



# State Government Coverage in Public Media

*Edison Media  
Research Survey*



Corporation  
for Public  
Broadcasting



**2021**

# Introduction



Early in 2021, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) set out to determine the overall capacity of public television, public radio, and joint licensees (radio and TV) to cover state capitol news and legislative proceedings, information that would inform future strategic investments in local journalism, particularly accountability reporting and government transparency.

To accomplish this goal, CPB posted a Request for Proposals and selected Edison Research, a leading political and media research firm, to survey a sample of public radio and television stations. Stations were identified as likely to cover state government based

“Public media stations in all 50 states provide original reporting on state government.”

on their recognized commitment to news and public affairs, geographic reach, and/or proximity to the capital of a state or U.S. territory. In total, 184 organizations across all 50 states, Puerto Rico and Guam, were invited to participate in an online survey about state capitol news and public affairs coverage. Of that number, 175 organizations completed the survey, for a response rate of 95% (a nearly unheard-of response rate for any kind of online survey). The sample included 87 radio stations, 41 TV stations, and 47 dual radio/TV stations, covering population areas ranging from just over 30,000 people to nearly 25 million.

The survey found that public media stations in all 50 states provide original reporting on state government. This report provides an overview of the format, frequency, and depth of their state government coverage. With some exceptions, the survey found

that state capitol journalism is generally stronger at public radio stations than at their television counterparts, an expected finding given the institutional standing and influence of NPR News in the system.

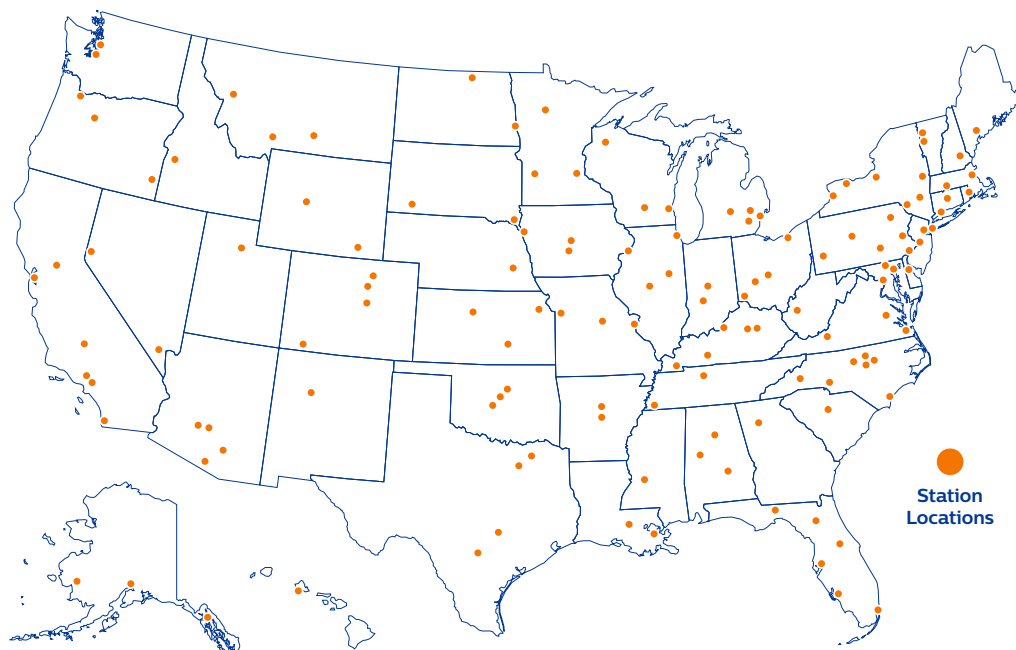
“This report provides a starting point for stakeholders to identify coverage gaps and examine opportunities for sustainable investment.”

Television stations, meanwhile, generally provide state government public affairs programming and livestreaming services that meet critical civic information needs, often in states with large rural populations and vast news deserts.

In addition to the quantitative data presented below, the survey also asked respondents for their thoughts about their state government coverage, their outlook on the future, and where they see opportunities for improvements. Where appropriate, this report provides actual quotes from these public media leaders. Stations were surveyed in June and July of 2021, and many stations reported that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic drove an increase in state government coverage as many state-level agencies and governors' offices responded to the crisis. It's unclear whether the stations will be able to sustain that level of coverage beyond the pandemic.

The increased coverage comes at a time when original, independent journalism about state government has declined across the country, alongside the diminishment of the local newspaper industry. Almost all the stations surveyed report seeing cutbacks to state government

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## State Government Coverage Survey

Total Station Sample

175 Public  
Media Stations

Station  
Locations

reporting by other news media, with stations in 31 states reporting that their organizations have stepped up their coverage in response to these cutbacks and – in some cases – asserting that their organizations provide the most robust coverage of state government in the states they serve.

*“The decline in the number of Statehouse reporters was one of the reasons [public media stations in the state] started really collaborating. We all had a joint interest in better and increased coverage of state policy, so it provided a natural collaboration point. We have since expanded our collaboration to work on election coverage and to share beat-based coverage that also includes state policy reporting.”*

– **Director, Oklahoma station**

*“With the growing news deserts in our state we are more often the ONLY consistent source of coverage of the state legislature between legislative sessions.”*

– **General Manager, New Mexico station**

*“We have made an intentional move towards public policy reporting in the last year. Many of the stories we report flow out of the decisions made in the state legislature. During the pandemic we focused on public health and this being Georgia we’ve focused on voting and elections. Our current focus is on the state’s redistricting process. We had great success with our podcast created to address all of the*

*questions surrounding Georgia’s elections.”*

– **News Director, Georgia station**

Even as many public media stations have made a concerted effort to grow their state government coverage, in some states that coverage has declined, due to various factors including reduced state funding.

