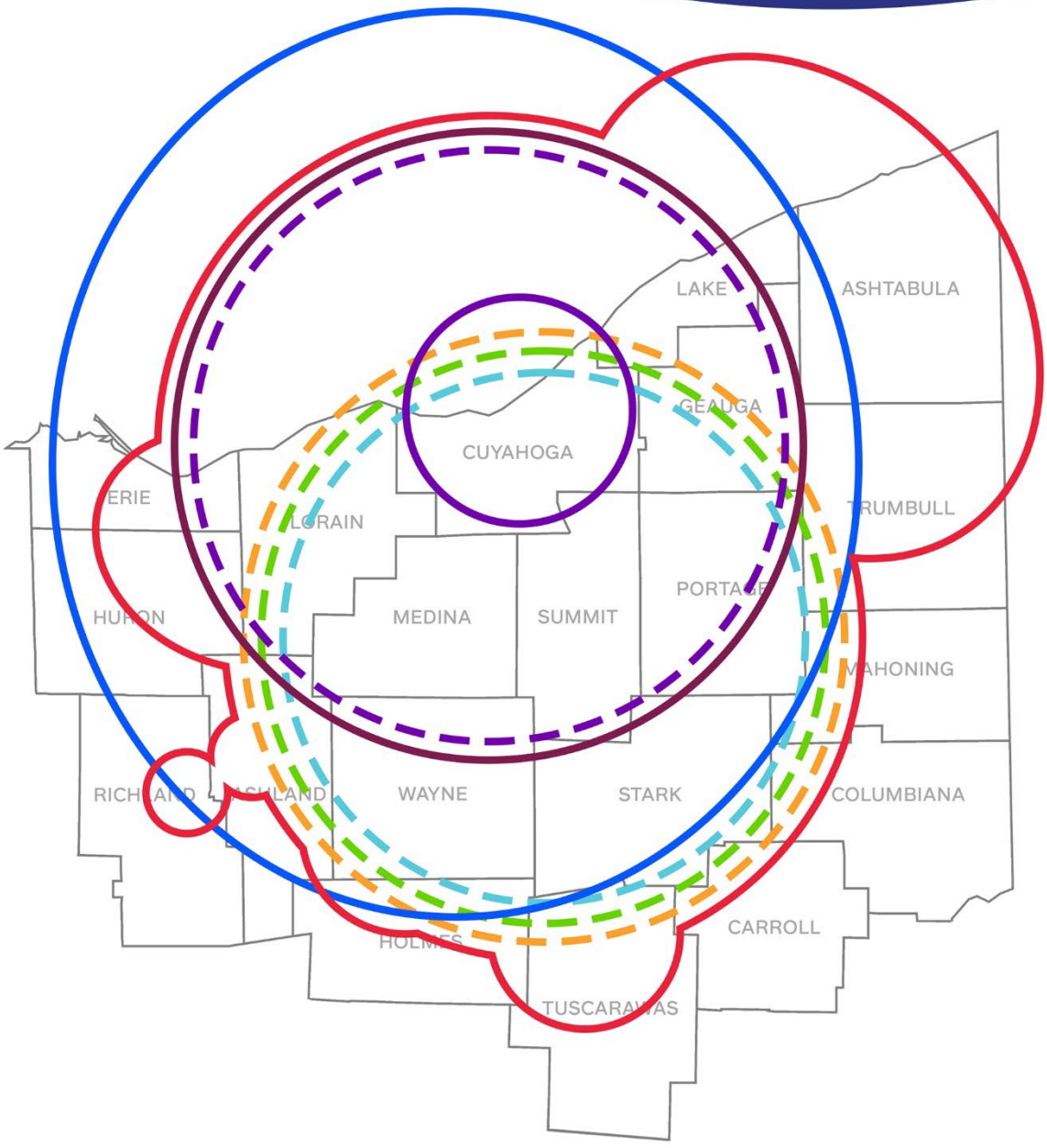
ideastream public media

The NEO Network Plan

2027 – 2029



WVIZ WKSU WCLV JazzNEO

IDEASTREAM PUBLIC MEDIA

Strategic Plan 2027–2029

Northeast Ohio's Civic and Cultural Institution

VISION
Ideastream Public Media is indispensable and highly valued for its unique ability to enrich our community.

MISSION
Ideastream Public Media is a trustworthy and dynamic multimedia source for illuminating the world around us.

CORE VALUES

We seek and incorporate the myriad diverse perspectives and lived experiences of our users, staff, board, and communities into all aspects of our work.

We can accomplish more by working effectively together internally and with our strategic partners to best meet the needs and interests of the communities we serve.

With a commitment to continuous improvement, we aspire for the highest standards in everything we do.

We innovate solutions and iterate adaptive approaches to successfully evolve amidst our ever changing internal and external environments.

