



Request for Proposals Closing Information Gaps in Rural America

Proposals Due Wednesday, April 16, 2025, at 5:00 pm ET

I. OVERVIEW

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (“**CPB**”) is inviting proposals to increase public media station services to rural communities through innovative, community-informed content strategies that identify and address vital news and information gaps (the “**Initiative**”).

Locally owned and operated public media stations have a record of delivering fact-based, relevant journalism that is trusted by the American public. Many public media stations are now the only locally based media outlets in rural communities, where local newspapers have largely disappeared, and residents struggle to find information they need to make decisions affecting the quality of their lives. Through this Initiative, CPB will support public media stations and entities to grow and sustain content services that address news and information gaps in rural communities (“**Rural News and Information Services**”), prioritizing those that have the greatest potential to be sustainable beyond the grant term.

The goals of this RFP (“**Goals**”) are to:

- A. Strengthen the capacity of public media station newsrooms to serve rural audiences through the growth of local relationships and the production of audience-informed content;
- B. Increase the number of public media journalists providing Rural News and Information Services;
- C. Measure the reach, utility, and impact of the Rural News and Information Services;
- D. Pilot new business models to sustain the increased editorial capacity; and,
- E. Document successes and lessons learned from these efforts, to be shared across the public media system.

Eligible applicants include:

- Public media stations receiving Community Service Grants (CSG), in good standing;
- Collaborations (“**Collaboration**”) of CSG recipients in good standing, with a single leading station.

Applicants are welcome to partner with other public media entities, local news organizations, and other local community organizations that share the goal of strengthening the accessibility of Rural News and Information Services and meet public media’s standards of trust and transparency (“**Partners**”).

CPB expects to make three (3) or four (4) two-year grants. For this grant program, CPB funds cannot be applied to indirect costs.

II. BACKGROUND

CPB is a private, non-profit corporation authorized by Congress in 1967 to receive federal government appropriations and to use those funds to promote the growth and development of public broadcasting and public telecommunications services. The mission of CPB is to facilitate a public media system that is valued by all Americans and reflects a broad range of ideas, content, talent, and delivery. CPB invests in approximately 1,500 local radio and television stations – their programs, services, and other initiatives to serve and engage the public. The system reaches more than 98 percent of the U.S. population with free programming and services.

CPB supports public media programs and services that inform, educate, enlighten and enrich the public for free and commercial-free and that help inform civil discourse essential to American society. It is CPB's responsibility to encourage the development of content that involves creative risk and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences. As steward of the federal appropriation for public media, CPB supports multi-platform journalism that is fair, accurate, balanced, objective, transparent, and created in a manner consistent with local stations' and producers' editorial independence. Since 2005, CPB has invested a total of more than \$200 million in discretionary funds to journalism, in addition to the money directly allocated annually to public media stations. Roughly a quarter of those funds have gone towards launching more than 40 local and regional news collaborations involving groups of public media stations that, together, have achieved scale and impact beyond what any one station could accomplish alone.

III. WORK SCOPE

Applicants for the RFP must address all Goals in their proposals. The paragraphs below outline the major elements of the grant work scope and the required activities.

- A. The Case Statement** (“Case Statement”), which describes the need and the opportunity for the applicant to provide Rural News and Information Services through new community informed strategies, partners, technology, and/or staffing. The Case Statement should include analysis, data, case studies, or other information that describes existing sources of local news and the existing gaps in information and detail why the applicant is well-positioned to address the needs of the community(ies) it seeks to serve. The Case Statement should also outline any needs for community surveys, meetings, or research that would further clarify community needs and how the applicant would work to meet them.
- B. The Sustainability Strategy** (“Sustainability Strategy”), which identifies and pilots new business models designed to achieve a sustainable strategy for providing Rural News and Information Services, and must include:
 - 1. An explanation of how the applicant determined the strategy, including any research, analysis, or implementation efforts already undertaken by participating entities to explore the feasibility of sustaining this enhanced coverage;

2. A list of non-editorial resources and conditions needed to optimize the probability of long-term sustainability and success (e.g., research, analysis), and why the current conditions are optimal for favorable outcomes; and,
3. A description of achievable, desired financial outcomes at the end of the two-year grant.

In addition, applicants must explain how they envision supporting the proposed Rural News and Information Services beyond the two-year term of the CPB grant.

