

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

 **wbur**

***KNOWING.*
UNDERSTANDING.
wbur**



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.

John F. Kennedy, then a U.S. senator, in a 1951 interview with WBUR.
(Boston University Photography)



A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

2025 is upon us. It was 75 years ago, this year, that WBUR first went on the air. It was the year the Korean War began; President Truman authorized the development of the hydrogen bomb; and Senator Joseph McCarthy began spreading fear that people with communist sympathies were lurking in our midst. It was the same year that “Peanuts” debuted — Charles M. Schulz’s iconic comic strip. His main character was Charlie Brown. A very anxious little boy.

Looking back, one realizes that life wasn’t so simple then, either. But *our* world at WBUR certainly was. On March 1, 1950 — the day we first went on the air — WBUR was just a 400-watt non-commercial educational radio station. Some say the signal got staticky when the wind blew. Today, WBUR is a world-class editorial enterprise. We reach millions of people in Boston and beyond. On air, locally and nationally, online at wbur.org, in newsletters, on demand with a slate of popular podcasts, and on stage at CitySpace at the Lavine Broadcast Center.

While we’ve evolved a lot, public service has always been at the heart of what we do. We believe in the power of journalism to foster understanding, connection and community. Our job is to tell the truth and to tell it well. And beyond reporting the news, there is something about the intimacy and the immediacy of audio — an old-fashioned medium — that reminds us of our shared humanity. So crucial in these polarized times.

Perhaps you noticed our new look in this year’s annual report. We’ve shined up our autumnal gold for a brighter hue. We hope it’s inviting and perhaps optimistic.

And our new logo image — the WBUR Viewfinder — encapsulates the role we play. You can see it on the top corner of this page. WBUR helps life come into focus and bring what’s confusing into view. The square represents the solid facts at our foundation. The circle is the shape we bring to each story. It’s both head and heart. Science and art. A tool to find understanding and perspective.

I hope you see that reflected in the following pages, as we try to capture the breadth and depth of our coverage in 2024.

With appreciation,



Margaret Low
Chief Executive Officer

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Jayson Tatum hoists the NBA Finals trophy during the Celtics championship parade in Boston June 21, 2024. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

OUR JOB IS TO TELL THE TRUTH AND TO TELL IT WELL.

We ask questions about what's happening in our community. We find the context. We ask why. And why not.

ELECTION 2024

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. People across the state told us they relied on our coverage to inform their decisions.

Beyond our voter guide, people turned to 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.

OUR COMMUNITY

Every day, we report on what's unfolding in our region. This year it ranged from a crisis in community medical care to political strife on college campuses, extreme weather, the solar eclipse and the Celtics championship duck boat parade.

"I believe WBUR keeps me in touch with a community of thoughtful, curious people."
— Gillian A.

When we reported on the Steward Health Care crisis and ultimate bankruptcy, we examined what led to the problems in the first place, and dug into the hospital system's secrecy around its finances. Our reporting focused on how the turmoil affected both patients and staff, notably in Ayer and Dorchester where two locations permanently closed.

We were the first to report on the state's family shelter system — which has been strained as more migrant families have come to the Bay State over the last few years. Our 2023 reporting on the systemic challenges and the plight of families with no place to call home won national and regional awards. We stayed on the story throughout 2024. With support from the Pulitzer Center we produced an in-depth narrative series following one family's journey to Massachusetts and their challenging search for housing.



Protesters outside the Executive Office at the Massachusetts State House call on Governor Maura Healey to reconsider new restrictions to the family shelter system. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

LOCAL JOURNALISM CAN STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES.

Research shows a strong connection between access to local news and civic engagement. We know that without high-quality journalism, communities come untethered. Voting rates decline. Government is less responsive and more wasteful when no one is keeping a watchful eye. People feel a lack of connection to one another and misinformation and disinformation flourish. Local journalism helps counter those trends and allows us to feel more connected to one another.

ACCOUNTABILITY

As the state faces more intense and frequent storms due to climate change, WBUR uncovered inadequate preparation for the increasing risk of a large-scale chemical spill. The threat comes from seafood processing plants near the Massachusetts coast. Independent federal regulators have urged companies to keep backup power generators, but there are no federal laws requiring it. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of residents who live near these plants are largely unaware.

