

With the recent sunset of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) on August 1, 2025 following the passage of a federal rescissions package and the release of the Senate Appropriations Committee's FY 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-H) appropriations bill, an era has come to an end in American history—marking the conclusion of over five decades of federally funded media. In light of this, the researcher intends to commemorate the event by exploring the American Archive of Public Broadcasting, also known as AAPB.

Established in 1967 by the Public Broadcasting Act, the CPB served as the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting. This included partnerships and funding for public radio and television stations, along with related online services across the United States, particularly aimed at supporting underserved audiences and communities by providing essential services to Americans nationwide.

Twelve years before its closure, in August 2013, the CPB awarded a grant to the public television station GBH in Boston and the Library of Congress to initiate a long-term project dedicated to the digital preservation of public media. This initiative aimed to make public radio and television programming accessible, ensuring its collection, management, preservation, and accessibility.

As the permanent co-stewards of this initiative, GBH and the Library of Congress were tasked with administering the digitizing of roughly 40,000 hours worth of programs selected by over a hundred public broadcasting stations across the nation. These programs (which include local news, historical productions reflecting the heritage of local communities, public affairs

programs, and topics covering education, environmental issues, music, art, literature, dance, poetry, religion, and local filmmaking), dated from the 1940s to the 21st century and originating from all regions of the United States, were made available to scholars, educators, researchers, students, and the general public at the Library's audiovisual research centers and at WGBH.

According to the article "Seeing the Big Picture: Developing workflows for digital moving image content" by Curtis and Drake (2019), the Library of Congress served as the "preservation arm" of the AAPB, and ingested high-resolution preservation files to ensure their longevity, while WGBH manages access files, making programs available for streaming on the AAPB website.

In the same research article by Curtis and Drake, it was noted that a significant effort was required to identify potential content for the AAPB. In 2013, upon the AAPB's inception, the Library hired a limited-term digital project specialist to focus solely on the initiative. This specialist was scheduled to deliver 70,000 files from the initial digitization project by mid-to-late 2015, following several necessary steps before ingestion. Fortunately, many workflows used for file ingestion were adapted from a recent acquisition of born-digital files from the History Makers project, avoiding the need to start entirely from scratch. In 2015, the Library hired a permanent digital project specialist specifically for the AAPB project, a role designed to complete the initial ingestion of 70,000 files and coordinate several grant-funded projects awarded to the AAPB and its contributors. These included the PBS NewsHour Digitization Project, funded by the Council on Library Information Resources (CLIR); the American Masters Interviews Digitization Project, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and undertaken

by WNET; and the National Educational Television (NET) Cataloging Project, which allowed the Library to hire two project catalogers to process and catalog its extensive collection of NET materials on film and tape. In addition to these three projects, the AAPB team actively reached out to stations and producers to acquire their content, much of which is born-digital.

In identifying potential projects for acquisition by the AAPB, while a few stations proactively approach the Library of Congress, the majority of content is obtained through outreach efforts. During the acquisition outreach process, AAPB targets stations and producers with content that is underrepresented in the archive. The Library poses several questions about its collections:

1. What material do they possess? What types of material can and cannot be archived.

Typically, the Library focuses on full episodes of local programming or the raw interviews utilized in final productions.

2. Do they own the rights to their materials? It is crucial for material available in the AAPB Online Reading Room to clear various copyright hurdles, which can be particularly complex with music programs.

3. Are their materials in analogue and/or digital format? Many archives feature a combination of both, especially those with long-running series that began in analogue and continued as born-digital.

4. How much material exists in each format?

5. How are their digital materials stored?

6. Do they have an inventory of their material? This is perhaps the most important aspect—an item-level inventory must be established before any donation can proceed. As

noted previously, at least three key pieces of metadata are required for each item: a unique identifier/file name, title, and format (moving image or audio).

7. Do they require assistance with grant applications? Funding can be allocated for a variety of tasks, ranging from creating an inventory of the collection to hiring a vendor for digitizing analogue material, or employing additional staff to manage the archive.

The acquisition outreach process had not always led to success for the AAPB, as many stations and producers are unable to donate materials for preservation in the AAPB repository due to budget and resource constraints.

For every AAPB project, an item-level inventory is required in terms of metadata obtained. The inventory must contain the following information, at the very least; a unique identifier (used by the institution) and/or filename; title; format type (audio or moving image); date (strongly preferred, but not required); description (strongly preferred, but not required).

For AAPB's file ingestion process, according to Curtis and Drake, the Library first receives the metadata and normalizes the files before creating MAVIS records. The initial file names are determined by the donor's naming conventions; however, these files are renamed according to the CPB GUID, with the original file name retained as an additional identifier within the MAVIS record. Throughout the acquisition process, it was also crucial for the specialists to track the negotiations and donations progress.

According to Curtis and Drake, a Trello board shared with the AAPB team is utilized to monitor donor contact information, note the results of relevant conversations, indicate the materials available for donation, and track whether donors are applying for grants. The Library also records whether the collection was accepted by the AAPB, the status of the agreement paperwork (deed of gift), and the timeline for file delivery.

As previously mentioned, the ingestion of these files necessitates significant manual effort. Most stations collaborating with the Library either lack archivists on staff or have limited personnel available for digital preservation tasks. The Library must work with whatever resources the stations can provide. Typically, files arrive without checksums, are organized according to the station's local file directory, and use local filenames. While certain elements of this workflow can be automated—such as checksum generation and ingest package creation—the process cannot be fully automated due to the diversity of file formats and folder structures involved. Fortunately, a significant number of similar file formats (such as ProRes) are received, allowing for some reuse of workflows. Regarding public access to the repository, the AAPB's "frequently asked questions" page outlines three methods for searching and browsing, which are as follows:

1. Users can access the AAPB Online Reading Room, which provides online access to select digitized collections for private research, educational, and informational purposes.
2. Users can search metadata records for all digitized items, which includes content available in the Online Reading Room as well as content that can only be viewed and listened to on-site at GBH and the Library of Congress.
3. Users can search through 2.5 million metadata records documenting public radio and television assets from over 120 public media stations and archives nationwide, with the majority of these assets remaining undigitized.

The AAPB has also curated exhibits featuring content of historical significance and special collections showcasing notable materials within the archive.

Regarding challenges, it is essential to acknowledge that the AAPB digital project specialist encountered several administrative hurdles associated with various acquisition paths, such as managing material from multiple sources in a range of file formats; overseeing large,

grant-funded projects involving up to four stakeholders; receiving born-digital files from individual donors; and advocating for the use of open-source tools.

References

Corporation for public broadcasting addresses operations following loss of federal funding.

CPB. (2025, August 1).

<https://cpb.org/pressroom/Corporation-Public-Broadcasting-Addresses-Operations-Following-Loss-Federal-Funding>

Curtis, R., and Drake Davis, L. (2019). *Seeing the big picture: Developing workflows for digital moving image content*. *Journal of Digital Asset Management*, (8)1, 15-28. (Available online, King Library).

FAQ. (n.d.). <https://americanarchive.org/faq>