



BY / WITH / FOR YOUTH
►► INSPIRING
NEXT GEN ►►
PUBLIC MEDIA
►► AUDIENCES

Next Gen Public Media Accelerator

Request for Proposals

1. OVERVIEW

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center (JGCC) at Sesame Workshop, with the support of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, is pleased to announce the **Next Gen Public Media Accelerator** request for proposals (RFP). The Cooney Center is seeking proposals for tween- and teen-focused projects that aim to develop and support new content, modes of engagement, usage and development of technologies, and community-based programs within the public media field. The Accelerator aims both to produce direct impacts and to advance the field's collective understanding of how to serve this critical audience through (1) the development and implementation of these projects and (2) support for grantee participation in the program's peer learning community and knowledge sharing opportunities.

The Next Gen Public Media Accelerator is an important element of the ***By/With/For Youth: Inspiring Next Gen Public Media Audiences*** initiative, a research and development project that conducts and translates research on youth media practices, including the creation of media by, with, and for tweens and teens, and explores opportunities for the public media sector to develop innovative and unique strategies to better engage young audiences. [More information about Next Gen Public Media can be found here.](#)

2. BACKGROUND

Public media is at a critical junction. Rapidly evolving technology ecosystems mean that new platforms, modes of engagement, and forms of content are driving every part of the media sector to innovate. At the same time, tweens and teens who are growing up in this new world of media are developing a distinctly different set of media practices and expectations that include not just passive consumption but creative, interactive, and social modes of engagement that can be complementary and overlapping. [Recent](#)

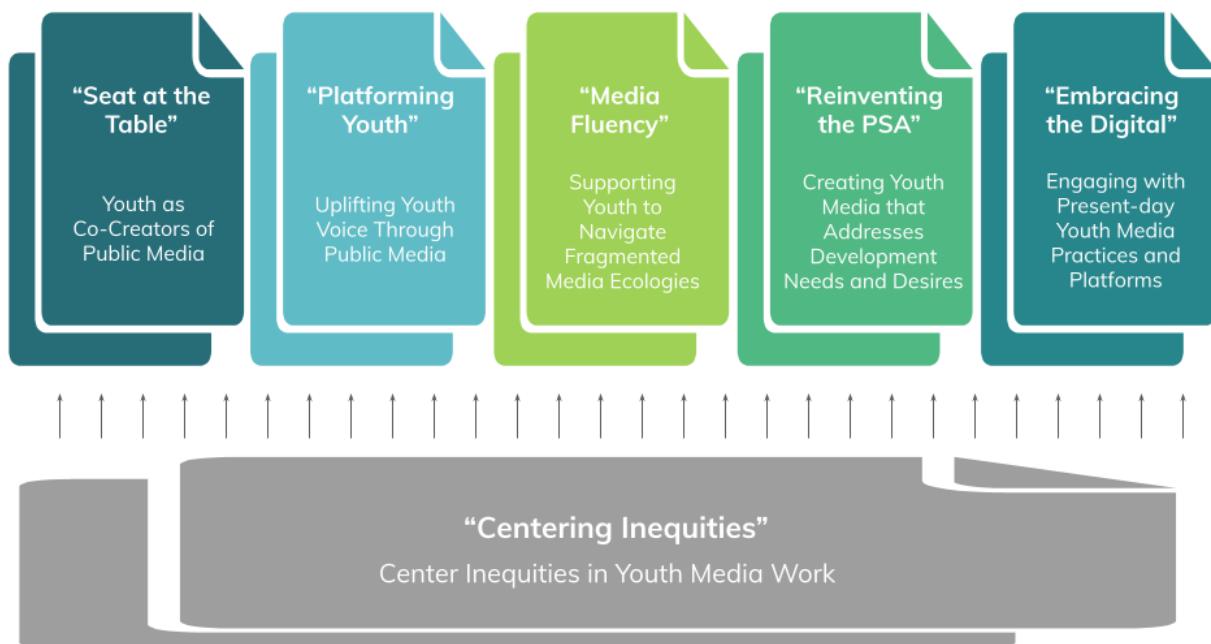
[research from the Joan Ganz Cooney Center](#) shows that today's youth value representation, authenticity, and accessibility in their media choices. However, in the current environment, they rarely have trustworthy, high-quality options available to support their educational, social, and cultural interests.

