



WBUR's Annual Local Content and Services Report

2020

As submitted to the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB)

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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.

2020 was a year like no other in history. Through it, WBUR doubled down on what it does best: serving its community with fact-based, trustworthy and original news and information. With 80 journalists now in the local newsroom, WBUR expanded the reach and impact of its journalism in 2020. As the pandemic progressively closed down many aspects of public life, WBUR journalists developed new reporting techniques to reach sources and members of our community to continue to report the news, issues and individual stories of our region in an evolving crisis. In one telling example, when the virus cut off regular media access in the early months of the pandemic, our health reporters took advantage of the ubiquity of smartphones to collect personal dispatches from doctors, nurses and hospital support staff to bring our audience primary source information and humanizing stories of extreme challenge and triumph from the front lines of the pandemic.

WBUR also focused its newsroom resources on covering the racial justice and anti-police brutality movement of 2020. This coverage included live rolling protest coverage, vivid photography, social media, on-air public policy discussions and citizen roundtables, as well as investigative and accountability reporting that shed new light on law enforcement practices amid city and state reform efforts. Our ideas and opinion team commissioned and published essays from a wide diversity of backgrounds, communities and beliefs.

In 2020 WBUR sought out new ways to reach and engage with the community and adapted its journalism to new and emerging platforms. As the pandemic escalated, we realigned newsroom beats to focus more resources to providing essential, daily news as well as in-depth, enterprise reports on air and online. In addition, we launched new initiatives focused on the pandemic including a regular newsletter, a short-form daily podcast and robust, daily data visualization and context. These efforts resulted in a substantial growth in audience on our digital platforms as the pandemic and economic fallout shifted media habits amid a widespread need for urgent, fact-based news and information.

In the leadup to the election, WBUR launched an innovative newsletter "course" that provided voter access and mail-in-balloting information as well as original newsroom reporting on issues and candidates. For this initiative, we partnered with El Planeta, Greater Boston's Spanish language daily, which distributed a Spanish language version of the newsletter guide. WBUR and El Planeta coordinated on audience strategy to distribute the voter and election information as widely as possible amid dramatic changes to the democratic process.

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.

News and Programming:

As noted above, WBUR deepened its collaborative partnership with Boston's Latino Daily, El Planeta. In addition to voter information, the news outlets collaborated on coverage of the pandemic and its disproportionate impact on Greater Boston's Latinx community. This partnership expanded both station's capacities to reach new audiences and engage with communities.

WBUR also partnered in 2020 with Futuro Media, dedicated to creating "multimedia content for and about the new American mainstream in the service of empowering people to navigate the complexities of an increasingly diverse and connected world." Over the course of the year, the organizations developed the new podcast Anything For Selena, hosted by WBUR journalist Maria Garcia, which launched in early 2021. The podcast, which was developed with full English and Spanish-language episodes, explores how Selena Quintanilla, the Grammy-winning ascending Mexican American popstar, became a potent symbol for tensions around race, class and body politics in the United States.

In 2020, WBUR also formed a new, formal partnership with ProPublica to bolster WBUR's investigative work and accountability reporting efforts, and hired a new investigative reporter dedicated specifically to this partnership. WBUR also launched a new collaboration with WGBH, Boston's other public media organization, on a daily news podcast that harnesses the local journalism of both newsrooms to provide conversational, informative news and storytelling designed for podcasting and on-demand's younger, more diverse audiences.

For the election, WBUR collaborated with media and educational partners The Boston Globe, WCVB-TV and The John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies at UMass Boston to design and host two broadcast debates for the competitive U.S. Senate race between Sen. Ed Markey and then-Congressman Joe Kennedy III. In addition to the primary media consortium partners above, additional partners for these debates included MassLive, The Springfield Republican, Entravision, New England Public Radio, UMass Amherst School of Public Policy, NEWS10 ABC in Albany, and NBC 10 WJAR in Providence.

Amid all of this, WBUR continued to maintain its existing local, regional and national partnerships with The Dorchester Reporter, The New England News Collaborative, and, of course, NPR.

Community Engagement:

WBUR CitySpace frequently partners with local arts, civic, media, and academic organizations. These partnerships help broaden our audience, highlight issues/ideas important to the community, and enliven/enrich community dialogue. Some local partnerships included Celebrity Series, Neighborhood Villages, and Mass Poetry. National partnerships included WNYC, NPR, The New York Times and The Washington Post.

