



# **WBUR's Annual Local Content and Services Report**

## **2021**

As submitted to the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB)

Report Date: February 15, 2022



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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.**

WBUR, Boston's NPR news station, is a public media leader committed to exceptional journalism on-air, online, on demand and on stage. Our mission is to serve the public, report the truth and enrich lives.

WBUR reaches seven million listeners across the country each week with two national programs, On Point and Here & Now. A pioneering podcaster, WBUR's produces critically acclaimed shows such as Endless Thread, Anything For Selena, Circle Round, and Consider This (NPR's first national-local daily news podcast). WBUR is home to Boston's largest radio newsroom and reports original, local stories that provide insight and cultural context to the community — helping to unite a diverse, complex and changing world.

WBUR CitySpace, the station's 270-seat venue, is home to approximately 100 programs a year that convenes the community around important conversations about politics, science, health, education, culture, arts, environment, as well as showcasing Boston artists in performance.

Much of the programming in 2021 aimed to address the myriad ways our community continued to be affected by the pandemic, including the challenges facing schools, health systems, and artistic organizations. The pandemic necessitated that the majority of our programming was virtual.

**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.**

Partnerships are critical to WBUR's strategy and the organization believes that through these collaborations we can serve our communities better together than we can as individuals. This is particularly the case with editorial partnerships, which include:

An ongoing partnership with community-oriented news outlets, including El Planeta, Boston's Latino Daily, and the Dorchester Reporter. These are long standing editorial partnerships in which newsrooms collaborate on stories and projects and share coverage. In 2022, WBUR also partnered with other regional outlets including The Springfield Republican, Lowell Sun, Fitchburg Sentinel and Enterprise and Old Colony Memorial to share stories that are uniquely relevant to these communities, respectively. These initiatives expand WBUR capacities to reach new audiences via these trusted community partners, broaden the reach of our journalism, and strengthen the network of local journalism in Massachusetts.

In 2021, WBUR's partnership with ProPublica resulted in an investigation into civil asset forfeiture in Massachusetts, supported with a grant from the Pulitzer Center. The investigation held powerful institutions accountable and revealed the actions of public officials that had not been brought to light, actions that had substantial impact on vulnerable and marginalized communities. These stories were translated and co-published by El Planeta for our region's Spanish-language audience. The series reached a national audience through ProPublica as well as Here & Now, where it was broadcast via hundreds of public media organizations around the country.

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 Boston mayoral election that were aired on WBUR with live streaming video on wbur.org. WBUR continued its collaboration with GBH, 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.

WBUR continued its partnership 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." In 2021 the partners released the podcast Anything for Selena about the Mexican American icon Selena Quintanilla, hosted by WBUR journalist Maria Garcia.

WBUR CitySpace had 40 programs, of which 17 were hybrid (in person and virtual). All programs going forward will be hybrid.

There was a four-part series on the vaccination rollout; a monthly series beginning in June on how Covid has altered so many aspects of society, which we called "This Changes Everything;" a series on the effects of climate change; "Sound On," a concert series featuring local up and coming musicians.

In addition, we hosted a debate with all of the candidates in Boston's historic mayoral race, followed by one-on-one interviews with the two final candidates.

Our partners included The Boston Globe, WCVB-TV, UMass Boston's McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies; Covering Climate Now (a project co-founded by Columbia School of Journalism and The Nation); Boston Center for the Arts; Futuro Studios; Coolidge Corner Theatre and the Sundance Film Festival; Boston University's Food & Wine Program; NPR affiliate KUOW; and NPR.

Support for "Climate Resilient Series" was provided by New England Aquarium and The Trustees One Waterfront Initiative; for "Leveling the Playing Field in Stem" by Olin College of Engineering; for "This Changes Everything: The Office Edition" by Code42.

We were also the media partners for high profile festivals, conferences and galas (all virtual) where our hosts and reporters served as emcees and moderators: The Boston Book Festival; Independent Film Festival; The Woods Hole Film Festival; Pride Extended Festival; Rosie's Place Safe and Sound Gala (a homeless shelter for women); Mass Poetry Evening of Inspired Leaders; 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.**

While the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines brought a transformative tool to fight the pandemic, and with it much hope, there was a lot of uncertainty around access and distribution and lingering questions about safety. To break through the noise and help inform Massachusetts residents during this fraught and confusing period, WBUR launched a multiplatform project disseminate fact-based news and information, and to directly answer our community's questions about the vaccines.

WBUR launched a special vaccine-specific issues of our coronavirus newsletter, drawing on our health and science beat reporting, data analysis and narrative storytelling. We hosted virtual town hall events that brought leaders in public health, vaccine science and epidemiology into direct conversation with the public. We made sense of confusing, overwhelming and sometimes conflicting data from multiple sources, creating clear visualizations and explainers. We made sure it was available across a variety of platforms and to readers beyond WBUR through our partnership with El Planeta, Boston's Spanish language newspaper serving the local Latino community. They published select materials in their print newspaper and sent a special edition email to their Spanish language audience on why Latinos should get vaccinated.