The habits and expectations of today's young people offer public media a unique opportunity to design not only with the youth audience in mind, but *in partnership with* young people who can help shape strategy and priorities, identify the issues that matter to them, and lead the way in developing the types of public media content and modes of engagement they want to engage with.

With a clear disconnect between Gen Z and public media, it's critical to re-establish the value of public media in meeting youth needs and building trust. Developing young people's orientation toward the value of trustworthy, high-quality media and the institutions that produce them is a component of helping them understand and harness the broader media environment in which they live, learn, work, and play. In addressing this audience, public media can deepen its educational mission to support, inspire, and engage.

3. NEXT GEN PUBLIC MEDIA FUNDING PRIORITY AREAS

Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals for projects focused on tweens and teens (10-18 years old) that address one or more of the following priority areas:



“Seat at the Table” — Engaging Youth as Co-Creators of Public Media

Public media has the opportunity to transform how it operates—from content, to platforms, to local programs—by creating “a seat at the table” for youth. Youth are hungry to shape their media environment and not just consume content, yet have few opportunities to do so. Proposals that address this priority area involve youth having new opportunities to participate in the development of content and programs and inform broader organizational priorities.

“Platforming Youth” — Uplifting Youth Voice Through Public Media

Public media is a powerful platform that has the potential to amplify youth voices for society at large. Proposals that address this priority area will demonstrate ways for youth to reach public audiences—either adults or their peers—and share about issues that matter to them.

“Media Fluency” — Supporting Youth to Navigate a Fragmented Media Landscape

In order to be informed citizens and community members, youth need to engage with media—but the media landscape they currently encounter is fragmented and characterized by issues of polarization, disinformation, platform biases, surveillance, and privacy. Proposals that address this priority area will help youth develop the “media fluency” to navigate this rapidly evolving landscape.

“Reinventing the PSA” — Creating Youth Media that Addresses Developmental Needs and Desires

The current media landscape isn’t giving teens and tweens everything they want, or need, to manage becoming adults in the 2020s. Some of these needs are perennial (e.g., issues of mental health, sexuality, and relationships) and others are contemporary (e.g., navigating technological change, engaging with complex institutions, and forging political and social identities). Old conceptions of media focused on these developmental needs—the PSA, the afterschool special—are due for reinvention by public media. Proposals that address this priority area will generate media that addresses these kinds of developmental needs and desires.

“Embracing the Digital” — Engaging with Present-day Youth Media Platforms and Practices

In stark contrast to legacy media, youth engage with media today in ways that are social, creative, and interactive—and they do so on media platforms that are dynamic and decentralized. Proposals that address this priority area will engage youth in innovative ways that embrace these social and technological changes.

Proposals can address a single priority area outlined above, or can address multiple (though this is not required). Regardless of which priority area(s) a proposal focuses on, all projects must address the following cross-cutting priority:

*“Centering Inequities” — *Centering Inequities in Youth Media Work**

Increasing inequities and long-standing historical injustices mean that new public media projects focusing on teens and tweens should not only focus on “universal service,” but must also actively include and address issues of marginalization, historic disinvestment, opportunity and access gaps, and/or issues of media representation of non-dominant groups.

See the [Additional Resources and Readings](#) (below) for more information on the funding priority areas.

4. GRANT INFORMATION

Next Gen Public Media Accelerator applicants may propose two different types of projects:

- **Piloting New Models ('Spark' grants)** - projects that design and pilot new content, modes of engagement, usage and development of technologies, or community-based programs that directly or indirectly (e.g., via teachers or out of school partners) engage tween or teen audiences and are aligned with Next Gen Public Media priority areas (see above).
- **Expanding Capacity ('Catalyze' grants)** - projects that benefit the field by building the capacity of public media stations to engage in tween or teen focused work through development of resources, professional development, technical assistance, support for adoption of program models, or other means and are aligned with Next Gen Public Media priority areas (see above).

Proposed projects do not need to be entirely new: they may instead add new components to existing series, content, or programs.

