WBUR's Annual Local Content and Services Report

2017

As submitted to the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB)

Report Date: February 15, 2018
#1: Describe overall goals and approach to address identified community issues, needs and interests through your station’s vital local services, such as multiplatform long and short form content, digital and in-person engagement, education services, community information, partnership support, and other activities, and audiences you reached or new audiences you engaged.

WBUR’s public service in 2017 continued to grow and evolve with long form, in-depth journalism serving eastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod and the islands and a growing national audience with programs produced by WBUR and distributed by NPR including Here & Now, On Point and Only a Game. WBUR is in a formal editorial partnership with NPR for the production of Here & Now – carried on more than 450 stations across America.

WBUR’s expanding newsroom focused most of its work in 2017 on vital issues around greater Boston and New England. Journalistic efforts were heard on radio broadcasts and online streaming - engaging WBUR’s audience on whatever platform chosen to consume content via ‘live’ broadcasts or ‘on demand.’ In-person events continued to grow in 2017 as WBUR engaged listeners in town halls and auditoriums for vibrant ‘live’ community discussions.

In 2017 WBUR continued the expansion of its coverage of arts & culture through its vertical ‘The Artery’ digital treatments online and radio segments. The Artery expanded its staff and resources to add more depth to its coverage of arts in small and vibrant communities all over greater Boston including under reported areas of the inner city.


WBUR’s online op-ed page Cognoscenti continued to grow its list of contributors – now well over 150 – with new essays and dispatches published daily.

Podcast production is now a staple at WBUR with weekly production of ‘Modern Love’ in partnership with the New York Times and new podcasts started in 2017 including one focused on children Circle Round, a daily sports podcast with the Boston Globe called Season Ticket, and another in partnership with Reddit called Endless Thread.

WBUR continued its regional collaboration in 2017 with stations around New England reporting on issues of common interest including immigration, energy, growing opioid addiction, transportation and infrastructure. The collaboration was funded in part by CPB.

Coverage:

WBUR focused much of its coverage to issues related to changing federal policies promulgated from the new administration of President Donald Trump that included proposed federal policy changes around immigration that potentially affected tens of thousands of immigrants around Massachusetts and New England.
The massive and fluid immigration story was reported by Reporter Shannon Dooling for the New England News Collaborative, the CPB-funded regional collaborative network. Dooling reported on the Trump administration travel ban and on many of the larger immigration issues roiling the region. Examples include:

- The local impact of President Trump’s initial and subsequent travel ban.
- Boston Mayor Martin Walsh’s vow to keep Boston a safe place for immigrants.
- Profiles of immigrant families including a Somali family resettled in Lowell.
- How Massachusetts agencies scrambled to resettle refugees amid legal chaos.
- The plight of a MIT janitor from El Salvador, arrested by ICE and threatened with deportation.

In 2017, WBUR continued to be a primary source for issues around the growing crisis related to opioid addiction and deaths. Among the groundbreaking stories reported by reporters Martha Bebinger and Deborah Becker:

- Public bathrooms have become ground zero in the opioid epidemic;
- Boston doctors in the 1800’s raised addiction concerns as the opium trade boomed;
- Patients wait days and weeks, as demand for Emergency Room Psychiatric beds grow;
- Communities in Massachusetts plan to sue Big Pharma for the growing opioid crisis.

In 2017 WBUR continued its robust reportage on the rising cost of health care and the Affordable Care Act. As part of the coverage WBUR’s CommonHealth produced a five-part series looking at advances made in cancer research and treatment with a focus on Boston-area hospitals, biotech companies, scientists, doctors and patients. This Moment in Cancer, included call-in segments on WBUR’s daily local news magazine, Radio Boston.

Special cancer-related segment continued throughout 2017 with WBUR hosting a public event that included members of the Boston medical community, along with patients and survivors of cancer.

CommonHealth Editor/Reporter Carey Goldberg also presented a series of reports examining increases in cases of Lyme disease around New England. The series of reports also presented new ways to prevent and treat the disease.

