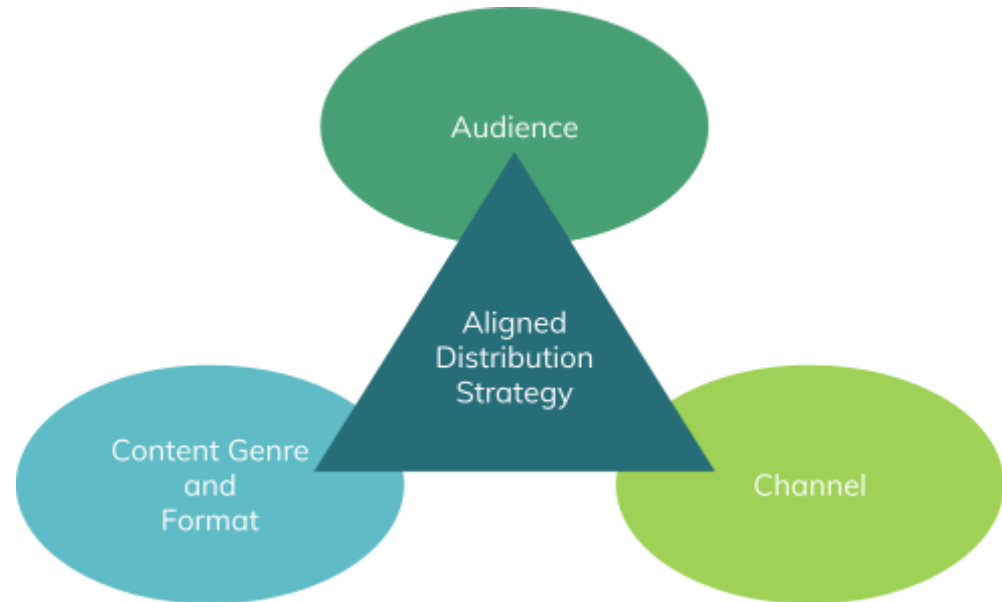


Strategies for Distributing Content Developed By, With, and For Youth

Intentionally thinking through a distribution strategy is a critical step for public media projects that focus on content reach as a key outcome. **An aligned distribution strategy considers your audience, the genre and format of your content, and channels that support you to reach that audience.**

Changing just one of these elements has implications for the alignment of all three. For example, content that platforms young people for general audiences, educational media for teachers to use in school, and digital content for young viewers or listeners — each calls for a distinct approach to distribution. Public media's commitment to serving its full community, including diverse young people, makes this all the more complex.

Creating a thoughtful distribution strategy requires thinking through who you want to engage, with what kind of content, shared through what channels.



Specifying Audience

Youth-oriented projects in public media tend to focus on one of three primary audiences:

- A. Youth, directly as media consumers
- B. Youth as students, through their teachers and schools
- C. A general public media audience, featuring youth voices and stories

While it's possible to create content that is meaningful to more than one of these audiences at the same time, each requires a specific distribution strategy with different channels and varying considerations.

Content Genre and Format

Different genres and formats fit the cultures and the set-up of different audience needs and channels. Key things to consider might include:

- Topic area/disciplinary focus (e.g., arts, technology, current affairs, science, history)
- Genre (e.g., news story, explainer, first person narrative, performance, curricular resource, educational media)
- Length
- Style, aesthetics, and look/feel
- Cultural norms, including humor, trends, language, sense of authority or approachability
- Fit with educational aims (including but not limited to state standards)

Channels for Distribution

Different channels align to different audiences' media use and have different norms and cultures. They also offer differing opportunities for amplification that require time and capacity to understand. Generally speaking, digital channels connected to social media may be the most used by young people, but they remain complex to navigate and predict. Broadcast may hold sway, but it's not a reliable way to reach younger audiences. Teachers that educate teens and tweens often look to specific channels to discover educational resources.

Some common categories of distribution channels include:

- Educational media repositories, such as PBS Learning Media and websites with curricular content
- Social media, including TikTok, YouTube Shorts, Instagram, Instagram Reels, and Facebook
- Online video platforms, such as YouTube or station websites
- Podcasts, including Spotify, Apple, and YouTube
- Broadcast to television or radio

For insights and considerations to keep in mind with distribution channels, check out our [distribution channel observations and trends](#) (October 2022).

Aligning Distribution and Avoiding Pitfalls

Below are a set of key questions that you can use to make sure you've thought through your approach to distributing content. Included next to each question are examples of potential pitfalls that we have observed in research and insights from stations.

Audience	Key questions for alignment	Pitfalls to avoid
Youth, directly as media consumers	Does your distribution strategy use platforms that young people tend to use?	"We had great content for teens, but they never saw it. We chose to broadcast all of our content over the air; I wish we had planned a digital release with a robust social media effort."
	Does the genre/style of your content fit with the norms and culture of the selected platform(s)?	"We repackaged content from one of our popular media properties and put it on TikTok, but it didn't really work. We learned too late that 'short-form vertical video' is a whole genre that is about more than just being short and, well, vertical."
	How might the platform design affect content strategy? (e.g. content moderation, discoverability)	"In general, our content on YouTube does great. What surprised us is that some of our best content has gotten buried because of the platform's discovery and recommendation algorithms. We've had to learn a lot about how the algorithms work, and how that should factor into our production decisions."
Youth as students, through their teachers or schools	How does your content align to standards and/or needs in schools?	"We produced an amazing podcast by and with tweens, and it speaks directly to science concepts they study in middle school. But without aligning the podcast to state standards, the district didn't get excited about it and teachers never picked it up."
	What additional resources might be needed to make your content most valuable for in-school use?	"Teachers wanted to use our media content, but it was too heavy of a lift without associated curricular resources and training to go along with it."
A general audience (featuring youth voices and stories)	Is the content providing new stories or insights that become possible through youth involvement?	"The teens who were involved in making media content with us were really proud of it, but the piece didn't really offer something novel for broader audiences. We need to sharpen our production process to make sure that we're producing something really compelling when we incorporate youth."
	Does the youth-produced content meet all the standards required for broadcast?	<p>"We had a really amazing youth-produced story, but they used B-roll that wasn't licensed, and so in the end it couldn't go to broadcast."</p> <p>"I didn't realize that our station requires our union editors to work on all broadcast segments until too late in the process of empowering teens to lead."</p>

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit research and innovation lab that focuses on the challenges of fostering smarter, stronger, and kinder children in a rapidly changing media landscape. We conduct original research on emerging learning technologies and collaborate with educators and media producers to put this research into action. We also aim to inform the national conversation on media and education by working with policymakers and investors.

For further resources and the full toolkit, visit toolkit.nextgenpublicmedia.org.

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