All awards will provide \$15,000 in funding. Applying organizations must provide matching funds, with proposed activities being supplemented by cash or in-kind support.¹ At least 10 grants will be awarded.

5. ACCELERATOR PARTICIPATION EXPECTATIONS

Accelerator funding will be provided to support both project execution as well as grantee participation (estimated 5-7 hours per month) in JGCC-led activities related to documenting, sharing, and learning, including:

¹ In-kind contributions are typically services or goods other than cash grants. Examples of in-kind contributions include services like project management, meeting space, communications services (telephone, copies), and administrative support; expertise like legal, tax, or business advice, marketing and website development; or goods like computers, software, furniture, and office equipment for use by your organization.

- **Peer Learning Community** - JGCC will facilitate activities throughout the grant period where grantees connect with one another as well as others within public media engaged in tween- and teen-focused work. Grantees will have opportunities to share about their projects, provide feedback, troubleshoot challenges, distill lessons learned, and identify opportunities for future work.
- **Documentation and Sharing Best Practices** - JGCC will work with grantees to identify, document, and share best practices and key learnings that are emerging from their projects. Sharing will include both open online resources as well as virtual public events hosted by JGCC. Awardees may be expected to participate in data collection that supports these efforts including interviews with project staff and/or youth participants, provision of project-related content, and virtual site visits.

Receipt of a Next Gen Public Media Accelerator Grant will be contingent on awardee signing an agreement with the Joan Ganz Cooney Center further describing these participation expectations and use rights around materials resulting from the grant.

6. ELIGIBILITY

All community service grant (CSG) qualified public media stations are eligible to receive grant awards. Producers, nonprofit, for profit, and community-based organizations may apply with a public media station as partner and designated grantee.

7. TIMELINE

The Next Gen Public Media Accelerator RFP is open from November 3 to December 20, 2021. During this period, the Joan Ganz Cooney Center will provide a set of additional opportunities for applicants to learn more about the RFP, brainstorm ideas, and hone proposal concepts. [Read more about these opportunities below.](#)

Grantees will be announced in January 2022. The Next Gen Public Media Accelerator will run from February 1 to July 31, 2022. Final reports will be due on August 31, 2022.

RFP Announcement	November 3, 2021		
Proposal Support Opportunities	November 8, 2021 @ 1-2pm ET November 10 & 12, 2021 @ 1-3pm ET November 15-19, December 1-3	Informational webinar Concept design sprint ² Consultation office hours	
RFP Deadline	December 20, 2021 @ 8:00pm ET		

² Design sprints and consultation office hours will be offered on multiple dates to accommodate schedule conflicts. They will not include different content.

Grantees Announced	January 2022
Next Gen Public Media Accelerator Award Period	February 2022-July 2022
Final reports due	August 2022

8. PROPOSAL SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

To support the development of robust proposals from diverse applicants there will be a set of optional opportunities to learn more about the RFP and to align proposals with Next Gen Public Media Accelerator goals:

Informational webinar

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center will hold a one-hour webinar about the Next Gen Public Media Accelerator RFP. This webinar will focus on the purpose of the RFP, the research that is motivating it, the key activities that will happen during the Next Gen Public Media Accelerator, and opportunities for potential applicants to ask questions about the opportunity.

November 8, 2021 @ 1pm ET. [Register here.](#)

Concept design sprint

This two-hour interactive workshop will help applicants transform their aspirations into compelling proposal concepts. Facilitated by Cooney Center project leaders, applicants will engage in design exercises that help generate ideas that align with Next Gen Public Media Accelerator goals and expectations.

November 10 @ 1-3pm ET and November 12, 2021 @ 1-3pm ET . [View the agenda](#), and register for either [Nov 10](#) or [Nov 12](#). (Note: the same session will be held twice to accommodate as many participants as possible.)

Consultation office hours

Interested in 1-on-1 support? Sign up for a 30-minute consultation slot during office hours during mid-November and early December. A member of the Cooney Center project team will answer your questions and help you improve your proposal concept.

November 15- 19, December 1-3, 2021. [Sign up for a consultation slot here.](#)

Read our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for additional information or contact us at cooney.center@sesame.org.

9. PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS

All proposals will be scored by JGCC project leaders and external experts using the [Proposal Evaluation Rubric](#) (below). JGCC project leaders will select awardees based on the resulting scores, as well as the diversity and balance of the cohort of Accelerator participants. Additionally, youth project advisors will participate in the evaluation and selection process.

10. HOW TO SUBMIT APPLICATIONS

Please submit all proposal materials, outlined below, no later than 8:00 PM ET on December 20, 2021 via our [online form](#). Please direct any questions to cooney.center@sesame.org.

11. PROPOSAL MATERIALS

Each application should include four elements detailed below. The proposal narrative will be evaluated according to the seven criteria listed. (See [Proposal Evaluation Rubric](#) for more information.) Please adhere to word limits as noted.

1. **Applicant information** - please complete the fields in our [online form](#) when submitting your application materials, including:
 - a. Station name and mailing address
 - b. Contact person for this application (name, title, email, phone)
 - c. Project title
 - d. Type of grant (i.e., Spark or Catalyst)
 - e. Project abstract (up to 100 words)
 - f. If applying in partnership with additional organization(s), please include their name(s) and address(es)
2. **Cover letter** - a brief cover letter should be provided on organization letterhead that includes the organization name, contact person, and project title signed by the organization's general manager, director, or executive.
3. **Proposal narrative** - the proposal narrative must address the following and not exceed 3,000 words:
 - a. *Project Title*
 - b. *Project Abstract:* A concise and clear description of the project, associated need, goals, intended outcomes and target audience(s) or benefactors. Please do not exceed 100 words. This section should be written in a way that can stand alone if removed from the rest of the narrative.
 - c. *Project Design:* Detailed and concrete description of the project. For Spark grants, what is being piloted and/or developed? For Catalyze grants, what capacity building activities will you be engaging in?

- d. *Innovation:* Why is this project necessary? Why is it novel? How is this different from what has come before? How does it build on best practices within or beyond public media and/or existing research on youth media engagement and/or youth development?
- e. *Execution:* What is your plan for implementing your project? What deliverables/outputs will you complete, and on what timeline? (*If multiple partners are involved, what roles will different organizations play?)
- f. *Projected Learnings:* What lessons, best practices, or other forms of knowledge do you expect this project to generate, and how they might be relevant to other public media practitioners?
- g. *Alignment:* How do this proposal's project design and projected learnings align with RFP priority areas, including the cross-cutting priority of Centering Inequity?
- h. *Capacity:* What kind of prior experience do you and/or your partners have that will support the implementation of the project? How do you want the Accelerator to help you grow?
- i. *Coherence:* How does this pilot fit into the organization(s)' recent work and upcoming priorities? Where do you imagine it going at the organization(s) after the grant period?

4. Operations addendum

- a. *Personnel:* List of key team members and brief biosketches, indicating up to three team members who will be regular participants in the Peer Learning Community. If you are applying as a partnership, at least one team member from each partner should be included.
 - b. *Use of Funds:* Describe how the funds provided, as well as your organization's matching funds (in-kind or cash), will be used to support project activities and goals. This does not need to include a line item budget.
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Funding for the Next Gen Public Media Accelerator program was made available through the generous support of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.



APPENDIX A: PROPOSAL EVALUATION RUBRIC

JGCC project leaders and external experts will score submissions according to the proposal narrative's seven criteria.

Note: Some criteria will be weighted differently for Spark vs. Catalyze grants based on the respective goals for these grant categories.

(*) - criteria will be weighted more heavily for Spark grants, and less heavily for Catalyze grants.

(‡) - criteria will be weighted more heavily for Catalyze grants, and less heavily for Spark grants.