In 2017 WBUR’s education vertical ‘Edify’ continued to examine issues related to education – at the school level and higher education in Massachusetts.

Massachusetts boasts some of the highest performing public schools in America with students ranked near the top on standardized tests. And yet these same students compare more poorly when compared to students in other countries, especially in math. In 2017, the Edify team
produced a special project, “Solving Our Math Problem,” examining how educators and parents can change the way schools approach and teach math. The series profiled teachers who succeed teaching math to girls and minority students. They also examined popular trends of “Russian Math” and what can be learned from how other countries teach math.

With the Boston Mayor’s election in 2017, Edify reporter Max Larkin provided coverage examining Mayor Marty Walsh’s record on education producing a two-part series comparing the education visions of the incumbent mayor and his main challenger, Tito Jackson, an African-American City Councilor.

WBUR has opened a bureau in the newsroom of the Dorchester Reporter, the city of Boston’s largest community newspaper to increase contacts with and reporting stories from Boston’s most diverse neighborhood.

The Dorchester Reporter publishes a newspaper for the community of Mattapan a largely African-American community and the Haitian community in Boston.

Examples of stories and issues:

- An organization founded to ease racial tensions among Boston teenagers is trying to make a field in Dorchester a destination. Some of Boston's most violent streets border the field.
- Counselors at College Bound Dorchester, a violence prevention organization, are working to eliminate gang violence in the city. Their approach is to convince gang members to quit the streets and go to college.
- When Mattapan residents passed by an old Ford dealership, it was a symbol of neglect -- a boarded-up building with graffiti and weeds coming up through the pavement. Three decades after the dealership closed, this key piece of real estate is coming back to life.

The Boston area’s tech and innovation sector continued its explosive growth in 2017 with additional start-ups, booming development, a further expansion of jobs and overall economic growth. From small firms to corporate giants like General Electric, which moved its corporate headquarters to Boston, WBUR’s economics vertical, Bostonomix, provided groundbreaking reports on various aspects of the innovation economy.

Reporter Asma Khalid WBUR provided in-depth reporting on the growing robotics and automation sectors emerging from the region’s leading research universities, entrepreneurs and defense-manufacturing corporations. Reporter Zeninjor Enwemeka focused on evolving cultural issues in the tech sectors, including gender and diversity. And Reporter Bruce Gellerman focused in areas emerging technologies in energy, power storage and the environment.

The Bostonomix team observed new work trends around the region in 2017 - such as the rise of co-working spaces, the growth of independent contractors and enhanced technology as part of work. The team wondered what the jobs of the future would be and the skills needed to fill them. The result was an ambitious, data-driven special project that included segments examining
how the workplace around us is changing. They looked at the growth of automation and robotics in everything from furniture making to dispensing drugs, and new programs training mid-career and more diverse workers for tech jobs in coding and web development.

Amid the Boston mayoral race, the first year of the Trump Administration, continued concerns regarding the opioid crisis, inequality, gender, race and politics, Radio Boston, WBUR’s daily news magazine offered community access to daily discussions and analyses of these vital issues.

During 2017, Radio Boston was the broadcast convener of mayoral forums between the incumbent mayor and his challenger, providing live broadcasts - with a public audience - from the campus of the University of Massachusetts-Boston and in partnership with the McCormack School of Public Policy and the Boston Globe. Radio Boston also devoted an entire hour of candid questions with each candidate.

In the fall of 2017, Radio Boston and WBUR joined Hubweek, a prominent Boston-area civic engagement initiative hosted by Harvard, MIT, Massachusetts General Hospital and The Boston Globe, as the main broadcast partner. Hubweek is a weeklong series of events throughout the Boston area that highlight the region’s entrepreneurialism, innovation and problem-solving people, ideas and research.

The Radio Boston team in 2017 also brought special focus on the region’s troubled and crumbling public transit system including the selection of a new CEO. Through a series of investigative and enterprise stories, the team raised important questions about the experiences and accomplishments of the newly selected executive, Luis Ramirez.

