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Public Broadcasting Snapshot: NPR and PBS are More than "Tiny Desk" and "Daniel Tiger," They are Critical to Public Safety

Item Type	Senate Minority Staff Report
Download date	2026-06-10 21:04:27
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14300/2929



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION

JUNE 2025: PUBLIC BROADCASTING SNAPSHOT

NPR and PBS Are More Than “Tiny Desk” and “Daniel Tiger” They Are Critical to Public Safety

Public broadcasting serves a critical role in disseminating local, state, and national emergency alerts and keeping Americans informed about lifesaving news. Local National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) member stations rely on federal funding to supplement private donations. By threatening funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) with his [rescission request](#) seeking to claw back nearly \$1.1 billion in support for public broadcasting, the President is risking the ability of these local broadcasters to deliver critical information during emergencies.

Key Findings:

- The operations of 79 public radio and 33 TV stations across 34 states and territories are considered vulnerable to federal funding cuts.
- Nearly 13 million Americans live in communities under threat of losing their local public broadcast stations. What’s worse, these stations serve large swaths of the Western, Midwestern, and Southeastern United States at risk of wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and other public safety emergencies. This double threat casts uncertainty on the ability of these stations to disseminate emergency alerts and information to residents when they need it most.
- More than 70 percent of federal funding goes directly to local public broadcasters for content, interconnection, and support services. It would cost local public broadcasters more than double CPB’s current contribution to replace these critical services through alternative public or private means.

Why NPR and PBS Are Essential in Emergencies:

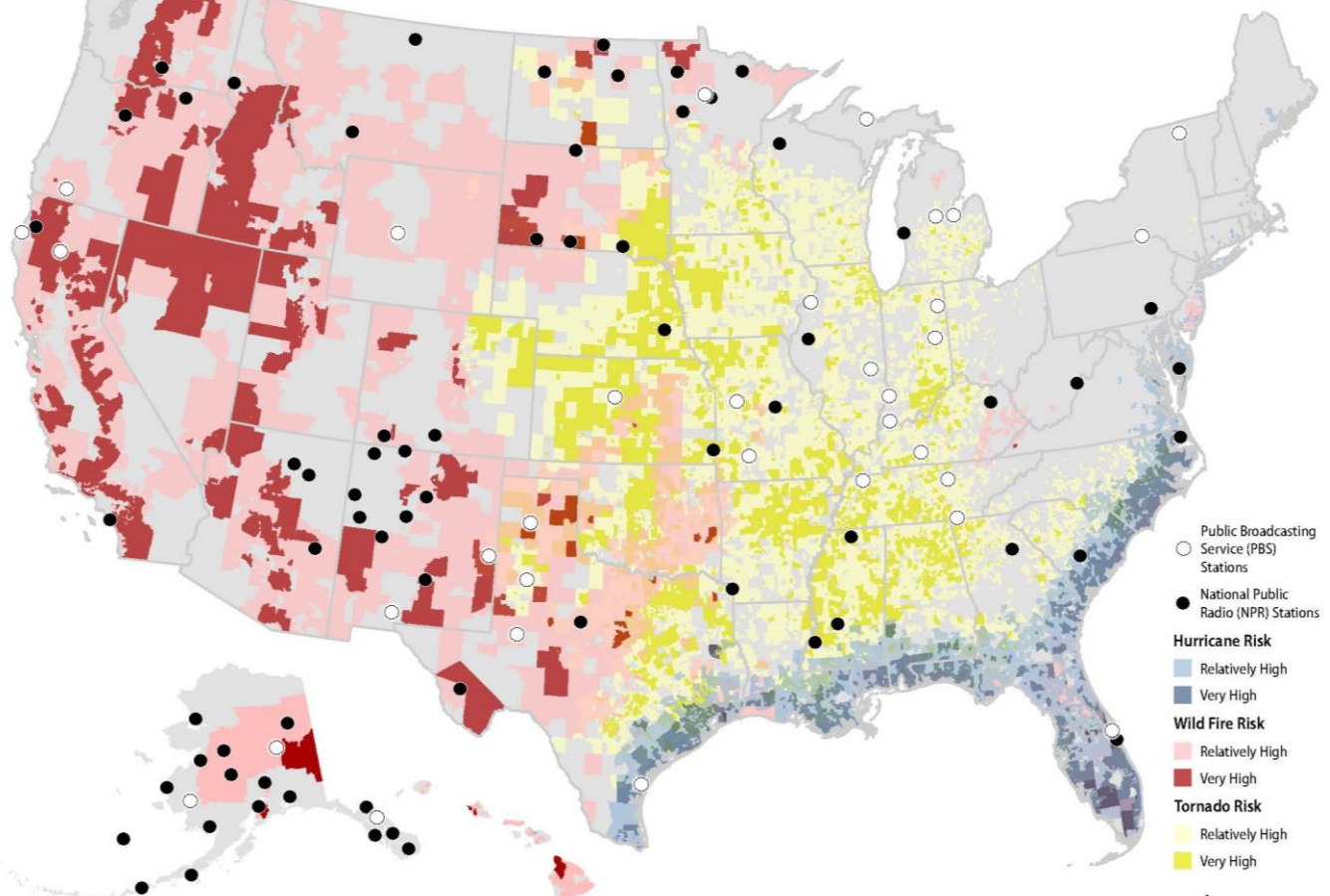
Public radio and TV stations play essential public safety roles that cannot be replaced by commercial alternatives. At least 20 States name public broadcasters as a resource in their emergency plans, and many serve as emergency operations centers.ⁱ NPR also provides member stations with resources such as backup transmitter kits and portable studio systems that can be used by stations if on-air operations are disrupted by natural disasters or other emergencies.ⁱⁱ Given the role they play in emergencies, there is no commercial alternative that can comprehensively replace public broadcasters.