Evaluation Criteria	Low quality	High quality
PROJECT DESIGN: Detailed and concrete description of the project. For Spark grants, what is being piloted and/or developed? For Catalyze grants, what capacity building activities will you be engaging in?	Proposal is unclear what activities the grantee would do during the Accelerator, what they would be piloting (Spark) or the ways they'd be engaging in capacity building (Catalyst).	Proposal has a clearly defined purpose and a set of activities that directly support its implementation/piloting.
INNOVATION: Why is it necessary? Why is it novel? How is this different from what has come before? How does it build on best practices and/or existing research on youth media engagement/youth development? (*)	Proposal does not acknowledge existing work in the field, make a case for how this project fits among those precedents, or sufficiently argue for how the project is both novel and necessary.	Proposal presents a thoughtful case for why and how this project is trying something novel and necessary, in the context of what has and has not worked previously and elsewhere.
EXECUTION: What is your plan for implementing your project? What deliverables/outputs will you complete, and on what timeline? (*If multiple partners are involved, what roles will different organizations play?)	Proposal does not have a clear plan and/or is not supported by clear outputs/deliverables; proposal's timeline is vague or seems unfeasible.	Proposal lays out a clear, well thought-out plan that is anchored by specific outputs that will be produced during the grant period.
PROJECTED LEARNINGS: What lessons, best practices, or other forms of knowledge do you expect this project to generate, and how they might be relevant to other public media practitioners?	Proposal does not have a stance of experimentation, inquiry, and learning: there are minimal opportunities for learning (including questions to explore) that might benefit other public media practitioners.	Proposal describes expected lessons that are relevant to other public media practitioners, and seem realistic given the project design .

ALIGNMENT: How do this proposal's project design and projected learnings align with RFP priority areas, including the cross-cutting priority of Centering Inequities?	Proposal does not address RFP priority areas and/or does not address Centering Inequities priority area.	Proposal convincingly addresses Centering Inequities, and at least one other priority area, in its project design and projected learnings .
CAPACITY: What kind of prior experience do you and/or your partners have that will support the implementation of the project? How do you want the Accelerator to help you grow? (#)	Proposal does not seem connected to prior experiences of organizations involved, making the plan for execution seem infeasible; the Accelerator seems tangential to the organization's goals.	Proposal's plan for execution seems feasible given the prior experiences of organizations involved and the support of the Accelerator.
COHERENCE: How does this pilot fit into the organization(s)' recent work and upcoming priorities? Where do you imagine it going at the organization(s) after the grant period? (#)	Proposal represents an experimental departure from existing priorities in a way that makes it unlikely to receive further internal support, or is otherwise unclear on how the organization imagines the work might move forward.	Proposal makes it clear that the pilot project supports organizational priorities that existed before and will exist after the Accelerator and evidences clarity around how the project might develop at the organization(s) in the future.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND READINGS

Those interested in learning about the research and practice that informed the Next Gen Public Media Accelerator, as well as related work, are encouraged to explore the following:

- [*Navigating Youth Media Landscapes: Challenges and Opportunities for Public Media*](#) by Patrick Davison, Monica Bulger, and Mary Madden
- [*The Missing Middle: Reimagining a Future for Tweens, Teens, and Public Media*](#) by Monica Bulger, Mary Madden, Kiley Sobel, and Patrick Davison
- [*Posts on the Cooney Center blog*](#) from the public media community on existing projects and initiatives focused on teens and tweens.

Research and existing projects and initiatives related to funding priority areas:

“Seat at the Table” - Engaging Youth as Co-Creators of Public Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>Involving Youth in Program Decision-Making: How Common and What Might it Do for Youth?</i> by Thomas Akiva, Kai S. Cortina, and Charles Smith● <i>Youth Collective: Amplifying Young Voices</i> by Kristina Kirtley, Michelle Chen, and Hannah Dawe● <i>Structuring Adult/Youth Collaboration in Ambitious Digital Learning and Making Projects</i> by Rafi Santo● <i>Design From Within: Transformative and Culturally Responsive Co-Design Pedagogy During a Pandemic</i> by Maria J. Anderson-Coto & S. Rose O’Leary● <i>Youth-led Advisory Boards to Promote Youth Leadership</i> by Anthony Pellicone and Rafi Santo● <i>Youth Participation in a Digital World: Designing and Implementing Spaces, Programs, and Methodologies</i> by Sandra Cortesi, Alexa Hasse, and Urs Gasser● <i>Tapping Youth Interest to Cooperatively Design Out-of-School Digital Learning Programs</i> by Anthony Pellicone and Rafi Santo
“Platforming Youth”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>Helping Teens Tell Their Stories in the Midst of COVID-19</i> by Kaari Pitkin

