report R48363, *The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS): Primer and Issues for Congress*, by Amanda H. Peskin; and CRS In Focus IF12998, *The Emergency Alert System: Status of Current Funding for Improvements*, by Amanda H. Peskin.

<sup>34</sup> CPB, “Next Generation Warning System,” <https://cpb.org/NGWS>.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, Department of Homeland Security Subcommittee, *Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Bill, 2023*, report to accompany H.R. 8257, 117<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., H.Rept. 117-396, July 1, 2022, p. 70, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/117th-congress/house-report/396/1?s=1&r=15>.

<sup>36</sup> See FEMA, “Notice of Funding Opportunity: Fiscal Year 2024 Next Generation Warning System Grant Program,” p. 9, [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_ncp-fy24-ngwsgp-nofo.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_ncp-fy24-ngwsgp-nofo.pdf) (hereinafter FEMA NOFO).

<sup>37</sup> See Executive Order 13985 of January 20, 2021, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” 86 *Federal Register* 7009, January 25, 2021, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/01/25/2021-01753/advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government>; and FEMA NOFO.

<sup>38</sup> Executive Order 14148 of January 20, 2025, “Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions,” 90 *Federal Register* 8237, January 28, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/initial-rescissions-of-harmful-executive-orders-and-actions/>.

<sup>39</sup> P.L. 117-103, Division F, Title III. See Julian Wylie, “FEMA Lifts Hold on Next Generation Warning System Grants,” *Current*, April 25, 2025, [https://current.org/2025/04/fema-lifts-hold-on-next-generation-warning-system-grants/?wallit\\_nosession=1](https://current.org/2025/04/fema-lifts-hold-on-next-generation-warning-system-grants/?wallit_nosession=1).

<sup>40</sup> CPB, “CPB Announces Five New Grants Totaling Up to \$9.6 Million to Rural Public Broadcasters to Upgrade Emergency Alerting,” press release, April 24, 2025, <https://cpb.org/pressroom/CPB-Announces-Five-New-Grants-Totaling-96-Million-Rural-Public-Broadcasters-Upgrade> (hereinafter CPB April 2025 press release).

the CPB, “approximately \$24.9 million has been awarded to 45 organizations in 24 states” as of April 2025.<sup>41</sup>

## CPB Support for Independent Broadcasters and Producers

Congress created the CPB to provide federal support for consistent funding for content production and distribution that would support a national public broadcasting enterprise (see the “The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967” section). As amended, the PBA provides a formula for CPB allocation of federal appropriations it receives from Congress. The formula allocates funding as follows:

