

Public Broadcasting: Background Information and Issues for Congress

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Brian E. Humphreys
Analyst in Science and
Technology Policy

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.

The CPB was funded by federal appropriations from its founding until it was defunded by Congress in July 2025. Appropriations to the CPB remain under the jurisdiction of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees should Congress decide to fund the CPB in the future. Beginning in 1975, Congress 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). Advance appropriations for FY2026 and FY2027 were rescinded on July 24, 2025, by the Rescissions Act of 2025 (P.L. 119-28). 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. On August 1, 2025, the CPB announced that it was beginning an orderly winding down of its operations in response to the rescission of congressional appropriations and Senate appropriators' decision not to include CPB funding in their FY2026 appropriations bill.

The CPB distributed appropriated funds to independent public broadcasting stations and content producers according to a statutory formula. In FY2024, approximately 10.6% of public television and 6.0% of public radio broadcasting revenue came from the CPB's Community Service Grants (television and radio station grants). The CPB grants were 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 have provided 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 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 took several actions in 2025 to curtail the CPB's role in the public broadcasting enterprise, including directives to dismiss all Democratic members of the CPB Board, to prohibit CPB funding of NPR and PBS, and to terminate all other grant funding by federal agencies. Several of these actions were being litigated in federal court when the CPB announced the planned cessation of its operations. Congress may consider actions to clarify legal authorities. Congress may also consider using FY2026 or future annual appropriations to restore funding to the CPB—either under current or amended authorities—or providing support to public broadcasters through alternative channels. Congress may also take no action.

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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.¹ 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.² 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 were 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) as an amendment to the Communications Act of 1934. The CPB did not own or operate any stations. On August 1, 2025, the CPB announced that it would cease operations in January 2026 because of a lack of funding after Congress rescinded advance appropriations for FY2026 and FY2027, and Senate appropriators elected not to include funding in the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2026 (S. 2587; see also S.Rept. 119-55).³

Throughout its existence, 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. The public broadcasting enterprise may witness changes following the closure of the CPB. Such changes could include closure of some broadcast stations and adaptation of others to find new sources of revenue, as well as less centralized oversight and development of the public broadcasting enterprise. 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.⁴ During this period, advocates viewed such broadcasting as a form of public education

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

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

³ See CPB, “Corporation for Public Broadcasting Addresses Operations Following Loss of Federal Funding,” press release, August 1, 2025, <https://cpb.org/pressroom/Corporation-Public-Broadcasting-Addresses-Operations-Following-Loss-Federal-Funding>.

⁴ See Federal Communications Commission (FCC), *Fourth Annual Report: FY1938*, p. IV, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-308653A1.pdf>.

similar to that provided in public schools, which they argued should be free from commercial pressures and influences.⁵

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.⁶ In the absence of regular federal funding of public broadcasting during this 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.⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹ The law authorized \$32 million in appropriations over five years—or \$339 million in April 2025 dollars.¹⁰

⁵ 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”).

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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/>.

⁸ 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%202000%20mile%20radius;and%20Carson%20Benn,%20The%20Midwest%20Program%20on%20Airborne%20Television%20Instruction%20and%20the%20Ford%20Foundation,%20Rockefeller%20Archive%20Center%20Research%20Reports,%202020,%20https://rockarch.issuelab.org/resources/37719/37719.pdf>.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ Calculated using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index (CPI) Inflation Calculator, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

Other advocates framed public broadcasting as a cultural alternative to the “vast wasteland” of commercial television, enriching civic discourse, public education, and community life.¹¹ 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.¹² The Carnegie Commission released its report, titled “Public Television: A Program for Action,” in January 1967—an event that received national front-page news coverage.¹³

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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ Congress elected to fund the CPB through the annual

¹¹ 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.

¹² “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.

¹³ Philanthropy Roundtable.

¹⁴ 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>.

¹⁵ 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); its successor, the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP), was authorized under the Public Telecommunications Financing Act of 1978, as amended, 47 U.S.C. §§390-393, 397-399b, (continued...)

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 reached 99% of the U.S. population as of August 2025.¹⁶

In the decades since the PBA's passage, multiple Congresses and presidential Administrations sought to make changes to the act and to the public broadcasting enterprise writ large. Issues addressed by these actions include

- CPB authorities for programming decisions and control over public broadcasters' access to the interconnection for national program distribution;¹⁷
- balance and objectivity of programming;¹⁸
- service to unserved and underserved audiences, especially children and minorities;¹⁹
- encouragement of creative risk in programming;²⁰
- the size, composition, and terms of service of the CPB Board;²¹
- development of telecommunications technologies;²²
- the formula for allocating CPB appropriations to public broadcasters and producers of programming content;²³ and
- requirements for public broadcast station financial transparency and public meetings.²⁴

Structure and Leadership of the CPB

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

and administered by the Department of Commerce until 2017. The final appropriation for the program was made in 2010.

