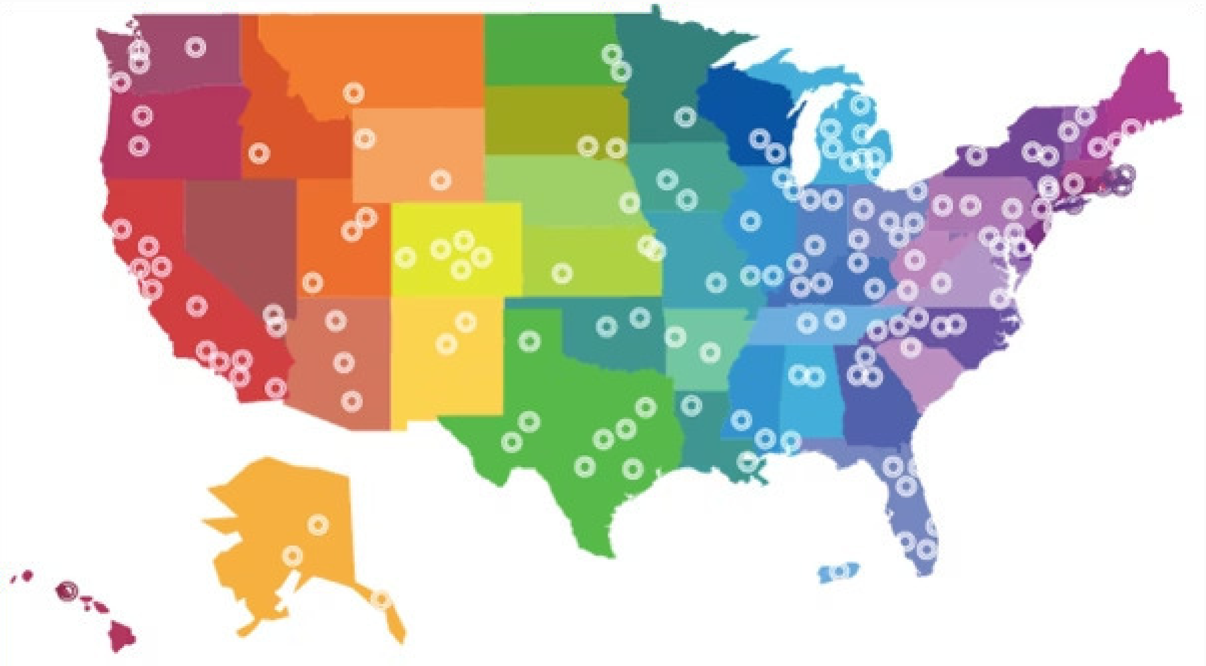
About Public Media Company



Public Media Company is a nonprofit consulting firm dedicated to serving public media. We leverage our business expertise to increase public media impact across the country.

For a quarter-century, Public Media Company has worked in partnership with organizations in urban and rural communities to find innovative solutions and build local impact. We have worked with more than 400 organizations in all 50 states, and we're currently coordinating the Public Media Bridge Fund to help stations hit hardest by defunding.

Welcome to Collaboration U!

LATER THIS WEEK

Find this deck and the recording of Sharing 101: How to Build a Collaborative at PublicMedia.co/collaboration-u

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WEDS., JULY 22 AT 2 P.M. EDT

Sharing 201

The Secrets of Sharing: Findings from PMC's Shared Services Research

HOST

Rick Holter

Director, Public Media Company

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Sharing 301

Tales from the Collaborative Front: A Panel Discussion

HOSTS

Gabrielle Jones & Rick Holter

Directors, Public Media Company

GUESTS

Vanessa de la Torre

Chief Content Officer, Connecticut Public

Tami Graham

Executive Director, KSUT Four Corners Public Radio

Nico Leone

President & CEO, KERA North Texas

Collaboration U Reading List

LOCAL NEWS CATALYST
A Public Media Company Initiative

Find tools, checklists and guides to collaboration at PMC's resource site, LocalNewsCatalyst.org

Station Strengthening Exercises

A roadmap for station leaders on clarifying strategy, building resilience, and financial benchmarking.