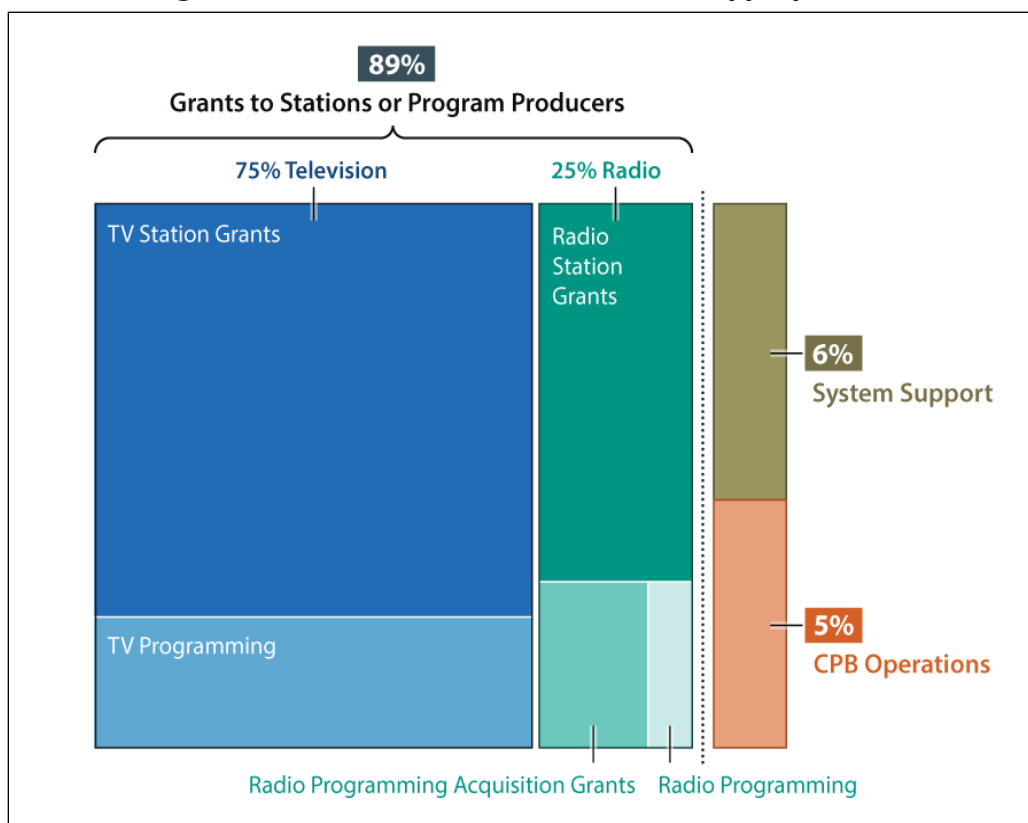
- CPB administrative costs receive 5% of the total allocation.
- System support activities, such as local journalism initiatives, professional development, interconnection operations, and royalty payments, among others, receive 6% of the total allocation.<sup>42</sup>
- The remainder—89% of the total federal appropriation to the CPB—is used to provide grants to public broadcasting stations and program producers that meet specified eligibility criteria.
- Of that 89% remainder, 75% is allocated to television grants, and 25% is allocated to radio grants.
- Funds for television grants are further divided into television station grants and programming grants—75% and 25% of total public television grant funding, respectively.
- For radio, 70% of total public radio funding is allocated to radio station grants. The remainder of the total is allocated between radio programming acquisition grants (23%) and radio programming grants (7%).

**Figure 1** provides a visual representation of the allocation formula.

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<sup>41</sup> CPB April 2025 press release.

<sup>42</sup> CPB, “CPB’s Federal Appropriation Request & Justification,” <https://cpb.org/funding>.

**Figure 1. Allocation of the CPB's Federal Appropriation**

**Source:** CRS, adapted from Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), "Appendix C—Formula for Allocating CPB's Federal Appropriation," in *Appropriation Request and Justification for FY 2023/FY 2025*, March 28, 2022, <https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/appropriation/FY-2023-2025-CPB-Budget-Justification.pdf>.

CPB grants are the largest single source of funding for public television and radio stations and for programming development and distribution. On average, in FY2024, 10.6% of a public television station's revenue and 6.0% of a public radio station's revenue came from CPB television and radio station grants.<sup>43</sup> The percentages for rural stations serving smaller audiences over larger broadcasting regions are often substantially higher because they generally have fewer alternative funding streams.<sup>44</sup> The CPB takes several factors into account in determining grant funding for individual stations, including rural geography, service to minority audiences, independent fundraising, and status as sole media provider in a service area.<sup>45</sup> Stations must apply annually for grants and meet transparency requirements for financial reporting and public oversight, among other requirements. Eligibility rules strongly favor incumbent licensees that received awards during the previous grant cycle.

Independent public broadcasters may also receive support from other federal agencies, state and local governments, community organizations, educational institutions, corporations and other businesses, philanthropic organizations, and individual donations from viewers and listeners.

<sup>43</sup> CPB, "CPB Financial Information," <https://cpb.org/aboutcpb/financials>.

<sup>44</sup> CPB, "CPB Support for Rural Stations," <https://cpb.org/aboutpb/rural>.

<sup>45</sup> CPB, "CPB Community Service Grants," October 28, 2020, [https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/CSG\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_10.29.20\\_FINAL.pdf](https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/CSG_Fact_Sheet_10.29.20_FINAL.pdf).

## The Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was created by the CPB in 1969 to operate and manage a nationwide program distribution system interconnecting public television stations and to provide a distribution channel for national programs to those stations. Although PBS does not produce programs for its members, it aggregates funding for the creation and acquisition of programs by and for the stations and distributes programs through its satellite distribution system to nearly 350 local public television stations.