At the same time, with the increasingly intense rainstorms, New England's aging sewer systems are often overwhelmed. That means sewage overflows into local waterways. While municipalities are required to report these events, each one does it differently. WBUR created a real-time map to help people see if their local water is safe.

SOLUTIONS

It's not enough to reveal problems. It's important to look at ways to make things better. We believe incorporating solutions helps combat news fatigue and feelings of despair.

This year, *Here & Now* launched an ongoing series called "Building Better Mental Health: Advice From Experts." This year's stories included: does everyone need therapy, why depression makes daily tasks so hard and how to tell if it's typical teenage behavior or a more serious mental health issue.

Another series from *Here & Now*, "Reverse Course," explores solutions to climate change. This year's installments included: a look at cleaning up pollution in aviation, off-the-grid homes made with old tires and the arrival of solar power to coal country.

CONNECTION

At WBUR, we bring people together to talk about the most pressing issues of our time — leaders, newsmakers, artists and big thinkers and doers.

In our events venue, CitySpace at The Lavine Broadcast Center, our conversations take place on stage and many are then shared on-air with our listening audience. 2024 highlights include historian Heather Cox Richardson talking about the future of American democracy, former NPR host Michele Norris on how Americans talk about race, and filmmaker Werner Herzog reflecting on his life.

Beyond high-profile conversations, WBUR hosts The Moth StorySlams, our monthly series "Curated Cuisine", and "Sound On", our concert series profiling rising local musicians. Importantly, CitySpace has become a "third place" in our community: a space outside of work or home where people can gather together.

NEWS FELLOWS

Fellowship programs are vital to developing the next generation of journalists. These fellows bring new ideas and perspectives into our newsroom and help inform coverage decisions. They are also helping us build newsrooms that more accurately represent our community.

Thanks to individual and institutional philanthropy efforts, six early career journalists joined WBUR in 2024 — to work on everything from investigative reporting to arts & culture coverage.



A man uses a power drill to fasten an array frame together during a solar installation course at the Action for Boston Community Development in Boston. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

WE BRING YOU MORE DEPTH AND NUANCE.

We commit time to researching, reporting and fact-checking our stories. We ask questions and search for answers. We provide context for every story we tell.

DEPTH

Sometimes we explore the present-day implications of our history. We worked in partnership with The Emancipator, a digital magazine that reimagines abolitionist newspapers for a new day, to examine the legacy of court-ordered busing to desegregate schools in Boston. Our series examined why Boston schools are now more segregated than they were 30 years ago, and what could be done to create more equitable schools that serve all students well.

Other times, we explore our future. Among the deep dives *On Point* took this year was its series “Elements of Energy.” The five episodes examined the chemical elements needed to produce clean energy. We looked around the world at the human and environmental toll and trade-offs of mining for lithium, copper, cobalt and nickel. To cap the series, we dug into whether the U.S. could meet its ambitious climate targets.

“My life would be less well-informed and less rich without WBUR.” — Susan M.

NUANCE

Two WBUR podcasts this year focused on true crimes, with sensitivity and sophistication. The longform nature of podcasts allows us the time and space to report deeply, craft captivating narratives and reveal hidden truths and untold stories.

Last Seen: Postmortem goes behind the headlines of the bodies stolen from Harvard Medical School and into the world of buyers and sellers of human remains. The series examined what went wrong and ponders questions like: how we should treat the dead and who gets to decide?

Beyond All Repair digs into the unsolved murder of Marlyne Johnson in 2002. It is an exquisite and painful portrait of a family torn apart — and pitted against one another in the aftermath of this tragedy.

ETHICS

WBUR journalists have always taken great care to thoroughly check and verify sources of information. Generative AI will not change that. To navigate concerns around generative AI, we created a new set of guidelines, drawing from WBUR’s existing Ethical Guidelines. Our goal is to be as accurate, transparent and clear as possible.

It can be increasingly difficult to tell the difference between images and sounds recorded in real life from those created by generative artificial intelligence. The rapidly evolving technology can make it hard for people to know what and whom to trust. If we do choose to use generative AI, we will clearly describe and explain its use.



