

Current

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NPR, APMG target executive pay in first rounds of budget cuts

BY TYLER FALK

Leaders of NPR and American Public Media Group moved quickly to reduce spending last month as they dealt with budget deficits triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Both organizations are reacting to steep declines in underwriting and pressures to provide financial relief to stations that carry their programs. NPR notified stations April 17 that it will suspend planned increases in its fees for core services next fiscal year.

The first round of belt-tightening started last month with reductions in executive compensation at NPR and APMG.

As of this week, members of NPR's SAG-AFTRA union will take cuts to their



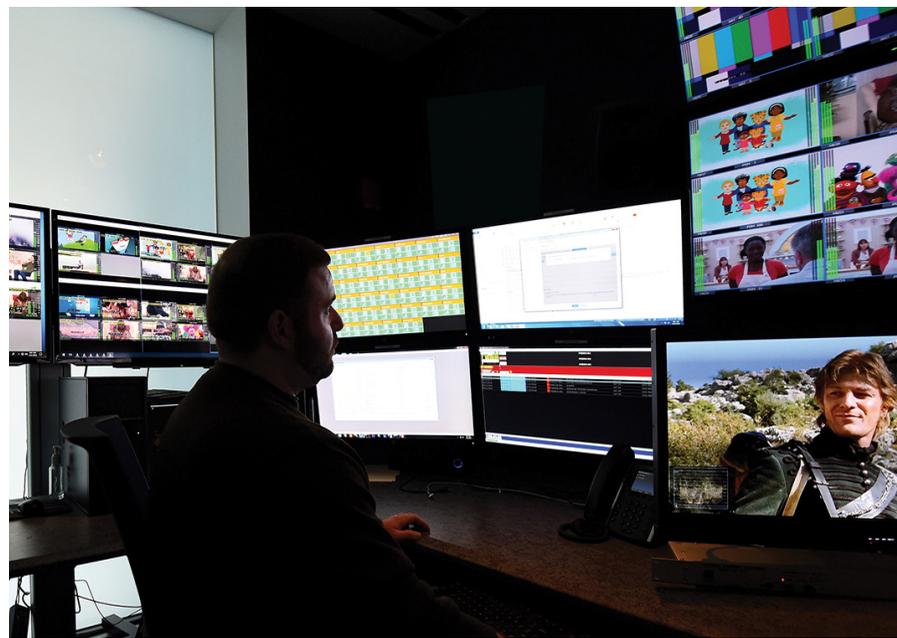
Lansing

pay and retirement benefits. The bargaining unit approved an agreement to temporarily reduce compensation through September 30, the end of NPR's fiscal year. SAG-AFTRA members also

agreed to extend a contract that was set to expire this summer.

NPR's leadership anticipates a combined budget deficit of \$30 million to \$40 million through next fiscal year, CEO John Lansing told staff in an April 17 memo. "This is going to be a very tough year financially for NPR. Our budget is taking a significant hit because of the business lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic." Management's goal is to identify cost savings of between \$16 million to \$25 million, he said.

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A PMM operator works in the network operations center. (Photo: WGBH)

Public Media Group buys stake in PMM, plans to upgrade cloud-based capabilities

BY SCOTT FYBUSH

Five years after to launch a centralized media management and content distribution service for public TV stations, Boston's WGBH is selling its half of Public Media Management to Boulder, Colo.-based Public Media Group.

Stacey Decker, former chief technology officer for WGBH, left Boston in July 2019 but remained CTO of PMM, working remotely from a new office in Colorado. He has been named president of PMM and CTO of PMG, giving him oversight over not only PMM's content distribution but also the ATSC 3.0 single-frequency network (SFN) systems that have been PMG's core business since it was founded a year ago.

PMG President Erik Langner said Decker was the key to the purchase.

"His interest in the future [ATSC 3.0] platform and the convergence of how joint master control and the cloud and 3.0

and single-frequency networks can work in unison to drive far greater service and opportunities" motivated PMG's interest in acquiring PMM, Langner said.

"We're really focused on the question of what are the platforms that are going to be needed to help drive the entire industry forward, given just the incredible scale

that's going to be required for the public broadcasting community to effectively compete in this IP-based ecosystem," he said.

WGBH's decision to sell its interest in PMM is part of a pattern in which the Boston-based public media giant has incubated business ventures and spun them off, said Decker.

"I think there's been a give and take in this relationship that has been beneficial for both Sony and PMM," said Decker, who emphasized that his relationship with WGBH remains close.



Decker

Continued on page 22

Stations respond to quickening 'drumbeat' of local mental health needs



Anne Hallward records an interview for Safe Space Radio. (Photo: Gabe Grabin)

BY JULIE HALPERT

Stations and producers who specialize in producing mental health coverage view their work as a crucial community service for audiences who are struggling and need support.

The time and attention required to deliver deep, nuanced reporting and programming on topics that many people hesitate to talk about — depression, anxiety, suicide — require a special commitment by a station or producer and its funders.

The coronavirus lockdown elevated the need for more reporting on how to cope with its mental health effects, including social isolation, stress and grief. Among the handful of local stations and programs already covering mental health, some were able to respond quickly to the pandemic. Others had to rethink how to balance the demands for breaking-news reporting with initiatives that prioritized long-form treatment or a different focus.

"We've been hearing the drumbeat around mental health and suicide in our community," said Rich Homberg, president of Detroit Public TV, one of several public stations that have been producing content on mental health since 2018. "Suicides are on the rise, and COVID will only increase these challenges."

Anne Hallward, a psychiatrist, medical educator and founder of the media nonprofit Safe Space Radio, said the increased interest in mental health coverage comes at a pivotal time, since social isolation is a risk factor for mental illness. Hallward's team is working on a series of national radio specials for this fall that seek to help reduce feelings of isolation amplified by COVID-19.

"It's frightening, and yet there is an opportunity to sense the connection we have with each other," Hallward said.

At WHYI in Philadelphia, Maiken Scott began reporting on mental health for the radio newsroom in 2008. She's now host and

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Viewers flock to pubTV for news, foodie shows during lockdown

Spike in *NewsHour* came from viewers tuning in more frequently

BY JUDITH LEROY, DAVID LEROY AND CRAIG REED

The coronavirus rocked our world, and it's really not appropriate to talk about silver linings — except for the occasional description of a lifestyle change we'd like to continue, or end, post-plague.

But in watching TV usage soar in the early days of the pandemic, many media observers grudgingly conceded that COVID-19 has been good for media consumption. With no drivetime during the current lockdown, radio took a hit, but TV viewing rose.

The lockdown resulted in large viewing increases for television news programming, which media researchers quoted as high as 19% for broadcast and 73% for cable. Ratings for network and cable entertainment series increased too, as did streaming of TV shows. In the first three weeks of March, streaming rose 85% over the previous year. Public TV saw gains too, especially during early fringe and weekend dayparts.

As the media world changed, TRAC Media began issuing weekly "Pandemic Scorecards" to provide television consumption and viewing data to station clients. Beginning on March 15 (post-pledge), the scorecards compared that week and each of the following four (through April 12–18) to the equivalent weeks in 2019 in the 56 metered markets. We watched as homes using TV (HUTs) increased significantly above the same period in 2019.



(Photo: Goran Petric/Shutterstock)

While all daypart HUTs increased, weekday daytime (6 a.m.–5 p.m. ET Monday–Friday) and early fringe (5–8 p.m. ET Monday–Friday) made the largest gains. More people were home to watch during both dayparts. In early fringe, people who were not commuting wanted to watch the latest virus news. By the week of April 5–11, HUT increases began plateauing in most markets.

Rating increases followed the HUT gains. Broadcast and cable networks saw substantial rating increases, and so did public television. How well did PTV take advantage of the increased HUTs? Our graph compares HUT and gross ratings point (GRPs) increases in pandemic weeks to pre-pandemic ratings from

February. Public TV took advantage of HUT growth in some dayparts better than others.

A word of caution here: Our narrative and graphs deal with averages from the 56 markets, but there were significant local differences. Markets and stations may vary from the norm in good times and bad.

PTV's early fringe viewing gains were particularly impressive, significantly outperforming HUT increases. Early fringe viewing rose 26% above February 2020. Viewership of BBC News programs and local shows increased, but the primary stimulus for growth was *PBS NewsHour*, rising 33% from a 0.70 to a 0.93 rating.

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Letter from the executive director

Everybody's doing it. Well, maybe not everybody. But Current is doing it...and it feels great!

What the heck am I talking about? Pivoting and partnering.

Current has joined forces with Greater Public, Public Media Journalists Association, Public Radio Program Directors Association, and Local that Works founder Mark Fuerst on "Building Resilience," a new webinar series. It focuses on how public media is stretching and strengthening during this pandemic, and creates a virtual space to connect with peers facing the same predicaments.

I'm sure many of you miss your conference buddies, your colleagues and the office where you spent more of your waking hours than at home. For now, we're Zoombies, and we must find purpose and camaraderie in online connections. We are building resilience.

Each of the organizations in this pop-up partnership could have launched its own webinar series. Leaders of these four groups have extensive experience in public broadcasting and bring deep knowledge to the table. But solo flying is not as practical, effective or fun. Not that

anyone is really having fun under house arrest, but our planning meetings have been productive and joyful. Together, we are stretching and strengthening our service to you.

In our first webinar, on May 6, called "All Hands on Deck," Debbie Hiott, GM of KUT in Austin, Texas, and Nico Leone, new CEO of KERA in Dallas, shared how they mobilized, rallied and redeployed their teams to ensure staff safety and continuity of broadcast service to meet the information needs of their communities.

These station leaders shared how the pandemic transformed their management strategies, including for remote work, ramped-up news operations and automation. They talked about how they are communicating with employees, members and audiences. They also addressed the serious financial impacts their stations face from the economic fallout of COVID-19. It was an hour of information and inspiration.

To tap into the zeitgeist of our shared new normal, Current and our partners

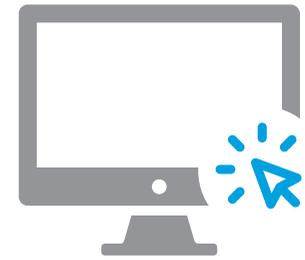
plan to offer two webinars each month. We hope that's enough to keep you engaged without overwhelming you with obligation. The next one, scheduled for May 19, will spotlight small stations that are pushing out of their comfort zones and shining as a result.



Where are we finding ideas for our topics? From your submissions to Current's growing database of pubmedia coronavirus initiatives (check it out!), and your emails that let us know what your station is doing *right now*.

In recent years, collaboration has been the mantra of the media business. With support from CPB, stations have been coming together to produce content most could not pull off as well alone. Stations have partnered with other organizations in their communities to gain authenticity and engage new and diverse audiences.

Collaboration is work, and partnerships work best when everyone has an equal voice and an equal stake, even though they may not have equal resources. Together, we are building resilience, and we invite you to join us on this journey. 🗣️



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Quick Takes

Advocates seek additional \$175M in emergency relief funds for CPB

A co-chair of Congress' Public Broadcasting Caucus said in a statement May 7 that there's bipartisan support in the House and Senate to provide an additional \$175 million in emergency relief funds to CPB.

While Congress debates what can and should be included in the next stimulus package, CPB is seeking funds to help stations survive losses in state and university funding, and downturns in underwriting caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), one of four co-chairs of the caucus, said in the statement that negotiations for additional funds are ongoing, "and we continue to inform our colleagues on all the incredible work their local stations are doing."

CPB requested \$250 million in stabilizing funds in March. The House sought \$300 million.

During a CPB board meeting April 27, Blumenauer said members of the House were "bitterly disappointed" that CPB did not receive the \$300 million.

Congress ultimately approved \$75 million in funds for CPB in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act signed by President Trump in March. CPB distributed the federal money last month by evenly splitting the funds between public TV and radio. In mid-April, CPB requested the addi-

tional \$175 million withheld from its earlier request.

During the meeting, CPB President Pat Harrison said the corporation has funded valuable programming including at-home learning services, daily news shows, *America Amplified* and a StoryCorps initiative connecting young people and the elderly.