¹⁶ CPB, “About Public Media,” accessed August 20, 2025, <https://cpb.org/aboutpb/what-public-media#:~:text=Today%27s%20public%20media%20system%20began,with%20free%20programming%20and%20services>.

¹⁷ The CPB had more direct control over programming when it was originally incorporated in 1967. In 1973, the CPB agreed to increase grants to independently licensed and operated broadcast stations and give them more discretion over programming content to address concerns over political bias of CPB-funded programming. See Patricia M. Chuh, “The Fate of Public Broadcasting in the Face of Federal Funding Cuts,” *CommLaw Conspectus*, vol. 3, no. (1995), p. 207, <https://scholarship.law.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=commlaw> (hereinafter Chuh, “The Fate of Public Broadcasting”).

¹⁸ P.L. 95-567.

¹⁹ P.L. 102-356.

²⁰ P.L. 102-356.

²¹ P.L. 102-356.

²² P.L. 95-567.

²³ P.L. 95-567 and P.L. 100-626.

²⁴ P.L. 95-567.

Directors are allowed 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 of 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.²⁵

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. Through the end of FY2025, the CPB exercised oversight of local stations through the Office of the Inspector General, which typically focused on ensuring use of CPB grants within program rules. The CPB Board and its officers do not manage programing 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.²⁶ 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 court challenge, this would leave two directors out of the statutorily mandated nine, because four vacancies were unfilled when the terminations took place).

²⁵ 47 U.S.C. §396(g)(1).

²⁶ *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.

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.²⁷ On June 8, 2025, the court denied the request for a temporary restraining order but allowed the case to proceed.²⁸ On July 15, 2025, the Trump Administration filed a lawsuit against the three board members, who had refused to leave their posts, claiming that they had usurped certain presidential authority and were therefore serving unlawfully. The lawsuit seeks to oust them from office.²⁹

Appropriations for the CPB

Until it was defunded by Congress, the CPB was largely funded by federal appropriations but sometimes received 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.³⁰ 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).³¹ 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.³² However, some Members in recent Congresses called for an end to advance appropriations for the CPB.³³

Appropriations to the CPB were made under the jurisdiction of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.³⁴ These subcommittees provided appropriations under the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Congress periodically provided separate appropriations for support of the interconnection infrastructure that enables national distribution of content and live programming

²⁷ Defendants Opposition to Plaintiffs' Motion for Temporary Restraining Order, *CPB v. Trump*.

²⁸ Memorandum Opinion and Order, *CPB v. Trump*.

²⁹ *United States v. Laura G. Ross* (D.C. Cir. 2025), https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.282676/gov.uscourts.dcd.282676.1.0_2.pdf.

³⁰ 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").

³¹ This appropriation was subsequently rescinded by the Rescissions Act of 2025 (P.L. 119-28), enacted on July 24, 2025.

³² CPB, "Purpose of CPB's Advance Appropriations."

³³ 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, 118th Cong., 2nd 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>.

³⁴ CPB appropriations were originally made under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Office of Education. See Chuh, "The Fate of Public Broadcasting," p. 210.

events. For FY2025, the appropriation for interconnection support was \$60 million.³⁵ In addition, Congress provided emergency appropriations to the CPB in response to economic and social disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁶

Other Sources of Federal Support for the CPB

In addition to direct appropriations from Congress, the CPB received 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.³⁷ RTL grants are awarded on a competitive basis every five years. The CPB was awarded grants in previous years to partner with local stations and other public broadcasting entities that produce content for national distribution.³⁸ In the past, RTL grants helped fund a number of well-known children's programs, such as Sesame Street, Clifford the Big Red Dog, and Molly of Denali.³⁹

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.”⁴⁰ 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.”⁴¹ 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.⁴² CPB President and CEO Patricia Harrison said that the

³⁵ Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-47). Interconnection support appropriations were not subject to the advance appropriations process.

³⁶ 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).

³⁷ 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>.

³⁸ Anne Brachman, Governmental Affairs, CPB, personal communication with CRS, April 7, 2017.

³⁹ 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).

⁴⁰ CPB RTL press release; see also Julian Wylie, “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.

⁴¹ 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>.

