



Embracing Our Potential

Meeting the Challenge

Imagining the Possibilities

Strategic Plan
February 2026





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A comprehensive version of the Detroit Public Media FY2027–FY2031 Strategic Plan is available upon request for those seeking additional detail.

Mission

Educate, engage, entertain and inspire through the power of public media

Vision

Media anchor of a diverse and connected community

Why

Detroit Public Media exists to amplify the voices and stories of our community to inspire hope, understanding, and opportunity for all.



Core Values

Diversity

Honor, understand, and support the diversity within our organization and the many communities we serve, through inclusive content, education, training, mentoring, and meaningful, ongoing dialogue.

Engagement

Establish and cultivate relationships with our audience, partners, leaders, and the general public, to understand community needs, to inform our content, and to create connections beyond our programming.

Trust

Act with integrity, reliability, and accountability to maintain and build the confidence placed in us by the community.

Innovation

Embrace new ideas and technologies to deliver effective solutions for the diverse communities we serve.

Excellence

Recognize the responsibility of public media to provide continuous improvement and exceptional service in all aspects of our operation for the betterment of the community.

Financial Sustainability

Understand that the ability of our enterprise to thrive depends on continued revenue growth, the generosity of the public and a solid reputation as diligent managers of our financial resources.

Executive Summary

Detroit Public Media, originally known as WTVS Channel 56, started broadcasting on October 3, 1955, as an educational station affiliated with Wayne State University and other local institutions. In 2005, they assumed the management of 90.9 WRCJ – home to the only classical and jazz radio station in Detroit. Together, Detroit PBS and 90.9 WRCJ operate as Detroit Public Media, where for more than 70 years they've created local content and events to serve Southeast Michigan.

Detroit Public Media's reach and impact across multiple platforms is vast. Across its five channels, Detroit PBS has 850,000 monthly viewers and more than 154,000 listeners tune to 90.9 WRCJ each month- the #1 public radio station in Detroit. Through digital platforms—including newsletters, websites, apps, and social media—Detroit Public Media connects with more than one million users each month, extending its influence well beyond traditional broadcast.

MONTHLY BROADCAST REACH

Over **one million monthly broadcast viewers and listeners** watch and listen across Detroit PBS and 90.9 WRCJ.





Operating in an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving media environment, 2025 presented both unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Reductions in federal and state funding required Detroit Public Media to respond with strategic focus and innovation to sustain both financial health and community service. The community’s response was immediate and affirming, demonstrated through increased donations, memberships, and major gifts—underscoring the essential role Detroit PBS and 90.9 WRCJ play across Southeast Michigan.

Looking ahead, Detroit Public Media has substantial opportunities to expand its impact, reach, and financial resilience. Deepening community connections, strengthening partnerships, and engaging audiences through a subscriber mindset will deliver personalized and technology-enabled content that reflects and elevates the stories and issues that matter most locally. By strengthening brand awareness and telling Detroit Public Media’s story more clearly and consistently, the engagement strategies focus on increasing awareness across Detroit and surrounding communities.

The forthcoming Detroit campus at 234 Piquette provides a powerful hub for engagement, while early education efforts and statewide initiatives such as the Michigan Learning Channel position Detroit PBS to scale its influence well beyond the city. Enhanced fundraising strategies, membership growth, and thoughtful use of the organization’s trusted brand and unique local ownership model offer clear pathways to long-term sustainability.

At the core of Detroit Public Media’s strength are its people—the staff, board, and community advisors—whose leadership and commitment make possible the trust, relevance, and community impact central to the mission.

Detroit Public Media enters the next five years as a highly trusted public media institution navigating a rapidly changing media, funding, and civic landscape. This strategic plan provides a clear and disciplined roadmap to strengthen its role as a media anchor for a diverse and connected community, while ensuring long-term relevance, impact, and financial sustainability.



Primary Research

Through a series of interviews and listening sessions, an outline of strengths, challenges, opportunities and risks were developed to help guide the thinking and framework of the strategic plan. Primary research was conducted with 110 individuals including subscribers, members, partners, staff, the Community Advisory Panel, the Board of Trustees and the strategic planning subcommittee. These listening groups, individual interviews, and committee meetings provided critical input on the organization’s current state and future opportunities amidst significant changes in media consumption and funding strategies.