IMPACT ON RURAL AMERICANS

Support through CPB is critical for many local stations, with the most vulnerable in rural and remote communities. Public radio and television stations serve as the primary—often sole—source of local news, educational content, and emergency alerts. These stations rely heavily on federal funding, with some depending on it for over 70 percent of their budgets. **Some rural areas depend on their local public media station as their only source of information in emergencies.**

In severe storm and wildfire situations that knock out a community's power supply, TVs broadcasting news on the path of an incoming tornado may go dark due to power outages, and cell phones may lose service, leaving families with only local public radio broadcasts delivered to battery-powered, hand-crank, or car radios. Without local broadcasting, families in rural areas may not receive critical alerts in time to get to safety.ⁱⁱⁱ

PBS and NPR Stations at Risk from Funding Cuts, Overlaid with Locations Susceptible to Hurricanes, Tornadoes, and Wildfires



The PBS and NPR stations included on the map are stations that received more than 30% of their operating budget from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in the most recent fiscal year. The stations may be in areas susceptible to hazards beyond those depicted (e.g., earthquakes, floods, and snowstorms).



Source: FEMA, PBS, NPR

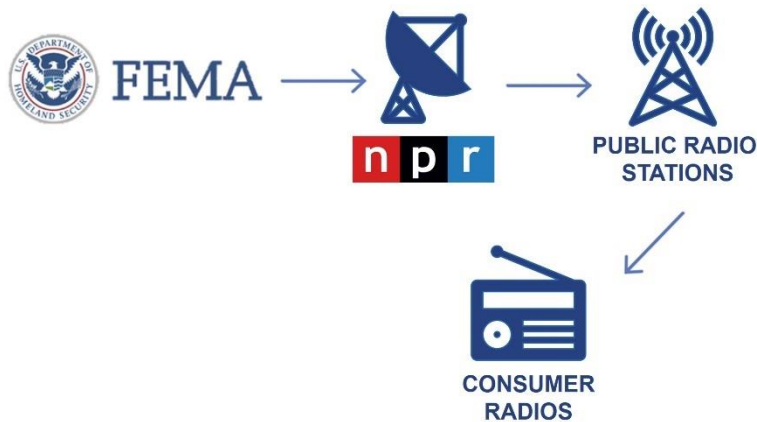
State	Extremely Vulnerable		Moderately Vulnerable		Vulnerable		Estimated Impacted Population
	Radio Stations	TV Stations	Radio Stations	TV Stations	Radio Stations	TV Stations	
Alaska	11	2	4		3	1	182,656
Arizona	3						459,358
California		2	2				116,313
Colorado	1				1		126,345
Florida	1	1					728,272
Georgia			1				524,079
Guam					1		153,836
Idaho	1						338,861
Illinois		1	1		1	1	414,505
Indiana		3			1	1	250,151
Kansas		1			1		351,670
Kentucky				1	1		385,501
Maryland					1		217,835
Michigan	1	1				2	14,145
Minnesota			2		2	1	770,377
Mississippi	2				1		491,672
Missouri			1	1		1	122,137
Montana	1				1		738,786
Nebraska					1		149,678
New Mexico	3		1	1	6	1	571,685
New York						2	49,154
North Carolina	1						514,719
North Dakota	1				2		384,456
Oregon	2			1			426,346
Pennsylvania					1		141,752
Puerto Rico					1		1,059,771
South Dakota	2		2				472,744
South Carolina	1						635,366
Tennessee		1		2			226,766
Texas		3		1	4		964,872
Washington			1		1		69,027
West Virginia	2						579,667
Wisconsin			1				232,866
Wyoming						1	10,682
Total	32	15	17	7	30	11	12,876,050