The focus on vaccines helped us grow our existing coronavirus newsletter, gaining about 4,000 new subscribers in less than three months. We believe the growth and continued high engagement was a result of listening to our audience. We surveyed over 1,000 readers, listeners and subscribers to better understand their questions, concerns and wants from WBUR when it came to vaccine coverage. Through cross-departmental collaboration efforts, we used these newsletters to regularly answer reader questions, give tips for booking vaccine appointments, provide resources on distribution and speak to experts to deliver trusted information in a concise way during a time when disinformation was running rampant.

We know these special issues on vaccines were successful, not only from a quantitative perspective, but also because our readers made it a point to tell us. Here are just a few examples of feedback we received:

"You have performed an incredibly valuable service to The Commonwealth during this period of Information Need!"

"You're a bright spot in pandemic life!"

"Thank you for this oasis of sanity."

This is just one example of WBUR's public service journalism and our sustained efforts to meet the information needs of our community. Here is just a sampling of additional feedback we've received from the community:

"I was not planning on contributing today except that I listened to "All Things Considered" and the program was done so compassionately and thoughtfully about transgender kids that I had to support that programing. Thank you for making it so."

"I moved to Belgium from Boston 16 years ago, and being able to listen to WBUR has kept me connected to my former home in important ways, most notably as a Massachusetts registered voter. WBUR is my life-line to the American perspectives I need in order to be fully

informed. And although I have come to feel completely at home here in Europe, WBUR is genuinely the number one way I also keep feeling at home in the U.S.! Please convey my thanks to the WBUR team. All those familiar voices are like a big family who moved to Belgium with me. And of course my gratitude extends to the many others we never hear.”

“Hello! I am a new subscriber to a few of WBUR’s newsletters. Being visually impaired there are times when news is not the most accessible. So newsletters are a great way for me to get important news and information. Also, living out here in North Adams, all the way out here in the Berkshires, It’s not always easy to be connected with things that happen outside of my little corner of Massachusetts. I’m enjoying the morning newsletter. I can’t think of anything to recommend other than to remember we’re out here. Massachusetts does not stop at Worcester/Springfield. Smile. Take good care and stay safe in these crazy times.”

“This @WBUR #bosmayordebate is excellent & really feels like a debate (last night felt more like another forum). Great moderating from @tiziana\_dearing & @Adrian\_Walker. #bospoli.”

Assessing the success of our events is determined by attendance (both virtual and in person), post-event surveys, anecdotal audience feedback, and media coverage outside WBUR. Anxiety over Covid and zoom fatigue have kept audience numbers – both in person and virtual -- lower than pre-Covid times. However, there was great interest in the mayoral candidate interview and our Curated Cuisine series (all things food). The program with Misty Copeland the Ballerinas of the 152nd Street Black Ballet Legacy was picked up by local and national news outlets.

**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.**

As noted above, WBUR has a longstanding partnership with El Planeta to collaborate on reporting and expand the reach of each organization's journalism to Spanish and English language populations in the region, a collaboration that continues in 2022. WBUR also released Spanish-language episodes of its critically acclaimed podcast Anything for Selena.

In 2021, the WBUR newsroom conducted multiple audits to analyze the diversity of the sources in its on air and online local coverage in order to understand how we can better reflect the communities we serve. WBUR is part of a regional journalism collaborative, the New England News Collaborative, which has launched an effort to increase the diversity of sources via a collaborative database. Each of these initiatives continue in 2022.

WBUR also provided sustained coverage in 2021 of Boston's unhoused population living in a tent encampment in a neighborhood near to services for mental illness and substance use disorders. In 2022, officials declared the situation a public health and humanitarian crisis. WBUR's long-running commitment to coverage of homelessness, addiction and mental health issues provided the expertise, sourcing and trust with the people most impacted by this issue to provide clear, reliable reporting on the intersecting public health issues, the response from officials, and the impact on this vulnerable community and their needs.

We had a conversation with African American best-selling YA authors Angie Thomas and Tomi Adeyemi; yoga instructor and body positive activist Jessamyn Stanley; Anything For Selena podcast host and creator Maria Garcia; Misty Copeland and the dancers of the 152nd Street Black Ballet Legacy. Panel discussions on New England Hip Hop; racial disparities in STEM. A celebration of 25 emerging artists of color in Boston; performances by musicians of color in our "Sound On" series.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion is intrinsic to all of our programming, inviting speakers who represent all racial, sexual, gender, and cultural backgrounds.

**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.