We provide strong oversight by managing the information and resources shared by our users, staff and supporters with the utmost integrity and responsibility.

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A NOTE FROM MIKE SHAFARENKO, CHIEF EXPERIENCE OFFICER

It is my pleasure to share Ideastream's new strategic plan, which reflects our commitment to serving Northeast Ohio as an essential civic and cultural institution. Across our services in journalism, arts and culture, education, and community engagement, Ideastream has built a legacy of public service rooted in the belief that trusted media and shared public experiences strengthen communities. At a time of significant change for public media and for the communities we serve, this plan affirms our commitment to deepening Ideastream's value to Northeast Ohio through the services, partnerships, and public experiences that inform, connect, and enrich civic life.

The development of this strategic plan was a rigorous, inclusive, and thoughtful process. Over the course of several months, it engaged board members, leadership, staff, and key stakeholders in a shared effort to assess Ideastream's strengths, confront the challenges of a rapidly changing environment, and clarify the opportunities ahead. Through scenario planning, analysis, and collaborative discussion, we identified the strategic priorities that will guide our work over the next three years and began the process of defining the measures that will help us learn, adapt, and stay accountable to our goals.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to the Board, the leadership team, staff, and all those who contributed their time, insight, and care to this process. The result is a plan that sets an ambitious course for Ideastream's future and reflects a deep commitment to the people and communities of Northeast Ohio.



STRATEGIC INTENT: A PLAN BUILT FOR THIS MOMENT

Over the next three years, Ideastream will intentionally operationalize and cement its identity as a civic and cultural institution. It will optimize its resources, strengthen its capital base, and position itself to meet the responsibilities of the moment with confidence, durability, and leadership.

> *This plan is not about Ideastream radically changing or reinventing itself. It is about Ideastream becoming a Northeast Ohio civic and cultural institution that is widely recognized for its indispensability to civic and cultural life in the region.*

STRATEGIC CONTEXT: NAVIGATING A VOLATILE ENVIRONMENT

Public media is stepping into a new era of consequence and change. Membership models are under pressure, national infrastructure is uncertain, and federal support and broader system-level volatility are challenging long-standing assumptions. At the same time, the political climate is turbulent, proliferation of AI is a rapidly expanding reality, the media environment is incessantly fragmenting, and there are few, if any, indicators of what a successful media institution of the future will look like. In Northeast Ohio, communities are aging and civic trust is fragile, making the role of cultural and civic institutions in sustaining vibrancy and attracting new generations more important than ever.

Northeast Ohio's leading cultural institutions have demonstrated that arts and culture are not luxuries, but key elements of economic and civic infrastructure. Ideastream's role is distinct but equally essential. We extend Northeast Ohio's cultural presence beyond Cleveland's venue walls and city lines. Through local and national programming, news and information services, classical and jazz offerings, educational initiatives, and long-standing community partnerships, we preserve cultural and civic integrity, elevate regional voices, and ensure access for those who may never walk into a concert hall or museum.

Through scenario planning, SWOT analysis, competitive review, and rigorous internal reflection, it became clear that the next three years are not about reinvention but intentional repositioning of Ideastream's unique institutional identity and the value of its services.

As the public media ecosystem faces unprecedented uncertainty, it is Ideastream's responsibility to not put its deservedly strong position at risk, but to optimize, stabilize, and prepare to build from that strength.

WHO IDEASTREAM SHOULD SERVE: THE DEMOGRAPHIC REALITY

The Cleveland-Lorain-Elyria-Akron market size is roughly 4 million people and is expected to remain relatively flat, with a slight contraction over the next five years. More significantly, Northeast Ohio's counties have some of the oldest population profiles in the state, and that trend will intensify as the region continues to age. This aging demographic is Ideastream's current core audience, one that is deeply loyal and a critical source of support.

This is not a crisis to manage. It is a demographic reality to plan around: nurturing and deepening relationships with the audiences that are Ideastream's financial foundation today, while intentionally building relevance with the audiences that will shape its future.

> *Ideastream will grow by deepening relationships with its existing audiences and making itself essential to Northeast Ohioans, meeting generations where they are, in ways authentic to Ideastream.*

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

This plan for disciplined evolution is organized around three interdependent goals, each essential to the others and none achievable in isolation.

Goal: Cultural and Civic Institutional Identity & Presence

Goal: Northeast Ohio's Civic Information Network

Goal: Enduring Capital & Revenue Resilience

GOAL 1: CULTURAL AND CIVIC INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY & PRESENCE

Ideastream's future depends on its ability to solidify its identity as a civic and cultural institution, both externally, in the eyes of the community, partners, and funders, and internally, among staff who must believe and embody that identity to express it authentically. The strength of that identity will determine whether Ideastream is seen as a platform for distribution alone or as a trusted institution with the standing and support needed to remain relevant and sustainable over time.