Percent of station funded by CPB grants			
	Extremely Vulnerable	Moderately Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Radio	>50%	41-50%	30-40%
TV	>40%	35-40%	30-35%

HOW IT WORKS: PUBLIC SAFETY

Public radio and television stations play essential roles in sharing public safety information during emergencies.

PUBLIC RADIO SATELLITE SYSTEM

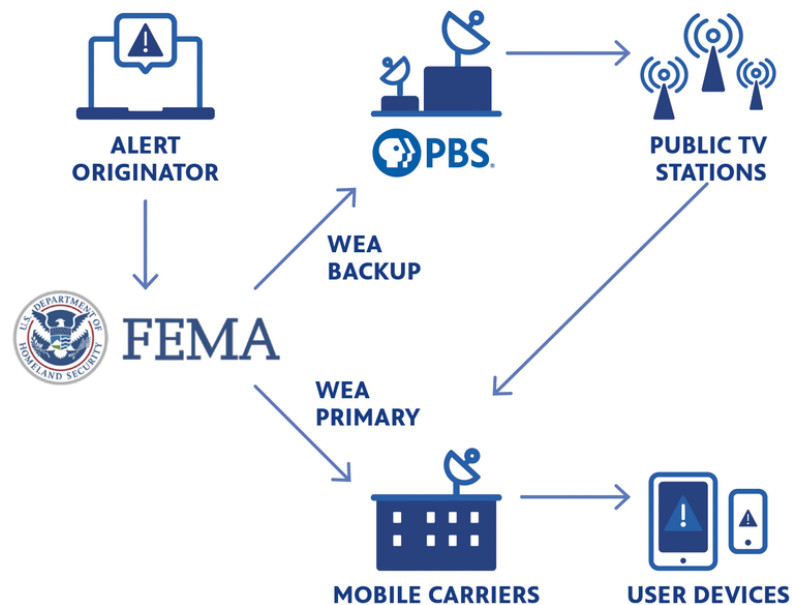


NPR manages^{iv} the Public Radio Satellite System (PRSS), which receives national Emergency Alert System (EAS) feeds directly from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This system provides important redundancy in the event of power, network, or internet outages. Without continued funding for public radio, federal, state, or local

governments would need to establish and fund a replacement emergency alerting system or risk alerts not reaching all residents.

PBS^v provides additional redundancy through its Warning, Alert, and Response Network (WARN), which partners with FEMA to enable stations to broadcast geotargeted emergency alerts to cellular devices. The WARN system relies on public television infrastructure to provide important redundancy in the event of a cybersecurity incident or if an internet disruption to a mobile carrier's facility

WIRELESS EMERGENCY ALERT PATH



breaks its connection to FEMA.^{vi} **In 2024 alone, over 11,000 alerts were transmitted over the PBS WARN system, marking a 30% increase since the prior year.**