America's Public Television Stations is separately asking lawmakers for increased federal and state funding, said APTS officials, as well as support for a FEMA grant program that could be added to funds reserved for infrastructure.

"This is a big interruption," APTS President Pat Butler said of the coronavirus pandemic. "We don't know the depth of it or the severity of it right now, but we're hopeful" that APTS' funding requests will be approved, he said.

CPB board votes to boost CSG pool with funds from Healthy Network Initiative

CPB's board of directors voted unanimously May 5 to postpone distributing funds from its Healthy Network Initiative, a program intended to help public TV stations streamline their operations, reduce infrastructure and increase services.

Board members voted to delay the initiative for one year. CPB had previously set aside \$1 million to support grantees' use of data to improve audience service. The funds were to

be distributed to stations in fiscal year 2021. Instead, the funds will be added to the pool of money distributed as Community Service Grants to public TV stations.

"The reason for this change is that CPB believes that public television stations would benefit from an increase in their unrestricted CSG funds as they face the unprecedented operational and financial challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis," said Ted Krichels, SVP of system development and media strategy, during the board meeting.

Before the vote, board member Ruby Calvert questioned whether CPB needed to move so quickly to delay the program. She asked whether CPB should wait to see what other financial needs arise as the coronavirus pandemic affects stations.

Michael Levy, CPB's executive VP and COO, acknowledged the funding uncertainties but said he didn't want to withhold money that could help stations.

"The purpose of this Healthy Network Initiative was to lay the groundwork for all the stations on the public television side to be able to support the digital infrastructure initiatives that we are preparing to undertake," Levy said. Those initiatives include a single sign-on platform, an enterprise content management system and a customer relationship management system.

"We're concerned that the ability to collect and manage data is uneven across the system," Levy said. "We're still concerned

about that ... , but right now the greater need for stations in financial hardship is to get them as much money as we can."

Seattle classical station cuts staff after sponsor revenues evaporate

Classical KING FM in Seattle cut three full-time positions and several part-time positions after local arts organizations cancelled their sponsorships.

"Underwriting revenue has almost disappeared for us," CEO Brenda Barnes told Current in an email.

Looking ahead to next year, Barnes said it's unlikely that income from underwriting and car donations will rebound. "In order to ensure KING FM is strong through the tough economic years ahead, I needed to make staff reductions."

Among the cuts were two programming positions and a development position, Barnes said. In total, the station eliminated the equivalent of 4 1/2 full-time positions, she said.

Though underwriting is suffering, Barnes said KING FM's listening in March "went sky-high." The station nearly doubled its Average Quarter-Hour Persons from the first week of March to the fourth week, according to Nielsen Audio Portable People Meter data compiled by the Radio Research Consortium.

"I expect listener-sensitive revenue to be strong through this," Barnes said. 📻

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Our Deepest Gratitude,

The CARS Team

Still working from home



PEOPLE IN PUBLIC MEDIA

Holly Groschner will retire as CEO of Vermont PBS June 30.

Groschner, who has led the station since 2015, oversaw growth in audience, membership and local programming. Her notable achievements include moving Vermont PBS into new headquarters, growing its membership by more than 4% and supervising the sale of spectrum for \$56 million.

Before joining public media, Groschner was general counsel for the **Vermont Telecommunications Authority** and VP of legal for Crown Castle International, an owner of communications towers.

Steve Ferreira, whom Groschner appointed COO in September, will assume the role of interim CEO following a vote by the Vermont PBS board of directors. The board has formed a search committee to recruit Groschner's successor.

Dorothy "Kitty" Lensman will lead Public Media Connect Inc., as president and CEO as of July 1.

Lensman will replace David Fogarty, who recently announced his plan to retire this summer. Public Media Connect is a partnership of CET in Cincinnati, ThinkTV in Dayton and the Southwestern Ohio Instructional Technology Association.



Lensman, left, will lead Public Media Connect as president; Groschner prepares to retire from Vermont PBS; Drew signs on as MPR president.

Lensman has earned several promotions since joining ThinkTV in 1999. She became senior manager of marketing and business development in 2003, station manager in 2009 and then COO in 2014. Prior to her work at ThinkTV, she worked for KPBS in San Diego, South Florida PBS and Oregon Public Broadcasting.

"I am very pleased for both PMC and for Kitty as she becomes president," said Fogarty. "She will be a capable and skilled leader."

American Public Media Group hired Duchesne Drew as president of Minnesota Public Radio.

Drew's appointment is the first permanent hire for the MPR presidency since APMG restructured its leadership in November. Tim Roesler, APMG's chief business development officer, has been in the role on an interim basis.

Drew, who started on the job May 4, arrived from the **Bush Foundation**, where

he oversaw three teams as community network VP. He has an extensive background in journalism, having worked as managing editor of operations for the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis. Earlier in his career, he was a reporter for the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Star Tribune*.

"Duchesne is absolutely the right leader for our regional services — especially during this extraordinary time," said Jon McTaggart, CEO of APMG and MPR, in the release. "He has terrific leadership and news experience, and his commitment to using public media to inform and inspire people is a perfect fit for MPR."

Entertainment management executive Kevin Sucher signed on as Radio Milwaukee executive director in April.

Sucher has run **Sucher Entertainment**, a management, production and consulting agency, since 2008, working with artists such as R&B singer Eric Benét and the vocal group The Tenors, according to his LinkedIn profile. He also worked as CEO of Truth Records, an artist management com-

pany with a record label and music publishing arm. Sucher also leads The Docksidiers, a yacht rock band.

Sucher's arrival overlapped with outgoing Executive Director **Glenn Kleiman**, who announced in October his plans to step down.

"While rooted in Milwaukee, Kevin brings connections and innovative ideas drawn from his national music industry experience," Radio Milwaukee Board President Juli Kaufmann said in the release. "He is an inclusive leader who brings fresh perspective to enhance our already exceptional team. We are thrilled to advance our mission under Kevin's leadership."

Frontline and Firelight Media selected four investigative journalism fellows for their 2020 cohort.

Assia Boundaoui, **Andres Caballero**, **Jacqueline Olive** and **PJ Raval** were named investigative journalism fellows for the fellowship, which is in its second year, focuses on supporting independent filmmakers of color.

The fellows include:

Assia Boundaoui, an Algerian American filmmaker and journalist, whose debut short film about hijabi hair salons for the HBO series *Lenny* premiered at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival. Her directorial debut, *The Feeling of Being Watched*, was broadcast nationally on *POV*.

Andres Caballero, a filmmaker, journalist and public radio producer who co-directed *Gaucha Del Norte*. He is also a 2016

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WBEZ's Jenn White named host of '1A'

Jenn White, host of a two-hour weekday talk show on WBEZ in Chicago, is leaving the station to become the next host of public radio's *1A*.

White's first day as *1A*'s host is July 6. The two-hour weekday show is distributed by NPR and produced by WAMU in Washington, D.C.

White said she admires how *1A* includes listeners in daily discussions using social media. Audience engagement is in the show's DNA, she said.

She added, "The other thing that really attracted me was the fact that it feels like they're really trying to answer this question about how we live and come together in this nation, and it requires difficult conversations. But they're committed to that, and that's the focus of my work as well."

White will replace Joshua Johnson, who left the program in December after three years to become an MSNBC anchor. Following Johnson's departure, Todd Zwillich served as interim host until late March, when he joined Vice News as its D.C. bureau chief.

White has worked for WBEZ since 2016. Last fall, she became host of *Reset with Jenn White* after hosting the station's *The Morning Shift*. She also hosted limited-series podcasts for the station including *Making Oprah*, *Making Obama* and *16 Shots*.

Hosting *1A* will give her the opportunity to cover more subjects of nationwide interest, White said.

The incoming host credits her interest in radio to her father, who collected tapes of broadcasts and played them for her.

"They were old-timey radio shows, like *The Lone Ranger*, where you'd have these



voice actors come in and the artists were making the sound effects," she said. "Those tapes were just fascinating to me, to hear the power of the human voice. That's when I fell in love with the medium itself. I grew into this deeper understanding

of what radio could do."

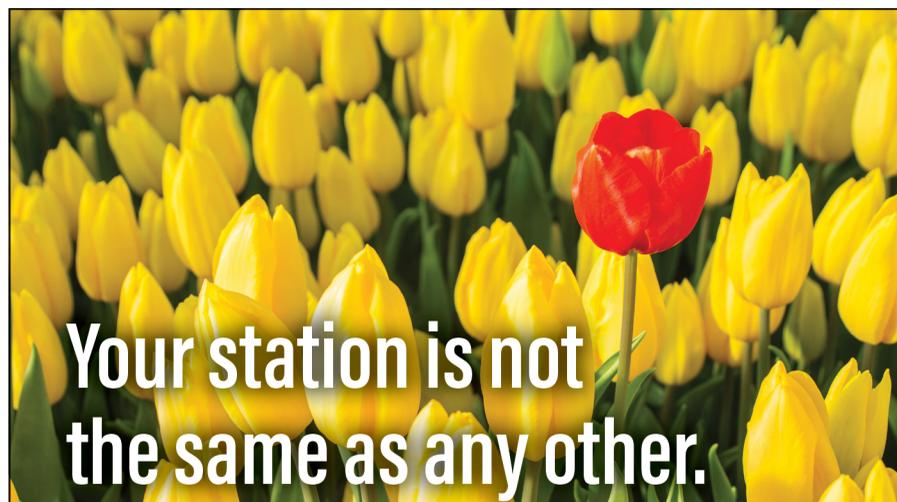
White's first job in public media was in fundraising with Michigan Radio in 1999. She later became station manager of the Michigan Channel from 2008–10, where she was EP and host of the television program *Out of the Blue: The Michigan Difference* on the Big Ten Network.

After a brief stint as director of media outreach and community relations for Michigan Radio in 2009–10, White became host of the station's *All Things Considered* broadcasts. For six years she moderated on-air gubernatorial and mayoral debates. White has also been an EP and host of the nationally distributed public radio documentary *Finding Our Bootstraps: Americans Deal with Recession*.

White said she's most interested in covering national politics, race and public policy as host of *1A*. She said she will most likely host the program from home when she starts the position.

1A debuted on 169 stations in January 2017 as successor to WAMU's *The Diane Rehm Show*. It now airs on more than 375 stations with 4 million weekly listeners to broadcasts and on-demand platforms, according to the station.

Sasha-Ann Simons, who was promoted to national correspondent for WAMU in March, and guest-host Celeste Headlee will continue anchoring *1A* until White signs on. — Julian Willie



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PBS fast-tracks 'American Portrait' special on coronavirus

BY JULIAN WYLLIE

Producers of *American Portrait* raced over the past six weeks to finish a special broadcast on the coronavirus pandemic for a May 8 PBS debut.

"In This Together: A PBS American Portrait Story" features content from more than 100 contributors to the crowdsourcing project exploring American identity. PBS greenlit and fast-tracked the half-hour program from RadicalMedia in mid-March, months ahead of the original timeline for broadcasts created from the engagement initiative.