⁴² 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> (hereinafter CPB, RTL statement).

organization would “work with Congress and the Administration to preserve funding for this essential program.”⁴³

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 administered a competitive grant program for public television and radio stations to replace and upgrade their broadcast technologies 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 Generation Warning System (NGWS) program.⁴⁴ NGWS is part of an upgrade within the existing public safety warning system known as the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System.⁴⁵ According to the CPB, Congress made appropriations between FY2022 and FY2025 totaling \$136 million to implement the NGWS Grant Program.⁴⁶

The program was established and funded through the annual appropriations process. Congressional appropriators set forth requirements for the program in appropriations committee reports. In the report accompanying the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2023 (H.R. 8257), congressional appropriators stated that

[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.⁴⁷

Appropriations reporting language is not legally binding but is often followed by federal agencies receiving the appropriation. Under FEMA’s original implementation of the program, the CPB was the only eligible applicant and sole recipient of grant funds for the FY2022-FY2024 grant cycles. Under the terms of the grant, the CPB awarded funds through sub-grants to public broadcast stations for technology upgrades and for purchase and distribution of commercial receivers to individual members of rural and underserved communities in order to assist them in accessing emergency information.⁴⁸

In compliance with President Biden’s E.O. 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” issued in January 2021, FEMA

⁴³ CPB, RTL statement. The RTL grant program is authorized under 20 U.S.C. §7293.

⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, *Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2022*, report to accompany H.R. 4431, 117th Cong., 1st 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).

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ CPB, “Next Generation Warning System,” <https://cpb.org/NGWS>.

⁴⁷ U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, Department of Homeland Security Subcommittee, *Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Bill, 2023*, report to accompany H.R. 8257, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., H.Rept. 117-396, July 1, 2022, p. 70.

⁴⁸ See FEMA, “Fiscal Year 2024 Next Generation Warning System Grant Program,” Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), p. 9, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_ncp-fy24-ngwsgp-nofo.pdf (hereinafter FEMA FY2024 NOFO).

prioritized grant awards to public broadcasting stations serving minority and underserved communities.⁴⁹ President Trump revoked this E.O. on January 20, 2025.⁵⁰

According to the CPB, “approximately \$24.9 million [had] been awarded to 45 organizations in 24 states” as of April 2025.⁵¹ 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 2022.⁵² 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.⁵³ On August 18, 2025, the CPB issued a press release stating that—because it was defunded by Congress—it could no longer manage the NGWS Grant Program. It stated that “FEMA should assume responsibility for disbursing the funds as Congress intended.”⁵⁴

Changes to the NGWS Grant Program for FY2025

On August 6, 2025, FEMA released a new notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for the NGWS Grant Program. The NOFO modified the previous purpose and funding structure of the program as implemented by the Biden Administration, which had centered the CPB and public broadcasting interests in broad accordance with congressional appropriations committee reporting language (see the “Public Broadcasting Support for Public Alerts and Warnings” section).⁵⁵ The 2025 NOFO indicated that FEMA would fund a wider array of public and private sector stakeholders and activities in the emergency alerting field, placing less emphasis on the role of established broadcasters and upgrades of broadcast station technologies.⁵⁶ The 2025 NOFO appears to indicate that FEMA may exclude participation in the program by organizations that have diversity, equity, and inclusion practices and by foreign nationals.⁵⁷ In contrast with previous funding opportunity notices, the 2025 NOFO made no mention of public broadcasting stations or public broadcasting audiences as intended beneficiaries of the grant program.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ 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 FY2024 NOFO.

⁵⁰ 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/>.

⁵¹ 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).

⁵² P.L. 117-103, Division F, Title III. See Julian Wyllic, “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.

⁵³ CPB April 2025 press release.

⁵⁴ CPB, “CPB Defunding Ends Next Generation Warning System Grant Program for Local Public Media Stations,” press release, August 18, 2025, <https://cpb.org/pressroom/CPB-Defunding-Ends-Next-Generation-Warning-System-Grant-Program-Local-Public-Media>.

⁵⁵ FEMA, “Fiscal Year 2025 Next Generation Warning System Grant Program,” NOFO DHS-25-IPAWS-138-00-99, August 6, 2025, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_gpd_ipaws_fy2025-ngws-nofo_08062025.pdf (hereinafter NGWS FY2025 NOFO).

⁵⁶ NGWS FY2025 NOFO, pp. 6-9. For example, the NOFO lists installation of IPAWS-compatible emergency sirens in rural and tribal areas as the top program performance criterion; see pp. 9, 29.

⁵⁷ NGWS FY2025 NOFO, p. 29.