Radio Boston also continued its focus in 2017 on the lack of affordable housing throughout the Boston metropolitan area. The show’s more flexible format also made it a key and regular part of our planning for local newsroom special projects and series, presenting special segments - sometimes inviting callers to share their stories.

In 2017, WBUR expanded its partnership with MassINC Polling Group to conduct regular polls - local and statewide - on important topics of the day. Our polls in 2017 gauged voters’ attitudes on issues ranging from the new President Trump, immigration, climate change, the opioid crisis, concussions and football, health care and the economy. Polls were reported on air featuring the voices of some of the polls’ respondents and often included written data analysis by pollster Steve Koczela that were featured on WBUR’s website. In addition to the information in the polls, the release of the polls regularly received wide coverage by other news media – locally and nationally – that allowed us to spread the information throughout our regional community and to a more national audience.

Boston’s arts and culture scene experienced significant growth in the number of music festivals, high-profile exhibitions and significant museum expansions in 2017. WBUR’s arts & culture team – The ARTery – chronicled and captured developments in creative and experimental treatments. Thanks to continued funding from a major grant from the Barr Foundation in 2017, The ARTery hired multimedia journalist, Maria Garcia and named Phaedra Scott, a local dramaturgist and journalist, a WBUR Community Arts Fellow. Together, Maria and Phaedra
brought fresh perspectives to arts & culture reporting profiling a greater diversity of artists, organizations and expressions both on our air and online.

In 2017, the regional arts scene experienced a significant expansion of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MassMOCA), which more than doubled its physical space. The ARTery produced several reports – for radio, digital as well as a special time-lapse video of the new space – and presented these stories to coincide with the museum’s re-opening in 2017. It was one of the most popular and well-received projects produced in 2017 and displayed WBUR’s ability to creatively own an important arts story as other news organizations in the region continue to decrease its coverage of arts & culture.

Also through the support of the Barr grant, The ARTery in 2017 conducted audience research and focus groups to examine other ways that our community and audience look for in arts and culture information. That revealed the important curatorial role that our reporters and editors could offer their expertise to help people decide what events or performances to attend. As a result, The ARTery launched a weekly email newsletter, “Five Things to do This Weekend,” as a way to curate what’s happening for listener and readers. The open rates for these newsletters showed early success as 2017 came to a close. We also began similar approaches on air and for other approaches: “Ten Albums that Stood Out in 2017” and “Best Books of 2017.”

#2: Describe key initiatives and the variety of partners with whom you collaborated, including other public media outlets, community nonprofits, government agencies, educational institutions, the business community, teachers and parents, etc. This will illustrate the many ways you’re connected across the community and engaged with other important organizations in the area.

WBUR created over 40 events – on its own and in partnerships -- in 2017. Some highlighted WBUR news stories, series, initiatives and podcasts while the rest of the topics were wide ranging to reflect and serve diverse communities. WBUR frequently partners with community groups, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, hospitals, museums, choirs, theatre companies and book stores in putting together community events.

WBUR’s “On Tap” series, held in our Events room (which holds about 80), is free and open to the public. In 2017, our topics ranged from poetry to an inside look on making podcasts to a roundtable discussion with leading health professionals.

WBUR has become a leader in podcast creations within public media, and several of our events were live versions of our podcasts: a sold out Modern Love Live at the Wilbur Theatre; a standing room only Freak Out and Carry On (politics seen through the lens of history) at Harvard Law School; two sold out Circle Round (for children) performances at Coolidge Corner and Regent Theatres; and a launch party for Endless Thread (in partnership with Reddit) at the Third Coast Festival in Chicago.
To accommodate larger audiences, we partner with various organizations who lend us their venues: The Kennedy Library for a conversation about the Trump election the evening prior to the inauguration; TripAdvisor headquarters for a conversation about the refugee crisis; the Thoreau Society for a conversation about Thoreau’s legacy at the First Parish in Concord; the Gardner Museum for a conversation about “sound” as art. In addition, many of the local book stores and theatre companies request WBUR personalities to interview visiting authors and conduct post-performance talk backs.