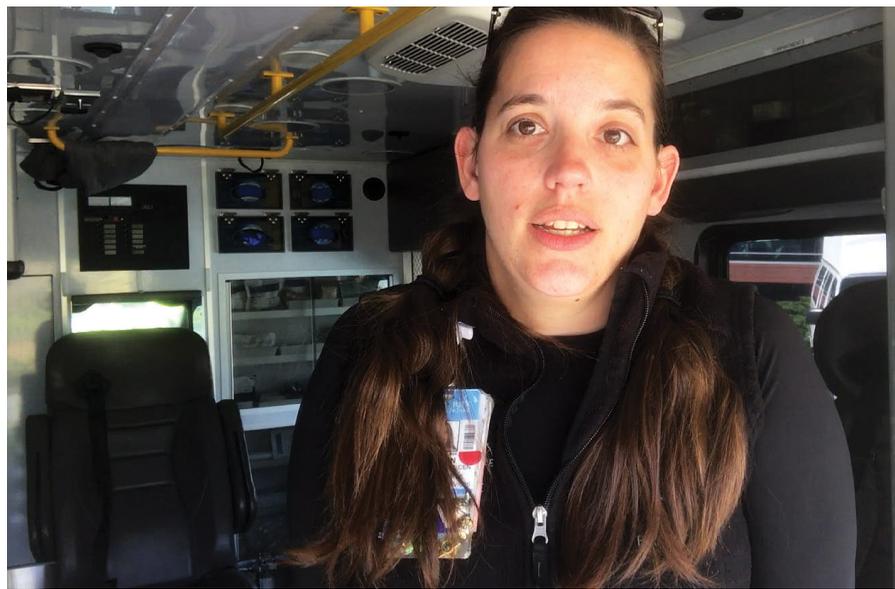
PBS unveiled *American Portrait* in January as the signature content initiative celebrating the 50th anniversary of the launch of PBS' national program service. RadicalMedia, which began collaborating with PBS in 2017 to develop *American Portrait*, recruited Target as corporate sponsor.

A web portal managed by RadicalMedia collects submissions of videos, photos and text about what it means to be an American. Under the original timeline, submissions adapted for broadcast were to air in a four-part docuseries early next year.

That miniseries is still in the pipeline for a January 2021 debut, and PBS plans to provide a template for member stations to create specials using user-generated content from their communities.

To inspire contributors to share their stories, the portal uses a variety of prompts. For "In This Together," PBS and RadicalMedia added prompts that indirectly referenced the pandemic, such as "I never expected..." and "When this is over..."

The prompt "I never expected..." generated a spike in submissions when it was promoted on social media, said Bill Margol, PBS senior director of general audience programming and development.



In a segment from the special, Allison, a nurse in Raleigh, N.C., discusses how the pandemic has affected her family. (Photo: PBS/RadicalMedia)

Submissions to this prompt and others guide "In This Together." Producers also worked with some of the subjects to film segments with longer narratives.

One story in the special features a nurse named Allison from Raleigh, N.C. She films herself reading sidewalk chalk that says "COVID-19 is a myth." While riding in an ambulance, she talks about the health risks to her family. Her husband also works in healthcare, and they have a 6-year-old son who is living with his grandparents during the pandemic.

"We had to sign a power of attorney for my parents to have guardianship of my son," she said. "We also had to arrange our wills and make statements saying that if something were to happen to my husband and I, that my sister and her husband get guardianship. ... I never thought I'd have to do this in my lifetime."

Another segment from the program

depicts a father named Mario who worked in a warehouse with confirmed cases of employees with COVID-19 and, at one point, a shortage of personal protective equipment. He and other workers went on strike after learning that the company had delayed informing staff about the first positive case. (The company is not identified in the segment.) Mario quit his warehouse job and started working as a truck driver.

"The only bad thing about it is spending a lot of time away from my family, sometimes four weeks, five weeks," he said of the new job. "This is a much better opportunity to put me and my family in a better position, so I'm going to do that."

Other segments feature people who are recovering from COVID-19 or were recently diagnosed.

The *American Portrait* portal has many more coronavirus stories that were not used in the program. The entire collection

now includes more than 3,500 submissions from around the country, with a mix of some small and larger states having high participation rates, according to producers from RadicalMedia.

'How do we respond to this?'

American Portrait was conceived from two different ideas that RadicalMedia and PBS began developing in 2017. RadicalMedia was brainstorming on a project about America at the time; PBS programmers were considering how to address the divisions in American society, especially the emergence of white supremacists after the 2016 presidential election. The Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Va., in August 2017, magnified the sense of urgency, Margol said.

"When I refer back to Charlottesville, a number of us came together and said, 'As the nation's public broadcaster, how do we respond to this? How do we respond to the division that is plaguing the country?'" Margol said. They wanted to explore the question, "What does it really mean to be an American today?"

When PBS and RadicalMedia later began collaborating on the project, they agreed that was a "loaded question," he said. They worked on a different approach.

"We knew there was a way to get to the heart of that question without ever actually [asking] it," Margol said. They decided to create prompts that "allow people to tell their own stories or the stories of someone they know."

The *American Portrait* portal presents more than a dozen prompts to website visitors, including "I took a risk when..." "I was raised to believe..." and "My Saturday night looks like..." The prompts act as

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'CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE LIFE WE'RE LIVING'

Talk show looks to connect American experiences during pandemic

BY TYLER FALK

In the era of social distancing, a new national radio show seeks to connect communities across the country by focusing on how people are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

America Amplified: Life, Community, and COVID-19 is airing live Saturdays through May 30, featuring eight hosts from seven stations during its trial run.

The show is named after America Amplified, the CPB-funded community engagement project that recently shifted its focus from the election to the coronavirus. The America Amplified team, based at KCUR in Kansas City, Mo., will provide engineering support and screen calls for the program.

"What we want in this show is to connect experiences of Americans in different parts of the country," said Donna Vestal, managing director of America Amplified. In planning for the first episode, a host pointed out that Georgia's governor is reopening some businesses. "I want to hear from the people there how that's going to play out," Vestal said. "And that is relevant



Santiago Briseño ensures that customers wear gloves and that the gloves are sanitized when they enter Mi Ranchito Market in Oakland, Calif. (Photo: Beth LaBerge/KQED)

to me in Kansas City and how our lives are being led here."

The show highlights a range of voices through live call-ins and messages stations are collecting through social media and voicemail. The America Amplified team is consulting with the stations on engaging their communities.

While America Amplified isn't producing every show, Vestal said, "the idea is that we want to have that flavor from that station, from those places, those perspectives, and have them find the voices and structure the show in the way that makes sense."

Rather than interview a governor, a suggestion from an early planning meet-

ing for the pilot run, Vestal emphasizes that the show instead chooses to focus on "the people affected by the governor's policies or what they've done to make their life work on the various topics that will be under consideration."

Each half of the two-hour program focuses on a single topic. The first episode looked at challenges faced by essential workers and inequalities that arise from distance learning. It was hosted by Rose Scott, host of the midday news program *Closer Look* on Public Broadcasting Atlanta's WABE, and Mina Kim, a news anchor and program host at KQED in San Francisco. KCUR's Brian Ellison and New England Public Radio's John Dankosky hosted the May 3 broadcast, which focused on decisions to reopen more businesses before widespread testing becomes available.

"I wanted to really decentralize where the voices were coming from," said John Haas, director of radio and television at Public Broadcasting Atlanta, who had the

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Pandemic prompts changes to Report for America jobs

BY PAOLO ZIALCITA

Several public media outlets have pulled out of partnerships with Report for America, the nonprofit initiative to add journalists in newsrooms across the country, citing financial complications brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier this year, RFA announced over 150 newsrooms across the country, including dozens in public media, would receive funds from the initiative for paying early-career journalists to take on neglected beats. Public media outlets made plans to focus on topics including Latinx communities and Native tribes.

But eight public media outlets dropped out in the weeks leading up to the April 23 announcement of corps member placements. Their reasons varied, but representatives of two stations said the global pandemic caused them to reconsider priorities.

"We still want to be fiscally conservative, because we see this as not going to end right away, and South Florida is one of the virus hot spots," said John LaBonia, GM of WLRN in Miami. The station had planned to add two journalists, one reporting on county news and the other on immigration.

News outlets partnered with RFA receive up to \$20,000 in funding for a corps member's salary. Each newsroom is responsible for raising money through memberships and local philanthropy to pay the rest.

Station leaders said decisions to cut RFA positions was an unfortunate tradeoff in bids to avoid layoffs or furloughs. At Michigan Radio, where an RFA mem-

ber would have focused on mental health coverage, station leadership identified the partnership as an area where costs could be reduced quickly.

"We are looking at a shortfall this fiscal year and a projected larger shortfall next fiscal year," said News Director Vincent Duffy. "In an effort to make sure that we could maintain the staff that we have and the work we were doing, we really couldn't add another position."

"There's just so many things impacted by mental health and mental health services. We see that as an area that's very rich for quality storytelling and accountability," said Duffy. "And it is something that we won't have now that we were hoping to have."

Stepping up to the plate

RFA stood to lose 10 placements at public media organizations this year, but other publiccasters stepped in to salvage nearly half of the jobs.

KERA in Dallas and Kansas City PBS both added corps members to preexisting commitments. The Missouri station added a second corps member to cover rural parts of the state. KERA, the lead station of The Texas Newsroom, will welcome three additional corps members.

RFA directors approached Texas Newsroom leaders after several partners dropped out. KERA redirected funds from its own fellowship program for up-and-coming journalists to sponsor three additional RFA reporters.

One KERA corps member will cover rural Texan news deserts through photography and video; the other will report on health disparities in Houston communities.



Report for America corps member David Fuchs interviews fire prevention technician Heather McLean on the site of Utah's largest wildfire in 2019 while reporting for KUER in Salt Lake City.

The third beat will focus on economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis. When KERA VP of News Rick Holter pitched this beat to RFA, he said he envisioned a position that would guide pandemic coverage in other newsrooms. The corps member will contribute virus-related stories to KERA's *One Crisis Away*, a digital news project focused on North Texans on the edge of financial collapse.

"This reporter will handle a lot of daily news developments but will also contribute pretty significantly to this project, because with 26 million newly unemployed people in the last month, there are a lot more people on the financial edge," Holter said.

Dropouts 'needed it the most'

RFA co-founder Steven Waldman was disappointed to learn that public media out-

lets were pulling out of the initiative, but said he understood the challenges created by the pandemic.

"It's tragic, because the ones that had to drop out were the ones that needed it the most," Waldman said. As more newsrooms struggle for viability during the pandemic, he sees public media stations such as WLRN and Michigan Radio as important players in the fight to preserve local news.

"Public radio is becoming quite an important part of the program," Waldman said. "Many public radio stations have really stepped up and tried to improve and strengthen local news operations, especially in the wake of newspapers contracting in their communities." ©

Current reporter Julian Wylie contributed reporting to this article.

Budget cuts

Continued from page 1

After cutting its executive salaries by as much as 35%, Minnesota-based APMG expects to reduce staffing costs through furloughs, reduced hours and layoffs, according to an internal memo from APMG President Jon McTaggart. "While we have some of our largest audiences, ever, we are experiencing the biggest financial test in our 53-year history," he wrote in an April 16 memo to staff that was obtained by Current.



McTaggart

McTaggart didn't reveal the size of APMG's projected deficit, but acknowledged that its program distribution arm, American Public Media, faces "real pricing distress" next year. "Even APM affiliates in major markets are already asking for discounts or delays to payment for our national programs or are threatening to drop APM shows from their schedule," he wrote.

APMG's national underwriting sales are expected to drop 19% this fiscal year. An "even bigger decline" is forecast for

FY 2021. At Minnesota Public Radio, underwriting is 10% under projected sales and is expected to drop 19% in FY21, he wrote.

An APMG board committee approved McTaggart's request to reduce compensation for himself and APM President Dave Kansas by 35%. Senior leaders at APM and MPR received pay cuts ranging from 20-30%, he said.

Decisions on additional budget cuts will be made after MPR's May 1-14 fund drive, he said.

"We're doing everything possible to limit the impact on employees," McTaggart wrote. "We want to avoid pay cuts and preserve as many jobs as we responsibly can, but there will

be selective furloughs, reduced hours, layoffs and position eliminations." The organization will start by offering voluntary furloughs and separations, he said.

'Extraordinary circumstances'

Cuts to executive compensation at NPR were also scaled across leadership ranks, according to Lansing's memo to staff.

Lansing cut his salary by 25% for the remainder of the fiscal year. Members of

his executive committee took a 15% reduction; other VPs received a 10% cut. NPR also eliminated executive bonuses for the fiscal year.

In his email to staff, Lansing said that his leadership team also looks to address the shortfall by pursuing business development opportunities that will bring in new revenues, as well as by drawing on reserves, "but they have taken a beating in this market and will not be enough to sustain us."

"And we will need to tighten our belts," he wrote.