⁵⁸ For example, the FEMA FY2024 NOFO defined eligible subrecipients narrowly as “public broadcast entities” as the term is defined in 47 U.S.C. §397(11), and identified “underserved public broadcasting audiences” as the intended beneficiaries of the program. See FEMA FY2024 NOFO, pp. 6, 11.

The 2025 NOFO made \$40 million available to fund improvements to emergency alerting systems to inform the public during emergencies and protect critical infrastructure. It stated that FEMA would administer the program directly and make a total of five awards—expected to be \$8 million each—to state, tribal, or territorial emergency management agencies (as opposed to the CPB).⁵⁹ According to the NOFO, grant recipients may spend funds directly or make sub-awards to eligible subrecipients. The NOFO did not provide a detailed definition of subrecipient eligibility.

CPB Support for Independent Broadcasters and Producers

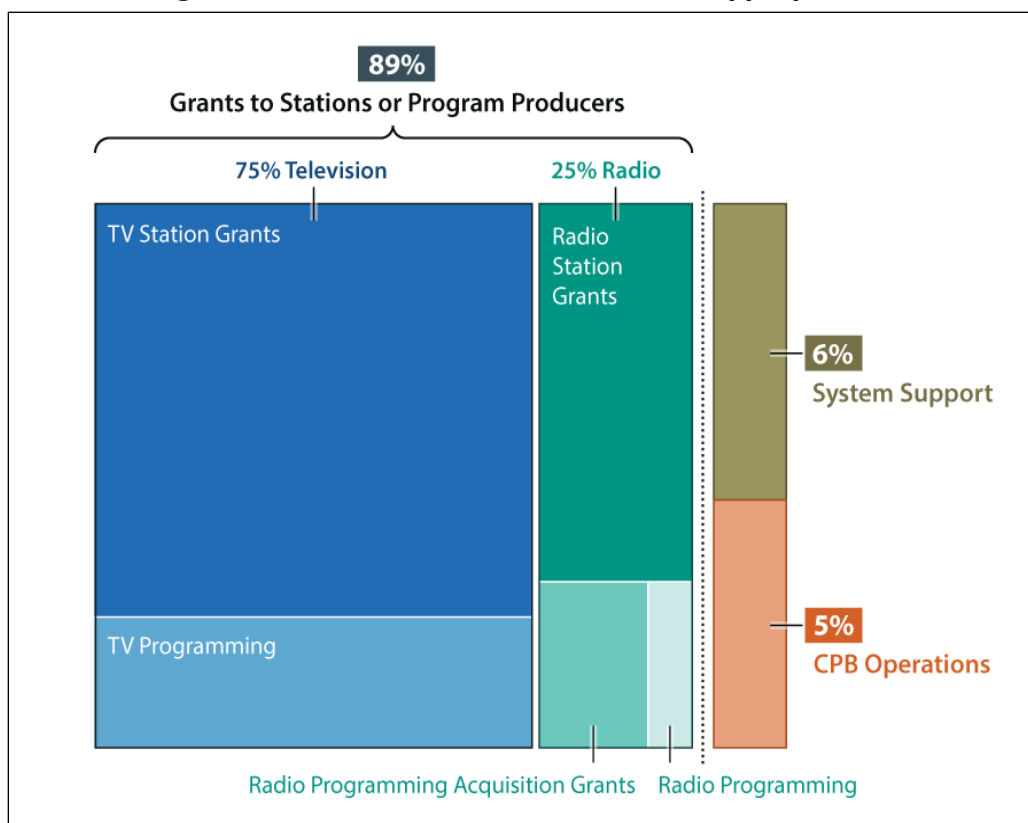
Congress created the CPB to provide federal support for consistent funding for content production and distribution that would support a national public broadcasting enterprise (see the “The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967” section). As amended, the PBA provides a formula for CPB allocation of federal 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.⁶⁰
- 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.

⁵⁹ NGWS FY2025 NOFO, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁰ 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 FY2023/FY2025*, March 28, 2022, <https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/appropriation/FY-2023-2025-CPB-Budget-Justification.pdf>.

CPB grants were 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.⁶¹ The percentages for rural stations serving smaller audiences over larger broadcasting regions were often substantially higher because they generally had fewer alternative funding streams.⁶² The CPB took 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.⁶³ Stations were required to apply annually for grants and meet transparency requirements for financial reporting and public oversight, among other requirements. Eligibility rules strongly favored incumbent licensees that received awards during the previous grant cycle.

Independent public broadcasters could 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.

⁶¹ CPB, "CPB Financial Information," <https://cpb.org/aboutcpb/financials>.

