

September 6th & 7th, 2018 (WBUR Staff Meeting)

# **WBUR CLIMATE SURVEY (“TAKING THE PULSE”) REPORT SUMMARY & ACTION PLAN**

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This summary of the WBUR climate survey (“Taking the Pulse”) and action plan includes recommendations (actions) to respond to employee concerns expressed to Longpoint Consulting through individual interviews and an on-line survey of WBUR employees, freelancers, and interns on May 4, 2018. A total of eighty-five (85) people were interviewed and 173 people (72% of the total group) responded to the survey. Survey responses included a large amount of narrative information.

Longpoint spent several weeks compiling the information gathered from the interviews and surveys. They delivered their report to the University on June 7, 2018.

This action plan, written by Peter Fiedler and Diane Tucker with input from Gary Nicksa, Steve Burgay and Erika Geetter, focuses on five (5) major areas, noted below, that require substantive action to improve the station’s climate and reassure WBUR staff that their concerns have been heard and are being appropriately acted on.

1. WBUR General Manager
2. WBUR Leadership Team
3. WBUR Staff
4. Human Resources Practices
5. University Responsibility

## **1. WBUR GENERAL MANAGER**

The Longpoint assessment report identified a number of thematic areas that must be addressed related to the management of WBUR. They included focusing on improving communication within the organization, greater accountability on the part of the WBUR leadership team, improved performance management oversight, and a greater awareness of the impact of the leadership style on station culture.

To address these important observations, Boston University will be hiring a full-time HR professional who will be embedded at WBUR. In addition, an outside consultant with extensive public radio management experience will be retained to assist the University and the station.

## 2. WBUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

WBUR's leadership team is a critical component of the day-to-day operation of WBUR. This group of managers must be focused on providing guidance and support to the employees that report to them. They must hold each member of the areas reporting to them accountable while at the same time providing thoughtful and appropriate direction, instilling a sense of collaboration and meeting the goals established by the general manager.

Themes that were identified in the Longpoint assessment include:

- Management skills within the leadership team should be evaluated and, as needed, improved through training to support the highly specific demands of a complex and sophisticated organization such as WBUR.
- Training will be provided to improve leadership team interactions with employees and to develop a respectful and collaborative workplace environment. This includes conflict management, difficult conversations, performance management, team building, appropriate hiring practices and workplace sensitivity.
- The role and responsibilities of each leadership team member will be evaluated to ensure all management positions are clearly defined.

As noted above, the University will provide both a full-time HR representative and a consultant skilled in the management of a public radio station.

### ▪ Recommendations

1. Clarify the role and responsibilities of all senior managers and their reporting relationship to the General Manager.
2. Consider holding off on new initiatives until the majority of the recommendations in this action plan are substantially completed.
3. Bring awareness of University resources available to WBUR leadership including training on conflict management, effective communication, difficult conversations, workplace sensitivity, building collaborative teams and performance management.
4. Strengthen the station's performance management process so that it meets the expectations of the University and is an effective tool for setting goals, evaluating employees and providing feedback.
5. Reinforce how BU's Code of Conduct applies to WBUR and establish behavioral standards for the station in order to build internal respect and enhanced communication down through the organization.
6. Provide regular opportunities (via meetings, surveys, internal newsletter) for station employees to become aware and also provide feedback to the WBUR leadership team regarding current workloads, new initiatives, hiring concerns and future initiatives.

The University has engaged Tom Livingston, President of Livingston Associates to assist WBUR and the University implement this action plan. Livingston Associates has extensive knowledge and experience in public radio station management and operation. Mr. Livingston has over two decades of experience managing public radio stations, has served as an interim CEO seven times and completed nearly 60 strategic assessments of stations and related public media organizations.

Mr. Livingston will focus on the WBUR organizational structure and will provide management advice to WBUR and University leadership.