NPR's agreement with SAG-AFTRA reduces employee pay on a sliding scale beginning this week, with a maximum cut of 9%. Employees earning less than \$80,000 will not be affected by pay cuts. NPR also suspended contributions to the employee retirement plan.

"Obviously, nobody likes to lose pay, but we recognize that these are extraordinary circumstances," Richard Harris, a union shop steward and science correspondent, told Current. "And we're stepping up to help."

The agreement includes optional furloughs for those employees who choose to take a week off without pay. NPR also agreed not to lay off employees for financial reasons through this fiscal year,

Harris said.

If NPR's budget problems continue, "it's highly likely that we will be back in September talking to the company about next steps," Harris said.

"NPR executives have already led the way in taking pay cuts, now NPR staff are also going to take compensation and benefit reductions for the rest of this fiscal year," NPR said in statement. "This approach is the result of our best thinking and collaboration with our union representatives and our non-union staff."

NPR's cost-cutting measures include dues relief for stations. The NPR board passed a resolution to suspend increases in member stations' core fees — which pay for newsmagazines, membership dues and digital services — in FY21. Lansing and SVP for Member Partnership Gemma Hooley announced the decision in an April 17 email sent to station leaders that was obtained by Current.

Stations that were to receive reductions in their core fees will still receive those, according to the email. The reductions are capped at 3% of their current payments.

Rates for NPR's non-newsmagazine programs will not increase between FY20 and FY21, the email said. ©



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Masterpiece 'doubles down' in pursuit of original dramas

'This way, we won't be at the end of the food chain for this kind of programming,' says the series' veteran EP

BY JILL GOLDSMITH

Rebecca Eaton stepped into a new role as executive producer at-large for *Masterpiece*, the British drama series that she steered to popularity, financial sustainability and critical acclaim over 35 years.

With Susanne Simpson now supervising daily operations as executive producer, Eaton is working to develop original productions and cultivate high-end donors for the Masterpiece Trust. The at-large role allows Eaton to focus on the work she loves most — collaborating with writers and producers.

"Frock dramas," as Eaton calls the series that PBS viewers love most, were once the exclusive province of *Masterpiece*. But as a downside to the popularity and financial success of *Downton Abbey*, original British productions now set off eye-popping bidding wars among streamers and premium cable networks. To sidestep those competitors and deliver shows that will reel in viewers and revenues for public TV, *Masterpiece* has refined its content-development strategy to take an ownership role in new productions.

In this interview, Eaton explains why acquisitions alone are no longer sufficient for sustaining *Masterpiece*. This transcript has been edited.

Current: The role of executive-producer-at-large is a new one for you and Masterpiece. What are you working on?

Rebecca Eaton: My first love has always been working on the content and the scripts — and developing relationships with the writers, producers, directors and actors. That's what I wanted to do. It's also where *Masterpiece* needed to double down on our efforts. And I thought it was a good time to have fresh eyes on all of the other stuff — the strategy, the brand and our plans for the future. Susanne is thoroughly up to speed on all of this and has stepped up with energy and dedication.

When I started, years and years ago, all *Masterpiece* programs had already been produced, so my role was focused on screening and acquiring them. Or, if broadcasters like the BBC had already greenlit something, we would just read scripts and decide which ones to acquire.



After leading *Masterpiece* through many changes over 35 years, Rebecca Eaton is now focused on developing ideas for series "we could own." (Photo: PBS)

Today most of our relationships are with independent producers — scores of them. *Wolf Hall* was made by Colin Callender's Playground Entertainment, *Sanditon* was produced by Red Planet Pictures and Mammoth Screen makes *Victoria* and *Poldark*. They come up with most of the ideas now, then sell them to us and other partners.

Susanne and I went through and divided up the job of managing our relationships with the companies. That includes staying in touch with them, hearing what their ideas are and reading their scripts once they get a production going. When *Masterpiece* invests in a drama from one of the companies, the responsibilities change to overseeing the co-production.

What are you doing differently now?

Eaton: We are beginning to generate ideas here — ideas that would work for *Masterpiece*. And then we talk to some of these independent companies and PBS Distribution about their interest in initiating our projects.

This is the absolute reverse of how things used to work, though it did happen occasionally. We initiated *Middlemarch*, for instance, years ago. We had the idea, found a writer — Andrew Davies — and brought it to the BBC. And we did this with Edith Wharton's *The Buccaneers*, which is one of my favorite pieces of literature. But we weren't the primary funder of those co-productions.



The Buccaneers, a 1995 miniseries adapted from Edith Wharton's unfinished novel, followed the adventures of wealthy young Americans who marry into the British aristocracy. (Photo: Joss Barrett/Mobil)

What we're doing seems necessary as more and more platforms outbid PBS for British drama. Susanne and I are doubling down on the effort to develop ideas that we could own.

To be doable, the productions have to be modest; they can't be giant, sweeping, huge, expensive.

"Precinct drama" is a term of art in television that originated with series like *Hill Street Blues*. It means filmed in a primary location. *Downton Abbey* was a precinct drama. The precinct was Highclere Castle. You need to have one central location to make a project affordable.

This way, we won't be at the end of the food chain for this kind of programming. In England, the BBC and ITV are the primary funders. They decide what dramas they want to put on their air, and they invest a lot of money. We are an additional funder, so a lot depends on what they want in the first place.

It gets harder to align these things because the British commissioners might decide they want to do a lot of cop shows, thrillers or true crime. I've been in this job long enough to see the cycle of that happening now. This is one of the reasons we're looking to start up our own potential series of costume dramas.

It's very clear what works for our audience and why they become members of their local stations and subscribe to Passport. They are drawn to returning high-end costume dramas — we call them "frock dramas." They are potentially multiseason, which is different than an adaptation of a book or a three-part series. Frock dramas are what PBSd wants to invest in, and what we want, too. These are the dramas our audience loves — *Downton Abbey*, *Victoria*, *Poldark*.

That said, we will continue to do miniseries like *Mrs. Wilson* and *World on Fire*, which is the exact opposite of a precinct drama. It is set in four different countries during World War II.

What needs to happen before you can greenlight one of these original projects?

Eaton: The most important thing is to figure out who's going to pay for it. We've been having those conversations with PBS Distribution and independent companies and distributors in the U.K.

When we find partners, we have specific conversations about how much money everybody is willing to risk to do this. Once we know the size of the budget, then we start



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Directed by Tim Tsai
MAY 4 ON REEL SOUTH & MAY 10 ON WORLD CHANNEL

JADDOLAND
Directed by Nadia Shihab
MAY 12 ON WORLD CHANNEL AT 8PM ET



STORIES TO LIGHT

Masterpiece

Continued from page 10

having conversations with writers and producers to say, “How about this idea or this book?” There’s a back-and-forth process that goes on.

Once we’ve done the creative work with the writers and producers, we go back through the financing with PBSd. And off we go.

What role does PBSd play in your funding and decision-making?

Eaton: PBSd is a really good partner. It ensures that *Masterpiece* and our whole drama ecosystem have enough revenue to continue to deliver these kinds of programs.

Masterpiece is a revenue stream for the whole system. It is partly funded by PBS, and it pays money back into PBS through PBSd. Individual stations can sell local sponsorship for it and attract members.

Downton was profitable and created a revenue stream that went back into PBS and into programming.

Now when we think about new programs, we have to think about profitability. We have to consider not only whether they’ll be popular and accessible to an audience, but whether they will generate money if we invest in them.

I’m not necessarily sitting in my office just dreaming up what would be a fun program, because there are a number of potential partners here. We have to be strategic about what will work both for the audience and for the bank account.

What impact did *Downton Abbey* have on *Masterpiece*?

Eaton: There was a confluence of events around the time that *Downton* was made. It was very, very good for us. And for PBS too, I think.

Our funding mix has changed drastically since *Masterpiece Theater* started in 1971. All the funding came straight from Mobil, our corporate underwriter. It was an image buy that made them look good to the movers and shakers in D.C. Mobil put a lot of money into both *Masterpiece Theater* and *Mystery!* PBS didn’t put any money into those series. This was how our funding worked when I became executive producer in 1985.

When Mobil left as a funder in 2004, we took another seat at the PBS table with our hungry siblings — *Frontline*, *American Experience* and others. PBS was our only funder, and we combined *Masterpiece Theater* and *Mystery!* into one series.

Everything began to change around the time that *Downton Abbey* started. Viking Cruises came in as underwriter. We started the *Masterpiece Trust*. It took us a while to get that trust going, but *Downton Abbey* certainly helped. It became possible to start conversations with high-end donors, because we needed the money to survive.

Viking Cruises is the first major sponsor since Mobil left. They’ve been very generous and easy to work with. I think the association with *Masterpiece*, especially with *Downton Abbey*, really helped their business.

And now PBSd also invests millions in *Masterpiece*.

We still depend on PBS for funding. Because of their circumstances, PBS pretty much gives us the same amount of money every year, even though the costs of British drama are soaring. So our funders are actually PBS, PBSd, our sponsors and the *Masterpiece Trust*.



Aidan Turner starred in *Poldark*, the recurring *Masterpiece* drama that delivered its final season last fall. (Photo courtesy Mammoth Screen)

Has the increased competition for British drama been the downside to *Downton Abbey*’s success?

Eaton: Yes. When *Masterpiece Theater* began, we created an appetite for high-end British drama in this country and we nurtured it. And, arguably, when *Downton* became a hit, others programmers discovered it. It wasn’t long before *The Crown* came to Netflix.

All the other networks had turned down *Downton Abbey*. They were not interested in it — whoops! Those were the good old days when no one but us was interested in programming for Anglophiles.

Now HBO, Cinemax, AMC — all of them are interested in British drama. That means we have to be vigilant and nimble. We are in storm-tossed seas with so many platforms and so much money being invested in all genres. Every year something like 350 new scripted programs are produced.

It’s very important for everybody in the system to know that *Masterpiece* is in the streaming world too, along with BritBox and Acorn. Our Amazon Prime streaming

channel, PBS *Masterpiece*, helps generate the money we need to buy and produce more drama.

Masterpiece is also bringing in money to stations through Passport. Our programs are the most-watched shows on Passport.

How do you plan to continue leveraging *Masterpiece*’s popularity on digital platforms?

Eaton: I think we need to improve Passport — its marketing and the user experience.

It’s three years old, and the end-user interface is still difficult.

Let’s evaluate what we have — something that money can’t buy anymore — a brand. The brand is *Masterpiece*. We own that. It means something.

How do we use that in this extremely crowded world? *Masterpiece* becomes a curator. It tells viewers, “We’ve done the work for you. You can rely on us to give you a really, really good British show.”

We have to cultivate the brand. We have to market the brand.

Is Perry Simon, the new PBS chief program executive, supportive of what you’re doing?

Eaton: Perry knows drama, and it’s good that he’s at PBS. He oversaw British drama at BBC America, and we can speak in shorthand about a lot of the actors, producers and directors.

Of course, I think Perry should have been given more money to spend on the prime-time schedule, and particularly *Masterpiece*, because that’s where the audience is.

Our audience numbers are pretty solid. Our continuing refrain is to get everybody to recognize that keeping *Masterpiece* healthy means investing more money into it.

How is *Masterpiece* doing with younger viewers?

Eaton: We’re doing a lot of things on Twitter and Facebook, and they are responding, so their awareness of *Masterpiece* is healthy. When we do a program about beautiful young people trying to be together when they are in love, younger viewers will show up!

Forbidden love will do it every time, but also just love stories and family sagas.

The average age of our audience has remained roughly the same. Viewers age into *Masterpiece*, and that’s good. Younger viewers come in and out of the audience, and at a certain point they’re ready to stay with us.

The bigger challenge, of course, is declining viewership across all of broadcast television. There are fewer people watching.

Had you ever considered moving to a commercial broadcaster?

Eaton: I started in public television when it was just beginning. Its intentions and mine were perfectly aligned. I was a child of the ’60s. We had plans to change the world, or at least make it better, and so did public television. I loved that.

