



WBUR's Annual Local Content and Services Report

2023

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.

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 produce high-quality journalism and enriching experiences that foster understanding, connection and community for an expanding circle of people. Our vision is to become a daily habit for every person in Boston and beyond who seeks to engage with the most consequential issues of our times.

WBUR reaches nearly nine million people across the country every month across all of its journalism. WBUR produces two nationally-distributed programs, On Point and Here & Now, the latter a partnership with NPR. A pioneering podcaster, WBUR produces critically acclaimed shows such as Endless Thread, Anything for Selena, Last Seen, and Circle Round. In 2023 WBUR produced two high-impact limited series podcasts with editorial partners. The first, Violation, a collaboration with The Marshall Project, explores the opaque U.S. parole system through a 1986 murder case. The second, The Gun Machine, produced with The Trace, explains how America was forged by the gun industry. WBUR also produces The Common, a daily local news podcast for the Greater Boston region.

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 255-seat venue, is home to approximately 100 programs a year that convenes the community – in-person and virtually – around important conversations about politics, science, health, education, culture, arts, environment, as well as showcasing Boston artists in performance. Our programming aims to be eclectic, informative and entertaining so that we reach the widest audience possible – not only our most loyal WBUR listeners (who tend to be older and white) but also newer and more diverse audiences who may be new to WBUR. We identify the cultural, political, scientific issues that are most relevant and topical and invite the most important thought leaders to discuss. In addition, we highlight local musicians, chefs, and artists to strengthen their ties to the community.

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 alone. 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 2023, WBUR also forged new editorial partnerships to grow the reach of WBUR's journalism in the Greater Boston community and beyond. We began new collaborations with MassLive, The Springfield Republican, The Associated Press, Grist, Scientific American and The Emancipator. 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.

Our partnership with ProPublica focused on investigative journalism in our region continued in 2023. Together we produced a high-impact series of reports revealing problems with the state-funded housing system in Massachusetts at a time when the state's shelter system was strained to a breaking point. In 2023 we also created a new collaboration with ProPublica and our national program Here and Now to regularly showcase investigative reporting.

WBUR is also a member of the New England News Collaborative, a collection of public media organizations from around New England, which collaborate on coverage and share stories with one another.

In addition to our robust one-off programming, we host an annual weekend-long Children's Podcast Festival, an annual membership appreciation night, and a two-consecutive-night "gala," our biggest fundraiser of the year. We have four monthly series: Curated Cuisine (which features well-known local and national chefs); MOTH StorySlams; Sound On (highlighting local up and coming musicians); Live Podcasts. This year, we started a new series "Field Trips to CitySpace," which brings community together around shared interests. We partner with local organizations to put these events together. For example, a Craft store for "Crafts" night; a gym for a boxing night. Partners included: The MOTH, Rosie's Place, New Hampshire Public Media, The Boston Globe, Boston University Food & Wine Program, and Brookline Booksmith.

We were also the media partners for high profile festivals and conferences where our hosts and reporters served as emcees and moderators: The Boston Book Festival; Independent Film 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.

WBUR launched a massive new multiplatform initiative in 2023 called Field Guide to Boston. The project aims to connect those living in our region to each other, whether they just arrived or have lived here for years. WBUR reporters spoke with more than 100 Bostonians (residents, historians, economists and civic leaders, alike) about their neighborhoods, their loves, struggles, and why they call it home. But that was just the beginning.

Field Guide launched in September of 2023 with more than 20 fully researched, deeply sourced and lovingly curated guides to city neighborhoods, capturing where to eat, where to play, and what makes each corner special. Each guide includes demographic and historical information; clear and useful infographics as well as information sourced from locals on their favorite haunts.

Alongside these neighborhood guides were dives into how to navigate the city: how to get around our somewhat-infuriating public transportation system, how to tackle the four seasons of New England, how to engage in Boston's unique brand of politics and local government, how to navigate our education system, and much more. Anchored by these guides, WBUR produced multiple episodes of WBUR's weekday morning podcast *The Common* on topics from the quirks of Boston's liquor laws to finding home within neighborhood immigrant communities. Many Field Guide stories also aired on WBUR's local broadcast shows *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered* and *Radio Boston*.