National Public Radio (NPR) was created by the CPB in 1970 as a news-gathering, production, and program-distribution company governed by its member public radio stations. NPR has over 1,000 member and affiliate stations, according to the CPB. In contrast with PBS, NPR is authorized to produce radio programs for its members. It also provides, acquires, and distributes radio programming through its satellite program distribution system. NPR Inc., located in Washington, DC, provides these administrative operations. NPR membership includes access to certain NPR-produced public affairs programs, but member stations retain control over programming decisions.<sup>46</sup> Two-thirds of all public radio stations in the United States are NPR members.<sup>47</sup>

According to the CPB, PBS is funded mainly by “member stations, distribution revenue, and underwriting support.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, NPR is funded mainly “by member stations, distribution services, underwriting and institutional grants, and individual contributions.”<sup>49</sup> Public broadcasters may use CPB grant funds to pay membership dues to PBS and NPR and to pay license fees for programming. Therefore, CPB station and programming grants awarded to independent local broadcasters may fund PBS and NPR indirectly. Because public broadcasting stations typically draw from multiple revenue sources to pay membership dues and program acquisition fees, there are no authoritative estimates of indirect federal funding levels of the PBS and NPR nonprofit organizations through dues and fees.<sup>50</sup>

Both PBS and NPR receive some direct federal funding from the CPB. In the case of PBS, the CPB provides direct grant support for certain national content, distribution infrastructure, and emergency alerting functions (see the “Public Broadcasting Support for Public Alerts and Warning” section). In the case of NPR, the CPB “provides direct grant support to NPR for its international reporting bureaus and for the infrastructure that distributes content from NPR and other national public radio producers to every public radio station.”<sup>51</sup> Such funding typically makes up a small fraction of these organizations’ total revenue.

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<sup>46</sup> National Public Radio (NPR), “Public Radio Finances,” <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/178660742/public-radio-finance>.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Patricia de Stacy Harrison, President and CEO of the CPB, to Sen. Ted Cruz, May 9, 2024, p. 2, <https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/CPB%20Response%20Letter%20to%20Sen%20Cruz%205-09-2024.pdf> (hereinafter CPB Cruz letter).

<sup>48</sup> CPB, “FAQ: How Are CPB, PBS, NPR and Local Stations Related?” <https://cpb.org/faq> (hereinafter CPB, “FAQ: How Are CPB, PBS, NPR and Local Stations Related?”).

<sup>49</sup> CPB, “FAQ: How Are CPB, PBS, NPR and Local Stations Related?”

<sup>50</sup> See CPB Cruz letter, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> CPB, “FAQ: How Are CPB, PBS, NPR and Local Stations Related?”

According to media reports, NPR receives about 1% of its funding for programming and related activities directly from the federal government each year, while PBS receives about 16%.<sup>52</sup> In a March 2025 public appearance, Katherine Maher, the president and CEO of NPR, said that direct federal funding is approximately \$11 million annually, with \$3 million going to support international news gathering, and the remainder going to support distribution and emergency warning infrastructure. NPR's annual budget is approximately \$300 million, according to Maher.<sup>53</sup> The PBS budget for FY2025 was \$373 million, according to media reports.<sup>54</sup>

## FCC Chairman's Request for Investigation of PBS and NPR

In January 2025, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr asked the FCC Enforcement Bureau to open an investigation of PBS and NPR member stations for potential violations of federal legal prohibitions against commercial advertising by public broadcast stations.<sup>55</sup> Member stations typically run underwriting announcements before programs to recognize sponsors. These announcements must adhere to strict criteria prohibiting promotion of goods and services, use of inducements, or calls to action.<sup>56</sup> In a letter to NPR and PBS leadership, Carr wrote