> By 2029, Ideastream will be viewed not only as a local broadcaster. It will be recognized as a central and enduring contributor to the region's cultural vitality and civic life, a core institution that Northeast Ohio relies on.

CULTURAL INSTITUTION RECOGNITION

Ideastream will pursue and earn recognition as a core cultural institution in the region, on par with the major arts and cultural organizations.

STRATEGIC ARTS & CULTURE PARTNERSHIPS

Over the next three years, Ideastream will deepen its partnerships with major arts and cultural organizations in ways that demonstrate peer-level status through co-creating, convening, and amplifying, thereby creating relationships that go well beyond promotion and media distribution.

THE IDEA CENTER

The Idea Center is Ideastream's physical expression of institutional identity. Over the next three years, Ideastream will invest in its role as a visible and physical civic and cultural destination, one that is programmed and activated as a place where Northeast Ohio comes together for public dialogue, technological innovation, cultural experiences, and creative collaboration.

ARTS & CULTURE SERVICES IMPACT

Ideastream will deepen the impact of its jazz, classical music, and local content offerings by shifting from a platform-driven to outcome-driven content and engagement strategy. It will use its cross-platform reach to showcase its institutional relevance by creating and extending cultural experiences beyond physical venues, delivering them to communities across the region.

LEARNING (EDUCATIONAL) STRATEGY SHIFT

Opportunities to provide formal and informal educational opportunities distinguish civic and cultural institutions from media entities. Ideastream has a long-standing commitment to lifelong learning, education and curriculum-aligned services and will shift its learning strategy and portfolio to reflect its position as a civic and cultural institution.

GOAL 2: NORTHEAST OHIO'S CIVIC INFORMATION NETWORK

At a time when news and information systems across the country are weakening, and the future structure of public media is increasingly uncertain, Ideastream's long-term strength as a civic institution will depend less on national affiliation and more on how clearly the value of its service is defined, experienced, and relied upon by the people of Northeast Ohio.

Ideastream already operates an extraordinary set of public-serving information services: local civic journalism through the Ideastream newsroom and WKSU, government accountability reporting through the Statehouse News Bureau, collaborative statewide reporting through The Ohio Newsroom, and the coverage and archiving of all state government meetings through The Ohio Channel. Taken together, these services provide something no other media or civic institution currently offers: a collection of public resources that helps people understand their communities, their state government, and the issues shaping civic life.

Yet today, these services are known in parts rather than experienced as a whole. A Cleveland listener knows WKSU. A policy professional knows the Statehouse News Bureau. A rural Ohioan may occasionally encounter an Ohio Newsroom story. Very few experience these services as a connected civic resource designed to help Ohioans understand their communities, their government, and their state.

The opportunity is not to invent something new, but to build on what already exists and make it more connected, more visible, and more dependable to the people who need it.

> By 2029, Ideastream's news and information services will be increasingly experienced by Northeast Ohioans as a civic information network, a connected resource for the news and context they need from neighborhood to statehouse.

EXPRESS NETWORK IDENTITY

Ideastream already has the operational foundation for collaboration across its news and information services. But being experienced as a civic information network will require intentionally connecting, leveraging, and promoting Ideastream's disparate services across platforms. By doing so, a single encounter with any part of the network becomes a natural path to more. The goal is for audiences to keep finding value, returning, and over time developing the habit of reliance that relevance requires.

This is also key to financial foundation and stability. With the loss of federal funding and fragility across the public media system, a more unified civic information network makes a stronger and more durable public case for support than any individual service can make on its own.

GOAL 3: ENDURING CAPITAL & REVENUE RESILIENCE

Ideastream's future as a permanent civic and cultural institution requires strategic funding to drive the identity shift. This means expanding the endowment, strengthening major philanthropic partnerships, and preserving broad individual support, to reflect the organization's institutional role in the region.

> By 2029, Ideastream will operate with a stronger capital position and a balanced portfolio of revenue streams that support long-term resilience and institutional leadership.

CAPITAL & INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTH

Ideastream will expand its endowment and major philanthropic partnerships to build a stronger and more durable capital base. A stronger capital position will reinforce Ideastream's standing as a permanent civic and cultural institution, increase organizational stability, and demonstrate institutional maturity to the funders, partners, and community members whose confidence it seeks.

This work will proceed alongside the preservation and strengthening of Ideastream's broad community of individual supporters, whose support reflects the relevance and public trust that no endowment can replace.

BALANCED & GROWING REVENUE PORTFOLIO

Ideastream will strengthen the diversification and balance of its revenue portfolio to ensure long-term growth and flexibility. By intentionally diversifying revenue through growth in earned revenue and thoughtful adjustments to institutional and corporate support strategies, Ideastream will increase its financial flexibility and resilience.

The goal is a portfolio balanced enough to remain stable and responsive across a range of economic, political, and industry conditions, including scenarios in which traditional funding streams contract significantly.