The following pages are rich in detail and commentary. Still, it is important not to extrapolate overly broad conclusions about public media coverage based on these survey results alone, as stations applied their own interpretations and definitions when responding to questions (e.g. who qualifies as a journalist). Furthermore, this was a limited sample of public media stations. Stations participating in this survey reported a total of 2,540 full-time journalists in FY21; compare that figure to the 3,091 full-time journalists self-reported by all 555 grantees to CPB in FY20. Stations also vary in format, budget size, broadcast footprint, governance structure, and number by state, so state-by-state comparisons require a nuanced understanding of the unique services each station provides. Taken all together, this report provides a starting point for stakeholders to identify coverage gaps and examine opportunities for sustainable investment.



# System Snapshot

This survey provides a first-of-its-kind look at public media's current and potential role in serving the public with state government news and information. Results have been broken out into key coverage categories (journalism, public affairs, video & livestreaming, digital), as well as strategic considerations (diversity, collaboration, governance).

# State Government Journalism Capacity

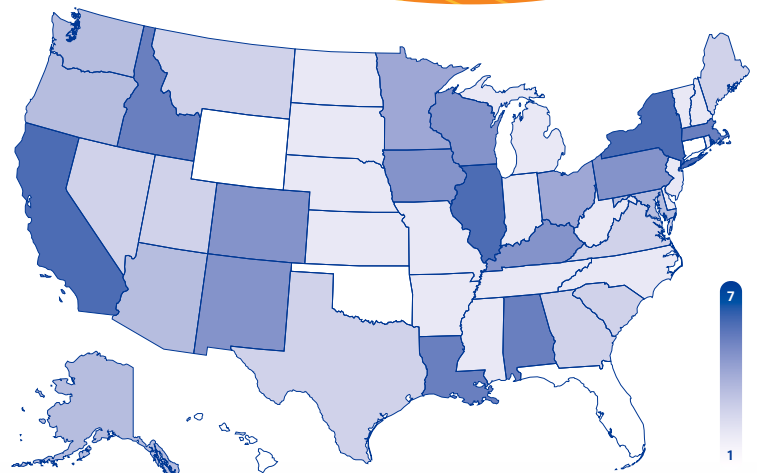
Public media represents the largest non-profit news system in the U.S. This survey found that, in every state, public media stations are providing state government coverage at least weekly when the legislature is in session. One hundred forty stations, even those with the most limited resources, indicated that they provide this level of coverage. Year-round coverage, however, is less prevalent. When the state legislature is out of session, weekly coverage of state government drops to 107 stations of the 175 stations surveyed.

Journalism capacity and talent are not equally distributed across the public media ecosystem, but the survey shows that stations do provide a meaningful level of coverage in many states. Public media stations in 45 states plus DC have at least one reporter entirely dedicated to the beat (defined as someone who spends

# Public Media Coverage of State Government



Journalism  
Public Affairs  
Video & Livestreaming  
Digital  
Diversity  
Collaboration  
Governance



175 Public  
Media Stations

## Public Media Journalists Covering State Government

Most or All of Their Time

most or all of their time covering state government), adding up to 134 beat reporters out of the 752 journalists who spent at least some part of the time covering state government. A total of 2,540 journalists were self-reported by the station sample.

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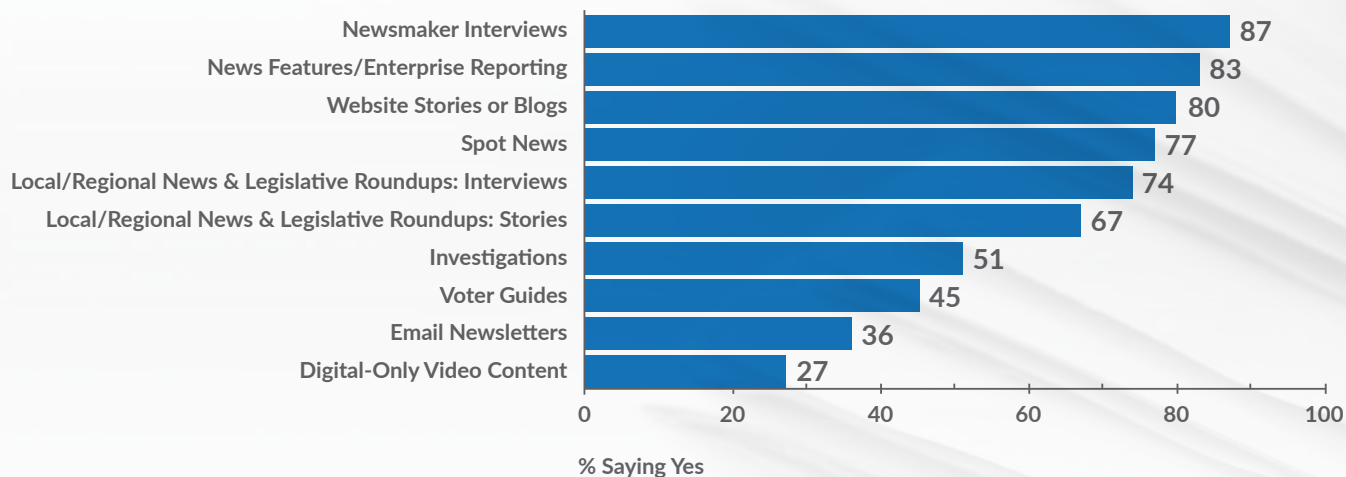
“Public media stations in 45 states plus DC have at least one reporter entirely dedicated to the beat.”