I believe this FCC investigation may prove relevant to an ongoing legislative debate. In particular, Congress is actively considering whether to stop requiring taxpayers to subsidize NPR and PBS programming. For my own part, I do not see a reason why Congress should continue sending taxpayer dollars to NPR and PBS given the changes in the media marketplace since the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. To the extent that these taxpayer dollars are being used to support a for-profit endeavor or an entity that is airing commercial advertisements, then that would further undermine any case for continuing to fund NPR and PBS with taxpayer dollars.<sup>57</sup>

FCC Commissioner Anna M. Gomez, an appointee of President Biden, released a statement criticizing the investigation request as "yet another Administration effort to weaponize the power of the FCC."<sup>58</sup> Additionally, several Members wrote letters to the FCC or issued public statements criticizing the investigation request.<sup>59</sup> PBS and NPR leaders made widely reported statements that member stations comply with applicable legal requirements.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> David Folkenflik, "Trump's FCC Chief Opens Investigation into NPR and PBS," *NPR*, January 30, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/30/nx-s1-5281162/fcc-npr-pbs-investigation>.

<sup>53</sup> Marta Szpacenkopf, "End of Federal Funds Would Break Fabric of Public National Network, Says NPR's CEO," *Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas* (blog), April 2, 2025, <https://knightcenter.utexas.edu/end-of-federal-funds-would-break-fabric-of-public-national-network-says-nprs-ceo/>.

<sup>54</sup> Julian Wylie, "PBS Board Approves \$373M Budget, Applauds Contract Extension for CEO Paula Kerger," *Current*, June 18, 2024, <https://current.org/2024/06/pbs-board-approves-373m-budget-applauds-contract-extension-for-ceo-paula-kerger/>.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Brendan Carr, FCC Chairman, to Katherine Maher, President and CEO of NPR, and Paula A. Kerger, President and CEO of PBS, January 29, 2025, <https://www.capradio.org/media/12276790/chairman-carr-letter-to-npr-and-pbs.pdf> (hereinafter Carr letter).

<sup>56</sup> FCC, "Commission Policy on the Noncommercial Nature of Educational Broadcasting," <https://www.fcc.gov/media/radio/nature-of-educational-broadcasting>.

<sup>57</sup> Carr letter.

<sup>58</sup> FCC News, "Commissioner Gomez Statement on FCC Investigation into NPR, PBS," press release, January 30, 2025, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-409227A1.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> For example, letter from Sens. Edward J. Markey et al., to Brendan Carr, FCC Chairman, February 12, 2025, [https://www.markey.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter\\_to\\_fcc\\_on\\_broadcasters.pdf](https://www.markey.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_to_fcc_on_broadcasters.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> For example, Todd Spangler, "PBS, NPR Say They Comply with U.S. Regulations After Trump-Appointed FCC Chairman Warns They May Be 'Violating Federal Law' by Airing Ads," *Variety*, January 30, 2025, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/pbs-npr-comply-u-regulations-202802382.html>.



## Other Public Media Organizations

Although PBS and NPR have become nearly synonymous with public broadcasting in the United States, there are multiple other public organizations that serve the needs of independent, local broadcasting stations.<sup>61</sup> Examples include American Public Television (APT), which claims to be the “leading syndicator of high-quality, top-rated programming to the nation’s public television stations.”<sup>62</sup> In radio, American Public Media operates a network of 49 public radio stations in the Upper Midwest and California and distributes public radio programming content nationwide.<sup>63</sup> Public broadcasters may use CPB programming acquisition grants to purchase programming from these and other similar organizations.

## The Future Federal Role in Public Broadcasting

Much of the debate over the future of public broadcasting involves controversy over whether it should continue to be treated as a public good and whether federal support should continue. Some supporters of public broadcasting contend that public radio and public television provide education and news to parts of the American population that are underserved by commercial broadcasters.<sup>64</sup> They argue that in doing so, public broadcasting fulfills the intent of the PBA, which states in its declaration of policy that public media should address the “needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities” through educational and cultural programming.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, advocates in the emergency response community have highlighted the role that public broadcasting plays in the national emergency alerting system—particularly in areas where commercial internet and cell service either are not universally available or affordable or have been taken offline by natural disasters.<sup>66</sup>

Critics have questioned whether these are relevant and appropriate roles for federally assisted broadcasting.<sup>67</sup> They contend that public broadcasting has lost much of its early impact as available media choices have expanded over the last several decades and that, as a result, the federal role in public broadcasting should be reevaluated. Many question the 1967 law that created the national public broadcasting system and whether the federal government should be in the “business” of providing general appropriations to the CPB.