I loved being part of a scrappy, under-financed, very creative institution that wanted to give voice to the voiceless and be available to everybody who could get a television set.

For my first 15 years or so, I was making local programs — documentaries, art shows, and working in radio and television. I learned the ropes of how to be a producer at WGBH.

Masterpiece was happening right in the same building and was already an iconic series when I arrived in 1971. Years later, I found myself in charge of it. It was a desk job that involved watching shows and choosing which ones you liked.

Then it got much harder as the corporate underwriting ended and competition picked up. But I also began to see the cycles of how things would go.

And that is one reason why I never wanted to go anywhere else. PBS and WGBH invested in people for the long haul. If this were a commercial enterprise and the ratings for *Masterpiece* dropped, I would be fired, or if we’d lost an underwriter, they might say, “Let’s get a new executive producer.” Public television doesn’t work that way. It has invested in people for life.

It’s kind of amazing and wonderful to me to go back now to my first love — programming — after having been the front person for the series for so long. 🗨️

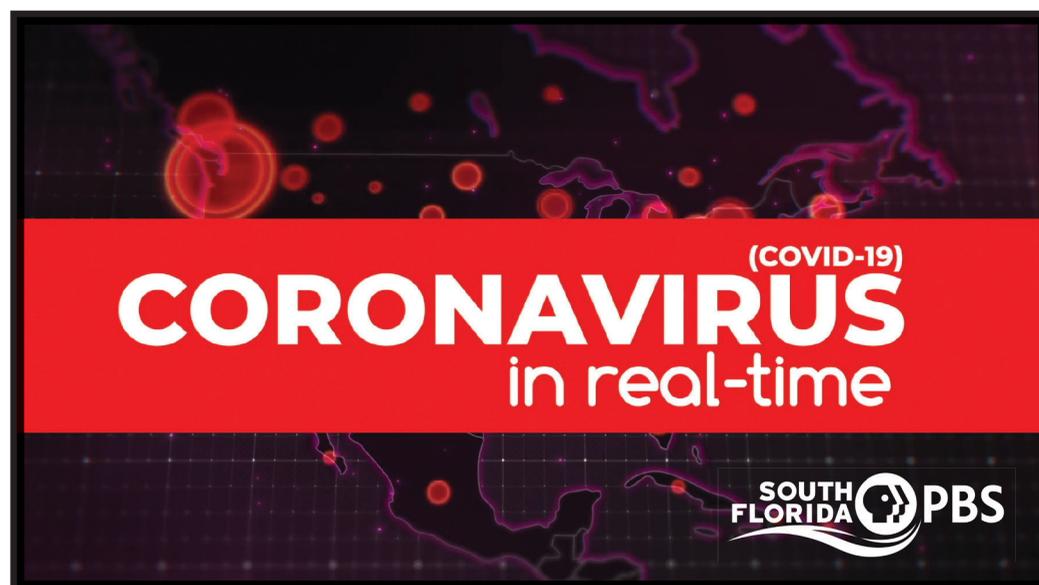
“Now HBO, Cinemax, AMC — all of them are interested in British drama. That means we have to be vigilant and nimble. We are in storm-tossed seas with so many platforms and so much money being invested in all genres.”



World on Fire, the epic World War II series that debuted last month, stars Zofia Wichlaz and Jonah Hauer-King. The BBC has already commissioned a second season. (Photo courtesy Mammoth Screen)

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Mental health

Continued from page 1

creative director of *The Pulse*, WHYY's weekly radio series on health and science, which regularly explores mental health issues.

In her earlier job as a reporter, Scott had to make the case for creating the specialized beat, arguing that mental health is integral to any serious coverage of health issues, she recalled. Now she sees wider greater recognition and acceptance of this idea.

Scott has explored the way mental health infiltrates other news beats, such as how the cost of treatments affects businesses. The ability to focus solely on mental health issues has allowed her to produce more complex stories.

"I'm like the guy who has covered city hall for 20 years," Scott said. "I know the backstories, the treatment history" as well as the mental health experts who have become key sources, she said. "It comes in really handy, especially in times like these where you have to do really good reporting very fast."

Scott believes that public radio provides the unique ability to present stories of people who are dealing with mental health issues, she said. "We hear their voices and their stories and we can relate to what is happening in their lives."

The Scattergood Foundation has funded WHYY's mental health coverage since Scott started on the beat. Now it supports *The Pulse* and partially funds the salary of Nina Feldman, the reporter who covers mental health for the newsroom.

The Pulse's April 3 episode, "Mental Health in Times of Crisis," focused on the challenges that mental health providers and their patients are facing with COVID-19. Future coverage will delve into other COVID-related topics, including how the outbreak is affecting delivery of mental health services, she said.

'Call to Mind'

American Public Media is two years into Call to Mind, a multimedia mental health initiative designed to get people talking about mental health



Apland

issues and encourage those who need help to seek treatment. Its content footprint includes news coverage, broadcast programming and live events.

Babette Apland, managing director of the content initiative, previously ran behavioral health programs for HealthPartners, a medical care and health insurance provider in Minnesota. She said she views mental illness as one of the nation's top healthcare challenges, pointing out that almost 44 million Americans experience a mental health condition. "It affects all of us."

Apland joined APM to lead the initiative in late 2017; Alisa Roth, a reporter covering mental health full-time for MPR News, signed on in 2018. The initiative has involved other journalists, producers and hosts in producing more than 150 media items across APM and MPR, Apland said.

APM Reports, a nationally distributed documentary series, produced an hour-long program on the search for a cure for Alzheimer's disease. News stories, expert interviews and event-based *Call to Mind* programs air on all of MPR's news and music services. Live events have focused on



Maiken Scott dons protective gear while reporting in a medical center in 2018. (Photo courtesy Maiken Scott)

such topics as suicide among college students, childhood trauma and loneliness.

"That experience has provided the knowledge, resources and network to move quickly in creating content about mental health during COVID-19," Apland said.

In the early weeks of the coronavirus lockdown, Call to Mind launched COVID-19 Wellness, a website that provides guidance and resources on how to cope amidst the pandemic. It covers topics such as managing an existing mental health condition during COVID-19 and coping with stress and anxiety.

APMG also produces two podcasts on mental health. Both launched years before Call to Mind. *The Hilarious World of Depression*, hosted by writer John Moe, generates more than 300,000 monthly downloads. *Terrible, Thanks for Asking*, hosted by author Nora McInerny, exceeds more than 900,000 monthly downloads. Last year, the show collaborated with Call to Mind on a three-part series on childhood trauma, "What Happened to You?"

"The audience response is tremendous, with capacity attendance at most of our live events," Apland said. "We are seeing pent-up demand from people seeking safe and trusted spaces for conversations about mental health."

In response to journalists' interest in learning how to cover mental health responsibly, Call to Mind also arranged trainings and created a style guide that covers ethics and best practices for interviewing people experiencing a mental health condition as well as details to avoid and use in coverage.

WBFO initiative aims to raise awareness

Buffalo Toronto Public Media, operator of WNED-TV/FM/AM and WBFO-FM with audiences in western New York and southern Ontario, has also been producing specialized reporting on mental health over the past two years.

The station saw an opportunity fill a gap in local news coverage while also approaching the topic in a different way than other media, said David Rotterman, SVP and chief content officer. "It's more than simply talking about the medication, the prescriptions, the incarceration. We're trying to think of how you raise awareness of mental illness," where stigma is still very much present.

After staff from WBFO developed a proposal for the initiative, the station approached the Patrick P. Lee Foundation, which supports mental health awareness and understanding. The foundation responded with a grant to launch the initiative in 2018. The funding has just been renewed through early 2022, Rotterman said.

Rotterman assembled a team of existing staff and a program consultant to work on

“We are seeing pent-up demand from people seeking safe and trusted spaces for conversations about mental health.”

— Babette Apland, APM

the initiative. The reporting airs on WBFO and is posted on websites for both WBFO and WNED.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, WBFO ramped up the frequency of its Facebook Live events. On April 16, it launched a weekly series exploring the pandemic’s impacts on mental health in the region. Videos from the Facebook Live events are also posted on the station’s website and YouTube Channel.

Finding a balance between coverage of breaking news on COVID-19 and long-form reporting for the initiative will be a challenge, Rotterman said. He had begun planning stories for the next phase of the initiative just before the pandemic hit New York.

Achieving that balance “is something every newsroom is struggling with,” he said. He believes the solution is “not putting all eggs in the breaking-news basket,” since people turn to NPR for longer features and in-depth stories.

‘We are not interested in one-offs’

Two public TV stations are building on earlier initiatives to address teen suicide: Milwaukee PBS and Detroit Public TV.

Following its 2019 editorial partnership on the documentary special *Kids in Crisis: You’re Not Alone*, Milwaukee PBS has adopted the personal testimonial style of that production for its COVID-19 coverage.

A new short-form video series, “Stories of our Pandemic,” began airing April 9 on its newsmagazine *10thirtysix* and in its World Channel lineup. Another short-form series introduced in March, “Home/Work” looks at the pandemic’s impact on the region, including in mental health. One episode, “Saying Goodbye from Quarantine,” by Milwaukee PBS audio engineer Gail Grzybowski, was broadcast by *PBS NewsHour* March 30. Instead of conventional reporting, “with a disembodied voice telling you how big an issue this is, we’re featuring those impacted by this,” said Bohdan Zachary, Milwaukee PBS GM.

This approach, which worked so effectively in the documentary on teen suicide “is really powerful and clearly works for us,” Zachary said. Now the station is producing special programs on how COVID-19 has affected the African American and the Latino communities.

Detroit Public TV has been developing mental health coverage on youth suicide for about two years. The initiative started after Homberg met John and Gail Urso, parents who lost their teenage son to suicide. The couple launched Kevin’s Song, a local non-profit aimed at preventing suicides.

Homberg explains that they became “champions” for the cause of suicide prevention. They have also opened doors for Detroit Public TV to become involved in addressing the issue.

Detroit Public TV’s coverage has focused on reducing shame and stigma of teen suicide through broadcasts and partnerships with the community, said Marty Fischhoff, director of community engagement. The

station has produced numerous livestreams of events, such as this year’s annual Kevin’s Song conference on suicide prevention in January. It also collaborated with Kevin’s Song and the Children’s Foundation to produce three videos on youth suicide.

Last year the Children’s Foundation awarded a \$40,000 grant to Detroit Public TV to produce three town halls on suicide awareness and prevention for students and educators. Homberg believes Detroit Public TV was able to secure the grant because of its focus on engagement that can help address the problem. “That’s what moves you from a media organization to one they see as providing a solution to problems,” he said.

“We want to go beyond the simple headlines and tragic numbers” and provide coverage that serves the community more deeply, he said. “For us, it’s always about that.”

COVID-19 has created a greater sense of urgency about addressing mental health needs, and the station responded by pairing *We Need to Talk*, a documentary produced by Kevin’s Song, with a repeat of the Milwaukee PBS documentary *Kids in Crisis*. “Resurfacing existing content is one of the smartest moves a station can make,” Homberg said.

Homberg is working to identify issues and opportunities, and make mental health coverage a sustainable initiative for Detroit Public TV. “We are not interested in one-offs,” he said. His ultimate plan is to seek funding for a bureau that could serve as a repository for information on mental health, and share those resources with the community through a series of ongoing events. Ideally, he would like to hire two full-time employees to focus on mental health. “It’s a business plan we’re building.”

‘New realities ... of the coronavirus’

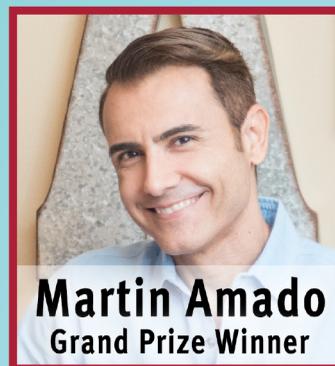
At Safe Space Radio, the independent non-profit that produces educational media on mental health, Hallward had planned a series of specials for May, designated mental health awareness month by the Mental Health Foundation. Hallward aimed to follow up on the success of *Can We Talk?*, the four-part Safe Space Radio series that aired on 221 public radio stations in 35 states last year.