- Uplifting Youth Voice Through Public Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing and Hearing Our Diverse, Compassionate Gen Z Storytellers by Leah Clapman • Distributing Youth Driven Media Projects via Social Media by Free Spirit Media • KUOW's RadioActive Youth Media on Centering Youth Voices in 2020 by Lila Lakehart
“Media Fluency” - Supporting Youth to Navigate a Fragmented Media Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How youth navigate the news landscape by Mary Madden, Amanda Lenhart, and Claire Fontaine • Designing for Critical Algorithmic Literacies by Sayamindu Dasgupta and Benjamin Mako Hill • Early Adolescents’ Perspectives on Digital Privacy by Nicholas D. Santer, Adriana Manago, Allison Starks, and Stephanie M. Reich • Rapid Evidence Assessment on Online Misinformation and Media Literacy by Lee Edwards, Mariya Stoilovam, Nick Anstead, Andra Fry, Gail El-Halaby, and Matthew Smith • Teens and the News: The Influencers, Celebrities, and Platforms They Say Matter Most, 2020 by Common Sense Media • Teen Fact Checking Network by Mediawise • Web Literacy 2.0 by An-Me Chung, Iris Bond Gill, and Ian O'Byrne • Civic Online Reasoning by Stanford History Education Group • Detox de Datos Latinx — Campaigning with Characters in Latin America & the Caribbean by Daisy Kidd • Data Detox x Youth by Tactical Tech
“Reinventing the PSA” - Creating Youth Media that Addresses Developmental Needs and Desires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital civic engagement by young people by Alexander Cho, Jasmina Byrne, and Zoë Pelter • Well Beings by WETA • Can TV shows help with teen mental health? by Stuart Wolpert • TikTok Is the Place To Go for Financial Advice If You’re a Young Adult by Cheryl Winokur Munk • From Doom Scrolling to Hope Scrolling: How Social Media Platforms Can Support Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing by Katerina Schenke • Producing Online Youth Fiction in a Nordic Public Service Context by Mads Møller Andersen and Vilde Schanke Sundet

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Health Practices, Social Media Use, and Mental Well-Being Among Teens and Young Adults in the U.S. by Victoria Rideout and Susannah Fox • From Research to Promising Practices – Building Youth Connections for Wellbeing by Claire LaBeaux
“Embracing the Digital” - Engaging with Present-day Youth Media Platforms and Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Z refuses to be locked in by Mary Madden • Next Gen: The Future Belongs to Young People by The Verge • Minecraft, Let’s Players and Peer Pedagogies by Michael Dezuanni • Raising Good Gamers: Envisioning an Agenda for Diversity, Inclusion, and Fair Play by Katie Salen Tekinbaş • Science communication on YouTube: Factors that affect channel and video popularity by Dustin J. Welbourne and Will J. Grant • The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2019 by Common Sense Media
“Centering Inequities” - Centering Inequities in Youth Media Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American teens face mental health crisis but are less likely than whites to get treatment by Rebecca Klisz-Hulbert • Who Jason Reynolds Writes His Best-sellers For by Rumaan Alam • Wanting to See People Like Me? Racial and Gender Diversity in Popular Adolescent Television by Morgan E. Ellithorpe and Amy Bleakley • Media Use and the Development of Racial and Ethnic Attitudes and Stereotypes by L. Monique Ward, Mercy Tran-Dubongco, Lolita Moss and Vaness Cox • The Media Platforms Gen Z & Millennials Feel Are the Most Diverse & Inclusive by YPulse • #digital hood: Engagement with Risk Content on Social Media among Black and Hispanic Youth by Robin Stevens, Amy Bleakley, Michael Hennessy, Jamie Dunaev and Stacia Gilliard-Matthews • Normalizing Injustice: The Dangerous Misrepresentations that Define Televisions Scripted Crime Genre by Color of Change and USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center • Race in the Writers’ Room: How Hollywood Whitewashes the Stories that Shape America by Darnell Hunt