

# **making the case**

## **Transformative Growth in Public Media's Local Journalism**

**Tom Thomas and Terry Clifford  
Station Resource Group**

grow the **audience**

for public radio

**Journalism**

**Become  
America's  
most trusted  
and most  
widely-used  
source of daily  
news and  
information.**

grow the **audience**

for public radio

# **Local Journalism**

**Greater scale  
and capacity in  
local and  
regional  
reporting so  
we can realize  
the impact and  
significance to  
which we  
aspire.**

# **Public service outcomes**

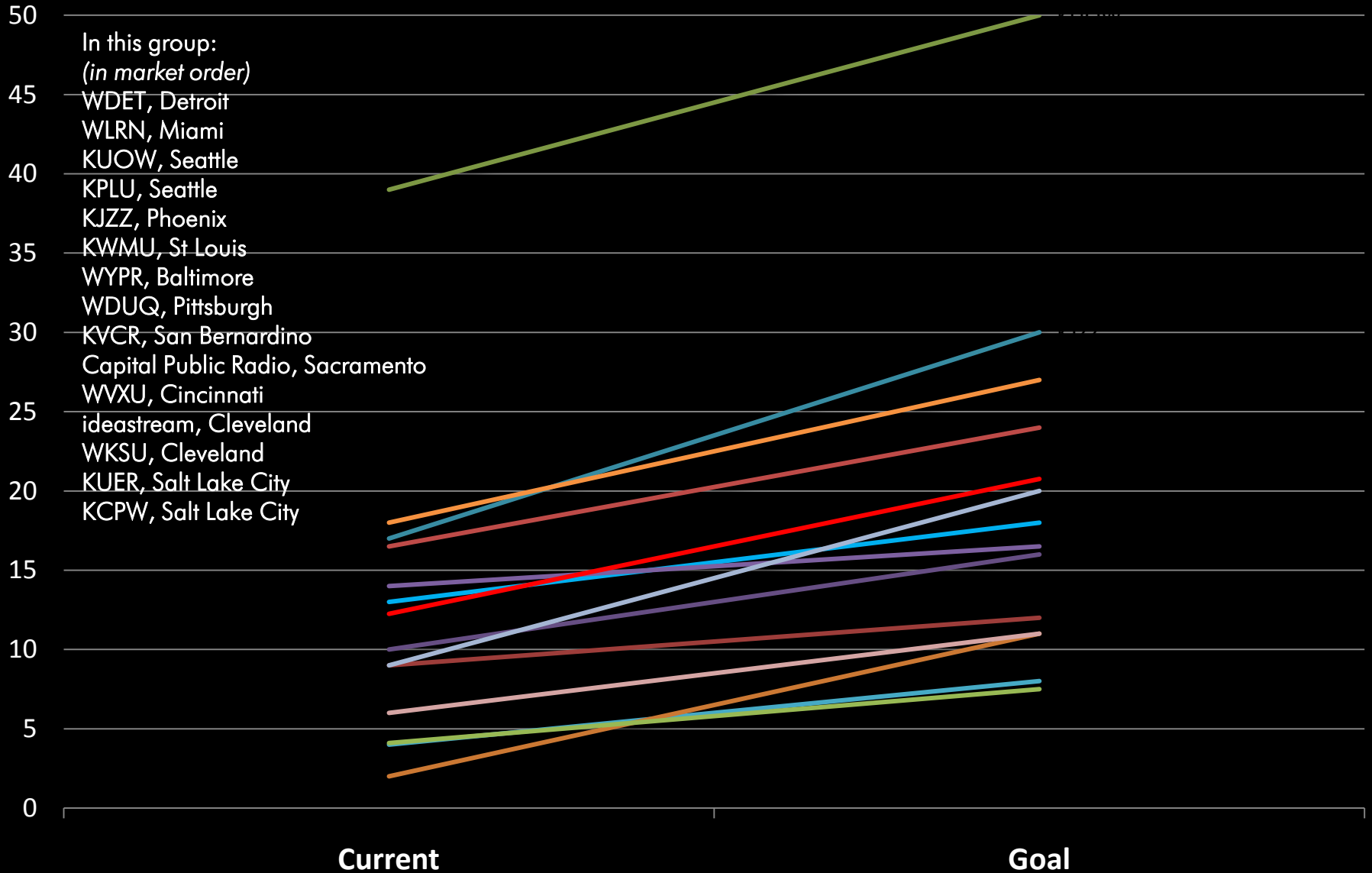
- **Trustworthy, original reporting on the issues and needs of our communities**
- **Civil discourse and a centering conversation on our future**
- **Partnerships that expand the depth of our stories and the reach of our work**
- **Engagement with audiences that leads to better decisions and solutions**