Kids sit on a cannon in front of the Vermont Statehouse in Montpelier, Vermont, on April 8, 2024. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

WBUR IS IN OUR COMMUNITY.

We live where we report. Our work is accessible to everyone — without a subscription. We work every day to win your trust and to ensure our reporting reflects the communities we serve.

We take special care to connect with people who don't see themselves or their stories in other news coverage.

STORYTELLING

Our children's storytelling podcast, *Circle Round*, is downloaded over one million times each month and continues to draw young fans and their grownups to packed venues. CitySpace produced a two-day children's podcast festival again in 2024, bringing together performances and storytelling for all ages. Both days were filled with creativity and laughter.

Beyond WBUR, the *Circle Round* team performed live on stages across the country — from Seattle to Minneapolis to New York City. All told, more than 6,000 people enjoyed the experience at 10 sold-out shows.

VOICES

Cognoscenti is WBUR's ideas and opinion section, where we explore the issues and life experiences that bind us.

In 2024, Cognoscenti published 250 original essays. Thousands of subscribers read our weekly newsletter on Sunday mornings. Beyond the page, Cognoscenti produced rich audio narratives for WBUR's *Morning Edition* and for *Here & Now*. One piece captured the musical talents of Boston Mayor Michelle Wu. Another revealed how plunging into cold water during a difficult period transformed how one woman saw herself.

Cognoscenti also presents multimedia projects, including a video with running influencer Laura Green about connecting through humor. Another featured award-winning chef Ana Sortun and what makes a great meal.

Sharing deeply personal stories adds richness to our lives and a deeper understanding of ourselves and one another.

PARTNERSHIPS

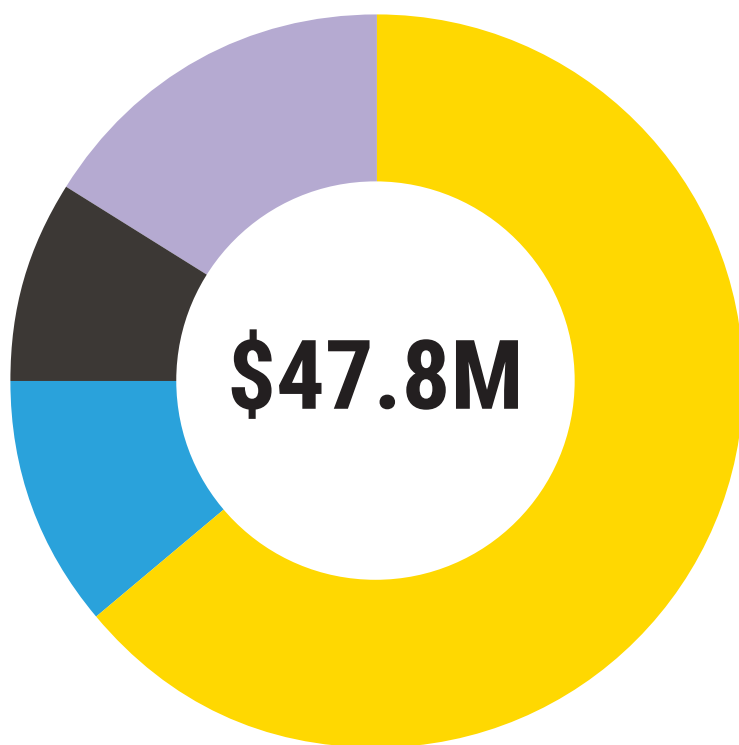
The stories from our community can resonate across the country. That's why we've partnered with nearly two dozen highly regarded news organizations. These partnerships not only expand our reach, they also add subject matter expertise and editorial heft to the work that WBUR produces.

Some of our long-standing partnerships include ProPublica, The Washington Post, the Marshall Project, Grist, New England News Collaborative, WCVB, the Dorchester Reporter and the Boston-based Spanish language newspaper El Planeta, which partners on reporting projects and translates select WBUR stories into Spanish.

We collaborated with The Brazilian Times in Somerville to translate our story on inhalers and climate change into Portuguese.