Feedback was largely consistent across stakeholder groups, with some variation in expectations reflecting the distinct perspectives of each group. Overall, these stakeholders consistently identified strengths that included the PBS and Detroit PBS brand, national programming, educational programs, the staff and the board.

Several areas—most notably brand awareness, content, financial sustainability, and the forthcoming building—were identified as both strengths and challenges. Opportunities to build on existing strengths while addressing these challenges include engaging new audiences, diversifying fundraising efforts, and transforming 234 Piquette into a vibrant community and journalism hub for Detroit.

STAKEHOLDERS	# OF PARTICIPANTS
INDIVIDUAL STAFF, BOARD, AND FUNDER INTERVIEWS	8
STAFF LISTENING SESSION WIXOM - 5/6/25	17
BOARD LISTENING SESSION 4/17/25 (VIRTUAL)	19
BOARD LISTENING SESSION 4/23/25	5
STAFF LISTENING SESSION JOURNALISM - 5/13/25	13
STAFF LISTENING SESSION 90.9 WRCJ - 5/13/25	12
CAP LISTENING SESSION 6/9/25	8
SUBSCRIBERS AND MEMBERS LISTENING SESSION - 6/18/25	19
PARTNERS LISTENING SESSION 7/15/25 (VIRTUAL)	9
TOTAL	110



Strengths

- Highly trusted, well-respected brands
- Skilled, passionate leadership and staff
- Strong content: local, national global, children's
- Multiple platforms
- Statewide via Michigan Learning Channel; National reach via PBS Books
- Deep community credibility and partnerships
- Solid financial discipline and diverse revenue streams
- Only community-owned public TV and radio stations in the state
- Forthcoming Detroit campus as a community hub

Challenges

- Fragmented staff and space limitations
- Competing capital and operating fundraising needs
- Gaps in brand awareness and community connection
- Challenges attracting 18–50 year old audiences
- Limited clarity on priorities and success metrics
- Some audiences unsure how to use Michigan Learning Channel
- DEI optics require ongoing attention
- Revenue model constraints on programming

Opportunities

- Engage Gen Y & Z
- Expand membership, major gifts, planned giving
- Leverage new Detroit building as a community hub
- Strengthen statewide PBS collaboration
- Grow Michigan Learning Channel and bilingual/multicultural content
- More events and community engagement
- Technology and AI for personalization and distribution
- Journalism hub for metro Detroit
- New revenue (rentals, production services)