⁶² CPB, "CPB Support for Rural Stations," <https://cpb.org/aboutpb/rural>.

⁶³ CPB, "CPB Community Service Grants," October 28, 2020, 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.⁶⁴ Two-thirds of all public radio stations in the United States are NPR members.⁶⁵

According to the CPB, PBS is funded mainly by “member stations, distribution revenue, and underwriting support.”⁶⁶ Similarly, NPR is funded mainly “by member stations, distribution services, underwriting and institutional grants, and individual contributions.”⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸

Both PBS and NPR received some direct federal funding from the CPB. In the case of PBS, the CPB provided 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 provided “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.”⁶⁹ Such funding typically made up a small fraction of these organizations’ total revenue.

⁶⁴ National Public Radio (NPR), “Public Radio Finances,” <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/178660742/public-radio-finances>.

⁶⁵ 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%2005-09-2024.pdf> (hereinafter CPB Cruz letter).

⁶⁶ 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?”).

⁶⁷ CPB, “FAQ: How Are CPB, PBS, NPR and Local Stations Related?”

⁶⁸ See CPB Cruz letter, p. 5.

⁶⁹ CPB, “FAQ: How Are CPB, PBS, NPR and Local Stations Related?”

According to media reports, NPR received about 1% of its funding for programming and related activities directly from the federal government each year, while PBS received about 16%.⁷⁰ In a March 2025 public appearance, Katherine Maher, the president and CEO of NPR, said that direct federal funding was 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.⁷¹ The PBS budget for FY2025 was \$373 million, according to media reports.⁷²

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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

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."⁷⁶ Additionally, several Members wrote letters to the FCC or issued public statements criticizing the investigation request.⁷⁷ PBS and NPR leaders made widely reported statements that member stations comply with applicable legal requirements.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ 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>.

⁷¹ 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/>.

⁷² 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/>.

⁷³ 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).

⁷⁴ FCC, "Commission Policy on the Noncommercial Nature of Educational Broadcasting," <https://www.fcc.gov/media/radio/nature-of-educational-broadcasting>.

⁷⁵ Carr letter.

⁷⁶ 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>.

⁷⁷ 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.

⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ 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.”⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ Public broadcasters may use CPB programming acquisition grants to purchase programming from these and other similar organizations.

The Future Federal Role in Public Broadcasting After the Rescission of CPB Appropriations

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 previously appropriated to the CPB for FY2026 and FY2027.⁸² 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.⁸³

On June 12, 2025, the House of Representatives passed the Rescissions Act of 2025 (P.L. 119-28) by a 214-212 vote. The act included all appropriations covered by the President’s special message. On July 17, 2025, the Senate passed the bill by a 51-48 vote.

Much of the debate over the future of public broadcasting before the rescission of appropriations involved controversy over whether it should continue to be treated as a public good and, therefore, whether federal support should continue. Some supporters of public broadcasting contended that public radio and public television provided education and news to parts of the American population that were underserved by commercial broadcasters.⁸⁴ They argued that in doing so, public broadcasting fulfilled the intent of the PBA, as amended, which stated 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.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ For a list of major organizations, see CPB, “Public Media Organizations,” <https://cpb.org/stations/pborganizations>.

⁸⁰ American Public Television, “About,” <https://aptonline.org/about/apt>.

⁸¹ 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>.

⁸² 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.

⁸³ 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.

⁸⁴ Protect My Public Media, “Corporation for Public Broadcasting,” <https://protectmypublicmedia.org/cpb/>.

⁸⁵ See 47 U.S.C. §396(a)(6). For discussion of public broadcasting advocacy issues, see Adam Ragusea, *Topple the* (continued...)

Additionally, advocates in the emergency response community highlighted the role that public broadcasting played 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.⁸⁶

Critics questioned whether these were relevant and appropriate roles for federally assisted broadcasting.⁸⁷ They contended that public broadcasting lost much of its early impact as available media choices expanded over the last several decades and that, as a result, the federal role in public broadcasting needed to be reevaluated. Many questioned 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 118th Congress, a House report, *Concurrent Resolution on the Budget—Fiscal Year 2025*, included a comment about discretionary spending under the “Education, Training, 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.⁸⁸

Some observers contended that the size and scope of the federal government budget deficit required significant cutbacks in many areas. They argued that federal support for public broadcasting was 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. Other observers noted that persistent gaps in internet coverage and affordability—particularly in low-income or rural areas—may have limited some Americans’ access to these resources.⁸⁹

Many critics of public broadcasting—particularly of PBS- and NPR-branded programming—voiced concerns that federally subsidized public broadcasting was not objective, balanced, or free of ideological bias. 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.⁹⁰

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>.