Most state government beat reporting in this sample of public media stations takes place in newsrooms with a radio component. Radio-only stations accounted for 40% of beat reporters, with another 33% coming from stations with both a radio and TV component. This left TV-only stations with just 27% of state government beat reporters. The survey asked respondents to list the types

of news and public affairs services they offer on state government, along with the frequency of production. Newsmaker interviews (provided by 87% of the stations surveyed), feature coverage (83%), website stories or blogs (80%), spot news (77%), and legislative roundups conducted in an interview format (74%) were the most common content offerings. Stations were less likely to deliver services requiring more resource investment, such as investigative journalism (51%), voter guides (45%), email newsletters (36%), and digital-only video (27%).

“752 reporters covering state government  
Including 134 dedicated beat reporters”

### Does your organization ever provide the following types of news and public affairs coverage focused on state government?



Only about a third of the sample provided daily spot news coverage. Among the stations that prioritized state government coverage, respondents said that resource challenges presented the most significant obstacle to providing more robust coverage. Station leaders shared some of their methods for prioritizing resources, which in many cases involved collaboration:

“We collaborate more with other public media stations in Alaska and now share a full-time state government reporter. We have moved away from short daily stories (although we still do many of these) in favor of enterprise coverage that our audience isn’t getting from competing news outlets.”

– President & CEO, Alaska station

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*"Our collaboration with [another public radio station] has doubled our full-time staff at the State Capitol. We also partner with the University of Montana School of Journalism who have daily stories and newscasts that we air during the legislative session."*

**– General Manager, Montana station**

*"We are part of a public radio collaboration called the Kentucky Public Radio Network. Partner stations pool resources to support the salary/benefits of a state capitol reporter. We also share with each other, via PRX, all locally produced news content, including state government stories. Each station can also use the other station's online stories, with attribution."*

**– News Director, Kentucky station**

*"VPM (a dual-licensee station in Richmond) covers the state legislature and feeds their stories daily to partner stations, because of their coverage and the size of our newsroom, we tend to pick up their coverage rather than cover ourselves unless there is a direct interest locally."*

**– Chief Content Officer, Virginia station**

In addition to Alaska, Kentucky, and Montana, the following states have public media stations that have formally pooled resources for state government reporting: California, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Washington. In over half of these situations, this shared coverage involves more than one journalist. In California, for example, Capital Public Radio based in Sacramento runs a bureau focused on capitol coverage, which is distributed as a syndicated service to over 50 affiliates throughout the state. "The service itself is not breaking even," writes the General Manager at Capital Public Radio, "but it's a commitment we've made to ensure that smaller public media stations with no newsroom capacity continue to receive relevant news of statewide and regional importance."

**Public media stations  
in at least 11 states  
pool resources to  
maintain a shared  
state capitol  
news bureau.**

## Student-Powered Journalism

Nineteen stations report that they rely on fellows or part-time interns to round out their state government coverage, and it's worth exploring whether these arrangements are due to insufficient resources and/or an interest in providing professional development opportunities. WUFT in Central Florida has leaned into a reporting partnership with the University of Florida's College of Journalism called "Fresh Take Florida," where undergraduate seniors are mentored by seasoned journalists and cover executive-branch agency operations, as well as legislative affairs. The reporting has been carried by Florida's public media stations, in addition to distribution agreements with the Associated Press, CNN, Gannett, Tribune, McClatchy, and TEGNA.



# Investigative Journalism

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Only half of the stations surveyed reported that they were able to provide investigative reporting, which was - for the most part - infrequent (less than once a month). No stations in Arkansas, North Dakota, and South Carolina reported providing investigative reporting about state government, although this part of the survey will require follow-up as it's unclear how respondents defined investigative reporting in determining their response. The desire to boost investigative and accountability reporting was a prominent theme among many respondents:

*"Our shared day-to-day statehouse reporter [shared among New York public media stations] is immersed in daily coverage and does a great job of going deep on news of the day. This doesn't however allow for data stories, investigative pieces, and the kinds of things that would require having that reporter off the treadmill from time to time. And if she were to take a longer view, we would absolutely miss the content."*

– **News Director, New York station**

*"Not nearly enough accountability reporting about the spending and ethics of elected officials takes place as it did years ago. I'd include accountability reporting at the agency level [as another coverage gap]."*

– **Chief Content Officer, California station**

*"In terms of investigative political work, we currently lack the resources due to the pressing needs of the broadcast clock. We have had some conversations about polling with members of the university-based school of public policy, so perhaps by the next election cycle we can act upon that. In our local [public affairs program], we are able at times to highlight the work of other investigative journalists in our community."*

– **General Manager, Idaho station**

**“** Approximately 1 in 3 stations reported providing investigative reporting less than once a month. **”**

# Community-Centered Journalism

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In an era where the traditional definition of news is under scrutiny in the public domain, some stations are re-evaluating their editorial priorities to make sure their state government coverage focuses on lived experiences and is more relevant to the communities they serve.

*"We're right now in the process of developing a new strategy for our statehouse reporting. We want to focus less on*

*following the daily news and more on the broad themes and currents that are actually changing lives in the state. We have a long history of access to newsmakers and we want to preserve that. But we want to refocus our coverage on 'what does this mean to the lives of our audience' and to frame our access to powerful people around that question."*

– **Senior Editor, Rhode Island station**

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*"For us, the legislature is a small PIECE of the much bigger state government story—from the governor to the very powerful state agencies overseeing various parts of the economy. The latter is where we put much more of our resources... More legislative content is available online (for example streaming coverage of legislative hearings). On our best days we fold in some of the legislative coverage as part of much broader stories—so the story is not just on legislative back-and-forths, but is driven by the topic of the story... It's also critical to cover the state government OUTSIDE the legislature—including the bureaucratic nooks and crannies where critical decisions can be made and where laws and policies are often executed."*

**– Vice President & News Director, Hawaii station**

## Election Reporting & Voter Guides


Coming out of a critical election year, public media stations in all but 10 states (Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island and West Virginia) said they offered voter guides on state-level issues and races. Some stations use third-party vendors offering ready-made voter guide templates or texting services to provide their audiences with relevant information about candidates, issues, and referendums. Despite their best efforts, significant obstacles remain when it comes to providing comprehensive reporting on state ballots.