### 3. WBUR STAFF

The staff of WBUR is the station's most important resource. Longpoint's assessment found, in large measure, WBUR staff feel the ideas they express to management are ignored or treated with disrespect (management promises to consider new ideas that are never followed-up on). Channels for feedback are unclear or disregarded by employees due to ineffective communication with the station's leadership. While some departments were reported to have excellent communications, others departments were reported to have little or no communication which has resulted in staff frustration.

The Longpoint report indicated that employees feel that all levels of the station's leadership lack concern for WBUR's producers. Many employees report that there is more concern and catering to the on-air hosts/talent than to them. Similar problems are seen in the newsroom due to confusion about leadership roles and responsibilities.

Communication from leadership to the station's staff has been weak. Lack of information about new and open positions, as well as the announcement of new hires into positions that were not known to be available, has led to concerns about internal transparency. Many employees feel that they are not being given basic information about their work environment including organizational structure, program ratings, and the success/failure of new initiatives such as podcasts.

The staff note there are limited opportunities for professional development/advancement and a lack of career paths.

The result is 48% of WBUR staff indicate that overall morale at the station is fair, poor, or very poor (Survey Question #14).

#### ▪ Recommendations

1. Develop a program that more visibly recognizes staff contributions to the station's mission and success.
2. Establish more regular and effective communications to the staff (via internal email, staff meetings, internal blogs) that keeps employees informed about job opportunities, new projects, awards, and management and staff changes.
3. Develop a simplified and readily available organizational chart.
4. Provide a WBUR directory with titles, email addresses and phone numbers.

5. Develop career paths for staff that support professional growth.

#### 4. HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICES

The station's human resources practices are perceived as generally weak and not focused on equitable treatment of employees, freelancers, and interns in terms of work load, benefits and pay. There is also a need for consistent focus on diversity, inclusion and basic workplace sensitivity. The focus on improving human resources practices at WBUR will begin at the senior leadership level and cascade through the entire organization. This effort will require guidance from BU Human Resources senior management.

A significant area of concern is the quality and consistency of management's assessment of employees who report to them. A common theme from the survey and interviews is a failure to manage individuals who exhibit inappropriate behavior in the work place or are poor performers. Performance reviews, which are critical for assessing employee performance at all levels, were described as often completed in a careless manner and generally ineffective. Performance reviews assessment (both positive and negative) is a critical step in identifying employee issues and building improvement plans. They also develop rapport between managers and their direct reports. The Longpoint report found that only 67% of those surveyed reported that "the feedback received (from performance reviews) is meaningful and/or appropriate".

Additionally, participants described the hiring process as "broken" (lacking in transparency, having excessive cycle times, and including inappropriate interview questions) which has resulted in disgruntled employees and candidates.

##### ▪ Recommendations

1. Assign a full-time senior human resources generalist to WBUR. The HR professional will report to BU Human Resources and their responsibilities will include oversight of the implementation of the recommendations described in this plan.
2. Complete a station-wide briefing on Human Resources services available to all BU employees with information about other University-wide resources such the Ombuds Office and the EthicsPoint Hotline. As part of this, complete a training needs assessment of all WBUR departments.
3. Complete a full process review of internal communications within WBUR with specific focus on the station's hiring process.
4. Review the station's organizational chart and assess the appropriateness of titles and job descriptions across the organization.
5. Assess the current hiring process, improve communication with candidates and clarify the roles of employees, Human Resources staff, and WBUR management.
6. In close collaboration with BU Human Resources, build on the station's StRIDE initiative (Station Recruitment Inclusion Diversity Engagement) so that the station's diversity efforts are consistent with and aligned with similar efforts at BU.

7. Provide management training in areas including performance management, interviewing and assessing candidates, conflict management, and difficult conversations.

## 5. UNIVERSITY RESPONSIBILITY

1. Meet with WBUR management and staff to present and discuss the results of the climate survey and action plan. Affirm the University's commitment to fully addressing the staff's concerns.
2. Oversee the completion of the general manager, management and human resources action plan recommendations.
3. Regularly monitor WBUR work place climate going forward through formal and informal meetings and surveys.
4. Provide the support needed to implement sustainable change in WBUR culture.
5. Reemphasize the station's journalistic mission as independent.