For example, in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, a House report, *Concurrent Resolution on the Budget—Fiscal Year 2025*, included a comment about discretionary spending under the “Education, Training,

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<sup>61</sup> For a list of major organizations, see CPB, “Public Media Organizations,” <https://cpb.org/stations/pborganizations>.

<sup>62</sup> American Public Television, “About,” <https://aptonline.org/about/apt>.

<sup>63</sup> Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), “Public Radio System Overview: How Are MPR and APM Different from NPR and PRX?” <https://www.mpr.org/about/public-radio-system-overview#:~:text=how%20are%20mpr%20and%20apm%20different%20from%20npr%20and%20prx>, and American Public Media (APM), “About Us,” <https://www.americanpublicmedia.org/about>.

<sup>64</sup> Protect My Public Media, “Corporation for Public Broadcasting,” <https://protectmypublicmedia.org/cpb/>.

<sup>65</sup> See 47 U.S.C. §396(a)(6). For discussion of public broadcasting advocacy issues, see Adam Ragusea, *Topple the Towers: Why Public Radio and Television Stations Should Radically Reorient Toward Digital-First Local News, and How They Could Do It*, Knight Foundation, 2017, <https://knightfoundation.org/public-media-white-paper-2017-ragusea>.

<sup>66</sup> CPB, “Public Media’s Role in Emergency Services,” August 10, 2020, <https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/Emergency-Alert-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> For example, James T. Bennett, *The History and Politics of Public Radio: A Comprehensive Analysis of Taxpayer-Financed U.S. Broadcasting* (Springer, 2021).

Employment, and Social Services” function that urged a cutoff of federal support for “cultural agencies.” It said, in part,

It should not be the responsibility of the Federal Government to provide subsidies for cultural agencies, such as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. This budget resolution recommends such agencies generate financial support from private-sector patrons.<sup>68</sup>

Some observers contend that the size and scope of the federal government budget deficit requires significant cutbacks in many areas. They argue that federal support for public broadcasting is no longer necessary, given the increasing predominance of internet-based technologies and formats in broadcasting that are broadly accessible to both producers and consumers of educational media content at a reasonable cost. However, persistent gaps in internet coverage and affordability—particularly in low-income or rural areas—may limit some Americans’ access to these resources.<sup>69</sup>

Additionally, many critics of public broadcasting—particularly of PBS- and NPR-branded programming—have voiced concerns that public broadcasting is not objective, balanced, or free of ideological slant. For example, on March 26, 2025, the House Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency held a hearing, *Anti-American Airwaves: Holding the Heads of NPR and PBS Accountable*, in which NPR and PBS leaders were called to testify and address allegations of liberal bias in public broadcasting.<sup>70</sup>

Katherine Maher of NPR defended the organization’s commitment to impartiality in its news and commentary programming, highlighting several recent organizational reforms.<sup>71</sup> Paula Kerger of PBS said, “We are constantly looking to making sure that we are bringing forward a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives.”<sup>72</sup> Additionally, public broadcasting advocates say that programming decisions—including whether to carry certain PBS- or NPR-branded content—are made by independent local stations, which are subject to public transparency requirements and may tailor programming to the preferences and needs of local audiences.

The Trump Administration has opposed federal support of public broadcasting on grounds of political bias and waste. An April 14, 2025, White House statement, “The NPR, PBS Grift Has Ripped Us Off for Too Long,” called for elimination of funding, claiming that the organizations “spread radical, woke propaganda disguised as ‘news.’”<sup>73</sup> During his first term in office, President Trump proposed eliminating CPB funding (save for closeout costs) in each of his

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<sup>68</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on the Budget, *Concurrent Resolution on the Budget on the Budget—Fiscal Year 2025*, report to accompany H.Con.Res. 117, 118<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., H.Rept. 118-568, June 27, 2024, p. 40, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/118th-congress/house-report/568/1?s=1&r=13>.

