



January 2, 2009

Dear President-Elect Obama,

Public service media - 600 public radio and television stations, CPB, PBS, NPR, hundreds of national and local producers and dozens of partner organizations - stands ready to serve and respond to an increasingly diverse America in ways that are both innovative and inclusive, all for the purpose of strengthening our civil society. Together we can solve in sustainable ways the challenges impacting both community and country.

Through our trusted content we can inform with high quality news and public affairs programming, improve academic skills and foster lifelong learning, create jobs that will stimulate the economy, and - through community engagement and interactive content - help Americans shape their future.

Our comprehensive platform comprises Diversity, Digital, and Dialogue.

Diversity of content and delivery is possible through our reach into communities across America – touching individuals of every ethnicity, economic and social background – as well as our work with diverse producers and content providers to meet local and national needs. Digital is our ability to use media 2.0 technology to reach these publics in the manner most convenient for them. Dialogue refers to the people formerly known as “the audience” working actively with public media institutions to address community needs. Dialogue includes education, community convening, and joint problem solving to address local challenges.

In short, we are already working in many areas related to the wellbeing of our communities – economic, educational, and civic. With further investment, we can expand these efforts to generate additional jobs and create economic stimulus.

We believe these proposals will not only produce sustainable improvements to the nation’s communications infrastructure but, if fully funded, they will create thousands of jobs and generate significant positive financial impact.

National Public Lightpath

National Public Lightpath will extend the reach of super-high-speed connections among public media organizations, public schools, universities, government agencies, community-based organizations and centers of innovation across the United States.

National Public Lightpath will create the ability to enter true real-time collaborations and provide access to a level of interconnection speed unsurpassed anywhere in the world. The impact on education, technology and innovation will be immediate; the strengthening of civic life and public engagement will be transformative.

Stimulus impact: Construction of the National Public Lightpath will create 1,800 jobs during the one-year construction phase and approximately 270 permanent jobs to manage and maintain the network. In addition, there will be significant secondary employment effects as purchases of cable and equipment move through manufacturing facilities.

Potential partners: Ford Foundation, National LambdaRail, Bay Area Video Coalition.

American Archive

Innovation is fostered by access to trusted information. Highly-trusted content of enormous value is languishing on the shelves of public television and radio stations. Billions of dollars worth of content assets, largely purchased with public money, are effectively lost to educators, inventors, government officials and private citizens because they have not been indexed and stored on accessible digital media. Worse still, some of these assets are in real danger of physical loss through disintegration and obsolescence.

Stimulus impact: The work of reviewing content, selecting material of lasting historical interest, digitizing and indexing it, clearing and cataloging intellectual property rights associated with it, and building databases and retrieval system to access it, will create hundreds of jobs. The work of maintaining the Archive's currency as content creation explodes in a web 2.0 environment will provide new and challenging careers well into the future.

Potential partners: Library of Congress, National Archives, local academic and public libraries, local and national museums

Education

We propose an initiative that would be a preschool Teach for America, targeting over 100 economically disadvantaged communities. We will enlist and train teachers, caregivers, and childcare workers as proficient users of new-media-based educational tools for young children. Further, we will create a new service-oriented professional and paraprofessional workforce dedicated to helping young children learn to read. Moreover, we will support continuing research in the effective use of educational media materials in high poverty environments, and provide grants to stations to partner with local organizations to recruit participants, disseminate materials and hold community events.

Stimulus impact: We anticipate that we will help over 500,000 young children learn basic skills associated with reading and academic success. We will train approximately 15,000 professional and paraprofessional teachers in compensated training programs. We will create 200 station-based education positions.

Potential partners: Pre-K-Now, National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Head Start Association, local daycare centers, local educational institutions.

Crisis Response

We propose to build infrastructure and community capacity to address community crises.