⁸⁶ CPB, “Public Media’s Role in Emergency Services,” August 10, 2020, <https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/Emergency-Alert-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

⁸⁷ For example, James T. Bennett, *The History and Politics of Public Radio: A Comprehensive Analysis of Taxpayer-Financed U.S. Broadcasting* (Springer, 2021).

⁸⁸ 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, 118th Cong., 2nd 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>.

⁸⁹ CRS Report R47506, *The Persistent Digital Divide: Selected Broadband Deployment Issues and Policy Considerations*, by Colby Leigh Pechtoll.

⁹⁰ 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/>.

Katherine Maher of NPR defended the organization's commitment to impartiality in its news and commentary programming, highlighting several organizational reforms.⁹¹ Paula Kerger of PBS said, "We are constantly looking to making sure that we are bringing forward a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives."⁹² Additionally, public broadcasting advocates said that programming decisions—including whether to carry certain PBS- or NPR-branded content—were 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 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.'"⁹³ During his first term in office, President Trump proposed eliminating CPB funding (save for closeout costs) in each of his budget proposals submitted to Congress.⁹⁴ The White House budget for FY2026 proposed canceling \$505 million out of \$535 million previously appropriated to the CPB for FY2026, leaving \$30 million for closeout costs, and would cancel the full advance appropriation of \$535 million for FY2027.⁹⁵

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.⁹⁶ 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. specified that the restriction applied 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 directed 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.:⁹⁷

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,

⁹¹ 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/>.

⁹² Statement made during question-and-answer period at the hearing. U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, *Anti-American Airwaves: Holding the Heads of NPR and PBS Accountable*, hearings, 119th Cong., 1st 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>.

⁹³ 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/>.

⁹⁴ 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 George W. Bush Administration and the first Trump Administration, Congress continued CPB appropriations in line with amounts previously appropriated.

⁹⁵ 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.

⁹⁶ Executive Order 14290 of May 1, 2025, "Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media," 90 *Federal Register* 19415, May 7, 2025.

⁹⁷ 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>.

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 subsequently 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.⁹⁸ 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.⁹⁹

Options for Congress

For nearly 60 years, the institutional parameters of the public broadcasting enterprise were 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. The rescission of CPB appropriations—followed by the CPB’s announcement that it would cease operations in early 2026—may substantially alter these parameters. Congress may influence the scope, character, and extent of changes, depending on the policy options it chooses to pursue.

Congress may consider three broad orientations for policy action or—alternately—may choose not to act, leaving the current status quo. Congress may (1) provide annual appropriations to the CPB under existing authorities, (2) provide appropriations to the CPB under amended authorities, or (3) decline to provide further appropriations to the CPB but provide funding through other channels to support certain public broadcasting activities previously carried out by the CPB, such as station and programming grants, emergency alerting, and interconnection support.

Fund the CPB Under Existing Authorities

The Rescissions Act did not address the PBA, which remains law. If Congress were to appropriate funds for FY2026 through the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, the CPB would likely continue operations. The CPB cited Senate appropriators’ decision not to provide funding in FY2026 as influencing its decision to begin winding down its operations at the end of FY2025.

Should Congress wish to reestablish the CPB in future years, it may appropriate funds to do so. However, given that the CPB would have likely ceased operations by that time, several considerations apply. Congress may need to include instructions for reestablishing the CPB in appropriations reporting language or authorizing language expressing a “sense of the Senate” or “sense of the House.” Congress might wish to affirm that it intends for the CPB to operate in accordance with the PBA prior to enactment of rescissions in 2025.

⁹⁸ 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>.

⁹⁹ 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>.

To establish a nonprofit corporation in the District of Columbia as required by the PBA, a registered agent must appoint an initial board of directors and file articles of incorporation with the Department of Licensing and Consumer Protection. The PBA originally designated the members of the CPB's initial board of directors to serve as incorporators. Fully reestablishing CPB functions under such conditions could take a year or more. Congress could therefore consider an initial appropriation to fund start-up costs before making a full appropriation to fund grants to public broadcasting entities through the CPB.