- C. An Editorial Plan** (“Editorial Plan”) for the proposed Rural News and Information Services, which includes the following:
- Editorial focus of the Rural News and Information Services;
 - Workflow organization chart(s), with diagrams of new editorial processes that are designed to consistently identify, incorporate, and respond to feedback from rural audiences;
 - Surveys or other ongoing methods of assessing the effectiveness of new processes, including virtual or in-person meetings, with the goal of growing relationships and trust with rural communities and ensuring objectivity and balance;
 - In the case of a Collaboration, the Partners’ commitment to a shared Editorial Plan.
- D. Collaboration Plan** (“Collaboration Plan”), where applicable, which outlines the methods for regular communication and coordination among Partners, and describes how Partners will approach any collaborative hiring, branding, fundraising, or other efforts that leverage their respective platforms and audiences to expand reach and impact.
- E. Content Deliverables (“Content”)** funded by the grant, which include the production of original fact-based content and reporting for broadcast and digital platforms that could include text, audio, video, photos, maps, animations, interactive elements, data visualization, and databases. The Content should transcend the superficial and demonstrate:
1. Community needs – a clear explanation of how the topic(s) was sourced through community input.
 2. Depth of coverage – use of multiple sources, providing background and context.
 3. Breadth of sources – use of sources beyond “official” voices, including subject matter experts and first-person accounts from relevant communities.
 4. Explanation and context – asks and answers “how” and “why” questions, anticipating what is next.
 5. Data analysis – empirical analyses and relevant trends.

Each applicant will determine what mix of Content adds the greatest value and is most relevant to its audiences.

- F. Code of Ethics.** The applicant, and any Partners, must adhere to a code of journalistic ethics that maintains public trust (the “Code of Ethics”), which must be publicly posted and included in the application.
- G. Personnel Structure** (“Personnel Structure”) for the proposed work, which lists existing and new personnel that will be supported by the grant funding, as well as the job duties for the

position(s). CPB will not fund existing positions unless the position dedicates more than 50% of its time to Rural News and Information Services.

H. Distribution Plan (“Distribution Plan”) which describes how the Rural News and Information Services will be made available, with distribution targets, where applicable.

In the case of Collaborations, each Partner needs a means of receiving and publishing Content. Reasonable direct costs incurred to interface the Partner Stations and distribute Content are eligible to be funded under this grant program.

I. Timeline (“Timeline”) which sets forth the key grant program during the 24-month grant term; such as planning meetings and hires completed.

J. Measures of Success (“Measures of Success”) which will track progress against Initiative Goals, as well as metrics established by the applicant that capture the utility and impact of the work, such as:

1. **Journalism Capacity:** Increased number of public media journalists providing Rural News and Information Services, compared to the previous year;
2. **Effective Workflows:** The establishment of new editorial workflows that enable the applicant and any Partners to consistently identify, incorporate, and respond to community feedback about rural news and information needs, with increased frequency, participation, and reach, year over year;
3. **Community Informed Content:** Evidence of the effectiveness of using community input to inform content;
4. **Trust:** Evidence that shows strengthening relationships and trust with rural communities, which could include but is not limited to audience surveys, community feedback, amplification by noteworthy entities, awards and opportunities;
5. **Audience and Distribution:** Rural News and Information Content that grows in reach, accessibility and usage, year over year;
6. **Sustainability:** The implementation of new revenue strategies, designed to sustain the activities beyond the term of the CPB grant; and
7. **Collaborations:** Where applicable, the efficacy of collaborations (for example, feedback or surveys among Partners).

Applicants will report progress against the Measures of Success each quarter to CPB as a deliverable (the “**Evaluation(s)**”). Reasonable direct costs incurred to implement regular Evaluations by an external evaluator or facilitator are eligible to be funded under this grant program.

K. System Communications Plan (“System Communications Plan”), which outlines the applicant’s intent to document and disseminate the successes and lessons learned from these grant-funded efforts to the public media system, to be shared in public-facing settings, such as online posts, research reports, and/or conference presentations across the public media system, and beyond. These findings should be prepared as a final report and could be presented to CPB executives, CPB’s Board of Directors, other stakeholders identified by CPB and, if requested by CPB, at professional conferences and webinars.

III. REQUIRED PROPOSAL CONTENTS

All applications must consist of:

- 1) **Summary paragraph** (Microsoft Word or Adobe format), which is no longer than 200 words and includes:
 - Name of applicant and primary contact information;
 - Names of any Partners, and the corresponding contact information;
 - A short overview of the proposed activities, including the identification of rural communities they are designed to serve; and,
 - The amount of the grant request.

- 2) **Project Narrative** (Microsoft Word or Adobe format), which is not more than 10 pages, describing the proposed Rural News and Information Service, that outlines:
 - a. Case Statement;
 - b. Sustainability Strategy;
 - c. Editorial Plan;
 - d. Collaboration Plan (where applicable);
 - e. Content Deliverables;
 - f. Code of Ethics;
 - g. Personnel Structure;
 - h. Distribution Plan;
 - i. Timeline;
 - j. Measures of Success, and
 - k. System Communications Plan.

- 3) **Letter(s) of Commitment from CEO(s)/General Manager(s) of Applicant**, including Letters of Commitment from all Partner CEOs/General Managers for Collaborations.