# Raise the bar

- **Reporting staff – more feet on the street**
- **Editing and production capacity**
- **Digital skills throughout the newsroom**
- **Innovative community connections**
- **Voices and views that reflect America**

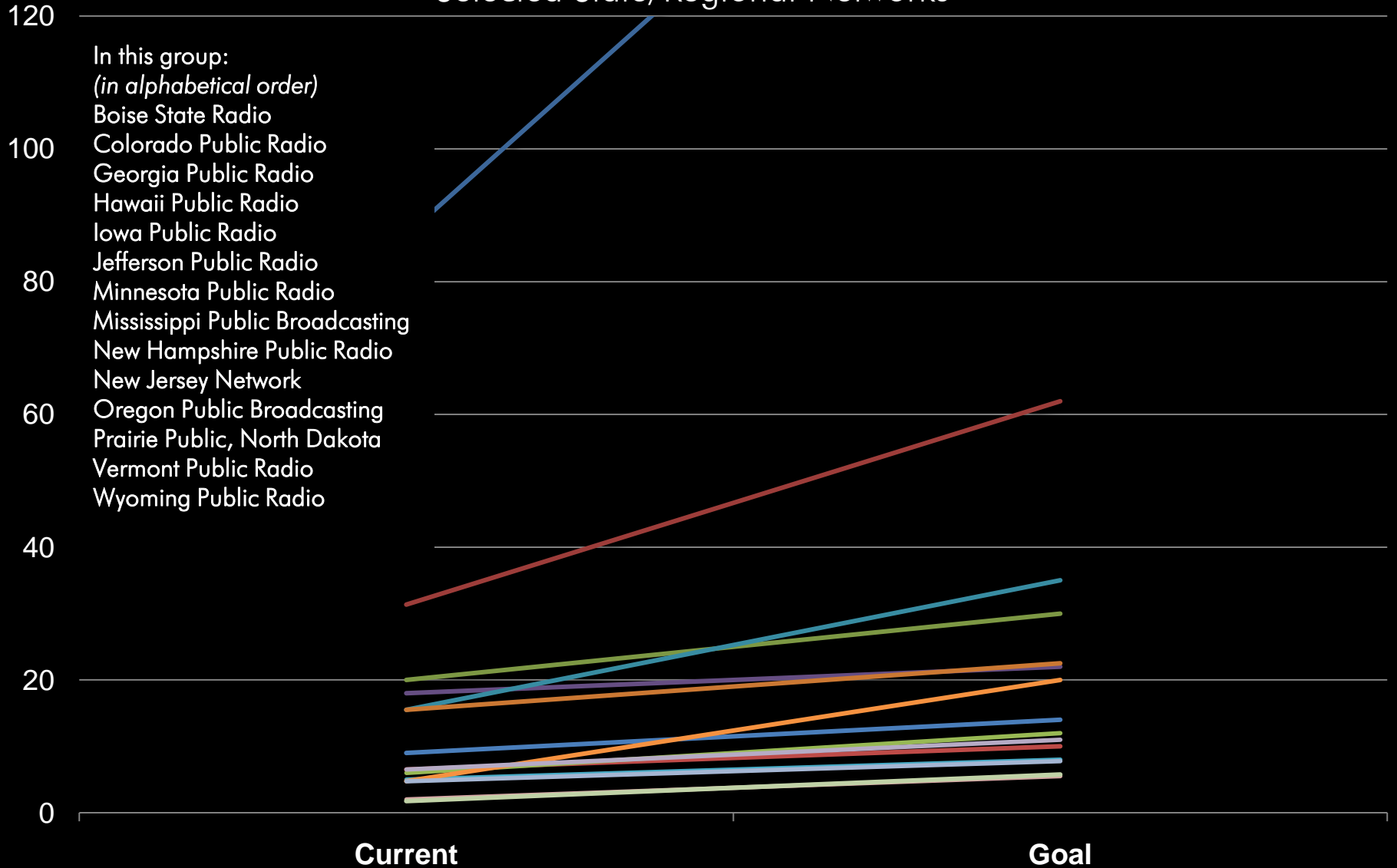
# Current News Staff and Aspirations

Selected Stations in Markets 11 – 30



# Current News Staff and Aspirations

## Selected State/Regional Networks



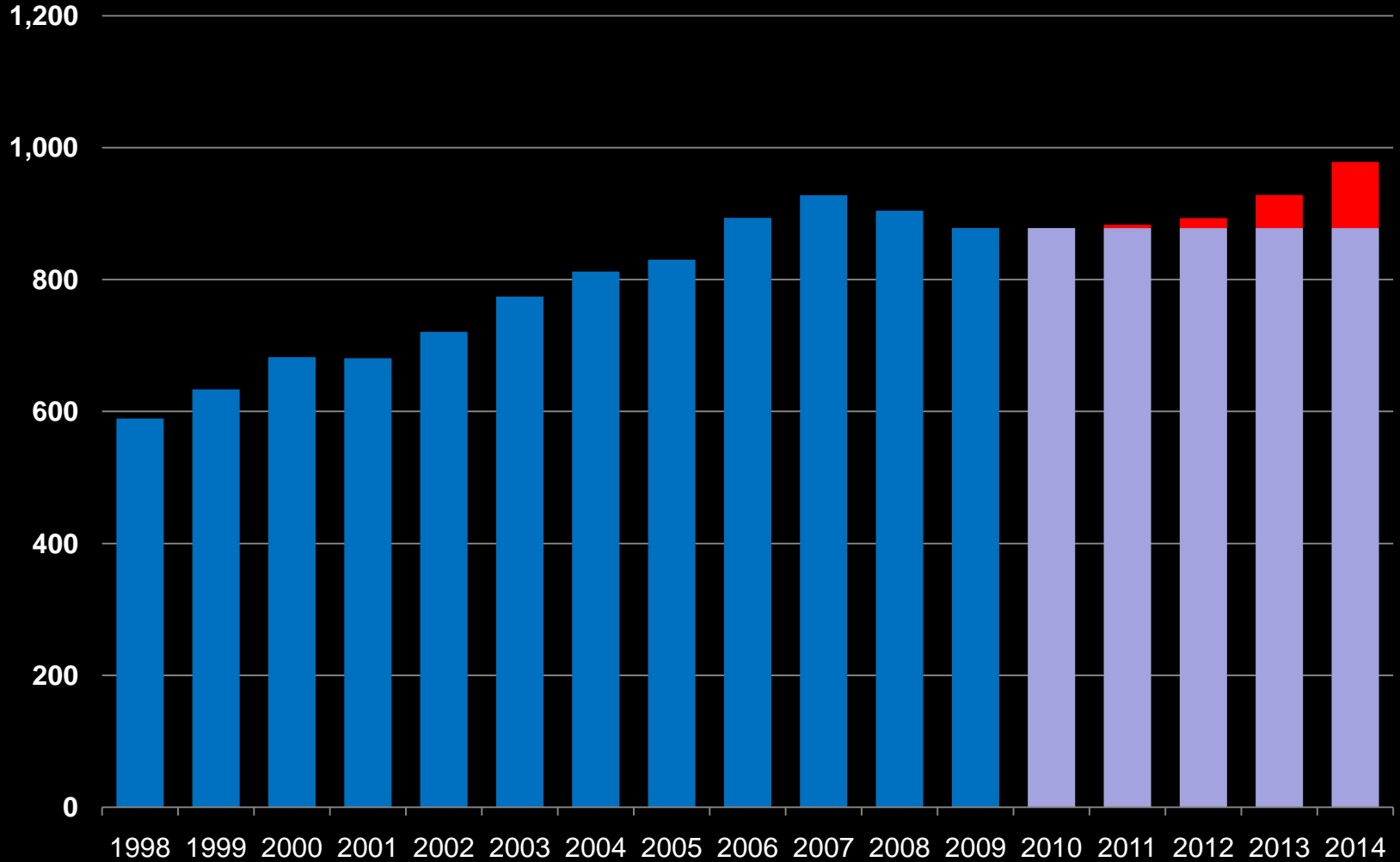
# **A transformative investment**

- **1,000 new reporters, editors and producers**
  - **Equipment**
  - **Technical support**
  - **Fundraising to sustain them**
- **\$100 million per year in new investment**



# Public Radio – Total Cash Revenue

1998 - 2009, Adjusted for Inflation (2009 dollars)



# Public radio members

- **Listening to the service**
- **Personal importance**
- **Education**
- **Need for listener support**

# Performance of news stations

- **Size of the news staff does not help predict listening**
  - Core composition
  - Education level in the market
  - News franchise
- **Size of the news staff does not help predict listener support**
  - Size of core audience

# **Performance of news stations**

**Stations with more resources are making mission-driven investments of those resources in local and regional community service.**

# **A campaign for growth**

- **Public funds**
- **Seed funding from major national foundations**
- **Principal funding from local and regional philanthropy and major gifts**
