



A brief history of Maryland Public Television

In 1966, an act of the Maryland legislature, signed into law by Gov. J. Millard Tawes, established the Maryland Educational-Cultural Television Commission, the governance body of the organization that first operated as the Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting.

Ground was broken for a headquarters and studio facility in suburban Baltimore County's community of Owings Mills on June 5, 1968, and the center went on the air on October 5, 1969. The founding executive director, Dr. Frederick Breitenfeld, Jr., already a leading figure in public broadcasting at the time of his appointment, served as chief executive for 17 years.

The center was established as a nonprofit, state-licensed public TV network and later became a member of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). The license required statewide reach, and so six towers across the state enabled MPT to get its then-analog signal to all corners of Maryland and into contiguous states and the District of Columbia. In 2024, MPT remains Maryland's only statewide broadcaster.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the introduction of an astounding variety of center-produced historical dramas, how-to programs, nature, and music offerings in addition to educational and cultural programming. During this time several MPT series enjoyed their premieres and what would become decades-long popularity among viewers locally and nationally.

MPT was rewarded for its production prowess with dozens of Emmy® Awards in those decades along with an impressive list of other major broadcasting honors. As 2024 got underway, MPT's Emmy tally stood at 196 regional and four national Emmys.

In 1981, the MPT Foundation, Inc. was established as the network's 501(c)(3) friend-and fund-raising affiliate.

In 1984, the name Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting gave way to Maryland Public Television (MPT).

In 2004, MPT began broadcasting in both analog and digital formats until digital-only transmission started in 2009. In 2007, MPT introduced V-me, a 24-hour Spanish language channel, which joined MPT's two other digital channels, the primary MPT-HD and secondary channel MPT2, in the daily programming lineup. Today, MPT operates four channels: MPT-HD, MPT2/Create, PBS KIDS, and NHK World-Japan.

MPT is a pioneer in the production, delivery, and dissemination of pre-K-12 educational resources and online courses. Its award-winning education website *Thinkport.org*, launched in 2003, offers high-quality lesson plans, digital media, learning games, and resources for educators, schools, the childcare population, and families. Educators rely on MPT for professional development courses and workshops year-round. In 1970, *College of the Air* debuted and operated for decades, as the center became the largest U.S. producer of telecourses for credit. Today, via Thinkport, the platform for learning has expanded to embrace new technologies, but MPT remains committed to being Maryland's sole statewide educator just as it was in the 1970s and '80s.

Today on its 31-acre campus and staffed by some 150 employees, MPT is sixth largest among 150 PBS member stations and largest among state licensees based on total revenue. Its major websites garner in excess of 12 million page views annually, and its membership roster exceeds 71,000 voluntary contributing members, more than 24,000 of them being monthly sustaining donors. Its governance body, the Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission, oversees a \$34 million budget.

In 2024 under the leadership of CEO Larry D. Unger, MPT's fifth president, the staff continues to produce award-winning local and national public television programs, provide distinctive online content and community outreach initiatives, and offer an impressive array of educational resources for children, teachers, families, and daycare providers across the state and nationally. MPT's Maryland State Ad Agency division provides advertising and media buying services for a growing roster of State of Maryland agencies, and its 2022-launched Center for Maryland History Films is the hub for ongoing storytelling about the Free State's historic people, places, and events.

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