WBUR had planned a ten-part series, Get Educated: The Defining Issues of the 2020 Presidential Campaign. We were only able to have the first two before having to cancel due to

the pandemic. We pivoted quickly to virtual programming and a ten-part series on all aspects of Covid-19, partnering with BU School of Public Health, The Boston Globe, and local hospitals. In addition, we continued our Curated Cuisine series (conversations with local chefs) virtually, concentrating on chefs who were persons of color showing how to cook their recipes at home. We had a six-part Summer Camp for children ages five to twelve engaging in a variety of activities – theatre, writing, art, dance and music – that we curated and posted. We partnered with local theatre companies, museums, dance companies, and bookstores who provided prompts and publicity.

We were also the media sponsors for high profile festivals, conferences and galas where our hosts and reporters served as emcees and moderators: The Boston Book Festival; The Woods Hole Film Festival; The Belmont Family Film Festival; 826 Boston gala; Mass Poetry gala; Mass Conference for Women.

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.

News and Programming:

WBUR has made a deep investment in health and science reporting, and, with our position in Boston and its medical capital, we found a huge appetite both regionally and nationally for our journalism. Many WBUR stories were picked up for rebroadcast and cross-publication on NPR, reaching millions of people around the country, as well as within our regional journalism collaborative, the New England News Collaborative.

Throughout the pandemic we sought out new avenues to bring our coverage to as wide a community as possible. We added additional local long-form reporting to our midday programming during the spring surge of the virus in the Northeast in order to reach people whose commuting and listening routines had changed during lockdown. We built a special landing page of charts and maps using COVID data that we updated daily to provide context to the pandemic's evolution, which user data shows was one of our most highly viewed and engaged pages. And we launched a daily COVID newsletter to break through the overwhelming volume of global pandemic news with clear, concise information and links to deeper dives. Here's one comment from a listener:

"As a registered nurse, I am very much interested in what is going around the COVID19 pandemic. You cover all the basic[s] and more for me: what is the governor saying, vaccines, spreading chart of cities and the state, etc. thank you for educating and informing me. Keep up the great work."

Our election newsletter project provided detailed information about how to vote during a complicated and at times confusing mass shift to vote-by-mail. The newsletter metrics show email open rates well above WBUR's regular newsletter audience, which is in turn higher than the industry average. Here's a representative comment from a subscriber:

"I thought it was very comprehensive, yet simple. You got the facts down without a lot of extra info that can be overwhelming. I liked the links to get to other sites if I wanted more information on something. So you covered all the bases!"

We produced short, explanatory videos about voter referenda to clarify the complex issues of ranked-choice voting and automobile telematics. On the same topic, WBUR developed an interactive Alexa skill to teach voters about these complex topics in a fun and engaging audio format. We built interactive maps to illustrate where mail-in-ballots could be dropped off. We hosted live debate on air, and designed interactive maps so listeners could see how their communities voted.

Finally, in a year of widespread social isolation, when grief and anxiety were so common but yet so often experienced alone, WBUR's capacity to create community bonds through stories of the human experience became increasingly vital. Our journalism served as witness at a time when so many of us were forced to stay apart. Here is one response we received following a story about Shiva, the Jewish mourning ritual:

"Thank you for this beautiful story about my darling, beloved Mom. I read the article through your link. I also listened to the NPR broadcast online. I felt that your writing was compassionate,

factual, and warmly heartfelt. I think that my Mother would have been pleased! The process of being interviewed, sending photos, speaking about the tragedy that COVID-19 exacerbated, was cathartic and helped me process my Mother's last days and her death. Your photographer's photo of my Mom's marker in the cemetery, gave me much stronger closure than I had prior to seeing it. For this opportunity, for your kind demeanor, and for the lovely tribute my to Mother... I will always be grateful. You are a special woman, talented reporter, & delightfully informed Journalist! You brought Mom back to Life for me, & acknowledged the Jewish aspect of her last months & her death."

Community Engagement:

This has been an unusual year for everyone. Instead of assessing success and impact through ticket sales, surveys, and in person testimonials, we have relied on on-line data and feedback. Our virtual programs have averaged 350 views, with a little over 1,000 YouTube views post-event.

Our Summer Camp was popular among families. We received scores of emails thanking us.

Here's a sampling:

- "We've enjoyed the camp so much this summer- lots of fun to work on our projects and see what others are doing." - Maura Deedy (mom to Beatrice, 6)
- "Elisa loves to dance and this was the best project for her. Dance has helped her stay positive during this pandemic." -Elisa's Mom (Elisa, 9)
- "This was a lot of fun and allowed him a lot of creativity." -Jude's mom (Jude, 5)
- "One of my favorite super heroes is Wonder Woman. For CitySpace Theater Week I had fun figuring out how to look like her." -Kessia, 7 (from Jerusalem)

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 2020, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2021. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

News and Programming:

Our partnership with El Planeta and our organizations' coordination on COVID coverage provided vital news and information from and for Latinx and Spanish language communities, which are at increased risk for COVID exposure while simultaneously facing system barriers to quality healthcare. Our collaboration included content sharing and cross promotion as well as reporters teaming up to co-report stories, sharing sources, reporting techniques and information. Our partnership on our election newsletter initiative provided voting access information and issue-based reporting to Spanish language communities underrepresented in WBUR's audience. WBUR also drilled into the disparities in our society exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic and the subsequent recession. We reported on how and why the coronavirus was disproportionately infecting and killing Black residents. We obtained and analyzed data revealing race gaps regarding COVID outcomes at elder care facilities. And we produced rich, audio narratives telling the stories of how the pandemic recession was impacting communities of color.

