



PUBLIC MEDIA VENTURE GROUP PARTNERS WITH THE GOOGLE NEWS INITIATIVE ON THE PUBLIC MEDIA MERGER PROJECT

BOULDER, CO (September 20) — As local newspapers continue to downsize or close their doors, public broadcasters are working to increase their local news staff and digital reach; simultaneously, journalist entrepreneurs have been launching digital-only startups to fill the gaps in local coverage. This landscape is creating significant opportunities for collaboration and mergers that can strengthen the quality of local news in communities around the country. At least nine of these mergers between public broadcasters and digital newsrooms have taken place since 2013. Business models for mergers of this nature, however, are virtually nonexistent, leaving both public broadcasters and digital newsrooms with no basis for evaluating viability and options for sustainable structures.

The Public Media Venture Group (PMVG), a nonprofit business development group comprised of 31 public media licensees, in partnership with the Google News Initiative (GNI), is pleased to announce **The Public Media Merger Project**. The project is centered on business models for local public media newsroom mergers. The GNI is Google's effort to work with the news industry to help journalism thrive in the digital age and build stronger and more viable models for news. Nine organizations will be involved in the project, including WNET's NJ Spotlight and NJTV, Colorado Public Radio and the Denverite, WHYY and Billy Penn, Rocky Mountain Public Media, and Southern California Public Radio's KPCC and LAist.com, among others.

The research portion of the project will be led by Dr. Elizabeth Hansen (PhD Organizational Behavior, Harvard Business School) whose work focuses on the digital transformation of newsrooms and the dynamics of leading and managing innovation. Over the next nine months, Dr. Hansen will complete the *Local Public Media Playbook*, a field guide for future mergers between public media entities and local digital newsrooms. The *Local Public Media Playbook* will be developed through research and data collection on the mergers completed since 2013, as well as in-depth study of the mergers launched in the last two years. The *Playbook* will focus on the strategic, technical, cultural, mission-based, financial, and branding challenges that may be faced as a result of a merger, and will include functional information around organizational and governance decisions, financial and technical performance indicators, leadership dynamics, and commercial versus non-commercial partnership concerns.

The project will also have a strong peer learning component. In the course of two convenings, PMVG and GNI will bring together public media and digital newsroom groups as well as foundations and other entities focused on building a stronger future for local journalism. Through its peer learning and capacity-building work, this project will also collaborate with other innovators in the industry to help build a broad range of resources and capital structures to support and sustain local journalism partnerships.

Jason Washing, Managing Director, News Partnerships at Google shares, "One of the pillars of the GNI is developing new business models for a sustainable news ecosystem. We are thrilled to be working with partners across the Public and Commercial media landscape to explore new ideas, share learnings, and amplify areas of success."

With a nationwide audience, an ecosystem of approximately \$3.0B in revenues, and a workforce of over 4,600 reporters, public broadcasters can provide reach, scale, and sustainability for local digital journalists. And with expert reporting, strong editorial capability and technical experience, local digital newsrooms can bring strong digital brands and robust digital audiences to legacy public broadcasters.

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[Sign up here](#) for intermittent updates on the project.

About PMVG

PMVG was founded in 2017 by Public Media Company – a national nonprofit strategic consulting company that fosters public media growth – and an initial group of 27 public media licensees. These founding organizations identified the need for public media stations to collectively develop, test, and launch services and revenue streams that leverage new technologies to further the mission of public media. Now an independent nonprofit business development corporation, PMVG consists of 31 licensees led by the public media industry's most dynamic public station leaders that operate 118 television stations which serve over 230 million people.

About the Researchers

Elizabeth Hansen (Lead Researcher) received her PhD in Organizational Behavior from Harvard Business School. Her work focuses on the digital transformation of newsrooms and the dynamics of leading and managing innovation. She has previously conducted research at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School and at the Shorenstein Center for Media, Politics, and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School.

Emily Roseman (Project Lead) is a media and technology researcher and digital media consultant. Recently, she was the Research Project Manager for a study at the Harvard Kennedy School's Shorenstein Center on business models for nonprofit news.

About the Google News Initiative

The Google News Initiative represents Google's largest-ever effort to help journalism thrive in the digital age. Through its partnerships, programs and products, the Google News Initiative works with thousands of organizations worldwide to support quality independent journalism, financial sustainability, and development of new technologies that drive innovation. Google invested \$300 million over three years to energize these collaborations, and to lay the foundation for new products and programs for a diverse set of news publishers, to benefit the entire ecosystem. This includes supporting thought leadership on topics like consumer revenue, advertising and data that are critical to the future of the news industry.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Marc Hand, marc@publicmediaventure.com

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