*"[California public media stations, which had a shared subscription to the BallotReady voter guide platform that stations populated with original and shared reporting] could use some temp extra staffing each election to build the Voter Guides. The audience loves them but there are a lot of down ballot measures and races that require links and reporting."*

**– General Manager, California station**

*"We are the only broadcast outlet committed to statehouse news coverage in the state. [In recent years, we've put] more focus on not just what is happening inside the statehouse but how decisions made there are impacting the lives of citizens across the state."*

**– Chief Content Officer, Ohio station**



Stations in 40 states provide voter guides on state-level issues and races.

*"Colorado is blessed with a fairly large core of state government reporters. However, there is still a gap in coverage of rural issues, there is not enough accountability reporting behind the scenes, and there is not enough coverage of elections in more remote areas."*

**– Executive Editor, Colorado station**

Respondents discussed other creative ways they are providing audiences with voting information, work that requires a significant resource investment to be done meaningfully.

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*"We have been conducting experiments in coverage through station-based engagement activities and those associated with America Amplified [a CPB-funded engaged journalism initiative]. These have included listening sessions and [texting] callouts for questions reporters can help the public answer, a sort of help-desk. This has resulted in some really interesting content. We've also found the need for voter guides in Spanish, civics training in immigrant communities, etc. We are working to formulate a cohesive and comprehensive plan for what to do next and how we will pay for it."*

**– Director, Oklahoma station**

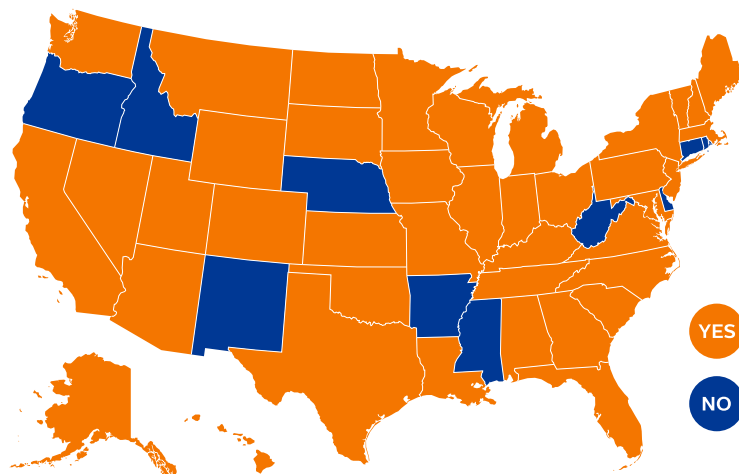
*"We do an elections website with a voter quiz to match voters with a candidate and bios of the candidates. Also, explainers about the different offices."*

**– News Director, Pennsylvania station**

Given the importance of providing citizens with information they need to make informed decisions in the voting booth, it is worth exploring the benefits of investing in shared digital tools that could improve each station's ability to deliver elections coverage more efficiently, such as templated voter guide services or digital engagement tools. Other efficiencies could also be achieved as public media stations migrate to a shared content management system.

## Surveys & Polling

Although there was no direct survey prompt, some stations mentioned state-level polling as an additional activity, sometimes conducted in partnership with other local newspapers and stations. For example, Illinois Public Media in Urbana conducts an annual "Illinois Issues Survey" to gauge top voter concerns in the state. Many stations have opted not to conduct horserace-style polling ahead of the elections and, instead, leverage their newsrooms and public affairs programs to provide more contextualized coverage of issues being decided at the ballot box.



### Voter Guides

*Provided by Public Media Stations*

Despite their best efforts, significant obstacles remain when it comes to providing comprehensive reporting on state ballots.

# Public Affairs Programming

“Public media stations conduct newsmaker interviews about state governance in all 50 states.”

Across the country, many public media stations have built a reputation for convening community conversations about issues of civic importance, in part because of their sustained commitment to providing public affairs programs. The survey found that public media stations conduct newsmaker interviews about state governance in all 50 states, and 78% of respondents say they provide interview/roundtable public affairs shows.

In 18 states, public media stations provide the only state government-focused public affairs programming for a broadcast audience in the primary state that they cover. These public affairs programs are broadcast to areas of the country that have seen a decline in local newspaper coverage, which makes the service all the more critical.

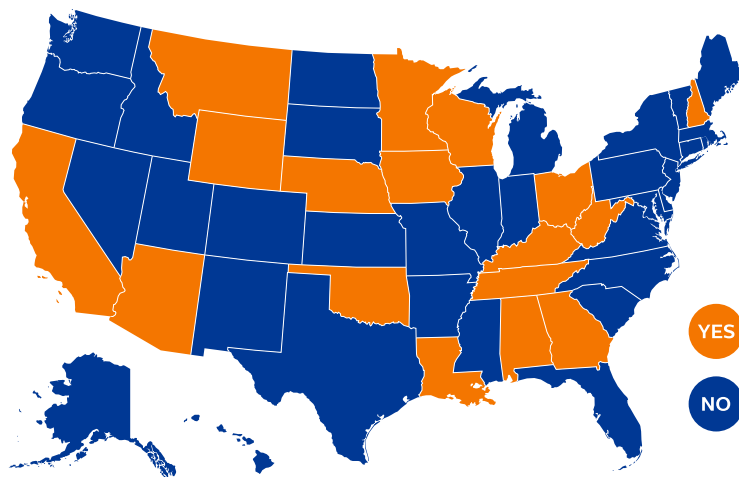
Stations also acknowledged a need to evolve their public affairs programming to reach newer audiences, and some respondents described new formats they've introduced in their communities.

“We launched [weekly political affairs television show] *The Hinckley Report* five years ago, and only recently let the livestream and podcast run longer than the TV taping.”