- **A multi-dimensional plan for long-term sustainability**

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# **Global warming activists**

- **Global warming is actually happening**
- **Global warming is harmful – to us**
- **Human activity contributes to global warming**
- **Personal action will make a difference**

# **Local journalism supporters**

- **Local journalism is at risk**
- **This is harmful to our communities**
- **Public radio can be part of the solution**
- **Local philanthropy and major donors can make a difference**



# Test the case

- **Three markets**
  - St. Louis, Louisville, Vermont
- **Major donors and local foundations**
- **In-depth conversations**
  - KublerWirka
- **Cross-check with national foundations**

# **Local journalism is at risk**

- **Collapse of newspaper revenue**
  - \$20 billion in annual revenue lost in last five years
- **Journalism positions disappear**
  - Nearly one-third across the past decade
- **Degradation of television news**
  - Partisan cable shout-fests
  - Culture of celebrity

# **This harms our communities**

- **Challenge to democracy**
  - Decline of accountability in public life
  - Erosion of public discourse
  - Less informed electorate
- **Challenge to community**
  - Loss of connection across social and geographic barriers
  - Weaker civic and cultural fabric

# **Public radio can play a role**

**Others urge public media to take a larger role in journalism**

- Knight Commission**
- FCC “Future of Media”**
- Columbia Journalism Review**
- New America Foundation**

**. . . but public radio is not  
the answer**

**It gets complicated**

# Challenges raised

- **Limits of broadcast-based radio**
  - Only so much time
  - Don't replace signature national shows
- **Analytical reporting, yes**
  - Hard news, not so much
- **The quality standard is high**
  - Local talent and execution inconsistent
- **Reporting on hot topics has risks**
  - Easy to offend benefactors

# Areas of opportunity

- **Value-added, discerning aggregator**
  - Facilitate access to other news sources
- **Develop content and audience across other media**
  - Less and less a radio station, and more and more an organization that provides news and information that I can access in many other ways
- **Partnerships with other players**

# Relative priority

- **Competing community needs**
  - Direct human services, civic development, education, health care, environment
- **Finite resources**
- **Link effective philanthropy to quality of public discussion and debate about priorities**
  - A catalytic role for effective giving



# **Making the case**

**Transparency about business models  
and mechanisms for investment**

- Collaboration and partnership**
- Local/regional/national**
- Look to leverage and scale**
- Avoid competition and redundancy**

# Making the case

## Build on topical areas

- Economic future of the community
- Energy
- Public education
- Environment
- Healthcare
- Transportation
- Political accountability
- Social challenges (poverty, addiction, etc.)