<sup>69</sup> CRS Report R47506, *The Persistent Digital Divide: Selected Broadband Deployment Issues and Policy Considerations*, by Colby Leigh Pechtoll.

<sup>70</sup> House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Hearing Wrap Up: DOGE Subcommittee Holds NPR and PBS Executives Accountable for Leftist Propaganda Funded by Taxpayer Dollars,” press release, March 26, 2025, <https://oversight.house.gov/release/hearing-wrap-up-doge-subcommittee-holds-npr-and-pbs-executives-accountable-for-leftist-propaganda-funded-by-taxpayer-dollars/>.

<sup>71</sup> Cameron Coats, “Maher Defends NPR’s Editorial Independence in DOGE Showdown,” *RadioInk*, March 27, 2025, <https://radioink.com/2025/03/27/maher-defends-nprs-editorial-independence-in-doge-showdown/>.

<sup>72</sup> Statement made during question-and-answer period at hearing, U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, *Anti-American Airwaves: Holding the Heads of NPR and PBS Accountable*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., March 26, 2025, H.Hrg. 119-14, <https://www.congress.gov/event/119th-congress/house-event/LC74287/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22Anti-American+Airwaves%3A+Holding+the+heads+of+NPR+and+PBS+Accountable%22%7D&s=2&r=1>.

<sup>73</sup> White House, “The NPR, PBS Grift Has Ripped Us Off for Too Long,” press release, April 14, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/2025/04/the-npr-pbs-grift-has-ripped-us-off-for-too-long/>.

budget proposals submitted to Congress.<sup>74</sup> The White House budget for FY2026 proposes canceling \$505 million out of \$535 million previously appropriated to the CPB for FY2026 for general programming and \$60 million appropriated for interconnection support, leaving \$30 million for closeout costs, and would cancel the full advance appropriation of \$535 million for FY2027.<sup>75</sup>

On May 1, 2025, President Trump issued E.O. 14290, in which he directed the CPB and all federal agencies to cease funding for NPR and PBS.<sup>76</sup> As justification, the E.O. cited a contemporary media landscape “filled with abundant, diverse, and innovative news options” and the alleged political bias of NPR- and PBS-branded current events programming. The E.O. specifies that the restriction applies to direct funding to the NPR and PBS organizations, as well as to CPB grant funds that NPR and PBS may indirectly receive from member stations in the form of membership and programming fees. It directs the CPB to change grant rules to prevent use of grant funds for these purposes.

Patricia Harrison, President and CEO of the CPB, issued a statement challenging the legality of the E.O.:<sup>77</sup>

CPB is not a federal executive agency subject to the President’s authority. Congress directly authorized and funded CPB to be a private nonprofit corporation wholly independent of the federal government. In creating CPB, Congress expressly forbade ‘any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over educational television or radio broadcasting, or over [CPB] or any of its grantees or contractors....’ 47 U.S.C. § 398(c).

NPR and PBS have since filed separate lawsuits against the President and senior Administration officials. On May 27, 2025, NPR along with three Colorado member stations filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. In the filing, the plaintiffs argued, in part, that the E.O. violated their right to free speech and was issued in retaliation for news reporting that angered the President. The plaintiffs also argued that President Trump did not have the authority to block duly enacted congressional appropriations to a corporation that Congress created as a private nonprofit to insulate it from political interference.<sup>78</sup> On May 30, 2025, PBS—joined by a Minnesota member station—filed its own lawsuit, making arguments similar to those put forth in the NPR lawsuit.<sup>79</sup>

On May 28, 2025, President Trump transmitted a special message to Congress requesting rescission of \$9.4 billion in enacted appropriations, including a total of \$1.07 billion that it had

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<sup>74</sup> See CPB, “CPB’s Past Appropriations,” <https://cpb.org/appropriation/history>. From FY2002 to FY2011, the Bush Administration declined to request two-year advance funding for the CPB. In both the Bush and Trump appropriations requests, Congress continued CPB appropriations in line with amounts previously appropriated.

