WBUR’s Annual Local Content and Services Report

2018

As submitted to the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB)

Report Date: February 15, 2019
1. Describe your 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 2018 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 420 stations across America.

WBUR’s expanding newsroom focused most of its work in 2018 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 2018 as WBUR engaged listeners in town halls and auditoriums for vibrant ‘live’ community discussions.


WBUR’s online op-ed page Cognoscenti continued to grow its list of contributors – now more than 750 – with new essays and dispatches published daily.

Podcast production is now a staple at WBUR: Endless Thread, a podcast from WBUR and Reddit, delves into Reddit’s vast communities to explore some of the most compelling stories the Internet has to offer, including revelations about our shared experience and powerful, personal stories. Edge of Fame, which paints intimate, surprising audio portraits of actors, musicians and comedians, from beloved performers you think you already know to up-and-comers bursting onto the scene. Circle Round, a storytelling podcast for kids ages 3 to 10, tells carefully-selected folktales from around the world with an eye towards inclusivity. Kind World tells stories of the profound effect that one act of kindness can have on our lives. From WBUR and The New York Times, Modern Love: The Podcast features the popular New York Times column, with readings by notable personalities and updates from the essayists themselves. Dear Sugars is a podcast based on the cult-favorite advice column. From WBUR and The Boston Globe, Last Seen offers a look into the largest unsolved art heist in history: the theft of 13 irreplaceable artworks from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston.

WBUR continued its regional collaboration in 2018 with stations around New England reporting on issues of common interest including immigration, energy, growing opioid addiction, transportation and infrastructure. The New England News Collaborative was originally funded by CPB but is now fully funded by its contributing stations around New England.
WBUR continued reporting in 2018 for the New England News Collaborative on the issue of immigration. A WBUR Reporter traveled to Honduras and El Salvador to chronicle the immigration fact-gathering mission of Massachusetts Congressman James McGovern and reported from inside both countries on people who had been separated by deportation from family members in Massachusetts. She traveled with a Massachusetts group of volunteers to Tijuana, Mexico to report on the camps in which asylum seekers live while awaiting their chance to apply for entry into the United States. She reported from through Massachusetts throughout the year on a variety of immigration issues roiling our community.

WBUR continued to be a primary source for issues around the growing crisis related to opioid addiction and deaths.

WBUR’s CommonHealth vertical reported on the advancements in cancer research and care with a continuation on our reporting on “This Moment in Cancer.”

WBUR’s education vertical EDify continued to examine issues related to education – from kindergarten through higher ed. A highlight of EDify’s work was a series of reports called “Pass/Fail” – evaluating 25 years of education reform in Massachusetts. The Edify team also provided comprehensive coverage of a federal civil trial in which Harvard University was accused of discriminating against Asian-American applicants.

WBUR has a bureau in the newsroom of the Dorchester Reporter, the city of Boston’s largest community newspaper. Boston is the nation's most income-unequal major city and the Dorchester bureau allowed WBUR to report in great depth on such issues as gentrification, displacement, transit inequity, healthcare inequity, environmental justice, and the shortage and resultant high cost of housing.

The Boston area’s tech and innovation sector continued its explosive growth in 2018 with additional start-ups, booming development, a further expansion of jobs and overall economic growth. From small firms to corporate giants like Boston-based General Electric, WBUR’s economics and innovation vertical, Bostonomix, provided groundbreaking reports on various aspects of the innovation economy.

A work crew contracted by Columbia Gas neglected to move pressure sensors from a cast-iron gas main to a plastic replacement in September, an oversight that triggered widespread fires and explosions in three Merrimack Valley communities. The fires and explosions damaged 131 buildings, including five homes that were completely destroyed. One person was killed and 21 others were injured. Gas was cut off for months to entire neighborhoods. WBUR sent teams of reporters to the Merrimack Valley North of Boston throughout the fall to report on the disaster.

In addition to robust reporting on all platforms on the candidates and issues in the election, WBUR teamed with the Boston Globe and the John W. McCormack School of Policy and Global Studies at the University of Massachusetts / Boston to produce a series of 10 hour-long debates and candidate forums. WBUR along with its partners and WCVB-TV produced the final and only-statewide radio and television broadcast debate between incumbent Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker and his Democratic Rival, Jay Gonzalez. We produced debates as well
on the race for Secretary of State, for Attorney General, for Congress in the 7th Massachusetts District, for the Democratic nomination for Governor and the three statewide ballot issues.

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 a main broadcast partner. Hubweek is a weeklong series of events throughout the Boston area that highlights the region’s entrepreneurialism, innovation and problem-solving people, ideas and research. Radio Boston brought special focus on the region’s troubled and crumbling public transit system and continued its focus on the lack of affordable housing throughout the Boston metropolitan area.

WBUR continued its robust partnership with MassINC Polling Group to conduct regular polls – local and statewide – on important topics of the day. Our polls in 2018 gauged voters’ attitudes on a range of public policy issues and on all the important statewide candidates and ballot questions.

The ARTery, WBUR’s Arts and Culture Team, has grown in scope of coverage and in personnel the last year. We produce three to five stories each day, focused on highlighting underrepresented communities in Boston and New England. Currently, we are producing a series on air and online profiling 25 Millennials of color in the Boston arts scene to watch. Video continues to be an effective way to extend The ARTery’s journalism beyond broadcast and digital.

Late in 2018, WBUR hired a senior investigative editor and reporter to lead the investigative team. In addition, WBUR hired a senior producing editor of Earthwhile, a new vertical dedicated to reporting on environmental issues facing the citizens of the world pertaining to energy, environmental health, ecology and climate change.

