



WBUR's Annual Local Content and Services Report

2024

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, Last Seen, and Circle Round. In 2024 WBUR produced two high-impact limited series podcasts the first, Beyond All Repair, a collaboration with ZSP Media, is a 10-part true crime investigation into a cold case. The second, Postmortem, is a deep dive into the stolen body parts of Harvard Medical School morgue. WBUR also produces The Common, a local news and culture 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. 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 ongoing partnerships 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.

WBUR has 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 Emancipator, Slate, ZSP Media and more. 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. We expanded on our partnership with ProPublica to combine the publication's groundbreaking investigative reporting with On Point's incisive analysis to radio and on-demand audiences. WBUR is also a member of the New England News Collaborative, a collection of public media organizations from around New England as well as NPR, which collaborate on coverage and share stories with one another.

At CitySpace, 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 regular event series including Curated Cuisine (which features well-known local and national chefs); MOTH StorySlams and Ones to Watch featuring up-and-coming artists across an array of genres: dance, comedy, film, theater and more.

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.

Voter concerns were central to WBUR's local and national election coverage. Here & Now's Scott Tong traveled to eastern Kentucky to talk to voters and learn what was most important to them. His reporting explored the history of the region, which went from supporting Democrats to Republicans in a single generation. The three-part series revealed how many people felt ignored or looked down on by elected leaders.

On Point featured election officials from the Democratic and Republican parties who faced death threats as they tried to ensure a free and fair election.

On Morning Edition, Radio Boston and All Things Considered, we regularly spoke with members of Congress and local leaders about national and community issues. Our beat reporters produced enterprising stories about key local issues at stake in the national election, from offshore wind to immigration. After the election, our journalists fanned out into communities across the Commonwealth to understand why people voted the way they did.

To ensure people had the information they needed to cast their ballots, our local newsroom created a comprehensive Massachusetts voter guide. It provided details on everything from voter registration to local and statewide races, including explanatory reporting on each of the five statewide ballot questions. We also co-hosted debates with our editorial partners at WCVB about those questions, and produced short videos breaking down the ballot questions for social media distribution and ease of sharing. People across the state told us they relied on our coverage to inform their decisions, and we saw huge audience interest in our explanatory reporting on wbur.org.

In 2024, we also launched our Mass. Politics newsletter, which provided concise, clear information about the election with links to deeper reporting. We saw sustained, double-digit month-over-month audience growth in the lead up to the election, revealing the hunger for trustworthy information. Here is just some of the feedback we received from readers of the newsletter:

- "Thanks for making my inbox a better place with your informative and engaging newsletter."
- "Your newsletter is a constant reminder of the importance of lifelong learning. Thank you"
- "I just wanted to drop a note and say thank you for your excellent newsletter."

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 2024, WBUR conducted community listening sessions 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 the diverse communities of Lowell and Framingham, providing translators in Spanish, Portuguese and Khmer. To help spread the word about the sessions, WBUR placed advertisements in community news outlets. The listening sessions were specifically designed around education, but covered a wide range of topics.

In 2024, WBUR launched a Community Engagement Task Force to advance WBUR's presence in local neighborhoods and at community gatherings. The group will work to prioritize the events, consider community partners, develop event submission processes, design promotional strategies, and standardize 'field kits' for community events.

Meantime, as noted above, WBUR continues to collaborate with El Planeta, Boston's Spanish-language news outlet, in which stories are shared and translated to reach broader audiences. WBUR stories also occasionally appear translated into Portuguese in the local news outlet the Brazilian Times. 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.

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 news institutions seek to adapt to the changing macro forces in our industry, 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, climate and local government, 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.