# **Making the case**

## **The importance of information stewardship**

- Public trust**
- High quality reporting**
- Balance and fairness**

# Making the case

**From serve the audience to serve the community**

- Current case focused on personal benefits**
- Not just more local journalism for current listeners**
- May require difficult strategic trade-offs**

# The summary argument

## Where we are

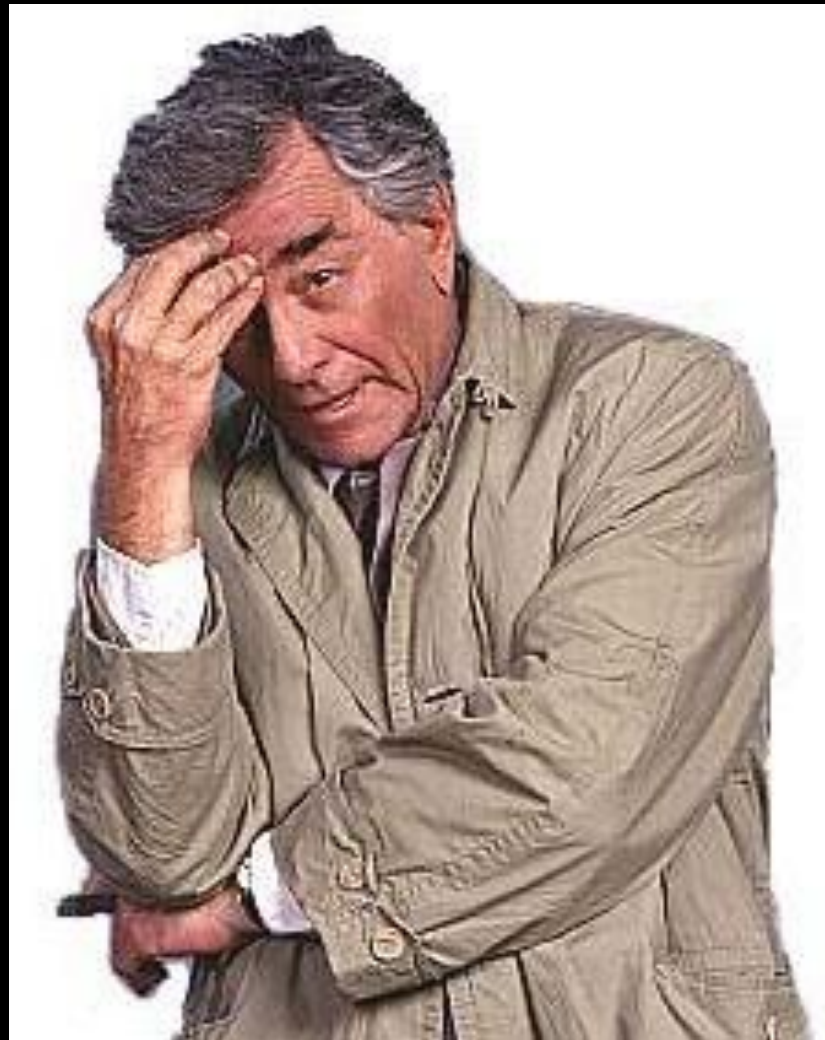
- Large and committed audience
- Demonstrated commitment to quality reporting
- Distinctive, impactful medium
- Experience in fundraising, membership, and a viable business model

# The summary argument

## Where we are going

- New audiences for our service
- New capabilities and journalism expertise
- Impact beyond audience metrics
- Embrace new channels and platforms
- Partner in content and production

**Just one more thing . . .**



# **Just one more thing . . .**

**Public radio may have a unique role as a news organizer**

- A crossroads in the news ecology**
- Make connections and collaborations**
- Convene and facilitate a conversation about community information needs and solutions**
- The next hire might not be a reporter, but an organizer**



# making the case

## Transformative Growth in Public Media's Local Journalism