– **Executive Director, Utah station**

“In 18 states, public media stations provide the only state government-focused public affairs programming for a broadcast audience.”

“Our coverage has stayed steady with a weekly public affairs program that covers the issues of the state government, in or out of session, along with a robust election season schedule of debate programs. Where we have grown in a unique way is adding more youth-focused public affairs programs that are not tackling state government directly but tackling state policy issues. We hope this builds engagement



## State Government Public Affairs Programming

Public Media Stations Providing Only Broadcast in State

in younger voters. An example of this is... our award-winning high school debate series that features high school students debating Colorado policy issues.”

– **Station Manager, Colorado station**

“Our weekly politics podcast started as a segment of our daily radio talk show many years ago, but we shifted it to the podcast platform in 2017 because we realized the ‘political junkie’ audience would find and follow it there. We now have a strong core audience for the podcast of about 10,000 listeners and a steady revenue stream from it... We’re also going to need to do some change management to shift our internal culture around video production so that something other than 30- and 60-minute shows are valued and supported. It’s a heavy lift and one we plan to get to, but it’s still on the roadmap, depending on available resources.”

– **Chief Content Officer, Oregon station**

“We restructured our public affairs program and changed hosts in recent years. We are starting to explore digital aspects but are just at the beginning of this thinking.”

– **Content Director, Nevada station**

Respondents described new programs designed to engage new audiences. In Florida, WMFE Orlando and WUSF Tampa partnered to produce a weekly Facebook Live show to cover the COVID-19 public health crisis as well as the elections, enabling them to connect with new audiences online.

# Call-In Shows & Engagement Events

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In the qualitative answers, many stations discussed being the go-to destination for call-in shows with state governors and lawmakers, where audience members could question decisionmakers directly. Stations also provide town hall-style broadcasts, where conversations about state-level issues such as the pandemic response are held among public officials, policy experts, and members of the community.

Prior to the pandemic, many stations were increasingly holding live events that invited members of the public to engage in a lively discussion about the work of the

state legislature and government, such as Q&As with journalists as well as state lawmakers and other state officials.

*"In addition to our reporting and the production of broadcast and digital news material, we also host live events concerning the work of the state legislature and government. These events allow the audience to hear directly from lawmakers and other state officials and question them along with our journalists. These events are done live in-person and online to maximize the audience."*

*– Chief Content Officer, Georgia station*

# Election Debates & Candidate Forums

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Ahead of state-level elections, candidate forums were hosted by public media stations in all 50 states, according to the stations surveyed. The practice is common throughout public media, with 73% of respondents reporting that the stations hold state-level candidate debates and forums.

Stations like Nine PBS in St. Louis have taken increasing leadership roles in statewide debates. Significantly, public media hosts and reporters are so trusted in their communities that many of them are also asked to moderate third-party candidate debates or other local civic events, and conversations.



Public media stations  
host state-level  
candidate forums in  
all 50 states.

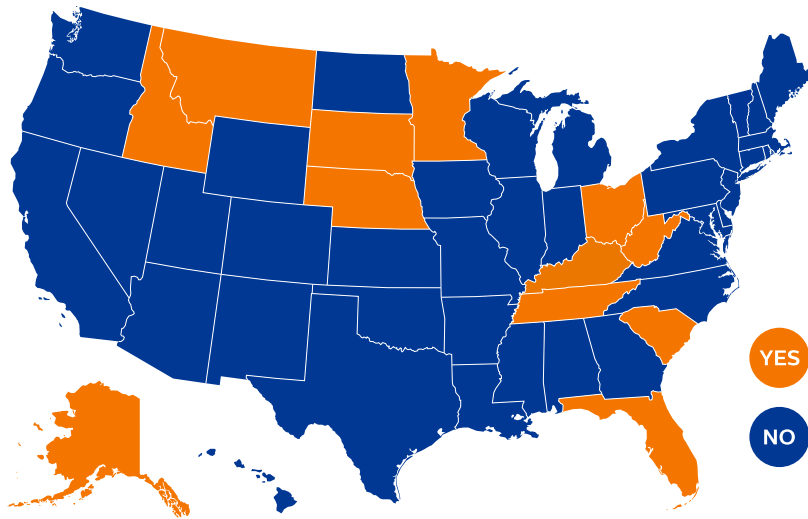


# Video & Livestreaming Coverage

During the pandemic, many public media stations made the decision to run the governor's press conferences live on television and radio broadcasts. Some, like Twin Cities Public Television in Minnesota, also provided translated services. In many cases, this service was a natural extension of the coverage stations provide when

governors deliver annual state-of-the-state and budget addresses. Overall, producing live coverage of state government proceedings is resource intensive, requiring operating agreements and sustained support, in most cases taken on by dual licensees or standalone TV licensees.

## State Legislature Floor Proceedings



### C-SPAN Style Broadcast of State Legislative Proceedings

*Provided by Public Media Stations*

YES

NO

175 Public Media Stations

This survey found that in 12 states, public media stations provide live, gavel-to-gavel coverage of state legislative proceedings for broadcast television audiences, via separate multicast channels: Alaska, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many state legislatures began to meet remotely, which made livestreaming essential to providing government transparency. In the state of Alabama, public television stations provided a critical stopgap service when officials enlisted their help to livestream Senate and House proceedings while they figured out how to navigate the pandemic. The state government has since resumed operations.

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Whether or not they produce the livestream themselves, some stations are funneling pooled feeds to their digital platforms, providing more opportunities for the public to stay informed about state government. For example, Georgia Public Broadcasting livestreams House and Senate chamber meetings on the station's website. Vermont Public Radio allows users to livestream audio

of legislative proceedings in the same pulldown menu as the station's livestream for news and classical music. And North Carolina public television stations have increased their coverage of state government by livestreaming select gubernatorial and legislative briefings online and via social media.