Now two of the programs are being retooled “to integrate the new realities we are facing as a result of the coronavirus,” Hallward said. An episode that was to explore saying goodbye at the end of life is being updated with new stories about the challenge of saying goodbye virtually. Another installment about climate change and mental health will be adapted to address the new sense of shared human vulnerability to global public health threats. She plans to deliver the package of four specials for national broadcast through PRX this October.

“These shows are designed to invite meaningful conversation at a time that we are hungry for it and receptive to it,” she said.

Public radio’s mental health coverage can play a pivotal role in providing reassurance during these frightening times of uncertainty, Hallward said. “Radio can reach people no matter how separate we are. It’s an extraordinary public health tool.”

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Climate advocacy group targets Duke Energy spots on WUNC

BY GRACE VITAGLIONE

A climate advocacy group in North Carolina has petitioned the FCC to investigate underwriting announcements that WUNC in Chapel Hill aired on behalf of Duke Energy.

NC WARN, a grassroots group that is campaigning to speed the state's transition to clean energy, criticized language in WUNC's spots as a violation of FCC guidelines for noncommercial underwriting. It also asked the commission to require Duke Energy and WUNC to disclose financial details about the corporate sponsorships.

Duke Energy, headquartered in Charlotte, N.C., is one of the largest electric and gas utility companies in the U.S. It's a frequent target of NC WARN's grassroots advocacy and regulatory complaints challenging Duke Energy's corporate practices.

In a 2018 campaign against the company's "influence spending," NC WARN petitioned the state's utilities commission to prohibit Duke Energy from spending ratepayer revenue on lobbying expenses and charitable contributions.

NC WARN petitioned the FCC because it believes Duke Energy's underwriting messages on WUNC are "deceptive" and use qualitative language in violation of FCC standards, said Jim Warren, executive director.

In the FCC complaint filed in February, NC WARN pointed to messages that said

Duke Energy is building a "smarter energy future" and is "committed to continue reducing emissions and increasing renewable energy."

"That statement — 'Smarter Energy Future' — is qualitative, not value neutral, and generally promotional in nature," NC WARN said in its complaint. "In addition to being promotional and qualitative, Duke's above-described advertisements on WUNC are misleading."

"It just creates a grossly misleading representation to listeners about what Duke Energy is actually doing," Warren said in an interview with Current. "We call that 'greenwashing.'"

NC WARN urged the FCC to prohibit WUNC from running Duke's "promotional, misleading advertising." It also asked the commission to order WUNC to disclose the full value of Duke Energy's financial support for the NPR News station and details about all of Duke Energy's sponsorship announcements aired since 2018.

FCC guidelines allow noncommercial broadcasters to air enhanced underwriting messages that identify sponsors as long as the announcements are not overtly promotional, according to the FCC's website. Qualitative language, such as messages that describe a company's product or service as the "best," is prohibited. Sponsors can use

their logos and slogans, but they can't mention pricing or include a call to action.

Michael Couzens, a former attorney advisor to the FCC who now advises public stations through his California-based law practice, describes the commission's underwriting guidelines as "a balancing act" between maintaining noncommercial standards and allowing broadcasters to raise funds from the private sector.

WUNC President Connie Walker said in a statement to Current that the station's underwriting messages comply with FCC guidelines and the law. She said she can't comment on "the specifics of any pending regulatory matter."

"It is through such underwriting that WUNC is able to provide the high-quality public service programming for which it is known," Walker said.

Corporate sponsorships are a key source of revenue for the entire public broadcasting system, generating nearly 14% of all revenues earned in fiscal year 2018, according to CPB.

Judgment calls required

Many companies purchase public media sponsorships for public relations purposes, said Jim Tazarek, managing director of Market Engineuity, which specializes in underwriting sales. Research on public radio underwriting shows that sponsors

benefit from a "halo effect" that makes positive impressions on listeners, he said.

Applying the FCC's underwriting guidelines does involve judgment calls, Tazarek added. Staying within the guidelines requires familiarity with case decisions the commission has made in the past, he said.

Melodie Virtue, a communications attorney with Foster Garvey who represents public media stations before the FCC, said a phrase cited in NC WARN's complaint — "reducing carbon emissions by x% since 2005" — might be considered qualitative if it's used to distinguish Duke from other companies. The phrase "building a smarter energy future" would be allowed as an established slogan for Duke.

Violations of FCC guidelines usually occur when a station allows sponsors to write announcements themselves and fails to review them for FCC compliance, according to Couzens.

The FCC's system for discovering violations of noncommercial underwriting is entirely complaint-based, Couzens added. "If no one complains, the FCC doesn't hear about it," he said, and complaints have to be very detailed to trigger an FCC investigation. If a complaint documents specific messages over time, as NC WARN did in its filing, the commission is more likely to take it seriously.

"It's far more typical that a complaint goes nowhere," Couzens said. ©



Warren



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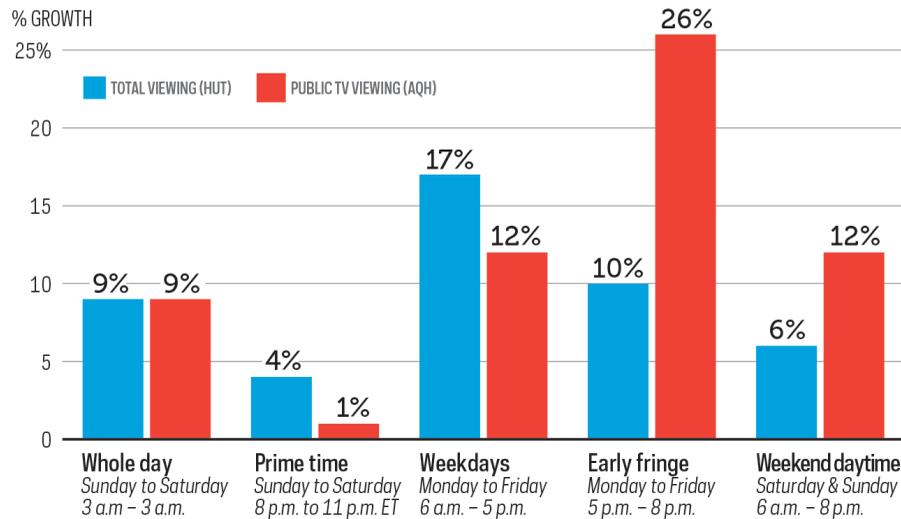
Continued from page 2

COVID-19 dominated much of *NewsHour's* content during the time. As usual, the audience skewed older: 65+ and 50–64-year-olds had higher ratings than younger demographics. But there were significant changes among viewers aged 18–49 too — increases of 44% for men and 33% for women in this age group. *NewsHour's* mid-March-to-April weekly cume increased 19% over February, but most of the program's growth came from people viewing more frequently, not from new people entering the *NewsHour* cume.

Weekend daytime (Saturday/Sunday 6 a.m.–8 p.m.) relied on gains from regularly scheduled weekend shows for a substantial GRP increase. *America's Test Kitchen* and *Cook's Country* had highest ratings, 0.77 and 0.76, increasing 20% and 14% over February. Shows like *Patti's Mexican Table*, *Moveable Feast*, *Samantha Brown's Places to Love*, *Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Television* and *tasteMakers* had even bigger increases. As with early fringe, the lockdown restricted weekend viewers' activities and anchored them to their sofas and TV screens. When they found public TV, some discovered they liked the programming and returned in later weeks.

In primetime HUTs didn't rise much — usage is always high. Public TV viewing was almost the same as in February, though it was higher than the same weeks in 2019. Adult general programming drives primetime, so we looked at primetime program ratings. Syndicated dramas like *Death in Paradise*, *Midsomer Murders*, *Shakespeare & Hathaway* and *Father Brown* performed like true champs, gaining 18% to 45% in ratings over February from viewers seeking predictable programming we call “comfort food” in a time of duress. *Masterpiece* was, as usual, reliable, and *Nature* had a moderate gain, as did the timely *American Experience*

Viewing increases over February 2020



documentaries “Influenza 1918” and “The Polio Crusade.” *Washington Week* had a particularly dramatic rise — up 36% from a 0.53 average to 0.72. Audience gains weren't universal, though: *Nova* and *Antiques Roadshow* lost viewers.

Monday to Friday daytime, the daypart with the largest schedule footprint, was a paradox. It had a very large HUT gain,

but PTV station performance was erratic. Viewing by kids 2–5 was way down, declining 27% in average quarter-hour numbers since February, though this audience showed up in increasing numbers for *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* and *Sesame Street*. Viewing by women 65+ grew 23% over February.

The big winner was kids 12–17, with an increase of 43%. What were they watching

on our stations during the school shutdown? At-home learning programs were certainly in the mix. Titles with most airings included *Nova*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *The Great American Read* and *American Experience*; programs that got the highest household ratings were *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History*, *The Greeks*, *American Experience*, *Food-Delicious Science*, and *Native America*. And, yes, these programs were watched by teens but also by adults — especially men (of all ages) and women 18–49. In fact, in many markets most of the viewing to the AHL schedule came from adults. The school year will be ending soon, AHL will become a thing of the past and PTV daytime will revert to pre-COVID-19 schedules. Or will it?

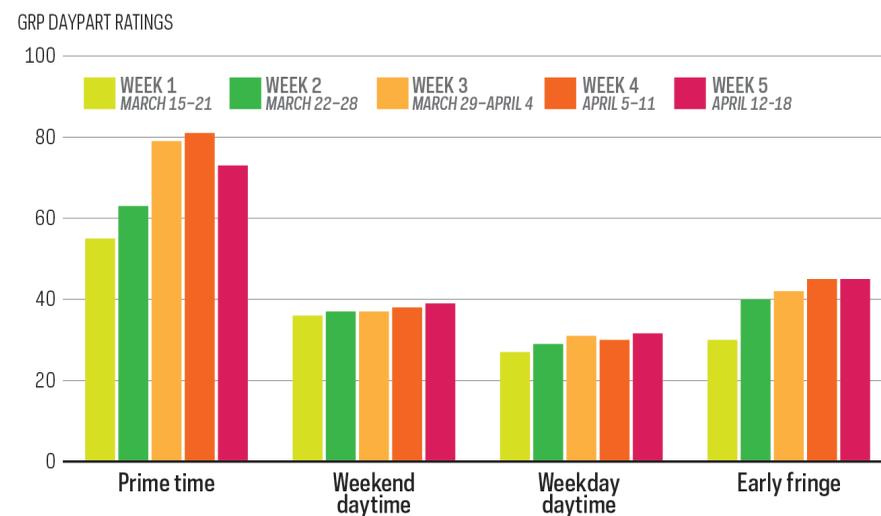
So what's next? TV pundits have been watching for signs of flagging media usage during the pandemic, and some are finding it. Traffic to news websites peaked in late March, and has since subsided substantially. Many media experts consider web traffic the canary in the coalmine for coming audience declines. There are signs of TV viewing leveling off. Weekly HUTs have stabilized overall, and so have public TV's GRPs, even regressing a bit in total day and primetime ratings.

General wisdom foretells diminished viewing when states lift stay-at-home orders and more people go back to work. Interest in news will flag, though new COVID-19 developments could change that in a millisecond.

The COVID-19 experience shows how much people depend on TV, including public TV, when a crisis strikes. Research studies inform us that respondents consistently report their primary source of information and entertainment is TV. The bigger the crisis, the more they depend on it.

Judith and David LeRoy are co-founders of TRAC Media Services, a research company that provides audience analysis and programming services for public TV stations. Craig Reed is TRAC's executive director.

Daypart rating trends by week



SPLIT ALLOWS FOR 'NEW REPORTING OPTIONS'

PRX, WGBH end BBC partnership on 'The World'

BY TYLER FALK

After more than 20 years, the BBC will no longer partner with PRX and WGBH on *The World*.

The move was a “strategic decision reached by PRX and WGBH,” PRX Chief Content Officer John Barth told *Current* in an email. “This has been a long and successful partnership of more than 20 years alongside the BBC, that's reached a natural conclusion.”