In addition to the nearly 200 new discrete posts, audio segments and podcast episodes, the project included a deep dive into the WBUR digital archive to tag, organize and resurface previously published evergreen material that newcomers and established residents alike might find relevant.

WBUR didn't hesitate to explore and illuminate the more challenging aspects of the city's history, including tackling its racist reputation, ties to slavery, painful school busing period and even the Salem witch trials. In addition to publishing several new stories with a practical focus on distilling these complex topics — such as books local historians recommend to understand Boston and how to engage with history in real life around the city — we also took a deep dive into WBUR's digital archive to resurface or build out past stories that showcased the rich context our outlet has long provided on air and online.

Lastly, the project is host to a collection of stories and features that capture the weird and the wonderful of living here. This includes features on our famous accent, how we got our historic Route 20 sign and why candlepin bowling took off in New England.

At the same time, WBUR also launched a Field Guide newsletter targeting those of us who are new to Boston: *The Newcomer's Guide to Boston*, a 10-part newsletter course that tackles everything from our vibrant arts scene, to Boston weather to how to make friends in a famously chilly city. This important resource launched in 2023 but will stay relevant and available for future newcomers for years to come. Much of the material in the newsletter was additionally published to the website for maximum discoverability and ease of sharing.

We hosted multiple in-person events to foster exploration, fun and the ultimate connection for our community. They included a board game night, “speed friending” and a running club, with several more slated through 2024.

It has been gratifying to receive the response — from the more than 170 suggestions we received on what favorite restaurant or venue we should profile next to the responses to our newsletter, where one subscriber wrote “Once again, a BIG thank you for putting out smart, empathetic content. It’s improved the emotional experience of moving in for me, and I think expanded my ability to more meaningfully participate in community-level work in Boston!” Much of this was prompted by qualitative reader feedback we solicited in the form of surveys, social media callouts, email prompts and in-person events. We’re using this information to help shape where we take the project next.

Assessing the success of our events is determined by attendance, post-event surveys, and anecdotal audience feedback. Post-covid we deploy the virtual option for audiences if an event is sold out or it is of community interest (political debates, Town Halls).

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 2023, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2024. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

In 2023 WBUR conducted four community listening sessions in gateway cities in Greater Boston to engage directly with members of our region in small group conversations. These were explicitly off-the-record conversations intended to gather qualitative information to help inform WBUR's editorial teams so they could better align with the needs and interests of our community. We conducted these conversations in predominantly Latino communities with multilingual WBUR journalists offering interviews in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Our first session, conducted in Lynn, was such a success with community members that it ran overtime and at the end of the night attendees were ripping out notepaper to share contact information to stay in touch.

To help spread the word about the sessions, bilingual reporters appeared on El Mundo, Boston's morning show, La Hora del Café, which streams live on Facebook and YouTube. The Chelsea Record, El Rumbo News, and El Planeta all wrote about the sessions.

The listening sessions were broad in scope and covered a wide range of topics. Participants also spoke of wanting more opportunities to connect with their neighbors without a specific event or an agenda. WBUR heard that despite being a community public media organization, it can at times feel unapproachable — on a pedestal. At the same time, the message was one of appreciation for WBUR showing up and listening.

WBUR journalists understand the value of listening sessions to their reporting and the organization as a whole. Already they have inspired an additional listening session in Boston's predominantly Black Mattapan neighborhood focused on equity and education, for which we provided on-site interpretation for Haitian Creole speakers.

Meantime, as noted above, WBUR continues to partner with El Planeta, Boston's Spanish-language news outlet, in which stories are shared and translated to reach broader audiences.

WBUR is also the proud home of ¡Con Salsa!, a five-hour bilingual (English and Spanish) weekly broadcast featuring the very best in Afro-Latin music, spoken word, history and commentary.

DEI is intrinsic to all our event programming: inviting speakers who represent all racial, sexual, gender, and cultural backgrounds and creating programs that address issues important to this community.

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?

As the world of broadcast media continues to adjust to post-pandemic realities, especially those related challenges in securing revenues from corporate partners, the CPB Community Service Grant allowed WBUR to continue its service locally, nationally and beyond. WBUR uses the CPB 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 reach to listeners across the country. Having the stability of this 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 continued 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.