

2025 *annual report*



WGLT Year in Review

from Executive Director R.C. McBride



R.C. McBride

There's no sugarcoating it: 2025 was a difficult year for public media, probably the most difficult in its history.

- In March, I attended a rather theatrical congressional hearing where the CEOs of NPR, PBS, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) were grilled for alleged biases.
- In May, President Donald Trump issued an executive order directing the CPB—an independent, Congressionally chartered agency—to immediately cease funding NPR and PBS and to forbid stations receiving CPB grants from using those funds for NPR or PBS programming. Additionally, the order forbade any federal agency from directing funds to NPR and PBS.
- In June, NPR—later joined by PBS—filed suit against the Trump administration, contesting that the executive order was unconstitutional. (In March 2026, a district court judge found that executive order violated the First Amendment and is therefore “unlawful and unenforceable.”)
- In July, Congress voted to rescind \$1.1 billion in funding it had already approved for CPB for fiscal year 2027. For WGLT, this meant a loss of \$175,000 in annual grant revenue, or about 15% of our budget. But for many stations, especially in rural areas, the percentage of their budget lost is much higher, presenting an existential threat for many.
- In September, NPR took CPB to court. The lawsuit cited CPB's sudden reversal of awarding a \$40 million grant to NPR for satellite service to stations as CPB complying in advance with an expected executive order. CPB settled out of court and awarded NPR the grant.
- Shortly after rescission, CPB announced it would be forced to shut down at the end of January 2026, ending decades of service as the funding mechanism for public media in the United States.

While all these events were without precedent, I'm proud to say we were prepared. As a member of NPR's board of directors, I had a front row seat for much of what transpired. I'm incredibly proud NPR and WGLT fought aggressively to protect the First Amendment, and that fight will continue. And the outpouring of support from our community in the form of donations and encouragement has been incredible. More on that in our *Development Report*.

There were some big highlights in 2025, including our 20th Radio Faces event, which featured a record crowd, and an appearance by NPR CEO Katherine Maher, and a rousing presentation on the importance



of a free press from *Morning Edition* host Steve Inskeep, who not coincidentally hosted WGLT's inaugural Radio Faces. We were also thrilled to induct new members to the WGLT Hall of Fame: Dr. David Strand, Dr. Sally Pancrazio, and Garlic Press.

Ryan Denham, Charlie Schlenker, and Lauren Warneke joined forces to win a national Edward R. Murrow Award for the coverage of how court orders of protection often fail. And WGLT ended the year reaching more people than ever: Per Nielsen, WGLT is the No. 1



Murrow Award

news-talk radio station in McLean County, and *Morning Edition* on WGLT is the county's most listened to news-talk morning show. And per Google Analytics, WGLT.org reached a record more than 5 million page views in 2025. The WGLT audience has never been larger, and we take our commitment to serving our community with the public media mission seriously.

Community response to defunding, coupled with our decision to hold off filling a pair of vacant journalist positions until there's more certainty regarding the financial stability of the entire public media system, have put WGLT in as good a financial position as possible given the circumstances headed into 2026.

As WGLT looks to celebrate its 60th anniversary, we, along with our key partners Illinois State University and NPR, have our eyes squarely on ensuring this important civic institution remains vibrant for another 60 years and beyond. Less than 1% of WGLT's audience makes a financial contribution, so if you're never given, please consider changing that. And if you are a supporter, tell your friends they can make a difference. With your support, WGLT will serve our community with excellence for a long, long time.

R.C. McBride
Executive Director
NPR Board Member

DEFUNDED

It's official: Congress defunded public media



Melissa Libert

Public media funding has overwhelmingly earned bipartisan support since 1967. That ended July 17, 2025, when Congress voted to rescind \$1.1 billion in advance appropriations. As a result, WGLT faced an immediate annual budget loss of approximately \$175,000—very real dollars we invested in programming and news.

Throughout the first half of 2025 we asked our supporters to advocate for public media funding by contacting their elected representatives and thousands of emails, phone calls and meetings followed. THANK YOU for using your voice to support NPR and WGLT. In the weeks that followed defunding, we launched an emergency fundraising campaign to fill the gap from the loss of CPB which yielded more than half of our expected community service grant.

