



Sustainability Open Call: Collaborative Operating Models

INTRODUCTION

Each day, public media organizations are innovating, developing new services, and positively impacting their communities. With the loss of federal funding, the public media system is confronted with the reality that many of the existing operational structures are too expensive or inefficient to maintain without CPB support. Leaders across the system are now rethinking how to operate, collaborate, and allocate resources in order to remain resilient and financially viable.

The Public Media Bridge Fund's Sustainability Program focuses on supporting local, regional, and national projects that enhance operational efficiency and innovation, while ensuring that uniquely local services — programming, donor relationships, and community engagement — remain strong.

OPEN CALL: COLLABORATIVE OPERATING MODELS

The Bridge Fund's first open call under the Sustainability Program focuses on advancing collaborative operating models across the public media system. The purpose of this initiative is to implement new operating and collaborative structures that strengthen the long-term sustainability of public media organizations while preserving and advancing public media's essential local mission.

For this open call, the Bridge Fund will support collaborative projects that are ready for implementation. At this time, we are not seeking proposals for exploratory projects, research, or discovery efforts.

Funded projects should aim to:

- Create measurable operational efficiencies, cost savings, and/or revenue growth.
- Reduce structural duplication while remaining deeply rooted in local service.
- Establish replicable and/or scalable models that could be adapted across the public media system.
- Demonstrate strong governance alignment and organizational readiness among committed partners.
- Move organizations beyond short-term stabilization toward long-term sustainability.

Funded projects should be guided by the following principles:

- **Be bold, but grounded:** We are looking for ambitious ideas that are realistically achievable over a twelve-month horizon.
- **Structural change:** We are interested in long-term sustainable models, not temporary fixes or incremental changes.
- **Local service is primary:** Operational efficiency should strengthen, not dilute, local service and impact.
- **Learning is a deliverable:** Selected projects should both transform and inform how public media engages with and serves local communities.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

As part of this open call, the Bridge Fund will support new operational and strategic collaborations involving two or more organizations, *at least one of which must be a public media entity*. The emphasis on collaboration in this open call derives from a recognition that a core strength of public media is our national, regional, and local network effects, along with the critical need to maximize scaled efficiencies and sustainability following the loss of CPB.

Below are some examples of such projects. However, we are also open to other creative or innovative approaches that may not be on this list:

- Statewide or regional operating networks
- Shared or networked operational services such as finance, HR, technology, underwriting, fundraising, marketing, engineering, and infrastructure
- Hub-and-spoke models by which a central “hub” organization handles certain back-office and operational functions while “spoke” organizations maintain control over local content, donor relations, and community engagement
- Channel sharing or lease agreements between stations with overlapping coverage areas, where one station leases broadcast capacity from a neighboring station to maintain local service while sharing transmitter infrastructure and costs.
- Operational partnerships between public media and non-public media entities (e.g., local news organizations, nonprofits, cultural institutions)
- Mergers, acquisitions, or formal consolidations

To maintain a focus on “system” change, the Bridge Fund is **not** seeking proposals for:

- Partnerships that are limited in scope or duration
- Content-only and event-based collaborations (though shared content or events may be a byproduct of an operational model)
- Existing, fully implemented collaborations seeking ongoing operating support
- Standard license-holder relationships between stations and universities, unless the proposal represents a material restructuring of that relationship
- Research, exploratory projects, or studies meant to define a potential collaboration

Bridge Fund investments will be comprised of three components: grants, low-interest loans, and advisory services. The terms and type of investments will be tailored to each project's needs, but the grant component will likely not exceed \$500,000 per project.

Eligibility:

- Projects must include a minimum of two entities. At least one entity must be an FCC-licensed noncommercial public radio or television station that was CPB-qualified as of September 30, 2025.
- Participating organizations must demonstrate a need for Bridge Fund support, which could include, but is not limited to: lack of accessible capital, need for specialized advisory services, or barriers associated with governing boards or license holder(s).
- The proposed project must be ready for implementation with committed partners. All involved parties must have buy-in and commitment from organizational leadership and license holders.

Review Criteria:

All proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Strategic Alignment:** Alignment with the program guidelines and guiding principles.
- **Strength of Concept:** Clarity and relevance of the proposed model.
- **Operational Impact:** Likelihood of achieving operational efficiency, cost savings, and/or revenue growth/diversification.
- **Local Service:** The proposed project would expand, enhance, or preserve local service. Priority will be given to projects that explicitly support communities that are at greatest risk of losing public media service.
- **Demonstrable Need:** Bridge Fund support would be catalytic to the success of the project. Priority will be given to projects that will not move forward without Bridge Fund support.
- **Feasibility and Organizational Readiness:** High level of commitment from all partners, realistic timeline, strong leadership.
- **Innovation / Field-Level Value:** Potential to inform broader system-wide transformation.

HOW TO APPLY

Eligible organizations with relevant projects should submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) here: <https://pmbf.givingdata.com/portal/campaign/sustainability>. The Bridge Fund team will review LOIs on a rolling basis.

[Click here](#) to view a full list of the LOI questions. ***Please coordinate with project partners to ensure that only one LOI per project is submitted.***

A select number of projects will be invited to submit a full application. Applicants will be asked to meet with the Bridge Fund Team as part of this process to further develop the proposed strategy. The Bridge Fund will engage an advisory council to provide input and

recommendations on funded projects. Funding decisions will be made on an ongoing basis pending available funds.

If you have questions about the Collaborative Operating Models open call, please contact the Public Media Bridge Fund team at bridgefund@publicmedia.co.