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 20 events – on its own and in partnerships -- in 2018. 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 also frequently provides our hosts, reporters and producers to moderate panel discussions, interview individuals and emcee galas for a range of nonprofit organizations: community groups, educational institutions, health centers, museums, choirs, theatre companies and book stores. WBUR’s participation helps promote these worthy events, while also raising the visibility of WBUR. WBUR participated in over 70 of these kinds of events.

Our partners included: Mass Poetry; Harvard Bookstore; Brookline Booksmith; Porter Square Books; Villa Victoria for the Arts; Jewish Arts Collaborative; Boston Health Care for the Homeless; Boston Symphony; Radcliffe Institute; John F. Kennedy Presidential Library; Rosie’s
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; Provincetown Film Festival; Fluff Festival; Wicked Good Festival; Boston University Power of Narrative Conference; FORWARD 2018; CRASHfest; Boston University Global Music Festival; Women in Comedy Festival; ARTweek; and HUBweek.

WBUR has become a leader in podcast creations within public media. We partnered with Laugh Boston, a comedy club in Boston’s seaport district, for monthly live shows featuring WBUR podcasts. In addition, WBUR organized the first-ever Children’s Podcast: Festival – “The Mega Awesome Super Huge Wicked Fun Podcast Playdate” – the last weekend of April, the end of school vacation and the beginning of “Screen Free” week.

In February, WBUR organized its first-ever narrative journalism show – “WBUR On Stage” – which featured seven of our journalists sharing stories interspersed with music, video and photos.

Editorially, WBUR’s local newsroom deepened its content-sharing partnership with the Dorchester Reporter, a weekly news publication that covers Boston’s largest and most diverse neighborhoods. In 2018, this partnership produced ground-breaking enterprise stories on the barriers that hip-hop artists have in finding performance venues around Boston; WBUR reporter Simon Rios developed stories about housing and gentrification that aired on WBUR and published in the newspaper.

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.

WBUR’s participation in myriad events across Greater Boston helps deepen our reach into the community; attract new listeners and members; and elevate the station’s standing as a convener of important, timely and enriching conversations.

Events help broaden the reach of our reporters’ beats: Carey Goldberg on medicine and science; Shannon Dooling on immigration; Barbara Moran and Bruce Gellerman on the environment; Maria Garcia on the arts; Amelia Mason on music; Martha Bebinger and Deborah Becker on the Opioid crisis; Shira Springer on sports; Zeninjor Enwemeka on business and innovation; Max Larkin on education.
Our presence (booths, banners, interactive games, giveaways) at festivals reaches audiences in the thousands and allows us to meet different communities, introduce WBUR, and sign up new members. In 2018, WBUR’s local newsroom, in partnership with World Boston, a local non-profit, hosted four delegations of journalists from different regions of Africa, Latin America and Asia, as part of a US State Department program to explain the editorial structure and operations of an American public news organization.

4. Please describe any efforts (e.g. programming, production, engagement activities) you have made to investigate and/or meet the needs of 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 2018, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2019. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

- In February, Robin Young, co-host of Here & Now, interviewed YA best-selling novelist Angie Thomas on her book The Hate U Give, at the First Parish in Cambridge. Over 600 attended – mostly African American young women. This conversation was also recorded and edited for a feature on Here & Now, which was the #1 download for African American women on NPR.
- In March, WBUR partnered with Boston Fashion designer Jay Calderin on a first-ever fashion show of minorities at the Villa Victoria for the Arts, followed by a conversation with ARTery editor Maria Garcia on Calderin’s book, Fashion is for Everyone.
- In May, ARTery editor Maria Garcia served as emcee to 826 Boston’s “Night of 1,000 Stories.” 826 Boston is a non-profit writing organization serving underserved students.
- In May, Bill Littlefield, host of Only A Game, served as emcee to Rosie’s Place annual gala. Rosie’s Place supports homeless women. In addition, on October 6, WBUR was the media sponsor for Rosie’s Place’s all-day fair and dedication to its founder -- the Kip Tierman Memorial Statue; and on December 17, WBUR participated in an annual reading of “The Christmas Carol” to raise money for the shelter.
- In May and June, WBUR reporter Simon Rios and photographer Jesse Costa shared stories and photos from their trip to Puerto Rico – first at the Podcast Garage and later at Villa Victoria for the Arts. Villa Victoria for the Arts also mounted a month-long exhibit of Costa’s photos.
- In June, reporter Shannon Dooling moderated a post-screening conversation with the director of Inside My Heart, a film about refugees, at TripAdvisor.
- In December, immigration reporter Shannon Dooling traveled with a group of Boston-based lawyers to the US/Mexico border as they gave pro-bono legal advice to migrants seeking asylum. Some of Shannon’s stories in 2018 were also translated and published in Spanish on wbur.org, through social media and in partnership with El Planeta, a Boston-area Spanish language weekly.
- Our first anniversary stories of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico were also translated into Spanish and published on wbur.org and in El Planeta.
2019:
WBUR is opening its state-of-the-arts events venue, CitySpace, in spring 2019. Having our own 280-seat theatre will allow us to program with more frequency and breadth. We are already partnering with many organizations to create programs that will reach diverse, minority and new audiences. Below are the early confirmations:

- Presentation of podcasts by people of color produced by Futuro Media in March
- 25 Millennials of Color in March.
- Panel on homelessness and recognition of 50th anniversary of Pine Street Inn in April
- Premiere of Jazz Muslim piece in May

5. Please assess the impact that your CPB funding had on your ability to serve your community. What were you able to 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, 20 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 2018 that were made possible by CPB’s help:

- WBUR has 18 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 2018 with greater use of visual graphs, charts and photographs.
- 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 2018 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 weekday. The newsletter includes local stories from WBUR and national and international stories from NPR and the Associated Press.
- WBUR in 2018 continued our experimentation 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.