## Providing Transparency in State Government

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It is important to emphasize that in some states, especially ones that serve significant rural audiences, public media's livestreaming capabilities on broadcast and digital provide a critical backbone to the entire local media ecosystem, as was reflected in the qualitative responses:

*"[Public media runs] the only statewide television network. Commercial news organizations use our Legislative coverage, streamed hearings, and debates in their news casts. Local newspapers are eager to partner with us on statewide debates and also link to our livestreams and archived Legislative content. I expect this will increase, especially among commercial television stations, as local owners are bought out by national conglomerates and local news departments are reduced...In the past year, we purchased a second 'live stream production unit' to increase the number of State and Legislative live streams."*

– General Manager, Wyoming station

*"We were one of the first states to provide C-SPAN style coverage of state government, starting in 1995. Today we offer a full-time statewide channel carried by other PTV stations, cable and DBS."*

– General Manager, Alaska station

*"For us, producing and carrying the live Montana Public Affairs Network (MPAN) coverage of the Legislature and interim committee work has been a big deal. We are under contract with Legislative Services to continue and expand live/unedited coverage of committee meetings as well as other state agency activity throughout the year."*

– General Manager, Montana station

*"Over time The Florida Channel has expanded its coverage to include all committee meetings and floor sessions. This expansion also meant that The Florida Channel expanded its streaming capacity to stream as many as 15 simultaneous meetings. And over the past 2-3 years, the introduction of the LiveU has allowed remote meetings to be delivered to The Florida Channel's master control via bonded cell technology. And the LiveU matrix has allowed The Florida Channel to access remote press briefing coverage from various news organizations."*

– General Manager, Florida station

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*"Our Live Idaho in Session coverage has grown dramatically in recent years. We now live video stream every legislative committee and special session, not just during the regular legislative season, but all year long. In addition, we have an energized [weekly news program] staff, including a number of new people, who see the need for state government coverage throughout the year."*

**– General Manager, Idaho station**

*"[Our live call-in with legislators] has been produced for over 20 years. With the formation of the MN Channel, coverage of the legislative session happens statewide throughout the session (since 2009 I believe)."*

**– General Manager, Minnesota station**

Beyond coverage of legislative activities, there are other opportunities for public media stations to fill critical civic information gaps when it comes to livestreaming. For example, Idaho Public Television, New Mexico PBS, and West Virginia Public Broadcasting are among a select number of stations that provide live coverage of state Supreme Court hearings. KANW-FM in Albuquerque provided live coverage of the New Mexico Judicial Nominating Commission hearings during the selection of a new Supreme Court justice. Additionally, South Dakota Public Broadcasting and Arkansas PBS are examples of stations that livestream state board and commission meetings. Depending on the broadcast footprint, more localization better serves the audience; for instance, Santa Fe Public Radio carries the Santa Fe City Council meetings twice per month.

## Digital



The vast majority of stations, regardless of size, are providing state government coverage on their websites as well as on their radio or television signals. The majority are also offering that coverage on Facebook (65%) and Twitter (59%). Other social media platforms are used to publish state government-related journalism; for example, 24% use Instagram, 18% YouTube, and 1% indicated they publish on TikTok.

Public media stations are not innovating quickly enough on digital platforms to meet the percentage of Americans who are using them. According to the Infinite Dial 2021 study from Edison Research and Triton Digital, a nationally representative study of Americans 13+, Facebook is the most-used service at 61%, with

Instagram second at 43%, and Twitter in fifth at 23% (tied with TikTok). The social platforms most in use by the public media stations surveyed tend to skew toward older social media users, while services like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are much more popular with younger Americans.

In podcasting, survey results reflect how public media stations have made significant inroads, but the capability is not spread evenly across the system. Of the stations sampled, 38% indicated they report state government-related content via podcast, and there were enormous differences between smaller, less-funded stations and their larger market siblings, with smaller stations much less likely to produce podcast content.

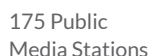
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*Produced by Public Media Stations*

– Program Director for News and Talk, Iowa station



*Produced by Public Media Stations*

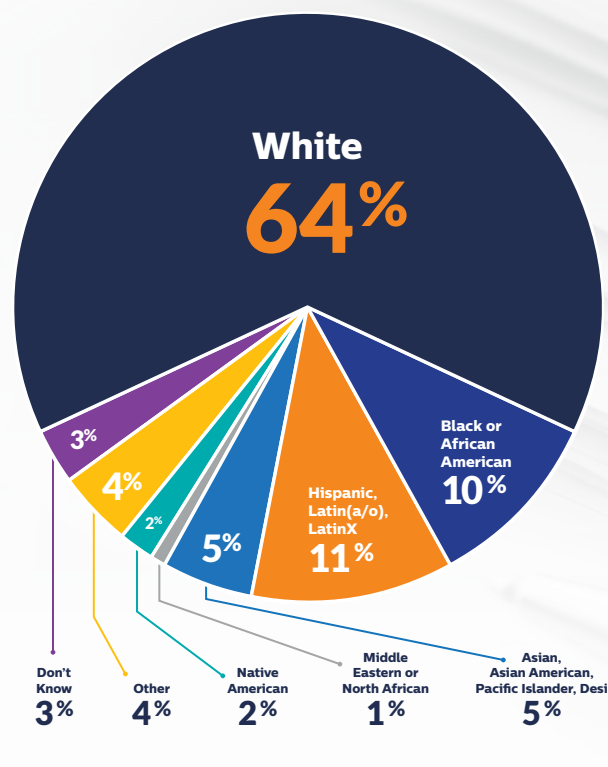
– Chief Content Officer, New Hampshire station



# Diversity

## Race/Ethnicity Composition of Public Media State Government Reporters

The uneven impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the death of George Floyd, has prompted deep introspection among many Americans about the state of race relations in the U.S. In public media, especially, which was established to better serve diverse, unserved and underserved audiences, many leaders recognize that stations need to be more reflective of the diverse communities they serve. Out of the 752 reporters covering state government, 64% identified as White, 10% Black or African American, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander/Desi, 1% Middle Eastern or North African, 2% Native American, 4% Other.