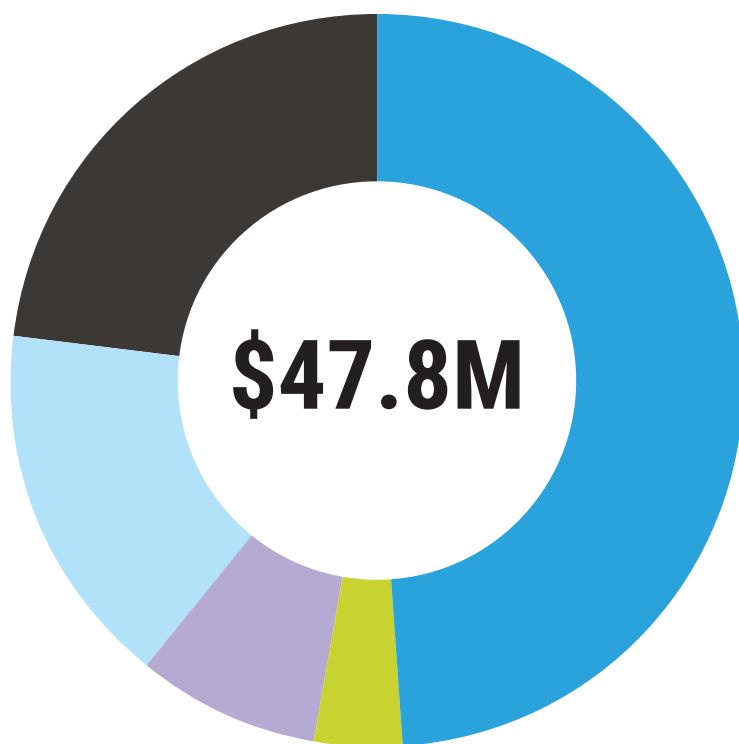
We've added new partnerships with The Emancipator and Scientific American. The joint reporting with the science magazine examined septic pollution in Cape Cod waters. We explained how wastewater ended up in the bays and ponds and what could be done to clean it up.

The two-part series was heard on air and published on wbur.org and Scientific American, tapping into the magazine's monthly global audience of 10 million people. The package also included a short documentary film and a short-run podcast.



FY24 Expenses

- Programming 64%
- Admin Support 16%
- Business Partnerships 9%
- Fundraising 11%



FY24 Revenue

- Individual Contributions 49%
- Business Partnerships 23%
- Other 16%*
- Organizational Reserves 8%
- Grants 4%

*Other includes: CitySpace tickets & rentals, syndication and additional contracts

WBUR's fiscal year runs from July through June. This chart summarizes the financial picture from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

OUR JOURNALISM IS STRONG AND OUR AUDIENCE IS GROWING STEADILY.

Like the most beloved institutions in Boston — from the symphony to the great museums and hospitals — WBUR is part of the essential fabric of this brilliant, beautiful town. WBUR has made this a stronger, more vibrant city and region for 75 years and we plan to serve the public for another 75. At least!

With the challenging economics of journalism, WBUR is a leaner organization than we were a year ago. At the same time, our journalism is more ambitious than ever and we have a clear-eyed focus on the future.

Our fundamentals are strong. We have one of the strongest local newsrooms in America and have earned high levels of public trust. We are a public media leader in digital journalism and consistently receive national recognition from our peers for our digital storytelling, as you'll see in the next pages. We reach millions of people across the country with our two nationally syndicated shows — in fact, we produce more national news programming than any other public radio organization in the country.

“Between the news, the local programming, and wonderful assortment of national shows — one cannot ask for a more reliable, informative and engaging source for in-depth reporting and intelligent entertainment.” — Steve K.

With an eye to the future, we're modernizing WBUR's technology behind the scenes in order to provide a more curated experience for our readers and listeners. Through the support of generous donors, the WBUR Board of Directors and the Knight Foundation, we have raised more than \$9 million to support this digital transformation, which we call The Catapult Initiative.

We're bringing in new revenue through CitySpace Productions, our custom podcast production company, and through our event rental business.