The rescission of CPB appropriations may disrupt existing federally supported public broadcasting activities, which involve long-term planning for programming, infrastructure investments, and station support activities. For those seeking to maintain public broadcasting as it existed in recent decades, reestablishing the CPB under existing authorities might have the advantage of mitigating such disruptions—especially if this is done relatively quickly while much of the public broadcasting enterprise the CPB formerly supported is still intact. However, a CPB reestablished under the existing authorities may face the same criticisms related to federal support of public broadcasting through a private nonprofit corporation, and the potential for future rescissions may complicate any effort to reestablish the CPB as it existed before being defunded (see “The Future Federal Role in Public Broadcasting After the Rescission of CPB Appropriations” section).

Congress may create an alternate funding mechanism separate from the appropriations process to mitigate such potential complications—for example, by creating 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. Alternately, it could use a mechanism similar to that used to fund C-SPAN, in which commercial cable and satellite television operators contribute operating funds through a designated fee.¹⁰⁰ Such mechanisms might provide greater independence to the CPB and consistent funding to public broadcasting but would likely reduce congressional oversight. Additionally, the variability of annual revenue might complicate CPB planning. Congress may repeal the PBA if it wishes to preclude reestablishment of the CPB under these or other conditions.

Fund the CPB with Changes

Congress might consider amendments to the PBA to address previous disputes over the independence, objectivity, and balance of the CPB and the organization's accountability to elected leadership. Some might argue that decisions about programming related to public affairs, early childhood education, national history, and other topics are inherently value laden and, therefore, should reflect the values of the electorate and the priorities of the nation's elected leadership if they receive federal funds.

From this point of view, Congress might seek to make a reconstituted CPB operate more like a federal agency than a private nonprofit. Congress could grant the CPB more centralized control over programming, akin to the authorities it held previously before these were transferred to public broadcasting stations in 1973 as a result of perceptions of bias in news coverage (see “The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967” section). Congress may also choose to fund the CPB with regular, annual appropriations to ensure greater CPB accountability to policy preferences of congressional majorities and the White House, rather than reinstituting advance appropriations.

¹⁰⁰ See “How is C-SPAN funded?” in C-SPAN, “FAQs,” <https://www.c-span.org/about/faq/>.

Alternately, Congress could structure the CPB or a successor organization within an existing federal department or as an independent federal agency with a director appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. The director could pursue Administration policy priorities in public broadcasting subject to statutory guidelines and congressional oversight as would be done by any other agency head. Some, however, might perceive such an arrangement to be inconsistent with the original intent of the PBA to make federal public broadcasting a shared national endeavor insulated from politics and the electoral process.

Fund Public Broadcasting Through Other Means

Congress may seek to create alternative structures for support of public broadcasting stations or use certain existing authorities. The Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP), established under the Public Telecommunications Act of 1992 (P.L. 102-356) as the successor to ETFA, provided funds for facilities construction until 2010, when Congress made its final appropriation. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) shuttered the program in 2011 and repealed program regulations in 2017.¹⁰¹ Congress could fund the PTFP if it chose to make appropriations and provide appropriate guidance for reactivating the program as a vehicle for supporting construction of public broadcasting facilities with federal funds. Congress may also wish to continue funding the RTL and NGWS programs, which were not addressed by the rescissions bill. Congress may provide guidance to federal agencies on administration of these programs and what portion of program funding—if any—should be directed to public broadcasting entities if this is not specified in statute.

Congress might assign new authorities to federal agencies, such as the Department of Education or the Department of Commerce, to carry out a public broadcasting enterprise. Congress might also direct an appropriate federal agency to use designated appropriations to fund broadcast stations and interconnections in lieu of CPB support. Additionally, other agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, or the Department of Defense might provide programming grants or other support relevant to their statutory missions.¹⁰²

This approach may allow Congress to directly and more narrowly target funding to support local public broadcasting stations and specific programming activities without an intermediary. The federal role in public broadcasting may be more limited or siloed under such a scenario in which federal support was realized through multiple issue-specific grant programs administered by multiple federal agencies. It may also raise concerns regarding the independence of the public broadcasting enterprise from political control. However, this approach would retain some federal involvement in—and support of—public broadcasting.

Take No Further Action Regarding the CPB and Public Broadcasting

If Congress chooses to take no further action on public broadcasting, the CPB will likely cease to exist in early 2026 (see “The Future Federal Role in Public Broadcasting After the Rescission of CPB Appropriations” section). However, the public broadcasting enterprise may continue, at least in the near term. Both NPR and PBS have released public statements indicating that they plan to

¹⁰¹ Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, “Repeal of Regulations Governing the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program,” 82 *Federal Register* 43844, September 20, 2017.