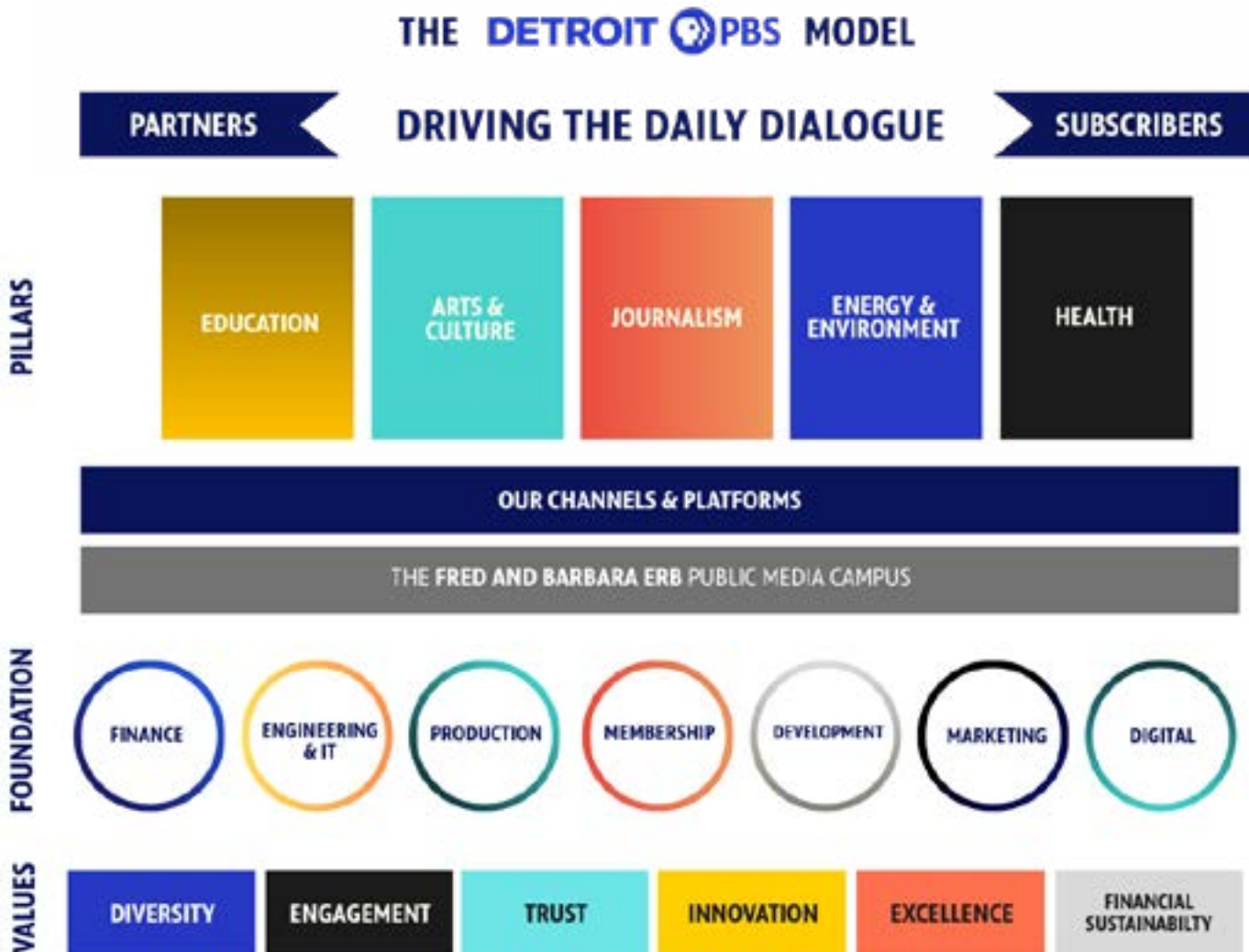


Operating Models

Over the past decade, Detroit Public Media has intentionally invested in building a strong, capable organization—strengthening its people, systems, and processes to better serve the community. As a result, the organization is well-positioned to execute this strategic plan, with the operational discipline, talent, and infrastructure necessary to drive sustained impact and adapt to a rapidly evolving media and public service landscape.

Detroit PBS Model

The Detroit PBS Model is a values-driven framework developed in response to a changing media landscape and a commitment to deepen the organization’s role as a trusted, everyday partner to the region. Grounded in core values and supported by strong internal teams, the model aligns operations, development, production and engagement as the foundation. From there, the Fred and Barbara Erb Public Media Campus serves as the physical extension of this foundation — a community hub designed to bring partners and audiences into the work, foster collaboration, and deepen engagement across Southeast Michigan. Content is distributed across an integrated set of broadcast channels and digital platforms and organized around five strategic pillars that reflect the core content pillars of the organization. Partners play a critical role by informing the work, shaping content priorities, and helping extend reach to specific communities, while Detroit PBS amplifies partner voices and connects audiences to trusted local and national organizations. Subscribers, in turn, are central to financial sustainability, with a focus on delivering the right content to the right people, building long-term relationships, and strengthening engagement over time. Together, these elements support an ongoing daily dialogue around critical regional issues and position Detroit PBS as an integral part of the civic, cultural, and educational fabric of Southeast Michigan.



Subscriber Mindset



A core component of the Detroit Public Media Model, the Subscriber Mindset represents a foundational element of Detroit Public Media's audience engagement and sustainability strategy. It is an audience-first approach designed to cultivate enduring relationships with individuals who regularly engage with content across platforms. Modeled on a proven conversion framework, the Subscriber Mindset guides audiences from initial awareness of programming and community services, to deeper engagement, perceived value, and ultimately to sustained loyalty, advocacy, and financial support. By integrating data and insights, Detroit Public Media can deliver personalized experiences that reflect the unique interests of each audience segment. As a core pillar of the organization's strategic plan, the Subscriber Mindset aligns technology, content, and development efforts to strengthen audience relationships and build the foundation for long-term institutional resilience.