- 4) **Itemized Project Budget** (Microsoft Excel spreadsheet) which shows revenues and expenses associated with the Initiative for the two-year grant period, including a budget narrative (Microsoft Word or Adobe format) that describes how costs were calculated.

CPB may ask follow-up questions or request additional materials during review of the application. Do not submit content samples unless requested by CPB staff.

IV. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following factors with the associated weight:

1. **Rural Impact:** The anticipated utility and impact of the proposed Rural News and Information Services; (20 percent).

2. **Sustainability Strategy:** Whether the proposal presents a compelling strategy for sustaining the grant-funded activities beyond the term of the two-year term of the CPB grant. (20 percent);

3. **Editorial Strategy:** Whether the Editorial Plan, Content Deliverables, and Distribution Plan enables the applicant to consistently identify, incorporate, and respond to feedback sourced from rural communities about their information needs, with the goal of strengthening trust and upholding the highest journalistic standards of editorial integrity including objectivity and balance (20 percent);
4. **Staffing, Readiness and Experience:** Whether applicant demonstrates the capacity to successfully execute the work outlined in the proposal, with clear metrics to effectively track progress against well-defined and achievable outcomes (20 percent); and
5. **Budget:** The reasonableness of the proposed budget (20 percent).

IV. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Required Formats:

Proposal Narratives must be in Microsoft Word or PDF. Budget Proposals must be Excel worksheets with calculations. Other formats will not be accepted.

Questions:

Any questions concerning the RFP must be submitted in writing to RURALRFP@CPB.ORG by Wednesday, March 5, with “Rural News and Information RFP” in the subject line. CPB guidance will be posted on CPB’s Website, where questions may be cited without attribution.

Proposal Due Date:

Proposals must be submitted through CPB’s online application portal. To gain access to submit a proposal for this RFP, please send an email request to RURALRFP@CPB.ORG no later than Wednesday, April 9, 2025. Access will then be given to the digital grants management system.

Proposals are due no later than 5:00pm ET on Wednesday, April 16, 2025, through CPB’s grants management system. CPB will not consider proposals submitted after the due date.

CPB may request Applicants with the top scores to virtually present their proposals to CPB. If so, CPB will notify each of the time and date.

CPB reserves the right to negotiate any or all RFP terms and conditions, and to cancel, amend or resubmit this RFP in part or in its entirety at any time. Statements known to be, or subsequently found to be, inaccurate or misleading may disqualify the applicant from further participation in the evaluation process. All selections are made at CPB’s sole discretion.

V. TIMETABLE

Below is the anticipated timetable.

ACTIVITY	DATE
Deadline to Submit Questions	3/5/2025

Deadline to Request Access to Application Portal	4/9/2025
Proposal Submissions Due	4/16/2025
Proposal Review and Selection	May-August 2025
Proposal Presentations to CPB (if required)	May-August 2025
Contract Drafting and Execution (anticipated)	9/1/2025

VI. PROPOSALS

CPB is not responsible for any costs incurred by Applicant in preparing and submitting its proposal in response to this RFP, or in performing any other activities relative to this solicitation. If a proposal is selected for funding, Applicant must sign a binding agreement that meets with CPB's approval (Agreement). Until the Agreement is executed by both parties, no express or implied commitment has been made to provide funding. Applicant is not authorized to commence any work until the Agreement is fully executed, nor will CPB compensate it for the same.

Applicant must guarantee that, among other things, any work it undertakes is not defamatory and will not violate or infringe upon the privacy rights, copyrights or other proprietary rights of any third party. Applicant must also agree to indemnify CPB against any loss resulting from breach of any of the representations and warranties in the Agreement.

The Agreement will contain additional requirements, including but not limited to the following:

1. **Applicant's Financial Position.** Applicant must demonstrate that it has adequate financial support to complete the work and to deliver reports and/or other intellectual property set forth in the Agreement.
2. **Record Keeping.** Except for the work that Applicant completes pursuant to a fixed price fee structure, Applicant must provide CPB with documentation (including timesheets or other relatively contemporaneous record-keeping documents), upon request, that evidences the actual costs of the project and supporting documentation that demonstrates that all costs were reasonable, necessary, and incurred for the project.

Applicant must maintain, for three years following the final payment for the project, all records related to the project which shall be accessible to CPB and to the U.S. Comptroller General or other representatives of each for examination and audit purposes. Applicant will additionally ensure that any subcontractors or consultants it engaged for the project also maintain such records for the same period and under the same terms.

3. **U.S. Comptroller Audits.** Applicant must provide CPB with a copy of any U.S. Comptroller General audit report issued in connection with the project.
4. **Equal Employment Laws.** Applicant must comply with all applicable equal employment opportunity and nondiscrimination laws.