WBUR is the media sponsor for many high profile festivals and conferences where our hosts and reporters serve as emcees and moderators: The Berklee Jazz Festival; The Cambridge River Festival; The Boston Book Festival; Mass Poetry Festival; The Martha’s Vineyard Book Festival; the Independent Film Festival; The Salem Film Festival; The Woods Hole Film Festival; The Belmont Family Film Festival; The Boston Jewish Film Festival; Cambridge Science Festival; Boston University Power of Narrative Conference; HUBweek (a weeklong series of events that showcase art, science and technology; partners include MIT, Harvard, Mass General Hospital and the Boston Globe). Tom Ashbrook’s On Point Live at Boston’s historic Faneuil Hall was part of HUBweek and featured a novelist, musician, and political analyst reflecting on the state of the nation. Radio Boston also did a live show during HUBweek on City Hall Plaza.

Ticketed events included our annual two Moth Story Slams (in addition to monthly local Moth Story Slams – one of which WBUR produced on the resilience of Puerto Rico); our annual “Listen Up” (an evening of turning off the lights and listening to audio stories at the Institute of Contemporary Art; “World According to Sound” (a similar audio presentation where the audience put on blindfolds and listened to various sounds); our annual On Point Live; “Cuba Con Salsa” (a conversation about the origins of Cuban music with Cuban musicians performing); “This Is Your Life,” a live show of Open Source with Christopher Lydon; Modern Love Live; and a conversation on the challenges of climate change with Tom Ashbrook and former EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy on Martha’s Vineyard. These revenue-generating events highlight what WBUR does best on air – telling stories, reporting the news, and exploring a topic deeply, but doing it on stage. These live performances help to create a community of shared values and conversations.

We once again were the partner for StoryCorps’ “Great Thanksgiving Listen,” encouraging high school teachers to ask students to interview a grandparent or elder over Thanksgiving 2017 using the free StoryCorps mobile app. Participants uploaded their recordings to the StoryCorps archive at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

The annual reading of “A Christmas Carol” by WBUR hosts and reporters to benefit Rosie’s Place, a shelter for homeless women, generated a sold-out crowd at Boston’s historic Parker House.

#3: What impact did your key initiatives and partnerships have in your community? Describe any known measurable impact, such as increased awareness, learning or understanding about particular issues. Describe indicators of success, such as connecting people to needed resources or strengthening conversational ties across diverse
neighborhoods. Did a partner see an increase in requests for related resources? Please include direct feedback from a partner(s) or from a person(s) served.

In addition to WBUR events, our hosts and reporters participated in over 80 events with outside organizations in Greater Boston. Our hosts and reporters moderate panels, emcee galas, and interview leading thinkers on various topics in Greater Boston and across the state. These partnerships help WBUR deepen our reach into the community; attract new listeners and members; and, elevate the station’s standing as Boston’s convener of important, timely and enriching events.

Our partnerships with festivals reach audiences of thousands and a few in particular very large audiences, i.e., HUBweek approximately 50,000; Beantown Jazz Festival 40,000; the Boston Book Festival 30,000; the Cambridge River Festival 10,000.

#4: Please describe any efforts (e.g. programming, production, engagement activities) you have made to investigate and/or meet the needs of the minority and other diverse audiences (including but not limited to, new immigrants, people for whom English is a second language and illiterate adults) during fiscal year 2017, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during fiscal year 2018. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

- In April, Jose Masso, host of Con Salsa, and Robin Young, co-host of Here & Now, interviewed Cuban musicians and experts on the origins of the island’s music and its influences on American music. It was the first time WBUR reached out to several Latino organizations and the audience reflected this effort. A private reception for Latino professionals preceded the show.
- WBUR partnered with TripAdvisor on a forum about the refugee crisis.
- WBUR is the media sponsor for 826 Boston, an organization supporting literacy for Boston’s immigrant children. In May, Robin Young, co-host of Here & Now, was the emcee of their annual gala.
- WBUR is the media sponsor for Rosie’s Place, an organization supporting homeless women. In May, Bill Littlefield, host of Only A Game, was the emcee of their annual gala. In addition, WBUR’s hosts and reporters participate in an annual reading of “The Christmas Carol” to raise money for the shelter.
- In December, WBUR organized a Moth storytelling evening on the theme of the resilience of the Puerto Rican people.