<sup>75</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Technical Supplement to the 2026 Budget: Appendix*, May 30, 2025, p. 1058, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/appendix\\_fy2026.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/appendix_fy2026.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Executive Order 14290 of May 1, 2025, “Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media,” 90 *Federal Register* 19415, May 7, 2025.

<sup>77</sup> CPB, “Corporation for Public Broadcasting Statement Regarding Executive Order on Public Media,” press release, May 2, 2025, <https://cpb.org/pressroom/Corporation-Public-Broadcasting-Statement-Regarding-Executive-Order-Public-Media>.

<sup>78</sup> NPR et al. v. Donald J. Trump et al. (D.C. Cir. 2025), <https://media.npr.org/documents/about/press/NPR%20Complaint%20for%20Declaratory%20and%20Injunctive%20Relief.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> David Bauder, “PBS Suing Trump Administration Over Defunding, Three Days After NPR Filed Similar Case,” *PBS News*, May 30, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/pbs-suing-trump-administration-over-defunding-three-days-after-npr-filed-similar-case>. See PBS et al. v. Donald J. Trump et al. (D.C. Cir. 2025), <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/70414813/1/public-broadcasting-service-v-donald-j-trump>.

previously appropriated to CPB for FY2026 and FY2027.<sup>80</sup> The President invoked Section 1012(a) of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 (ICA; 2 U.S.C. §683(a)). The act grants the Comptroller General of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) responsibilities to monitor and enforce through litigation executive branch compliance with the ICA's requirements. Congress may address the requested rescissions for the CPB separately from those of others contained in the special message.<sup>81</sup>

On June 12, 2025, the House of Representatives passed the Rescissions Act of 2025 (H.R. 4) by a 214-212 vote. H.R. 4 included all appropriations covered by the President's special message. Senate Majority Leader John Thune said that the Senate was likely to take up the rescission bill for consideration in July and might seek changes, according to media reports.<sup>82</sup>

## Issues for Congress

For nearly 60 years, the institutional parameters of the public broadcasting enterprise have been defined largely by the relationship between the CPB and the public media organizations it created (PBS and NPR), on the one hand, and local public media broadcasters under a variety of ownership structures, on the other. Congress may take a number of actions that might transform, eliminate, or sustain these institutional relationships in different ways.

For example, Congress might provide legislative ratification for White House actions (such as attempted dismissals of CPB directors, prohibitions of CPB funding of NPR and PBS, termination of the RTL program, and suspension of NGWS grant funding) that aim to curtail the CPB's role in the public broadcasting enterprise. Alternatively, Congress might act to maintain or reinforce existing institutional relationships by clarifying legislative intent in matters under legal dispute (see the "Structure and Leadership of the CPB" and "The Future Federal Role in Public Broadcasting" sections). If Congress takes no action, this would leave resolution of disputes between the Trump Administration and public broadcasting entities to the outcome of litigation in the courts (see "The Future Federal Role in Public Broadcasting" section).

Congress previously authorized CPB funding through FY2027 through advance appropriations. If Congress were to decline to make CPB appropriations for FY2028 during the FY2026 budget cycle, the public broadcasting enterprise would have a year to adapt to a policy and fiscal environment in which the federal government was largely absent for the first time in decades. However, Congress might also choose to eliminate federal support for public broadcasting immediately through rescission of existing appropriations (see the "Appropriations for the CPB" and "Other Sources of Federal Support for the CPB" sections). Rescission (whether at the behest of the White House or directly from Congress) would likely disrupt existing federally supported

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<sup>80</sup> White House, "Message to Congress," May 28, 2025, pp. 21-22, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Proposed-Rescissions-of-Budgetary-Resources.pdf>. The George W. Bush Administration requested rescissions of appropriated CPB funds through its budget requests for FY2006 to FY2010. The proposed rescissions were \$10 million from FY2006, \$53.5 million from FY2007, \$50 million from FY2008, \$200 million from FY2009, and \$220 million from FY2010.

<sup>81</sup> For more information on rescissions, see CRS Report R48432, *The Impoundment Control Act of 1974: Background and Congressional Consideration of Rescissions*, by James V. Saturno.

