



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2018-2021 Plan for Transformation

Aspiration

SRG members aspire to be the anytime, anywhere, multi-platform choice for audiences seeking news, music, and cultural experiences that are personally meaningful, supportive of their communities, and distinctive at every turn. They see enormous opportunities to expand their public service value, reach and engagement by embracing digital transformation.

The imperative for transformation cuts across all our formats – journalism, multiple music genres, and entertainment. Journalism is at the center of the current challenge, as public media respond to the ongoing economic crisis of the news industry, the devastation of local news in communities large and small, and the erosion of public confidence in the news media.

Digital transformation requires significant changes in daily work and organizational culture – accelerating growth in the capacity to create original content, new approaches to addressing a broader range of communities' needs, and greater collaboration between stations and their communities, among public media organizations, and with other local and national content partners. These aspirations have been stated many times over the last 20 years, but there is a new urgency and readiness for action and results.

Strategy

SRG's strategic ambition is to advance members' response to these imperatives, driving a transformation in local service in a time of radical and continuing change. SRG's roles are to:

- Inform, inspire, and support the public media leaders who are making this transformation real – providing thought leadership, catalyzing action, and strengthening public service;
- Organize and coordinate collaborative efforts that achieve scale, resources, and expertise beyond the reach of a single organization; and
- Represent members' collective interests with networks, funders, and vendors.

Focus

SRG will work in six key areas:

The Station | NPR Relationship in the Digital Space

Knowing the Digital Audience

Major New Investments in Local Journalism and Distinctive Original Content

Shared Learning for Organizational Transformation

Digital Technology and Infrastructure

CPB Funding Policy for Public Radio Stations

The Station | NPR Relationship in the Digital Space

SRG members seek mutually beneficial arrangements with NPR, their principal partner in journalism, to seize opportunities in the digital space. SRG will support and facilitate the engagement of SRG members, other public media leaders, and NPR executives to refresh, strengthen, and clarify critical aspects of their relationship. Goals include:

- Creating integrated and complementary digital experiences that build large, localized digital audiences and increase the relevance and strength of public radio services to individual users and communities.
- Leveraging local and national digital assets – content, platforms, and technologies – for greater effectiveness and efficiency in reach, use, engagement, and support.
- Establishing principles and business rules for managing audience relationships, audience data, and audience revenue that enable stations and NPR to work together to connect with the digital audience, learn more about them, and capture individual contributions.

Knowing the Digital Audience

SRG members are many years and tens of millions of dollars along the path of creating digitally delivered public services, with growing investments in “digital first” content and products. Yet knowledge about the audiences for this work remains quite limited.

It is critical to know more – who are members of public media’s digital audience now and who our organizations want them to be; what news, other content, and experiences these audiences are using now and what they are seeking; and how public media’s digital users move in the larger digital space.

SRG members will also benefit from a shared framework for digital audience measurement – a framework that aligns with critical shared goals and that provides the most useful, intuitive, and actionable metrics to track progress against them. By using a shared framework, we lay the foundation for aggregated reporting and comparisons across organizations.

Crucially, local public media organizations need to move from knowing their audiences in the aggregate to knowing them as individuals, being able to meet audiences where they are with content and engagement they find relevant and important.

To advance SRG members’ knowledge and understanding of digital audiences, SRG will:

- Gather data, research, and recommendations about digital audiences for public media and the digital landscape broadly; integrate and synthesize this complex and important material; and report regularly to members on key issues and the “state of play.”
- Working with station digital leads, NPR, and others, promote broad adoption of key digital performance metrics and develop systems and protocols for sharing results. This

will build on recommendations of the “digital analytics group” (largely SRG members) and encourage greater transparency and collective accountability about our progress.

- Identify, promote, and share results of activity to measurably increase the “knowns” among organizations’ digital users, which supports opportunities to increase engagement, relevance, and conversion to membership.
- Explore ways in which SRG members can share and aggregate anonymized user data to discover patterns of use, appeal, and loyalty, including protocols to protect users, maintain their trust, and protect organizations’ fiduciary and business interests.

Major New Investments in Local Journalism and Distinctive Original Content

SRG members have the opportunity to develop large, localized digital audiences that extend their overall public service and maintain direct, relevant connections to communities and individuals. Realizing that opportunity will turn on the capacity to create distinctive original content – independent, rigorous journalism; compelling storytelling; music and cultural discovery and celebration – and present it in innovative ways across multiple channels and platforms.