We have continued — and we will continue — to count on our Members. Individual contributions covered just about half of WBUR's expenses last year. This includes your membership donations, your used cars and generous gifts that donors left in their wills. Thank you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A NEW VOICE AND A NEW TEAM

Fall 2024 began with a new but familiar voice on WBUR's *Morning Edition*. Tiziana Dearing stepped up to host the show in September, after spending five years behind the mic on *Radio Boston* where she and the team developed strong relationships with elected officials and community leaders.

Dearing is a superb journalist and a virtuoso interviewer who is deeply connected to our community. She has lived in the Boston area for 30 years. Dearing came to journalism after a career that spanned academia, nonprofits and for-profit management consulting. Now she's the voice many people wake up to as they look to understand what's going on in their neighborhood and the world.

At the end of 2024, we bid farewell to *Radio Boston* after nearly 15 years as a daily show. We know many listeners are sad to see the show come to an end. And yet, while *Radio Boston* as an hour-long program has sunset, our local news mission remains the same. In fact, we're stepping up our game. We're deploying the show team and our resources to make sure that the best local journalism we produce is integrated more deeply into everything we do across the day, on-air and online. No matter where and when you tune in, you will get WBUR's signature high-quality coverage.



THE WBUR FESTIVAL

SAVE THE DATE: MAY 29-31

To celebrate our history and community, we're celebrating WBUR's 75th birthday with a big bash for the city we love. The first-ever WBUR Festival will be a convergence of fascinating people grappling with the most consequential issues of our time. We'll have musical performances, a lively street fair and a KidsStage, too. We hope to see you there.

WE PRODUCE HIGH-QUALITY WORK THAT HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED AS BEST IN CLASS BY OUR PEERS.

WBUR

2024 Edward R. Murrow Awards:
Winner, Overall Excellence, Region 10

FIELD GUIDE TO BOSTON

2024 Edward R. Murrow Awards:
Winner, Digital, National
2024 PMJA Awards:
Second Place, Multimedia, Division E

WHY A MOM TURNED TO SUPERVISING ILLEGAL DRUG USE AT HER HOME

2024 PMJA Awards:
*First Place, National News Coverage
— All Divisions*
2024 Gracie Awards:
Winner, News Feature
90th National Headliner Awards:
First Place, News Series — Broadcast
2024 Online Journalism Awards:
Finalist, Feature

EMPTY PUBLIC HOUSING

90th National Headliner Awards:
First Place, News Series — Radio Stations
2024 Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting:
Semi-finalist

THE GUN MACHINE

2024 Edward R. Murrow Awards:
Winner, Podcast, National
2024 Online Journalism Awards:
*Finalist, Excellence in Audio Digital Storytelling
— Limited Series*

SEEKING SHELTER

2024 Edward R. Murrow Awards:
Winner, Continuing Coverage, National

VIOLATION

90th National Headliner Awards:
*Second Place, Narrative podcast focused
on a single incident, person or time*

DEEP SEA VESSEL DISAPPEARS

90th National Headliner Awards:
Third Place, Breaking News or Continuing Coverage

PFAS CHEMICALS

2024 PMJA Awards:
First Place, Series — Division E

MANY SCIENTISTS DON'T WANT TO TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE. HERE'S WHY.

2024 Science in Society Journalism Awards:
Finalist, Commentary

THESE BOSTON MARATHON MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS RESPONDED TO THE BOMBINGS — THEN HEALED EACH OTHER