Funder Pitch Tool

AI-powered help for crafting the perfect grant narrative

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Collaboration U

A Public Media Company Webinar Series

Sharing 101: How to Build a Collaborative

July 15, 2026

Today: Sharing 101: How to Build a Collaborative

HOST

Alison Scholly

Managing Director

Public Media Company

GUEST

Kenya Young

President & CEO

Louisville Public Media

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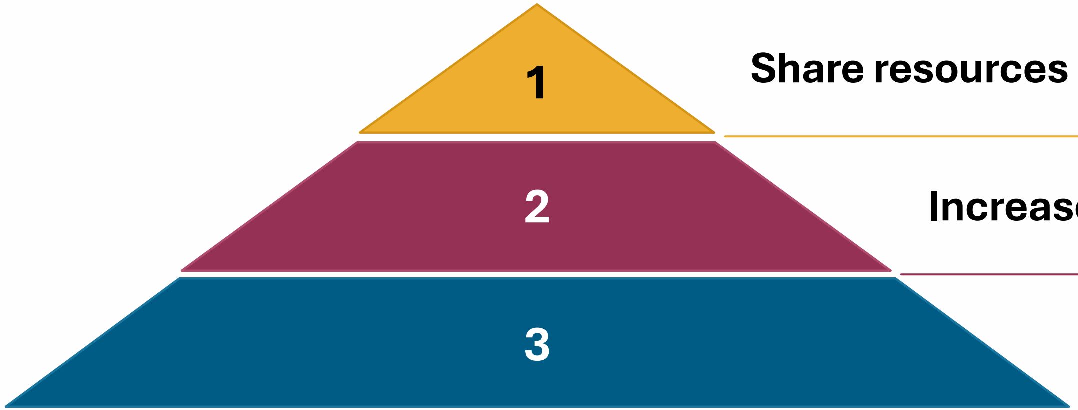
Why Collaborations Are On The Rise

Public radio and television stations are turning to collaborations to increase their value and stature in their communities at a time when local commercial media is on the decline.



Share resources & expertise

Increase local impact & service

Build overall sustainability

What Is A Collaboration?

All involved parties need to invest time and energy into the opportunity

1

Partnerships that are permanent (not episodic)

2

Informed by cross-disciplinary multi-year business and staffing plan

3

Driven by increasing sustainability and impact

4

Requires substantial station commitment by GM, Staff & Board

Collaboration Examples

Journalism Hubs

- Statewide or regional reporting
- Emergency Weather (Florida Public Media)

Example: Texas Newsroom

Shared Infrastructure

- Engineering
- Master control
- Fundraising
- Underwriting

Example: Centralcast

Governance

- Mergers or partnerships that increase local service

Example: Vermont Public

Getting Started

1. Build trust (we'll return to this)
2. Agree on shared vision
3. Agree on conceptual framework to achieve shared vision
4. Include all key stakeholders
5. Start putting details on paper

How to build trust

What does it look like?

- Understand and articulate each others' strengths and challenges
- View each other on an equal playing field
- Words match actions

How do you get there?

- Many in-person (and virtual) meetings
- Start small, but be willing to discuss all kinds of collaborations
- Take risks
- Be generous with time, resources

Case Study

Content Collaborative

Background

- The Appalachia + Mid-South Newsroom launched in January 2025 as a collaboration between NPR and seven public media stations:
    - West Virginia Public Broadcasting
    - Tennessee: Nashville Public Radio and WUOT
    - Kentucky: Louisville Public Media (lead station), WEKU, WKMS and WKU Public Radio
- The newsroom aims to be the essential news source for the Mid-South and Appalachia regions — connecting rural communities and population centers through multi-platform storytelling.

Reasons for Change

- Build capacity for local and regional reporting in regions frequently overlooked in national coverage.
- Increase collaboration between NPR and regional reporters for deeper coverage, amplifying region-specific stories, often centered on rural communities, to national platforms.
- Establish shared services, a sustainable financial framework and clear governance across seven independent partner stations.

Audience

1.8 million **radio and digital audience members reached** across three states.

Funding

Leveraged revenue opportunities raising $1.8 million in foundation investment, including multiyear gifts through fiscal 2028, plus $80+K from individual donors.

Capacity

Created eight shared positions from new and existing staff roles that include editorial, fundraising, audience development, and administrative roles.

Collaboration

AMSN GMs are a **management cohort** — meeting weekly and working on shared services for their stations.

Training

Shared training opportunities led to 11 virtual and in-person trainings held for reporters at partner stations.