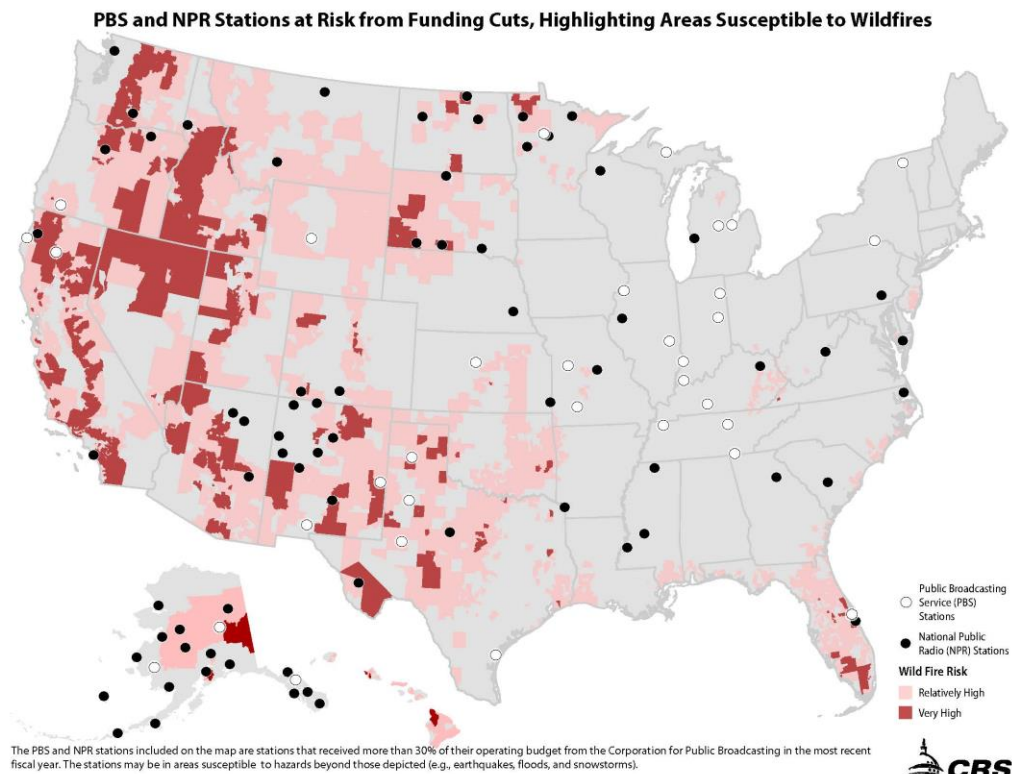
WILDFIRES

OKLAHOMA

In March 2025, public broadcasters played a critical role in responding to wildfires in Oklahoma. KOSU, along with its two satellite stations, KOSR and KOSN, collectively serve central and northeast Oklahoma, making them the primary emergency alerting distribution system for the northeast quadrant of the state. Between March 13 and 23, 2025, 65 fire alerts were issued across 13 counties utilizing public broadcasts. Additionally, six evacuation alerts were transmitted, further demonstrating the lifesaving services provided by public broadcasters.

KOSU is not compensated for this service except through the federal funding offered through CPB. KOSU operates this system as a community service on behalf of Oklahoma, at a cost of \$751,042 in Fiscal Year 2024—a \$175,067 grant from CPB and \$575,975 in private donations. While the percentage of federal funding is smaller than private donations, making up this gap would require significant support from alternative funding sources to continue providing critical emergency alerting services.

This year, FEMA has designated^{vii} much of the Western United States as “very high” wildfire risk; some of these areas, such as in Montana and South Dakota, are served by public broadcasters that are extremely dependent on federal funding.



Source: FEMA, PBS, NPR

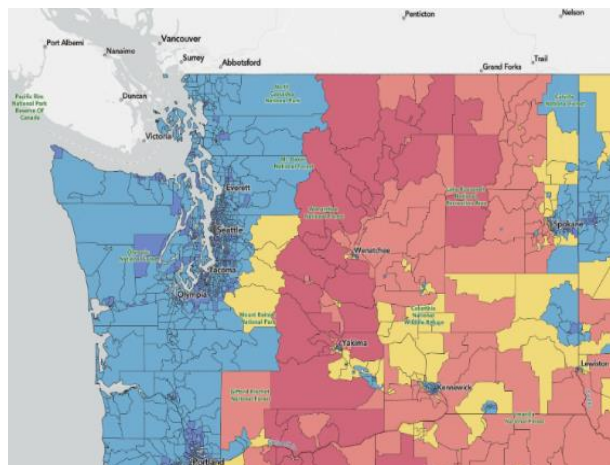
WILDFIRES CONT.