Content-Platform-Audience-Partner (CPAP) Framework

The Content-Platform-Audience-Partner (CPAP) framework illustrates how Detroit Public Media is intentional about understanding the different audiences it serves on more than 60 platforms. It recognizes and embraces the importance of leveraging partners to expand content and engagement. The CPAP framework aligns with the mission and strategic priorities, connecting audiences to meaningful experiences across broadcast, digital, and in-person platforms. See Appendix 1 for the Content-Platform-Audience-Partner framework.

Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS)

Detroit Public Media follows the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS®) - a practical management framework which helps translate strategy into disciplined execution. It provides a shared operating rhythm, clear accountability, and measurable priorities that ensure the strategic plan does not remain aspirational, but is actively advanced across the organization.

EOS aligns the organization around a clear vision—including long-term goals, strategic priorities, and a defined plan—so every team understands what matters most. That vision is translated into execution through annual goals and rocks (90-day priorities), which break multi-year strategies into focused, time-bound actions and provide real-time insight into progress. EOS reinforces accountability by clarifying roles and responsibilities ensuring that strategic initiatives have clear leaders. Regular leadership meetings establish a consistent cadence for reviewing performance, solving issues, and removing obstacles. EOS embeds a culture of discipline and follow-through, ensuring that day-to-day decisions, resource allocation, and team focus remain aligned with strategic objectives.





Long-Term Goals

These long-term goals were developed through extensive primary and secondary research and thoughtful discussion with the leadership team and strategic planning subcommittee. These are designed to guide the organization over the next five years to advance its mission and vision and live its core values.

Engagement

Engage, sustain, and grow audiences and subscribers to reach them where they are with the content that they want.

Team

Attract and develop a high-performing team with the skills, experience, and vision needed to meet the challenges and opportunities of 2030.

Content

Recognized as Southeast Michigan's strategic media partner by producing, acquiring, and distributing relevant content.

Technology and Cybersecurity

Maintain and strengthen the station's technology infrastructure and foster a cybersecurity-first culture to position the station as a technology-forward media leader.

Education

Deliver comprehensive, impactful education programming from early learning through workforce development in partnership with educators, community organizations, and parents.

Financial Sustainability

Achieve long-term financial sustainability through diversified revenue streams and a strong financial position.

Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) enable the team to monitor, assess, and make timely adjustments reflecting changes in metrics that reflect successes and challenges. These KPIs will be collected and shared on a quarterly basis for the leadership team and board to review and reflect. They will also be shared quarterly with the full staff to provide insight and prompt discussion on how trends and initiatives are shaping the business.

Tracking and Implementation

This five-year strategic plan will be shared with key stakeholders through a variety of formats designed to engage the community in the future of Detroit Public Media. Communication efforts will include individual meetings, group sessions, targeted email communications, and a concise plan summary available online, ensuring broad understanding, alignment, and ongoing engagement.

Consistent monitoring and assessment of actual results against key initiatives and financial projections will be critical to the success of this plan. EOS will continue to support accountability and align strategic priorities with annual work plans, individual goals and objectives. The Level 10 (L-10) meeting strengthens EOS by providing a structured, weekly forum for leadership teams to stay aligned, accountable, and focused on solving critical issues.

Financial performance and key performance indicators will be shared with staff and the board on a quarterly basis, creating a clear framework for transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making. This disciplined approach will enable timely adjustments as new opportunities and challenges emerge and ensure sustained alignment with the organization’s mission and vision.

KPI	BASELINE
TOTAL # OF MEMBERS	80,000 <i>(current December 2025)</i>
DIGITAL CUME	1,099,600 <i>(monthly average CY25)</i>
TV CUME	850,000 <i>(monthly average CY25)</i>
RADIO CUME	154,000 <i>(monthly average CY25)</i>
EXTERNAL MEETINGS	Newly Established
EVENT PARTICIPANTS	Newly Established
WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE SCORE	68% <i>(April 2025)</i>
% OF EMPLOYEES PASSING PHISHING TESTS	94% <i>(FY2024/2025)</i>
TOTAL REVENUE	\$14,721,308 <i>(YTD Q2 FY2026)</i>





Thank You

to the Strategic Planning Subcommittee

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And to everyone who participated in a listening session or interview.