5. **Governing Law.** The Agreement shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the District of Columbia without regard to its conflict of law provisions.
6. **Restrictions.** Applicant is strictly prohibited from using any funds provided by CPB:
 - a. for any activity designed to influence legislation or appropriations pending before the United States Congress or any state legislature; or
 - b. to conduct any reception or provide any other entertainment for any officer or employee of the federal government or any state or local government.
7. **CPB's Appropriation.** CPB's primary source of funding is appropriations made by the U.S. Congress. Therefore, if CPB's appropriation is reduced and that reduction materially affects CPB's ability to meet its obligations under the Agreement, then CPB and Applicant, at CPB's discretion, may agree to enter good faith negotiations to modify or cancel the Agreement.
8. **Research and Materials.** All research and materials created, developed, compiled or produced pursuant to or as a result of this project (including but not limited to all reports) will be considered ordered and commissioned by CPB as works made for hire under the copyright laws, and made in the course of services rendered. If, for any reason, the proposed research and materials to be provided are not considered works made for hire under the copyright laws, then Applicant will be required to assign all right, title and interest in and to such research and materials to CPB. Applicant further agrees that neither it, nor any of its subcontractors, will have any copyrights or other intellectual property rights whatsoever in any research and/or materials created, developed, compiled or produced by them or by any subcontractor, or by any third party participating in the preparation of research or materials for this project.

VII. CPB TERMS

This RFP does not constitute an agreement by CPB to extend funding to any party. CPB may, in its sole discretion, elect not to pursue this project. Proposals submitted in response to this RFP shall be valid for at least 90 days following the closing date.

CPB is not responsible for loss or damage to material that Applicant provides to CPB in conjunction with this RFP. Upon submission, said information shall become CPB's property (not including any intellectual property rights contained in such submission), and CPB is not required to return the same. Applicant is responsible for any violation of copyright, trademark, patent, trade secret, or other rights related to such material. Additional terms follow.

9. **Multiple Applications.** Neither multiple nor alternate applications will be accepted.
10. **Confidential Information.** Applicant should clearly identify any portion of its proposal that it considers confidential, proprietary commercial information or trade secrets.
11. **Subcontractors.** Applicant must identify all subcontractors and advisors and include a description of their roles.

12. **Exceptions.** Applicants selected for funding are deemed to have accepted the terms in this RFP. Any exceptions to these terms must be clearly identified in their proposals. CPB, at its sole discretion, may reject proposals that include exceptions.
13. **CPB Information.** In reviewing Applicant's proposal, if CPB's shares materials, data, other information and analyses (collectively, "Information") with Applicant, Applicant shall be deemed to agree to protect, preserve and maintain all such Information on a strictly confidential basis, and to promptly return to CPB, upon its request, all tangible copies of such Information in Applicant's possession.
14. **Proposals.** By submitting a proposal, Applicant grants to CPB the right to duplicate, use, disclose, and distribute any of the materials submitted for purposes of evaluation, review and research. In addition, Applicant guarantees that it has full and complete rights to all information and materials included in its proposal and guarantees that such materials are not defamatory and do not infringe upon or violate the privacy rights, copyrights, or other proprietary rights of any third party.

VIII. EXPENSE GUIDELINES

Travel expenses incurred by non-CPB staff (including consultants) need to be itemized in the Non-Employee Expense Form. Each expense of \$25.00 or more must be supported by an original receipt. Expenses requiring CPB approval must evidence such approval. Reimbursement of travel expenses is subject to the following limitations:

1. **Transportation:** Only coach or economy class airfare, rail fare or bus fare will be reimbursed towards travel expenses. Travelers must make every effort to plan travel and book transportation sufficiently in advance to realize cost savings and are required to accept the lowest fare available for the required itinerary. Final fare coach may be used only in unusual and/or special circumstances and, in each such instance, a detailed explanation shall be provided, and reimbursement shall be contingent upon approval by CPB.

Private automobile use will be reimbursed at the prevailing IRS rate, but not in excess of the lowest available airfare. Taxicab (and rideshare) fare will be reimbursed to the extent reasonable and necessary. Rental car expense will be reimbursed only when the daily taxi (or rideshare) fare would exceed the per-day car rental rate, or when no other convenient and less expensive form of ground transportation is available. Travelers may rent intermediate-size vehicles.

2. **Lodging:** CPB will only reimburse for reasonable, standard rate, single room accommodations and appropriate incidental charges (i.e., tax). Incidental expenses incurred for comfort, grooming or personal enjoyment, such as airline and room movies, haircuts, shaving equipment, shoe shines, etc., are not eligible for reimbursement.
3. **Meals:** CPB will reimburse for meals up to a total of \$75.00 per day for domestic travel, provided that meals are not otherwise furnished or included in connection with an activity.