WASHINGTON

In the State of Washington, KDNA, which serves Granger and the surrounding area, is reliant on federal CPB grants for a significant portion of its operating budget. KDNA serves an area that is at a high risk of wildfires, including the city of Yakima, with a population of over 90,000. KDNA plays a critical role in responding to emergencies by providing local news and information. Without continued federal funding, KDNA and other public broadcasters will have to find alternative funding sources or risk being unable to provide their essential public safety services.



Source: CPB



Source: FEMA

“NWPB is committed to bringing critical fire coverage to audiences around the Northwest — online and on the air. The NWPB news team is staffed May through October 24/7 to track and report on fires that pose a risk to human lives, property and close major roadways. The team has increased the number of on-call staff to account for a larger number of fires that have already been started. Throughout the fire season, more in-depth coverage is a primary focus, as well, with topics like [wildfire communication gaps for Spanish-speaking Northwesterners](#) and how some groups are working to help ensure emergency alerts are translated properly for the safety of all in the region. This is of specific concern in [Skamania County region after unclear alerts were sent](#) and NWPB has continued to follow up with progress on the issue.”

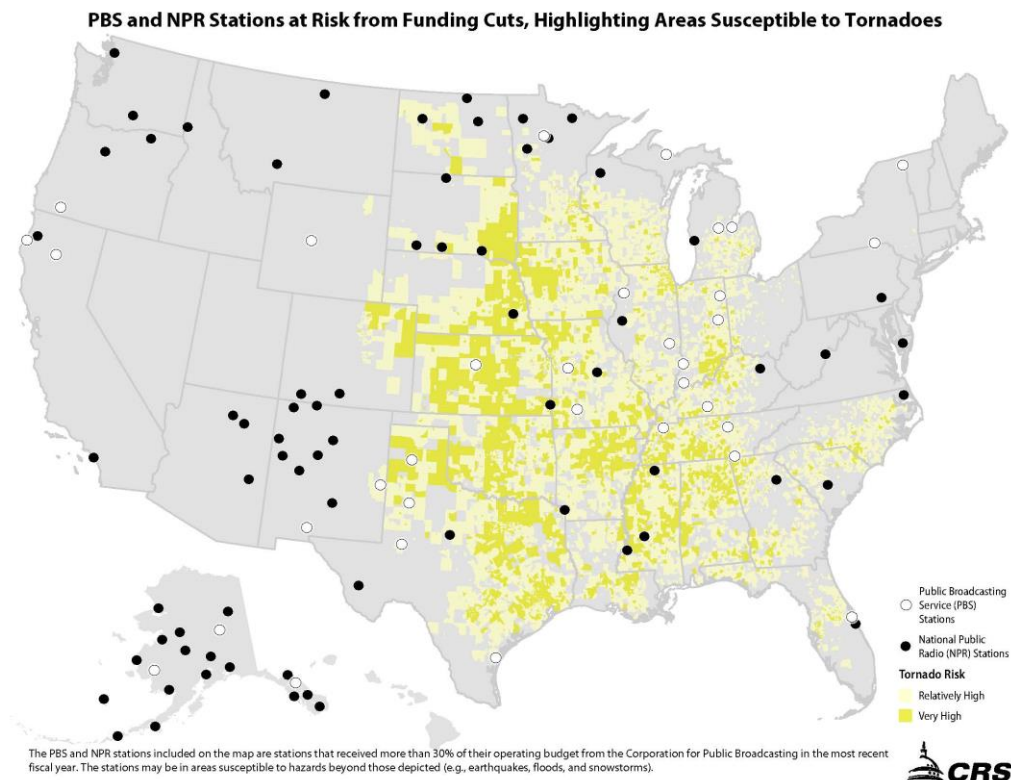
~Northwest Public Broadcasting

TORNADOES

KENTUCKY

An historic tornado in December 2021 ravaged western Kentucky, leaving devastation that communities are still recovering from today. This storm stands as one of the most catastrophic in U.S. history, carving a tornado track that ranks among the longest ever documented in the nation. During this emergency, WKMS, a public radio station operating in western Kentucky, was often the sole source of news and emergency information as communities suffered from widespread power and communication outages. Affected residents were able to utilize their emergency or car radios to receive critical information from WKMS, underscoring the lifesaving services provided by public broadcasters.