PRX and WGBH will become the sole producers of *The World* beginning July 1, the organizations announced March 31. The BBC was one of the founding partners of the weekday international news program when it launched 24 years ago to address the decline of international reporting in the U.S.

“For more than 20 years, *The World* has been a key part of our desire to serve American audiences and has enabled the BBC's

distinct approach to global news to be heard across the country,” said Steve Titherington, senior head of content commissioning for the BBC World Service, in the press release announcing the split. “We're proud to have been a founding partner of the program and we look forward to serving our audiences into the future through the momentum we have built with public media stations and programs.”

A BBC spokesperson declined further comment.

PRX and WGBH made the decision “as part of *The World's* editorial growth,” Barth said in the release.

“The nature of media has changed dramatically in the 24 years since *The World* launched. ... Based out of its newsroom at WGBH in Boston while co-produced and distributed by PRX, *The World* now has a robust staff and digital capabilities empowering a network of reporters and



(Photo: chrisdorney/Shutterstock)

contributors who bring listeners reporting from across the globe,” Barth said. “*The World's* ability to leverage editorial partnerships in key areas also allows for new reporting options.”

The World, which airs on nearly 300 stations and has 2.5 million weekly listeners, has added four editorial staffers in the past year, Barth said.

“*The World* staff is producing more original reports than ever — this means more

distinct reporting on news that matters around the world, all helping listeners become better-informed global citizens,” Barth said. He pointed to “Every 30 Seconds,” a CPB-backed reporting project about the Latino electorate, and “The Big Fix,” a weekly segment exploring climate change solutions that launched last month.

At least one station has taken notice of the changes at *The World*. WAMU in Washington, D.C., scheduled the show at 8 p.m. after airing it at midnight for three years.

“The producers of *The World* ... have reinvented their newsmagazine — from updating the sound and style to deepening its content,” WAMU said in an FAQ about its schedule changes. “The program emphasizes international news and global journalism through interesting stories and engaging voices, and because of that, WAMU is committed to support innovation and reinvention and bring it to our audience as soon as its available.”



Barth

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— Martin Luther King, Jr.



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American Portrait

Continued from page 6

“guardrails” for people who may struggle with how to tell their stories, Margol said.

As the collection grew, user submissions have become increasingly creative, Margol said. Some submitted videos, selfies, poems and brief manifestos. Many of the posts are serious, but some are humorous, others endearing.

Another inspiration for *American Portrait* was “The Family of Man,” a 1950s photography exhibition curated by Edward Steichen, a former director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Margol said. Steichen collected hundreds of images from photographers all around the world to evince universal aspects of the human experience.

‘People wanted to share’

A RadicalMedia spokesperson said March was a record submission month overall for the *American Portrait* portal. States that have generated the most engagement so far include California, Pennsylvania and Texas, according to a heat map posted online.

“In some ways I regret that [the coronavirus special] is only a half-hour, because we got such great material,” Margol said. “But given the time to turn it around, we decided to go with the half-hour.”

Craig D’Entrone, director and EP of *American Portrait*, and Michèle Stephenson, the series producer, have supervised the documentary’s production for RadicalMedia while working remotely. Both said this is the first time they’ve managed a major project like this from home.

“It was a very intense and transformative journey, given the time constraints we had,” Stephenson said. “What was mind-blowing for me was the degree to which people really wanted to share — were open to being vulnerable.”

Stephenson and colleagues reached out to some participants to ask them to expand

on their initial posts to the *American Portrait* portal. “We thought it was really important to have essential workers represented, the people on the front line, first responders and people affected directly by the virus, either sick or recovering themselves, or loved ones who are a part of that.”

‘Like a Lego set’

In addition to planning for the four-part *American Portrait* docuseries for early next year, RadicalMedia and PBS are working on a book about the initiative and a traveling exhibit showcasing the content, once it’s safe to do so.

“It’s going to be a very useful, very important and meaningful tool to the purpose and the mission of PBS,” said Jon Kamen, chairman and CEO of RadicalMedia.

The *American Portrait* initiative also has a significant educational component that’s being developed for PBS LearningMedia. The educational materials draw from the PBS

Newshour Student Reporting Labs curriculum, according to a news release.

Latino Public Broadcasting is among the public media organizations involved with education and outreach tied to the project. It concluded a four-part teacher professional development series Tuesday with a virtual event “We Are Witnesses” or “Somos Testigos.”

The series helped teachers with lesson plans for using *American Portrait* in classrooms.

To expand the broadcast footprint for the initiative, PBS plans to provide a template for member stations to create their own *American Portrait* half-hour specials. The portal collects state- and county-level data on user submissions, which will help stations track participation within their communities.

“It’s sort of like a Lego set. They can customize parts with local content, bits they can pull out and run in their communities,” Margol said. “The nice thing about *American Portrait* is that the duration of it allows us to adapt and to change to the circumstances.” ©



Margol (Photo: Rahoul Ghose/PBS)



“Even though we focus on a local person or a local organization, we’re bringing them into the conversation because it resonates nationally.”

— John Haas, Public Broadcasting Atlanta

America Amplified

Continued from page 6

idea for the series and is serving as EP. “... So we’re hearing from different perspectives and different geographical areas.”

“Not having that centralized voice was a concern,” Haas said about using a variety of hosts, “and it was something that we had to take into consideration. But if you offer a consistently excellent product and a good conversation each week, then I think that becomes the mainstay versus a personality per se.”

Each episode also includes hosts talking to a reporter from a third station, as well as a pre-produced piece from a reporter in a fourth community.

Upcoming episodes pair Marty Moss-Coane from WHYY in Philadelphia and Gemma Gaudette from Boise State Public Radio/Mountain West News Bureau; KQED’s Kim and Iowa Public Radio’s Charity Nebbe; WABE’s Scott and Dankosky; and Ellison and WHYY’s Maiken Scott.

Haas emphasized that the show “is going to be national-quality” and geared towards a national audience.

“I’ve made it very clear that everything that comes on has to have resonance throughout the country,” he said. “Even though we focus on a local person or a local organization, we’re bringing them into the conversation because it resonates nationally. We don’t want people to tune out and think they’re listening to somebody else’s radio show. This is for them.”

More than two dozen stations will carry the show, including WAMU in Washington, D.C., and KERA in Dallas.

The pandemic prompted KCUR to consolidate two local shows into one focused solely on COVID-19, “but a lot of stations don’t even have the resources to do that,” Vestal said.

“In my mind it was like, maybe this could even relieve a little bit of the burden of getting those conversations about the life we’re living that you don’t really hear on the national shows — that we could kind of pick up that load for what may or may not be happening locally,” she said.

Haas said he’s been thinking about starting a weekend show for the past few years. The seed for *America Amplified* came from *Swap Talk*, a 2017 KQED series which the station partnered with others across the country to co-host a talk show.

Haas started getting serious about the idea in February and was able to give it a test run when WABE partnered with Minnesota Public Radio in March on a national call-in show about COVID-19.

Since *America Amplified* was conceived prior to the pandemic, his aspirations are for the program to live on beyond its six-week pilot run.

“I’m in discussion with some other stations about co-hosting down the line,” he said. “I really think that this is a show that can live in perpetuity and become a Saturday staple.” ©



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FCC proposal could help pubTV stations improve signal coverage

BY SCOTT FYBUSH

Public TV stations could eventually reach more over-the-air viewers struggling to receive their signals if the FCC approves a proposal endorsed by America's Public Television Stations and the National Association of Broadcasters.

The proposal would expand stations' ability to augment their signal coverage with small booster transmitters that operate on the same frequencies as the stations' main signals, filling holes in the coverage areas already authorized by the FCC.

The FCC is proposing to modify engineering criteria for those on-channel boosters, which are used in technologies called distributed transmission systems and single-frequency networks. APTS and NAB filed a joint petition for rulemaking in October, and it has been issued as a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking by the FCC, opening a public comment period that may eventually lead to the commission approving the new rules.

The use of DTS and their newer variant, SFNs, has been one of the selling points for the eventual conversion of TV broadcasts from the current ATSC 1.0 digital system to the new ATSC 3.0 standard.

While ATSC 3.0 signals will initially be broadcast from the same transmitter sites and at the same power levels as current ATSC 1.0 transmissions, the new standard is designed to do something ATSC 1.0 cannot do: operate from multiple transmitters at lower power levels on the same frequencies, making it possible to fill gaps in signal coverage that have long plagued stations trying to serve wide areas from single tower sites.

Many public TV stations have tried to fill such holes with translators, which operate on a different channel from the main signal. But that strategy is problematic, says APTS COO Lonna Thompson.

"They're separately licensed, they're on their own channels, they have their own equipment needs and upkeep, and often they're isolated at very, very difficult-to-reach areas," she said. "SFNs are important because it's a much more expedient way of serving viewers who might not get a signal because they're in a hard-to-reach area or a very dense urban area where signals aren't penetrating."

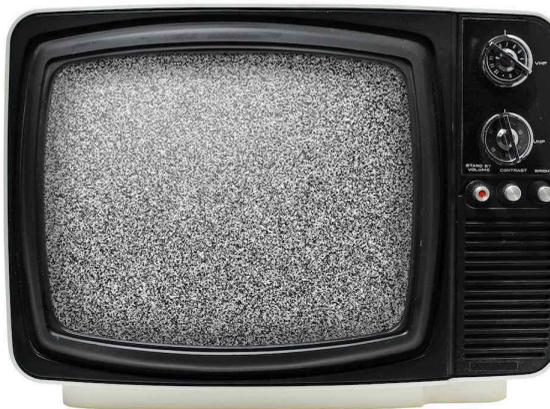
From a regulatory standpoint, SFN signals don't need their own separate licensing or renewal process, which streamlines stations' legal burdens. Because they share the same channel as their parent signal, they also use scarce broadcast spectrum more efficiently, Thompson said.

Changing analog-era rules

Making SFNs truly useful, though, will require changes to current rules that determine where an on-channel booster signal can be placed in relation to a station's primary transmitter. Current booster rules require a booster's "noise-limited contour" — essentially, the outer fringe of a signal's potential coverage area — to be contained entirely within the noise-limited contour of the station's primary transmitter.

In many cases, NAB and APTS argue, that significantly limits the areas that a DTS or SFN booster can usefully serve. While acknowledging that the FCC has opposed any rule changes that would lead to major increases in TV broadcasters' coverage areas, the proposal by APTS and NAB calls for using the primary station's outer "interference" contour to determine how far out a booster can be placed.

Within that larger area, NAB and APTS argue, TV stations should be allowed to extend the noise-limited contours they serve



(Photo: Stocksnapper/Shutterstock)

with usable signals, provided that the new DTS/SFN signals don't expand the outer interference contour. The result, they say, is that stations could provide more robust service within their own markets without creating any new interference to stations on the same channels in adjacent markets.

"We're not asking to enlarge the area where a station is protected from interference," Thompson said. "We're not asking for a change in the interference standards so we can interfere more."

Next steps delayed

The FCC has so far been receptive to the proposal, Thompson said, which took less than six months to move from petition to NPRM status. Following publication in the Federal Register, the FCC will open a comment period, followed by a reply comment period and, APTS hopes, a final set of rules.

"We're hopeful that process will move along efficiently, too," Thompson said. But with the coronavirus pandemic bringing many day-to-day operations to a standstill at stations, actual rollout of ATSC 3.0 and SFNs may be delayed.

While a handful of "Next Gen TV" ATSC 3.0 pilot projects are already

underway in markets including Phoenix and Dallas-Fort Worth, the pandemic has delayed a wider rollout. In Portland, Oregon Public Broadcasting was planning to be part of a late-April market-wide Next Gen TV launch in partnership with commercial broadcasters, but Thompson says that has been delayed at least until June.

"Because those transition plans have been slowed a bit — not significantly, but a bit — SFN rollout will be, too," Thompson said.