2024 Edward R. Murrow Awards:
Winner, Feature Reporting, Region 10

AS BOSTON POLICE PREPARE TO REMOVE 'MASS. AND CASS' ENCAMPMENT, SOME WONDER WHAT COMES NEXT

2024 Edward R. Murrow Awards:
Winner, Hard News, Region 10

ON POINT: THE BORDER CRISIS ARRIVES IN CHICAGO

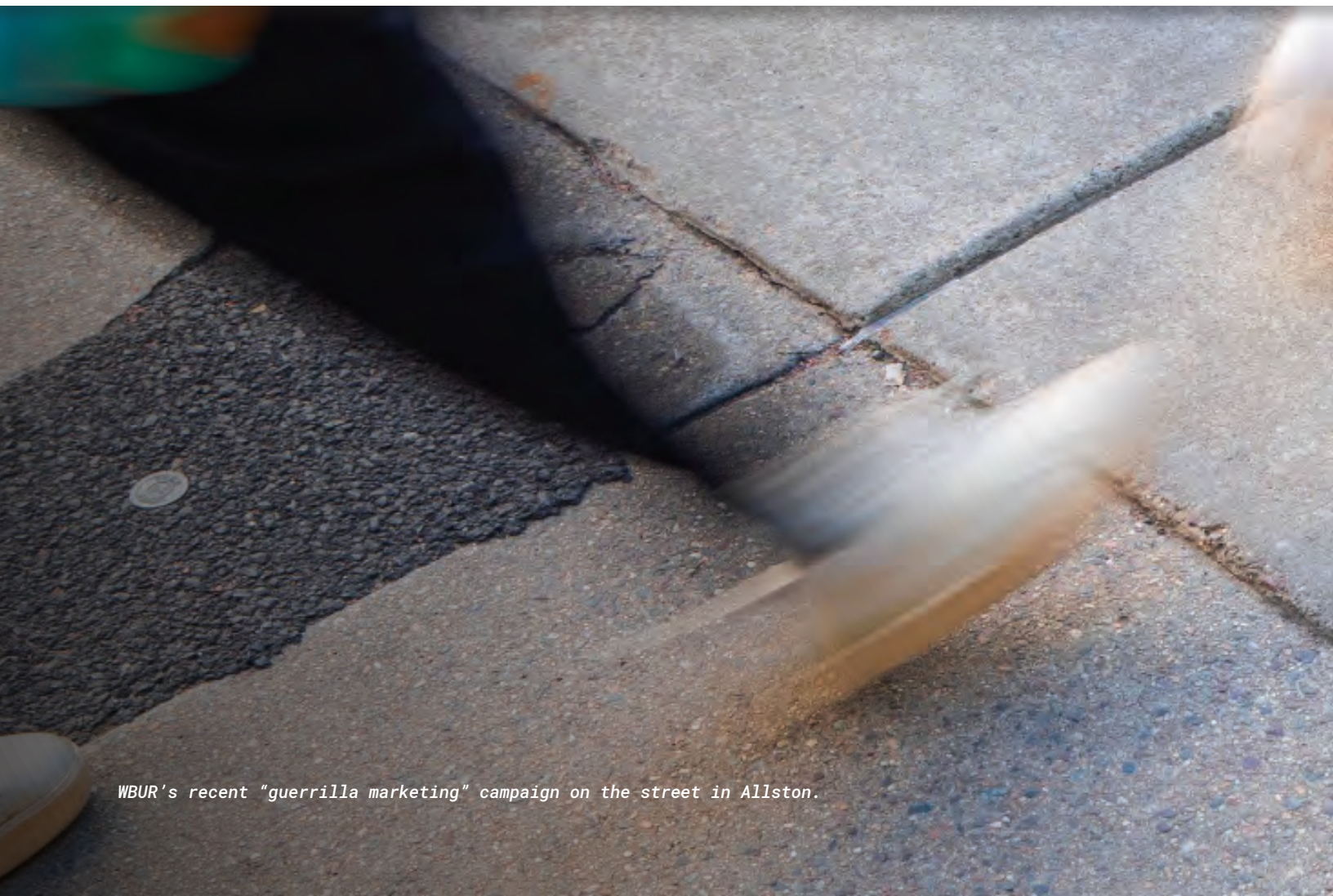
2024 Edward R. Murrow Awards:
Winner, News Documentary, Region 10

BEYOND ALL REPAIR

Signal Awards:
Silver — Best Host, Limited Series or Special
*Silver — Best Original Score / Music,
Limited Series or Special*

THE LION'S WHISKER: SISTER AND BROTHER TAKE ON A CHALLENGE TOGETHER

2024 Nautilus Winners:
*Gold Winner, Large Press Children's Picture
Books / Fiction Ages 2- 6 Years*



WBUR's recent "guerrilla marketing" campaign on the street in Allston.