FEMA has identified much of the Midwest United States as at risk for tornadoes this year.^{viii} While tornadoes generally occur from March through August, they can strike at any time. Tornadoes have impacted every state, but most occur in “Tornado Alley,” a belt from Nebraska through Kansas, Oklahoma, and into central Texas.^{ix}



Source: FEMA, PBS, NPR

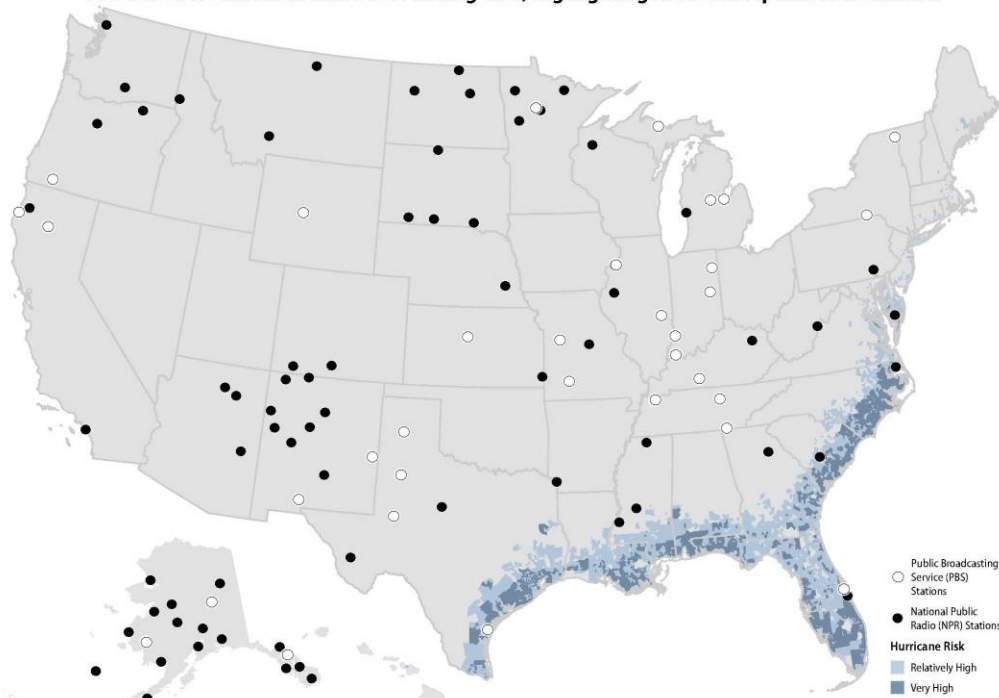
HURRICANES

NORTH CAROLINA

During the 2024 hurricane season, public broadcasting played a crucial role in disseminating emergency information and maintaining communications channels amid widespread disruptions. The devastation caused by Hurricane Helene left 500,000 people in the Southeastern United States without power and without reliable access to the internet and to cellular networks. In North Carolina, Blue Ridge Public Radio (BPR), a local NPR station, provided the most reliable information to the impacted areas, as other sources couldn't be accessed without power. The station provided live updates and emergency resources—invaluable services that alternative sources would be otherwise unable to share with impacted communities.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)^x, the 2025 hurricane season, which began June 1 and runs through November, has a 60% chance of being “above normal,” and FEMA^{xi} has designated much of the southeast coast as at “very high” risk of hurricanes. With an estimated 2 to 5 major hurricanes in 2025, the Trump Administration’s threats to public broadcasting are a clear threat to public safety.