White: 64%, Black or African American: 10%, Hispanic, Latin(a/o), LatinX: 11%, Asian, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Desi: 5%, Middle Eastern or North African: 1%, Native American: 2%, Other: 4%, Don't Know: 3%

# Multilingual Coverage

Public media coverage is predominately in English; but many stations are expanding their offerings to better serve underserved audiences. About 1 in 6 of the surveyed stations said that they provide state government coverage in a language other than English, led by stations with the largest budgets. Spanish was the most common offering, reflecting the growth of the Spanish-speaking population in the United States, and increased station service in this area presents an opportunity for more collaboration to achieve increased efficiencies and scale. Here are some examples of that coverage:

- Radio Bilingüe said the Spanish-language radio network's state government coverage focuses on "state policies impacting Spanish-speaking, Mixteco-speaking,

Triqui-speaking essential worker families." Radio Bilingüe provides information on state government and policies through public affairs programs that include the morning talk show "Comunidad Alerta" and weekend call-in program "La Hora Mixteca." Radio Bilingüe broadcasts in communities across the U.S. through its own network of 13 full-power FM stations, 10 translators and scores of affiliate stations.

- WGCU, a dual licensee station serving Southwest Florida, provides critical information to the local migrant community through the production of a weekly news brief, "Noticias de WGCU En Español." This award-winning series airs on Radio Conciencia 107.7, a community radio station in Immokalee, FL, and is also shared online.

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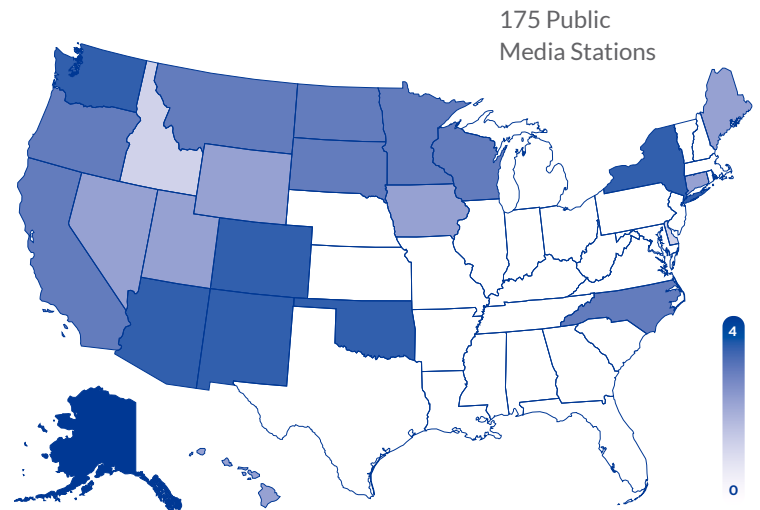
- Iowa PBS provided the pool feed for the governor's press conferences during the pandemic, all of which were translated into Spanish.
- KUNR in Reno partnered with Noticiero Movil and This is Reno to provide news coverage and public events in both English and Spanish to keep Northern Nevada's Latino community informed about the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the local community. This coverage earned a national Edward R. Murrow Award for excellence in diversity, equity and inclusion in the small market radio category.

# Tribal Government Coverage

The survey asked respondents whether they covered tribal government, and 45 stations in 22 states answered affirmatively. Of those, eight are owned by tribes. Small-market stations were roughly as likely to provide this coverage as larger-market stations.

- Koahnic Broadcast Corporation, a Native-owned station in Anchorage, provides coverage of the annual Alaska Federation of Natives Convention including interactions with state representatives, policy pronouncements, town halls, and speakers.
- KOHN-FM in Sells, AZ, which is owned by the Tohono O’odham Nation, provides regular coverage of tribal government when it is in session, as well as candidate debates and voter guidance.
- PBS Wisconsin provides live coverage of the “State of the Tribes” address in Wisconsin every year.

- KOSU in Stillwater, OK, leveraged the resources made available through the CPB-funded America Amplified engaged journalism initiative to produce Spanish-language content and conduct outreach with the local immigrant community.
- KETR-FM in Commerce, TX, wrote that the station is “working toward a transmitter replacement (soon) that should allow us access to our HD-2 and HD-3 channels, on which we hope to place Spanish-language news and information.”



## Stations Covering Tribal Government

Although this was not the focus of the study, it is important to mention that CPB has provided ongoing support to Native America Calling and National Native News, which are distributed nationally and through Native Voice One to stations across Indian country, including the 36 Native stations in CPB's Radio Community Service Grant program. Given the critical lifeline public media stations provide to many Native communities, and the significant number of non-Native stations covering tribal government, the survey suggests public media stations need to be more intentional about hiring, retaining, and promoting Native American journalists in public media. The prevalence of reporting about tribal government across public media also suggests there could be an opportunity for more collaboration to enhance and deepen this coverage.



# Collaboration

Since 2009, CPB has invested more than \$42 million to help launch 41 local and regional news collaborations, investments that have helped stations add editorial staff, pool coverage, achieve efficiencies, and grow enterprise reporting. This funding has worked alongside other efforts to develop a collaborative culture across the public media system, and it should be no surprise that many stations cited increased collaboration as one of the positive changes they've seen over recent years. Journalism collaboration is more likely to take place among public radio stations, where the daily appetite for news content has advanced a shared interest in carrying reporting by other stations, and is less common between television stations in the absence of a statewide network agreement.

