The Public's Radio provides quality journalism and compelling storytelling that informs, educates, and inspires our shared community.

As a nonprofit, local journalism institution, The Public's Radio dedicates the most significant part of its budget in serving the people of Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. This includes local bureaus in Newport, Westerly and in New Bedford, MA. We have an investigative desk, health desk and political desk all dedicated to regional coverage as well. We do this because it is only through a local presence that we can find and share the stories that directly affect the people that live here.

In 2020, The Public's Radio served our community through multiple platforms, with dedicated COVID-19 resources and airing of the governor’s daily briefings, as well as long-form stories surrounding the impact of the pandemic on our region. We partnered with area nonprofits to find ways to bring the arts to a locked-down audience. We conducted socially distant conversations surrounding a divisive election and racial injustice. We continued to identify underserved communities and ensure that their stories were being told as well.

The Public's Radio serves a growing, diverse audience in southern New England. We embrace the requirement that we assist citizens in verifying what we report, that we give a marker to the topic in its historical, evolutionary context, and analyze the future paths and potential solutions that the topic might generate. In short, we do more than describe local topics, events, accomplishments, and challenges—we account for them. We transfer their meaning.

“In the most basic sense, our public media service is not about what we want to say, but what is being said around us in our community.”

- Torey Malatia, President, CEO & General Manager of The Public’s Radio
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.

The goals are to inform and educate our audience, inspire community and ensure we address issues that are important to everyone in our coverage area. Geographic, socio-economic and ethnic diversity are important in all the work that we do. Our local journalism includes daily news coverage of major issues, including the pandemic, racial equity and the political landscape. It includes multi-platform enterprise reporting in our broadcast and digital services. We engage with the community through direct on air and online invitations to contribute feedback and story ideas. In December, our Community Advisory Board held a digital public forum to solicit feedback from the community on programming and issues important to the region. This was shared with senior editorial staff, who were also present at the event. We also reach out through social media, including Facebook, Twitter and our daily email newsletter, The Daily Catch. Our arts and culture commitment continued strong throughout 2020, even as our resources were shifted to cover the national health emergency and sociopolitical issues that framed the election.

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.

The Public’s Radio’s key partnerships were with: University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, The New England News Collaborative, The Boston Globe, Rhode Island PBS, The Gamm Theatre, The Providence Athenaeum, and Brown University’s Center for Environment and Society, with whom we are co-producing a podcast series called, “Possibly” about environmental sustainability. The Public’s Radio holds several public forums a year with the non-profit Providence Athenaeum. In 2020, because of the pandemic, that was reduced to one: a forum last fall about the upcoming election. We also partnered on a sold-out community event on the wind industry with the “Possibly” team from Brown University. In December, through a partnership with The Gamm Theatre, we co-produced a holiday production of “It’s A Wonderful Life”, in a community service to bring theater to audiences through the airwaves in lieu of in-person theater experience.
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.

In this year, our production of local content grew significantly, with the urgent need for coverage of the unfolding pandemic in the spring, through the sociopolitical unrest in the summer and into the political coverage of the 2020 presidential election. We upgraded our website, using a subdomain to create pages that not only displayed our content, but invited audience testimonials and stories related to the news. In December, we built out an art gallery to share artists’ work reflecting and interpreting the significant events of the year. All of that increased audience engagement in an interactive way that will become part of our work going forward. In addition, we completed a second season of our award-winning podcast series Mosaic, focusing on stories by immigrants around the immigration experience and identity. In short, our commitment to providing essential news in a time of crisis grew and through new digital tools we were able to provide a space for the community to receive and share vital information. Our special coronavirus updates page continues to trend as one of our most viewed pages on our website, providing crucial information on pandemic cases, deaths, testing and now vaccine distribution, in addition to a growing list of community resources. At a time when the pandemic also hit hard in the journalism community, resulting in local, state and national layoffs and downsizings of news organizations, The Public’s Radio averted layoffs, added a bureau reporter in Newport and increased its offerings of news and information to the community.

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.

In 2020, as the world was rocked by racial protests and demonstrations over racial inequity, the entire news staff at The Public’s Radio was involved in coverage of a story that called attention not only to police injustice and long-standing systemic racism in our country, but to the deep need for equity and inclusion in our newsrooms. This led to internal conversations about diversity in our coverage, our sourcing and our staffing. As well, it spurred conversations with key stakeholders in the Black and Hispanic communities that we believe will strengthen our relationships, our coverage and the reflection of diversity in all that we do. One tangible result is a commitment to developing metrics for measuring content and source diversity, which we are working on in 2021 to begin a more thorough internal accounting of the efforts to increase diversity in our journalism.
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?

CPB funding is critical to The Public’s Radio as we grow and strengthen our commitment to local journalism at a time when the work has never been more important. 2020 was a difficult year, financially, for journalism in general. The Public’s Radio was no exception, as the pandemic affected underwriting revenue streams and membership support in the early months. Despite that, the station was able to avert cutbacks in its news staff. The steady support of CPB is critical to that financial model. Because of the work we did in 2020, supported by CPB, we increased our digital audience by 50 percent and held steady, in spite of national downward trends early in the pandemic, with our broadcast audience. We’ve also continued to add new members who support The Public’s Radio. Three truncated on-air drives, in the summer and late fall, exceeded revenue goals, an indicator of the importance of our services in a time of great uncertainty with an urgent community need for information and analysis about the events unfolding throughout the year. CPB funding provides a steady base of support upon which we continue to build.