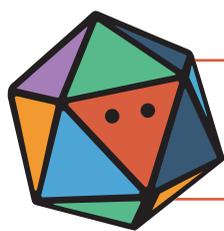
In the meantime, Thompson hopes that the pause in activity on the ground will give the FCC time to approve the new rules. She also hopes that it will allow stations that might benefit from SFNs to further develop plans to get their signals into areas where viewers now struggle to see them.

"As stations are planning their budgets, it may be useful to know, 'Gee, I can now serve this area that I wasn't able to serve, so what does that mean in terms of my budget, and what does that mean in terms of fundraising?'" Thompson said.

She hopes the change would benefit stations in both large urban markets and smaller, more rural areas, especially where a statewide PBS network provides the only over-the-air service to outlying communities beyond the reach of commercial TV.

"In rural areas, that could be a valley between two mountains, and in urban areas it could just be an area where, due to the density and the height of building structures, the signals aren't getting through," Thompson said.

"Particularly in this time period, those audiences are losing out on everything we've been doing for education and awareness of COVID-19," she said. "And now that's more critical than ever." ©



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People

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MacArthur documentary grant recipient for *The Interpreters*, a film about Iraqi and Afghan interpreters.

Jacqueline Olive, whose award-winning debut feature documentary *Always in Season* won the Special Jury Prize for Moral Urgency at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. PBS' *Independent Lens* presented the film's broadcast premiere in February.

PJ Raval, a first-generation Filipino American filmmaker whose film *Call Her Ganda* debuted on POV in 2019 and was nominated for a GLAAD Media Award. Raval also shot the Academy Award-nominated documentary *Trouble the Water*.

Each filmmaker receives a three-month research and development grant and up to \$60,000 in funding for a film.

Report for America, a program that places reporters in local newsrooms, selected more than 40 journalists to work at public media stations in 2020.

After some participating stations pulled back from earlier commitments to hire corps members, nine others agreed to host multiple reporters (story, page 8).

Public media's 2020 cohort of Report for America reporters include: **Erin McKinstry**, KCAW, Sitka, Alaska; **Andrea Perez Balderrama**, KAWC, Yuma, Ariz.; **Roman Battaglia**, Delaware Public Media; **Rachel Cohen**, Boise State Public Radio; **Kassidy Arena**, Iowa Public Radio; **John Boyle**, WFPL, Louisville, Ky.; **Paul Braun**, WWNO, New Orleans; **Sarah Kim**, WYPR, Baltimore; **Eve Zuckoff**, WCAI, Woods Hole, Mass.; **Kyeland Jackson**, Twin Cities PBS; **Jacob Douglas** and **Catherine Hoffman**, Kansas City PBS; **Eric Schmid**, St. Louis Public Radio; **Lucia Starbuck**, KUNR, Reno, Nev.; **Chris Welter**, WYSO, Yellow Springs, Ohio; **Seth Bodine**, KOSU, Stillwater, Okla.; **Antonia Ayres-Brown**, The Public's Radio, Providence, R.I.; **Richard Two Bulls**, South Dakota Public Broadcasting; **Samantha Max**, Nashville Public Radio; **Anna Van Dine**, Vermont Public Radio; **Emily Allen**, West Virginia Public Broadcasting; **Savannah Maher**, Wyoming Public Media; **Maria Esquinca**, Radio Bilingüe, Fresno, Calif.; **Kaitlyn Nicholas** and **Kevin Trevellyan**, Yellowstone Public Radio, Billings, Montana; **Brenda Leon** and **Ali Oshinskie**, Connecticut Public; **Anthony Orozco** and **Alanna Elder**, WITF, Harrisburg, Pa.; **Juanpablo Ramirez** and **Yvonne Boose**, WNII, Dekalb, Ill.; **Riane Roldan** and **Allyson Ortegón**, KUT, Austin, Texas; **Maria Mendez** and **Dominic Walsh**, Texas Public Radio, San Antonio; **Laura Brache Field**, **Alex Watts** and **Dante Miller**, WFAE, Charlotte, N.C.; **Kate Groetzinger**, **Lexi Peery** and **David Fuchs**, KUER, Salt Lake City; **Mallory Falk**, **Keren Carrión**, **Alejandra Martinez** and **Sara Ernst**, KERA, Dallas.

Report for America placed a total of 225 journalists in local newsrooms for this year's program.

Content

Chicago's WBEZ promoted **Daniel Tucker** to EP of its two-hour midday talk show. Tucker previously served as the show's senior producer. Before WBEZ, Tucker was a producer for WNYC in New York City. He also served as an editor for the publishing company McGraw-Hill.

NPR hired two producers from local stations. **Lee Hale** signed on as an editor and producer for *All Things Considered*. Hale covered education and religion for KUER in Salt Lake City, where he was host and creator of *Preach*, a podcast that ended in April. **Emily Alfin Johnson** also became an associate producer for NPR One this month. Johnson previously worked as a digital editor for the Guns & America team based at WAMU in Washington, D.C. She was also a senior producer for Vermont Public Radio and an associate producer for *On Point* at WBUR.



Hale

KUER promoted **Tricia Bobeda** to director of audience development and hired **Emily Means** as political reporter. Bobeda previously served as managing producer of podcasts and special projects for the station, supervising launch of *Preach*.



Bobeda

Before joining KUER, Bobeda worked at WBEZ in Chicago. She was also co-creator and co-host of the podcast *Nerdette*. Means departed KPCW in Park City, Utah, where she had worked as a municipal reporter and as a producer. At KUER, she succeeds **Nicole Nixon**, who began reporting on politics for *Capital Public Radio* in Sacramento, Calif., in February.

Christopher Peak joined *American Public Media* as a reporter last month. He is initially reporting on the coronavirus but will later cover how schools teach kids to read. Peak was previously a reporter for the *New Haven Independent* and NationSwell, an online publication.

Andrew Ramsammy left Arizona PBS last month to become director of digital content for the Global Sport Institute at Arizona State University, the station's licensee, according to GM **Mary Mazur**. Ramsammy was hired last year to direct audience development for the station.



Ramsammy

Heather Cherone covers local politics as a digital news reporter for WTTW in Chicago. Cherone previously worked as managing editor and a city hall reporter for the *Daily Line*, an online publication about Chicago politics.

Kirsten Dobroth reports on arts and culture for *Aspen Public Radio* in Colorado. She replaces **Christin Kay**, who is now the station's interim news director and editor. Dobroth previously worked as a freelance journalist and as digital editor of *Vail-Beaver Creek Magazine*, a lifestyle publication. Her position at Aspen Public Radio is funded by the Edlis Neeson Foundation.

Send news of "comings and goings" to people@current.org

"We're really focused on ... the platforms that are going to be needed to help drive the entire industry forward, given just the incredible scale that's going to be required for the public broadcasting community to effectively compete in this IP-based ecosystem."

— Erik Langner, PMG



PMM

Continued from page 1

WGBH CEO Jon Abbott said in a statement via email that the timing was right to hand off the station's interest in the project.

"We're proud to have nurtured its development at WGBH, and we're excited to offer greater opportunity for the service to advance and further strengthen the public media system as part of the vital and visionary work of PMG, under the continued direction of Stacey Decker," Abbott said.

Sony "had no intention of walking away, and they made that very clear," Decker said. "WGBH just wasn't going to get into the services business." The network operations center will remain based at WGBH's Boston headquarters. Its existing staff will remain in place, though Decker noted that since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, PMM staffers have been working from home and will continue to do so for some time.

Decker said it's likely that an increasing amount of PMM's workflow will be cloud-based in its new incarnation. Even before the pandemic shut down many offices, PMM was working with one of its 18 current client stations, Rocky Mountain PBS, to build a completely cloud-based environment to duplicate the hardware "node" that links the network's current Denver headquarters to the PMM NOC. That would allow RMPBS to stay on the air for several days entirely from the cloud while moving to a new building.

Decker said PMM's cloud-based approach differentiates its system from competitors in the centralized master control business, including Syracuse, N.Y.-based Centralcast and Jacksonville, Fla.-based Digital Convergence Alliance. While those services use a "hub-and-spoke" model built on fiber connections that can take weeks or months to be installed at new client stations, Decker said PMM can begin delivering new services to client locations in 30 days or even less.

That flexibility will be increasingly important to stations that move into ATSC 3.0, Langner believes. With more bandwidth available to them, stations will seek to launch additional content. While that once required expensive capital investments in hardware for each new channel lighting up, PMM's ability to "spin up" new services quickly will be valuable.

The coronavirus pandemic has given stations more reasons to use that flexibility. Langner points to a new service PMM recently spun up: inserting hours of

PBS LearningMedia content into World Channel, which many of its client stations already carry.

While the ATSC 3.0 system is too nascent to fully respond to the many new demands the pandemic has imposed, Decker said a clear path is ahead to new ways in which PMM's services can work in tandem with the signal-expansion projects PMG has been pursuing as it builds out SFN projects.

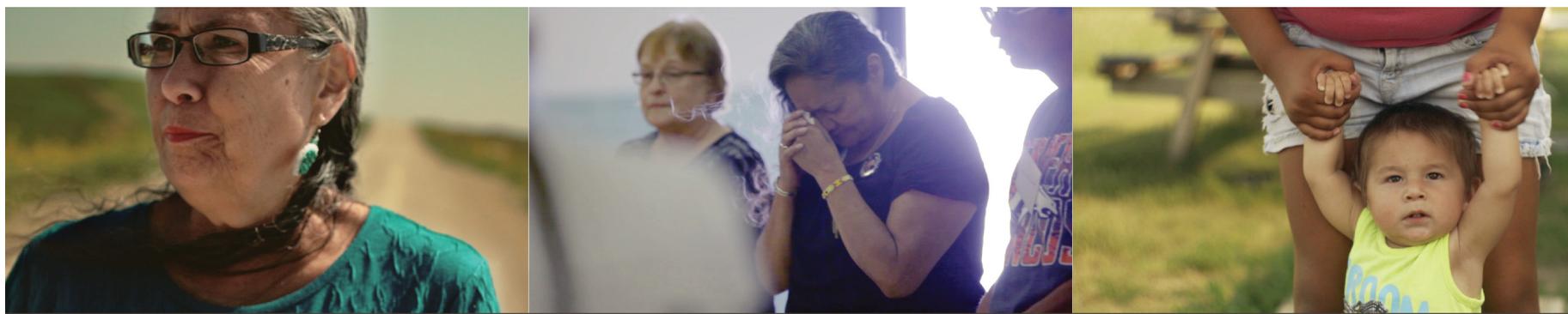
The first of those projects, in the San Francisco market, is already underway. With eight low-power "nodes" filling in coverage holes in the rough terrain of the Bay Area, PMG's SFN network has added usable coverage of 2 million additional households, a 42% expansion beyond the signal coverage from a single transmitter on Mount Sutro in San Francisco.

Conversations about additional SFN projects in partnership with local public and commercial stations are underway in markets including Houston, Los Angeles, Seattle, New York, Dallas, Raleigh, N.C., and Washington, D.C., Langner said.

Moving forward into the ATSC 3.0 future, Decker said PMM's content management and production capabilities will be valuable to broadcasters using SFNs. As broadcasters determine how much of their ATSC 3.0 bandwidth they need for their own content — a figure that can change dynamically as programming needs shift during a broadcast day — they can make excess bandwidth available to sell to other entities that might want to use the highly efficient data distribution ATSC 3.0 and SFNs promise to provide. For instance, Langner says, the eight-node SFN in San Francisco can provide the same coverage of the market that it would take 500 traditional cellular or 5G sites to serve.

Decker also points to expansion potential in Sony's Ci Cloud system, which started as a management tool for existing content in the PMM system and has grown to add cloud-based production capabilities, an important addition as more content producers are working from home. And he said PMM's content management tools are providing more options for stations seeking to manage content going to on-demand providers and streaming services.

PMG is not revealing the terms of the deal, which closed April 28. Langner said PMM will continue to operate as a for-profit corporation. While new parent company PMG serves both commercial and public broadcasters, Langner said PMM will initially remain focused exclusively on public media clients. ☉



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