For example, in St. Louis, a mortgage crisis initiative conceived of and led by local public media institution KETC has brought dozens of independent community organizations together to help families save their homes from foreclosure. With a strong broadcasting and web infrastructure in place, the station urged families in need of assistance to call the one-stop “211” hotline to access a network of community assistance organizations assembled by the station. In addition, the station has also provided content about managing debt and financial literacy. Since this initiative began six months ago, KETC and its partners have helped 8,200 families.

We propose to extend this effort to 75 metropolitan areas around the country, targeting locations with the highest mortgage default rates. Stations may assist with other community problems as well, working with national and community-based partners to develop resources to help individuals from all walks of life deal with the consequences of the economic slowdown.

Stimulus impact: Based on our experience in St. Louis, we anticipate that public broadcasting stations and their community partners will assist 750,000 households. We will fund producers to create content that is delivered on multiple platforms and community engagement staff at stations to work with local partners, creating approximately 750 positions in all.

Potential partners: local community service organizations, counseling and call centers, and local financial organizations.

Access 2.0

Innovation requires access to media. New digital platforms allow consumers to be active creators of knowledge and culture, while traditional broadcast platforms continue to serve large numbers of people. Unfortunately, access to the media channels and the tools and techniques that enable people to contribute their voices to our society is uneven. As public media, we have an obligation – and many opportunities – to enable and encourage all citizens to tell their story as part of America’s story.

We propose to train thousands of community-based and professional digital content creators in multimedia production, bringing new voices to public media. We will also provide start-up staffing for 30 new Native American radio stations recently authorized by the Federal Communications Commission. In addition, we will support expansion of content and services of interest to, and reflecting the experiences of, Native American, Latino and African American audiences.

We propose to help our local public media institutions create a Community Issues Initiative to support local journalism, hyper-local content and organizing and convening activities to bring local organizations together to solve problems and enhance community life.

Stimulus impact: This initiative will result in a significant expansion of local content and engagement. Several hundred positions will be created at local public media institutions; several hundred additional positions will be created outside of stations, and hundreds of content producers will have the opportunity to improve their skills.

Potential partners: Native Public Media, Independent Television Service, TV and Radio Minority Consortia, Youth Radio, Public Radio Exchange, Bay Area Video Coalition, Ford Foundation, Knight Digital Media Center, Association of Independents in Radio, Radio Arte, StoryCorps, Ford Foundation.

Support for Station Capacity

The uniquely American system of public media, which leverages the effectiveness of national networks while anchoring operations in radio and television institutions in local communities, is showing signs of stress. On one hand, stations are facing sharply declining revenues (preliminary estimates indicate potential current year losses could amount to \$300 million). On the other hand, stations are also trying to meet a sudden escalation in the need for local services. A one-time investment of federal resources would help stations help communities cope with the economic crisis, protect as many as 1,000 station jobs now at risk, and assure continuity in services used daily by tens of millions of Americans.

Conclusion

Today, public service media informs through top-quality journalism, educates, and helps the next generation of Americans to meet the extraordinary and unpredictable challenges ahead – as it has done for the past 40 years.

As we enter a media 2.0 world, we are the last locally controlled media with national reach built specifically to serve the American public. Our commitment to quality, excellence, public service, and community dialogue is evergreen.

President-Elect Obama, public service media is ready to support your efforts to revitalize our nation's economy, create a comprehensive jobs program, and become the global leader in technology and education. We believe the cost of all of these proposals would

total approximately \$550 million. We are prepared to discuss moving forward on any of these ideas.

We are confident that CPB is the appropriate organization to manage a stimulus investment in public media. CPB has staff and structures in place to move stimulus funds to communities around the country quickly. CPB can have many of these initiatives underway shortly after receiving a go-ahead. CPB also has significant experience managing infrastructure investments, as CPB's management of the multi-million dollar investment in the digital conversion of public broadcasting's radio and television facilities demonstrates.

During this challenging time for our country, public service media stands ready to support you and the work of your Administration.

Sincerely,

Patricia Harrison
President and CEO, CPB

Paula Kerger
President and CEO, PBS

Dennis Haarsager
Interim President and CEO, NPR