PBS and NPR Stations at Risk from Funding Cuts, Highlighting Areas Susceptible to Hurricanes



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Source: FEMA, PBS, NPR



BACKGROUND ON PUBLIC BROADCASTING

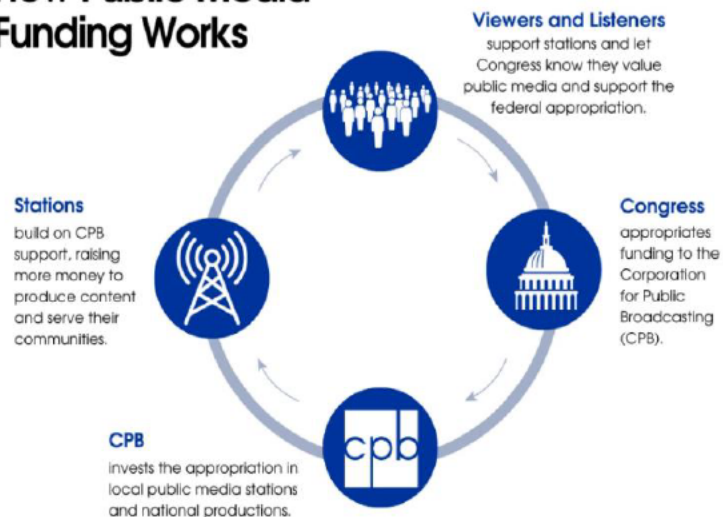
The Corporation for Public Broadcasting is a private, nonprofit corporation authorized by Congress in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Congress has provided funding on a bipartisan basis for public broadcasting for more than 50 years. 95 percent of CPB's appropriation goes to content creation, community services, and other local needs, with the rest allocated to CPB's administrative costs. Through the Community Service Grants, CPB directly supports local National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) member stations. Since 1975, CPB has had a unique, two-year advance appropriation designed to insulate local NPR and PBS stations from political interference and allow local stations and producers the time needed to properly plan, design, execute, and support programming and services. Without the certainty of a two-year appropriation, stations could not provide the same quality programming and services.^{xiii}

Line Item	Percent of Budget ^{xii}
Public TV Station Grants	50.1%
Public TV Programming Grants	16.7%
Public Radio Station Grants	20.7%
Public Radio Programming Grants	1.6%
System Support Funds	6%
CPB Operations	5%

Source: CPB

With over 70 percent of CPB's funding going directly to local stations, it is estimated that it would cost local public broadcasters more than double CPB's current contributions to replace the content, interconnection, and support services currently provided by CPB. Defunding public broadcasting would have a detrimental impact on rural communities across the United States, potentially forcing numerous rural stations off the air, leaving residents without critical information, especially during emergencies like natural disasters and extreme weather events.

How Public Media Funding Works



Source: CPB

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- ⁱ Corporation for Public Broadcasting. (n.d.). *Emergency alerts*. <https://cpb.org/emergency-alerts>
- ⁱⁱ PBS. (n.d.). *WARN contact information*. <https://www.pbs.org/about/about-pbs/contact-information/warn/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ NPR Distribution. (n.d.). *Support: Station emergency kits*.
<https://www.nprdistribution.org/support#station-emergency-kits>
- ^{iv} CNN. (2019, March 4). *Tornado safety tips: What you need to know*.
<https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/04/us/tornado-safety-tips-wxc>
- ^v Corporation for Public Broadcasting. (n.d.). *Emergency alerts*. <https://cpb.org/emergency-alerts>
- ^{vi} PBS. (n.d.). *WARN contact information*. <https://www.pbs.org/about/about-pbs/contact-information/warn/>
- ^{vii} WTCI PBS. (n.d.). *WARN*. <https://www.wtcitv.org/warn/>
- ^{viii} Federal Emergency Management Agency. (n.d.). *Wildfire hazard*. National Risk Index.
<https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/wildfire>
- ^{ix} Federal Emergency Management Agency. (n.d.). *Tornado hazard*. National Risk Index.
<https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/tornado>
- ^x Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2020, August). *Tornado safety initiative: Fact sheet*.
https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-08/fema_tornado-safety-initiative_fact-sheet.pdf
- ^{xi} National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2024, May 23). *NOAA predicts above-normal 2025 Atlantic hurricane season*. <https://www.noaa.gov/news-release/noaa-predicts-above-normal-2025-atlantic-hurricane-season>
- ^{xii} Federal Emergency Management Agency. (n.d.). *Hurricane hazard*. National Risk Index.
<https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/hurricane>
- ^{xiii} Corporation for Public Broadcasting. (n.d.). *CPB appropriation*. <https://cpb.org/appropriation>
- ^{xiv} Corporation for Public Broadcasting. (n.d.). *Purpose of CPB appropriation*.
<https://cpb.org/appropriation/purpose>