Following the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, WBUR turned its attention to covering the racial justice and anti-police brutality protests that followed. We assigned visual, social media, broadcast and digital journalists to bear witness to this historical movement. We commissioned essays from a wide diversity of local writers on the scourge of white supremacy and oppression in this country. This work elevated voices and distributed the power of our platform to the community. And amid police reform efforts at the city and state level, WBUR broke many stories on law enforcement accountability.

Another underserved population WBUR devoted significant attention and reporting to in 2020 was the people confined to the state's jails and prisons. The first landmark project of WBUR's investigative team was a four part series that revealed the death and suffering that resulted from poor medical care in the state's jails. Jails and prisons provide little to no access, and so the general public has very little information about the members of our community in correctional facilities. The series uncovered dozens of deaths that had not been included in official accounts, and for families that had been unable to learn how their loved ones died, WBUR's reporting finally provided some answers. After the series, the Suffolk County district attorney enacted a new policy requiring all deaths in custody be reported to her office for investigation, and lawmakers demanded more transparency of sheriffs as COVID threatened to become the next medical threat in jails. As that threat became reality, and as the virus swept through facilities, WBUR was unique in its daily and long-form enterprise coverage of jail and prison populations, from infection rates and poor COVID protections, to decarceration efforts and vaccination plans. Our focus and coverage also included Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities in Massachusetts, which are even harder to reach. Through the development of sources in jails and prisons and its commitment to covering this community, WBUR broke several stories of great impact to this population as well as to the general public.

Another vulnerable and under covered population WBUR strives to serve through its journalism is the people who are homeless in Greater Boston. Here, too, WBUR provided unique coverage of the health risks and challenges as the virus quickly spread through the homeless community and how care was being delivered.

Lastly, in 2020 WBUR launched a new initiative: the WBUR Newsroom fellowship. This is a year-long, salaried and fully-benefited full time position for emerging public media journalists committed to covering underrepresented voices in the media. The program is designed as a rotation in which the fellow embeds in different departments to learn and practice a wide variety of multiplatform skills. WBUR received well over 150 applications from talented journalists around the country. We made our first fellow selection in 2020 and plan to expand on this initiative in future years.

Community Engagement:

CitySpace had 18 in-person events before being forced to shutter our doors due to the pandemic. Of those 18, we had four addressing the needs of minorities, immigrants and the underserved. Several more were scheduled but many had to be canceled. We pivoted immediately and programmed virtual events – a ten-part Town Hall series on Covid-19, including its effect on minority populations. After the killing of George Floyd, we quickly pulled together a conversation to explore the history of police brutality. We partnered with Initiative on Cities at Boston University for a four-part series entitled “Black Boston,” featuring leaders in health, art, politics and business. We had a conversation with award-winning African American author, Yaa Gyasi, on her new novel Transcendent Kingdom.

We continued our Curated Cuisine series (conversations with local chefs) virtually, concentrating on chefs who were POC showing how to cook their recipes at home.

We expect we will need to be virtual for at least the first half of 2021, perhaps for most of it. We are planning a four-part Town Hall series in the spring on the vaccine, which addresses the equity issues of availability and distribution.

For the launch of the WBUR podcast Anything For Selena, we are having a virtual conversation with the host, Maria Garcia, about the inspiration and creation of this podcast about the Mexican American singer Selena Quintanilla.

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?

Due in large part to the extraordinary circumstances related to the pandemic and the related challenges in securing revenue during the year, the CPB Community Service Grant allowed WBUR to continue its service locally, nationally and beyond!. WBUR uses the funds to support robust reporting on urgent and critical issues affecting our communities, like health, racial justice and election coverage, with the largest newsroom of reporters and local news producers in Boston. The grant also helps continue the stability of our national programming and its national reach. Having this stability of revenue allows WBUR to focus some of its own resources on local news and emerging tools to bring our journalism to people where and how they want to consume it. Our expansion into podcasts is helping us engage our audiences in new and exciting non-traditional ways, and bringing our programming to some traditionally underserved audiences, such as children and non-English speaking communities. These podcasts are available around the world, helping WBUR to expand its reach globally. Without the annual grant, some of these efforts could not be sustained.