SRG members and other leading stations have dramatically increased their content capacities. Over the past six years public media organizations have added over 1,000 journalist positions, launched scores of podcasts and digital-only audio streams, and connected with hundreds of thousands of people at in-person forums, performances, and other community events.

But so much more needs to be done to propel local and regional public media organizations to the position of front line, comprehensive new providers for their communities, to create content and experiences that command attention and inspire action, to take advantage of each of the multiple media, channels, and platforms we employ. It will take transformative new investments to do so.

With the journalism imperative in the forefront, SRG will advance the framing and planning of a prospective major local/national, station/NPR fundraising initiative to launch and sustain transformative work in local journalism. Our aim is a shared endeavor, possibly including other national producers, stakeholders, and contributors, that would capture several hundred million dollars in new funding from major donors and philanthropies.

SRG’s initial roles will be to:

- Facilitate clarity regarding outcomes of such an initiative and alignment of the multiple local and national agendas involved in such work.
- Organize station investments and participation in the planning and testing of the initiative and support the identification of the party or parties that can lead this work.

On a more granular level, and looking further ahead, virtually all SRG members are concerned about how to transform their fundraising models, with particular focus on creating a membership funnel around digital services. SRG will look for opportunities to share innovations and progress at member stations.

Shared Learning for Organizational Transformation

Standing behind and cutting across all the areas outlined above is the need for organizational change – realigning long-term strategy, business models, relationships among content, marketing, and development teams, workflow processes, and culture to achieve public-service-driven competitive advantage in a changing media marketplace.

The success and stability many public media organizations are currently enjoying with their legacy services makes this change a particular challenge. It is difficult to embrace the need to truly pivot, disrupt, and transform. Moreover, a growing number of organizations are actively pursuing “digital first” content, new approaches to storytelling, and other product innovations. But the audiences for much of this work are small and ephemeral and monetization to support the new initiatives remains elusive.

SRG’s board chair says “It feels like we are living through the industrial revolution.” The co-chair of SRG’s strategic planning committee, returning from an in-depth planning session, says “It was even clearer to me than before how little I know, how much I need to learn, and how much I need to transform (again!) my organization.”

SRG will support a sustained effort at shared learning by members’ top executives and their leadership teams. SRG will:

- Launch a continuing effort to discover, assess, and regularly share key concepts and strategies, organizational tools and processes, structural models and best practices from both inside and outside public media.
- Identify media innovation training programs and resources with which SRG members might connect, such as the Poynter Institute’s Local News Innovation Program, the American Press Institute, and the Lensfest Institute, and explore ways in which these and other efforts could be made more relevant and accessible to public media.
- Cultivate a roster of organizational change consultants and advisors, especially those with experience at media organizations, that SRG members can retain to support their local work.

Digital Technology and Infrastructure

SRG members’ digital service ambitions require significant technology and infrastructure development, both capacities at local and regional organizations and shared national solutions that are essential for the successful functioning of the system as a whole or that can eliminate duplicative efforts. SRG will:

- Through a second phase of the Audience Intelligence project, support design, implementation, and documentation of localized data warehouse solutions appropriate and feasible for local public media organizations that create significant content on a daily basis.
- Promote the design and implementation of content management systems that support real-time collaboration in planning, creating, editing, and presenting daily journalism on-air and online – across stations and with the multiple centers that anchor public media journalism.
- Develop a case for philanthropic investment in local and shared digital infrastructure.
- Work with the Public Television Major Market Group to elevate system-wide discussion of the benefits of federated digital infrastructure and to secure the participation of SRG station leaders in planning the long-term financing and governance of such systems.

CPB Radio Funding Policy

SRG will continue its long-term role advising the Corporation for Public Broadcasting on key issues and priorities for its investments in public media, looking to advance the particular interests and views of its members and to strengthen public media as a whole.

SRG will give particular attention to the intersection of CPB policies with digital transformation of the field and the challenges of making forward-leaning investments within the framework of a legacy-focused legislative framework. SRG will:

- Participate in a comprehensive review of CPB’s \$90 million annual Radio Community Service Grant program, the first such review in five years.
- Advise CPB with respect to uses of its “capital budget” appropriation, which has recently changed to an annual \$20 million allocation that includes authorization to invest in both program interconnection systems and other system infrastructure.
- Advise CPB with respect to its investments in public radio programming.