<sup>82</sup> Patricia Zengerle, "US House Passes Trump Cuts of \$9.4 Billion for Foreign Aid, Broadcasting," Reuters, June 12, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-house-passes-trump-cuts-94-billion-foreign-aid-broadcasting-2025-06-12/>; and Benjamin Guggenheim et al., "Crucial Megabill Changes Could Come Today," *Politico*, June 13, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/inside-congress/2025/06/13/crucial-megabill-changes-could-come-today-00404668>.

public broadcasting activities, which involve long-term planning for programming, infrastructure investments, and station support activities.

Congress may go further and eliminate CPB authorities codified in statute. If Congress eliminates the CPB without creating an alternative structure for support of public broadcasting, public broadcasting stations and producers of programming content for public broadcasting may seek to secure additional nonfederal funding to avoid curtailments or cessation of operations. In addition, new means of support for maintenance and improvement of national interconnection infrastructure that enables program distribution, live broadcasts, and emergency alerts would need to be found if these functions were to continue uninterrupted.

Congress may consider how elimination of CPB authorities and appropriations might affect federal governance of public broadcasting. For example, repeal of existing statutory requirements for “objectivity and balance” in certain CPB-funded programming by public broadcasters might allow stations greater freedom to openly support preferred cultural values and political goals. However, this would also create financial difficulties for many broadcasters that rely on station and programming grants from the CPB and could affect service to difficult-to-reach minority and rural audiences. Withdrawal of federal support for the public broadcasting enterprise might therefore raise questions about the “public” character of public broadcasting.

Congress may take other actions that would change the status quo but stop short of eliminating CPB authorities and appropriations. If Congress elects to continue funding public broadcasting through the CPB, it may (1) modify CPB authorities and related mandates; (2) modify, eliminate, or create additional requirements for distribution and use of grant funds; and/or (3) adjust appropriations levels and make changes to the advance appropriations process.

For example, Congress may modify or eliminate requirements for partisan balance of CPB Board membership and make explicit (subject to any constitutional constraints) any legislative authorities permitting or prohibiting the President to remove board members. This might clarify the legal basis of executive branch policies that have met court challenges (see the “Structure and Leadership of the CPB” section). Further, Congress may mandate greater board oversight of programming content funded by CPB grants. Certain of these steps might make the national public broadcasting enterprise more accountable to the President and the national electorate. They might also lead to greater influence of partisan politics in public broadcasting.

Congress may also decide to change grant requirements—particularly as these relate to the permissibility of using CPB-provided funds to pay membership and programming fees to NPR, PBS, or other public broadcasting entities. Going further, Congress could eliminate programming support as an eligible grant activity and instead focus grant funding on non-programming needs of local stations, such as equipment costs.

Congress may extend the period of advance appropriations or eliminate it entirely. Alternatively, Congress may create an alternate funding mechanism entirely separate from the appropriations process, such as an excise tax on certain goods and services, as suggested by the Carnegie Commission (see the “Public Broadcasting Before 1967” section). Congress could dedicate revenue from the tax to the CPB or other public broadcasting entities. This might provide greater independence to the CPB but would likely reduce congressional oversight. Additionally, the variability of annual excise tax receipts might complicate CPB planning.

Congress may also change the CPB mission itself or consider other institutional arrangements for supporting independently owned public broadcasting stations, especially those serving rural areas that rely heavily on federal support to remain on the air. For example, Congress might assign a more active role to federal agencies, such as the Department of Education or the Department of Commerce, that would go beyond existing authorizations for RTL and NGWS grants. Congress

might also direct an appropriate federal agency to use appropriations to fund broadcast stations and interconnections in lieu of CPB support, as originally envisioned by the Carnegie Commission. Additionally, other agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, or the Department of Defense might provide programming or other support relevant to their statutory missions.<sup>83</sup>

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## **Acknowledgments**

Rachael D. Roan (Senior Research Librarian) contributed research to this report.

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<sup>83</sup> Prior to 1967, some support for public broadcasting was made through defense appropriations, and the ETFA was justified in part on defense grounds—see “Public Broadcasting Before 1967” section.