Brand

Launched a digital brand and shared digital products in December 2025 with The Porch Light newsletter and @PorchlightNews social accounts.

Case Study
Shared Infrastructure

Background

- Content collab was born in the 1980s with five Colorado mountain-town stations.
- The founding partners developed a monthly newsmagazine show (initially delivered on cassettes), then built collaborative coverage of state government.
- Gradual ramp-up included hiring a managing editor in 2022, then rural climate reporter, and joint digital production help.
- Now includes 21 radio operations across four states — both NPR and non-NPR stations.

Reasons for Change

- Extensive network of 70 tower sites, plus transmitters and repeaters — many in difficult mountain terrain.
- In all, 67 studio sites being managed for news, music performances, community affairs, etc.
- Engineering technology is aging — in some cases, out of date.
- Broadcast engineers are retiring, and stations face a shortage of potential replacement staff.
- Smallest stations can't afford to support staff engineers.

Key Outcomes

- Press Forward awarded a $1 million grant to create a **shared engineering staff**. It's Press Forward's largest grant to public media.
- **Project coordinator** has been hired on contract.
- Building a **dedicated staff** to travel between stations. Currently hiring a chief engineer.
- Buying a **4WD vehicle** to access tower sites.
- Creating **equipment pool for emergency repairs**.
- Talent-development strategies include **apprenticeships** and **station staff training**.

Getting Started, Part 2:

Leadership changes can spur collaborative opportunities

If a nearby station has traditionally not been open to collaboration, new leadership can change that dynamic dramatically.

1

"Founder" or otherwise long-term GMs had pervasive influence on station

Institution not inclined toward working with other stations

2

New GM will likely favor collaboration

Boards typically choose a GM with commercial media background (which included partnership or openness to collaboration)

3

Culture will evolve and develop openness

Will take time for board/staff to reset to a transformational mindset

What about a merger?

Station independence has always been highly valued, but more and more stations are considering a strategic unification when two local media outlets are similarly aligned and recognize that a combined organization will provide **capacity** to the newly formed unified entity.

Mergers can grow out of existing collaborative partnerships, or can be the primary reason for beginning conversations.

Mergers don't happen overnight; they take time to build shared understanding. Talks can start with **vision conversations** and a **side-by-side comparison of the organizations**.

The board and leadership will have to work on a **shared financial model for the combined entity.** This becomes the basis for the **operating plan for the combined entity.**

Joining forces can bring **scale, succession, greater focus on shared impact** to the city, state or region being served.

Are you ready?

When Public Media Company assesses the feasibility of a potential unification of stations (or a collaboration), here's what needs to be explored.

- **Leadership** – Alignment on key executive roles
- **Governance** – Identifying an operating structure that works for all
- **Brand** – Determining a new identity
- **Shared vision** – Consistent view of the benefit of working together
- **Staffing** – Addressing fears and misinformation
- **Other** – station debt/endowments, unions, etc.
- **Culture** – Organizational values and ways of working

= TRUST

In addition to assessing the scale and benefits of a collaboration, **geographic relevance** is a new dynamic that requires assessment as well.

Case Study

Merger

Background

- In 2019, Vermont Public Radio and Vermont PBS were financially healthy stations. VPR had sizable investment funds, and VPBS received $56M in the spectrum action.
- VPBS's GM was retiring. The VPR CEO was new in his role and was coming from a joint licensee.
- Vermont's population is 643K, but the number of journalists had plunged 40% over 20 years.

Reasons for Change

- A respected Vermont PBS board member suggested that the two entities merge; board chairs began talking.
- Public Media Company led the combined board through a series of visioning session and prepared a detail business model for the merger.

Key Outcomes

- Merger ratified in 2020, launched in 2021.
- Public version of the summary of this exploration is **here.**

Risks & Cautions

Public Media Company is often questioned about why station mergers stall. The most common reasons:

Leadership

Merged CEO not agreed, other leadership roles uncertain (e.g., CFO), leaders not currently aligned

Governance

Uncertainty about future governance structure (e.g., a smaller merged board)

Energy

Insufficient lay/exec leadership belief in the unified entity to keep working through the challenges

Other

Perceived fears about the other entity's situation (e.g., union, debt) and long-held negative perceptions about the other entity

Q&A

Drop your questions into the chat, and we'll attempt to answer them!

Congratulations!

You've aced your first course at Collaboration U

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