Additional revenue highlights

- On the heels of a robust emergency campaign response, the Fall Fund Drive hit its \$100,000 goal! Thank you to everyone who stepped up for WGLT and NPR over the summer and fall, especially the first-time donors.

- We celebrated 20 years of Radio Faces October 30 with the return of *Morning Edition* host Steve Inskeep to Normal following his first trip in 2005. Special guest Katherine Maher, NPR's CEO, joined the celebration alongside more than 500 friends of the station. Revenue from the event shattered all previous records!
- WGLT hosted its first Highway 309 Studio Sessions contest, presented by longtime supporter CEFCU, which awarded a \$1,000 prize and a live in-studio concert to Illinois State student Samara Jane.
- We received fee relief from NPR resulting in a modest discount in our annual fees for programs like *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. We also received \$9,000 from the CPB as it expended leftover funds before closing September 30. Thanks to a large influx of individual donations to NPR, WGLT received a share of that revenue, equaling approximately \$13,000.

The vote to defund devastated millions of people who rely on public media every day. NPR and WGLT moved into uncharted territory. But our commitment to serving our community did not and will not waver. Defunding challenged the station in many ways, and we continue to push forward into 2026 and WGLT's 60th anniversary knowing that with challenges come opportunity and robust community support has positioned us much more favorably than many of our peer stations. We must continue to grow our supporters and build a sustainable financial future for WGLT and the next generation of public media fans.

Onward!

Melissa Libert
Assistant General Manager and Development Director

See [WGLT.org](https://www.wgl.org) for our 2025 Donor Roll and Underwriters/Event Sponsors



From the WGLT Newsroom

Top stories of 2025

1. State Farm rolls out voluntary employee exit program
2. After getting millions in tax breaks, Rivian now won't say how many people work in Normal
3. Illinois Attorney General sues State Farm over homeowner insurance data
4. Junior high student among the four found dead at a Bloomington home
5. Students can soon earn automatic admission to state's universities, hoping to keep more in Illinois

The awards just keep coming

Edward R. Murrow Awards Radio Television Digital News Association

- Investigative Reporting (National winner, "Protective order violations face a high bar for consequences in McLean County")
- Overall Excellence [Regional winner]



Crystal Mic Awards (Illinois News Broadcasters Association)

- Best Digital Presence (1st place)
- Best Newscast (1st place, Charlie Schlenker)
- Best Investigative Report (first place, "Life under Oak Wood," Ben Howell, Ryan Denham)
- Best Investigative Report (second place, "Protective order violations face a high bar for consequences in McLean County," Lauren Warnecke, Charlie Schlenker, Ryan Denham)

6. B-N native Denny Matthews, 'Voice of the Royals,' to say 'I do' for the first time at 83
7. Illinois State football gets record \$2.5 million gift from former quarterback
8. Normal Police and ISP find human trafficking victim at local massage spa
9. One person shot, injured during student group's event at ISU's Bone Student Center
10. Major winter storm expected to drop 5 to 7 inches of snow in Bloomington-Normal

- Best Political Reporting (second place, "A Normal \$28,000 campaign contribution," Ryan Denham, Lauren Warnecke)

Public Media Journalists Association

- Audience Engagement (National winner, first place, "WGLT Video Shorts")

Noteworthy features and highlights

- Released first-ever video documentary, "Frozen and Forgotten: An Unhoused Winter in Bloomington-Normal", tied to an on-air and online series about homelessness. The film debuted at a standing room-only premiere at the Bloomington Public Library.
- Produced an award-winning news series on the business practices of one of Bloomington-Normal's largest mobile home operators and produced a five-part news series on the manufacturing boom in the McLean County entitled "Made in Bloomington-Normal."
- Renovated Studio A with a multicamera video setup, allowing for video interviews and musical performances shared on WGLT.org and social media.
- Added first graduate student reporter from Illinois State, Ben Howell, who is studying communication.
- Restored participation in the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield with the hiring of Cesar Toscano to cover state government.



WGLT@IllinoisState.edu

Main office
(309) 438-2255