2018:

- WBUR is planning more outreach into the Latino community with a series of forums on Latino cuisine, music and culture.
- WBUR is having a conversation with fashion designers on the importance of inclusion based on gender, age, race, body type and disability.
• WBUR had a sold out conversation with best-selling YA African American novelist Angie Thomas and Robin Young, co-host of Here & Now. The audience was predominantly millennial and people of color.

#5. Please assess the impact that your CPB funding has on your ability to serve your community. What can you do with your grant that you wouldn't be able to do if you didn't receive it?

WBUR produces 19 daily local newscasts and, on average, 12 minutes of feature-length long-form stories per hour each morning within NPR’s Morning Edition and 14 minutes each afternoon for local features within All Things Considered. WBUR also produces Radio Boston – a one-hour daily public affairs program that typically focuses on several issues of local importance each day, including lengthy segments that often includes calls from listeners.

The depth of the feature reporting is made possible with help from CPB. To do a strong job editorially, WBUR needs to understand what issues are important and vital to the region and then have resources to examine and report on those issues in the manner expected by our discerning listeners. Here are more details about WBUR’s efforts in 2017 that were made possible by CPB’s help:

• WBUR has 20 local reporters producing stories on issues and news events in eastern Massachusetts. The reporters cover state and city government, healthcare, the economy, education, arts & culture and many other issues and news stories of great importance to WBUR’s listeners and the users of wbur.org. There are another 30 staffers helping to make that content possible, including editors, producers and news writers. WBUR’s online body of work continued to flourish in 2017 with greater use of visual graphs, charts and photographs. In addition, WBUR launched a daily sports podcast, Season Ticket; a storytelling podcast for children called Circle Round; and a political and historical podcast called Freak Out and Carry On.

• WBUR produces a daily public affairs program, Radio Boston (3-4pm, repeated 10-11pm each weekday). Each broadcast, supported by a staff of dedicated producers, focuses on issues of importance around greater Boston and tackles national issues through a distinctly local lens for residents.

• WBUR in 2017 continued to send out a daily morning newsletter that includes news stories from WBUR and NPR. The newsletter is sent out to listeners every morning to let listeners know about the most important stories produced by WBUR and NPR— with links to each story. The newsletter is sent to more than 15,000 listeners and readers each week day. The newsletter includes local stories from WBUR and national and international stories from NPR and the Associated Press.
WBUR’s health blog ‘CommonHealth’ flourished in 2017 and continues to garner almost 50% of WBUR’s entire web traffic. The blog, with an editor and health and science reporters, continues to focus on healthcare issues, including rising health costs and the Affordable Care Act as it collided with national health policy and the Massachusetts Health Reform law. WBUR produced a year-long series on cancer called, “This Moment in Cancer,” which looked at the cutting edge cancer research conducted in the Boston area. CommonHealth also broadcasted and published in depth coverage of the Opioid addiction crisis. It remains a must read for those involved in the healthcare community across Massachusetts. The Editor of ‘CommonHealth’, Carey Goldberg, also contributes each week to WBUR broadcasts including Morning Edition, Here & Now and Radio Boston. WBUR Medical Reporter Martha Bebinger was also a regular contributor to ‘CommonHealth’ in 2017 including extensive reporting on the region’s Opioid crisis.

WBUR in 2017 continued with aggressive social media strategies to get its content out to as many listeners and readers as possible. Included in the strategy were experiments with Facebook ‘live’ video offerings. The experiment has been wildly successful. ‘Live’ video offerings have also become popular covering events on Instagram and Twitter. WBUR is one of public radio’s leaders in this new and growing field.