¹⁰² 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.

continue operations after the CPB shuts down, albeit with cutbacks.¹⁰³ At the same time, many public broadcasting stations have reported record contributions from individual viewers and listeners, as well as from corporate underwriters.¹⁰⁴ Some states provide substantial funds to public broadcasting stations and may continue to do so for the foreseeable future.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, many observers have predicted that broadcast stations located in more remote areas or those that serve economically marginalized audiences may struggle to keep operating without station grants provided by the CPB.¹⁰⁶

In August 2025, PBS announced a 21% cut to its annual budget in response to federal defunding of public television.¹⁰⁷ The President and CEO of NPR said that 78 member stations face immediate risk to continuing operations and that roughly half would “have to make significant adaptations” to stay on the air. However, she voiced optimism that many of them will adapt to the changed policy environment and continue to operate.¹⁰⁸ Several foundations have undertaken a coordinated effort to fund vulnerable public broadcasters, according to media reports.¹⁰⁹ Stations in more heavily populated areas with larger and more affluent audiences may seek new ways to monetize aspects of their operations formerly performed as a public service while maintaining their FCC status as noncommercial, educational stations.

The Rescissions Act of 2025 and subsequent closure of the CPB will alter the relationship between Congress and the national public broadcasting enterprise. The PBA contains numerous congressional mandates for CPB stewardship of the federal investment in public broadcasting, which were institutionalized over many decades. In exercising its statutory authorities to confirm presidential nominations to the CPB Board and maintaining oversight of it, Congress was able to secure a measure of influence over public broadcasting writ large. Having defunded the CPB, Congress will not have access to the institutional levers that provided this influence.

Prior to being defunded, the CPB was compelled to submit an annual budget request and justification to Congress. The document typically covered a wide range of issues of potential concern to congressional appropriators on the use of federal funds, such as the effectiveness of children’s programming in improving educational outcomes, adoption of new media technologies and formats, programming priorities, cybersecurity measures, and funding of local stations.¹¹⁰ Since 1988, Congress has required the CPB to maintain an independent inspector general for

¹⁰³ See NPR, “Statement from Katherine Maher, NPR President & CEO, on Closure of Corporation for Public Broadcasting,” press release, August 1, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/01/g-s1-80660/statement-from-katherine-maher-npr-president-ceo-on-closure-of-corporation-for-public-broadcasting>; and PBS, “The CPB Is Closing. We Are Not,” <https://www.pbs.org/video/the-cpb-is-closing-we-are-not-fjeix/>.

¹⁰⁴ Scott Nover, “Can NPR Do Without Federal Funding? Its CEO Says She’s Optimistic,” *Washington Post*, August 6, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/08/06/npr-katherine-maher-funding/> (hereinafter Nover, “Can NPR Do Without Federal Funding?”).

¹⁰⁵ “How Much Do Public Broadcasters Receive in State Funding,” *Current*, 2025, <https://current.org/state-funding-guide/>.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin Mullin, “The Race to Rescue PBS and NPR Stations,” *New York Times*, August 19, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/19/business/the-race-to-rescue-pbs-and-npr-stations.html?searchResultPosition=1> (hereinafter Mullin, “The Race to Rescue PBS and NPR Stations”).

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin Mullin, “PBS Slashes Budget by 21% After Federal Funding Cuts,” *New York Times*, August 14, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/14/business/pbs-budget-cuts.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Nover, “Can NPR Do Without Federal Funding?”

¹⁰⁹ Mullin, “The Race to Rescue PBS and NPR Stations.”

¹¹⁰ For example, see CPB, *Corporation for Public Broadcasting Appropriation Request and Justification FY 2026/FY 2028*, May 30, 2025, <https://cpb.org/sites/default/files/Public-%20FY%202026%20and%20FY%202028%20Justification%20to%20Labor%2C%20Health%20and%20Human%20Services%2C%20Education%20Related%20Agencies%20Subcommittee%20%281%29.pdf>.

oversight of the CPB and CPB-funded entities, including audits of local stations. Public broadcasters were likewise required to submit annual financial reports to the CPB and conduct public business meetings, which provided a measure of transparency into their operations. Such transparency may be diminished after the CPB ceases operations.

The relationship between public broadcasting entities and the citizenry at large may also change. Public broadcasting was supported by Congress as a public good available to every citizen at no cost. Some states provide funds to support public broadcasting stations under their jurisdiction, which may serve to perpetuate this mission in those states, albeit at perhaps a more modest scale than with previous federal support. Absent federal or state funding, public broadcasters and content producers may prove less willing to serve certain minority or underserved rural audiences if the costs are deemed prohibitive or if more financially beneficial opportunities exist elsewhere.

Author Information

Brian E. Humphreys
Analyst in Science and Technology Policy

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