Collaboration is embraced more in some states than others, but stations that have fully adopted the practice have been able to grow their local journalism as a result. For example, WAMU in Washington, D.C., whose broadcast footprint overlaps two states and the District of Columbia, is an example of a station that relies on other public media stations for statehouse reporting so they can better localize their coverage. WAMU has recalibrated the newsroom's Virginia and Maryland politics beats to focus less on statehouse reporting and more on county governments in the broadcast coverage area. This strategic decision enables the station to devote more resources to covering immediate communities. So, WAMU's Maryland reporter now primarily focuses on Montgomery County and Prince George's County, and the Virginia reporter is now on the Northern Virginia politics beat, with a focus on targeted counties.

This is still an evolving space, and public media leaders are still testing new models and piloting new ways of working together. For example, in Illinois during the time the survey was conducted, WBEZ in Chicago was in contract negotiations to oversee the statehouse reporting program, which until then had been run by Illinois Public Radio in Springfield. The station's Chief Content Officer wrote, "By folding the two full-time Springfield-based bureau reporters into the WBEZ workflow, the reporters would have more editorial support while at the same time maintaining the ability to provide daily and enterprise coverage of the statehouse for about 8 stations who contribute to the funding of the two reporters. While the reporters will be FTE at WBEZ, the reporting work belongs to every station in the collaboration." WBEZ also expressed hopes of collaborating with a non-profit digital news outlet covering Illinois state government.

WBEZ's acquisition of the Chicago Sun-Times in the first quarter of 2022 illuminates increasing work by public media stations to partner more closely with non-public media news organizations. Currently, this collaborative activity occurs most often among public media stations and local newspapers. Approximately 8 out of 10 public media stations surveyed say they collaborate and/or coordinate editorially with a newspaper, and about half of the stations surveyed report that a newspaper has distributed their content. Collaboration is also taking place with internet news sites, journalism schools, and wire services, but less so with commercial radio and TV.

About 57% of stations reported already relying on wire services to supplement their reporting, but a notable number of stations, mostly large, have a two-way relationship, with 30% of stations saying that a wire service had also distributed their coverage. Taking advantage of these existing content sharing agreements could open the door to new collaborative models that significantly boost state government coverage, such as an expanded partnership with a wire service like the Associated Press, which covers the state legislature in all 50 states.

# Governance

While market size and budget are two very important variables in the robustness of a station's state government coverage, there are also local politics and local support of public media that have the potential to impact stations' reporting in some states. In 49 states, public media broadcasters receive funding from state government, which helps support critical station services but could also influence station coverage.

In their qualitative responses, some state university-licensed and state agency-licensed stations described the challenges of delivering state government coverage while relying on state funding. The reasons ranged from a lack of support by state officials – “The state has not expressed a willingness to support these efforts by public media,” wrote a general manager in Kansas – to ongoing pushback for the public affairs coverage they do provide. “The call-in shows [with state legislators] are becoming harder and harder to produce each year as the legislators are getting more upset when a topic is brought up in which they disagree with, to the point in which they threaten to pull our funds that we receive at the state level,” wrote another Kansas station leader.

In these cases, strong leadership, strategic collaborations, separate funding streams, as well as clear firewalls can help stations navigate the real or perceived conflicts of interest. Indeed, another Kansas station wrote that state government coverage actually improved after the state pulled funding due to increased collaboration among public media stations. State funding challenges in Illinois prompted the stations there to evaluate the management of the shared statehouse bureau and is prompting conversations that could help strengthen the Springfield-based reporting over the long run.

Forging content partnerships with non-public media entities, with the operations sustained by independent and transparent revenue streams, could also help buttress a strong, local civic information ecosystem. A chief content officer in New Hampshire wrote, “Since the loss of state funding, we weren't able to cover the legislature as we had for years since people were laid off,” but collaborating with other news outlets has allowed each partner to “amplify the strengths of each news organization” and fill the coverage gap.



# Conclusion

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Conducted during the summer of 2021, this survey offers insight into the many ways public media stations provided critical state government news and information amid a public health crisis. Public media's heightened relevance during these uncertain times, however, was not necessarily accompanied by increased revenue. In fact, according to station reporting to CPB, public radio stations reported a 7% dip in journalism staffing in FY20 while journalism staffing at public television stations remained stable—in line with general staffing trends that year—but a reversal from a period of organic growth enjoyed in the years leading up to the pandemic. One station leader candidly summarized their state government coverage this way: “Our legislative coverage has increased during election years, around redistricting fights and during the recent pandemic, but that is episodic and not sustained coverage.”

Generally, many public media leaders say that they are not providing the kind of coverage that they would like. The pace of the news cycle and the lack of investigative reporting were often cited in the written responses. Collaboration, and, in particular, the logistical and technical tools to facilitate working with other stations, is seen as increasingly important for one of the most often-cited words in this study: accountability. The drive to provide the kind of coverage that will hold state legislatures accountable for their actions is fueling an increasing collegiality and a desire to work together to achieve this shared goal.

Public media's growing embrace of editorial collaboration, along with new technologies that allow for greater efficiencies, presents an opportunity for stations to make significant leaps in their state capitol coverage by taking advantage of public media's networked capabilities. In the past several years, CPB has funded shared investigative resources for local public media stations, via national partners such as PBS FRONTLINE, NPR, and APM Reports, and it's worth exploring whether other shared resources could grow state government coverage across the system. NPR, furthermore, has long-standing relationships with many state government reporters and finding opportunities to build on those foundations could be fruitful. Public media stations are also migrating toward shared digital platforms, with the assistance of CPB funds, which could enhance other collaborative efforts.

This survey is the first step in CPB's strategic interest in growing state government coverage in public media, an urgent civic need given the increasing influence of misinformation and disinformation in public discourse. Moving forward, convening stakeholders and industry experts to reflect on these survey results will help identify modest investments in station-based coverage that could significantly boost public access to state capitol news and information.